

# Spiritual Disciplines | Scripture

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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I want to start by asking some questions of you guys about spiritual disciplines. And since I want everybody to be honest and not feel any shame or any pride, I'm going to do the kind of the typical church thing where I'm going to ask you guys to close your eyes and raise your hand so you don't have to feel like weird about looking around, okay? But we're not going to do it too long because I don't want you to fall asleep. So I'm going to ask a few questions and just raise your hand if it's true of you and put your hand down if it's not true of you. Don't worry, I'm not taking notes and I'm not looking at specific individuals, okay?

So don't feel bad if you can't raise your hand or if you raise your hand to everything, okay? So go ahead and close your eyes. This is the first question. Raise your hand if you read the Bible for at least ten minutes, 6 days a week. Raise your hand ten minutes, 6 days a week. Okay, thank you. Go ahead and put your hands down. Raise your hand if you pray for at least ten minutes a day, 6 days a week that doesn't have to all be at once. It can be combined time, okay? All right, so a lot more with combined time. That's good.

Okay? Raise your hand if you attend a worship service like this, at least three out of every four Sundays. We all have vacations and stuff. But, you know, 75% of the time, okay, I figured you're all here. There's a lot more hands on that one. It's okay. That's good. All right. Raise your hand. If you have served somebody else in any way for at least 25 hours so far this year, not counting the church. So I'm talking about neighbors or, you know, whatever, raise your hand if you served others outside of the church, okay?

That's good. All right, raise your hand if you have read through the entire Bible in your life, at least once. Read through the entire Bible. That has been the most shocking in both services. A lot of you have read through the entire Bible. I love that. That is good. Okay. One more. Raise your hand if you have talked to at least three unbelievers about faith this year. Now let me put a caveat in there. This doesn't mean that you shared the whole gospel, but that you intentionally shifted the conversation to the topic of faith.

So raise your hand at least three people, you've shifted the conversation of faith. Okay, that's really good. You guys can open your eyes and now hopefully you didn't fall asleep. All right. Thank you for participating. I know for some of you, that was really hard. And for others of you, you're thinking to yourself, man, I wish everybody's eyes were open because I raised my hand on every one. I'll be doing a sermon on pride next week, okay? So don't worry about that. I'm joking. I won't be doing that on pride. You know, again, one of the things that was interesting, both services today was how many people have read, I didn't think about, oh, I don't think we got an audience shot for the live feed.

So hopefully nobody gets to see that. But a lot of people have read through the Bible in their lifetime. And that's awesome. I could have asked other questions. Certainly about fasting about giving about worshiping. I think we would have had similar responses if I had asked questions about health. Now, don't raise your hands for any of these. I had first service some people started raising their hands. You don't need to raise your hands, okay? Raise your hand if you exercise for at least 6 hours a week, right? Some of us might be able to raise our hand for that.

Raise your hand if you drink 64 ounces of water per day on average. This to me is just crazy unless they're counting diet Mountain Dew. I don't even come close. All right? 64 ounces. That's what they say you're

supposed to have in a day. Raise your hand if you have at least one sweet per day. Man, my hand would have to be way up on that one, right? I have at least one sweet a day, probably more than one. And I don't know what it is about summer, but I want ice cream every day. I hope I'm not the only one. I love it, okay? Raise your hand.

If you consistently eat four servings of vegetables a day, no way do I do that? My wife fights with me and the kids to eat the vegetables at the dinner table. Now you don't have to worry about answering those questions. But here's the deal. What is it about our nature? What is it about our personality that makes it so difficult to do what we know is best for us and instead do the things that hurt us in the long run? What is it about our nature? What is it about our personalities, the ways that we are created?

Now, I can't speak for everyone. So I will just speak for myself as I answered that question. Thinking about in preparation for this message. The first answer was an easy one. Sometimes I'm just lazy. Sometimes I'm just lazy. I have the time. I just don't feel like doing it. Whatever it is, if it's exercising or drinking the water or spending time in the word, sometimes I'm just lazy. Sometimes I just want immediate satisfaction. And so I want ice cream. I know that it's going to taste good. It's going to feel good.

I'm hungry. And so I go get ice cream, knowing that I shouldn't do that every single day, but sometimes I do. I get caught up in a trap with that. Sometimes I'm just not disciplined enough. I just don't have the discipline. I know what I'm supposed to do, and I just don't do it. And sometimes I think about today instead of the future, I know that if I don't eat my vegetables and I'm eating unhealthy food and not drinking enough water, that it's not good for my body, but I'm only thinking about the moment, not the future.

And so I get caught up in the here and now. Now, if none of you agree with me on that or can relate with me, I'm still okay this morning because I know at least one person that had a similar struggle. His name was Paul. He wrote much of the New Testament. Most of the New Testament that we have. And so I just want to read to you a section from a letter that he wrote to the churches in Rome where Paul has the same struggles that I have when it comes to these disciplines. Listen to what Paul says. I do not understand what I do.

For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate that I do. It's a little confusing with all of those in there. But Paul's basically saying, I know what I'm supposed to do and I just don't do it. And I know what I'm not supposed to do, and I keep doing that. He goes on versus 18 and 19 to say, for I know that good itself does not dwell in me. That is, in my sinful nature, for I have the desire to do what is good, but I can not carry it out for I do not do the good that I want to do, but the evil that I do not want to do, this, I keep on doing.

Paul is saying, I want to make the right decisions. I know what I am supposed to do, but when the moment comes for me to do it, I fail. You see, I've come to learn in my own life and in counseling lots of other people that knowing the right thing to do is usually not the problem. The problem is actually doing it. But if you and I want to grow in our faith, we know what is necessary. We just have to do it.

So I want to spend a little time talking about that today, specifically talking about spending time in the word of God. As I meet with individuals and talk about their study habits and if they spend time reading the Bible outside of coming to church or in their life group, I find that most people are afraid to read the Bible because it intimidates them. Studies have been done to discover how many people who claim to be Christ followers.

This isn't just across the United States, but these would be people that go to church on a Sunday morning and this shows that you guys are not the normal or average congregation. But how many people have actually read through the entire Bible in their lifetime? They've actually read from beginning to end. How many people have done that? And the best guess that they have from those surveys is about 5 to 10% of people that claim to believe in Jesus Christ as their lord and savior have read through the entire Bible.

Now I know I've told you this before, but I am amazed by so many people that say that they believe something as important as their Salvation and eternity, but they don't even know the whole story. Now, I understand

that when if you're going to read through the Bible, if you start in genesis and you want to get to revelation, you get the genesis, things are going well. Exodus is good. You get to Leviticus and you're like, I'm done, right? You just hang it up. It's a difficult book to get through. I understand that. And that's where most people quit.

But I tried to imagine if we truly believe this is the word of God, why wouldn't we take time to read it? And so I tried to think of an analogy to understand how silly this is. And the only one that I could come up with is imagine that you're getting a love letter from your spouse or a loved one that you haven't seen in years. Maybe your spouse, your fiancée, your girlfriend, your boyfriend, whatever it is. You haven't seen them in years. Maybe they're off serving in the military. They're on duty.

Maybe their job called them to go away. And so you haven't been able to talk to them, but they have sent you a long letter. And yet when you receive that letter in the mail, you decide that you don't care enough to read the whole letter. Doesn't that seem absurd? You can't find time to open it. You're just too busy. It's too confusing as you try to read it. And so it just sits there on your desk on opened. This is what we do with scripture.

It is God's word to us, and sometimes I have used the excuse. I'm just too busy. I don't understand it. I don't have time for it. But I truly believe with everything that I am that the Bible has the power to transform our lives. We call it the word of God because I believe that it actually is God speaking to us.

And so I want to spend some time looking at some text of what the Bible claims it is, what it claims to be, and why we should give it the time of day to study it, to understand it, and to process it. So let me pray, and then we'll look at a couple of sections of scripture. Heavenly Father, we come before you, and I believe as your word says that the scriptures are living and active, that they truly can transform our lives, make us into a new creation, something new and exciting and different.

And so lord, I pray, even this morning, as we open up the text together, that you would speak to us through the power of your spirit, and we ask this in Jesus name, amen, Hebrews chapter four verse 12, I want you to listen and pay attention to the claim that the Bible is making about itself. I understand that this is coming from the Bible. So this is the claim that it is making about itself.

Hebrews chapter four 12 for the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. This book, scripture, that you have before you is claiming to be alive. What does that mean? What does it mean to be alive? It means that these are not just words on a page.

This isn't just a story. It's not just a fairytale. It's not just some fictitious book that is meant to make us better. When I talk with people about the Bible, one of the number one responses that I receive, so many people think that this is just a book that is meant to help people be better people. It's just, they're just stories to help me make better decisions about my life. I don't think they actually happened. I don't think they're true, but you know I just believe that their stories to help me be a better person.

They don't believe they actually happened. And I often struggle with the logic behind that because we just read in Hebrews chapter four versus 12 that this book is making the claim that it is alive and active and it transforms hearts and lives. It is living. It is true. It's just as illogical for people that make the statement, I believe Jesus was a good person, but I don't believe Jesus was God.

That statement just doesn't make logical sense because Jesus claimed to be God. Jesus said to his followers, if you have seen me, then you have seen the father. That's why he was crucified because they were claiming he was a heretic. He was claiming to be something that they didn't believe was true. And so they crucified him. So it doesn't make logical sense just to believe that Jesus was a good teacher because if he wasn't, God, then he's either a liar or crazy.

Because he claimed to be God, the same is true of scripture. If we think that it's just a good book for helping us and teaching us, we can't believe that because the Bible is making claims that it's beyond that. So it's either lying or it's something that we shouldn't read because it's not true. If the Bible is just a good book to help people live their lives, then the Bible shouldn't make the claim that it's living inactive.

It is either the word of God, and it is alive and active or it is false, and it should be thrown away. But here's what I can tell you from personal experience. If you read this book, and I have said this multiple times already, it will transform you. Again, I can say this from personal experience. I know I've shown many of you this Bible before. This is the Bible that I bought when I was in high school. I saved some of my birthday money to buy the special leather bound with the gold coloring on the outside of the pages, which lets you know I was not a normal teenager, okay?

So I saved my money and I bought this Bible and not because I necessarily cared about what was in the Bible, but because I didn't want to waste my money, I decided that I was actually going to read it. And so every night, before I went to bed, I would open my Bible and I remember my youth pastor was one that had taught me that it's okay to underline in your Bible and to star and maybe put a question mark if you don't know what you're reading. And so I went through the scripture page by page while I was in high school trying to understand it and to grasp it.

And I would go and ask questions of the youth pastor in the pastor if there was a section I didn't understand. And I would read through this whole thing. And I remember I started in genesis and went to revelation, and I got to Leviticus and I wanted to quit, right? But I can tell you from personal experience that this book changed my life. I am not the same person today that I would have been without this book in my life. It radically, radically transformed me.

It made me into a different person without even knowing it. I was beginning to view the world with different eyes. I was beginning to think differently than what I was. And so from personal experience, I can say that it's alive and active. He was chapter four verse 12 also said that the word of God penetrates to dividing soul and spirit joints and marrow. What does this mean? This means that the word has a way of peering deep inside of us to our deepest members.

When you read the word of God, it dives deep into your inner being. We can not hide from the word. We can not hide our true selves. The word illuminates all that is inside of us that needs to be cut out. And we all need things to be cut out of our lives. As we read the living word, it convicts, and it reveals, and if I were honest with you, I believe this is the underlying reason why most people don't read the scripture.

Because they are afraid that it is going to convict them of something, and they are enjoying their life and they don't want to be convicted of something. They would rather try to live in ignorance, you see the enemy doesn't want us to open this living book. The Bible calls us to action. It calls us to do something. It isn't simply a story or a fairytale. It demands a response. This is another reason why people don't want to read the word of God because reading the word really divides mankind into two different categories.

One category is those who read the message and now have a faith in Jesus Christ as their personal savior. The other category is those who maybe have never read it or those who do read it and have come to their own conclusion that it just can't be true. Two different beliefs, two different lives, finally Hebrews chapter four verse 12, says that the word of God judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

The word is the best and most accurate mirror you will ever look into. Concerning your life. If you want to know what you look like, spiritually, and how you are reflecting to other people, then look into the word of God. The word will give us the most honest response to the response to the question, am I good? When you read the word, you get an answer to that question. Am I good?

You see, reading the word allows us to get a view of ourselves that nothing else can. It truly does penetrate to dividing sole in spirit joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes and actions of the heart. Now that's just one verse. Hebrews chapter four verse 12. For the sake of time, I only have one more that I want to share with you. This comes out of second Timothy, chapter three. Some of you are familiar with this. Again, this is written by the Apostle Paul.

And he says in second Timothy chapter three versus 16 and 17, all scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Again, this is a strong claim. This means even Leviticus is good for that, right? Leviticus is getting a hard difficult day today.

Second Timothy, chapter three versus 16 and 17, all scripture is God breathed. Everything in this book is to be taken seriously as if this comes from the mouth of God himself. As I talk with individuals, sometimes people will ask me the question pastor, do you ever wish that you could hear from God? That you could just have an audible voice. And I say, yeah, there's many times in my life that I wish God would just speak to me. Maybe he would write it in the clouds.

Maybe he would just explain to me what he wants me to do in a certain situation. And it's almost like I get slapped upside the head. I don't think it's God that slaps me, but I all of a sudden it's like, you can. It's right here. The Bible is God's word. We use that phrase to describe this book for a reason because we believe this actually comes from the mouth of God. I know that's a serious claim, and I noticed some people that's crazy. But I can only speak from personal experience because we could just call this a book.

We could just say it's the canon, it's the Bible, it's our scriptures, it's our text. We use that language as well, but I intentionally call it the word of God. Because God is speaking to you through it. And he will never tell you something that contradicts this book. Can I say that again? God will never tell you something that contradicts what he's already told us in his word.

There have been times, not many, where people meet in my office or have a conversation with them out in the community, and they'll say pastor, God told me, and then they give me what God told them. And it totally contradicts what's in his word. And I just look at them and I go, I don't think so. I don't think that was God. He will not tell us something that contradicts his word. God speaks to us every day. Through his word, the entire book is good for teaching.

We can learn about God and about the world from this book. In this information that we receive from the Bible, it's not just a knowledge. It's not just things that we can put in our memory bank of our mind, but this book gives us advice on living, wisdom in order to rebuke and to correct and to train ourselves. It is the ultimate guidebook for life. Paul says that when we read this book, it's so that we can be thoroughly equipped because this book prepares us for what's ahead.

You and I don't know exactly what's going to happen in our world and in our life and all of the craziness that's going on around us. But the word is meant to prepare us. For that. If we spend time in his word, we are preparing for what is to come. So I really don't know what else to tell you, except just do it. Just do it. Make a commitment to spend time in the word of God. Maybe you need to start small.

I can give you some suggestions on how to do it. Maybe if you're not already practicing reading the word of God, start with just 5 minutes a day. That's fine. Start small. Maybe you need to do it right away in the morning so you don't forget and get busy with your day because you're a morning person. And so you need to have the Bible out on your nightstand the night before you go to bed so you will see it and you can read it for 5 minutes before you get up. Maybe if you're like me, you're a night person, not a morning person. And so you also have it on your nightstand, but you make sure 5 minutes before you go to bed.

I'm going to get out the Bible and I'm going to read. Maybe neither of those times work because you have families and there's distractions and everything else. And so you need to do it at lunchtime. Maybe you need to do it right when you get home. Maybe you need to read it alone or with your spouse or with your family. I feel like Dr. Seuss and green eggs and ham. You can read it here. You can read it there. You can read it anywhere. Just start. Just do it. Let me give you some practical suggestions. If you have the U version app on your phone or your iPads or whatever else, these are all listed there.

You can look under events for our event today. One suggestion, read a proverb a day. There's 31 proverbs, read one a day, that'll take you less than 5 minutes on most days. Maybe you want to read a psalm a day, and so you say, you know what? I'm going to start today with psalm one. That will take you way less than 5 minutes a day. And you say, you know what? God speaks to me through the psalms. And so you want to do that? That's fine. But I'm just warning you. When you get to psalm one 19, break that up a little bit, or you're going to quit. It's the longest book, longest chapter, longest chapter in the Bible.

Read through the New Testament book of John. Again, I have a lot of people that say, okay, I'm just going to start in genesis and work my way through. You'll have some rough patches if you do that. Maybe you want to start in the New Testament with the book of John reading about Jesus, but I do encourage reading through genesis. It lays the foundation for everything that comes after. And if you like story form, narrative form, it's great. It's amazing. Get a plan from you version, technology can be awful, but it can be really good. This is one of the ways that it can be really good. We all have at our fingertips on our phones and our iPads.

You can download this app called U version and there are thousands of Bible study plans on there. You can invite other people so you can do it together, hold each other accountable with your spouse, family, whatever else we have men's group that do it at the church, contact us, we'll add you to that group. Get a plan from you version. Maybe some of you say, you know what? I've never read through the entire Bible. That sounds enticing. I want to try that. You want to go through the Bible in a year, simply Google, go through the Bible in a year, and you can find any plan to follow and just start today.

You don't have to wait until January 1st. Start today and you will just finish on July 8th of 2024. And it's about 15 minutes a day for the average reader. You can go through the entire Bible in a year. That's great. Maybe you want to read Luke with your life group. Again, one of the gospels is a great place to start. To read about who God is. I want you to know that this is so important. So important that we spend time in the word of God, not just here on Sunday mornings, but in our own personal lives, that I am tempted to preach the same message every Sunday until 90% of you are reading the Bible every day.

I won't, but I'm tempted. I can tell you, I think this is more important to your spiritual journey than just about everything else that I could talk about. Maybe prayer, they go hand in hand, reading God's word and praying on your own. Please don't just listen to me on Sunday mornings. Study it yourself. Are you willing to commit to try to read the Bible every day, maybe 6 days out of the week? And if you are, do something to hold yourself accountable.

If you're like me, I can't tell you how many times internally I've told myself, hey, I'm going to start a diet on Monday. I'm going to stop eating so many sweets. I'm not going to drink as much diet Mountain Dew. And I have learned to intentionally not tell anybody because then when I don't follow through, I don't feel guilty, right? I say, I'm going to start on Monday, but Monday never comes. Tell somebody. That way you'll be held accountable. Come to the altar. Maybe you want to say, you know what? I really want to do this. And so I'm going to come to the altar because I just want to kind of put a stake in the ground and say, I'm doing this.

Ask someone to remind you. Again, technology can be a great thing. Put an alarm on your phone on your watch that goes off at the same time every day and this is the time I'm going to read from God's word. But just do it. I know some of you are thinking, great. I came to church and the message was read your Bible.

Wonderful message pastor. Thank you. But that's what it is. It's nothing new. I just encourage you to do it. Let me pray.

Heavenly Father, I do believe your word is living in active. So I think that there is no greater encouragement than I can give to this body, this family of believers, but to be in your word and to allow it to transform their lives. Thank you for transforming my life. Thank you for making me into a new creation. Thank you that I am a sinner that's been saved by grace.

It's in Jesus name we pray. Amen.