

 Spiritual Disciplines

Lesson 1: Wednesday, August 25, 2021

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**TEACHING NOTES**

**Spiritual Disciplines: Introduction**

**-Midweek Welcome**

**-Quick intro into how Midweek works**

* Schedule
* Groups
* Kids/youth
* Hand out
* Fellowship time to follow

***Plan for teaching***

* Spiritual Disciplines
* Fruit of the Spirit
1. **A Disciplined Life**

The spiritual disciplines are practices we find in Holy Scripture that honor God in our doing and promote spiritual growth in the gospel of Jesus Christ among believers. They are practices or habits that Christians prioritize because it aids us to cling more to Christ and grow in Christlikeness.

**1 Timothy 4:7** …discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; (NASB)

The word **Discipline in the Greek is (gymnazō) It means, to train, to exercise,**

This is where we get our word Gymnasium.

Just as an athlete must train if they are going to perform on the field at any quality level we who belong to Christ must train for the life and ministry He has saved us to and called us to.

The sad reality is that most of us like the path of least resistance. Most of us struggle to go the extra mile without having to be asked or to do the hard work unless we have to.

No, the flesh likes to be coddled and it is very selfish and so most of us loath the idea of discipline all together.

It is not hard to see the evidence in this as most of us don’t eat like we should unless we are on a crash diet. We don’t exercise like we should unless we are threatened with illness or motivated by something else to do so. We don’t keep our homes, rooms, cars, clean and organized like we should unless someone else is going to see it. Let’s face it, our natural self really dislikes the idea of a disciplined life.

This is the very real mountain before us this year as a church. Because while most of us like the idea of growing in the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life, left up to you all by yourself you are not very motivated to really pursue them.

At best they remain a good idea that “at times” you are bought into and maybe even execute well but most people are guilty of just letting the basics of life get in the way.

You know what I mean… busy with the house, the job, the kids, the cooking, the planning and attending of events, and as a result many weeks, months, seasons of your Christian life don’t look that much different then they heathen next door.

This is why we are excited to teach on the spiritual disciplines as the first focus of our Midweek Gathering. Our hope and prayer is that, together, we would take a serious and needed turn on the road we are on unto something much more disciplined and God honoring.

No matter if you are young or old, single of married with a bunch of kids, a newer Christian or a long time veteran of the faith, we pray that we take a serious inventory of how we are using the days God gives us in this life for His glory and not our own.

For his kingdom and not our own. My prayer is that the disciplines we are going to study are truly taken to heart and prayed over and that you seek accountability and make real plans to humbly reprioritize your days so that your Spiritual disciplines are truly top of your list and practice in these days God gives us under the sun.

Tonight my objective is to simply set the table and ready you for the road we are about to go down together. I have planned for tonight’s teaching to be shorter than normal so that we can give those of you committed to groups time to catch up and for those with group changes, time to get to know each other on our first night back to Midweek and to share where you are at when it comes to spiritual disciplines and where you hope to be in the coming weeks and months and then to spend some time praying together.

Before I jump in to some introduction and clarity about what the Spiritual Disciplines are and what they are not let me pray for us.

PRAY

1. **The Spiritual Disciplines are Personal and Corporate**

The first point of clarity is short and simple…

There are some spiritual disciplines that we practice alone and some that we practice with other Christians and some both. So, for example, scripture is clear that we are to pray alone and also to pray with one another and corporately with the church. Therefore prayer is an interpersonal and congregational spiritual discipline. Whereas, the spiritual discipline of silence and solitude is just something we do alone. It kind of ruins the silence and the solitude part if there is communication with other people.

We are to practice both Personal and Corporate disciplines because Jesus practiced both and because the Bible prescribes both for us. So we don’t want to think of spirituality and the spiritual disciplines just as something we do by ourselves. We are to also engage others in the practice of the spiritual disciplines, according to Scripture.

1. **The Spiritual Disciplines are something you DO!**

A second important clarity of spiritual disciplines is that they are activities; they are not merely attitudes. Disciplines are practices. Spiritual disciplines are things you do. They are not character qualities. They are not the fruit of the Spirit. They are things you do.

When you read the Bible, that is something you do. That is a spiritual discipline. When you pray, fast, worship, serve, learn, and so forth, these are activities.

Now the goal of practicing any given discipline is not about doing as much as it is about being: being like Jesus, being in step with Jesus. God has ordained means (like spiritual disciplines) for the process of growing in being more like Jesus—through the rightly motivated ***doing of the biblical, spiritual disciplines***.

So, we “do” the spiritual disciplines.

And note something important: You can do them as a Pharisee that is trying to make something of themself or you can do them humbly, in a way that draws you into Christ all the more, all with the goal of making much of Christ and becoming more like Christ. Church, let us not “do” these things for our own name, or in some unbiblical pursuit of work-based righteousness. No, let us be motived rightly for the glory of God, in love for Christ…knowing that it is the power and will of God causes our doing...

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed … work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Let’s consider further Christian growth from God’s word…

Look with me at …

**Ephesians 4:15** Rather, speaking the truth in love,

we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

Paul says, we are to grow up in every way!

**What does it mean to grow up in every way?**

It means **to mature. To be complete. To be fully-grown.**

Jesus is the epitome of mature!

We see this in **Ephesians 4:13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

 **We are called to conform to Jesus. BE Known for Jesus. Look more and more like Jesus.**

**Ephesians 4:15** Rather, speaking the truth in love,

we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

Paul’s emphasis is Christian maturity, spiritual growth. This is something that is meant to encompass every part of our lives. He says, “we are to grow up in every way”.

A true disciple of Jesus says, “here is my life, I want it ALL to look like Christ.

I want every muscle to be retrained and to grow in righteousness.”

This is what Paul is emphasizing here. “we are to grow up in every way, into Christ!!!”.

This is why we practice spiritual disciplines. To grow up in every way into Christ!!

We must understand as we go into this year of Midweek study that **Christian growth is into Christ.**

We practice the spiritual disciplines to better cling to Christ and be more like Christ …we don’t do them as an end in and of themselves. That was the error the Pharisees made. They thought the self-righteous disciplines they were committed to were the goal of the godly life when they are not.

Christ is always the goal. Knowing him, trusting Him, being satisfied in Him, making much of Him!

Look with me at what Jesus says about this in John 15

**John 15:5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

**The first point Jesus is making is to highlight the critical nature of the vine to the branches.** He says we are the branches and He is the vine.

**What is a branch that is separated from the vine?** **A Dead branch.**

It cannot grow, mature, thrive, live, bear fruit by itself or attached to anything else.

The fence, the rock, the sky cannot make the branch alive or grow fruit from it. Only the vine.

**The Vine is Life: Spiritual and Eternal Life.**

This is the last of the famous “I am statements of Jesus. All of which implore different metaphors to essentially make the same point. True Life, lasting life, spiritual life is only found in Jesus. Without him we are and remain dead and eternally hopeless. Let me remind you..

**Jesus said,**

* I am the bread of Life, **John 6:35**
* I am the Light of the world **John 8:12**
* I am the door for the sheep to find pasture **John 10:7**
* I am the good shepherd **John 10:14**
* I am the resurrection and the life **John 11:25**
* I am the way, the truth and the life **John 14:6**

**1 John 5:12**  He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Jesus has not come to fulfill one aspect of life. He is not coming just to make this life better. He is coming to bring Life. **He is Life**. We have no spiritual life without Christ. He is the one mankind has been waiting for from the beginning.

He is the one you have been waiting for whether you know it or not.

Now, don’t’ miss this is essentially what Paul is emphasizing too.

The body has no life without the head!

A body that is cut off from the head is dead!

See, how essential, how vital, our life in Christ and our growing into Christ is!!!

**John 15:5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him,

 **"To ‘abide’ = to ‘continue,’ to ‘dwell,’ to ‘remain’ in Christ**

To abide is to stay plugged in to the source of life which is Christ himself. We do not thrive in the Christian life by turning away or unplugging… it is in these seasons that we drift, we wonder, we slow down, we see and savor sin instead of Jesus. To abide is to remain constantly in Christ pondering his word, acting for his glory and will, living out of who he is in you. **We are to always be desperate for him.** We are to remain disciplined in abiding into HIM!

Now look with me at the other end of the spectrum…

**John 15:5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, **he it is that bears much fruit,**

Spiritual Fruit is the display of God’s work on the inside of us. Changing our character, our desires, our satisfaction to produce God honoring fruit.

**It is a growing Christ likeness… evidence of maturity and a God honoring life.**

Think about a life that is full of: **Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.** –Surely this is a picture of a spiritually mature person.

This fruit that the Spirit produces in us as we cling well to Christ will be the focus of the last portion of our year. But before we get to that we must look at the disciplines that accord with abiding in and growing into Christ.

When Paul says “we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” **Ephesians 4:15** He is helping us see that Our focus must be “INTO CHRIST” as branches we are to focus on our cling to, dependence on, love for, obedience of, Christ. Our growing is INTO Jesus!

Christian growth is not about what you produce… it is always about a deeper more intimate and steadier cling and devotion to and worship of Christ. God is the one in charge of the fruit production.

The fruit that God produces in us is the Result of a life that is being TRANSFORMED by the power of Christ as a result of a closer, deeper, more treasured relationship “IN” Christ!

This is where the Spiritual Disciplines are so helpful and necessary.

They are what we “DO” to abide in Christ. To stay focused on Him, trusting him, growing in Him.

**So Let me ask you…**

**What are you doing to focus on Christ, grow in Christ, trust in Christ, abide in Christ?**

* **Daily and weekly time to worship Him**
* **Faithful time in God’s word**
* **Constant in prayer**
* **Inviting others in to reorient every part of your life to Christ.**

These are just some of the Spiritual Disciplines God’s word gives us.

So, how do we know what the Spiritual Disciplines are?

Well I can tell you that..

1. **The Spiritual Disciplines are not whatever we want them to be:**

**God’s word is clear to tell us that the truth we need for life and godliness is found in God’s word.**

**2 Timothy 3:16–17** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Therefore we don’t need things outside of scripture to be added to help us be complete, equipped for every good work. The God-given disciplines that cause us to hold fast to Christ and to walk by faith are found in God’s word.

They are the disciplines the Lord has given us in his word. Jogging in the countryside may be a very helpful thing for your body and you may even feel connected to the Lord in a special way when you do but that doesn’t make it a replacement for the disciplines God’s word has given us.

The Spiritual Disciplines we will study this year that we see in Scripture are:

1. Worship
2. Serving
3. Evangelism
4. Apologetics
5. Stewardship
6. Discipleship
7. Forgiveness
8. Confession/Repentance
9. Sabbath
10. Fasting
11. Accountability
12. Bible Study
13. Bible Memorization
14. Faith
15. Submission/Humility
16. Silence and Solitude
17. Prayer
18. Chastity/Purity

These are the practices of a faithful Christian. These are the habits that we value and prioritize so that we can, be satisfied in Christ, be like Christ and make much of Christ all the more.

The question is, **are these the things that you prioritize in your day or your week?**

**If we were to look at your schedule, your plan for tomorrow, or next week, how serious and how high a priority are these things?** **Would you even have a plan at all?** It’s hard to take seriously your devotion to a discipline if you aren’t even willing to make a plan.

What this means is, you can’t just say, *I am going to start reading my bible every day.* Because unless you prioritize time to do that in a time of the day that actually allows you to prioritize it, then you won’t develop that new habit. This brings us to my next clarity…

1. **The practice of the Spiritual Disciplines is a time issue and a priority issue:**

One of the biggest errors modern day Christians make is to think that they will deepen their affections for God, have a fruitful life and a bright testimony WITHOUT spending TIME practicing the Spiritual Disciplines.

No, we must cultivate, prioritize, develop habits, schedule, plan and commit ourselves to the spiritual disciplines or they simply will not ever be a discipline but more of a special event or short term exercise.

**Think about your normal day!**

Think about the disciplines you have in a regular day.

**What are they?**

- You make time to clean yourself- Bath, shower, wash face, brush teeth

- You make time to equip yourself- Clothes, makeup, phone, wallet, lunch, car keys

- You make time to feed yourself- Coffee, Lunch, snack, dinner, for some…. Snack again

These are all disciplines. These are things you do every day! These are things that take time meaning they do not happen on their own and they do not happen without you setting aside time to do them.

**Now, Why do you do them?**

**Because you have decided that they are valuable enough to prioritize time to do them.**

Because you have discovered that when you practice them your life is healthier and your day goes better.

**Do you have to brush your teeth? No, you might have less friends though.**

**Do you have to eat lunch? No, but you might be grumpy because you are hungry**

**Do you have to put on clothes? Technically no**.. but you will be issued an orange jumpsuit if you decide to walk around naked outside your home.

**Do you have to practice Spiritual Disciplines if you are going to …**

**to deepen our affections for God, a fruitful life and bright testimony?** **YES**

The problem is far too many of Christians decide most days to not practice them and instead choose to practice something else. Many Christians look at those who are committed to spiritual disciplines and think I just don’t have the time to do what they do but what you must understand is that ***you have the same amount of time as they do***. The difference is that you are choosing to prioritize it differently.

I have found that most who struggle making Spiritual Disciplines a reality in their DAILY life really do “want to” do them… just like they want to lose 20 pounds, or finish the car restoration project or they want to walk 2 miles every day or they want to reach out to your distant friends more often. But see with me that this simple desire is not enough. There must be real steps of planning, prioritizing and being accountable if you are to truly take on new and lasting spiritual disciplines.

🡪 My point is this.

The SD’s will always remain a good idea just out of reach unless you are willing to Prioritize time for them.. **What does that mean?**

It means you most likely will have to give up something else you currently value or enjoy doing.

It means you most likely will have to become more disciplined in how you use the minutes of your day and go so far to even making a plan for tomorrow or this week so that you are able to actually do the things we want to do and not just the things calling for your attention or that you have previously given yourself to.

When you really start to slow to consider what you give your time to it is very helpful to see that there is lots of room for changes. The question is are you willing to make them.

For example: Do you even know, How much time a day you give to Social media or TV or internet browsing or gaming? All of these are purely entertainment mediums and yet they consume many minutes if not hours of our day.

**Are these precious minutes and hours given to these things something that is helping us cling to Christ and or make much of His name?**

**Are they good stewardship for the time God gave us that day that we are to use for Him and not to just waste away?**

Even good productive things like School activities and sports are often chosen by modern people and or families as flat out replacements for the core spiritual disciplines God has given us to steward. \*A real challenge for many households is the temptation to pay for and give immense hours to a club sports or actives because of your child’s interest or skill set but these things are the very reasons given for why there is little to no time for spiritual disciplines, discipleship or training.

**There has to be a revisit of what your true priorities are.**

Time Management training that I have done and taken many through requires you not just to starting thinking of what you want to add to your days but first has you stop and really take inventory about what is most important to you.

**A personal exercise- Governing Values/God Given Priorities.**

Once you have done this can you begin to really evaluate your days, your commitments and your plans based not on who is calling your name the loudest or based on the way we have always done it but based on what God has called you to.

For some of us this list varies in that we have been called by God to different things as husband or a wife or a parent or a single person. A pastor or a church member. ETC.

**Only when we have a biblical view of what God has called us to are we able to better “put on and put off” as scripture calls us to.**

**Put on; Put off**

**In Colossians chapter 3 Paul speaks to the need for Christians to put off their old priorities and practices and put on new ones that honor and serve Christ.**

**Colossians 3:9** Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices

 **Colossians 3:12-13** Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

**In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians Paul spoke in this way as well. That we who belong to God because of our new birth made possible by Christ are to…**

put on the new self, created after the likeness of God  **Eph 4:24**

Put on the whole armor of God **Eph 6:11**

Church, see with me that these are new priorities, new practices, that we put on.

They are spiritual disciplines that cause us to increase our grip on Christ and our trust in Him.

What you can’t do is just add the new practices to the old ones.

No, there must be a putting off and a putting on.

I say this because, in my 2 decades of pastoral ministry I have seen it to be very true, that you won’t stick with new God honoring habits unless you are willing to put off the old habits that get in the way.

You can’t stay up late watching TV and then have the discipline to get up early to get into God’s word and to pray. What you also won’t do well is just try to stick it in.

Some will say, I will just get some time with God after work or during my lunch break but the problem is all too often that you don’t take a real lunch break and you get busy with other things after work.

You won’t be rightly committed to participating in the life of the church as God has called you to if you remain committed to watching weekend sports or spending all your after work time wrenching on the car. No, in Christ there are things we must put off and put on. You can’t just add. It doesn’t work that way nor does this reflect a life that is maturing in Christ as there are surely many things are not only good to add to our daily disciplines but that should be removed as well.

**1 Timothy 4:7** …discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; (NASB)

When we do this well and Spiritual Disciplines become new habits for us, people will look at our lives and see a difference in our commitments and our time management. This is a not only good for our Christian growth but for our gospel testimony to others.

A verse we will surely spend more time with in our series is…

**Hebrews 10:24-25** and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

**What is the habit of some?**

Neglecting the spiritual discipline of Corporate worship and fellowship.

God’s word is clear that we must have habits, disciplines that protect the things that are more important and put away the things that are not. There must be a purpose to why we do what we do and why we don’t do what we don’t do.
This is Paul’s point in …

**1 Corinthians 9 24-27** Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

Paul is speaking of a disciplined life. A focus on time management that allows him to run the race that matters, the spiritual race, and not the one that matters less, the material or temporal race.

We are all prone to get overly focused on the now.

What’s in the bank account, how are the kids performing in school or sports, what is on the schedule for this year’s family trip. As we focus on these things we grossly deprioritize the things that are eternal. The spiritual training, growth, testimony that God has called us to in this time and place.

**There are lots of ways you can run the race of this life, Christian.**

What we cannot afford to do is only what we have done (tradition)

or what we want to do (Flesh)

or what society is telling us to do (secular idolatry)

but we must do what God has given us to do.

**To run this race with discipline and run it well to win the prize!!!**

So, I ask you again.

1. **How much discipline is there in why you do your days the way you do?**

Calendar, daily planning, accountability and tracking for how you are doing?

1. **How much of that discipline is spiritual and not just temporal?**
2. **Are you ready to make some changes and be accountable to putting into practice the things we learn this year? Not coming just to hear a nice message on serving but to really evaluate and grow in how you are serving the Lord?**

**There is an opportunity to really come out of this year in a different place than we entered it if we are willing to do the work and be accountable.**

**The training the spiritual disciplines will be to your life and faith are second to none.**

**How do I know? Because they are given to us by the Lord in His word.**

**Let us trust it and lean in and put our lives on the alter in every way.**

…we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ… Eph 4:15

A true disciple of Jesus says, “here is my life, I want it ALL to look like Christ.

I want every muscle to be retrained and to grow in righteousness.”

May it be so. For His glory, our joy and many others good!