

EQUIPPED

Five Foundations of the Faith



**Salvation and
Identity**



**The Word
of God**



**Spiritual
Disciplines**



**The Local
Church**



**Mission &
Purpose**

Personal Study Guide



Spiritual Disciplines



Lesson Question: How do I grow and practice my faith?

Main Idea: Spiritual Disciplines are not just practices of piety; they are tools for transformation.

Key Terms

Spiritual Disciplines: Practices prescribed by God that facilitate growth in us.

Sanctification: The lifelong process of being made more like Jesus.

Meditation: The act of reflection on the Word of God.

Worship: Anything we do that brings glory to God.

Legalism: The false idea that we can be “more loved” by God through practices.

What are Spiritual Disciplines?

Most Christians may not be able to define spiritual disciplines, but they are likely familiar with them. Spiritual disciplines are God-ordained practices that facilitate spiritual growth, also called sanctification, in the life of the believer.

God has ordered life to follow a certain pattern. Getting better at something requires repetition, training, and diligence. The tragedy of the 21st century is that the church is increasingly calling people to a faith void of any personal responsibility. In essence, we create converts rather than disciples.

The old adage says, “Give a man a fish, feed him for a day, teach a man to fish, feed him for life.”

I am unsure where this originated, but there is a certain crossover between this philosopher’s musings and Christian practice. We might well offer salvation through the simple gospel (thank God for it), but a robust Christian life is developed through the disciplines. Paul compares it to bodily training in his first letter to Timothy, “train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way.” (1 Timothy 4:7b-8a, ESV)

Question 1:

What are some examples of Spiritual Disciplines? How do they help us grow?

A New Practice

Bible Verses

Psalms 119:105, Hebrews 4:12, Psalm 1:2

Bible Reading

In discussing spiritual disciplines, it helps to get very specific about these practices. It is hard to train the body if you don't know any workouts. The same is true of spiritual training. In this study, we will briefly look at 5 different spiritual disciplines, beginning with one of the most important: Bible reading and meditation.

Psalm 119, the longest chapter in all of the Bible, discusses the Word of God at length. It is a beautiful section of Scripture, written as an acrostic featuring all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, with 8 verses in each offering a robust ode to the Bible. In this section, David writes, "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). In this metaphor, David offers an illustrative reminder from our last lesson. The Bible is our guidebook to knowing God and living for Him. It metaphorically lights our path.

I am personally thankful for light. We recently moved into a 2-story home, our first one. Our children's rooms are positioned on the second floor. For whatever reason, there is no light on the stairwell. Our city was recently hit by a devastating winter storm, causing a power outage for weeks. This caused many to

reach for flashlights, candles, or generators, to keep the light on. For us, I was thankful for some rechargeable lightbulbs that we had bought to help illuminate the staircase. They helped ensure that our children could navigate unfamiliar terrain without tripping or falling and getting hurt.

Hebrews 4:12 describes the Bible as "sharper than a double-edged sword." The Bible is able to light our path, to cut away the rough edges, to help shape us into the men and women that God is developing us to be. The pruning process is not always easy, but sometimes it brings growth and beauty.

Question 2:

How does the Bible light our path?

Question 3:

Can you describe a time when God used the Bible to "cut away" a rough edge and shape you?

A New Practice

Bible Verses

Psalms 119:105, Hebrews 4:12, Psalm 1:2

Meditation

As Christians, we are called to take in the Bible and allow it to shape us. After all, the Bible's goal is to ensure that we are complete and equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We also have a special command to meditate on the Words of Scripture.

David wrote many of the psalms, including the very first one. In it, he presents a contrast between relying on wicked counsel and meditating on the Word of God. He says he meditates on God's Word, day and night.

When we think of meditation, we often think of a strange process of emptying our minds with varying goals. The Bible endorses and encourages meditation, but it is not an act of emptying our minds. It is the opposite.

Biblical meditation is the process of filling our minds with the Word of God and reflecting on it. This reflection might be to ponder a meaning, to ponder an application, or both. Still, meditation is the act of filling our minds with God's Word as a means of growth in our lives.

Biblical meditations are reflections of passages and, as such, should follow the rules of biblical interpretation. They should never be divorced from their context. The reflections and conclusions must align with the whole of Scripture, and there is something to be said about the plain reading of the Scripture. We are often intrigued by a deep reflection, when God has planted treasure in the shallows.

Question 2:

What is the difference in biblical and worldly meditation?

Question 3:

How can we add Scripture meditation to our routine?

Biblical Meditation

- Select a passage
- Reflect on the passage
- Apply the passage

Cautions

- Don't divorce from context
- Scripture interprets Scripture
- Power in the Plain Reading

A New Conversation

Bible Verses

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Philippians 4:6-7

Another well-known spiritual discipline is prayer. Prayer is the act of communication between man and God. Prayer is a privilege. We are so very privileged that God has, in His grace, decided to bend His ear low to us to engage in a blessed spiritual conversation with His people. In the Old Testament theology, God's design involved having a priest to go in and offer sacrifice and petition on behalf of people. Because of Jesus and His finished work on the cross, it has now been revealed that God's ability to interact with His people is not limited by geography.

When do I pray?

The Bible calls for consistent prayer. Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica that prayer should be "without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This does not necessarily mean every moment of every day, but that consistent communication with God should be maintained. This shows a reliance on God and reveals a close fellowship. Likewise, Paul, writing to the Philippian church, calls for prayer about everything (Philippians 4:6-7). The Bible calls for consistent prayer about everything as a reflection of a heart that relies on God and seeks His purpose in all of life. The late Billy Graham said, "Prayer is a way of life, not just in case of emergency."

How do I pray?

One great barrier to consistent prayer is people feeling like they don't know how to pray. Jesus is so gracious and offered us an example prayer in His Word. This prayer can be found in Matthew 6:9-13. In it, we find **praise** of God for who He is and **petition** for needs, including requests for needs, forgiveness, and deliverance. In addition to this, a prayer might include **confession** of sin or **thanksgiving** to God for sustenance and blessing. Thus, prayer might be multi-faceted, offering praise or thanks and petitioning for personal needs or the needs of others.

Question 4:

What might a Christian pray for?

Question 5:

How does prayer shape us as believers?

A New Adoration

Bible Verse

Romans 12:1, Psalm 95:6, John 4:24

Worship is another unsurprising spiritual discipline. Worship is generally thought to be offering God praise through song, but in reality, worship is anything that we do that brings glory to God. In short, worship is the act of glorifying God. This broadens the way we tend to think about worship to show that worship may include a great many things, many of them spiritual disciplines. This is evident in Romans 12:1. Paul describes the presentation of our bodies as living sacrifices as “spiritual worship.” The presentation of our bodies as living sacrifices goes beyond merely lifting our voices or hands in song. It is not less than those things, but it is certainly more.

Worship as an attitude

In Psalm 95:6, the psalmist calls on the reader to both bow down and kneel before the Lord. The Lord is worthy of our physical submission before Him. Physical kneeling is an act of worship in that it reveals a right heart of submission to God. Worship is as much about the posture of the heart as it is the posture of the body. Jesus often criticized the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. They looked the part, but their hearts were far from God (Matthew 15:7-9). Our hearts must be in proper submission to Christ.

In Spirit and Truth

Jesus has an interesting exchange with a Samaritan woman, known to us as the woman at the well. She asks Jesus about proper worship. The Samaritans had made their own practice of temple worship in their own temple. They considered themselves the true descendants of Abraham. In her question, she asked Jesus about the proper practice and location of worship. Jesus response is a call for worship in spirit and truth. There is an aspect of this that is geographic, meaning worship can be done anywhere as long as it is according to the truth of God’s Word.

Question 6:

What are some examples of worship?

Question 7:

How can worship in our hearts be different than our practice?

Two New Practices

Bible Verse

Mark 10:45, 1 Corinthians 4:2, 2 Corinthians 9:7

A New Contribution

Serving is another spiritual discipline. Serving is easy to overlook, but it is critical to sanctification. In a petition for His disciples to serve, Jesus presents Himself as the great example of a servant.

He stepped into our hopeless situation to serve us through the gospel. He is the great servant leader. A pastor friend often says, “We are never more like Jesus than when we are serving.” Jesus appears to agree.

We will discuss this at greater length in the discussion on the local church in the next lesson. There are specific mechanisms that God ordained to encourage service in the local church. Church is not simply about gathering, singing, or hearing a sermon. Church is about belonging to a family that serves one another and serves Christ’s purposes. Pray about how you might serve. Ask the leaders in your church about opportunities. It is a critical component of sanctification.

A New Partnership

There are many other spiritual disciplines, but this study’s goal is to offer a foundation upon which to build. Thus, we are only looking at a few of the most foundational. The last one we are examining is stewardship.

When we think of stewardship in the church, we often think of giving money, and this is one aspect (2 Corinthians 9:7). More broadly, however, stewardship means exercising resources for the glory of God. This is a proper use of time, making time to edify the saints, serve the church, and evangelize the lost (1 Corinthians 4:2). In all these, God’s people must be strategic and dedicated to leveraging their lives for the glory of God. We must ensure that we prioritize our resources to be used for the glory of God.

Question 8:

How can we serve Christ? How has Christ served us?

Question 9:

How can we be good stewards?
