

SO, NOW WHAT DO I DO?

Lesson 4: What about Spiritual Disciplines?

For many believers today the concept of practicing “spiritual disciplines” is an accepted norm for Christian living. For others it is not only seen as the norm but a requirement for right-standing with God.

As we awaken to grace, we realize that all the things we used to do to maintain or improve our relationship with God are not necessary. If these things are not necessary, it begs the questions, “So now what do I do?” This lesson is designed to answer that question and untie “knots” in your thinking.

I. What are “spiritual disciplines”?

If you are a new believer and have not yet heard of “spiritual disciplines”, you will eventually, so it’s good to know ahead of time what they are so that you do not accept them as required.

A. The concept of “spiritual disciplines” comes from monastic thinking. That is to say that we need to “find” God through a variety of “spiritual” exercises.

B. The practice of spiritual disciplines also comes from the idea of exercising ourselves toward godliness.

1 Timothy 4:7-8

But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise (NASB “discipline”) yourself toward godliness. ⁸For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

C. The question is then asked, “Well, then how do we exercise ourselves to godliness?” And then “someone” starts writing a list.

A former teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church, defines “spiritual disciplines” this way, “Any activity that can help me gain power to live life as Jesus taught and modeled it. How many spiritual disciplines are there? As many as we can think of.”

AS MANY AS WE CAN THINK OF?

1. That is just what happens, and the list never ends. There is ALWAYS something new to do to “get closer to God”.

D. However, what is ignored is that we are already as close to God as we can ever be.

1 Corinthians 6:17

But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

- E. Godliness is a gift to us that we simply receive and exercise (use). Exercising godliness then means to live in a godly way. You are already godly if you are in Christ. You don't need to make yourself godly. Peter is encouraging the believers to exercise the godliness they already have, NOT to make themselves godly. You can no more make yourself godly by doing "spiritual disciplines" than a dog can make himself a cat by meowing and eating cat food. God is the one who makes us godly by His grace through FAITH in His Son.

2 Peter 1:1b-4

To those who have obtained (received) like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: 2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, ³ as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, ⁴ by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

1. Notice, we already have all things that pertain to godliness through the knowledge of Christ.
 2. We are partakers of the divine nature. A human being cannot become more godly than partaking of God's nature. Our part is to simply let this godliness flow in our lives (exercise it).
 3. It bears repeating. You cannot make yourself godly through religious exercises. If you could, then Christ died in vain.
- F. Other common terms for "spiritual disciplines" are "devotions", "quiet time", and "spending time with the Lord". The list of "spiritual disciplines" can become very long depending on what church you attend and how long you have been a Christian, but all lists will include at least these two things: prayer and Bible reading/study. These are the two "spiritual disciplines" we will discuss in this lesson. However, for anything else on a list of what you supposedly need to do to maintain or improve your relationship with God, you can apply these same concepts to them. **ANY religious practice which claims to maintain or improve upon what God did through Christ is flesh, and no flesh will be justified in His sight.**

Galatians 3:2-3

This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

- G. It is very common (but inaccurate) for spiritual disciplines to be seen as the way Christians:
1. LOVE God
 2. Please God
 3. Serve God
 4. MAINTAIN our relationship with God
 - *In other words, if you don't pray and read the Bible, you aren't right with God, and you might even drift away.*
 5. IMPROVE our relationship with God.
 - *The way we know Him MORE intimately*
 - *The way we get CLOSER to Him*
 6. OBTAIN certain things, for example:
 - *Personal holiness, righteousness, purity, character, etc.*
 - *Victorious Christian living*
 - *Spiritual awareness and sensitivity*
 - *Spiritual gifts or supernatural manifestations*
 - *Victory over the enemy*
 - *Revival*
 - *Blessings*

II. What is wrong with “spiritual disciplines”?

There is nothing wrong with deliberate prayer and Bible reading/study. Please don't misunderstand. However, when done for the wrong reasons, “spiritual disciplines” can devastate your relationship with God.

- A. Spiritual disciplines can imply that the work of the cross was incomplete. Yes, Jesus saved you, but now YOU need to pray and read the Bible to maintain or improve your relationship with God.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

- B. Spiritual disciplines put the emphasis on what YOU do instead of on what JESUS did and does.

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 (NASB)

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

- C. Spiritual disciplines become a law/requirement/expectation for most believers.

Galatians 2:21

I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.

- D. Spiritual disciplines can be seen as the cause and/or the answer to any problem; either that the person is having difficulties for not practicing them or that practicing them will solve the problem.
- E. Spiritual disciplines, if completed, will lead to self-righteousness (the feeling of being justified before God based on what we do AND feeling “more spiritual” than someone who isn’t regularly practicing them).
- F. Spiritual disciplines, if not completed, lead to guilt (the sense of not feeling justified before God because we haven’t done these things) AND feeling “less spiritual” than those who are doing them.
- G. This justification based on what we do causes us to be estranged from Christ and to fall from grace which is the complete opposite of what we think “spiritual disciplines” will do!

Galatians 5:4

You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

III. Proper Prayer¹

A. So, NOW Why Do I Pray?

1. We pray BECAUSE we are right with Him.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, having been justified (made righteous) by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

2. We pray BECAUSE we already have a close relationship with Him.

- a. He is our Father.

1 John 3:1

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.

- b. We pray not to BECOME one spirit with Him, but because we ARE.

1 Corinthians 6:17

But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

- c. We do not pray IN ORDER to have fellowship with Him, but because we DO have fellowship with Him.

1 John 1:3

That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

3. We pray because He hears us.

Psalms 34:15

The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry.

¹ This lesson is not designed to examine all aspects of prayer but is meant to help set you free to pray.

4. We pray BECAUSE He tells us to pray.*John 16:26-27**In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you;²⁷ for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.**John 16: 24**Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.***5. We pray BECAUSE He will answer².***Matthew 21:22**And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.**Matthew 7:8**For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.***B. So, NOW How Do We Pray?****1. No Formula!***You don't have to first worship,**...then confess your sins,**...then sit quietly**...then pray for others**...and THEN pray about your needs.**Just come before His throne of grace with confidence.**Hebrews 4:16**Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.***2. No Quantifying!***No time requirements! When we pray, for a minute or for an hour, God receives our prayer. He isn't keep track of how many minutes we pray or how many days in a row we have "devotions". He isn't storing your prayers until you have enough of them for Him to answer. He is eager to hear and answer.**1 Thessalonians 5:17**Pray without ceasing.***3. No Qualifying!***God isn't judging the quality of your prayers. Sitting quietly before Him is NOT superior to petitioning from Him. Worship is not more valuable than casting your cares upon Him. Praying about your needs is not less noble than intercession. All of these concepts just tie our hands in prayer. God isn't judging your prayers. He isn't putting your prayers in a scale to see if they are in proportion. He is listening and answering.*

² There is no point in praying if we don't believe God hears and answers, but many who practice "spiritual disciplines" do so as a required routine, not necessarily expecting anything, just feeling obligated to put in their time.

4. No Guilt or Guilty Motivations!

God intends for this grace of being able to communicate with Him 24/7/365 to be a joy! He doesn't want you to feel guilty if you haven't "prayed". He doesn't want you to pray out of guilt either. He wants you to pray because you want to pray. Always feel free to talk to Him.

5. Don't Fear Reprisals!

- God doesn't pout if you don't "pray".
- He won't withhold your request today because you didn't pray yesterday.
- He doesn't ignore short prayers because you haven't prayed long prayers.

6. Pray Without Pride!

Praying on a regular basis doesn't make you better than a child of God who is entirely undisciplined. It doesn't give you "Brownie points" with God.

7. Just do it!

God loves to have fellowship with you any time of the day. If you have a minute to simply thank Him or request something or pray for someone who comes to your mind, do it. Forget all the rules you've heard about prayer and simply pray. Remember, Jesus purchased with His blood this closeness with God that we enjoy. You can't improve on that. So, simply begin to talk to God wherever, whenever. If you want to spend deliberate or extended times devoted only to prayer, go ahead, but please remember that God is not keeping score.

Remember, prayer is not a means to obtain what Jesus Christ has already gained for us through his death and resurrection. We pray BECAUSE of what He has accomplished.

IV. Better Bible Reading Motivation³**A. We read/study the Bible to grow in the knowledge about Jesus Christ.**

2 Peter 3:18

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

B. We read/study the Bible to learn more about God's nature.**1. Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. When we read about His life and ministry, we see the attributes of God**

John 14:9

He who has seen Me has seen the Father.

Colossians 1:15

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

³ "Bible reading" here also includes meditation, memorization, singing Scriptures, and/or systematic Bible study.

- C. When we behold Jesus, we are transformed. Reading about His ministry and teaching is one way to behold Him.

2 Corinthians 3:18

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

- D. We read/study the Bible as one means of renewing our minds.

Romans 12:2

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

- E. We read the Bible to discover all that He has accomplished in Christ.

Ephesians 1:15-19

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.

- F. We read the Bible to learn of His great love for us.

Ephesians 3:14-19

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

- G. By acknowledging what He has done in us we are better prepared to share our faith with others.

Philemon 4-6

I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, ⁵ hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, ⁶ that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

- H. We read/study the Bible to appreciate the blessings and promises of the New Covenant and to be thankful we are NOT under the Old.

Hebrews 8:6

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

1. By looking at the blessings of the Old Covenant we can be assured that our blessing are better.
 2. By reading the New Testament, we are able to discern the promises God has made to us.
- I. We read/study the Bible to prove all things and hold fast to that which is good.

Acts 17:11

These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

- J. We read/study the Bible as a means of allowing God to speak to us for encouragement, correction, and instruction.

2 Timothy 3:14-17

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- K. So, now HOW do I read/study the Bible?

1. No Formula!

Just start reading! Without neglecting the Old Testament writings, spend most of your time in the New Testament.

2. No Quantifying!

No time requirements! When we read the Bible, for a minute or for an hour, we will be blessed and encouraged. God isn't keep track of how often you read the word or how many chapters you read a day. In fact, you might find that you get more out of your reading/study if you read less and pay closer to attention to the details.

3. No Qualification!

God isn't keeping account of the quality of your Bible reading or study. Bible meditation is not superior to Bible study or to Bible reading or to Bible memorization, etc. You don't HAVE to do a little of each to have a "balanced" Bible reading regimen. He wants you to read the Bible because He wants you to know all that He has done for you. He wants to speak to you personally through what is written. If you've grown frustrated with formulas that tell you that you can best hear from God when things are quiet, try simply reading a verse of two. That's what you will really "hear from God". He speaks to us through His words.

4. No Guilt and NO Fear!

There is NO REASON to feel guilt if you haven't read the Bible in a very long time. There is no need to be afraid that you will fall from God if you don't read the Bible every day. Even when you don't physically read the scripture, the Holy Spirit will be whispering His words to you.

John 14:26

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

5. No Reprisals!

God doesn't pout if you don't read the Bible. He doesn't ignore you because you haven't read the Bible lately.

6. No Pride!

Reading and studying the Bible on a regular basis doesn't make you better than a child of God who is entirely undisciplined. It doesn't give you "Brownie points" with God.

7. Just do it!

God wants to speak to you and teach you through the Scriptures. If you have an iPhone, there are apps with the entire Bible in them some with several translations. Biblegateway.com has multiple versions even in other languages, and several audio versions. E-sword is a free program you can download with multiple study references and commentary to which you can add additional resources. Biblos.com is also a great resource. Graceandfaithministries.org offers all of its resources free of charge.

Some prefer to just listen. Others like to listen and read along. God doesn't care if you are holding a physical Bible or listening or reading on a computer. He delights in revealing to you more and more about what He has done for you and in you. Keep in mind that while reading and studying the Bible will accomplish many things in your life, it is not meant as a means to gain what Jesus Christ accomplished already. For example, you don't "know God more" by reading the Bible. You learn more ABOUT Him and gain a greater appreciation for him, but you ALREADY know God as a benefit of the New Covenant.

**Whatever you do, do it BECAUSE of what He has accomplished
and not in order to accomplish what JESUS has accomplished FOR you.**

