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Last week we talked about the different stages of the faith journey. The goal of every christian should be to reach a forged and fruitful faith. But how do we get there?

- How does an athlete get better at their sport? They train. It takes discipline to train. That's what we're going to discuss in this series. Our goal is this year is to help you develop a deeper relationship with God.
- Spiritual disciplines are part of that. But, here's the deal. Have you ever heard the saying you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. We can show you the disciplines and we can talk to you about how you can go deeper in your relationship with God, but ultimately it rests on you. You can only go as deep as you allow yourself to go.
- You have to practice the disciplines we'll share with you, and you have to make that time to spend and invest in your relationship with God.
- Have someone read 1timothy 4:7
- Paul is telling us that we need to work towards being Godly. We need to be disciplined towards developing a deep relationship with God.
- What are spiritual disciplines?
- Spiritual Disciplines are those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times.
- Let's simplify that a little....they are habits that promote spiritual growth.
- God uses several catalysts for changing us and making us more like Jesus, but the spiritual disciplines are a way that He allows us to control to a degree.
- He allows us to have some control over our spiritual growth, much like he gives us that choice to accept or reject the gift of salvation through His son, He gives us the power to say how deep we will go in our relationship with him.
- What are some disciplines that we can practice to go deeper in our relationship with him?
- Disciplines can include scripture reading, prayer, fellowship, worship, fasting, stewardship, self care, silence and solitude...There are many others but in this series we will use this list as a guide.
- But let's be real for a minute and say that practicing these disciplines is hard. I mean it feels like chores that we need to do right? And does God really want us to have a checklist of things that we do?
- The answer is that God does not want us to have a checklist of things to do for Him, but He does want us to spend time with Him. He wants us to become more like Jesus and to have a deeper relationship with Him. And that should be our desire.
- Tom Landry, the coach of the Dallas Cowboys for the better part of three decades said, "The job of a football coach is to make men do what they don't want to do in order to achieve what they've always wanted to be."
- In the same way, as Christians we need to make ourselves do something we would not normally do, which is to pursue these disciplines, in order to become what we should want to be which is more like Jesus, and to achieve a deeper more meaningful relationship with God.
- Paul tells us to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness.
- So let's talk a little about one of the disciplines....which discipline do you think we'll be discussing?
- Today I want to talk about reading Scripture.

- How many of you have seen the movie walk the line?
- It's a great biopic movie about the life of Johnny Cash.
- Johnny had a brother who wanted to be a preacher. In the movie there's a scene where Johnny's brother is reading His Bible and Johnny essentially asks him why he's reading it all the time and his brother responds if I'm going to be a preacher and help people I need to know the right stories to tell.
- But you know, preachers, or pastors shouldn't be the only ones to read their Bibles.
- There is perhaps no spiritual discipline more important than the intake or reading of God's word. Nothing can substitute for it.
- Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.
- It's all God breathed...meaning over the period of hundreds, even thousands of years God used and inspired men to write His story, which points to Jesus.
- And not only did He write it, it's so important that it's profitable or good for many different things.
- Think of taking in Scripture like your food or your meals you eat each day. You could survive a little while without food, but eventually you'll die. We need to food to grow and to live. It's the same with taking in scripture. We need it to grow and to live spiritually.
- Although it is the most important, taking in Scripture can be on of if not the most difficult of the disciplines to apply in our lives.
- I mean come on this book is literally ancient! And what if I don't like to read?
- Well never fear there are a few different ways to take in Scripture, and to be honest we should be allowing ourselves to use them.
- The first is to hear God's word. This is the eased part of it, simply hearing it. In fact we've done it tonight. We've read the word out loud together. Other ways to hear Scripture is to listen to preachers teach about what the word of God says. Or, even to have an audio bible read it to you.
- The second is to read it yourself. We need to read the word for ourselves. Jesus would often ask questions about people's understanding of Scripture beginning with the words, Have you not read... He assumed that those claiming to be God's people would have read the word of God. And you could make the case that this question implies that we should have a familiarity with the entire word of God.
- Finally we need to study God's word. This means we can't just read it just to read it. We need to seek to understand what it says and how it applies to us and how it can help us grow spiritually and go deeper in our relationship with God.
- Think about it like this, if reading the Bible can be compared to cruising the width of a clear lake in a motor bate, studying the Bible is like slowly crossing that same lake in a glass bottomed boat. The motor boat will provide an overview of the lake, the glass bottomed boat will take us beneath the surface and see what's going on down there.
- Now, I know the middle school group last year spent some time studying how to read the Bible, and the High school small group is doing the same this year. I won't get in to too much detail on how to read and study the Bible tonight. And let's be honest, I don't have the time to do give the art of reading and studying the Bible justice. So, if you have questions on that any of the leaders can definitely see about spending some time with you individually to help you with that, but I do have a short video that will give you some tips on how to read the Bible.
- Show video.

- As we prepare to close, that video brings up a good point. Too often we read the Bible as a self help book, or even as a book in which we can insert ourselves. The Bible is not about us, and it's not a self help book. As Jesus said in John 5:39 Jesus called out the religious leaders of his day by telling them that it seems they're looking for the source of eternal life in the Scripture. But, Scripture is there simply to testify about Jesus, who is the source of eternal life.
- The Bible is about and points to Jesus. Every verse of all 66 books points to Jesus. The more I study the Bible the more I see how Jesus is woven into the very fabric of it's words. And it is because of that that we need to be studying and reading the Bible.
- It's how we will know Jesus better, it's how He will speak to us, it's how we can grow.
- So, let me ask you, are you taking in Scripture at all? Yes you're coming here and hearing the word of God, but taking in Scripture shouldn't just be something you do once a week or once a month, or when you feel like you need help. It needs to be done regularly, almost like eating your daily meals. It's that vital to your spiritual life.
- So what are you doing to take in scripture daily? There are many resources out there for you to take it in, there are recorded sermons, there are audio bibles, we've given most of you a hard copy of the Bible, there are study resources that the leaders and I would be happy to share with you. But you need to make the choice to do it.
- Next week we're going to do a special Christmas lesson, but I want to challenge you between now and December 30, that's three weeks, to spend at least 12 of those days taking in Scripture. That's 4 days each week. We'll even do another group plan on the Bible app. But as we approach the new year we all need to make the commitment, if we are to go deeper in our relationship with Jesus, to take in more scripture.