

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

LESSON 1: UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

THE TARGET: As men, there are times when it is difficult to be disciplined in our activities, thought life, and core beliefs. In fact, many men live reactively according to their current circumstances, someone's words or actions, or their own desires. However, disciplines keep you grounded, filter your emotions and feelings, allow you to be accountable, and give you a clear pathway for your future. Spiritual disciplines are the biblical knowledge points, application steps, and practical exercises which allow you to receive, learn, and develop the character of Christ. It is through this process that you begin to experience spiritual transformation, which will enable you to leave a spiritual legacy to future generations.





SIGHTLINE: Acquire Your Target

Peter, in his final statement from 2 Peter 3:18 says, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” What a final statement. Peter focuses on the target of spiritual disciplines: to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. This target brings clarity for our life’s mission and is what every believer should strive toward. Spiritual disciplines help you grow spiritually and strengthen your spiritual man so you can complete your God-given assignment(s). Focusing on the target of becoming like Christ will make the difference.

As you begin moving into a new dimension of spiritual discipline, you will see your walk with Jesus go beyond the Sunday morning worship experience to a personal, daily, and growing relationship with God. As your personal relationship with Christ strengthens, you will notice that people around you begin seeing you differently.

For that reason, Men’s Ministries has identified four dimensions of manhood that every man should experience and pass onto the next generation. These dimensions are Relationship, Identity, Purpose, and Vision. For a full explanation of these dimensions, you can download our Launch resource, which you can access for free on the Men’s Ministries app at <https://subsplash.com/mensministries/app>

It is important to remember that not every man is disciplined at the same level. Just as you would not expect your six-month-old child to have the same behaviors as your seven-year-old child, neither should you expect every man to be at the same level throughout their discipleship journey. In addition, you may be very disciplined in some areas of your life and somewhat undisciplined in other areas.

Spiritual disciplines are developed through a transformation process which starts in your heart as the Holy Spirit works to transform you from the inside out. That acknowledgment allows you to make decisions in your mind and accept the prompting of your heart during prayer time, to study moments in Scripture, and to have conversations with trusted family or friends. The final step is moving beyond your heart passion and mindful decision making to



taking action steps in your daily activities, conversations, thought life, and the quiet minutes when you turn everything off and allow your mind to drift.

As you work through the spiritual disciplines, you will find yourself in one of five places in life. In the book *A Spirit Empowered Church: An Acts 2 Ministry Model*, Alton Garrison shares these five steps of spiritual growth.¹

Unbelievers – People who haven't received Christ as Lord and Savior of their lives.

Believers – People who've received Christ as Lord (belief system) but haven't yet become learners who obey God's Word (behavior and actions).

Disciples – People who adhere to the teachings and practices of growing in Christ and demonstrate a lifestyle corresponding to God's Word.

Servant-Leaders – People who've grown in the direction, ways, and timing of the Lord and share their knowledge of Christ with others so they, too, can learn His direction, ways, and timing. They're involved in different aspects of church life (bus drivers, altar workers, greeters, deacons, Sunday School teachers, etc.).

Reproducers – People who mentor others through relationship to the point where they become servant-leaders.

You may not be where you would like to be in your spiritual journey, but as you allow God to transform you, you will become who God intends you to be. Alton Garrison observes, "*Statistics show that adults tend to stop growing spiritually in the fifth to seventh year of their Christian experience.*"² However, this does not have to be the case. Take it as a challenge to keep growing in Christ. As you take responsibility for your spiritual growth through spiritual disciplines, God can help you better cover, protect, care, and connect with those in your sphere of influence in a healthy manner.

1 Garrison, Alton. *A Spirit Empowered Church: An Acts 2 Ministry Model*. Influence Resources, Springfield, MO. 2015. Page 84.

2 Garrison. *A Spirit Empowered Church: An Acts 2 Ministry Model*. Page 178.





CROSSHAIR: Focus on Your Target

As you begin taking your spiritual growth to a new level, consider the following three thoughts.

First, Men's Ministries recommends assessing where you are. This self-assessment from <https://storage.snappages.site/dkyym24ydo/assets/files/Spirit-Empowered-Faith-self-assessment-S-89.pdf>, completed annually, can give you a benchmark of your spiritual health, much like an annual physical gives you a snapshot of your physical health.

Second, seek a fresh daily encounter with the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit guiding your discipleship, all you will be gaining is knowledge void of the power required for true spiritual growth. If you are not sure about the Holy Spirit's role in your life, consider a targeted study about Him. Men's Ministries has an outstanding resource you can use to learn more about the Holy Spirit. You can find this free resource on the Men's Ministries app at <https://subsplash.com/mensministries/app>.

Finally, remember spiritual growth is a process and ultimately, Christ wants your life united with His life in order to make an impact in your world. This can be accomplished as you learn to utilize the spiritual disciplines in your daily life.

One question men on the spiritual growth journey wrestle with is whether spiritual growth happens automatically or as a result of a believer's intentional application of spiritual disciplines. In other words, do spiritual disciplines cause spiritual growth? The biblical term used to describe this growth or maturing is spiritual formation, and there are two theories about how it takes place.

The first is that spiritual growth happens only when God takes the initiative. He acts and people depend on Him to bring about change in their hearts. The second theory is that an individual takes responsibility for his own growth by obeying and exercising his spiritual muscles. In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul outlines the tensions between these two theories of growth.

At the end of the day, spiritual maturity is a gift from God given to the believer. You cannot earn this gift; however, you must exert effort to receive it. Therefore, Men's Ministries believes that if you are going to be involved



in spiritual formation, you should be aware that spiritual disciplines are the catalyst for, but not the cause of, that formation. Spiritual maturity comes from God alone, who is pleased to work through us to assist others in finding their purpose within the Church.

As you move forward in this study, there are two extremes to avoid. The first is to focus exclusively on following the rules of the spiritual disciplines. If this happens, the by-product is legalism. The second extreme is to completely ignore all rules and boundaries of the spiritual disciplines. If this happens, the by-product is lawlessness.

Spiritual formation can be difficult to understand. Here are a few thoughts to help you along your journey.

First, spiritual formation involves transformation. Paul underscores this in Romans 12:2 where he uses the word “transformed.” In the noun form, it means metamorphosis—to be changed or transformed. In the verb form, the word means shaped, formed, or modeled into Christ’s image. Paul teaches that spiritual formation affects all of one’s life and can be seen in behavioral change.

Second, spiritual formation must be intentional. Matthew refers to this type of growth as an active followership or submission, which implies that you will pattern your life after Jesus’ life (Matthew 4:19; 16:24; 28:19).

Third, the goal or target of spiritual formation is to become like Christ. Paul tells the believer in Colossians 1:28–29 and Ephesians 4:13 that spiritual maturity will be the believer’s benchmark.

Spiritual disciplines are strategically designed to ensure that you are continually taking next steps in your walk with Christ. Remember, the target is to grow in Christlike character, convictions, and conduct through intentional teachings, exercises, and spiritual disciplines that will empower you to live out the Christian life to a greater measure. Again, if all you do is gain knowledge without learning how to apply that knowledge in everyday life, you are missing the full concept of discipleship. Like any other relationship, growing close to God requires a personal investment of time and energy. To help you develop your relationship with God, you must invest in your growth *personally*.

A young man was once invited to travel on an aircraft training carrier with his dad for two weeks. During that time, the young man was privileged to observe the intricacies of flight training. In one conversation with a pilot, the



young man asked, “What is needed the most when you are landing a plane in the middle of the ocean with minimal light?” The pilot responded, “In that moment, the thing I need the most is discipline not enthusiasm.” Likewise, spiritual discipline is what will ensure that you do not crash and burn during your life journey.

Men’s Ministries believes spiritual formation is an intentional, multi-faceted process which promotes the transformation by which Christ is formed in a believer so that they can become His continually maturing disciple. This means you must assume some responsibility for the process of spiritual formation. If this is true, what should you know about the process of spiritual formation? The Bible does not seem to provide a process to develop spiritual maturity. However, the church, over the years, has identified various disciplines which have come to be considered essential to spiritual formation.





BULLSEYE: Hit Your Target

Spiritual disciplines are the tools used to help you develop spiritual maturity in your life. When these disciplines are practiced, you intentionally bring your whole self under God's authority. Spiritual disciplines are means by which the grace of God transforms you, making you into the man He calls you to be. Over the years, although different names have been given for them, most Bible teachers have agreed on 14 spiritual disciplines. These are spiritual reading, spiritual direction, meditation, prayer, confession, worship, bodily exercise, fasting, blessed subtraction, sabbath keeping, spiritual retreats/sabbaticals, tithing, journaling, and building spiritually healthy relationships.

Spiritual disciplines are not a cure all. They are tools you use to draw closer to God. Moreover, as a reminder, when you incorporate the use of disciplines into your spiritual formation, you should leave the results to God's timing. Don't grow weary in well doing. Be patient, giving God time to work on your behalf. Here are some simple exercises for you as you seek God for your sightline, focus, and bullseye.

- Start journaling. Get a notebook and begin to write down how you see the Scriptures, areas of your life which are changing, struggle points within this study, prayers and thoughts. At times you may even want to share your journaling with your family or friends. Years from now, you will be able to look back and see what the Lord has accomplished in and through you.
- Look over Alton Garrison's discipleship steps. With which do you most identify right now? Prayerfully write out a plan to move to the next level.



- On a scale of 1-4 with 1 being strongly growing and 4 being stopped growing, rate yourself on your spiritual growth journey. Write out a plan to improve.

- What is God's role in spiritual formation?

- What is your role in spiritual formation?

- Take some time to listen to the Lord about what you just studied. How did this study help deepen your love for God?

- Write down a thought from this study that you experienced this week.



- As a result of your deepened love for God, how can you practically demonstrate what you experienced to your family and to others around you?

Next Step:

- Courage:** Commit to one month of one spiritual discipline.
- Strength:** Commit to three months of two spiritual disciplines.
- Endurance:** Commit to twelve months of three or more spiritual disciplines.

FireBible:

Men's Ministries is excited about your opportunity to get into God's Word and find the truths that you will set you free. If you are interested in going even deeper in your studies, we recommend the *FireBible*. The *FireBible* is the number one Pentecostal study Bible in the world. This study will reference the *FireBible* from time to time; however, you don't have to own one to use this study. If you have a *FireBible*, check out the following notes.

- Read the *FireBible* notes on Philippians 2:12-13. What can you learn about spiritual growth?

- Read the *FireBible* note on Romans 12:2. What can you learn about transformation and its role in spiritual growth?



