

TREK 101:

Christian

Discipleship

LESSON 1 INTRODUCTION

“Work hard to show the results of your salvation,
obeying God with deep reverence and fear.”
Philippians 2:12b (NLT)

A Ministry of Rockpointe Church

Lesson 1

What Are the Spiritual Disciplines?

(This Lesson Adapted From Donald Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life*)

Spiritual Disciplines are a collective name given to biblical exercises and actions which mimic the nature and actions of Jesus' earthly life and ministry. They are personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth. Since biblical times, God's people have practiced these with one single purpose in mind: becoming more like Jesus. Since it is God's express desire that every Christian become more and more like Jesus, the Son of God, in all His holiness and spiritual perfection (Romans 8:29), then our goal as Christians is to pursue the spiritual habits, biblical practices, and Christian lifestyle which reflect Christ's nature. At every stage of our life, every one of us needs more of Christ in us; the more that we allow Christ and His Holy Spirit to fill us daily, the more we will be conformed into His empowered image. Therefore, whether you are new in your faith, have been a "baby" Christian for a while, or even if you have been a trusted disciple for many years in the Christian faith...all of us need to re-ignite our passion for true intimacy with our Savior, Redeemer, and Lord—Jesus the Christ. This short study is designed for YOU!

The goal of our time together is to study, remind, think about, discuss, and ultimately encourage you to embrace new and old Spiritual Disciplines in your life. There is no point of studying any of this if it only becomes head knowledge and an academic pursuit. Rather, the purpose of our study together is to engage both your mind AND your heart so that God will stir up new affections in you in order to help you change bad habits into godly ones and begin afresh a new and deeper walk with the One alone who can grant you abundant life (John 10:10). The fact that you are here, that you are reading this page is a great sign that God is already at work in your life to mold you more into the man and woman of God He has created you to be. Open your heart for all that God has for you this semester. Embrace God's love and forgiveness afresh (1 John 1:9). Beg God to speak to you in new ways and allow His Spirit and His Scripture to guide you to a new spiritual reality where He is Lord over every area of your life and His Spirit

has the reigns of your actions, desires, habits, and direction. Get ready for God to change your life for the better as you press deeper into Him through this study. As your church, we are so excited to help you grow into a deeper love relationship with your Maker; embrace all that He has in store for you this year. May God richly bless this study in your life! Ready? Get Set!

Read Aloud 1 Timothy 4:7 “Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.”

1. In this context, to what does discipline refer?
2. The Greek word for “discipline” is the source of our English words gymnasium and gymnastics. Considering the implications, how would that meaning illustrate one’s pursuit of godliness?
3. Does this meaning of Discipline cross over into other arenas of life?
4. Would you agree with this sentence: “Discipline without direction is drudgery.”
5. Describe a time when you disciplined yourself in order to reach a specific goal, or when you did not discipline yourself and failed to reach a specific goal.

Compare the meaning of 1 Timothy 4:7 to Philippians 2:12b “Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear.”

What elements are the same about these two verses? How does Phil. 2:12 provide a better context for Spiritual Disciplines?

Biblical Spiritual Disciplines:

Though the Bible mentions many Spiritual Disciplines, for the sake our study together this semester, we are limiting the disciplines we’ll study to include: Bible reading and study; Prayer; Worship; Evangelism; Serving; Stewardship; Fasting; Meditation/Contemplation; Connecting with other Believers; and Leadership.

The Purpose of Spiritual Disciplines:

God takes His Word very seriously. He expects us to do the same. If

we are to live on this earth with the charge to become more like His Son, then we must pay attention to God's Word which instructs each of us as to HOW to become more and more like the incredible Son of God. God's Word states:

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to **be holy**," we're also commanded in Hebrews 12:14, for "without holiness no one will see the Lord." This leads us to ask what every Christian should ask: "How then shall we pursue holiness? How can we be like Jesus Christ, the Son of God?"

We find a clear answer in 1 Timothy 4:7—"Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (NASB) and in Philippians 2:12b (NLT)

"Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear." The only road to Christian maturity, holiness, and "Godliness" (a biblical term synonymous with *Christlikeness* and holiness) passes through the practice of the Spiritual Disciplines.

1) Godliness is the goal of the Disciplines, and when we remember this, the Spiritual Disciplines become a delight instead of drudgery. God Commands Us to Be Holy; the original language of the words "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" makes it plain that this is a command of God, not merely a suggestion. Holiness is not an option for those who claim to be children of the Holy One (1 Peter 1:15-16), so neither are the means of holiness, that is, the Spiritual Disciplines, an option. The expectation of disciplined spirituality is implied in Jesus' offer of Matthew 11:29—"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me." The same is true in this offer of discipleship: "Then he said to them all, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me'" (Luke 9:23). Remember, Jesus is not only the model in our practice of Spiritual disciplines, but He is the very PRIZE at the end of our pursuit. These verses tell us that to be a disciple of Jesus means, at the very least, to learn from and follow Him. Learning and following involve *discipline*, for those who only learn accidentally and follow incidentally are not true disciples. That discipline is at the heart of discipleship is confirmed by Galatians 5:22-23, which says that

spiritual self-discipline (i.e., “self-control”) is one of the most evident marks of being Spirit-controlled.

Let’s keep in mind that merely doing these Spiritual Disciplines either to gain God’s favor or to impress others doesn’t make us more “spiritual.” To avoid this, James Bryan Smith in his book, *The Good and Beautiful God*, calls them “soul training.” This reminds us of the purpose. God uses the practice of these disciplines to “train” our soul so we become transformed into the image of Christ. When we think the things Jesus did (God’s word) and do things Jesus did (spiritual disciplines), we will become like Him.

Therefore, the purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines is to aid our daily transformation into Christlikeness.

2) God uses the Spiritual Disciplines to reveal more about Himself and yourself. Even though godliness is the aim of the Spiritual Disciplines, the by-product of your time, study, and effort in prayer and Scripture are just as valuable. As we seek to become more like the Son through dedicated time and spiritual exercises which focus my mind and heart on Him, we will inevitably learn much about the character, nature, and work of God. Thus, an intrinsically valuable product of this study and your transformation will be your knowledge of God. Further, as you seek to know the heart of God better, you will unavoidably discover more about your own life, your heart, your weaknesses, and your complete dependency on God for all things. Therefore, your TREK toward a life of Spiritual Disciplines is also a journey toward knowing God better and knowing yourself better.

Theologian John Calvin rightly commented: “Our wisdom, insofar as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other.” John Calvin, *Institutes* 1.1.1. As you seek the to know the heart of God, He will reveal more and more to you about your self and how He would transform you daily into His likeness.

Describe a Godly person you know who you think has reached spiritual maturity through discipline or who consistently demonstrates

spiritual maturity. Which practical Spiritual Disciplines do you see regularly practiced in their life? What is the evidence of a life truly yielded to Christ?
Would anybody mention you in these terms? It is time then to start...

Your Personal Journey in the Spiritual Disciplines

As you embark on this journey of self-discovery, re-ignited passion for the things of God, and a renewed desire to seek Christ first and most in your weekly TREK toward godliness, three factors will proportionately contribute to your success – proportionate to your allowing them to shape your spiritual experience:

The Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit is to produce within us the desire and the power for the Disciplines that lead to Godliness. That He develops this in every believer is evident from 2 Timothy 1:7. The Bible doesn't explain the mechanics of the mystery of the Spirit's ministry to us. But these two things are clear: (1) He will be ever faithful to help each of God's elect to persevere to the end in those things which will make us like Christ, and (2) we must not harden our hearts, but instead respond to His promptings if we would be Godly.

Fellowship. No one should read of the Spiritual Disciplines and imagine that by practicing them in isolation from other believers they can be just as Christ-like, perhaps even more so, than Christians who are active members of a local body of Christ. To measure progress in Christlikeness only in terms of growth in fellowship with God is an incomplete measurement. Spiritual maturity also includes growth in fellowship with the children of God. Embrace the overtures of other Christians at Rockpointe who want to bless you with fellowship, encouragement, and accountability. We all need it (men included) and we are commanded in Scripture to allow others into our weaknesses for the purpose of healing and accountability (James 5:16). Remember, Scripture often reminds us that God often changes us through people in our life—family, friends, co-workers, etc. (Proverbs 27:17).

Struggle. There is a natural element of struggle in the Christian life. Many forces combat the spiritual progress of those still on this side of Heaven (Ephesians 6:12; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Practicing the

Spiritual Disciplines and progressing in godliness will be accompanied by struggle. The victory that we actually experience over the forces opposing our progress in the Disciplines will come through the *practice* of those very Disciplines.

The Fruit of Spiritual Disciplines

We must remember that the full-grown freedoms of discipline-nurtured Godliness don't develop overnight or during a weekend seminar. The Bible reminds us that self-control, such as that expressed through the Spiritual Disciplines, must persevere before the mature fruit of godliness ripens. Notice the sequence of development in 2 Peter 1:6—"and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness." Godliness is a lifelong pursuit!

If your picture of a disciplined Christian is one of a grim, tight-lipped, joyless half-robot, then you've missed the point. Jesus was the most disciplined Man who ever lived and yet the most joyful and passionately alive. He is our example of discipline. Let us follow Him to joy through the Spiritual Disciplines.

Two Key Bible Illustrations for Spiritual Disciplines:

READ Aloud Luke 18:35-43 and Luke 19:1-10

What do these two Scriptural events have in common?

What did both Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus do in order to get close to Jesus?

Think of the Spiritual Disciplines as ways we can place ourselves in the path of God's grace and seek Him much as Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus placed themselves in Jesus' path and sought Him. As with these two seekers, we will find Him willing to have mercy on us and to have communion with us. And in the course of time we will be transformed by Him from one level of Christlikeness to another (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Axioms of Spiritual Disciplines:

- A. God Commands us to seek Him and become like Him (1 Peter 1:15-16)
- B. There is Freedom in embracing the Spiritual Disciplines (Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16)
- C. If there is freedom in Spiritual Disciplines, then there is spiritual danger in ignoring the disciplines (1 Corinthians 12:4-7; Galatians 5:19-21).

Since God has called us to fellowship with Himself through our personal relationship in Christ, then let us not forsake the means He has presented to give us abundant life. Let us not be guilty of forgetting, ignoring, or abandoning the tools of life He has granted us in order to seek after Him and be conformed into His beautiful likeness. Can you imagine a more miserable person on this earth than the Christian who has neglected all His benefits and mercies granted to him only to live in a spiritual prison of despair and depression created by his own obstinance and ungratefulness to God. May God grant you better and more than you could ever imagine and hope for as you seek Him first and run toward a new (renewed) life in Christ through the pursuit of these Spiritual Disciplines (1 Corinthians 2:9).

So Now What?

As you are ready to embrace this new challenge of pursuing the Spiritual Disciplines, remember what Pastor Ron mentioned in his sermon concerning discipleship. Spiritual growth may be best defined as "Grace driven effort," a quote he referenced from D.A Carson. Remember, your spiritual growth is a gift from God and comes in proportion to His mercy and grace in your life (John 17:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 2:11).

Second, remember that your spiritual growth is measured less by head-knowledge, but by practical faithfulness demonstrated throughout your life when both adversity and blessing come your way. Pace yourself and beg God to lead you each step of the way as

you Seek first His presence in all things (Matthew 6:33).

Third, be honest! Be honest with yourself and others. As you examine your own heart and your spiritual needs (such as a depraved heart and mind bent toward sin) (Jeremiah 17:9), ask God to reveal to you how to overcome by His grace those areas of your life where you have tasted little victory but only a lifetime of defeat. Allow yourself the freedom to hurt, to mourn, and to heal those deep wounds in your life that God wants to give you victory over...no sin, no past wound, no event, nothing is too much for God to reach into your past and forgive, heal, and bring glory to His kingdom from the ashes of your life. As part of your journey in the TREK toward these Spiritual Disciplines, embrace all that God will bring your way and honestly share them with those who want to encourage you and help you on your journey toward godliness and kingdom usefulness.