

# Spiritual Disciplines

## “For the Purpose of Godliness”

### I. Introduction

If I were to ask you to tell me adjectives that describe the Christian life, would discipline make your list? Scripture indicates we are to pursue spiritual discipline. Let's start by looking at a passage from Paul's letters to Timothy:

#### 2 Timothy 1:7

*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

This class is intended to help you achieve that discipline. It is based on Don Whitney's book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*.

The class also draws from a book by John Loftness and C.J. Mahaney entitled, *Disciplined for Life*, and C.J.'s little book, *Living the Cross-Centered Life* (both *Spiritual Disciplines* and *Living the Cross-Centered Life* are on our bookstall.).

There are both corporate and personal spiritual disciplines. We addressed corporate disciplines in the core seminar course that preceded this one, *Living as a Church*. Our course will address 11 spiritual disciplines:

Bible Intake (two classes)

Prayer

Worship

Evangelism

Service

Stewardship

Fasting

Silence & Solitude

Journaling

Learning

Our last lesson will be a summation and call to perseverance in the disciplines.

(You may be familiar with a slightly different list of SDs. Other SDs include confession, accountability, simplicity, submission, celebration, and “watching.” You may be able to name more.)

Let's take a quick survey. If you have been a Christian for less than one year, please raise your hand. Over 3 years? 5 Years? 10 Years? Over 20 years? We definitely have a wide spectrum. Has anyone of us mastered all of these SDs?

## II. Spiritual disciplines are the means to godliness

The dedication of Don Whitney's book reads, “*For the glory of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ – becoming like Him is the goal of the Spiritual Disciplines.*”

You've heard the terms godliness, holiness and Christ-likeness. They are not three different things, but rather synonyms for being set apart for God, wholeheartedly obedient to God's commands, becoming more conformed to the image of Christ. Spiritual Disciplines help you become more godly, more holy, more Christ-like.

That must mean they're not easy. So why should we work to understand and practice such things?

Without a goal, or realizing what the Lord intends for us, these disciplines will be fruitless. The most important feature of a discipline is its purpose.

We must remember that God is at the center of the disciplines and that he has predestined us to Christ-likeness.

### **Romans 8:29**

*<sup>29</sup>For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

We have to see the end, and even when the end seems distant, we have to remember it and be disciplined in doing what the Lord commands.

It may help us to think about spiritual disciplines by using an illustration Don Whitney includes in his book, about a boy named Kevin and his guitar lessons. His well-meaning parents put a guitar in his hand and paid for music lessons in order to make him well-rounded. So Kevin practiced, sitting in his bedroom strumming “Home on the Range,” but while he did, he would look outside his window and see his friends playing baseball or skateboarding. Picture him there, laboring through seemingly aimless and endless practices because his parents' said he should, wondering when it would be over, just so he could check it off his list and run outside and play.

It is discipline, but discipline without direction is drudgery.

But what do you think would happen, if an angel appeared to Kevin, brought him to a concert at the Kennedy Center, where he heard an accomplished guitarist - a guitar virtuoso - playing wonderful music, more beautiful and captivating than anything he

had ever heard. The angel then says, “That wonderful musician is you in a few years.” Pointing at Kevin’s guitar, he says, “But you must practice!” Then the angel disappears.

**What do you think his attitude would be like, the next time he picks up that guitar?**

As long as he actively remembers what he is becoming and what he will eventually become, his discipline will have direction, his desire or goal will pull him through.

**Does your own spiritual discipline lack direction?** \_\_\_\_\_ I bet at one time or another, we could all say that we experienced that sense of drudgery.

Why do we read the Word? Why do we pray? Why spend time memorizing Scripture? Why serve in the church? To what end?

To answer that question, we must first understand what we will become. What end does God have in mind for us? Well, a moment ago we read Romans 8:29, which reminded us that God’s eternal plan is that Christians will ultimately achieve Christ-likeness.

**1 John 3:2** is also helpful here:

*<sup>2</sup>Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

So why, if God has predestined our conformity to Christlikeness, do we talk about discipline? Where does discipline fit in? Well, let’s go on to read **1 John 3:3**:

*<sup>3</sup>Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*

Although God has promised Christlikeness to Christians at his return, he has still called us to live holy lives, to purify ourselves, to grow in sanctification, to grow toward Christlikeness.

**1 Peter 1:15-16**

*<sup>15</sup>But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; <sup>16</sup>for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

We are not to wait for holiness, but we are to pursue it hard!

**Hebrews 12:14**

*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

Another great verse, which is the theme verse of this class, is **1 Timothy 4:7-8**

*<sup>7</sup>Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. <sup>8</sup>For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

In your Bible, “*Train yourself toward godliness*” may be translated “exercise yourself toward godliness” or “discipline yourself toward godliness.” (The NAS, which I quoted upstairs, reads, “*Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.*”)

Godliness is the goal of the SDs and with that goal in mind they become not drudgery, but a delight and the way to freedom.

### III. A Warning

**Don't fall into the trap of thinking Spiritual Disciplines are a way to reconciliation with God.** Practicing, even mastering, Spiritual Disciplines will not make you right with God. Only repentance and faith in Jesus Christ – trusting in His atoning sacrifice to pay the penalty for your sins and having his righteousness credited to your account – can make you right with God.

1 Corinthians 1:30

*He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*

Throughout our Christian life, and particularly when we are seeking to do something to grow closer to God – become more sanctified - we must beware our innate attraction to legalism – seeking forgiveness from God and justification before God - through obedience to God. Only Christ can reconcile us to God. A man is either wholly justified or wholly condemned in the sight of God. Our righteousness and sanctification flow from our being united with Jesus Christ by faith.

Legalism has its roots in self-worship. If people are justified by what they do, then the glory goes to them, not to God. **Legalism is essentially self-atonement, for the purpose of self-glorification, and ultimately for the purpose of self-worship. We must flee from this!**

Are there any questions about what I've said so far? \_\_\_\_\_

### IV. Three Catalysts for Change

So where does this godliness come from? There are three catalysts, or change agents, that God uses to sanctify us, to grow us in Christ-likeness.

A. The first change agent is people. God uses people to accomplish His purposes in us.

**Proverbs 27:17**

*As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.*

The close contact and friction between two pieces of iron sharpens them. Similarly, in close relationships we are able to see strengths and learn from another, encourage one another in areas where others are weak, and get encouragement as well. Who are change agents?

They could be our spouses, pastors, other church members, friends, and coworkers.



(Offer a personal example of how another has sanctified you through your relationship.) I'm certain every Christian here could cite an example of another person positively influencing their walk with Christ.

B. God uses circumstances and suffering as a second change agent. The classic text is **Romans 8:28**

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Financial pressure, health, birth, death, even the weather are all things God can use and has used, to bring his people to holiness.

Do you realize even Christ learned obedience through suffering?

**Hebrews 5:8**

*Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered*

C. SDs are the third change agent.

The first two change agents work from the outside-in. SDs work from the inside-out. We have immediate control over our involvement in SDs. We can control how long we read the Bible, when we fast, when we pray, etc.

You may ask, "Well, since these acts are in our control, does it mean that we can control how holy we are?" **No!**

Even with the most iron-willed self-discipline will not make us holy, apart from God. Remember, our sanctification flows from our union with Christ by faith. Growth in holiness is a gift from God:

**I Thessalonians 5:23**

*<sup>23</sup>May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

On the other hand, we can do something to further the process. Sanctification is a synergistic activity – God works and we also work. In fact, sanctification has been described as 100 per cent God's work and 100 per cent our work. Our work is the necessary result of what God has already accomplished for us through his Son Jesus Christ. A helpful way of thinking about our sanctification: We are to *be* who we *are* in Christ. God has given us the SDs as a means of growing in holiness.

Take the reading of God's Word as an example.

**John 17:17**

*Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth.*

Time and time again we read of God's Word going forth, Genesis 1 where God creates and gives life by his word, Ezekiel 37 where God gives life to dead bones by his Word, and Romans 10 where we read that spiritual life, comes by hearing the Word.

Our righteousness is a passive one. We have been acted upon; we have received this right standing before God by His grace. What an amazing God!

By the spiritual disciplines, we place ourselves before God for him to work in us!

Two Biblical illustrations of this are the stories of Bartimaeus (Luke 18:35-43) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). [Summarize; only read if time permits]:

### **Luke 18:35-43**

<sup>35</sup>*As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.* <sup>36</sup>*When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening.*

<sup>37</sup>*They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."*

<sup>38</sup>*He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

<sup>39</sup>*Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

<sup>40</sup>*Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, <sup>41</sup>"What do you want me to do for you?"*

*"Lord, I want to see," he replied.*

<sup>42</sup>*Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you."*

<sup>43</sup>*Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.*

### **Luke 19:1-10**

<sup>1</sup>*Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.* <sup>2</sup>*A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.* <sup>3</sup>*He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd.* <sup>4</sup>*So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.*

<sup>5</sup>*When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."* <sup>6</sup>*So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.*

<sup>7</sup>*All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"*

<sup>8</sup>*But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."*

<sup>9</sup>*Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham."* <sup>10</sup>*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*

So we can think of the SDs 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. These men humbly cried out to God in acknowledgment that He alone could heal. They had faith.

We are all beggars in need of mercy and would be wise to put ourselves in the path of God's grace. Like these men, we will find God willing to have mercy on us and we will be changed.

Charles Spurgeon put it this way: *"I must take care above all that I cultivate communion with Christ, for though that can never be the basis for my peace – mark that – yet it will be the channel of it."*

## **V. It Takes Work!**

Though it is God who sanctifies us, we also have responsibility to cultivate godliness. Think of the SDs as a spiritual gymnasium.

Scripture refers to the Christian life as a race in which we have to persevere. We are to exercise, train and fight.

### **2 Timothy 4:7**

*<sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

### **Hebrews 12:1-3**

*<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. <sup>2</sup>Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

We have to "exercise" ourselves unto godliness as the KJV says, or "train" as the NIV says. The Greek word for train or exercise is where we get the word gymnasium in English. Hence the KJV uses the phrase "exercise thyself unto godliness."

The analogy is clear. The SDs can be compared to working out. If you lift a certain weight enough, your muscle will adapt to the stress that it is put under. Eventually, that movement will get easier and easier, and you will soon be able to lift more weight. Likewise we will be built up spiritually as we encounter God through these disciplines.

As we read in Hebrews, God says *"throw off everything that hinders."* Think about your priorities. How many hours did you spend watching TV this week? How many did you spend reading the Bible? How many did you spend working out your physical body, and how many did you spend praying? I'm not saying that measuring time spent

is the best way to gauge one's spiritual life, but it can give you clues. The SDs must become a priority for us if we will be godly.

(Segue:) Not only does Scripture say the SD are a means to godliness, but it also implies that the disciplines are *normative* for all Christians.

## VI. God Expects Us to Pursue Spiritual Disciplines

We must purpose to do this.

### Matthew 11:29

<sup>29</sup>*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

### Luke 9:23

<sup>23</sup>*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."*

We are expected to exchange our worldly desires for godly ones.

Learning and following involve discipline. Some say that "Failing to plan is planning to fail."

We must be self-controlled—self-disciplined. This is a mark of being controlled by the Spirit.

### Galatians 5:22-23

<sup>22</sup>*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

## VII. Christ's Example

Dallas Willard writes in his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*,

*"My central claim is that we can become like Christ by doing one thing—by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father."*

Some examples of SDs in Christ's life include:

### Luke 2:46

<sup>46</sup>*After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.*

### Matthew 14:23

<sup>23</sup>*After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.*

## **Matthew 4:1-2**

<sup>1</sup>*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.* <sup>2</sup>*After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.*

We discipline ourselves to succeed in our careers, and even our bodies to be fit. What about our minds? Unfortunately, as one Os Guinness puts it, "Our Christianity has become a mile wide and an inch deep (Os Guinness-Fit Bodies, Fat minds)." We've dabbled in everything and are disciplined in nothing. We need to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

## **VIII. More Application**

### **A. Neglecting the Spiritual Disciplines Will Preclude Fruitfulness**

We are all given spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4-11), but just as with natural gifts, spiritual gifts must be developed by discipline in order to bear spiritual fruit (Gal 5:22-23).

**(If time permits)** William Barclay, a 16<sup>th</sup> century Catholic lawyer commented on the difference between the disciplined and the undisciplined, using Samuel Taylor Coleridge as an example.

*Nothing was ever achieved without discipline; and many an athlete and many a man has been ruined because he abandoned discipline and let himself grow slack. Coleridge is the supreme tragedy of indiscipline. Never did so great a mind produce so little. He left Cambridge University to join the army; but he left the army because, in spite of all his erudition, he could not rub down a horse; he returned to Oxford and left without a degree. He began a paper called The Watchman which lived for ten numbers and then died. It has been said of him: "He lost himself in visions of work to be done, that always remained to be done." Coleridge had every poetic gift but one—the gift of sustained and concentrated effort." In his head and in his mind he had all kinds of books, as he said himself, "completed save for transcription." "I am on the eve," he says, "of sending to the press two octavo volumes." But the books were never composed outside Coleridge's mind, because he would not face the discipline of sitting down to write them out. No one ever reached any eminence, and no one having reached it ever maintained it, without discipline. (Whitney, 22)*

### **B. Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines Requires Persistence**

We must remember this maturity does not come easily or instantly, but comes gradually, over time. It took time to turn the Titanic around; it will take time to turn you around too. We observe this process in **2 Peter 1:5-9**

*<sup>5</sup>For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; <sup>6</sup>and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; <sup>7</sup>and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. <sup>8</sup>For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.*

The gold of godliness isn't found on the surface of Christianity. It must be dug from the depths with the tool of SDs. Those who persevere will know that the treasures are more than worth the troubles. The Lord expects us to seek Him, knows what is best for us, and is working to help us achieve sanctification.

### **C. Be Encouraged by What Lies Ahead!**

Remember Kevin and his guitar lessons. His daily practice took on new meaning once he saw where it would take him.

We are to be who we are in Christ. Just as we have been united with him in his death, we have also been united with him in his resurrection. Therefore we walk in newness of life now. Because of what Christ has accomplished on our behalf, we can practice the SDs with confidence, knowing that God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son.

Remember that the SDs are not drudgery, but a sweet blessing given by God. If we have repented of our sins and have trusted in Christ to save us, then we are those who have been redeemed by God. As his people, our joy and delight is to be in fellowship with him. The spiritual disciplines are a means by which we maintain our communion with God.

#### **Psalm 34:8:**

*<sup>8</sup>Taste and see that the LORD is good;  
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*

**(If time permits)** Let's review what God tells us in **1 Timothy 4:7-8:**

*<sup>7</sup>Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. <sup>8</sup>For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

I hope you've found this helpful and are persuaded to persist in this class. Please join us next week join us for the first of two classes on the spiritual discipline of Bible Intake.

### **Closing Prayer**

Our heavenly Father, we thank you for the amazing gift of your love. You have given us new life in Christ and desire to communicate with us through these SDs, in order that we might grow in the holiness that should mark us. May we hear well and, by your grace, be conformed to the image of Christ. We ask it for His name's sake, amen.



## Spiritual Disciplines “Bible Intake-Part 1”

### Review

Last week we looked at the Purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines: godliness.

Key verse: **I Timothy 4.7-8**

*<sup>7</sup>Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. <sup>8</sup>For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

Two main points:

- **SD's are the means to godliness.** God sanctifies us through the SD's.
- **The Lord expects them.** Holiness isn't optional for the Christian. We must train ourselves for holiness; we must fight for it.

Likewise in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul uses the image of an athlete in training to impress upon us the importance of discipline in the Christian life.

### **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

*<sup>24</sup>Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.*

*<sup>25</sup>Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. <sup>26</sup>Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. <sup>27</sup>No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

Note the strong language that Paul uses (“*I beat my body and make it my slave*”). It is the language of self-denial and self-control. Like Paul, we should put away sin and any other thing that hinders our spiritual growth. If athletes can discipline themselves in order to win a temporal prize, how much more should we, as Christians, labor for an eternal reward!

Growing in Christian maturity and usefulness takes work. It calls for effort on our part. It is not enough merely to want to grow, we must strive for it. Proverbs 13:4 both admonishes laziness, as well as encourages diligence.

### **Proverbs 13:4**

*The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.*

At the same time, we must always remember that it is by God's grace alone that we are able to grow in godliness. We labor not in our own strength. God has saved us for His glory, and He enables us to live holy lives. Let this truth encourage us in our sanctification. Paul, in Philippians 2:12-13, conveys this balance perfectly.

### **Philippians 2:12-13**

<sup>12</sup>*Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

### **1 Timothy 6:12**

<sup>12</sup>*Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

### **2 Timothy 4:7**

<sup>7</sup>*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

### **Why is Bible intake so important?**

This week we are going to examine the ***foundational SD***, hearing and reading God's word, the Bible.

There is no substitute, all the other SD's spring from this one. If we are not taking in Scripture, then how do we know we are praying about the right things? How do we know who we are worshipping? In our evangelism, are we sharing the biblical gospel? Are the doctrines we learn in accordance with what Scripture teaches? Are we serving with the attitude of Christ Jesus?

Don Whitney recounts a 1989 visit to East Africa, where he encountered a church of professing Christians among whom lying, stealing and sexual immorality were common and generally accepted, even among leaders of the church. The church had been started by missionaries, but no one had a Bible, not even the pastor. They had only half-a-dozen sermons, loosely derived

from Bible-story recollections. Without God's Word, the people at that church had no idea how they were meant to live. (Whitney and his friends bought them Bibles, taught them, prayed for them.)

Bible intake is the bedrock of all the spiritual disciplines. It is the solid foundation upon which we can build a faithful life and grow in holiness.

Why is the Bible so critical for the Christian life?

**Firstly**, Scripture is the means God uses to bring about our new birth in Christ Jesus.

### **1 Peter 1:23**

<sup>23</sup>*For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*

Christianity is a **revealed** religion. Our God has not only acted in history, but he has also interpreted his own actions for us. Praise God for how he has made himself known to us through his Word! All of Scripture is God-breathed. It is the revelation of himself to us, and the Bible is the very word of God.

How do we become Christians? It is by listening to God's Word. **Romans 10:17** tells us that “*faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ*”. The Bible teaches us the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It shows us our need for a Savior, who that Savior is, and how we can receive Him.

The Bible reveals how God is perfectly holy and just. It reveals to us our sinfulness and how we deserve God's righteous judgment for our rebellion against Him. It also teaches us that God is full of mercy and compassion. We learn that we can do nothing to save ourselves, but that our only hope is to repent and trust in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins. Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures. And after three days, he was raised from the dead, according to the Scriptures. The Bible encourages us to come to Jesus, in whom alone is found life and joy and peace.

This brings us to our **second** point.

Just as our spiritual life begins with God's Word, our spiritual growth

depends on it too. The Bible teaches us how we ought to live for God's glory, as those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

We see this in 1 Peter 2:2, just a few verses down from what we read earlier.

### **1 Peter 2:2**

*<sup>2</sup>Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.*

The “pure spiritual milk” that Peter refers to is none other than the eternal Word of God. Just as an infant desires the milk necessary for growth, so we too should crave for a regular diet of God's Word in order to mature as Christians. Our progress in sanctification is tied to our desire for Bible intake.

Peter's likening of God's Word to milk for babies is very instructive. Newborn infants do not want anything except milk and cannot even digest other foods. Believers, likewise, should long for God's Word with the same singular desire and devotion.

The analogy of God being sustaining food and drink is used over and over again in the Bible. It communicates the idea of sustenance and satisfaction. Christ declares, in **John 6:35**, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” He is the living Word, but he likewise acknowledges that the written word of God is also our sustenance.

### **Deuteronomy 8:3** (quoted by Jesus in Mathew 4:4 and Luke 4:4)

*Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.*

Just as we need a regular diet of food to keep us physically healthy, so we should also feed daily on God's Word for the sake of our spiritual health. The food we consume with our mouths satisfies us temporarily. But learning of God from His Word has eternal value.

Do we seek to shun worldliness? Do we yearn to be more like Christ? Paul exhorts us in **Romans 12:2** to be “*be transformed by the renewing of our minds*”. Consider the context of Paul's statement. In the earlier part of his letter to the Romans, he had written about the gospel in great detail. The

great truths that he had just taught were meant to transform the lives of the readers of his epistle. So if our minds are to be renewed, we need to deepen our knowledge of God's Word, especially of the gospel. We must be diligent and disciplined in our Bible intake if we are to think and act biblically.

Before I go any further, are there any questions?

### **Prerequisites to hear God speak from Scripture**

Before we think about the various ways of Bible intake, let's consider three necessary conditions if we are to profit from Bible intake.

**Firstly, we must reverence Scripture.** It is God's Word. Therefore, it is infallible, sufficient and authoritative. We must not approach the Bible in a flippant or careless manner. Instead, we ought to emulate the Christians at Thessalonica.

#### **1 Thessalonians 2:13**

<sup>13</sup> *And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.*

The **second** condition is **humility and a sincere dependence upon God**. We need the Holy Spirit to illumine our minds. The Reformers called the activity of God by which the truth of His Word is pressed upon the mind and consciences of His people "the internal witness of the Holy Spirit". We know that apart from the Holy Spirit's work in us, we cannot receive and obey God's Word.

#### **1 Corinthians 2:14**

<sup>14</sup> *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

Therefore, humility should be accompanied by prayer. Like the psalmist, we should pray "*Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law*".  
(**Psalm 119:18**)

The **third** condition is that **our hearts must be receptive to God's Word**.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus likens a receptive heart to good soil. When the seed of the Word is sown in such a heart, it takes root and bears fruit pleasing to God.

James exhorts us to be doers of the Word, and not only hearers.

### **James 1:22-25**

*<sup>22</sup>Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup>Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup>and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup>But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.*

The Bible should not only instruct our minds, but should also transform our lives. The goal of Bible intake is to grow in conformity to Christ.

Before we move on to look at ways of Bible intake, **are there any questions?**

## **Ways of Bible intake**

### **I. Hear God's Word**

In his book, Don Whitney describes hearing the Word as “the easiest of the SDs related to the intake of God's Word”. He goes on to say that for most of us, disciplining ourselves to hear God's Word means developing the practice of regularly attending and joining a church where the Bible is faithfully preached.

Preaching is a means of grace ordained by God for His glory as well as for the good of His people. Throughout the Bible, God uses the public teaching of His Word to communicate His truth to His people.

For instance, we see this taking place in Deuteronomy. Before Israel crosses the Jordan River to take possession of the Promised Land, Moses teaches the people about God's work of redemption in their history. He also expounds the Law, teaching the people about their obligation to live in obedience to

God.

A similar event takes place towards the end of the Old Testament. The Israelites have just returned from their exile in Babylon. Ezra and the priests appear before the people. What do they do? They read and teach God's Law.

#### **Nehemiah 8:8**

*<sup>8</sup> They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.*

This pattern continues through to the New Testament. The resurrected Christ appears to Peter and urges him to “feed His sheep”, no doubt referring to the faithful teaching of the Word for the spiritual nourishment of God's people.

And again, in **1 Timothy 4:13**, Paul exhorts Timothy to “devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and teaching”.

Seeing how God has blessed the church with teachers, what should be our response? The only right response is to discipline ourselves to hear the Word regularly and attentively. Remember that the preaching of the Word is a means of grace given by God for His glory and for our good.

In Luke 11:27-28, Jesus speaks of the blessings that come to us through *hearing* and *obeying* the Word.

**Luke 11:27-28.** *As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."*

We would do well to take to heart Jesus' exhortation: “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*”.

So what are some practical ways in which we can devote ourselves to hearing God's Word?

- Sunday morning service. We gather to hear the God's Word being preached. As a family of believers, we sit under the preaching of the Word. We should think of the sermon as a spiritual feast for our souls.
  - In order to profit from the preaching, we ought to prepare



ourselves to hear the Word. Preparing the heart begins on Saturday night. It would be wise to ensure that we get enough rest, so that we are not tired and distracted on Sunday morning.

- And just as any exercise program should start with a 15-20 minute warm up period, we should likewise spend some time “warming up” before hearing the Word. It is not a good idea to go into service rushed and flurried. We should strive to honor God by being punctual. This discipline gives us time to prepare our hearts before joining in public worship. Spend some time in prayer: Ask God to give us attentive hearts that are soft to His Word.
- Jeremiah Burroughs wrote in 1648 the following words of counsel regarding preparation for the discipline of hearing God’s Word:

*First when you come to hear the Word, if you would sanctify God’s name, you must possess your souls with what it is you are going to hear. That is, what you are going to hear is the Word of God... Therefore you find that the apostle, writing to the Thessalonians, gives them the reason why the Word did them so much good as it did it was because they did hear it as the Word of God. “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the Word of God, which you hear from us, you accepted it not as the word of man but as what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).*

- We should be active and attentive listeners. Hearing God’s Word is more than passive listening. Come to the Word with eager anticipation. Ask God to apply His Word to our hearts that we may grow in holiness.
- Tapes or CDs of sermons or Scripture being read. We could put the time we spend on our daily commute to good use by listening to these, whether in the car or on the Metro or bus.
- The Internet – great resource for sermons. Those of us with MP3 players, why not download sermons from the Web?

**Are there any questions?**

## **II. Read God's Word**

Knowing the value of God's Word should motivate us to read it regularly.

### **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

<sup>16</sup>“*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*”<sup>17</sup>*so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*”

Here, we learn about the Bible's value. We have the very words of God written down for us in Scripture. Because it is all God-breathed, it is infallible and authoritative.

It is also “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”. How do we know what to believe? Scripture teaches us God's truth. How do we know whether we've sinned against God? Scripture rebukes us.

How do we know to turn from sin? Scripture corrects us and leads us back to obedience to God. How do we know to grow in godliness? Scripture trains us in righteousness.

We also learn about the *sufficiency* of Scripture, which thoroughly equips us for every good work.

Jesus often asked “Have you not read?”; “Haven't you read in the law...?” He assumed that those claiming to be the people of God would have read the Word of God.

### **Matthew 22:31-32**

<sup>31</sup>*But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you,* <sup>32</sup>*I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.*

Christ Himself was a diligent reader of God's Word. He knew the Scriptures well. He would often say, “It is written” to answer his questioners or accusers. We also see an example of this in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Three times Jesus was tempted by Satan, and three times Jesus answered, “It is written”.

### **Matthew 4:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup>After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup>The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

<sup>4</sup>Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup>"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, o that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

<sup>7</sup>Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

<sup>8</sup>Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. <sup>9</sup>"All this I will give you," he said, "If you will bow down and worship me."

<sup>10</sup>Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

<sup>11</sup>Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

British preacher, John Blanchard, writes in his book *How to Enjoy Your Bible*,

*"Surely we only have to be realistic and honest with ourselves to know how regularly we need to turn to the Bible. How often do we face problems, temptation and pressure? Every day! Then how often do we need instruction, guidance, and greater encouragement? Every day! To catch all these felt needs up into an even greater issue, how often do we need to see God's face, hear his voice, feel his touch, know his power? The answer to all these questions is the same: every day! As the American evangelist D.L. Moody put it, 'A man can no more take in a supply of grace for the future than he can enough for the next six months, or take sufficient air into his lungs at one time to sustain his life for a week. We must draw upon God's boundless store of grace from day to day as we need it.' (Whitney, 33).*

Don Whitney suggests three practical ways for consistent success in Bible reading.

## **1. Find the time**

We should discipline ourselves to set aside time every day to read God's Word. Don't leave this to chance. Be deliberate about this. Having a fixed time every day helps us to be consistent in our Bible reading.

According to Whitney, reading for 15 minutes each day takes us through the Bible in less than a year's time. Recorded readings of the Bible have shown that we can read through the entire Bible in 71 hours.

## **2. Find a Bible-reading plan**

**Who follows some kind of plan for reading Scripture?**

Here are some other examples of Bible-reading plans:

(a) Reading three chapters in the OT and three in the NT every day will take us through the OT once and the NT four times in a one-year period.

(b) Another plan involves reading books from the different genres in the Bible. The OT can be divided into the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets. The NT can be divided into Gospels, the epistles, and Revelation. This helps to ensure that we read the whole Bible, not just the portions we “prefer”.

## **3. Meditate on the Word**

Don Whitney suggests finding at least one word, phrase or verse to meditate on each time we read the Bible. We'll look at how we can do this in next week's class.

## **III. Study God's Word**

Don Whitney likens the regular reading of God's Word to taking a motorboat across a lake. It gives a good overview of the lake and a passing view of its depths. Studying Scripture, however, takes us beneath the surface for an in-depth look at the details we would otherwise miss. Reading gives us breadth, but studying gives us depth.

Here are some examples of believers with a heart to study God's Word:

**(a) Ezra 7:9-10**

*<sup>9</sup>He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. <sup>10</sup>For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.*

Because Ezra devoted himself to studying God's Word, the gracious hand of God was on him. Grace and spiritual blessing is poured out upon us through this SD.

And studying God's Word is not merely an intellectual exercise. Ezra obeyed the Word and he also taught it to others. Studying the Word should not only help us to grow in godliness, but it should also edify others as we teach and encourage them. Mere intellectual knowledge often leads to pride, but a true understanding of God's Word increases our obedience and edifies those around us.

**(b) Acts 17:11**

*<sup>11</sup>Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

Those who search the Word with eagerness have a “noble character”. Are we like the Bereans in this regard? Do we exercise our minds to ponder Scripture? Are we careful to examine all things in the light of God's Word?

God is pleased when we delight in His Word and when we have a fervent desire to study it. In fact, Christians should be characterized by a love for God's Word. Is our zeal for the Word flagging? Ask God to revive our hearts to love His Word! May He enable us to cry out like the psalmist, “*Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long*”! (Psalm 119:97)

So what are some practical methods to help us study God's word?

1. Writing down our thoughts about a passage of Scripture is helpful. We can note down observations about the text and record questions that come to our mind. We can also write down the applications we draw from the text.

2. Checking up the cross references for a particular verse or passage help us compare Scripture with Scripture. Let the more clear passages of scripture help you to interpret the more difficult ones.
3. A concordance is great for word studies. For example, if we wanted to examine what the Bible means by the term “justified”, we can refer to a concordance to see where the word appears.
4. Besides word studies, we can also do in-depth character, topical and book studies. Check out the church library for a selection of Bible study helps. You might also want to ask the elders to suggest books that are helpful for Bible study.

But using such “predigested” materials should not keep us from wrestling with a passage ourselves. We should first put in the hard work of pondering over the meaning and application of a passage.

Recommended books to help us read and study the Bible:

- 1) For the Love of God by D.A. Carson
- 2) Search the Scriptures by Alan Stibbs
- 3) Bible Speaks Today series
- 4) Welwyn Commentary Series
- 5) According to Plan by Graeme Goldsworthy
- 6) Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem

#### **IV. More Application**

- A. Our growth in godliness depends on the quality of our Bible intake.
  - a. Our growth is proportional to the quality of our bible intake. It’s not the quantity, but the quality that matters.
  - b. We severely restrict the main flow of sanctifying grace towards us, by neglecting this discipline. Jesus, in praying for all who belong to Him, said: “*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth*” (John 17:17)
- B. What is one thing you can do to improve your intake?

Several suggestions:

  - a. Wednesday night Bible study – to corporately and

deliberately examine scripture inductively

- b. Small groups – to study a particular book
- c. Meeting up one-on-one with another believer to read the Bible
- d. Audio library – to find sermons on the different books of the Bible or on particular topics
- e. Library – to find commentaries and helpful bible study aids
- f. Online – to listen to sermons or to find Bible study materials

Finally, Welsh pastor Geoffrey Thomas leaves us with some wisdom on how to approach Bible intake:

*Do not expect to master the Bible in a day, or a month, or a year. Rather expect often to be puzzled by its contents. It is not all equally clear. Great men of God often feel like absolute novices when they read the Word. The apostle Peter said that there were some things hard to understand in the epistles of Paul (2 Peter 3:16). I am glad he wrote those words because I have felt that often. So do not expect always to get an emotional charge or a feeling of quiet peace when you read the Bible. By the grace of God you may expect that to be a frequent experience, but often you will get no emotional response at all. Let the Word break over your heart and mind again and again as the years go by, and imperceptibly there will come great changes in your attitude and outlook and conduct. You will probably be the last to recognize these. Often you will feel very, very small, because increasingly the God of the Bible will become wonderfully great.*

## V. Review

- a. Why Bible intake is important
- b. Three conditions in order to profit from Bible intake
- c. Three ways of Bible intake

The challenge: Bible intake is critical for spiritual health and growth. May we be diligent in our hearing, reading and studying of God's Word.





Spiritual Disciplines Week 3  
“Bible Intake (Part II)... For the Purpose of Godliness”

### I. Memorizing God’s Word

How many of you are currently trying to memorize Scripture? \_\_\_\_\_

How many of you are finding it easy? \_\_\_\_\_

(Assuming no hands go up) As I suspected!

Let’s first acknowledge that memorization takes time and consistent effort.

Many Christians respond to a request for them to memorize Scripture with the same eagerness as a request for volunteers to face Nero’s lions. They come up with all kinds of excuses.

One objection Christians give is that they don’t have enough time. “With my job, packed Sundays, my daily Bible reading, work around the house, reading for pleasure, Wednesday night Bible study, participating in a community ministry,... (*so far so good, but then comes*).... the newspaper, the seven magazines I subscribe to, my favorite blogs, that new TV show.....” A careful examination will show that not everything you spend time on is worthwhile.

Some folks offer another common objection: “I’m just no good at memorizing.” I wouldn’t be surprised if many of us have used that one. But what if someone offered you \$500 for each verse you could recite by next Sunday?!

Would you try? \_\_\_\_\_ Do you think you would succeed? \_\_\_\_\_

Money would be a base reason to memorize Scripture, but this illustration does show that “inability” excuses really aren’t valid.

It really just boils down to setting the right priorities. Memorizing Scripture won’t be a priority for you if you see it as an uninteresting task of little value. However, if you grasp the wonderful benefits that will come from it, you will be motivated to pursue it.

Let’s begin by considering motives for memorizing Scripture. First let’s note there are bad motives, such as:

- Building a reputation in your church
- Impressing your friends

The right and proper motive for memorization is **godliness**. Let’s look at several specific benefits that accrue from Scripture memorization.

#### A. Benefits of memorizing Scripture

##### 1. *Memorization supplies spiritual power to fight sin.*

##### **Psalm 119:11**

*I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*

Memorized Scripture can help you in your time of need, making the difference between compromise and disobedience or standing and being an example to others.

In **1 Corinthians 10:13**, the Lord promises us that when we are tempted he will provide a way of escape:

*<sup>13</sup>No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

That way of escape may be through memorized Scripture. **Ephesians 6:11-17** tells us how we are to be prepared to fight and what equipment we need.

*<sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>17</sup>Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is **the word of God**.*

This sword – Scripture - can be the determining factor in a spiritual battle. It is the only offensive weapon in Paul's list of equipment we're to have. **In the midst of a battle is no time to go looking through your concordance.**

We were reminded last week that Jesus quoted Scripture when facing temptation. When Satan said, *"If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."*, Jesus replied, *"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."* **Jesus didn't trust in the words themselves, but in the One who made the promise.** We should do the same.

A note of caution applies here. The enemies of God, typified by Satan, also use scripture, slightly wrong or out of context, to deceive you. We must know the full counsel of God.

How about you? When you're in the midst of a crisis and the Holy Spirit rushes to your mental arsenal to get some memorized scripture to fight with, when he flings open the door, will he only find John 3:16, Genesis 1:1, and the Great Commission? Those are great swords, but they're not suited for every battle. **Build up your arsenal!**

For instance, if you're tempted by pornography, be ready to call up David's pledge in Psalm 101:3, *I will set before my eyes no vile thing.*

If you're prone to gossip, call to mind Ephesians 4:29, *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."*

If we do sin, **memorized Scripture can also help convict us of sin and bring us to repentance.**

**Mark 14:72**

*Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept.*

Remembering the words of Christ brought Peter to repentance. God’s word in Scripture, memorized, can do the same for us.

**2. Memorization strengthens your faith.**

The Holy Spirit, dwelling within us, can use memorized Scripture to strengthen our faith and help us live a godly life.

**Proverbs 22:17-19**

<sup>17</sup>*Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise;  
apply your heart to what I teach,  
<sup>18</sup>for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart  
and have all of them ready on your lips.  
<sup>19</sup>So that your trust may be in the LORD,...*

We memorize Scripture so that we may learn more about the Lord in whom we trust. In times of trouble, you will then be prepared to lean on the God who has spoken those words you’ve memorized.

If you’re frustrated in your circumstances, or have experienced some tragedy, and so are tempted to mistrust God for his providence in your life, be ready with Paul’s soaring doxology in **Romans 11**:

<sup>33</sup>*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!  
<sup>34</sup>“Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counselor?”  
<sup>35</sup>“Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay him?”  
<sup>36</sup>For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

Perhaps some of you will remember Lisa Beamer, the wife of the “Let’s Roll” hero of United Flight 93 on 9/11, Todd Beamer. She spoke of how having memorized those verses, after the loss of her father many years prior, sustained her through her loss of Todd. And what a wonderful testimony it was to the living God when she said that in reply to a reporter’s question about how she was handling Todd’s death.

### 3. **Memorization equips you for counseling and witnessing.**

Memorized Scripture you are ready to counsel believers or witness to non-believers. With the words of God ready on your lips, you are a vessel fit for use.

#### **Proverbs 15:23**

*A man finds joy in giving an apt reply — and how good is a **timely** word!*

It's okay to get back to someone later if you can't respond right away, but how much better it is to have God's word ready on your tongue.

#### **Ephesians 4:15**

*...**speaking the truth in love**, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*

You have great potential for good when you speak God's word into someone's life, or into your own!

The Lord can also open doors so that you may win souls to Christ by speaking God's word.

#### **Romans 10:17** (CHBC theme verse)

*<sup>17</sup>So then faith comes by hearing, and **hearing by the word of God**.*

We know God's words are more effective than ours. Memorization allows us to readily share the very words of God during our everyday conversations.

Conversely, Christians often miss opportunities to share their faith or participate in prayer because of a fear of misquoting a verse.

We'll spend much more time on the spiritual discipline of evangelism later on in the course.

### 4. **Memorization is a means of God's guidance**

Memorization is a means to comprehend and apprehend God's guidance for how we are to live. God's word lightens dark paths.

#### **Psalms 119:24**

*Your statutes are my delight; they are **my counselors**.*

#### **Psalms 119:105**

*Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a **light for my path**.*

Are you girded up with the Word? Does the Scripture guide your steps? (For more, attend the Core Seminar on Guidance.)

**Before we go on, what questions do you have about the benefits of Scripture memorization?** \_\_\_\_\_

Let's now talk about how to do it.

## **B. Aids for memorizing Scripture**

### ***1. Decide you can memorize Scripture.***

We have already shown the fallacy of the “no time” and “I can’t” excuses. The question that you must answer is, will you discipline yourself to memorize Scripture? You don’t need expensive equipment or a membership, just a desire to know God.

Andy Davis, the Pastor of First Baptist Church in Durham, NC, has memorized the entire New Testament. ([www.fbcdurham.org](http://www.fbcdurham.org), then select “Writings”) Surely each of us can memorize a few verses!

### ***2. Have a plan.***

There are several pre-packaged Scripture memory plans that you can purchase. However, you might prefer to select verses on topics you’ve been struggling with or that would be useful in evangelism.

You can organize the passages topically, like “faith” or “obedience,” or just take them in the order they appear. Or you can memorize an entire book or chapter of a book, which might touch on several topics.

### ***3. Write out the verses.***

If they’re not already written down for you in some handy form (e.g. 3x5 cards), taking time to copy down the verse is wise. This will help you to slow down and consider what each verse is saying. This also increases your ability to recall the passage.

If you have a Bible program, you can cut and paste the verses you want to learn into a document. That’s what I do (show).

### ***4. Memorize the passage word-perfectly, with references “front and back.”***

Say the passage reference - book, chapter and verse(s) – both before and after the verse. This will help you to keep the verses straight in your head and avoid confusion. Knowing the reference will also enable you to look at the context of the verse if someone asks. Knowing the whole verse will also keep you from coming up with ideas the author didn’t intend for you to believe.

### ***5. Use memory aids like pictures or songs.***

Some people are helped by visual images – pictures that remind them of a verse, such as an apple for Galatians 5:22 (fruit of the Spirit), a Bible inside a heart for Psalm 119:11, etc. Others find it easier to remember a verse when it is set to music, whether someone else’s or their own.

## 6. *Find a method of accountability.*

Help each other out! Commit to memorizing the texts with other Christians. You can repeat them to your small group, prayer partner, or spouse. People will be encouraged by fruitfulness in your life when you tell them about your plan to memorize Scripture.

## 7. *Regularly review the verses you've memorized.*

Keep your swords sharp and ready! Don't lose all that you've learned. You might have known a verse last year, but you will lose it without reviewing. When you first get it down, review it daily. It will only take a fraction of the time that it took to memorize it. As you come to know it well, you can cut back to once a week, once a month, or even less frequently.

No matter which of these aids you use, look beyond their practice to the goal you are pursuing: godliness.

So that's our section on memorization. **What questions or comments do you have?** \_\_\_\_\_

Now we turn to...

## II. **Meditating on God's Word**

When someone says "meditation," many people think of transcendental meditation – emptying our minds and tuning into our inner selves while sitting cross-legged somewhere high in the Himalayas. Christian meditation is not about emptying our minds, but rather filling them up with truth!

Meditation is both commanded by God and modeled by the godly in Scripture.

### **Philippians 4:8**

<sup>8</sup>*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—**think about such things.***

Don Whitney defines meditation as “**deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application and prayer.**” That definition is consistent with how we see meditation used in Scripture.

Meditation goes beyond hearing, reading, studying and memorizing as a means of taking in God's word. Meditation helps you absorb the word of God. A sermon is like a short burst of rain falling on hard ground. If you don't absorb it, it doesn't sink in and affect you. Some folks like the “cup of tea analogy”: meditation is like letting the tea bag soak.



## A. Benefits of meditation

### 1. Meditation helps you to know God.

When we meditate on Scripture's description of God's characteristics and deeds – his omnipotence, his omniscience, his holiness, his wrath, his compassion, his providence – we begin to better grasp the wonderful God who created all that is, reigns over us, and saved us. The Psalms are rich with examples of this, such as:

#### Psalm 77:12

*I will **meditate on all your works**  
and consider all your mighty deeds.*

#### Psalm 119:27

*Let me understand the teaching of your precepts;  
then I will **meditate on your wonders**.*

#### Psalm 119:148

*My eyes stay open through the watches of the night,  
that I may **meditate on your promises**.*

### 2. Meditation makes you wiser.

God tells us in **Proverbs 2:6** that “*the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*” . Meditation is one of the ways God gets his word into us and renews our minds. When we think deeply about the truths of Scripture, they begin to saturate our thinking and we become wiser in our actions. Psalm 119 speaks to this.

#### Psalm 119:97-99

<sup>97</sup>*Oh, how I love your law!*  
***I meditate on it all day long.***  
<sup>98</sup>*Your commands **make me wiser than my enemies,***  
*for they are ever with me.*  
<sup>99</sup>*I have **more insight** than all my teachers,*  
***for I meditate on your statutes.***

### 3. Meditation fosters success.

#### Joshua 1:8

<sup>8</sup>*Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; **meditate on it day and night**, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be **prosperous and successful**.*

#### Psalm 1:1-3 (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup>*Blessed is the man  
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor stands in the path of sinners,*

*Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;  
<sup>2</sup>But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
**And in His law he meditates day and night.**  
<sup>3</sup>He shall be like a tree  
Planted by the rivers of water,  
That brings forth its fruit in its season,  
Whose leaf also shall not wither;  
**And whatever he does shall prosper.***

However, please remember that, in God's eyes, success does not mean attaining a promotion, buying a new BMW, or having lots of friends. It rather means living a godly life as a servant of Christ in accordance with God's will.

## **B. Meditation methods**

Let's think now about some methods that are useful for effective meditation.

### *1. Meditate upon verses you have memorized.*

You can meditate upon any verse of Scripture, but memorization and meditation are complementary. Memorizing God's word fuels meditation upon it, and it is easier to meditate upon a verse you can recall without having to open your Bible.

### *2. Pray through the text.*

Submit your mind to the Holy Spirit's illumination.

***Psalm 119:18***

***Open my eyes that I may see  
wonderful things in your law.***

Praise God for his revelation – for speaking to us. Pray for a proper understanding of the passage. Pray the blessings you see in the Scripture for your church or for specific people. (This is also a useful way to pray through the church's membership directory. Even though you may not know someone well enough to be aware of specific circumstances in their life to pray about, you know that what the Bible says would be for their good and can pray that for them.)

### *3. Rewrite the passage in your own words.*

This helps to focus your attention. A variation of this would be to outline a passage, helping you to retain it by remembering its organization.

### *4. Repeat the verse in different ways.*

Turn it like a diamond, examining every facet. For instance, John 11:25 could be read as:

***I am*** the resurrection and the life. (Jehovah – the great "I AM")  
I am the ***resurrection*** and the life.

I am the resurrection and the life.  
I am the resurrection and the life.  
I am the resurrection and the life.

**5. Don't rush; take your time!**

If you want the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to a passage, spend some time with it. Remember that meditation goes past simply reading!

That completes our look at memorizing and meditating on God's word. **What questions do you have?** \_\_\_\_\_

Well, let's turn to our final point...

### **III. Applying God's Word**

#### **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

*<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the man of God may be **thoroughly equipped for every good work.***

#### **James 1:22-25**

***Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who **looks intently into the perfect law** that gives freedom, and continues to do this, **not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does.*****

#### **John 13:17**

*<sup>17</sup>Now that you know these things, you will be **blessed if you do them.***

If you know the text is for you, do all it says! God will bless you because he loves obedience, which is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22, Proverbs 21:3).

The basic steps of Bible study are to read a passage and then ask:

What does it say?

What does it mean?

What does it mean for me?

So let's look at some practical steps to help us apply Scripture properly.

#### **A. Understand the text before trying to apply it.**

In 2 **Timothy 2:15** we are exhorted to *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who **correctly handles the word of truth.**"*

Accepted **principles of interpretation** to follow are:

1. **Context**

Each biblical statement must be considered in context. We must consider the author's stated purpose, what issue he was trying to address.

2. **Style**

Consider the style of the material and then interpret it within that framework. Poetry is to be treated as poetry. Historical accounts are to be treated as history, parables as parables, hyperbole as hyperbole, and so on.

3. **Word Meaning**

Consider the meaning of the individual words, at the time written, and the individual's use of them.

4. **Non-Contradiction**

The Bible has a single author, God. If two parts of Scripture seem to contradict each other, our interpretation of one or both must be in error. Each passage of Scripture must be understood not only in its immediate context, but also in light of the context of the whole of Scripture. This is sometimes stated as "Scripture interprets Scripture." The Westminster Confession (I, ix) states: "*The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself, and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.*"

**B. Ask application-oriented questions of the text**

That third question, "What does it mean to me," is the application question. To avoid overlooking an application, it is helpful to ask ourselves another set of questions about the text we're reading:

- Does it reveal something I should believe about God?
- Does it reveal something I should praise or thank or trust God for?
- Does it reveal something I should pray about for myself or others?
- Does it reveal something I should have a new attitude about?
- Does it reveal something I should make a decision about?
- Does it reveal something I should do for the sake of Christ?

**C. When you come up with an application, respond specifically**

Far too often, we slack off in disciplining ourselves to respond specifically. If we are not disciplined, we can have times with God and remain unmoved by Him.

Every encounter with Scripture should lead to a response: An act of faith, worship, praise, or prayer. Application may not demand an overt action.

#### **IV. Moving Towards Godliness**

You must decide whether you will commit to pursuing these means of grace.

- Will you begin a plan of Scripture memorization?
- Will you cultivate the discipline of meditation?
- Will you prove yourself to be a diligent ‘applier’ of the God’s word?

Are there any final questions or comments? \_\_\_\_\_

Spiritual Disciplines Week 4  
“Prayer... For the Purpose of Godliness”

## I. Prayer Defined

The Westminster Catechism (Question 178) defines prayer this way:

*Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God [a], in the name of Christ [b], by the help of his Spirit [c], with confession of our sins [d], and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies [e].*

- a. Psalm 62:8 - *Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.*
- b. John 16:23b - *my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name*
- c. Romans 8:26 - *...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*
- d. Psalm 32:5-6 - *...I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”; Daniel 9:4a - I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed...*
- e. Philippians 4:6 - *in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

Prayer is not so much an [act](#) as an [attitude](#) of [dependency](#) upon God.

## II. Views of Some Notable Christians

### A. John Calvin (1509-1564)

*Our prayer must not be self-centered. It must arise not only because we feel our own need as a burden we must lay upon God, but also because we are so bound up in love for our fellow men that we feel their need as acutely as our own.*

### B. Thomas Hooker (1586-1647)

*Prayer is my chief work, and it is by means of it that I carry on the rest.*

### C. Charles Spurgeon (Morning and Evening, a.m. 2 Jan)

*It is interesting how large a portion of Sacred Writ is occupied with the subject of prayer, either in furnishing examples, enforcing precepts, or pronouncing promises. We scarcely open the Bible before we read, “Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord;” and just as we are about to close the volume, the “Amen” of an earnest supplication meets our ear. Instances are plentiful. Here we find a wrestling Jacob-there a Daniel who prayed three times a day-and a David who with all his heart called upon his God. On the mountain we see Elijah; in the dungeon Paul and Silas. We have multitudes of commands, and myriads of promises. What does this teach us, but the sacred importance and necessity of prayer? We may be certain that whatever God has made*

*prominent in his Word, he intended to be conspicuous in our lives. If he has said much about prayer, it is because he knows we have much need of it.*

### III. Prayer is Expected

In Christ's "Sermon on the Mount," recorded in **Matthew 6**, we read:

In verse 5: "*And when you pray, ...*

In verse 6: "*But when you pray, ...*

In verse 7: "*And when you pray, ...*

In verse 9: "*This, then, is how you should pray: "*

In **Luke 18:1**, we read,

*<sup>1</sup>Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should **always pray and not give up.***

Jesus clearly expected prayer to be a regular part of his disciples' daily life. Paul's epistles contain similar commands.

#### **Colossians 4:2**

*<sup>2</sup>**Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.***

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

*<sup>16</sup>Be joyful always; <sup>17</sup>**pray continually**; <sup>18</sup>give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

What an awesome privilege it is, to be beckoned to God's throne in prayer!

**Hebrews 4:16** tells us how we should approach the throne.

*<sup>16</sup>Let us then **approach the throne of grace with confidence**, so that we may **receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.***

God is all knowing, always has our best interest in mind, and welcomes our prayers. In Revelation 5:8 it says that the prayers of the saints are like *golden bowls full of incense*, a sweet aroma to God.

Prayer is an expression of the Christian's unbroken relationship with the Father. God expects us to pray just as a general expects to hear from his soldiers in battle.

Prayer is a **tactical radio** for **spiritual warfare**, not an **intercom** to **order room service**.

What questions do you have so far? \_\_\_\_\_

### IV. Prayer is Answered

#### **A. The Bible declares that God answers prayer.**

In **Psalms 65:2**, David refers to God as "*O you who hear prayer,*" and Christ tells us in **Matthew 7:7-8**

<sup>7</sup>“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

### 1 John 5:14-15

<sup>14</sup>This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. <sup>15</sup>And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

#### B. Prayer does not conflict with God’s sovereign will.

Skeptics question whether prayer really changes anything. They argue that if God is sovereign and has decreed all that will come to pass, why should we pray? They may cite Scriptures such as [Isaiah 46:10](#)

*<sup>10</sup>I make known the end from the beginning,  
from ancient times, what is still to come.  
I say: My purpose will stand,  
and I will do all that I please.*

Others who question the value of prayer may point to the [Romans 8:28](#) promise “that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” They ask why should I pray that God will do good to me when he has already promised to do this? Can’t I just sit back, relax, and go along for the ride?

No! From the beginning to the end of Scripture, God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility are laid out side by side, without apology and without any consternation by the people of God. There is no conflict between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility to pray.

**God has appointed us to be instruments for the carrying out of his will and one of the means he has given us to do this is prayer.**

**Our prayers do not change the future that God has charted nor move him to form fresh purposes.**

**However, our prayers do make things change.** The next several sections will explain this more fully.

#### C. God uses our prayers to advance [his kingdom](#).

Our prayers allow us to be involved in activities that are eternally important. Our prayers can be the instruments through which God accomplishes his pre-ordained purposes and advances his kingdom.

An excellent example of this is found in [Daniel 9](#). There we read that Daniel “understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years” and yet he immediately set to praying that God will be faithful to his



word. The angel Gabriel then appears to Daniel, announcing that **as soon as Daniel began praying an answer was given**. Gabriel goes on to declare the prophecy of the 70 weeks, including the announcement that the Messiah will be sent into the world. Daniel had been used as an instrument in God's hands for bringing about his holy and perfect will.

Some promises of God are conditional, with the condition being prayer. **2 Chronicles 7:14** is a good example.

*<sup>14</sup>if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

Such changes as these are never unforeseen. They have been ordained from before the beginning of time, but it is prayer that prompts God to act as he has promised.

**D. God uses prayer to change us.**

Prayer expresses our trust in God and is a means whereby **our trust can increase**. It brings us into **deeper fellowship with God**, for he loves us and delights in our fellowship with him. Real prayer is **communion with God**, so that there will be **common thoughts between his mind and ours**. What is needed is for him to fill our hearts with his thoughts, and then his desires will become our desires flowing back to him. **Then God can better use us as his instruments for accomplishing his purposes.**

**E. God uses prayer to bless us.**

Prayer is the way and means God has appointed for the communication of the blessings of his goodness to his people. When we ask for things that are in accordance with his will for us, he blesses us.

**Matthew 7:9-11**

*<sup>9</sup>“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? <sup>11</sup>If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*

**F. Sometimes persistence is required.**

**Luke 18:1** (cited previously)

*<sup>1</sup>Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should **always pray and not give up**.*

After class, I recommend you read Luke 18:2-8, the Parable of the Persistent Widow.

**G. The answer may be different than what we asked for.**

The promise isn't that we're going to receive exactly what we ask for. The all too common idea seems to be that I come to God and ask him for something that I want, and then I expect him to give me exactly what I have asked for. This is a most dishonoring and degrading idea, which reduces God to a servant doing our bidding. Prayer, rightly understood, is coming to God, telling him my need, and leaving it to him to deal with as he sees best.

Paul provides a good example here. We know from **2 Corinthians 12:7-9** that God saw fit not to answer one of his prayers as he wished.

*<sup>7</sup>To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup>Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup>But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*

Our Father will not always answer his children's prayers in the form in which we offer them. If in our flesh we ask for things that are not for our benefit, God, like any good parent, reserves the right to say, "No, not that; for it wouldn't be good for you – but have this instead."

#### **H. Sin may be a barrier to our prayers being answered.**

There may be other reasons our prayers are not answered as we expect. We may have done something sinful that causes God to ignore our pleas. Some examples of such reasons include:

##### **Unrepentant sin: Psalm 66:18**

*<sup>18</sup>If I had cherished sin in my heart,  
the Lord would not have listened;*

##### **Wrong motives: James 4:3**

*<sup>3</sup>When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

##### **Idolatry: Ezekiel 14:3**

*<sup>3</sup>"Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?"*

##### **Hypocrisy: Matthew 6:5**

*<sup>5</sup>"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full."*

**Anger: 1 Timothy 2:8**

<sup>8</sup>*I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.*

**Indifference to needs of poor: Proverbs 21:13**

<sup>13</sup>*If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.*

**Unforgiving spirit: Mark 11:25**

<sup>25</sup>*And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”*

**Inconsideration towards wife: 1 Peter 3:7**

<sup>7</sup>*Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

What questions have I provoked? \_\_\_\_\_

**V. Prayer is Learned**

There is a sense in which prayer no more needs to be taught to a child of God than a baby needs to be taught to cry. Prayer should be **as natural as breathing**. Think of what it was like to pray when you first became a Christian. Your prayers proceeded from a right heart, but they may not have been all that biblical. Prayer is a discipline we should learn well.

How is prayer learned? We are going to look at **six ways**.

**A. Prayer is learned... by looking to Christ's example**

In **Luke 11:1**, the disciples asked Jesus, “*Lord, teach us to pray.*” We would be wise to look to him as well.

Christ's response to that request is recorded in **Matthew 6:5-13**. In verses 5 and 6, he tells us prayer is not to be for show.

<sup>5</sup>*“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup>But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

In verses 7 and 8, Christ tells us we shouldn't babble along trying to inform God of something.

*<sup>7</sup>And when you pray, **do not keep on babbling like pagans**, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup>Do not be like them, for **your Father knows what you need before you ask him**.*

Prayer is not for furnishing God with [knowledge](#) of what we [need](#), but rather a confession to him of our [sense of need](#). God designs to be honored by our asking, just as he is to be thanked after he has bestowed his blessing upon us.

Most famously, in verses 9-13 Jesus teaches us what we know as The Lord's Prayer: <sup>9</sup>*"This, then, is how you should pray:*

*"Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
<sup>10</sup>your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
<sup>11</sup>Give us today our daily bread.  
<sup>12</sup>Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
<sup>13</sup>And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.'*

We can also look to Christ's example as to when we should pray:

Jesus prayed regularly. **Luke 5:16**

*<sup>16</sup>But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

Jesus prayed early in the morning. **Mark 1:35**

*<sup>35</sup>Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*

Jesus prayed after work. **Mark 6:44-46**

*<sup>44</sup>The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.*

*<sup>45</sup>Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>46</sup>After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.*

Jesus prayed before making a major decision. **Luke 6:12-13** (choosing disciples)

*<sup>12</sup>One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. <sup>13</sup>When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles*

Jesus prayed in the midst of popularity. **Luke 5:15-16** (crowds came)

*<sup>15</sup>Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. <sup>16</sup>But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

Jesus prayed in the midst of crisis. **Luke 22:41-44** (Gethsemane)

*<sup>41</sup>He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup>"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." <sup>43</sup>An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. <sup>44</sup>And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

If we desire to be more and more conformed to the image of Christ, we should pray as he did.

## **B. Prayer is learned... by praying.**

Like speaking a foreign language or playing a musical instrument, you won't truly learn the discipline until you put it into practice.

A useful acrostic for structuring a prayer is ACTS. **Are you familiar with it?**

A – Adoration

C – Confession

T – Thanksgiving

S – Supplication

We see elements of all four in the Lord's Prayer. You'll also notice all these aspects of prayer in our Sunday morning worship service. Our children here at CHBC are being taught this in their classes each Sunday.

Praying out loud is useful. Find a quiet place where you won't feel self-conscious. Get used to verbalizing your praise, confession, thanks, and requests to God. Don't worry if your phrasing is clumsy or your pace uneven, for **Romans 8:26** provides a comforting assurance:

*<sup>26</sup>In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*

As to what to pray about, begin by remembering Christ's example and consider this godly advice from John Owen:

*Pray as you think. Consciously embrace with your heart every gleam of light and truth that comes to your mind. Thank God and pray about everything that strikes you powerfully.*

As you learn, start to pray aloud in smaller settings and gradually expand. You can begin by saying grace before meals with others. If you are involved in a Bible study, volunteer to pray. It's okay if you don't know how to pray well,

the people around you love you and will encourage you, and God will be pleased.

**C. Prayer is learned... by singing.**

When we sing in worship, what we are almost always doing is participating in a corporate prayer of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, or supplication. Hymns remind us of profound Scriptural truths and teach us how to pray.

**D. Prayer is learned... by meditating on Scripture.**

We talked about meditation last week. This may be the most important concept we touch on this morning.

Meditation is often the missing link between Bible intake and prayer, and the key to a passionate prayer life.

Biblically, meditation and speaking to God in prayer go hand in hand. David was led to pray passionately to the Lord as he meditated carefully upon his word. Consider David's words in **Psalm 5:1-2** (KJV), which we often sing:

<sup>1</sup>***Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation.***

<sup>2</sup>***Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray.***

Similarly, David says in **Psalm 19:14**:

***May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.***

The English Puritans (quoted by Whitney on p. 73) understood the role of meditation in prayer well. William Bridge put it this way:

*As it is the sister of reading, so [meditation] is the mother of prayer. Though a man's heart be much indisposed to prayer, yet, if he can but fall into a meditation of God, and the things of God, his heart will soon come off to prayer.*

In a long passage on pages 74-76 of his book, Don Whitney quotes George Muller's wonderful but overlooked explanation of how meditation on Scripture made his prayers so effective. This 19<sup>th</sup> century prayer warrior ran a huge orphanage in Bristol, England relying solely on prayer and faith. Without advertising or debt, he cared for thousands of orphans at a time and supported mission work across the world.

So make it a habit to read the Bible before you pray. Then meditate on what you read and pray in response. Look for something you may be able to praise or thank God for in the text. Look for a promise of God and pray it back to him. If you are reading about the sins of God's people, consider how your heart is similar to theirs and confess your sins.



Thus far we've said prayer is learned by looking to Christ's example, by praying, by singing, and by meditating upon Scripture. A fifth way...

**E. Prayer is learned... by praying with others.**

The disciples learned to pray not only from Jesus' teaching, but by being with him as he prayed. Similarly, we can learn from the godly examples of those around us.

**Proverbs 13:20**

*He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.*

As an undergraduate, Don Carson began meeting weekly with a pastor to pray. Those meetings taught him the fundamentals of prayer and have informed much of his prayer life since. He writes, "*Choose models, but choose them well. Study their content, their breadth, their passion, their unction – but do not ape their idiom.*" (Unction = fervor; Idiom = dialect, expression, style)

Listen to others pray during our Sunday morning corporate worship services, during our Sunday evening prayer services, in your small groups, etc.

If you desire to learn how to pray, then ask someone who you think is a good model of prayer to pray with you regularly. This can be part of a discipling relationship.

**F. Prayer is learned... by reading about prayer.**

Besides Christ's example, the Bible gives us many other wonderful examples of prayer. Psalm 51:1-12 is one. The Pauline epistles provide many great examples of prayer, such as **Ephesians 3:14-19**.

*<sup>14</sup>For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup>I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup>may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup>and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Isn't that beautifully rich?

To better appreciate Paul's prayers, the elders commend to your reading Don Carson's book, ***A Call to Spiritual Reformation***. Its aim is "*to work through several of Paul's prayers in such a way that we hear God speak to us today, and to find strength and direction to improve our praying, both for God's glory and our good.*" (p 27)

Biographies of Christian saints also provide examples of wonderful prayers. For example, the biographies of George Muller (by Basil Miller), David Brainerd, George Whitefield, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones all contain great lessons about prayer.

Martin Luther wrote “*A Simple Way to Pray*” to tell his barber how to empower his prayer life.

A superb book on prayer is *The Power of Prayer*, by Samuel Prime. It describes the role of prayer in the lives of New Yorkers during the last national awakening in 1857. Republishing it was the last recommendation Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones made to the Banner of Truth Trust before his death.

*The Valley of Vision* (Banner of Truth Trust), a compilation of Puritan prayers, is another great resource. I use it in my quiet time and it has taught me much about prayer.

Do you have any questions or comments? \_\_\_\_\_

## VI. Moving Towards Godliness

To conclude, we recognize that prayer is expected of us, it is answered, and we can train ourselves to pray better. So this is a good time to ask yourself some questions to make sure you're on the right course in this spiritual discipline:

### A. How committed are you to praying?

We must make conscious decisions now about how we're going to live. What role is prayer going to have in your life?

### B. Will you learn to pray better?

Will you plan on linking your Bible reading to meditation and to prayer? Will you pray with others? Are you willing to read in order to learn more about praying in a way that pleases God? Make it your goal to learn to pray better.

### C. Will you pray persistently?

Will you ask, seek and knock continuously? George Muller said, “*The great fault of the children of God is, they do not continue in prayer; they do not go on praying; they do not persevere. If they desire anything for God's glory, they should pray until they get it.*” (quoted by Whitney, p. 81)



## Spiritual Disciplines Week 5

### “Worship... For the Purpose of Godliness”

#### I. Introduction

In his book, Don Whitney recounts a sad experience from his childhood. On his 10<sup>th</sup> birthday he invited his eight closest friends for a party. It began after school with football and basketball until dark. Then his father grilled burgers and hot dogs, his mom served a beautiful cake, and he opened his presents. He didn't have any brothers, so the best part was just being with the other boys.

He planned a grand climax: he bought everyone tickets to the most exciting event in town – the high school basketball game. He pictured sitting in the stands with his friends, cheering on their team while munching popcorn and punching one another playfully.

But as soon as they entered the gym, Don's friends scattered, not to be seen the rest of the night. No thanks for the games, food, fun, or tickets. Not even a “happy birthday.” Without a gracious word they vanished. He sat alone, miserable. It wasn't what he'd dreamed of, but rather a sad disappointment.

Don Whitney tells the story not to elicit sympathy, but because it's analogous to the way we often treat God in worship. Though we are invited to an event where he is the guest of honor, it is possible to offer him a thoughtless gift, sing a few customary songs to him, and then completely neglect him while we focus on others and enjoy the performance before us. And just like his 10-year old friends, we may leave without any twinge of conscience or any awareness of our insensitivity, fully satisfied that we have played our part convincingly.

Worship is a fundamental component of the Christian life. Similar to the disciplines previously discussed, it is both a command and privilege.

**Psalm 95:6.**

*<sup>6</sup>Come, let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;*

This responsibility, to worship God and him alone, was cited by Jesus when he was tempted by the devil.

**Matthew 4:10**

*<sup>10</sup>Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”*

God clearly expects us to worship. We can't think of godliness without this component. What does Paul write in **Romans 12:1**?

*<sup>1</sup>Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as **living sacrifices**, holy and pleasing to God—**this is your spiritual act of worship.***

It should also be pointed out here that this passage makes clear that worship is not a half-hearted or part-time activity. Sadly many of us treat it that way, which led one joker to comment that “the trouble with living sacrifices is that they keep crawling off the altar.”

Those who pursue God must realize that it is possible to worship God wrongly and in vain. Modern evangelicals like to think all worship is acceptable. Many Christians think it smacks of elitism to condemn any form of worship. Yet Jesus said, quoting Isaiah in **Matthew 15:8-9**:

<sup>8</sup>“*These people honor me with their lips,  
but **their hearts are far from me.**  
<sup>9</sup>**They worship me in vain;**  
their teachings are but rules taught by men.*”

How can we avoid worshiping God in vain? To avoid this we must learn from God himself.

## II. Understanding Worship

Worship is hard to define well. Some Christians think of worship as singing and associate it with a particular music style, but reading, listening, praying, singing, and responding to God’s word are all acts of biblical worship.

### A. Worship examples

Some examples of worship are helpful.

#### **John 20:26-28**

<sup>26</sup>*A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”* <sup>27</sup>*Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”*

<sup>28</sup>*Thomas said to him, “**My Lord and my God!**”*

Jesus appears to Thomas and shows himself to him. Worship is what happened when Thomas exclaims, “My Lord and my God!”

#### **Revelation 4:8-11**

<sup>8</sup>*Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:*

*“**Holy, holy, holy  
is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was, and is, and is to come.**”*

<sup>9</sup>*Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever,* <sup>10</sup>*the twenty-four elders fall down*

*before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:*

<sup>11</sup>*“You are worthy, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they were created  
and have their being.”*

### **Revelation 5:11-14**

<sup>11</sup>*Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. <sup>12</sup>In a loud voice they sang:*

*“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and praise!”*

<sup>13</sup>*Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:*

*“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honor and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!”*

<sup>14</sup>*The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

### **B. Worship defined**

What have we seen in these examples? Notice how many times God was described as “worthy.” To worship God requires we ascribe the proper [worth](#) to God, celebrate his [worthiness](#), and approach God as one who is infinitely [worthy](#). As we understand and appreciate just how worthy, how praiseworthy and magnificent he truly is, we can’t help but worship him.

That’s why those that come closest to his presence, who comprehend his holiness or see the radiance of his glory, instinctively fall on their face and worship. We see this in Job, in Isaiah, and in Revelation.

[Leviticus 10:1-3](#) provides an important warning. God insists he be approached in accordance with his word.

<sup>1</sup>*Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered **unauthorized** fire before the LORD, **contrary to his command**. <sup>2</sup>So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. <sup>3</sup>Moses then said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD spoke of when he said:*

*“Among those who approach me  
I will show myself holy;*

*in the sight of all the people  
I will be honored.’”*

*Aaron remained silent.*

So worship is focusing on and responding to God on terms that he proposes and in a way that he alone makes possible.

Since worship is focusing on and responding to God, we aren't worshipping if we're not making God the focal point of our thoughts. We can listen to a sermon or a prayer, but if God isn't the object of our thoughts, then we aren't worshipping. If we're singing "*A Mighty Fortress is our God*," but we're checking out what clothes the people around us are wearing or deciding what we're going to have for lunch, we aren't worshipping. However, whenever we focus on our infinitely worthy God, we will naturally respond in worship, just as the moon reflects the sun.

### **C. God's revelation of himself**

Just as an indescribable sunset or a breath-taking mountaintop vista evokes a spontaneous response, so we cannot encounter the worthiness of God without the response of worship. If you could see God at this moment, you would so utterly understand how worthy he is of worship that you would fall on your face and worship him.

We aren't in heaven yet, but God has, nonetheless, partially revealed himself to us here in order that we might worship him.

#### **1. God has revealed himself through *creation*.**

##### **Psalm 19:1-3**

<sup>1</sup>*The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

<sup>2</sup>*Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they display knowledge.*

<sup>3</sup>*There is no speech or language  
where their voice is not heard.*

##### **Romans 1:20**

<sup>20</sup>*For since the creation of the world **God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.***

The grandeur of a sunrise, the crashing of the surf, a mountain range, a sunset, or a storm can and should evoke our spontaneous praise and awe. Such scenes just give us a glimpse into how holy and almighty the Creator and sustainer of

the universe is. He is worthy of all the honor we can give him and infinitely more.

**2. God has revealed himself through his *prophets* and his *Son*, as recorded in Scripture.**

**Hebrews 1:1-2**

*<sup>1</sup>In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*

**John 1:18**

*<sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*

God has revealed himself through his word, the Bible, and its account of his word in flesh, Jesus Christ. That's why both public and private worship of God should draw from Scripture. In meditating upon his word, and its revelation of Christ, we will understand what God is like. Don Whitney writes (p 88), "Bible reading and preaching are central in public worship because they are the clearest, most direct, most extensive presentation of God in the meeting." As Dr. Ligon Duncan says, we should read the Bible, hear the Bible, pray the Bible, sing the Bible, and see the Bible (as it is acted out in the sacraments). For similar reasons, private worship should revolve around taking in and meditating upon God's word.

What questions do you have so far? \_\_\_\_\_

**III. Worship in Spirit and in Truth**

**John 4:23-24** (Jesus meeting the woman at the well)

*<sup>23</sup>Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. <sup>24</sup>God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."*

This concept of worship as done in spirit and truth is critical and ought to define our approach to God.

Lig Duncan, in his book "Foundations for Biblically-Directed Worship," states that "Worship is Spirit-gathered, Spirit-dependent, Spirit-engendered, and Spirit-empowered." (p 63)

To worship we must have the Holy Spirit within us.

## 1 Corinthians 12:3

<sup>3</sup>*Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and **no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.***

The Holy Spirit was active in the writing of the Bible. He “breathed out” the truths of God to the prophets.

## 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us:

<sup>16</sup>***All Scripture is God-breathed** and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,...*

The Holy Spirit is also active in conveying the truth of the Bible to those who read it.

## 1 Corinthians 2:12-13

<sup>12</sup>*“We have not received the spirit of the world but **the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.** <sup>13</sup>And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but **taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.**”*

## Ephesians 1:17

<sup>17</sup>*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you **the Spirit of wisdom and revelation**, so that you may know him better.*

The Holy Spirit does not convey to individual believers some new or mystical information apart from what the Scriptures already say, but rather he opens our hearts to understand the meaning that is already there and to apply it to our lives. That’s what David understands when he prays in **Psalms 119:18**, “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.”

So worshiping in spirit **can’t be distinguished** from worshiping in truth.

Yet having the Holy Spirit doesn’t ensure that we will always worship in spirit and in truth, it simply means we can. We must worship sincerely, as Don Whitney says, “*from the inside out*,” and according to the truth of Scripture. Poetic prayers and beautiful songs without sincerity is hypocrisy. **It’s what Christ condemned the Pharisees for: all the form, but none of the heart.**

**Ask yourself a few questions** to help you perceive the attitude of your heart:

Do you pray with those that offer prayers, or does your mind wander?

Do you meditate upon the words that you sing, or are they merely catchy tunes and eloquent words?

We must worship God with a sincere heart. John Piper puts it well, “Where feelings for God are dead, worship is dead.” (paraphrase Piper’s wedding anniversary analogy quote on pg. 90)



However, our worship is not made satisfactory by sincerity alone. God insists he be worshiped in accordance with his word. The two go hand in hand. The world has a hard time accepting this truth, but **a person's sincerity doesn't make his worship right with God.** If I'm not worshiping in truth, I'm worshiping in vain. It is the height of arrogance to assume that we, as fallen creatures, can choose to worship God as we want. **We can be very sincere, but sincerely wrong** if we offer worship to God that is not in accord with Scripture.

For a clear example, consider the second commandment in **Exodus 20:4-5**:

*<sup>4</sup>You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. <sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God,...*

Now consider how Israel violated this commandment in their worship of the golden calf, as recorded in **Exodus 32:3-6**:

*<sup>3</sup>So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. <sup>4</sup>He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."*

*<sup>5</sup>When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD." <sup>6</sup>So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.*

While they may have been sincere and included elements of true worship in their activity, what the Israelites did was detestable and dishonoring in God's sight, for it broke his command. The consequence was death for about 3,000 Israelites.

God alone determines how he is to be worshiped. This is what we call the "regulative principle" – the simple biblical truth that God's revelation must shape our worship.

We must worship God as he is revealed in the Bible, not as we might want him to be.

We can't treat Scripture as a smorgasbord, taking only those parts that we find desirable. We must worship the true God, who is both just and merciful, both wrathful and loving, and who both condemns into hell and welcomes into heaven.

### **Mark 12:30**

*<sup>30</sup>Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*

Biblical worship involves both our heart and our head. Worship should be guided by truth, and meditation on God's truth will kindle a right passion for God.

Just because we may not feel like worshiping doesn't mean we are to give up. How many times have you entered a service only to have your cool heart and mind

transformed with warmth and passion for God? Press on and let God graciously touch your heart and mind, transforming you into a true worshiper.

#### **IV. Worship is Both Public and Private**

Besides worshiping in spirit and truth, worship is also to be both public and private.

##### **A. We are to worship together (“corporately”).**

###### **Hebrews 10:24-25**

*<sup>24</sup>And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup>Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

A primary exercise in worship is to develop the habit of faithfully assembling with other believers for the purpose of worshiping God. There is no such thing as individual Christianity; Christianity is not an isolationist religion. The NT describes the church as a body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13) and a household (Ephesians 2:19-20).

To be a Christian is to be a part of, and involved in, a corporate body of believers – a local church. When the author of Hebrews called Christians to meet together, it wasn’t to talk about the weather or civic affairs, but to encourage each other by worshiping!

Watching other Christians worship on TV or a video may be a comfort for believers unable to gather with their own church, but it is an inadequate substitute. There are elements of corporate worship that can’t be replaced by remotely observing others worship.

Think of the ways you’ve been deeply blessed by participating in the public worship services of this church – a powerful sermon, a baptism testimony, or Sunday night stories of conversion, missions, and answered prayer. To ignore corporate worship is to forego a tremendous blessing from God that brings us closer to Christ.

##### **B. Worship is to be private as well.**

When we read Romans 12:1, we commented that it showed worship was not to be a part-time activity. In his book, *Engaging with God*” subtitled “*A Biblical Theology of Worship*,” David Peterson makes the point that the New Testament doesn’t use the term “worship” to refer to Christian gatherings. These are regarded as part of Christian life, but there is no special reference in any of the Greek words translated into the English word worship that has any particular connection with Christian gatherings. We shouldn’t see our obligation to worship as limited to a certain time each week.



No matter how fulfilling and faithful our public worship is, there are certain experiences largely unique to private worship. Jesus, while faithful in temple worship and teaching, regularly withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

In private worship you can read Scripture, meditate, pray, and even sing, focusing on and responding to God.

- Rather than going along on the worship course laid out by others, the Holy Spirit may lead you through the fertile fields of Scripture to address those areas of your life where you need to shine the light of God's truth.
- He can cause you to meditate on things you need to understand deeply.
- He can lead you into prayers of praise, thanksgiving, confession, and supplication that are most helpful for your individual circumstances.
- You can sing as the Holy Spirit prompts you, without regard to what you sound like to others.

Public worship does not excuse private worship. Don Whitney writes:

*Can we expect the flames of our worship of God to burn brightly in public on the Lord's Day when they barely flicker for him in secret on other days? Isn't it because we do not worship well in private that our corporate worship experience often dissatisfies us?*

It is one of the great blessings of life that God does not limit our access to him and enjoyment of his presence to just one day a week. An invitation to grow in intimacy with Christ is open every day. This is a tremendous gift, to worship the great God of the universe. God never tires of our prayers and he does not cringe at our out-of-tune voices. We ought to exercise this privilege and fulfill this expectation for the glory and enjoyment of God forever.

## **V. Moving Towards Godliness**

Worship is both an end and a means. Worship is an end in itself because worship, as we've defined it, is to focus on and respond to God and there is no higher goal than focusing on and responding to God. However, worship is also a means, in the sense that it is a means to godliness. To worship consistently requires discipline. The more we worship God in spirit and truth, the more we become like him.

People are molded and shaped by their focus. We become what we think about. Focusing on the world more than on God makes us more worldly than godly.

**A. Will you commit yourself to daily worship?** As the late A. W. Tozer said, *"If you will not worship God seven days a week, you do not worship Him on one day a week."* We can't expect worship to flow from our lips on the Lord's Day if we keep it dammed up throughout the week. Our God is worthy of our worship every day of our lives.

Watch your public and private worship balance. Some of us may rely too heavily on our private devotional lives and forsake the blessing of worship God has called us to corporately. This is particularly true during moves to new areas and especially busy times when we take ourselves away from a local body. We try to convince ourselves that our disciplined “quiet times” can carry us through. But it will only be a matter of time before we begin to fall. We weren’t intended to live the Christian life that way.

Conversely, you may go to the opposite extreme, faithfully attending church but neglecting the private devotion of the heart. If you’re progressing little in the Christian life, is it because worship has been knocked out of your daily schedule? Don’t let it happen to you.

**B. Will you put actual worship into your acts of worship?** If you don’t feel like worshiping, the problem is with you, not God. When you’re tired, consider the object of your worship – the glorious and majestic God of heaven. Read over Revelation chapters 4-5 and 21-22. Consider the multitudes in heaven worshiping God throughout eternity. Read from the Psalms. Allow Scripture, meditation, prayer, song, and other Christians to aid you in your worship. As you grow stronger in the worship of God, your likeness to Christ will increase.

Spiritual Disciplines Week 6  
“Evangelism...for the Purpose of Godliness”

## I. Introduction

So what is evangelism? A simple definition is that evangelism is communicating the gospel to non-Christians. The words can be spoken, recorded or written, and delivered to one person or a crowd.

The gospel tells us that God is perfectly holy and just. He has created us and charged us to rule here in accordance with his laws, but instead of obeying him, we have rebelled against his authority. We have tried to run our own lives our own way, committing treason against God and hurting ourselves and others in the process. All of us are sinners who have earned God's righteous wrath. He won't let us rebel forever. Hebrews 9:27 reminds us we will each face judgment. When a sinner stands alone before God, he will be sent away from God into the eternal punishment of hell.

But God, in his grace, has given Jesus Christ, his Son. Christ took on human flesh and lived the life of perfect obedience to God that we have not. He then voluntarily went to the cross as an atonement for sinners, taking upon himself the punishment of every sinner who would ever turn from his sin and trust in Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He was raised from the dead in victory over sin and death.

The gospel calls sinners to repent and to believe in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sin. We cannot earn God's favor with our works. But we can be reconciled to him through faith alone in Christ alone. God promises to forgive and adopt all those who come to him through Jesus.

J.I. Packer, in his book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, has given us a fuller definition of evangelism: It is “to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinful people in order that they may come to put their trust in God through Him, to receive Him as their Savior, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church.”

Most of the world either hasn't heard the gospel or has rejected it. We need to tell it to them. Are we as evangelistic as we should be? None of us can say that we are. Personal witness is often difficult and carries real risks. It can result in our being laughed at. It can result in our being criticized as stupid or narrow-minded. It can result in outright hostility. In some parts of the world, it can result in death.

It can also be discouraging because we usually won't see immediate results.

Evangelism tends to be a slow process, in which we could experience months or even years of rejection before someone responds.

Nonetheless, we should not lose heart. Rather, we should let God's word convict us about the importance and necessity of evangelism.

## II. Evangelism is Expected

We are not all expected to use the same methods of evangelism, but we are all expected to evangelize.

### A. Evangelism is a matter of obedience.

The Lord Jesus Christ himself has commanded us to witness.

#### John 20:21

<sup>21</sup>*Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*

#### Matthew 28:19-20

<sup>19</sup>*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

These commands were not given to the apostles only. Jesus' words "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" make it clear that his command to evangelize has relevance for all Christians. The question for us, therefore, is this: Are we obedient to our Lord in this matter?

### B. Evangelism is a matter of gratitude.

The Bible speaks of worship and evangelism as the right responses to God's saving grace. As those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, should it not be our obligation to proclaim his love and mercy to those around us?

Our attitude and actions should be the same as the psalmist in **Psalm 116:12-14**:

<sup>12</sup>*How can I repay the LORD  
for all his goodness to me?*

<sup>13</sup>*I will lift up the cup of salvation  
and call on the name of the LORD.*

<sup>14</sup>*I will fulfill my vows to the LORD  
in the presence of all his people.*

Verse 14 focuses on the **public praise of God's grace**. In his comments on verse 14, C.H. Spurgeon said: "***O secret disciples***, what say you to this verse! *Be encouraged to come into the light and own your Redeemer. If, indeed, you have been saved, come forward and declare it in His own appointed way.*"

### C. Evangelism is a matter of living a godly life.

As God's people, we ought to commend the gospel to those around us by the way we live. Our lives should consistently be characterized by holiness, which will catch the attention of unbelievers. It may cause them to wonder what's different about us and will testify to our sincerity about the gospel we proclaim.

## 1 Peter 3:15-16

<sup>15</sup>*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always **be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.** But do this **with gentleness and respect,** <sup>16</sup>*keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.**

As we are transformed by God's word we become wiser and live more righteously, which will encourage us to share the gospel with the lost.

## Proverbs 11:30

<sup>30</sup>*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.*

In a sermon preached on this verse, Spurgeon said it teaches us two key points: *"The first is, the life of the believer is, or ought to be, full of soul-blessing. In the second place, the pursuit of the believer ought always to be soul-winning."*

So each of us must ask ourselves: Does my life reflect Christ? Am I, through my witness, a blessing to those around me?

### **D. Evangelism is every Christian's calling.**

Some Christians think that evangelism is a gift and therefore only the responsibility of those with that gift. They appeal to **Ephesians 4:11** for support:

<sup>11</sup>*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,...*

The point of this verse, however, is not that only those who have the gift of evangelism should evangelize. God does gift some Christians for the vocational ministry of evangelism, but he calls **all believers** to be **his witnesses**. Our perspective on personal evangelism should be informed by **1 Peter 2:9**:

<sup>9</sup>*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, **that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.***

According to this verse, God has chosen us in Christ for a purpose: that we may proclaim the excellencies of Christ to a world enslaved in the darkness of sin. All of us ought to glorify God by proclaiming the glories of his grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The verse also establishes the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Christ's church is a kingdom of priests. As Christians, all of us have a duty to perform a mediatorial service that declares the will of God to the world and bears human needs before God's throne in prayer.

To all those who have been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ, a ministry of reconciliation has been given. We are commissioned by God himself

to be his ambassadors.

## 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

*<sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup>that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Knowing that he was an ambassador for Christ filled Paul with a sense of duty and urgency. Paul implored others on Christ's behalf. We should, indeed must, do the same, for God relies on his people, Christians, to call sinners to repent of their sins and surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord.

We should count it a privilege that God has entrusted us with proclaiming the gospel. We should be good stewards of this message. But too often, instead of being faithful and diligent ambassadors for Christ, we let ourselves be invisible!

What are some of the reasons we don't evangelize as much as we ought? \_\_\_\_\_

Fear?

Lack of knowledge?

Frightened by the seriousness of evangelism? The consequences are eternal and we don't want to misinform anyone.

Not knowing more than the person you're evangelizing?

Lack of time?

Or other reasons that Christians usually don't volunteer, such as:

Apathy?

Cold-heartedness?

Laziness?

Lack of discipline?

### III. Evangelism is Empowered

One of the most common reasons many of us fail to be better witnesses for Christ is fear. Fear can appear in many forms. We might be afraid of our own lack of ability. We might be afraid of derision or rejection. We might be afraid of the consequences of getting the message wrong.

The best way to overcome such fears is to have a biblical view of evangelism. A good starting point is understanding that God is sovereign in the salvation of sinners.

God, in his grace, has elected some, but not all, sinners unto salvation. He has promised that he will gather a people for himself from every nation and tongue, tribe (Isaiah 66:18). It was this knowledge of God's sovereignty that gave pioneer missionary William Carey the confidence to labor many years in India before he saw fruit.

The same knowledge encouraged Paul while he labored in Corinth. God assured Paul that his evangelism would not be in vain, because his elect were in the city.

### **Acts 18:9-11**

*<sup>9</sup>One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. <sup>10</sup>For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." <sup>11</sup>So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.*

We can witness with confidence, knowing that the elect will respond as God has ordained. Jesus proclaimed in, **John 6:44**, that *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."* **1 Corinthians 12:3** puts it this way: *"no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit."*

Our task is to be obedient in proclaiming the word of God. God determines if conversions will result, and when. It is his work. We can rely on God's sovereign power to bring sinners to Christ, and that should spur us on in our evangelism.

God equips his people for the task of evangelism. We read earlier, in the Great Commission, how Jesus promised to be with his followers always, indeed to "the very end of the age." He has fulfilled this promise by giving us the Holy Spirit, who was first poured out upon Christians at Pentecost.

### **Acts 1:8**

*<sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

The apostles were told to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit and then go witness for Christ. That way they would realize that the power for evangelism did not come from their own strength, but from God.

**1 Corinthians 6:19** assures us every Christian has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

*<sup>19</sup>Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?*

What an encouragement this is for us in our witness! If evangelism depended upon our own abilities, there would be cause for despair, for who among us could say with confidence that they are adequate for such a task?

But the indwelling Holy Spirit gives us the power to witness. Be confident that if



your life has been changed by the gospel, you are equipped to share the gospel.

The blind man healed by Jesus in **John 9:25** provides an encouraging example. Though he had been a believer in Jesus Christ for only a few minutes and had no evangelism training, he was willing to tell others what Jesus had done for him.

*“One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”*

As Don Whitney says: *“Part of the beauty of our message is that God saves sinners, sinners like us... The practice of consistent Christian living does empower evangelism, but a Christian recovery from your own un-Christian living strengthens your witness in another, very believable way.”*

God delights in using weak instruments so that he alone gets the glory. Do you feel lacking in your ability to witness? Then ask God for grace to do so! He has promised in his word (Prov 3:34, 1 Pet 5:5) to give grace to the humble. We should depend upon him, and not on our own strength. May the words of Paul in **2 Corinthians 4:7** be ours also:

*“<sup>7</sup>But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”*

Not only do we have the help of the Holy Spirit, but the message of the gospel itself is powerful, able to save all those who believe it.

**Romans 1:16**

*<sup>16</sup>I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*

The gospel we share is a powerful message that God will use as he wishes. In **Isaiah 55:11**, God declares his word will accomplish what he intends:

*It will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

**Romans 10:17** affirms that *“faith comes from hearing the message.”*

But don't think the gospel is some kind of magic wand we can wave over unbelievers and the power of God will spring from it and automatically convert all of them. We should expect rejection by many of those to whom we witness.

**1 Corinthians 1:18**

*<sup>18</sup>For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

But we can trust God to apply the gospel powerfully upon the heart of his elect. By his Spirit, he regenerates sinners who are dead in their sins. He removes their hearts of stone and gives them a heart of flesh so that they are able to comprehend the gospel, repent, and believe in Jesus.

The power is not in your own education, eloquence, or persuasiveness. The power



is in the gospel.

So how should we measure success in evangelism? Success in evangelism is sharing the gospel. Our job is just to be faithful in pointing men and women to Jesus Christ to have their sins washed away and be reconciled to God.

Be faithful and trust God for the results. Let **Ecclesiastes 11:5-6** be an encouragement to us.

*<sup>5</sup> As you do not know the path of the wind,  
or how the body is formed in a mother's womb,  
so you cannot understand the work of God,  
the Maker of all things.*

*<sup>6</sup> Sow your seed in the morning,  
and at evening let not your hands be idle,  
for you do not know which will succeed,  
whether this or that,  
or whether both will do equally well.*

Some of us may plant the seed, others may water it, and still others may do the harvesting, but it is God who causes new life to spring forth.

What questions or comments do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

#### **IV. Evangelism is a Discipline**

Evangelism is a natural overflow of the Christian life, but we must not just wait for witnessing opportunities to happen.

God intends every Christian to find ways to share the gospel with unbelievers. In whatever context the Lord places us, he calls us to find ways to fulfill the Great Commission.

Some opportunities are ours by nature of our responsibility as parents.

##### **Ephesians 6:4**

*<sup>4</sup>Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

However, most opportunities to witness don't come about naturally. Evangelism is a discipline that we must cultivate in our lives. Evangelism requires a deliberate effort on our part to invest time and energy in the lives of unbelievers in order to share the gospel with them.

The grace of God and the glories of Christ should stir our hearts to bear witness for him. After expounding on the excellencies of Christ, Paul, in **Colossians 4:2-6**, exhorts Christians to be fervent in evangelism.

*<sup>2</sup>Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. <sup>3</sup>And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the*

*mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. <sup>4</sup>Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. <sup>5</sup>Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup>Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

From these verses, we learn several ways by which we can discipline ourselves for evangelism.

First, we should pray. Paul asked the Colossian Christians to pray for opportunities for him to share the gospel, as well as to pray that he would proclaim the message clearly. We should pray for these things as well. Ask God for opportunities to witness. Ask him for grace to be a better witness for Christ.

Second, we need to be wise in the way we act towards unbelievers. We need to **watch our lives** and make sure our actions do not undermine the credibility of our proclamations. Do we discipline ourselves to live godly lives that commend the gospel, or are we careless in the way we live before a watching world?

Third, we should “make the most of every opportunity.” The sense of this exhortation is this: Do not just sit there waiting for an opportunity to fall into your lap, but **actively pursue opportunities** for witnessing.

The time is short and we ought to be filled with a sense of urgency in sharing the gospel. This means making time for others. All of us have busy schedules that revolve around work, family, friends, and church. That is why we need to discipline ourselves to spend fruitful time with unbelievers.

Don Whitney suggests having meals regularly with non-Christians. This could involve inviting unbelievers home for a meal or meeting a co-worker for lunch.

Fourth, we must always speak in a way that is gracious and “seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

The key is not just to rub shoulders with unbelievers, but to dialog with them in such a way that their hearts and minds might be opened to the gospel.

How do you speak graciously? We earlier quoted **1 Peter 3:15**. It is worth repeating here.

<sup>15</sup>*Always **be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,***

“Seasoned with salt” means that our speech has flavor. It is not empty or insipid, but thought-provoking and worthwhile, drawing hearers toward Christ.

This is a good point to debunk the expectation that it is enough of a witness of our faith in Christ to live good lives. A popular quote attributed to Francis of Assisi is, “Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.” It is always necessary to use words. To illustrate this, Don Whitney tells this (paraphrased) story (p 111):

A man who became a Christian during an evangelistic event told his boss about it. His employer responded with, “That’s great. I’m a Christian and have been praying for you for years.” The new believer was crestfallen. “Why didn’t you ever tell me? You were the very reason I haven’t been interested in the gospel all these years.” “How can that be?” the boss asked. “I’ve done my best to live the Christian life around you.” “That’s the point,” explained the employee. “You lived such a model life without telling me it was Christ who made the difference, I convinced myself that if you could live such a good and happy life without Christ, then I could to.”

So how do we season our words to turn the conversation towards Christ? And how can we have a good answer for everyone when they ask a question with spiritual implications?

Pray, know the Scriptures (remember our memorization class?), and try to anticipate, and prompt, those questions. In other words, prepare!

Don Whitney observes that an excellent way to turn the conversation to spiritual matters is to ask them how you can [pray for them](#).

Mack Stiles' book “Speaking of Jesus” has useful suggestions on how to open the door to a conversation about Christ.

One part of knowing how to answer everyone is to be able to clearly explain the gospel. If you haven’t already done so, or need a refresher, our core seminars titled *Two Ways to Live* and *Explaining Christianity* are very useful for thinking through ways to present the gospel to non-Christians clearly and concisely. You’ll also find the *Evangelism* core seminar a useful way to explore evangelism issues more thoroughly than we can here.

The local church can be a great tool to help you in your personal evangelism. A healthy church will display [unity](#) and [love](#) among Christians. Members can [help each other witness](#). That corporate witness glorifies God in a unique way.

Another way to answer a questioner well is, after the conversation has turned to spiritual matters, have evangelistic literature readily available to give to them.

A final word of advice is to meditate on the gospel often. A familiar exhortation in this church is “Preach the gospel to yourself.” This will remind you where your only hope lies, inspire gratitude to God, and help give you a heart for evangelism.

How does all this sound to you? Do you have any comments or questions? \_\_\_\_\_

## **V. Moving Towards Godliness**

Evangelism is not an optional activity meant only for certain Christians. Rather, it is a responsibility and privilege that God gives to every Christian. In evangelism,

we are declaring the glories of God - his justice, righteousness and love, all supremely demonstrated in Jesus Christ.

What a high calling, that the sovereign God should give us a role to play in his plan of redemption!

Take heart from the fact that we do not do this work in our own strength. The Holy Spirit is the one who changes hearts and draws people to Christ. There is power in the gospel itself. We can trust God's ability to work through us to accomplish his purpose.

Evangelism is a discipline that helps us grow in godliness. Since evangelism is a discipline, will you plan for it? Will you commit yourself to at least one act of intentional evangelism in this month?

(If time permits) We'll close with a sermon extract from the inimitable Charles Spurgeon:

*"I count nothing to be worthy of your pastor's life, and soul, and energy, but the winning of you to Christ. Nothing but your salvation can ever make me feel that my heart's desire is granted. I ask every worker here to see to this, that he never turns aside from shooting at this target, and at the center of this target, too, namely that he may win souls for Christ, and see them born to God, and washed in the fountain filled with blood.*

*Let the workers' hearts ache, and yearn, and their voices cry till their throats are hoarse; but let them judge that they have accomplished nothing whatever until, at least, in some cases, men are really saved. As the fisherman longs to take the fish in his net, as the hunter pants to bear home his spoil, as the mother pines to clasp her lost child to her bosom, so do we faint for the salvation of souls; and we must have them, or we are ready to die. Save them, O Lord, save them for Christ's sake!"*

## Spiritual Disciplines Week 7

### Serving...for the Purpose of Godliness

#### Introduction

To start us off, it is helpful to first consider what Christian service is. A definition I find useful is this: Christian service is the [sincere worship](#) of God with [our whole lives](#). So it is not so much about the kinds of things we do, but more about our reason for doing those things.

You could be leading a Bible study, witnessing to your co-workers, or striving to be a godly husband, wife, father or mother. But the different forms of serving all have a common goal: [the glory of God](#).

We see this in [2 Thessalonians 1:11-12](#).

*<sup>11</sup>With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. <sup>12</sup>We pray this so that the **name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you**, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul prayed that God might enable the Thessalonian Christians to “fulfill every good purpose and every act prompted by their faith”. This was so that Christ would be glorified by their service (v12).

Understanding the goal of Christian service is important. After all, serving is hard work. It can also go unappreciated and unnoticed by those around us. So it is no surprise that our sinful flesh resists serving God.

We are often guilty of laziness and pride – the two sins that commonly hinder Christian service. Without discipline, we will only serve occasionally, when it’s convenient or opportune, or when it benefits us. But a desire to glorify God should inspire fervent service to God.

Paul in [Romans 12:11](#) exhorts Christians to:

*Never be lacking in **zeal**, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*

Zeal is the opposite of sloth. The word “zeal” in our Bible is derived from the Hebrew and Greek words for “jealous” or “jealousy”. To be zealous for God is to be jealous for His glory, such that we vigorously labor to glorify Him in all that we do.

#### I. Every Christian is Expected to Serve

The chief end of a Christian is to glorify God. Therefore, every Christian is expected to serve. When God calls his elect to himself, he calls no one to idleness. We are saved in order to glorify God, and we glorify God through serving Him.

#### A. We are servants of Christ

As Christians, we are a [redeemed people](#). Freed from our bondage to sin, we now serve a [new Master](#). Jesus gave His own life in order to redeem us and our obligation now is to [serve him](#).

#### [Revelation 5:9-10](#)

<sup>9</sup>*And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and **with your blood you purchased men for God** from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

<sup>10</sup>*You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to **serve our God**, and they will reign on the earth.*

#### [Romans 6:22](#)

*But now that you have been **set free from sin** and have become **slaves to God**, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.*

As Christians, we belong to Christ. This means the direction and purpose of our lives have changed radically. We no longer live for ourselves because we are no longer masters of our own lives. Instead, our obligation now is to live for Christ who has bought us with his own blood.

#### [1 Corinthians 6:19b-20a](#)

<sup>19</sup>*You are **not your own**;* <sup>20</sup>*you were **bought** at a price.*

In the New Testament, there are many examples of how the disciples of Christ understood this. Paul ([Titus 1:1](#)), James ([James 1:1](#)), and Jude ([Jude 1](#)) all saw themselves as servants, or slaves, of God.

Christ paid an exceedingly high price to ransom us from sin. He gave his very life to save us from our sin. Isn't it only right that we offer our entire lives for his service? Should we not strive to be conformed to Christ in this?

#### [Mark 10:45](#)

*For even the Son of Man **did not come to be served, but to serve**, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

Serving God is not a job for the casually interested. He asks for service to him

to be a priority, not a pastime. He doesn't want servants who merely give him the leftovers of their life's commitments. In short, service is costly. God asks for our life. He has a right to, because he owns us.

## B. We are called to serve

### [Ephesians 2:8-10](#)

*<sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith —and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — <sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast.*

*<sup>10</sup>For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Verse 8 and 9 are very clear: Salvation is entirely by God's grace, and not by our own works. As poor, needy sinners, our only hope is to trust in Jesus Christ. He alone is our Savior and we can do nothing to earn our salvation.

It is only faith in Christ – and Christ alone – that saves. But true saving faith is never alone. It will always produce the fruit of obedient service. This is what Paul means in verse 10. God has given us new life in Christ in order that we might “do good works”. We are saved for a purpose – [to serve God and glorify him](#).

### [Hebrews 9:14](#)

*How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, **so that we may serve the living God!***

[Romans 12:1](#) highlights the radical demands of Christian service.

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to **offer your bodies as living sacrifices**, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.*

In view of the mercies we have received from God through Christ, our only right response is to [offer our entire lives to the Lord](#). Do we hold anything back from the service of God? How do we use our time, energy, money, abilities and talents? May the Lord help us to offer ourselves completely as living sacrifices for his glory!

Serving Christ involves [serving the church](#). We cannot claim to serve Christ if we are indifferent to the welfare of his body. This challenges the way we think about the church. Do we join a church because of the good that **we** can gain



from it, or do we become members so that we can serve other Christians and be a blessing to them?

One of the most pressing needs for the church today is to recover the concept of the working church, where every member is actively serving. This is what it means to be a priesthood of believers – all of us are to contribute to the good of the body, in whatever way the Lord has enabled us. This is how healthy church growth comes about.

#### **Ephesians 4:11-16**

*<sup>11</sup>It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to **prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up** <sup>13</sup>until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*<sup>14</sup>Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup>Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*

*<sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, joined and held together by **every** supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as **each part** does its work.*

The leaders are not the only ones responsible for growing the church. In fact, Paul here places that duty squarely on the congregation. The duty of the elders is to equip God's people for service, so that the **church members themselves** can build up the body of Christ (v11 and 12).

In light of this, we should ask ourselves: Do we simply enjoy good teaching for its own sake, or are we seeking to equip ourselves for ministry? Are we actively using what we have learnt to serve others? Knowledge, unless used to bless others, often leads to pride.

We **all** have a part to play in building up the church. None of us are exempt from this responsibility. Verse 16 encourages us all to serve in whatever way we can. A body grows in a healthy way when its various parts carry out their different functions in unity. This illustration is very instructive: No part of the body can say that it is too small or insignificant – **each** part does its work. So it is with the church and its members. There is healthy growth when **all** of us work together for the good of the body.

**Are there any questions? What obstacles keep us from serving?** A lack of time? Sin? No apparent need?

## II. Motivations for Serving

Such obstacles can make us less fervent in serving God. A good way to rekindle our passion for serving God is to [meditate on the biblical motivations](#) for doing so. This is also a helpful way of [checking our own motives](#) for serving.

### A. Motivated by Obedience

[Deuteronomy 13:4](#)

*It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and **obey him; serve him** and hold fast to him.*

We should serve God because He commands it and we want to obey Him. No Christian is meant to sit on the sidelines and watch others do the work of the kingdom! It is sinful not to serve God.

### B. Motivated by Gratitude

[1 Samuel 12:24](#)

*But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; **consider what great things he has done for you.***

It is no burden to serve God when we remember what he has done for us. Two verses before, Samuel reminds the Israelites that “the LORD was pleased to make you his own”. So it is with all of us who are God's people.

We were dead in sins, without Christ and without hope. We rightly deserved God's judgment. But God, in his grace towards us, sent his Son as a sacrifice for our sins in order that we might be forgiven. He called us to himself by his Spirit, giving us faith that we might believe in Christ. And he did all this not because we deserved it, but because it pleased the Lord to make us his people. From start to finish, we are debtors to God's grace.

When our hearts grow cold towards serving God, we ought to consider what great things the Lord has done for us in Christ. May our gratitude to God inspire us to serve him fervently!

We serve God because we are forgiven, not in order to be forgiven. Christians aren't prisoners who should serve God grudgingly because of guilt. The opposite is true: We can serve willingly because Christ's death and resurrection has freed us from guilt! Consider the example of Isaiah and notice his response once God had forgiven him.

### Isaiah 6:5-8

<sup>5</sup>“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” <sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup>With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; **your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.**” <sup>8</sup>Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “**Here am I. Send me!**”

Isaiah was eager to serve the Lord. Why? Not because he felt guilty, but because God had taken his guilt away. Has he taken your guilt away? If so, then serve him because of it!

### C. Motivated by Gladness

Meditating upon what God has accomplished through Christ should fill us not only with gratitude, but also with joy. We rejoice as we remember the work of Christ, and we rejoice as we look forward to his return, when we shall be glorified in him. This ought to motivate us to serve the Lord. Our service to God should be characterized by joy, not with murmuring and complaining.

**Psalm 100:2** (NIV substitutes “worship” for service; use KJV (here), NAS or ESV)

*Serve the LORD with **gladness**: come before his presence with singing.*

Do we count it a privilege to serve God? Then let us serve him with gladness. Not only do we rejoice in what God has done for us, we also rejoice as we see his work in causing other Christians to grow.

### Romans 16:19

*Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am **full of joy** over you.*

Joy also comes as we labor together with other Christians for the sake of the gospel. Such fellowship is especially sweet and it encourages us in our service for God. We see this in **Philippians 1:3-5**.

<sup>3</sup>*I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup>In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray **with joy** <sup>5</sup>because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.*

### D. Motivated by Humility

There is a sinful tendency in us that says, “If I have to serve, I want some recognition for it.” Such pride and selfishness hinders sincere Christian service.

Through the power of the Spirit, we must strive to put these sinful desires to death.

At the same time, we must model our service after Jesus' example. He is the perfect example of what it means to serve with humility. In [John 13](#), Jesus washed his disciples' feet, setting an example for us to follow. And it was the same humility that led Jesus to offer himself willingly as a sacrifice for sin for all those who would trust in him.

### [Philippians 2:3-8](#)

<sup>3</sup>*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, **but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*** <sup>4</sup>*Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of **others.*** <sup>5</sup>*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:* <sup>6</sup>*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,* <sup>7</sup>*but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.* <sup>8</sup>*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!*

If Jesus, the Creator and Ruler of all things, willingly humbled himself to serve his people, should not we – as those who follow him – do likewise?

### **E. Motivated by Love**

Love is at the heart of Christian service. Without love, any form of service would be hypocritical and dreary. Love motivates and encourages us to serve God fervently.

Firstly, it is God's love for us in Christ that spurs us on to serve him. This must be the starting point. We are able to love God and to love our fellow Christians only because God has first loved us.

### [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](#)

<sup>14</sup>*For **Christ's love compels us**, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.* <sup>15</sup>*And he died for all, that those who live should **no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.***

Understanding how he was loved by God in Christ motivated Paul to give himself entirely to the Lord's work. Paul realized that because Christ had died for him, he could no longer live for himself but he had to live for his Savior. The unchanging love of Christ for us ought to stir us up to serve. And just as his love does not wane, so our motivation for service should also be constant.

Secondly, it is our love for God that encourages us to serve him. After his resurrection, Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Three times Peter replied "yes", and three times Jesus exhorted him to feed his sheep. Do we claim to love our Lord? Then let us serve him willingly.

Thirdly, our love for other Christians ought to motivate us to serve them.

[Galatians 5:13](#)

*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, **serve one another in love.***

Our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ ought to be active. It is by serving them that we show our love for them. By doing so, we commend the gospel to outsiders; for it is by loving one another that we show ourselves to be disciples of Christ.

## **F. Motivated by Reward**

We do not earn our salvation with good works. But there is a sense in which our reward in heaven is determined by our faithfulness in serving God in this life.

Jesus exhorts us to labor for things of eternal value.

[Matthew 6:19-21](#)

<sup>19</sup>*"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.* <sup>20</sup>*But store up for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.* <sup>21</sup>*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

The certainty of our bodily resurrection should also motivate us to serve God. We have a sure hope in Christ that assures us of future glory. This ought to encourage us, as it encouraged Paul.

### 1 Corinthians 15:58

*Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. **Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord**, because you know that your labor in the Lord is **not in vain**.*

### G. Motivated by a Desire for Godliness

Serving is part of obedience to God. To serve faithfully is to grow in our sanctification. Serving is a spiritual discipline that we cultivate for the purpose of godliness.

Are there any questions?

## III. Every Christian is Gifted To Serve

As Christians, we have all [received the Holy Spirit](#). He sovereignly equips [each one of us](#) with spiritual gifts so that we are [able](#) to serve God.

### 1 Corinthians 12:4, 11

*<sup>4</sup>There are **different kinds of gifts**, but the same Spirit... <sup>11</sup>All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.*

There are many different types of gifts, but they all have one purpose: [service for the glory of God](#).

### 1 Peter 4:10-11

*<sup>10</sup>Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its **various forms**. <sup>11</sup>If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

In addition to studying Scripture, the best way to discover and confirm our spiritual gifts is by serving. We should avoid the idea that we need to take a spiritual gifts inventory before deciding where to serve. It may be God's intention to take us out of our comfort zones. He may be calling us to serve in new and unfamiliar ways, so that we depend more on him and less on ourselves.

## IV. Serving Requires Discipline

Serving the Lord is hard work, and we need to discipline ourselves to serve him.

He is not pleased with half-hearted service offered only whenever it is convenient or easy for us. Rather, God calls us to make serving him the utmost priority in our lives, to the point of suffering for the sake of Christ.

Disciplining ourselves for service means that we have to [deliberately set aside time, energy and resources for the Lord's work](#). For example, we might have to cut down on the time we spend on leisure, or we might have to take steps to ensure that our jobs do not leave us too tired or busy to serve God.

We will think about this in more detail next week when we consider the spiritual discipline of stewardship.

Some say that we should pace ourselves so that we don't “burn out” while serving God. But we often use this as an excuse to avoid the hard work of service. Let's listen to what Paul says:

[Colossians 1:29](#)

*To this end I **labor, struggling** with all **his** energy, which so powerfully works in me.*

The word “labor” here means to work to the point of exhaustion. The Greek word translated “struggling” is where we get the word “agonizing”. The strong words that Paul uses show that he did not hold anything back in serving God.

Paul was not worried about being burnt out, because he knew that his strength came from God. Note how he says “his energy”. Like Paul, we ought to serve God fervently, trusting that God will give us grace to do so.

## V. Moving Towards Godliness

Each one of us is expected to serve and gifted to serve. We must all ask ourselves, [“Am I willing to serve?”](#)

**What are some practical ways we can serve?**

Some suggestions:

- 1) Look out for volunteer opportunities in the church announcements
- 2) Seek out the deacons and offer to serve
- 3) Meet up with other Christians to encourage them
- 4) Offer hospitality
- 5) Help out in child care
- 6) Pray fervently for others
- 7) Provide transport to older or disabled members



- 8) Encourage missionaries through letters or emails
- 10) Offer to baby-sit for married couples in order to free their time for service
- 11) Greet visitors
- 12) Disciple other Christians
- 13) Tutor children
- 14) Lead Bible studies with juvenile offenders
- 15) Share the gospel both individually as well as in corporation with other Christians
- 16) Get involved with the college ministry
- 17) Get involved with the youth ministry
- 18) Prepare meals for college lunch

GO, labor on, spend, and be spent,  
Thy joy to do the Father's will;  
It is the way the Master went,  
Should not the servant tread it still?

Go, labor on: 'tis not for nought;  
Thy earthly loss is heavenly gain;  
Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not;  
The Master praises; what are men?

Go, labor on: your hands are weak,  
Your knees are faith, your soul cast down;  
Yet falter not: the prize you seek  
Is near – a kingdom and a crown.

Go, labor on while it is day:  
The world's dark night is hastening on;  
Speed, speed thy work; cast sloth away;  
It is not thus that souls are won.

Toil on, faint not, keep watch, and pray;  
Be wise the erring soul to sin;  
Go forth into the world's highway,  
Compel the wanderer to come in.

Toil on, and in thy toil rejoice;  
For toil comes rest, for exile home;  
Soon shalt thou hear the Bridegroom's voice,  
The midnight cry, 'Behold, I come!'

*Horatius Bonar, 1808-89*

Spiritual Disciplines Week 8  
**Stewardship...for the Purpose of Godliness**

**I. The Disciplined Use of Time**

Having so perfectly ordered his days, Jesus was able to pray to the Father at the end of his life that he had spent his time well:

**John 17:4**

*<sup>4</sup>I have brought you glory on earth by **completing the work you gave me to do**.*

Just as there was work for Jesus to do on earth, so we have been given work to do during our time here. God gives us the gift of time, and he gives us work to do during that time. We should seek to glorify God by our use of time and can expect him to make us more godly in the process.

We'll **first** consider why using our time wisely is important and **then** why we don't have any time to waste.

**A. Why should we use our time wisely? Two reasons:**

**1. We should use our time wisely because “the days are evil.”**

**Ephesians 5:15-16**

*<sup>15</sup>Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,*

*<sup>16</sup>**making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.***

(NAS: “making the most of your time”)

Our hearts are inclined to self-worship, manifested in a desire for prestige, pleasure, and comfort. Our hearts are reluctant to perform the work God has given us to do. Unless we practice self-control in how we use our time, we will tend to promote evil more than godliness. Every day the world, the flesh, and the devil try to steal time from us and put it to evil use.

We have been made alive in Christ, and we are to spend our lives wisely. In **Matthew 6:33**, Christ tells us we are to “*seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.*”

Our affections, passions, and actions need to rise above worldly gain and pleasure. Thoughts of these things will tempt us, but don't dwell on them. To use an analogy: Although you can't stop the birds from flying overhead, you can stop them from nesting!

**2. We should use our time wisely to prepare for eternity.**

Jesus calls us to prepare for eternity by storing up treasure in heaven.

**Matthew 6:19-20**

*<sup>19</sup>“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup>But store up for*

yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Christ's "Parable of the Talents" in Matthew 25 teaches that our faith is manifested in what we do with what God has entrusted to us.

We are accountable to God for our time. All Christians find a sobering statement in **Romans 14:12**

<sup>12</sup>*So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

To have to give a report to the Lord on how you've spent your life should motivate each of us with a holy fear.

Although believers will be saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and not by works, once in heaven our rewards there will be determined on the basis of our works, the fruit of our faith.

### **1 Corinthians 3:12-15**

<sup>12</sup>*If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup>his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. <sup>14</sup>If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. <sup>15</sup>If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

The wise response to these truths is to evaluate your use of time now and spend it in a way that will be approved of by God.

There is a specific day on the calendar, unknown to you, when your time to prepare for eternity will be over. Christian, will you be ready?

## **B. We have no time to waste. Five reasons:**

### **1. Our days are few.**

#### **James 4:13-14**

<sup>13</sup>*Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." <sup>14</sup>Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*

The scarcer something is, the more value we tend to attach to it. That's why we value diamonds more than sand. The more you realize how limited your time is, the more you will value it.

### **2. Time is fleeting.**

#### **Psalm 144:4**

<sup>4</sup>*Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow.*

Our days are slipping away. We speak of buying time, saving time, and making time, but we can't add any days to our lives or slow the march of time.

### 3. *Our remaining time is uncertain.*

Not only are our days here few and fleeting, but we also don't know how soon they will be over. **Proverbs 27:1** reminds us of this:

*<sup>1</sup>Do not boast about tomorrow,  
for you do not know what a day may bring forth.*

God commands us to live in such a way as to be ready to die at any moment. The Parable of the Rich Fool in **Luke 12:16-20** reminds us of this.

*<sup>16</sup>And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. <sup>17</sup>He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'*

*<sup>18</sup>"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup>And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"*

*<sup>20</sup>"But God said to him, '**You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you.** Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'*

### 4. *Time is so easily lost.*

**Proverbs 24:33-34** reminds us how easily time is lost and how quickly the consequences are felt.

*<sup>33</sup>A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest—  
<sup>34</sup>and poverty will come on you like a bandit  
and scarcity like an armed man.*

Notice that it's wasting just "a little" time. Time appears to be plentiful, so wasting a bit seems inconsequential. But it isn't plentiful and wasting it is consequential.

### 5. *Time lost cannot be regained.*

You can lose, but then regain, car keys, money, possessions, and perhaps even a friend or reputation. Time is different. Once gone, it's gone forever. Nothing you can do can bring it back.

#### **John 9:4**

*<sup>4</sup>As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.*

The time for the works of God is now, while it is still "day" for us.

Some here, myself included, regret the time we have already wasted. But consider Paul's exhortation in **Philippians 3:13b-14**:

<sup>13</sup>... ***Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.***

Rather than dwell on the past, we should wisely and joyfully use the time that remains to love God and love our neighbors, secure in the blessed hope we have in Christ.

**Does anyone have any practical suggestions to be a good steward of time?** \_\_\_\_\_

- Be deliberate about how you spend it; keep a calendar.
- Tithe your time as well as your dollars; setting aside this resource first.
- Participate fully in the life of your church.
- Have a dedicated quiet time each day.
- Be intentional in arranging meetings with other Christians.
- As we discussed two weeks ago, plan evangelistic events.
- Avoid activities that can be time wasters if you're not disciplined in their use, such as TV, newspapers, blog surfing, etc.
- Guard adequate time to rest.
- Have a time reserve, so you can respond when the unexpected occurs.

May the Lord teach us to wisely use our precious time. Next, we turn to the disciplined use of money.

## **II. The Disciplined Use of Money**

### **Matthew 6:21**

<sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Because we invest most of our days working in exchange for money, there is a real sense in which our money represents us. Therefore, how we use money expresses who we are, what our **priorities** are, and what's in our **hearts**.

Let's look at 10 New Testament principles of giving.

**A. God owns everything you (think you) own. (#1)**

**1 Corinthians 10:26**, quoting Psalm 24:1, helps us remember who really owns our money:

<sup>26</sup>... ***"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."***

And to be a bit more specific...

**Haggai 2:8** (3<sup>rd</sup> from last book in O.T.)

<sup>8</sup>***'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty***

We are only temporary managers – stewards - of the resources God has given us. They are not ours.

For a biblical example of stewardship, consider Joseph. He was a slave to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials. He was placed in charge of his master's household. Joseph owned nothing, but was responsible for managing everything. Such are we – temporary stewards of things belonging to God.

Therefore, our question should not be, “How much of my money do I give to God?” but rather, “How much of God's money should I keep for myself?” (We'll address tithing in a few minutes.)

## **B. Giving is an act of worship. (#2)**

Do you see giving as an act of worship? Paul, in **Philippians 4:18**, makes that clear.

*<sup>18</sup>I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus **the gifts you sent**. They are **a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God**.*

## **C. Giving reflects faith in God's provision. (#3)**

The portion of your income that you give back to God is an indication of how much you trust him to provide for your needs.

### **Mark 12:41-44**

*<sup>41</sup>Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. <sup>42</sup>But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.*

*<sup>43</sup>Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. <sup>44</sup>They all gave out of their wealth; but she, **out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.**”*

The rich people's large gifts didn't necessarily reflect trust in God's goodness, but the widow's sacrificial offering made her totally dependent upon God for her needs.

Some people hoard their money because they fear the future and think money will provide them security. But only God can be our refuge and strength. Investments may turn worthless. Thieves may steal it. Calamity may strike. We are not to trust in uncertain riches, but in God's promises and love.

The temptation to trust in money, instead of God, is certainly greater for the rich. As Christ warned in **Mark 10:25**, after his encounter with the rich young ruler:



*“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”*

The Parable of the Sower in **Matthew 13:22** provides another insight about the dangers of wealth:

<sup>22</sup>*The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and **the deceitfulness of wealth** choke it, making it unfruitful.*

God cares about the attitude of our heart towards money. In **1 Timothy 6:10** we read that *“**the love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil.”*

So we see money is dangerous. However, being rich is not a sin, but rather an obligation. **1 Timothy 6:17-19** makes this clear:

<sup>17</sup>*Command **those who are rich** in this present world **not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth**, which is so uncertain, but to **put their hope in God**, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.* <sup>18</sup>*Command them to **do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.***

<sup>19</sup>*In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

So let your giving reflect your trust in God’s provision.

#### **D. Our giving should be sacrificial and generous. (#4)**

The story of the widow that Jesus commended is one illustration of the truth that giving to God is not just for those who can afford it. The Apostle Paul gives us another good example in **2 Corinthians 8:1-5**:

<sup>1</sup>*And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.* <sup>2</sup>***Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.*** <sup>3</sup>*For I testify that **they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.*** Entirely on their own, <sup>4</sup>*they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.* <sup>5</sup>*And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us **in keeping with God’s will.***

Remember, giving isn’t sacrificial unless it’s a sacrifice. Does your giving cause you to make different choices about how you live? Sacrifice comes with a cost and causes us to forego or delay things we want for the sake of giving to God.

#### **E. Giving reflects spiritual trustworthiness. (#5)**

We find a startling insight into the ways of God’s kingdom in **Luke 16:10-13**:

<sup>10</sup>*“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”* <sup>11</sup>*So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you*

*with true riches?* <sup>12</sup>*And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?*

<sup>13</sup>*"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You **cannot serve both God and Money.**"*

The use of your money and how you give it is one of the best ways of evaluating your relationship to Christ. What do your checkbook, ATM record and credit card receipts say about you? They say more about you than almost anything else. If, after death, your children or a biographer were to review these records, what conclusion would they come to? What would they reveal about your walk with Christ?

Compare the rich young ruler, who at the thought of parting with his riches went away sad, and Zacchaeus, who gave half his money to the poor and repaid everyone he had wronged four times over. One held money with a closed, tight fist; the other opened his hand out of love for God. One made money his god and the other made money his servant.

**F. Give out of love.** (#6)

**2 Corinthians 8:7-8**

<sup>7</sup>*But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also **excel in this grace of giving.***

<sup>8</sup>*I am not commanding you, but **I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.***

**G. Give willingly, thankfully, and cheerfully.** (#7)

**2 Corinthians 9:7**

<sup>7</sup>*Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

There are three kinds of giving: grudge giving, duty giving, and thanks giving. Grudge giving says, "I wish I didn't have to." Duty giving says, "I ought to." Thanksgiving says, "I want to."

Another helpful analogy: Some people give to God like they give to the IRS. Some give to God like they give to the electric company. But a few give to God like they give an engagement ring to their fiancée.

God wants you to enjoy giving. If you have trouble being happy giving some of God's money back to him, just remember what God has done for you by adopting you as his child because of your faith in Christ. What an inheritance we have! Everything else in this world is a pittance!

## H. Giving is an appropriate response to real needs. (#8)

Christians are to give in response to specific needs as they arise. There are several good examples of this in Acts.

### Acts 2:44-45

<sup>44</sup>*All the believers were together and had everything in common.* <sup>45</sup>*Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone **as he had need**.*

As a spiritual family we care for our brothers and sisters. In Acts 4:32-35 and 11:27-30 we find more good examples of the church caring for needy brethren.

We also understand we must honor God's command in 1 Timothy 5:8 to care for our relatives. This affects the way we handle benevolence funds to care for needy CHBC members. We first ask whether the person in need has asked their own family for assistance. If they have a valid need and their own family is unable to help, we do so joyfully.

## I. Giving should be planned and systematic. (#9)

### 1 Corinthians 16:2

<sup>2</sup>*On the first day of every week, **each one of you** should **set aside** a sum of money in keeping with his income, **saving it up**, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*

Notice Paul says "*each one of you*." All who claim to be believers are to do this. Give in good times and difficult times, when you're a teenager, when you're a new parent, when you're retired, and even if you have only a part-time job.

Notice he says "*in keeping with his income* or, as the NASB says, "*as he may prosper*." While time precludes a full exegesis on this, our church believes that giving a tithe, 10 percent of your gross income, is not a ceiling to stop at, but rather a floor to move up from.

Those who have given themselves to the Lord are liberal with their wealth, even in hard times. This church has seen a very encouraging affirmation of the transforming power of God's word in people's lives. From 1999 to 2006, our annual giving has increased from \$634K to \$2.18M, **a 244% increase**, while our membership has grown from 275 to 559, **a 103% increase**. In other words, our giving is growing at over twice the rate of our membership. We can't assume all this giving is sacrificial, but it is certainly a sign our members increasingly understand their responsibility as stewards of the money God gives them.

John Wesley asserted it is important for us to make way for receiving God's blessings by passing on the things he gives us. He said that as soon as he received money he passed it on as quickly as possible, lest money should get hold of him. His sermon on "The Use of Money" has been summarized as "Make all you can and save all you can, to give all you can." (The connotation of "save all you can"

is not to maximize the amount of money you put away in the bank, but rather to not spend any more money than necessary.)

Stewardship of our money doesn't end at the offering plate. As members of a congregational church, we also have a responsibility to ensure those offerings are put to proper use. Let's say our church only spent money on facilities and caring for its own members. As good stewards, we would need to remember our responsibility for the spread of the gospel worldwide. We'd want to ensure we were also helping build other healthy churches, sending missionaries overseas, cooperating with other churches to fund seminaries, etc. Thankfully, that's not an issue here.

Think also about how you spend money to meet your own needs. Should you buy products from a company that makes something you like but gives grants to Planned Parenthood or organizations advocating homosexual marriage? Conversely, if you buy from Christian businesses, a portion of the owner's profits will flow to their church.

#### **J. Generous giving results in bountiful blessing. (#10)**

“Prosperity theology” – teaching that it is God's will to make every Christian rich here on earth - is heresy. However, there **are** many NT passages that indicate earthly blessings of an unspecified nature will be given to those who are faithful stewards of God's money.

#### **Luke 6:38**

<sup>38</sup>*Give, **and it will be given to you.** A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*”

You may not see immediate fruit, although some have. God blesses over time and in ways we may never know in this life.

#### **2 Corinthians 9:6-8**

<sup>6</sup>*Remember this: **Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.** <sup>7</sup>**Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.** <sup>8</sup>**And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.***

Most of God's blessings for giving will come in the next life. Regardless, by good stewardship we are laying up treasure in heaven.

**Do you have any comments or questions about being a good steward of your money?**

### III. Moving Toward Godliness

How we spend our time on this earth is critically important, both to live a godly life here and to prepare for eternity.

How we value, spend, and give away our money is a reflection of our heart.

God will judge us for our stewardship and make us more conformed to the image of Christ if we are faithful in this task.

- If you know Christ as Lord and Savior, you should fear death no more than sleep. But how's your heavenly bank account? Have you stored up treasures there?
- Are you using your time as God would have you use it?
- Are you following God's principles for giving? Maybe God is calling for some fine-tuning or major readjustments in your spending habits

As a believer, no matter how much or little you have, you can discipline yourself to use your money for the purpose of godliness. **Get on a budget!** Know how your money is being spent and plan wisely. How can you be a faithful steward and not know what you are in charge of?

During the course of 30 years, the Lord will likely provide you with over \$1 million. How will you steward this money?

Jonathan Edwards' Resolution #17 is instructive, "*Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.*" Will you do the same?

Recommended reading:

- "*The Preciousness of Time and the Importance of Redeeming It,*" by Jonathan Edwards
- "*Money, Possessions and Eternity,*" by Randy Alcorn
- "*Don't Waste Your Life,*" by John Piper

## Spiritual Disciplines Week 9

# Fasting...for the Purpose of Godliness

### I. Introduction

Let's begin with two broad definitions of fasting:

- The most inclusive definition of “fasting” is “abstinence from anything that is legitimate in and of itself, for some special spiritual purpose” (Martin Lloyd Jones). That might include food, sports, TV, telephone, etc.
- The narrower definition of fasting is voluntarily abstaining from physical nourishment – food and drink – for some special spiritual purpose. This study will deal only with this type of fasting, which is what the Bible refers to.

Some people, for medical reasons, shouldn't fast from physical nourishment. They can still fast from another of God's gifts, per Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

Let's acknowledge that Christians, particularly in a gluttonous, self-indulgent society, will often struggle to practice fasting, or even to accept Scripture's mandate to do it. And even if our society weren't gluttonous and self-indulgent, we still are!

As **Philippians 3:18-19** reminds us, “<sup>18</sup>...*many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.* <sup>19</sup>*Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.*”

John Piper observes that, “*The greatest adversary of love of God is not his enemies but his gifts.*” (A Hunger for God, p 14).

Some Scripture passages that attest to this are:

- Jesus, in the Parable of the Sower in **Luke 8:14**, speaks of people who “*are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life*” (NKJV).
- The parallel passage in **Mark 4:14** records it this way: “*the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.*”

Piper goes on to say (p 15):

“*The pleasures of this life*” and “*the desires for other things*” – they are not evil in themselves. These are gifts of God. They are your basic meat and potatoes and coffee and gardening and reading and decorating and traveling and investing and TV-watching and Internet-surfing and shopping and exercising and collecting and talking. And all of them can become deadly substitutes for God.”

When we fast, we say no to the things of this world and yes to God!

Richard Foster, in *The Celebration of Discipline*, says, “More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us.”

There is no merit in the act itself; being hungry won't sanctify you. It is the motive of our heart that is the critical factor. If we are doing it for self-pride, it is of no benefit and instead earns God's condemnation. Christ tells us this clearly in **Luke 18:9-14**:



<sup>9</sup>To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup>“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, **I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.** <sup>12</sup>**I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.**’

<sup>13</sup>“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

<sup>14</sup>“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. **For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**”

The purpose for the abstinence is critical. There is nothing commendable in fasting without the right motive. If it’s motivated by a desire to draw closer to God, then it’s not a biblical fast. We’ll talk more about purpose later.

## **II. Characteristics of Fasting**

There are at least four ways fasting can be described. Fasting is described in terms of what is given up, who participates, the duration of the fast, and how often the fast is conducted. You can think of them as the dimensions of fasting.

### **A. Degree of Abstinence**

We can abstain from food and drink to various degrees.

#### **1. Normal Fast**

A normal fast involves abstaining from all food, but not from water or perhaps fruit juices. (Example: Luke 4:1-2 - Christ in the desert for 40 days)

#### **2. Partial Fast**

A partial fast is a limitation of diet, but not abstention from all food. (Example: Daniel 1:12)

#### **3. Absolute Fast**

An absolute fast is the avoidance of all food and drink. (Examples: Esther 4:15-16, Ezekiel 10:6, Acts 9:8-9, Deuteronomy 9:9)

### **B. Number of Participants in the Fast**

The breadth of participation is another dimension of fasting.

#### **1. Private Fast**

A private fast is what Jesus was speaking of when, in his Sermon on the Mount, he said that we should fast in a way not to be noticed by others.



## Matthew 6:16-18

<sup>17</sup>...when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup>so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father...

### 2. Small Group Fast

We can fast with other Christians as a shared commitment, as in **Acts 13:1-3**:

<sup>1</sup>*In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. <sup>2</sup>While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” <sup>3</sup>So **after they had fasted and prayed**, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

### 3. Congregational Fast

A fast can be conducted by an entire congregation of God’s people.

**Esther 4:16** described a fast of all the Jews in Susa. **Nehemiah 9:1** describes a fast by the entire nation of Israel. **Joel 2:15**-16 is a third example:

<sup>15</sup>*Blow the trumpet in Zion,*

**declare a holy fast,**  
**call a sacred assembly.**

<sup>16</sup>*Gather the people,  
consecrate the assembly;  
bring together the elders,  
gather the children,  
those nursing at the breast.  
Let the bridegroom leave his room  
and the bride her chamber.*

Charles Surgeon testified to the blessings of congregational fasting: “*Our seasons of fasting at the Tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has heaven’s gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory.*” (quoted by Richard Foster, *ibid.*, pg 48)

### C. Length of Fast

The Bible doesn’t give any commands about length. It cites fasts over part of a day (Jdg 20:26-28), one day (Jer 36:6), three days (Est 4:1, Ac 9:8-9), seven days (1Sa 31:13), 21 days (Dan 10:2-3), and supernatural fasts of 40 days (Deu 9:9, 1Ki 19:8, Mt 4:1-2). The Bible also records many fasts without mentioning their length (e.g., Mt 9:14, Lu 2:37, Ac 13:3).

## D. Frequency of Fasts

How often, *i.e.*, on what schedule, is another way of characterizing fasts.

### 1. *Regular Fast*

On a repetitive schedule, e.g., Israel's fast annual fast on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31).

The Pharisee in Luke 8:12 congratulates himself for fasting twice a week.

Although without biblical warrant, John Wesley would not ordain a man to the Methodist ministry who did not regularly fast every Wednesday and Friday.

### 2. *Occasional Fast*

These occur whenever a need is perceived. Most of the fasting examples in Scripture far fall into this category.

### 3. *Continuous Fast*

Example: John the Baptist. In [Matthew 3:4](#), we read, "His food was locusts and wild honey."

These ways of describing fasts are largely independent of each other; you can specify one characteristic without constraining the others. The most common fast among Christians today is [normal](#) (abstaining from food but not water), [private](#), [occasional](#), and [24 hours](#) long.

## III. Fasting is Expected

Fasting was commanded in the Old Testament. Fasting is nowhere commanded in the New Testament. Some have argued that because fasting was largely associated with mourning, Christians should no longer fast because Christ has come and his kingdom has been inaugurated, so we should celebrate, not mourn. Yet it seems clear in Scripture that Jesus did expect his followers to fast.

In [Matthew 6:16-17](#), part of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ gives instructions that seem to assume his followers will fast.

<sup>16</sup>*"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup>But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup>so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

The phrase "when you fast" should be understood in light of Jesus' immediately preceding instructions about giving in Matthew 6:2-3, "...So when you give, ... But

*when you give...” and his words about praying in Matthew 6:5-7, “But when you pray....when you pray....And when you pray...”*

It would sound strange to you if a Christian said they had never given money to the church or never prayed a single prayer. So why is it pretty common for a Christian to say they have never fasted?

There are a few more things to note in this passage. Christ gives us a negative command, a positive command, and a promise.

- Negative command: Don’t’ look somber, like you’re suffering.
- Positive command: Present yourself so that no one can tell that you’re fasting. The only observer of your fast should be God.
- Promise: “...*your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*”

Notice also that Jesus gives no command about how often or how long we should fast. Like other SD’s, fasting is not to be a legalistic routine. It is a privilege and an opportunity to seek God’s grace. We are not to neglect it, but decisions regarding the specific characteristics of our fasts are to be Spirit-led, as he helps us understand God’s word and he applies those truths to our hearts in particular circumstances.

Matthew 9:14-17 is perhaps the most important passage on fasting in the Bible.

<sup>14</sup>*Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”*

<sup>15</sup>*Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.*

<sup>16</sup>*“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. <sup>17</sup>Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”*

So we see that Christ expected that the time would come when his followers would fast. Jesus has ascended, and until the bridegroom of the church returns, he expects his followers to fast.

Christ’s statement about wineskins implies something very important has changed. Unlike the circumstances under which God’s people fasted in the Old Testament, Christ’s followers have now tasted of his presence, and want more of him!

There is an ache inside each Christian because Jesus is not as fully, and powerfully, and intimately, and gloriously manifested to us as we want him to be. We hunger for so much more. This is the context in which we fast.

We'll address the purposes of fasting next, but are there any questions or comments about what I've said so far? \_\_\_\_\_

#### IV. Fasting is to be Done for a Purpose

If fasting is done for worldly purposes, such as:

- weight control,
- medical pre-op,
- physical training,
- saving money, or
- political protest,

then it isn't a Christian fast!

The biblical accounts of fasting make it clear there are at least ten reasons to fast. None of these purposes is to [earn God's favor](#). We can't use fasting as a way to impress God and earn his acceptance. We are made acceptable to God through the work of Jesus Christ alone. Fasting has no eternal benefit to us unless we **repent** of our rebellion against God and **surrender to Jesus Christ in faith**.

##### A. Fast to Strengthen Prayer

###### [Nehemiah 1:4](#)

*<sup>4</sup>When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.*

[Ezra 8:21-23](#) provides another example.

The Bible does not teach that fasting is a kind of spiritual hunger strike that compels God to do our bidding. If we ask for something out of God's will, fasting does not cause him to reconsider. Fasting does not change God's [hearing](#); it changes our [praying](#).

Christians who pray while fasting communicate that they are truly in earnest and are expressing that earnestness in a divinely-appointed way.

The most important aspect of this SD is its influence on prayer. You'll notice that in one way or another, all the other biblical purposes for fasting relate to prayer. Fasting is one of the best friends you can introduce to your prayer life.

##### B. Fast to Seek God's Guidance

###### [Judges 20:26-27a](#)

*<sup>26</sup>Then the Israelites, all the people, went up to Bethel, and there they sat weeping before the LORD. They fasted that day until evening and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the LORD. <sup>27</sup>And the Israelites inquired of the LORD.*

Fasting does not ensure we will receive **clear guidance** from God, but it does make us **more receptive** to the Lord who loves to guide us. It helps us tune out the world and focus on God, so that we might hear, like Elijah, **his gentle whisper**. (1 Kings 19:12)

### C. Fast to Seek Deliverance or Protection

#### 2 Chronicles 20:2-4

*<sup>2</sup>Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, “**A vast army is coming** against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar” (that is, En Gedi). <sup>3</sup>Alarmed, **Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.** <sup>4</sup>The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD;...*

Fasting should be one of our first defenses against persecution from family, schoolmates, neighbors, co-workers, or other Christians.

### D. Fast to Express Grief

The Bible contains many examples of fasting to express grief over sin or calamities that befall God’s people.

#### 2 Samuel 1:11-12

*<sup>11</sup>Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. <sup>12</sup>They mourned and **wept and fasted** till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.*

Christians fast because of grief for their sins, but remember that is not in the sense of paying for their sins, <sup>18</sup>*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” (1 Peter 3:18).*

Praise God that he has promised, in **1 John 1:9**, that “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*”

But that doesn’t mean that confession is a light and easy thing, a simple mouthing of words. Biblical confession involves grief for the sin committed, and inasmuch as fasting can be an expression of grief, it is never inappropriate.

Don Whitney says in his book, “There have been a few occasions when I grieved so deeply over my sin that words alone seemed powerless to say to God what I wanted. And though it made me no more worthy of forgiveness, fasting communicated the grief and confession my words could not.”

## E. Fast to Express Repentance and Return to God

Closely related to expressing grief for sin, fasting can also signal a commitment to obedience and a new direction.

Joel 2:12

<sup>12</sup>“Even now,” declares the LORD,  
“**return to me** with all your heart,  
**with fasting** and weeping and mourning.”

## F. Fast to Humble Yourself Before God (6<sup>th</sup>)

1 Kings 21:27-29

<sup>27</sup>When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and **fasted**. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly.

<sup>28</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: <sup>29</sup>“**Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son.**”

John Calvin said about fasting, “Since this is a holy exercise both for the humbling of men and for their confession of humility, why should we use it less than the ancients did in similar need?”

Fasting itself is not humility before God, but it is an expression of humility.

## G. Fast to Express Concern for the Work of God (7<sup>th</sup>)

We looked at **Daniel 9:2-3** in our class on prayer. Daniel expressed in fasting his burden for the return of the Jews from exile.

*I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. <sup>3</sup>So I turned to the Lord God and **pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.***

**Nehemiah 1:3-4** provides another good example of fasting for the work of God.

Obviously we can’t fast continually as an expression of concern for all His work, but the Lord occasionally gives us so great a concern for his work that the Holy Spirit tells us we should fast.

## H. Fast to Minister to the Needs of Others (8<sup>th</sup>)

Fasting cannot be compartmentalized from the rest of our lives. The Lord will not bless the practice of any SD, including fasting, if we **reject his word** regarding relationships with others.



### Isaiah 58:6-7

<sup>6</sup>“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?

<sup>7</sup>Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—  
when you see the naked, to clothe him,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

We often use our busy-ness as an excuse for not ministering to others. But if we give up some meals by fasting, we can use that time and money to do so.

### I. Fast to Overcome Temptation and Dedicate Yourself to God (9<sup>th</sup>)

Consider Christ’s example in [Matthew 4:1-2](#)

<sup>1</sup>Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup>**After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.**

Scripture doesn’t ask us to fast for 40 days to prepare to face Satan, but that doesn’t mean there is nothing in Jesus’ example that applies in our own lives.

Think about the situation for a moment:

- Christ is on the threshold of his ministry. On his obedience and righteousness hangs the salvation of the world.
- God wills, at the very onset of Christ’s ministry, that he should be tempted to abandon the path of lowliness and suffering that lies ahead.
- Yet of all the things Jesus could have done to fight off this threat, he is led, in the Spirit, to fast!

Let him be our example. If we are struggling with, or anticipate, temptation, fasting is a way to overcome it and freshly dedicate ourselves to following God’s word.

### J. Fast to Express Love and to Worship God (10<sup>th</sup>)

To fast means that you love God more than food. You deny your hunger for food to pursue your hunger for God. Seeking more of Him is more important than eating. When you feel a hunger pang, let it remind you that your stomach is not your God and that your fasting honors the only true God.

### [Luke 2:36-37](#)

<sup>36</sup>There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup>and then was a widow until she was eighty-



*four. She never left the temple but **worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.***

To summarize this section on the purposes of fasting, remember that fasting must always have a spiritual purpose – a God-centered, not self-centered purpose.

Are there any questions I can address? Or perhaps some of you may have a lesson to share regarding fasting? \_\_\_\_\_

## **V. Moving Toward Godliness**

Fasting tests where your heart is. It helps you focus on God and feast on him more fully.

When it reveals that your heart is with God and not the world, a mighty blow is struck against Satan.

Some questions each of us must consider:

- Will you confess and repent of any fear of fasting?
- Will you fast as God's word and the Holy Spirit direct?

Review the 10 reasons to fast.

- If you need stronger prayer about a matter, that's an invitation from the Lord to fast.
- If you need God's guidance in an issue in your life, that's an encouragement to fast.
- If you need deliverance or protection, that's a time to fast

You can start with a one or two meal fast, but start!

Have God's people benefited from fasting? Yes. Then let's not forget this means of grace; it is not obsolete!

Recommended reading: John Piper, "A Hunger for God"

## Spiritual Disciplines Week 10

# Silence and Solitude...for the Purpose of Godliness

### I. Introduction to Silence and Solitude

Think about a typical day around your home. How noisy is it? TV, radio, CD playing? Traffic noise from the street? Telephone ringing? Washing machine or vacuum running? Noise from the activities and conversations of roommates, spouse, or children?

And when you leave home, probably strapped to a cell phone, does it get more noisy? Car radio playing? iPod in your ears as you walk or ride the Metro? Unending noise of traffic and human activity all around you?

Do you enjoy such constant noise?

Does anyone here besides me yearn for the chance to get away from it all and be in a private, comfortable library with unlimited time, surrounded by all those great Christian books you've wanted to read? Does life in a monastery sometimes seem appealing? Then why do most of our lives not contain more silence and solitude?

Or are you so used to noise and busyness that these seem like strange questions?

The truth is many of us are addicted to sound. Think about it. Do you turn the TV or radio on as soon as you wake up or walk in the door? Almost continually have your favorite music playing from your iPod, CD player, car radio, or laptop? Perhaps you're in the habit of listening to "talk radio" or TV news as "background"?

Our culture conditions us to be comfortable with noise and crowds. Noise is so routine that many of us are uncomfortable in silence.

(Recount a personal experience – for me, being placed in a sound-proof closet to take a Navy hearing test.) It was a startling time where the absence of sound made me anxious. In fact, the absence of sound is "disquieting" for most of us! **Some of us think a quiet evening at home is of all things, watching a movie!**

As NavPress author Jean Fleming has rightly noted, "We have become a people with an aversion to quiet and an uneasiness with being alone." Yet there are valuable, biblical reasons for us to regularly pursue times of silence and solitude.

Let's define these terms:

**Silence** is the voluntary, temporary abstention from conversation and other noise to pursue spiritual goals. Silence may be pursued for the purposes of reading, writing, meditating, or praying.

**Solitude** is voluntarily and temporarily withdrawing to privacy for spiritual purposes. It could be for a few minutes or a few days. The intention is to

participate without interruption in other spiritual disciplines or simply to be alone with God.

Silence and solitude are usually found together. Our use of a moment of silence at the end of our corporate worship services illustrates that silence and solitude can be distinguished as individual spiritual disciplines. But a primary reason to seek solitude is rest from conversation, and it's hard to have silence without being alone, so today we will think of them together.

You may object to the assertion that silence and solitude are good for us spiritually, correctly noting that the Bible calls us to family, fellowship, corporate worship, evangelism, discipling, and other forms of ministry. But as we'll see, the Bible also calls us to periods of silence and solitude.

Silence and solitude are complementary to fellowship. Just as we may be stagnant without fellowship, so we may be shallow without silence and solitude. **Balance requires both.**

## II. Biblical Reasons for Silence and Solitude

There are many biblical reasons to pursue silence and solitude. We will consider ten of them.

### A. To follow Jesus' example

The scriptures teach that Jesus regularly practiced these disciplines. We'll look at three examples.

#### Matthew 4:1

<sup>1</sup>*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.*

We talked last week about how the fasting discussed in the next verse was the key to preparing Christ to face the devil, but we can infer that the silence and solitude that exist in the desert were also part of the Lord's preparation to face Satan's temptations.

#### Mark 1:35

<sup>35</sup>*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*

In the face of great ministry demands, Jesus chooses to spend time alone conversing with his Father. We can conclude he understood that the importance of his ministry necessitated these times of silence and solitude.

#### Luke 4:42

<sup>42</sup>*At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them.*

Put yourself in Jesus' shoes for a moment. People are clamoring for your help and have many real needs. You are able to meet those needs. Can you ever feel justified pulling away to be alone? Jesus did. We love to feel wanted, to be seen as indispensable. Jesus did not succumb to such temptations. Nor should we.

To be like Jesus we must discipline ourselves to find times of silence and solitude.

[Note: We must tread carefully when we consider following Jesus' example. Just because Jesus did something, we aren't necessarily expected to do the same. As the Son of God, Christ was unique, and so was his ministry. We shouldn't ask ourselves "What would Jesus do?", but rather, "What would Jesus have me do?" Here we're on solid ground following Christ's example.]

## **B. To hear the voice of God better**

Of course, we don't have to remove ourselves from people to hear God speak; otherwise we'd never recognize his prompting in daily life or in the course of a corporate worship service. But there are times to eliminate the voices of the world in order to hear the voice of God completely undistracted.

### **Psalm 46:10**

<sup>10</sup> *"Be still, and know that I am God;*

According to Jonathan Edwards, this was the secret of the godliness of his wife Sarah. While getting to know her before marriage, he wrote, *"...she hardly cares for anything, except to meditate on him... She loves to be alone, walking in the fields and groves, and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her."*

Where Sarah had fields and groves, we may have to walk in the park, or around the block, or maybe pull off into that scenic overlook or remote corner of a parking lot. Or maybe just go into some room in your home and lock the door! Wherever it is, we need to find a place to be alone and silent to hear the voice of God, whose presence is unseen yet more real than any other.

We spoke earlier in this class about reading and hearing God's word and about speaking to him in prayer. But there is also a time to listen to him in silence.

It is there, in silence, that he may bring to mind a truth you've read in his word or heard preached here during one of our corporate gatherings.

To get time alone with God and be silent before him requires discipline.

## **C. To express worship to God**

Another way silence and solitude can help us grow spiritually is to help us worship God.

## **Habakkuk 2:20**

<sup>20</sup> *But the LORD is in his holy temple;  
let all the earth **be silent before him**.*

## **Zephaniah 1:7**

<sup>7</sup> ***Be silent before the Sovereign LORD,**  
for the day of the LORD is near.  
The LORD has prepared a sacrifice;  
he has consecrated those he has invited.*

There are times to simply behold him and adore him in silence. When we're confronted with the magnificent beauty of his creation or when we see God's sovereign hand at work in the lives of those we love, audible words can't express the worship we're experiencing, but silence and solitude can.

### **D. To express faith in God**

This discipline is also an expression of faith. Silence, as opposed to approaching God in a whirlwind of anxiety, can be a demonstration of our faith in him.

## **Psalms 62:1**

<sup>1</sup> *My soul waits in silence for God only;  
from him is my salvation. (NASB)*

[NIV reads: <sup>1</sup>My soul finds rest in God alone;  
my salvation comes from him.]

**Isaiah 30:15** identifies the link between silence and faith well.

<sup>15</sup> *This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says:  
“In repentance and rest is your salvation,  
in quietness and trust is your strength,  
but you would have none of it.*

As stress piles up, give yourself quiet time alone with God and be reminded of his sovereignty, his promises, and his faithfulness.

### **E. To seek the salvation of the Lord**

This applies to a non-Christian seeking salvation from sin and condemnation, and also to a believer seeking “salvation,” or deliverance, from painful trials.

Jeremiah writes in **Lamentations 3:25-28**

<sup>25</sup> *The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him;*  
<sup>26</sup> *it is good to wait quietly  
for the salvation of the LORD.*  
<sup>27</sup> *It is good for a man to bear the yoke  
while he is young.*

*Let him sit alone in silence,  
for the LORD has laid it on him.*

In a sermon on this text, the ever-powerful Charles Spurgeon writes the following of this method of seeking God:

*I commend solitude to any of you who are seeking salvation, first, that you may study well your case as in the sight of God. Few men truly know themselves as they really are. Most people have seen themselves in a looking-glass, but there is another looking-glass, which gives true reflections, into which few men look. To study one's self in the light of God's word, and carefully to go over one's condition, examining both the inward and the outward sins, and using all the tests which are given us in the Scriptures, would be a very healthy exercise but how very few care to go through it!*

## **F. To be physically and spiritually restored**

A sixth reason to practice the discipline of silence and solitude is for physical and spiritual restoration. Our bodies and souls need rest and nourishment.

### **Mark 6:30-32**

<sup>30</sup>*The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.* <sup>31</sup>*Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”*

<sup>32</sup>*So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.*

I doubt any of us here need to be convinced of our need for physical rest, but perhaps you haven't thought much about spiritual rest and the way God's plan links these. The beautiful truth is that we were *created* to enjoy a day of rest from our secular labors in order to reflect upon the Lord. Don't neglect the re-creative attributes of silence and solitude that are deeply therapeutic to both body and soul.

## **G. To regain a spiritual perspective (#7)**

We often need to step back and get a less worldly, more spiritual perspective on things. If we do not take time to be alone and to remind ourselves that we are in the world, but not of it, the world can consume us.

The story of Zechariah's response when the Angel Gabriel told him that he and his elderly wife would miraculously have a son, John the Baptist, provides an illustration of how closing our mouths can help us open our minds.

### **Luke 1:18-20**

<sup>18</sup>*Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”*

<sup>19</sup>The angel answered, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup>And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time.”

We see the result of this imposed silence in **Luke 1:62-67**

<sup>62</sup>Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. <sup>63</sup>He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” <sup>64</sup>Immediately his mouth was opened and **his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.** <sup>65</sup>The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. <sup>66</sup>Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.

<sup>67</sup>His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

#### H. To seek the will of God (#8)

**Luke 6:12-13** provides a good example of S&S helping to discern God’s will.

<sup>12</sup>One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. <sup>13</sup>When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles...

Great men and women of God always take time to be “recalibrated” by God as they sought **his will by his word** on a regular basis. Don Whitney cites the moving story of Hudson Taylor’s decision to begin a mission to inland China as he walked along a deserted beach in Brighton. (If time permits, read his story on Whitney p. 192).

We too, need times of silence and solitude so God can rearrange our priorities.

#### I. To learn to control the tongue (#9)

Learning to keep silent for periods of time can help us control our tongue all the time, and Scripture makes it abundantly clear that controlling our tongue is critical to Christ-likeness.

##### **James 1:26**

<sup>26</sup>If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

The discipline of silence and solitude can help us break our habit of waiting for a break in the conversation to get in our two cents. It gets us comfortable with a lull in the conversation. It helps us think before we speak, and speak with purpose when we do.

##### **Ecclesiastes 3:1,7**



*<sup>1</sup>There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under heaven:  
<sup>7</sup>a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,*

When we practice silence and solitude, other skills such as observation and listening are sharpened so that when we do speak there are depth and wisdom in our words.

## **J. To better employ other spiritual disciplines (#10)**

One reason why the dual disciplines of silence and solitude can be so thoroughly transforming is because they can help us with the others SD's. Examples include:

- Silence and solitude should normally be a part of individual Bible intake, meditation, and prayer.
- It's common to practice fasting during times of silence and solitude.
- As we'll learn next week, they can help us keep a good journal and learn effectively.

That completes our list of ten reasons to pursue S&S. Before we get into how we might do so, are there any questions? \_\_\_\_\_

## **III. Suggestions for Silence and Solitude**

So just how do we merge this discipline into our busy schedules? Let's consider a few suggestions.

### **A. "Minute retreats"**

The first is to make use of minute retreats. Regardless of what we do for a living, each of us undoubtedly has moments throughout the day where we can enjoy silence. Seize moments throughout the day to enjoy silence (in the car, as you walk to work, etc.). Instead of turning on the radio as you drive to work, the gym, or the market, meditate upon what you read that morning or heard in last Sunday's sermon. You could have a minute retreat as you walk between tasks at work. Consecrate that time to the Lord.

### **B. A goal of daily silence and solitude**

We need to be diligent in planning daily periods of silence and solitude. Almost without exception, those who make the most rapid, consistent growth in Christ-likeness have daily time alone with God. As a new Christian, 18<sup>th</sup> century evangelist George Whitefield used to spend several hours in the morning in silence, reading over Scripture passages word by word, meditating and praying upon each until he knew that passage well. Then he would move onto the next,

and the next. Whitefield's unyielding commitment to daily silence and solitude prepared him for the remarkable ministry that God would soon call him to.

I don't know of any special tricks to make this practice any easier. It simply requires planning, a commitment to keep a schedule, and accountability. We have many demands on our time and the enemy knows the stakes involved. Missionary Jim Elliot summarized the battle well, "*I think the devil has made it his business to monopolize on three elements: noise, hurry, crowds.....Satan is quite aware of the power of silence.*" If we don't plan for these times daily and remain committed to them, they simply will not happen.

Does anyone have any practical suggestions that could help us incorporate the disciplines of silence and solitude into our daily lives? \_\_\_\_\_

Discuss "quiet times."

Truly quiet?

Alone or together?

How make a priority?

Spurgeon's Morning and Evening

### C. Getting away for silence and solitude

A third practical suggestion to help cultivate this discipline is to consider getting away for periods of silence and reflection. A change of pace - removing yourself from things that may be crowding out your daily discipline – can be very helpful.

Now you don't necessarily need a cabin in the woods to get away. You could visit a local park or the public library. The point is to retreat someplace for a few hours where you'll be undisturbed.

Although S&S are individual disciplines, I believe it can also be appropriate to get away with your spouse for a time of solitude, reflection, and prayer.

### D. Special places

Identifying *special places* can be another useful habit to promote silence and solitude. Try to find them at home, or within walking distance or a short drive.

Consider Susanna Wesley, the mother of John and Charles Wesley. She had a very large family and for years found it near impossible to get away. When she needed silence and solitude she would bring her apron up over her head and read her Bible and pray underneath it. This was a sign to her children that she was not to be bothered. Although not necessarily ideal, each of us can locate someplace that will work for us.

A great benefit of this practice is that as you return to this place, the past memories and reminders of previous experiences help to bring you to a meditative, contemplative state.

(If time allows) **Does anyone have an example to share to encourage us in this?**

### **E. Trade-off daily responsibilities**

A fifth suggestion is to trade off your daily responsibilities with a spouse or friend. This is a great **and inexpensive** practice to consider if you're finding the demands of family make it particularly difficult to get away. Young mothers who have cooperated this way say it has been very helpful for them. One watches the children while the other has time for silence and solitude.

## **IV. Moving Toward Godliness**

### **A. Will you seek daily times of silence and solitude?**

By now I hope you've seen the importance of scheduling silence and solitude into your daily routine. And the busier you are, the more hectic your world, the more important this discipline becomes. **The question is, will you do it?**

Will you decide today that you will no longer let days go by without quiet periods of reflection and meditation upon your God, his word, and your life? Get your spouse or a close friend to help hold you accountable. Establish **a schedule**.

Like the great Christian saints before you, plan to do it, and plan to begin today. Listen to A.W. Tozer:

*Retire from the world each day to some private spot, even if it be only the bedroom (for a while I retreated to the furnace room for want of a better place). Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart and a sense of God's presence envelops you... Listen for the inward Voice till you learn to recognize it. Stop trying to compete with others. Give yourself to God and then be what and who you are without regard to what others think. Learn to pray inwardly every moment. After a while you can do this even while you work... Read less, but more of what is important in your inner life. Never let your mind remain scattered for very long. Call home your roving thoughts. Gaze on Christ with the eyes of your soul. Practice spiritual concentration. All the above is contingent upon a right relation to God through Christ and daily meditation on the Scriptures. Lacking these, nothing will help us; granted these, the discipline recommended will go far to neutralize the evil effects of externalism and to make us acquainted with God and our own souls.*

### **B. Will you pursue extended times of silence and solitude?**

Put them on the calendar. Act decisively. If you don't, nobody else will do it for you. If you've come upon a crisis of faith that requires time for prayer, deep thinking, and much soul searching, make time for an extended period of silence and solitude. There's too much at stake to neglect the matter or treat it

superficially. We take days off to heal our bodies when we are ill. Don't do anything less to care for your soul.

**C. Will you start now?**

What are you doing this afternoon? If you begin today, the only regret that you will have is that you didn't start sooner. In closing, consider these words from Jonathan Edwards....

*A true Christian doubtless delights in religious fellowship and Christian conversation, and finds much to affect his heart in it; but he also delights at times to retire from all mankind, to converse with God in solitude. And this also has peculiar advantages for fixing his heart, and engaging his affections. True religion disposes persons to be much alone in solitary places for holy meditation and prayer.*

If you've experienced God's saving grace, then silence and solitude will be, in the words of Jonathan Edwards, a "delight," a faithful fountain of refreshment, joy, and transformation.

Are there any final questions or comments? \_\_\_\_\_

Spiritual Disciplines Week 11  
**Journaling and Learning...for the Purpose of Godliness**

## **JOURNALING**

### **I. What is Journaling?**

A journal, or diary, is a place where we can write down various things that are personal to us. As a Christian, our journal is a place to record the [works](#) and [ways](#) of God in our lives. This can include accounts of how he cares for us, how his Word guides us, as well as how he causes us to grow in holiness through our struggles and triumph over sin.

Our journals can also include a diary of personal relationships, a notebook of insights into Scripture, and a list of prayer requests and answers to prayer.

Although the practice of journaling is not commanded in the Bible, it contains many examples of God-inspired journals. For instance, many psalms are accounts of David's personal spiritual journey with God. Similarly, the book of Lamentations can be considered as a journal of Jeremiah's feelings about the fall of Jerusalem.

### **II. Why Journal?**

How does journaling help us to grow in godliness? Let's look at eight benefits of journaling.

#### **A. To help us in self-understanding and evaluation**

[Jeremiah 17:9](#)

*The **heart** is **deceitful** above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

As Christians, we have received new hearts from God. However, we still struggle with indwelling sin. As a result, our self-understanding can still be marred by sinful deceit. Journaling can be a means that God uses to search our hearts and to try our thoughts.

We also have a strong tendency to over-rate ourselves. Not surprisingly, the Bible exhorts us to constantly examine ourselves in the light of God's Word.

### Romans 12:3

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather **think of yourself with sober judgment**, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

Journaling doesn't automatically keep us from being conceited, but the simple act of recording my reaction to the events of the day could help me to examine myself more closely than I would otherwise.

In his monumental work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin wrote “*Without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God. Through the knowledge of ourselves and our condition, we are aroused to seek God.*”

## B. To help us meditate on Scripture

### Psalm 1:1-2

<sup>1</sup> *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; <sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in his law he **meditates** day and night.*

This is where the spiritual disciplines of meditating upon God's Word and journaling come together. Putting our thoughts down on paper as we read the Bible is a good way of meditating upon God's Word. Writing focuses our minds and helps prevent us from being distracted while we meditate on the Word. Otherwise, we might drift into the fog of daydreams instead of thinking in the light of Scripture.

Sitting with a pen and paper during our personal devotions also heightens our sense of anticipation as we come to God's Word. We come expecting a fresh insight as the Holy Spirit applies the Word to our hearts.

## C. To help us express our thoughts and feelings to the Lord

### Psalm 62:8

*Trust in him at all times, O people; **pour out your hearts** to him, for God is our refuge.*

As God's people, we are encouraged to pour out our hearts to Him. We can do this through prayer, as well as through the practice of journaling.

A journal is a place where we can unreservedly pour out the feelings of our hearts. Since our thoughts and emotions can range between the extremes of exhilaration and despondency, we can expect to find both within our journals. The psalms are a good example of this. They record a wide of Christian thoughts and feelings.

#### D. To help us remember the Lord's works

##### Psalm 77:11-12

<sup>11</sup> I will **remember** the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will **remember** your miracles of long ago. <sup>12</sup> I will **meditate** on all your works and **consider** all your mighty deeds.

Many of us think God has not given us many material things until we have to move to a new home. Similarly, we tend to forget our rich blessings in Christ, as well as the many times when God has answered prayer or enabled us to persevere and mature in our Christian walk. Having a journal to record these things reminds us of how the Lord has blessed us. Journaling can help to foster joy and gratitude to God in our lives. It can strengthen our faith in God as we remember how He has provided for us.

This was the purpose behind what Joshua did when Israel crossed the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land.

##### Joshua 4:4-7

<sup>4</sup> So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, <sup>5</sup> and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, <sup>6</sup> to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' <sup>7</sup> tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a **memorial** to the people of Israel forever.



We read of another example of this in the life of Samuel, after God gave Israel victory over the Philistines.

#### 1 Samuel 7:12

*Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it **Ebenezer**, saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us."*

This principle of remembering how God has helped us finds its supreme expression in Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper. We are to eat of the bread and drink of the cup **in remembrance of Christ's all-surpassing work on the cross**. By his sacrificial death for us, Jesus has given us victory over the devil, sin, and death. In the rough and tumble of life, we often forget what Christ has done for us. Journals can help us to remember by recording our spiritual Ebenezers. As we read our entries, we can also say "Thus far has the Lord helped us". This can encourage us in times of trial and doubt. A journal can serve as a reminder of God's unfailing love and faithfulness towards us in Christ.

Are there any questions so far?

#### E. To help us create and preserve a spiritual heritage

Journaling is an effective way to teach the things of God to our children and leave a legacy of our faith for the future. A journal can communicate the gospel to the generations that will come after us. By recording the works and ways of God in our lives, we can bear witness to future generations.

#### Deut 6:6-9

<sup>6</sup>*These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.*

<sup>7</sup>**Impress them on your children.** *Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*

<sup>8</sup>*Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.*

<sup>9</sup>*Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.*

#### F. To help us clarify and articulate our insights and impressions

Journaling can help lend coherence to our thoughts and meditations upon Scripture. Francis Bacon said, "*While reading makes a full man, and dialogue a ready man, writing makes an exact man.*"

Writing down our meditations on the Word during our quiet times will also help those impressions to stay with us longer. These insights that God gives us will then be ready for us to use in conversation, counseling, encouraging others, and witnessing.

### **G. To help us monitor our goals and priorities**

A journal can be a tool to remind us of the things we have promised to do. Some put a list of priorities down and review it everyday. Don Whitney says he desires to encourage a least one person a day and checks it off in his journal.

If we really care about our growth in some area of our Christian life, we should inspect our progress over a period of time. We can do this by periodically recording in our journal how we're doing. Have we grown in Christian maturity? Then we should give thanks and praise to God. Have we failed in certain areas? Then we should go humbly to God, seeking His help and forgiveness through our Savior.

George Whitefield's diary, for example, begins with a list of criteria he used each night as a basis for self examination:

Have I:

1. Been fervent in prayer?
2. Used stated hours of prayer?
3. After or before every deliberate conversation or action, considered how it might tend to God's glory?
4. After any pleasure, immediately given thanks?
5. Planned business for the day?
6. Been simple and recollected in everything?
7. Been zealous in undertaking and active in doing what good I could?
8. Been meek, cheerful, and affable in everything I said or did?
9. Been proud, vain, unchaste, or envious of others?
10. Recollected in eating and drinking? Thankful? Temperate in sleep?
11. Taken time to give thanks according to (William) Law's rules?
12. Been diligent in studies?
13. Thought or spoken unkindly of anyone?

14. Confessed all sins?

Like Whitefield, we can ask ourselves similar questions in our journal:  
Have we been fervent in prayer? Have we confessed our sins to God? Have we sought to do good to others? Have we been zealous in serving the Lord?

#### **H. To help us maintain the other spiritual disciplines**

Journaling is a good way to chart our progress in the other spiritual disciplines and for holding yourself accountable to personal goals. A journal can help us to examine our Christian walk.

Should we slacken in our practice of any of the spiritual disciplines, we tend to build up an inertia that keeps us away from it. Having a journal to exhort us daily can help us break any bad habits.

### **III. How to Journal?**

There are many different ways of journaling:

- There are expensive leather bound books with preprinted blank pages which helps some people see the time spent as truly special.
- Others chose spiral bound notebooks full of blank pages that don't suggest how long or short your entry should be.
- Don Whitney uses loose leaf paper. It is easier to carry around and can be left in multiple places so that a sheet is always handy. He then assembles those sheets into a three ring binder about once a week. If he loses his paper, he has lost at most one week's worth of his journal.
- Some of us may write better using a computer. But this also means that we need access to a computer whenever we want to make an entry into our journal.

The bottom line is to use the method that works best for you. "Your way of keeping a journal is the right way!"

Journaling doesn't mean that we need to have long entries or to write something everyday. A good way to get started is to list one verse or idea from your Bible

reading that impressed you most. Meditate on that for a few minutes, and then record your insights *and* impressions. From there, you can add significant events in your life and your feelings and responses to them.

Does anyone have any experiences journaling that they'd like to share?

## LEARNING

In his book, Don Whitney asks a pointed question: Why do many Christians live as though they have to choose between scholarship and devotion? That, of course, is a false dichotomy. Learning and a deep love for God are not mutually exclusive. In fact, how can we love God if we don't know anything about Him? A biblically-balanced Christian has both a full head and a full heart, radiating both spiritual light and heat.

### Ephesians 1:17-18

*<sup>17</sup>I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of **wisdom and revelation**, so that you may **know him better**. <sup>18</sup>I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be **enlightened** in order that you may **know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.***

Of course, there is a difference between knowing *about* God and *knowing* God. How can we turn our knowledge *about* God into knowledge *of* God? J.I. Packer gives this advice: “The rule for doing this is simple but demanding. It is that we turn each truth we learn *about* God into matter for meditation *before* God, leading to prayer and praise *to* God.” The worship of God ought to be the goal of all our learning! We learn in order to better serve God and others. Knowledge that is not exercised in love toward God and toward one another will only make us proud.

Reading, meditating on, and applying Scripture are among the chief ways we learn as Christians. We’ve talked about Bible intake as a spiritual discipline in an earlier class. Today, we’re going to think about other ways we can learn.

## **I. We can learn in a variety of ways**

- Sitting under good teaching at church
- Books

- Recordings of sermons, talks, and conferences
- Christian radio
- The Internet
- Meaningful dialogue with spiritually mature Christians
- Discipling relationships
- Christian fellowship

Note: If you're not sure about a book or resource, just check with the elders.

## II. Why Learn?

### A. Learning is commanded

[Proverbs 23:12](#)

*Apply your heart to **instruction** and your ears to words of knowledge.*

This is a call to diligence in the pursuit of knowledge. Applying our hearts requires effort and discipline. The learning that is spoken of in Scripture isn't rote memorization of facts without application. We ought to gain knowledge to live wisely. Godly wisdom is the skillful application of God's truth in our lives. Christ is the incarnate wisdom of God. To be diligent in learning is to be diligent in growing in our knowledge of our Lord and Savior.

### B. Learning characterizes the wise person

According to the book of Proverbs, one of the characteristics of a wise man or woman is a desire for learning. Proverbs 9:7-9 contrasts the attitude of the fool and the wise man towards learning.

[Proverbs 9:7-9](#)

<sup>7</sup>*“Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. <sup>8</sup>Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; **rebuke a wise man and he will love you.** <sup>9</sup>Instruct a wise man and he will be **wiser** still; teach a righteous man and he will **add to his learning.***

The fools are those who are unteachable and proud. Those who are truly wise are humble and teachable, because they know there is so much they have yet to learn. The wise are always looking to learn.

A wise man regards knowledge as precious treasure. He will diligently seek it out and once he has acquired it, he will steward it well.

#### Proverbs 10:14

*Wise men **store up** knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin.*

#### Proverbs 18:15

<sup>15</sup>*The heart of the discerning **acquires knowledge**; the ears of the wise **seek it out**.*

Learning is a life-long discipline. Biographer Samuel Hopkins said of Jonathan Edwards that although he was a man already 20 years in the ministry, he still had “*an uncommon thirst for knowledge...he read all the books, especially books of divinity, that he could.*”

**Are there any questions at this point?**

### C. Learning fulfills the greatest commandment

#### Mark 12:28-31

<sup>28</sup>*One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”* <sup>29</sup>*“The most important one” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.**’* <sup>31</sup>*The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”*

God demands that we love him with our whole person. This includes our mind. God is glorified when we use the mind he made to learn of him, his ways, his Word and his world. We ought to apply our minds to learn of God because he is worthy.

The Christian heart cannot blaze brightly without the fuel of the knowledge of

Christ. It would be improper for me to be content with a zeal for Christ that is unaccompanied by a growing knowledge of Him. Zeal and knowledge are not mutually exclusive – God calls us to have both.

R.C. Sproul has written:

*God has made us with a harmony of heart and head, of thought and action... The more we know him the more we are able to love him. The more we love him the more we seek to know him. To be central in our hearts, he must be foremost in our minds. Religious thought is the prerequisite to religious affection and obedient action.*

#### **D. Learning is essential for increased godliness**

[Romans 12:1-2](#) helps us understand how learning affects our Christian walk:

*<sup>1</sup>Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Growth in godliness involves a mental renewal that cannot happen without learning. The alternative to this is to be conformed to the world. Unless we renew our minds through learning, we will not be able to discern God's will. Do you desire to walk in obedience to God? Then be diligent in learning more about him.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "Let us never forget that the message of the Bible is addressed primarily to the mind, to the understanding."

### **III. Learning takes discipline**

[Job 32:6-9](#) reminds us that growing older doesn't mean we'll automatically grow wiser.

*<sup>6</sup>So Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite said: "I am young in years, and you are old; that is why I was fearful, not daring to tell you what I know. <sup>7</sup>I thought, 'Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.' <sup>8</sup>But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding. <sup>9</sup>It is **not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right.***

Age and experience alone don't increase our spiritual maturity. Unless we make



deliberate efforts to learn, simply being a Christian for a longer time does not mean we would have grown in knowledge as well. I always find it convicting to speak to someone who has been a Christian for a shorter amount of time, but who shows a stronger thirst to learn of the things of God.

Learning takes discipline. Unless we are intentional about learning, our growth in the knowledge of God will be haphazard at best. We would do well to take to heart Paul's exhortation to Timothy.

#### 2 Timothy 2:15

*<sup>15</sup>Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who **correctly handles the word of truth.***

We cannot handle the Word with confidence when we have not worked diligently to get understanding. It takes discipline to learn.

Any there questions or suggestions about how we can learn?

### IV. Reading to Learn

For many of us, reading a good Christian book could be the most common way of learning. Therefore, I'd like to close by offering some practical suggestions for how we can be better readers.

When it comes to choosing books to read, the church bookstall is a great place to start. The books there have been chosen for their teaching value, and they are a good resource for our learning. There are also a number of good Christian booksellers online. If you'd like more information about this, our Deacon of bookstall John Ingold is a good person to ask.

What are some good things to bear in mind when we read?

#### Tips for reading:

- 1.Read the way that suits you. Whether fast or slow, read naturally.
- 2.Read and think. Let books give you food for thought. Assess what you read.
- 3.Read and talk about it. Share impressions and recommendations. This will

greatly enrich all your spiritual conversation, and it is one of the best ways to seal your knowledge in your mind.

4.Read and be challenged. Let a good biography fire you up. Let a doctrinal book lead you to prove God. Let a devotional book stir self-examination and love to Christ.

5.Read systematically, including different kinds of books (eg. doctrine, Christian living, devotionals, biographies, commentaries, church history)

6.Read always. Always have a book ‘on the go’. However little time you may have to spare in any week, try to read – even if only a few pages.

7.Read but don’t steal. Your first priority throughout life is to read God’s Word. Other reading must never raid Bible reading time. All other books are good only as they promote Bible understanding and application.

## **V. Moving Towards Godliness**

Journaling and learning both take discipline. May God help us to be disciplined and diligent in our spiritual disciplines, for His glory! Let the words of Proverbs 13:4 be an encouragement to us all as we strive to grow in godliness.

### **Proverbs 13:4**

*The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.*