



Highlight (Scripture references and Introduction.)

1 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 12:11-14, 2 Peter 1:2-10, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Today's lesson serves as an invitation and a map for a journey. The invitation is an invitation to explore what it means to be disciplined for the purpose of godliness. The lessons that follow today's will serve as a road map for a life that is disciplined for godliness. Godliness is a gift from God that must be maintained by discipline. Your staff has prayerfully chosen to write lessons concerning the spiritual disciplines of a Christian life. Over the next year (I know that sounds like a long time, but not with respect to eternity) the staff will write informative and practical lessons on the topic of spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines that will be explored are Bible Intake, Prayer, Worship, Evangelism, Serving, Stewardship, Fasting, Silence and Solitude, Journaling, Learning, and Perseverance. The sources for these lessons will be God's word of course, and a book titled "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life" written by Donald S. Whitney. The staff invites you to take your copy of God's word and even purchase a copy of Spiritual Disciplines and take this journey with us. You purchasing a copy of Spiritual Disciplines is not necessary, our main text will be the Bible. The staff will explore the spiritual disciplines emphasized by Whitney.

A few years ago my daughter ask me to run in a 5K with her. Your pastor's body is not built for running. Maurice Brown says it is built for rolling. However, because this was my daughter I agreed but with some reluctance. So I started the long training period of three weeks. Don't laugh it was a tough three weeks. The rest of the story is that I did finish the race, I finished in third place, third from the last, no kidding. The only two I finished ahead of were senior adults who walked the 5K. I did get a t-shirt though. All joking aside, the reason I do not run well is because I am not a disciplined runner. Word on the street says if you are going to run well you must eat right, have the right exercise routines, sleep right, say no to activities that are not productive for your running schedule, and not to mention the right mental focus. Runners suggests that these are the basic disciplines to running well. In fact, anything we are going to do well in the earthly realm we must discipline ourselves.

Your spiritual life is no different. If you are going to maintain a healthy spiritual life then you must have in place some essential spiritual disciplines. You may be thinking you do not have time for anything else in your life. Your schedule is already full from everything else that is demanded of you. Please stop and consider this ...

Spiritual disciplines are not intended only for Christians with lots of spare time on their hands (where are they?). Rather *spiritual disciplines* are the God-given means by which busy believers become like Christ. Perhaps on this journey you may discover

that these spiritual disciplines are God's way of lightening your load and to give you smoother sailing (Spiritual Disciplines, 289).

- **Question:** Have you ever disciplined yourself in order to reach a specific goal, or have you ever tried to reach a goal and failed because you had not disciplined yourself toward the goal? Are you willing to discuss one of these times? What were the different outcomes?

Explain (Context and Commentary for the Scriptures.)

Point 1: Godliness as your purpose!

Read: Read 1 Timothy 4:7-8 once again. If possible read these verses from several translations. Hebrews 12:11-14

Discuss: Discipline without direction is drudgery (Whitney, wbk, 1). The reason why most people fail at different disciplines is because they do not have goals or purpose for their discipline. People do not discipline themselves because they do not value the end result. Without purpose discipline becomes a drudgery. God's word identifies the purpose of spiritual disciplines in the believer's life. In these verses the Apostle Paul challenges Timothy to exercise or train himself for the purpose of godliness. In doing so, the believer will taste the joy of a spiritually disciplined lifestyle (Whitney, wbk, 1).

Discipline must have direction. That direction or purpose for the believer is the pursuit of Christlikeness or godliness. Several years ago people would wear bracelets or t-shirts with the initials WWJD. These initials stand for 'what would Jesus do'. I am not sure we can ever attain to this lifestyle this side of heaven, but these initials serve as a reminder that Jesus is our model and He is our pursuit. We do not reach heaven because of our 'doing' but because Jesus has already 'done' in us what is necessary for our salvation. Through His righteousness we have been forgiven of our sins. Jesus lived a perfect and righteous life and therefore provides redemption from those who cannot live righteous lives.

God's word speaks of what believers will become. When Christ comes again believers will be conformed to Christ's image (1 John 3:2). We will be made like Him. However, the believer is not to wait for the Lord's appearing to become what God desires for them to be. The writer of Hebrews informs believers of what they are to be pursuing (Hebrews 12:11-14). He says that believers should strengthen themselves in their areas of weakness (12-13) and that they should set as their goal peace and holiness (14). He informs us that no one will see the Lord without this pursuit.

Believers should be encouraged that they are not in this alone. You might say believers have a built in work out partner. When a believer is saved the Holy Spirit comes to reside in them (Ephesians 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit residing in the believer creates a holy thirst for godliness in the believer. So, spiritual disciplines are the activities in a believer's life that leads them to godliness. With godliness as your purpose, spiritual disciplines become joyful not drudgery.

▫ **Questions:**

1. Have you ever tried to discipline yourself in some activity without a purpose? If so, was the outcome a positive one or a negative one?
2. What does 1 Peter 1:13-17 say about why the believer should discipline themselves?

3. What does 1 Timothy 4:7 say is the single most important reason for spiritual disciplines in the believer's life?
4. In the past how have you felt about spiritual disciplines like Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, fasting, and etc.? Be honest.
5. How does knowing you have a Helper residing in you help you with spiritual disciplines?

Point 2: What are spiritual disciplines?

Read: 2 Peter 1:2-10

Discuss: Simply, spiritual disciplines are the means to godliness. Spiritual Disciplines are those practices found in the Scripture that promote spiritual growth among the believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Whitney, bk, 4). Godliness in the believer comes through spiritual disciplines (Whitney, bk, 10). Godliness is experienced as the believer draws closer to the Lord and is conformed into His likeness. Spiritual disciplines are the activities by which a believer pursues the life that they have been given in Christ. We have experienced God's grace and peace the Lord Jesus (2). We have been given His divine power to experience life and godliness (3). We have received the great and precious promises of God so that we might be partakers in His divine nature (4).

There are both personal and interpersonal spiritual disciplines. Some are personal because they are meant to be practiced alone. Yet, some spiritual disciplines can be interpersonal because they are meant to be practiced with other believers. For instance, God's word instructs in both personal time in God's word and also corporate time in His word.

Spiritual disciplines are activities. Spiritual disciplines are practices that the believer does in order to grow in the grace of God. Spiritual disciplines are not attitudes we possess but activities we do so that we resemble or conform to Christlikeness. They are practices that nurture godliness in the believer's life. The disciplines are not the end in themselves but are the means to the end of godliness.

Spiritual Disciplines are biblical. Spiritual disciplines are those practices promoted in the Bible that produces health in the believer's life. The list of disciplines listed in the introduction of this lesson are not exhaustive, but are certainly prominent ones encouraged in God's word.

Spiritual disciplines are sufficient for being made complete in Christ Jesus. God's word promotes and provides everything necessary for the believer to grow in the likeness of Christ (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Spiritual disciplines will always be gospel-centered. Spiritual disciplines will always take the believer to the heart of the gospel. The believer's life is made possible because of the gospel and it is only by the work of the gospel in that person's life that continued growth is possible. Spiritual disciplines should always cause believers to grow deeper into the greatness of God's grace-filled gospel.

Believers do not practice spiritual disciplines as an end to themselves. Spiritual disciplines are the means to godliness. When spiritual disciplines are practiced towards the purpose of godliness then the end result is closeness and conformity to Christ. When believers experience godliness then spiritual disciplines are not drudgery but they become joy-filled.

▣ **Questions:**

1. Can you think of examples in the Bible where spiritual disciplines were modeled as personal (alone)? (ex. Mark 1:35) What about examples when spiritual disciplines were modeled interpersonal (in a group)? (ex. Matthew 5:1)
2. Why is spiritual disciplines described as activities verses attitudes?
3. What is the difference between biblical spiritual disciplines and activities that may help us to rest or relax spiritually?
4. What is the single most important direction or purpose of spiritual discipline? (Consider 1 Timothy 4:7)

Point 3: Why Spiritual Disciplines?

Read: 1 Peter 1:13-17, Matthew 11:28-29 and 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Discuss: William Barclay, a Scottish minister said of discipline, “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.” (Whitney, bk, 16). Where Barclay was referring to the necessity of physical discipline for the athlete the same could be said of spiritual discipline for the Christian.

Spiritual Discipline for the believer is not an option. Discipline for the believer is a must. First, spiritual disciplines are commanded. In 1 Peter 1:13-17 Peter describes the actions that believers should take to prepare themselves according to the grace that God has delivered to them. Spiritual disciplines for the believer are described in phrases like ‘gird up the loins of your mind’ (13). Peter informs his readers that they are not to conform themselves to the former lusts but that they are to conform themselves to the holiness of God (14-15). Peter does not present this as an option but as a command. He quotes an Old Testament command from God to His children, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’ (1 Peter 1:66, Leviticus 11:44).

Second, spiritual disciplines are expected. Jesus himself communicated his expectations of his followers. In Matthew 11:28-29 Jesus invites those who will to come to Him and He promises to them His rest. While that rest may be an initial gift He certainly makes it clear that ‘learning’ is necessary for the maintenance and abiding in His rest. The twelve original disciples were invited to do just that, they followed Jesus around and learned from Him. They demonstrated the discipline of learning and following Christ. Following Jesus today is no different. Christians who pursue conformity to Jesus will embrace the spiritual disciplines necessary to learn of Him.

Third, but certainly not exhaustive of the ‘why’ for spiritual disciplines is that fact that they are necessary. The Apostle Paul highlights the necessity for spiritual discipline in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. He uses an athlete competing in a race as an example. No one would ever imagine an athlete who desired to compete well to compete without disciplining his/her body. He says an athlete is ‘temperate in all things’ (25). The word ‘temperate’ is actually a verb that means to exercise or train in self-control. In verse 27 he uses another word to teach the necessity of spiritual discipline when he writes ‘But I discipline my body’. Once again the word ‘discipline’ is a verb. The word describes an athlete who trains or exercises his/her body rigorously in order to prepare themselves for competition. The Christian life is no different. Who would ever imagine that a Christian, with eternity in their future, would not prepare themselves to run well?

▣ **Questions:**

1. Have you ever disciplined yourself as an athlete for the purpose of some type of competition? Was the training rigorous on your body?
2. Why do Christians who discipline themselves for years to become proficient at their careers or recreational sports quickly stop pursuing the Spiritual Disciplines?
3. Can you explain why spiritual discipline is necessary for maintaining and growing in godliness?

Application (What does God want me to do?)

Physical discipline is difficult. If you and I are not careful we will procrastinate on beginning any type of plan with respect to physical exercise. I am always going to get around to disciplining myself physical. If we are not careful we will treat spiritual disciplines the same way. We will procrastinate beginning any type of plan. The results will be the same. With respect to the physical exercise we will be out shape and unhealthy. Procrastination of spiritual disciplines are the same, an unhealthy and unfruitful Christian life. Once again, the staff invites you to take part in a journey, the journey of pursuing godliness through spiritual disciplines.

Respond (What specific commitment will I make?)

This morning begins several months of intentional training in the spiritual disciplines. Will you make the commitment with your staff to travel along this map and journey? This morning we will begin 40 days of intentional and purposeful reading through the Gospel of John together as a church family. You can pick up a reading guide located on one of the music stands. Will you journey with the staff over the next several months in the spiritual disciplines of Bible Intake, Prayer, Worship, Evangelism, Serving, Stewardship, Fasting, Silence and Solitude, Journaling, Learning, and Perseverance?

Additional Study Resources

1. Additional Bible Study tools are available at www.biblecc.com.
2. Additional Bible Study tools are available at www.biblegateway.com.
3. Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, Donald S. Whitney, 2014.

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