

The Power of
YES & NO



Following Jesus One Choice at a Time

by Pastor Ben Johnson

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Part One	5
Part Two	9
Part Three	14
Part Four	18
Spiritual Discipline Guide	22

INTRODUCTION

The season of Lent is a 40-day Christian season meant to prioritize prayer, fasting, and repentance to prepare oneself for the celebration of Easter. This season begins with Ash Wednesday, as a day that reminds us of our mortality, and ends with Easter as we celebrate the eternal life that Jesus won for us all. The name comes from an Old English word for spring, *lencten*, and involves disciplines like giving up luxuries, prayer, giving to the less fortunate to focus our attention on our true reality, and identity, that we are citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Now here is what I have learned about discipline...I like the idea of it but the doing of it is a whole other thing. I mean this season is a time for introspection, repentance, and drawing closer to God. Honestly what Christian wouldn't want more of that in their lives? The difficulty comes with the reality that this season is like swimming upstream from the flow of our culture.

Study after study shows a perceived loss of discipline in our modern culture. A lot of this has been linked to increased distractions from (smartphones, social media, technology), instant gratification, comfort-seeking, and less structured environments. All of this has led us as a culture to poor focus, inconsistencies with values and practice, and difficulty with long-term commitments. This has significant impacts on our work, health, personal goals, family life, and our spiritual walk with the Lord.

Now I know this just sounds like a big bummer but there is something everyone of us can do about it. This decline can be reversed through conscious effort and the building of new habits. This is the heart behind this study. How could we use this season of Lent to train our hearts to understand a crucial truth that every YES is also a NO, and every NO is also a YES.

To say NO to the world's noise, impulses, or distractions is to say YES to God's presence, purpose, and peace. Conversely, every time we say YES to lesser things, we say NO (even unintentionally) to the things of God. This study aims to help disciples of Jesus to see that self-denial is not punishment, but it is all about prioritization. Spiritual disciplines are not about earning God's love but clearing space to experience it.

Now I want to give you a bit more of my heart behind the why of this study. I believe much of my life, my love and my legacy will be determined by what in life I gave my yes's and what in life got my no's. What we say yes and no to is governed by the values of our lives and what the goal/aim of our lives is aimed at. My desire is that every man, woman, child and family of God would be empowered to control the things they can control and to trust God fully with the things that are not in their control.

My heart is to make this as deep and relevant as can be for every person who decides to take on this adventure. Whether you have been following Jesus for one day or eighty years there is something for everyone when it comes to the pathway of how we discipline ourselves around the person of Jesus. Honestly this is what the word disciple means in the first place...one who disciplines themselves around the greatest, most loving, most amazing, most powerful, most mysterious person to ever walk this earth. We are disciples of Jesus so let the adventure begin...

PART ONE

We begin this adventure where all Christian adventures begin and that is with a heart of humility. The reality is the bible was never meant to be our self-help book so that we can make positive changes in our lives based on our own power, intellect, and wisdom. The bible is the living breathing words of our God meant to be surrendered to, and held tightly to, as our lifeline through the storms of this life. The power for a disciplined life begins and ends with the power of the Holy Spirit as we are empowered to be fully devoted to the power of the Word of God and the clarity that it brings to our lives.

So let's begin this adventure in the book of Joshua as we listen to him address the people of Israel. Chapter 23 tells us that God had given Israel rest from all their surrounding enemies, given them land to build cities, fields to grow food, and Joshua is old and wanting to speak to the leadership, so they discipline themselves to the one who has richly blessed them. In his final instruction he says to the people in Joshua 24:14-15

¹⁴Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

True self-discipline begins with a yes/no decision about our allegiance. Joshua challenges the people with a statement, "choose this day whom you will serve", and it seems right to place ourselves in the crowd and to answer this for ourselves as well. Joshua is asking if they will discipline themselves to the honor, love, respect and worship of God or will they be like their forefathers who trusted the false gods of the Amorites? What would this challenge sound like in today's world for all of us right now?

Take a moment to write your own answers down to these questions...

1. What are the outdated belief systems we have inherited from our ancestors we are called to move away from?
2. What are modern approaches to life that we are called to step away from?
3. How does choosing a God-centric aim of life change what you say no to and what you say yes to?

Now I want you to notice that we are just like Israel where their decision came after God had already given them everything. Our decision isn't to earn more from God, but it is done in response to the reality that God has already given us everything. Jesus has already lived perfectly, died sacrificially, risen victoriously, and is currently preparing a place for us, in His Kingdom, for all eternity. It's the clarity of our identity that shapes our discipline. Every yes/no decision is a decision of the type of person we see ourselves to be and the kind of person we want to become; revealing what the treasure of our heart truly is.

In Matthew 6:19-21 Jesus teaches us about the link between what we treasure and our hearts passion. Jesus says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,"²⁰ *but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.*²¹ *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Jesus is distinguishing between two kinds of wealth: the perishable and the eternal. Jesus is not simply talking about money; he is speaking about where a person invests their life's priorities, values, and ultimately, their heart. Jesus here is saying do not make the yes's of your life simply to hoard for yourself more and more of what the world deems as treasure but instead aim your yes's at actions and qualities that have eternal significance. Say yes to good deeds, generosity, spiritual growth and the seeking of God's kingdom. The location of your most valued possessions reveals your true priorities and allegiances in life.

Researcher Roy Baumeister, in his research on self-control, found that willpower works like a muscle. We all have a limited supply, but it can be strengthened through consistent small practices. Maybe a helpful analogy would be to picture your life like a completely full glass of water. If we are wanting to say yes to something this would require a spillover of something else. Every yes we make, both big and small, is a no to something else and everyone no (I am not going to put that in my glass) is a yes to what is already in there.

The first step to bring clarity into our lives would be a very simple, yet enlightening, yes/no audit on our decisions. Take some time to think through where do your yes's typically go? What do you implicitly say no to? Doing a yes/no audit is a little bit like tracking your calorie consumption. It can be both enlightening and discouraging at the same time, but all good change happens when God empowers us, in humility, to see ourselves rightly. The amazing grace of our God is He always loves us right we are and loves us way too much to allow us to stay there.

Once that is complete then choose one meaningful "no" for the season of Lent. An example could be that you tend to spend the end of your night mindlessly scrolling on your phone and you feel led to say no to that and instead reading scripture, with some prayer, until its bedtime. Another example could be regarding a morning routine where you usually start your day in a certain way but instead you are going to say no to something and make time in the word/prayer instead. There is an endless number of examples, but the goal is to make it meaningful to you, sacrificial and to strengthen the muscle of self-discipline as it pertains to our ongoing walk with Jesus.

I pray this process will help in bringing clarity into your life, as it pertains to our yes's and no's. In the second part of this study we will lean into what saying no to the world looks like so that Jesus can be an even bigger yes of our lives.

PART TWO

I think we could all agree that we live in a very noisy time in human history. From the external noise that is caused by traffic, construction, loud conversations, music, television and the reality that many of us choose to put earbuds in and inject the mind with continuous noise. These are examples of external noise which originate outside of your mind and body but what about the other kind of noise? What other kind of noise you might be wondering? The other noise is the internal noise that occurs within us. There is physiological noise that can happen in the form of a rumbling stomach, migraine or a health issue that interferes with concentration. There is also psychological noise that are linked with mental and emotional distractions such as worry, anxiety, anger, or racing thoughts that prevent you from focusing or relaxing. No matter the noise our God has an invitation.

Psalm 46 is a beautiful psalm written by the Sons of Korah. Psalm 46 begins by saying *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”* The Psalmist describes our God as a safe refuge and a place we can always retreat to. God is an immediate and reliable source of help who provides stability when everything seems to be collapsing. The Psalm continues by describing cosmic upheaval with the earth giving way, mountains falling into the sea, waters roaring and mountains trembling. Believers here are encouraged to be fearless, not because noise can be avoided, but because God is a sufficient refuge within the noise.

The Psalm ends with these two verses *“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”* The Psalm calls us to be still and know. This is not just a call to be quiet, or reflect, but a command to stop striving and fighting. To be still is to remember and rest in the reality that God alone is sovereign and will be exalted over all the earth. The overarching message is the unwavering confidence of God’s people in God’s power and presence.

I think we underestimate how much the world is discipling us day in and day out. Every marketing ad is geared to get your attention and focus. The algorithms are trying to get 24/7 of your attention and send you notifications when you are not complying. Everything has been hardwired to be as noisy as possible so that we will stop and look at it. You know that famous analogy of how you boil a frog in water? If you try to put the frog into boiling water, it just jumps right out but if you slowly increase the water temperature it won't jump out before it is too late. Yes, that's a little graphic but it gets the point across that the world is slowly and deliberately conforming us...unless we do something about it.

Paul speaks into this in Romans 12:1-2 when he says, *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers & sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."*

Paul is speaking a very deep truth that your everyday existence, every choice you make with your body and your time, is meant to be an act of worship. Our surrendered lives is our spiritual worship, and we holistically desire to have Jesus be our life's "yes" which would mean the ways of the world would be a hard "no". To live as a sacrifice requires a defensive plan (don't conform) and an offensive action (be transformed). Paul is encouraging believers to actively replace worldly patterns with Godly ones to clearly understand and pursue God's best plan for you. Now I must admit this is much harder than we could imagine but the cost-benefit ratio is well worth the effort.

So how do we go about saying "no" to hurry, noise, digital distraction, comparison, and consumption so that we can open up more spiritual space for stillness & presence? I read multiple research articles from Cal Newport, Raleigh Oaks Behavioral Health, RJ Starr and Lone Star Neurology and they found that noise kills meaning while silence restores depth.

There is so much research that confirms that both silence and boredom are crucial for fostering deep thought and creativity. They find these periods of low stimulation allow the brain to switch from processing external information to engaging our internal processing systems which leads to enhanced self-reflection, problem-solving, and generation of new ideas.

Basically, science is catching up with scripture that we were made by God for periods of stillness. Jesus Himself said to us in Matthew 11:28-30 “²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” What would it look like in your life to say no to something in order that this invitation could be a yes. This invitation from Jesus is available anytime, anyplace, any circumstance, no matter what.

So again, how do we go about saying “no” to hurry, noise, digital distraction, comparison, and consumption so that we can open up more spiritual space for stillness & presence? Let's start by first answering these questions:

1. What are the sources for the loudest noise in your life (internal & external)?
2. What have you tried in the past (worked & didn't work) to build rhythms of solitude into your life?

Here are 4 practical ways that can help quiet the internal noise and reducing information overload with some real-world application.

1. **Prayer & Mindfulness.** Prayer & mindfulness grounds us in the time and place we are in. It's a time to observe our thoughts without getting carried away by them and helping us calm our busy minds. Prayer is not for God's benefit, but ours, as we come to the person of Jesus and remember He is not confused by our lives. He has promised peace for our souls and that we can ask, seek and knock on the doors of any questions we may have. Remember that Jesus is our ever-present help in times of trouble and its His presence that makes all the difference in our lives. Try starting the day in 10 minutes of prayer and ending the day in 10 minutes of prayer.
2. **Limit Stimuli and Screen Time.** We could all go for a reduced exposure to information overload from social media, constant notifications and excessive screen time. Every click, every scroll, every image is a tiny dose of dopamine that gets released. This means we have less for the meaningful and real things of life because we microdosed it all away to our phones. Try designating a screen free time where you will disconnect from devices and allow your mind to rest. You could pair this with a walk, light workout, stretching or something that helps relax your body and mind.
3. **Seek Solitude and Stillness.** Spending time alone in silence allows your thoughts to the surface where you can process them more clearly, rather than letting them build up as background stress. Look at your calendar and make an appointment between you and Jesus. Create the event in your calendar (as many times as you want throughout the week) and treat this event as a must not miss event of your day.
4. **Prioritize Sleep and Physical Health.** Quality sleep is essential for strengthening our reliance to stress and helping manage our internal noise. Most of us are guilty of saying yes to our phones, shows, salty snacks and beverages while saying no to the one essential thing that brings so much to our well-being...true rest. While sleep is important

so is treating our temples well through quality food, drink and regular exercise. Jesus cares deeply about our holistic health and it does amazing things for our overall well-being. Pair a spiritual discipline with a physical discipline...taking a walk while actively praying...riding a spin bike while watching an episode of the chosen.

As you can see there are limitless examples for how someone might say yes to this in their lives, but the same invitation is available to all no matter what it looks like. The Gospel of this is Jesus is willing and waiting. Jesus came, died and rose again to make this relationship available to you no matter what. He forgave and cleansed you from the inside out to make you a holy dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. We are empowered, to not be conformed to the patterns of the world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds.

Remember true discipline starts with remembering who and whose you are. You were made to find completion in your Savior and the prayer is that day-by-day, week-by-week, month-by-month, and year-by-year Jesus would continue to become more and more our souls overwhelming yes.

PART THREE

Have you ever heard of the term “supernormal stimulus”? A supernormal stimulus is an exaggerated version of something we’re naturally wired to respond to, and we tend to respond to it more strongly than the real thing, even though it’s artificial or unnatural. This idea was first described by Dutch scientist Niko Tinbergen in the 1940’s. He noticed that animals (and people) often preferred exaggerated fake versions of natural things over the real deal.

Niko Tinbergen conducted an experiment using butterflies. The female butterflies have specific colors and patterns that signal readiness to mate, which the male butterflies instinctively recognize. Niko created artificial butterflies (fake ones) that were bigger and had more vibrant, contrasting colors than real females, making them visually way more appealing. What he found was the male butterflies ignored the real females and swarmed cardboard models, attempting to mate with them instead. Obviously, it didn’t work and many of the male butterflies tried to mate with the fake version even when it killed them.

Some examples for humans would be junk food, social media, pornography, entertainment & screens, caffeine, etc. Junk food is engineered to be sweeter, saltier, and fattier than anything found in nature. We as humans are biologically drawn to calories, so companies make hyperpalatable foods that hijack our instincts. Entertainment and screens use fast motion, bright colors and sound effects to give us a sensory overload...which our brain loves. Social media hijacks our brain that loves approval, entertainment and connection. Especially when it comes to the “like” button on our posts. This exaggerated, fast-feedback version of social approval replaces the real thing.

Why this matters is because these supernormal stimuli exploit your natural desires and can lead to overindulgence, addiction, or loss of interest in the real thing. Now let's connect this with how the word teaches us about our

true desires. Jesus says in Matthew 4:4 (quoting Deut 8:3) *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God"*. Jesus also says in John 6:27 *"Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you."*

I think much of our aversion to discipline is that we see it has a thing done to us and not a pathway to a greater freedom for us. Discipline is not deprivation; it's the path to true delight. Spiritual disciplines are absolutely a holy "no" to the things of the world but that is only half the story. We don't only turn from something, but we are turning towards Someone!

When we think through our lives, we naturally discipline our lives around things we love. We make choices to prioritize the things that we think are most important, but here is where we need to be careful. Satan is also in the business of trying to allure our attention and delights away from God. There is a Holy Spirit of God and a spirit of this world, and they are very very different. Jesus says in John 14:26-27 *"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 that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."*

You cannot simply eliminate a poor habit, but you must replace it with something better. If I want to cut down on junk food I don't just eat nothing, but I replace the junk food with something nourishing. Jesus in these verses is telling His people that He has everything we need for a life of abundant joy and peace. He is the real deal, the true food that endures to eternal life, and He alone can give us peace beyond the circumstances of this world. Take one Godly character trait as an example and let's use an attitude of gratitude. Gratitude is proven to lead to increased joy, resilience and relational connection. Honestly you could deep dive every fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control). What you will discover is every fruit of the Holy Spirit leads us into greater joy, happiness, fulfillment and true enduring peace in our lives. Spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, worship, scripture, sabbath) function as the pathway.

Let me use an example from my own life. I love cold coffee, and I especially like cold coffee in the afternoons. Now I know that what I truly need is water, but the allure of cold coffee is just so strong. Cold coffee is not going to give me any of the benefits that my body truly needs. It will leave me more dehydrated, it will not hydrate, it won't truly energize but the allure is there. What I need is a big glass of cold water to hydrate, increase natural energy and help my body remain resilient and healthy.

So question for you...What are the cold coffee's of your life? What are supernormal stimulus that you are drawn to like the butterflies?

Want some help identifying them in your life? Answer these questions:

1. Is this thing triggering me more than it should?
2. Is it a more intense version of something I naturally enjoy?
3. How do I react if someone would question its use or take it away?
4. Do I feel less satisfied with the real version after going to this thing?

Awareness is the first step and then we practice moderation or a complete fast from those supernormal inputs. Remember though it's not enough to just stop, you need to replace with the real deal. Try saying yes to scripture before screens. Try saying yes to prayer before social media. Try saying yes to serving someone before doing something that serves yourself. Try saying yes to gratitude before complaining (name 3 blessings everyday your grateful for).

Remember every spiritual discipline is not depravation from something, but an invitation to greater delight. You're not just turning away from something, but you are actually turning towards Someone! We all desire more joy, more peace, more patience, more love, more kindness, more goodness, more faithfulness and more self-control in our lives. Every one of these is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that only God can grace us with, and the good news is He is more than happy to flood our lives with true delight in/and from Him.

Easy next step is what is one supernormal stimulus that you could replace with something from God that will help you experience the true delight of a relationship with your Maker? Think of it like training for a marathon: discipline creates strength to enjoy the journey, not just to suffer through it. I pray this has been encouraging and helpful for your life of following Jesus. In part 4 we will look at how our yes's and no's are forming us into particular kinds of people and God has given us the power to decide who that person is going to be.

PART FOUR

A key motivation for the increase of a spiritually disciplined life is because all of our yes's and no's are forming us into a particular person. We are always in the process of becoming someone and the question is who is that someone we are becoming? This season of Lent asks us "Am I becoming more like Jesus or just more exhausted?" The battle of our lives is always a battle for what gets to shape our identity. Our identity encompasses how a person sees themselves and the qualities, beliefs, personality traits, appearance and expressions that make us distinct from others.

In a world that constantly attempts to define people by their achievements, appearance, relationships, or social status, the concept of identity is often fluid, fragile, and subject to change. Our God entered this chaotic landscape as a steadfast and unchanging foundation, providing us this foundation to form our true identities from. Scripture fights for our identities by constantly dismantling false labels, reminding us of our divine origin and worth, and providing an unshakeable, God-defined reality of who we truly are.

The battle for identity is a spiritual battle which is why we need spiritual disciplines to engage the battle. The world suggests that you must look inward or achieve outward success to find your worth, but Scripture declares that your identity is a gift given to you by God Himself. Again, society frequently ties a person's identity to their performance or achievements (career, grades, social standing). Scripture fights this by assuring us that our standing is based entirely on God's grace and the finished work of Jesus...not our works. We are accepted, loved, and valued simply because we are His children, not because of what we do.

Take a moment and look up these identity verses that rest upon your life: (seriously...do it)

1. 2 Corinthians 5:17 "I am a New Creation"
2. 1 Peter 2:9 "I am a person for God's own possession"
3. Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ"
4. Ephesians 2:10 "I am God's masterpiece"
5. John 1:12 "I am a child of God"
6. Colossians 3:3 "My true life is hidden with Christ in God"
7. 2 Corinthians 5:21 "I am the righteousness of God"

The Word of God provides us the means for transformation. Remember it is our yes's and no's that will shape us into a particular kind of person. The question isn't if we are being transformed but what are we being transformed into (world or Jesus)? The Word of God is the means of transformation by first renewing our minds. Romans 12:2 instructs believers to *"not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds."* Engaging Scripture daily is the primary way this mental renewal happens, replacing worldly lies with God's truth.

When we come to the Word of God, we don't approach it to try to figure God out, but we submit ourselves under the Word to allow it to figure us out. Scripture provides the means to fight back against the lies of Satan by empowering us to stand firm in the reality of who God says we are. Scripture provides an unwavering foundation rooted in God's eternal love and purpose for our lives. It is the most powerful tool/weapon/resource we have that assures us we are loved, forgiven, secure, and purposeful, enabling us to live confidently from a God given identity rather than a fragile, self-made one.

I was reading a research paper on how to build long-term habits, and they found that identity-based decisions lead to the most sustainable discipline. Identity based decisions shifts the focus from what outcome I want to achieve to what kind of person do I want to become? This concept is central to habit formation popularized by authors like James Clear. He wrote that "by focusing on the identity first, the actions (habits) follow more easily, creating a powerful feedback loop: your habits shape your identity, and your identity shapes your habits."

With this in mind look with me at Hebrews 12:1-2 *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."*

This passage is a cornerstone teaching which gives us this athletic metaphor for the life of faith. This passage is urging believers to continue, to persevere, to not waver in their commitment to Jesus by looking to Jesus who alone is the author and perfecter of our faith. The writer of Hebrews presents the Christian life as a sustained effort requiring discipline and stamina. Christians are called to remove distractions and sins that impede their progress, much like an athlete shedding excess weight.

So how is a Christian able to do this and not burn out or give up? The writer of Hebrews says by a sustained focus on Jesus which is crucial for navigating the challenges of faith. Jesus, in this text, serves as both an example of endurance and the source of strength for believers. Jesus did all of this for the joy that would come in having a forever relationship with you. He endured the cross, despising its shame and rose again victorious to lead you into the life that He created for you.

I hope you see how spiritual disciplines are not a burden on our lives, but the pathway to the greatest life we could possibly live. The reason for this is because they are the pathway to greater intimacy with Jesus and He is what we were created for. Jesus tells us in 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."* And also in John 15:11 *"¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."*

I pray this study has helped you see spiritual disciplines in a whole new light. I also pray that we all take Jesus up on His offer as we come and abide in His word and receive His joy so that our joy may be full. There is

a resource page at the end of this study with a breakdown of some different spiritual disciplines and practical ways to approach them. Remember self-discipline is a muscle that grows over time. Start with one and then build the weight from there.

Notes

Spiritual Disciplines Guide

The goal of this guide is to create a list of simple shifts in habits intended to build consistency and awareness without overwhelming your daily life. Each one is designed to create space through self-denial and spiritual disciplines so that our hearts can say a greater “yes” to Jesus Christ.

Getting Started: Things for Lent (Entry Level)

1. **Give Up One Specific, Minor Distraction Daily:** Identify one low stakes habit you do without thinking and temporarily remove it. This could be checking social media before you get out of bed, watching late-night TV on weeknights, or listening to music while you drive. The small sacrifice helps cultivate intentionality.
2. **Commit to 5 Minutes of Quiet in the Morning:** Instead of immediately checking your phone or starting chores, dedicate a mere five minutes to silence, deep breathing, or simply sitting quietly with a cup of coffee. Use this time to center yourself and articulate a prayer asking God to guide your day.
3. **Replace Casual Consumption with Scripture:** Whenever you reach for your phone out of boredom or wait in line, open a simple Bible app (YouVersion is popular) and read one Psalm or a passage from a Gospel like Mark or Luke. This replaces passive time with intentional connection.
4. **Practice Mindful Eating (One Meal per Day):** Before dinner, pause for 30 seconds to genuinely thank God for the meal and the hands that prepared it. Then, eat the meal without any screens (phone, TV, computer) for company. This small discipline restores gratitude and presence to a routine activity.
5. **Perform One Small Act of Kindness Each Day:** Look for an easy, no-cost way to serve someone else. Hold a door open, send a quick encouraging text message, let someone merge in traffic, or offer a sincere compliment. This shifts focus from your own self-denial to loving your neighbor.

Getting Deeper: Medium-Hard Things for Lent

1. **Fast from a Favorite Beverage (e.g., Caffeine or Alcohol):** The dependence on a daily coffee or an evening glass of wine provides a constant, physical reminder of your Lenten commitment. The small headache or lack of the "pick-me-up" becomes a prompt to pray and focus on God as your ultimate source of strength.
2. **Establish a Daily 15-Minute Prayer/Reading Routine:** Move beyond five minutes of quiet. Set aside a non-negotiable 15 minutes to engage actively in structured prayer (perhaps using the Lord's Prayer as a template) or the Lenten devotional book. Make this time a priority appointment.
3. **Give Up A Specific Indulgence:** Instead of giving up specific foods, try giving up a non-essential activity that takes up time and attention, such as video games, online shopping for non-essentials, or a specific type of social media. This is harder because these activities may be deeply ingrained habits.
4. **Commit to Almsgiving:** Almsgiving means giving financially to the poor or a cause you care about. A medium-hard approach involves setting aside the money you save by giving things up (e.g., the cost of coffee/wine) and donating it weekly, or setting a specific percentage of your income to give away during Lent.
5. **Stop Complaining or Criticizing for the Day:** This is harder than it sounds. Catch yourself every time you are about to complain, judge others, or make a sarcastic remark. Instead of speaking the negativity, use that moment to pray for patience or offer a positive perspective. This is a profound "yes" to grace of speech.

Deep Practices: Hard Things for Lent

1. **Fast for a Full 24 Hours (The Traditional Fast):** Abstain from all food and drink (except water) from dinner one evening until dinner the next evening, or from waking up until sunset once a week. This physical weakness is intended to foster profound spiritual reliance on God's strength. Consult a healthcare professional before undertaking significant fasting.
2. **Commit to a Rigorous Scripture Reading Plan:** Don't just read a few verses; commit to reading an entire book of the Bible during Lent, or follow a comprehensive 40-day plan that covers significant ground. This requires consistent daily discipline and significant time investment.
3. **"Digital Detox" or Minimal Tech Use:** Give up entertainment screen time entirely. This means no Netflix, no YouTube, and only essential computer/phone use for work or communication. This radical removal of distraction forces you to fill your time with prayer, reading, service, and presence with others.
4. **Embrace Silence and Solitude:** Commit to several hours of silence once a week (perhaps a Saturday morning) where you are completely alone, disconnected, and focused entirely on being present with God and listening. This requires overcoming modern society's intense fear of being alone with one's thoughts.
5. **Take Up a Significant Act of Service/Volunteering:** Commit a substantial amount of time, several hours a week, to active service in your community, such as volunteering at a food bank, assisting an elderly neighbor, or mentoring someone in need. This is a powerful "yes" to loving others sacrificially.

A few things to remember is that a holy “no” is only half the story. Discipline is not deprivation; it’s the path to a greater delight because we aren’t just turning FROM something, but we are actually turning TOWARD Someone. Whether it’s a simple 5 minutes in the morning or a few hours of solitude in prayer the goal is to turn towards Jesus. The goal is that we get in the habit of saying “NO” to the things of this world so that Jesus can become the greater and greater “YES” of our lives.

Also remember that self-discipline is like a muscle that grows over a long period of time by slowly increasing the weight. This is not a time for comparison or self-deprecation but is simply a season for awareness, repentance, self-denial and an opportunity to add some weight to the cross that we have been told to pick up and follow Jesus with. Jesus never promised that following Him would be easy, but He does promise it will be worth it.

May God bless you all this season of Lent. May the Holy Spirit stir in you in powerful and tangible ways. May you find your true delight in the presence of your Savior as we build the muscles of our self-discipline by creating holy spaces and moments to abide in Him.

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Take This Journey With You

Access this Lent devotional online or as an audiobook, and find more studies and resources created to strengthen your faith and guide your daily walk with Christ.

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