

# SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

## Youth Bible Study

- **QUESTIONS**

- What is discipline?
- Could we learn from other areas of discipline?
- What is a disciple?
- What are some examples of spiritual disciplines?
- How can I become more disciplined in these areas?

"The word discipline has disappeared from our minds, our mouths, our pulpits, and our culture. We hardly know what discipline means in modern American society. And yet, there is no other way to attain godliness; discipline is the path to godliness" (Jay Adams).

"Ours is an undisciplined age. The old disciplines are breaking down. . . . We need the rugged strength of Christian character that can come only from discipline" (V. Raymond Edman).

- **Definition:** "training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character" (Merriam-Webster)
  - to attain, achieve, or excel at anything requires discipline
- **Disciplining Children**
  - purpose – molding process (teaching, helping, learning)
    - behavior
      - how to get along with others
      - learn self-control
      - language
      - become responsible citizens
      - care about others
      - develop a moral compass (strong spiritual foundation)
      - develop problem-solving abilities
        - (Mom: "I'm not going to be here the rest of your life.")
    - milestones
      - personal care (brush teeth, shower regularly, wear deodorant)
    - to learn to do what is right because they want to – not just to avoid punishment
    - learning to discipline your children effectively is hard work
      - parents can improve their discipline methods
        - reading, talking to other parents, talking to their own parents, trying different strategies
  - when parents implement discipline, they are setting up their children for personal discipline
  - parents need goals
    - "What do I want my child to be like as a teenager and as an adult?"
    - Examples of goals parents might want for their children:

- strong personal relationship with God
- close relationships with family
- productive citizen (vote, don't litter, recycle, donate)
- not lazy – know how to work
- know how to manage money
- education
- know how to think for themselves (don't be a sponge)
- **Self-Discipline**
  - Categories
    - Eating
    - Exercise
    - Getting enough sleep
    - Managing time well
      - being on time
    - Budgeting money well
    - Relationships
    - Personal care
      - neglect of dental health – might lead to dental surgery
  - How to become more self disciplined?
    - sometimes forced to (health problems, money problems)
    - learn from others
    - educate yourself
      - books
      - videos
      - articles
    - practice (just do it – over and over – until it becomes a habit)
    - make lists
    - use the buddy system
- **Discipline in Sports, Music, Business, etc.**
  - how to win or excel in any chosen sport?
  - discipline builds strength, endurance, and skill
  - hard work
  - long hours
  - follow a schedule (eating, sleeping, exercising, etc.)
  - eliminate junk food/alcohol (sports)
  - remove distractions
  - trusted coach, teacher, mentor
  - enjoy what you do
- **Discipline in Other Areas**
  - Study of Protestant churchgoers (<https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/research-survey-bible-engagement-churchgoers>)
    - 19 percent – daily Bible reading
    - 68 percent – walked pet daily
    - 48 percent – daily prayer
    - 49 percent – floss daily

- 49 percent – visited dentist in last 6 months
- 15 percent – fasted in the last 6 months
- **Spiritual Disciplines**
  - We are called disciples of Jesus
    - definition of "disciple" = follower, adherent, believer
    - Isaiah 50:4 AMP – "The Lord God ... awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple [as One who is taught]"
      - the ability to be awakened (ears to hear) so that we can be taught (become a disciple) comes from God
      - qualities needed to become a disciple
        - willing
        - listening
        - obedient
    - In Bible times, disciples imitated the teacher's life, instilled his values, attitudes, and ideas in themselves through persistent instruction, and passed it on to others.
      - discipleship requires spiritual disciplines
  - What are spiritual disciplines?
    - One definition: "A spiritual discipline is, when practiced faithfully and regularly, a habit or regular pattern in your life that repeatedly brings you back to God and opens you up to what God is saying to you."
      - (Source: <http://www.iwilltrustinyou.org>)
    - Another definition: "Spiritual disciplines can be described as behaviors that facilitate [make a process easier] spiritual growth."
      - (Source: <http://www.resources.gci.org>)
    - Spiritual disciplines exercise our spirit, mind, and emotions so that we become closer to God.
    - They help us see His will for our lives more clearly so that we can live the life He desires for us. The more we practice these disciplines, the better we get at them, and the stronger we make our faith.
  - Disciplines are "practices" (an action word)
  - What is the source of spiritual disciplines?
    - must come from the Bible
    - 2 Timothy 3:16 AMP – "Every Scripture is God-breathed (given by His inspiration) and profitable for ... discipline in obedience"
    - this eliminates unbiblical disciplines
    - look for examples of Jesus (the One we are to be disciples of) modeling spiritual disciplines
      - "If Jesus needed to do this, how much more do we?"
  - What is the purpose for spiritual disciplines?
    - become more like Jesus through the proper motivation
  - 1 Timothy 4:7 – "exercise thyself rather unto godliness"
    - AMP – "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness [keeping yourself spiritually fit]."
    - In other words, TRAIN yourself to be godly.

- **Disciplines – How to Put Into Practice**
  - **(1) Have a Purpose or Goal**
    - why do you desire to become more disciplined?
      - consider a parent's goals for his/her child
    - are you content with your current disciplines?
    - Prayer warriors – "I want to pray with belief, power, and results."
    - possible reasons:
      - to understand more about the Bible
      - I don't want to "fail to give an answer"
      - Souls, Lord
      - I want to be the example for my children
      - I want my children to chose this way
      - I'm learning the dangers of a strong SELF
      - I want to help others – share, inspire
  - **(2) Realize That You Cannot Spiritually Tread Water**
    - we must continually be putting forth effort to become more Godly, more like Jesus
      - discipline is an ongoing process
    - what was "enough" in your younger years will not be enough as you grow older, gain more responsibility
      - "when I was young, I thought as a child"
      - staying up till early hours of the morning – somewhere that had to change
        - as you get older, you will have to become more disciplined in your bedtime
      - it is the same spiritually
  - **(3) Meditate and Memorize Scriptures**
    - inspiration
    - Acts 2:42 "– And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship"
      - other translations = they devoted themselves
    - Quote: "The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation" (Thomas Watson).
  - **(4) Use Practices From Self-Discipline List**
    - educate (read, hear, watch)
    - ask for help
    - spiritual mentor
    - create a schedule
    - remove distractions
    - make lists
    - accountability
- **Examples of Spiritual Disciplines**
  - (Discuss/Consider the following disciplines; what are some tips, methods, disciplines that you have found effective? What new methods might you implement?)
  - "Can we expect the flames of our worship of God to burn brightly in public on the Lord's Day when they barely flicker for Him in secret on other days?" (Donald S. Whitney, Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life)

- **Prayer**
  - daily
  - out loud
  - same time
  - continual
  - personal & at church (interpersonal)
  - with spouse or family
  - with friends
  - educate yourself
    - books on prayer
    - listen to audio messages about prayer
    - Bible study on prayer
      - what is the purpose of prayer?
      - how should we pray?
      - why should we pray?
      - what does prayer accomplish?
      - prayer can be simple
      - write out or memorize verses about prayer
  - ask for help
    - have someone pray with you
    - ask for advice
  - spiritual mentor
    - who is a prayer warrior? Talk to them, ask questions
  - create a schedule
    - pray same time every day
    - talk to God as soon as you wake up (and remember)
  - remove distractions
    - I will not \_\_\_\_\_ until I have prayed
  - make lists
    - prayer journal – write down prayer requests, write down answers to prayers
  - accountability
    - ask someone to keep you accountably
    - create a chart to keep track of your prayer life
  - "When there is little awareness of real need, there is little real prayer" (Donald S. Whitney).
- **Bible Reading**
  - educate yourself
    - what is the context of what you reading?
    - consider the author of the book of the Bible, why it was written, genre?
    - what do certain words mean? (Dictionary, Strong's Concordance)
  - ask for help
    - how do others read the Bible?
    - how do they know what it means?
  - spiritual mentor

- create a schedule
  - keep a journal
  - keep track of your reading
  - make notes
- remove distractions
- make lists
  - create goals
  - "I'll read every day."
  - "I'll read one chapter every day."
- accountability
- "Some wag remarked that the worst dust storm in history would happen if all church members who were neglecting their Bibles dusted them off simultaneously" (Donald S. Whitney).
- **Bible Study**
  - educate
    - consider: how is Bible study different from Bible reading?
  - ask for help/spiritual mentor
    - how do they study the Bible?
    - what are some good Bible study helps they might recommend?
    - can one study the Bible with only 15-20 minutes available? If so, how?
  - create a schedule or a goal
    - "I'll work on my Bible study \_\_\_\_\_ per week/per month."
  - remove distractions
    - what prevents you from Bible study?
  - make lists
    - lists of what you want to learn about
    - possible Bible topic studies
  - accountability
  - Why do so many Christians neglect the study of God's Word? R. C. Sproul said it painfully well: "Here then, is the real problem of our negligence. We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy."
  - "If you will not worship God seven days a week, you do not worship Him on one day a week" (A. W. Tozer).
- **Meditation**
  - educate (read, hear, watch)
  - ask for help
  - spiritual mentor
  - create a schedule
  - remove distractions
  - make lists
  - accountability
  - "Why do we forget what we read in the Bible? Is it just a poor memory? No, it's a

failure to meditate" (source unknown).

- **Fasting** (self-denial)
  - educate
    - not just from food
    - fasting from earthly pleasures
      - the Christian's life must include self denial
      - consider: what are the dangers of not practicing self-denial?
    - fasting must include serious prayer
    - fasting brings to our attention our spiritual weaknesses
      - spiritual disciplines shine a light on areas in your life that you need to work on
      - just as physically working out lets you know which areas you need to concentrate on
      - just as a physical fast detoxes the body, so a spiritual fast can detox as well
      - results = less sluggish, sharper thinking, a removal of toxins
  - ask for help/spiritual mentor
    - sharing ideas
  - create a schedule
    - fasting needs to be systematic (regular); more than for camp meetings & revivals
    - set goals for fasting (possibly 1 or 2 times per month)
  - remove distractions
    - what tempts you to break a fast?
  - make lists
    - what are you fasting about? (salvation, healing, other problems)
    - write down your fasting goals and burdens
  - accountability
    - fast with a partner
  - "Fasting is more about replacing than it is about abstaining — replacing normal activities with focused times of prayer and feeding on the Word of God" (Gary Rohrmayer).
- **Additional Study: Other Spiritual Disciplines to Consider**
  - Church Attendance
  - Worship
  - Fellowship
  - Evangelism
    - what might be included in this discipline?
    - sending cards/visitation/phone calls or texts
    - greeting at church
    - looking for people to reach out to
      - "Evangelism is a natural overflow of the Christian life. Every Christian should be able to talk about what the Lord has done for him or her and what He means to him or her. But evangelism is also a Discipline in that we must discipline ourselves to get into situations where evangelism can occur, that is, we must not just wait for witnessing opportunities to happen" (Donald S. Whitney).

- Giving
- Service
  
- **Review: The Power of Spiritual Disciplines**
  - reveals spiritual weaknesses
  - learn how to strengthen weak areas of our life
  - enables us to do more than ever before
    - greater understanding of the Bible
    - stronger prayer life
    - greater outreach
  - strengthens our convictions
  - disciplines creates strength, endurance, and skill

### **Food for Thought**

- "Can we expect the flames of our worship of God to burn brightly in public on the Lord's Day when they barely flicker for Him in secret on other days?" (Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*)
- "The reason we come away so cold from reading the word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation." (Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*)
- "People do not drift toward holiness. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated" (D A Carson).
- "Our bodies are inclined to ease, pleasure, gluttony, and sloth. Unless we practice self-control, our bodies will tend to serve evil more than God. We must carefully discipline ourselves in how we 'walk' in this world, else we will conform more to its ways rather than to the ways of Christ" (Donald Whitney).