

Spiritual
DISCIPLINES
FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Concord church of Christ

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

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LESSON 1

THE IDEA OF DISCIPLINE

Have you ever felt like your spiritual life is stuck living on the surface? You want a deeper relationship with the Father but you don't know how or even where to begin. Don't worry, within the Scriptures we have been provided with the means of experiencing the deeper things of God. Those means are called the "Spiritual Disciplines" and the main requirement for using them is that we have a longing after God.

WHAT ARE THE "SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES"?

Think of the disciplines as tools that help us dig deeper into the Divine nature of God and know Him more intimately. God has given us the Disciplines of Bible reading, meditation, memorization, fasting, and others as a means of receiving His graces. They are God's way of getting us on a path where He can work within us and transform us into what He desires. Similar to physical exercise of the muscles, these tools break the ingrained habits of the flesh and replace them with new spiritual habits. Once the spiritual habits are in place we find that we are not just digging deeper into the Divine nature but our nature is being transformed into the Divine.

DISCIPLINE WITHOUT DIRECTION IS DRUDGERY

There can be a danger in seeing the Disciplines as an end in and off themselves but they are not. This is why will fail to continue in them. We lack direction.

Read the following story by Donald Whitney:

"Imagine six-year-old Kevin, whose parents have enrolled him in music lessons. After school every afternoon, he sits in the living room and reluctantly strums "home on the Range" while watching his buddies play baseball in the park across the street. That's discipline without direction. It's drudgery.

Now suppose Kevin is visited by an angel one afternoon during guitar practice. In a vision he's taken to Carnegie Hall. He's shown a guitar virtuoso giving a concert. Usually bored by classical music, Kevin is astonished by what he sees and hears. The musician's fingers dance excitedly on the strings with fluidity and grace. Kevin thinks of how stupid and klunky his hands feel when they halt and stumble over the chords. The virtuoso blends clean, soaring notes into a musical aroma that wafts from his guitar. Kevin remembers the toneless, irritating discord that comes stumbling out of his.

But Kevin is enchanted. His head tilts slightly to one side as he listens. He drinks in everything. He never imagined that anyone could play the guitar like this.

"What do you think, Kevin?" asks the angel.

The answer is a soft, slow, six-year-old's "W-o-w!"

The vision vanishes and the angel is again standing in front of Kevin in his living room. "Kevin," says the angel, "the wonderful musician you saw is *you* in a few years." Then pointing at the guitar, the angel declares, "But you must practice!"

Suddenly the angel disappears and Kevin finds himself alone with his guitar. Do you think his attitude toward practice will be different now? As long as he remembers what he's going to become, Kevin's discipline will have a direction, a goal that will pull him into the future. Yes, effort will be involved, but you could hardly call it drudgery.

When it comes to discipline in the Christian life, many believers feel as Kevin did toward guitar practice – its discipline without direction. Prayer (and Bible reading) threatens to be drudgery. The practical value of meditation on Scripture seems uncertain. The real purpose of a Discipline like fasting is often unclear.”

THE PURPOSE OF THE DISCIPLINES

As the story above shows us the disciplines must have a purpose and a goal in mind for them to have any effect upon us. God gives us that purpose, the purpose of godliness.

1 Timothy 4:7-8 ⁷ *But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; ⁸for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.* These verses will be our theme throughout our study. Consider this text in answering the following questions.

What is godliness? (see also **2 Pet. 1:3-4, 1 Pet. 1:15-16, Heb. 12:14**)

What is the profit or value of godliness?

According to the text, what does it mean to discipline yourself?

IS SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE REALLY FOR ME?

"We must not be led to believe that the Disciplines are for spiritual giants and hence beyond our reach, or for contemplatives who devote all their time to prayer and meditation. Far from it. God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who must wash dishes and mow lawns. In fact, the Disciplines are best exercised in the midst of our normal daily activities. If they are to have any transforming effect, the effect must be found in the ordinary junctures of human life: in our relationships with our husband or wife, our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbors.

Neither should we think of the Spiritual Disciplines as some dull drudgery aimed at exterminating laughter from the face of the earth. Joy is the keynote of all Disciplines. The purpose of the Disciplines is liberation from the stifling slavery to self-interest and fear. When one's inner spirit is set free from all that holds it down, that can hardly be describe as dull drudgery. Singing, dancing, even shouting characterize the Disciplines of the spiritual life." - Richard J. Foster

LESSON 2

THE DISCIPLINE OF BIBLE INTAKE

"No Spiritual Discipline is more important than the intake of God's Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There simply is no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture. The reasons for this are obvious. In the Bible God tells us about Himself, and especially about Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God. ... In the Bible we learn the ways and will of the Lord. We find in Scripture how to live in a way that is pleasing to God as well as best and most fulfilling for ourselves. None of this eternally essential information can be found anywhere else except the Bible. Therefore if we would know God and be Godly, we must know the Word of God - intimately.(emphasis added)" - Donald Whitney

If Bible intake is so important to our purpose of godliness, why do we struggle to spend much time with God's word on a daily basis?

HEARING AND READING

As we begin the study of the discipline of Bible intake we look at two aspects of intake: (1) hearing and (2) reading God's Word.

HEARING

Why consider this a Discipline? Because if we don't discipline ourselves to hear God's Word regularly, we may only hear it accidentally, just when we feel like it, or we may never hear it at all.

What is the emphasis in the following passages:

Luke 11:27-28 -

Romans 10:17 -

Is the application of Romans 10:17 only for the initial faith in Christ? Explain.

READING

"Jesus often asked questions about people's understanding of the Scriptures, beginning with the words, 'Have you not read...?' He assumed that those claiming to be the people of God would have read the Word of God. And a case can be made that this question implies familiarity with the entire Word of God." - Donald Whitney

Note the following passages and how hearing and reading are stressed:

Matthew 4:4 - Which words are we to live on?

2 Timothy 3:16 - How much of the Scripture is God's word?

Revelation 1:3 - Who is the one who is blessed?

"A man can no more take in a supply of grace for the future than he can eat enough for the next six months, or take sufficient air into his lungs at one time to sustain life for a week. We must draw upon God's boundless store of grace from day to day as we need it." - John Blanchard

Discuss the quote above from John Blanchard.

Are we as Christians guilty of this mindset?

Discipline of Daily Bible Reading Habit

- Find the time to read - make a habit of reading the same time every day
- Find a Bible-reading plan - those that read random passages may soon drop the discipline

As we seek to implement ways to accomplish our "DAILY" interactions with the word of God and therefore, with God Himself, we may get discouraged. We will start out with the best of intentions, but then there will be periods of laxity. Exercise is not easy but difficult and tiring. But remember you are creating a New Habit!

- Don't Be Discouraged when you stumble.
- Start over. The most important thing is to not quit.
- Revise strategy if you have taken on too much.

BASIC BIBLE READING PLAN – OLD TESTAMENT / NEW TESTAMENT

2 – OT; 2 – NT – Read through the Bible once in a year (approx).

3 – OT; 3 – NT – (1 year: OT once; NT – 4 times)

Multiple Locations Plans

Variation 1

Five places each day (1 chapter/day each section) – at this pace, complete entire Bible in 238 reading days. Five reading days a week equals 250 days a year.

The Law	History	Poetry	Prophets	NT
Genesis to Deut. (187 ch's)	Joshua to Esther (249)	Job to Song of Sol. (243)	Isaiah to Malachi (250)	Matt. to Rev. (260)

Variation 2

Three places each day (2 chapters each section)

Law/History	Poetry/Prophets	NT
Genesis to Esther	Job to Malachi	Matt. to Rev.

Variation 3

Five places each day with Epistles overlay

The Law	History	Poetry	Prophets	NT History	Epistles -1,2,3
Genesis to Deut.	Joshua to Esther	Job to S of S	Isaiah to Malachi	Matt. to Acts	Rom. to Rev.

117 Chapters (1 chapter/day – read through 2x in a year)

Overlay with Epistles (1, 2, or 3 chapters each day) – 143 total.

3 chapters – takes you through 5X in 1 yr.; 2 ch. – 4X in a yr.; 1 ch. – 2x in a yr.

Total chapters – 6-8/day.

(If you read 2 chapters out of each OT section and NT History: 11-13 chapters/day.)

Variation 4

Different section EACH DAY, plus Epistles overlay.

Law (Gen...)	187 chapters	4 chapters/M
History (Joshua...)	249 “	5 chapters/T
Poetry (Job...)	243 “	5 chapters/W
Prophets (Isaiah...)	250 “	5 chapters/Th
NT History (Mt. – Acts)	117 “	2-3 chapters/F

Overlay with Epistles (1, 2, or 3 chapters each day) – 143 total.

1-5-2-2 or 1-5-1-1 Reading Plan (practical / devotional)

Variation 1

1 chapter of Proverbs each day (Takes you through the Proverbs 12 X in a year)

5 Psalms each day (Takes you through Psalms 12 X in one year)

2 – OT chapters

2 – NT chapters (takes through Bible in 1 year)

Variation 2

Just 1 OT/ 1 NT each day (along with 5 Psalms / 1 Proverbs chapter)

OTHER IMPORTANT READING CONSIDERATIONS

Read a Bible without notes or underlining

- The value of this is that you read the Bible afresh – without past conclusions prejudicing your reading.
- Past conclusions may have been driven by circumstance that keeps one reading a passage through a particular lens – the lens of that past controversy or consideration.
- You may only see application of a text to the particular controversy – when, the text itself, may have a different focus (e.g., Rom. 7:2-4, 1 Cor. 7 – often read in context of Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage controversies today; or 1 Cor. 16:1-4 in context of church treasury usages).

- The goal of our reading should always be to hear the Holy Spirit with as fresh and unencumbered a mind as possible. *We are reading, not to support a prior position, nor to stick to what brethren have concluded, but to **listen to God!***

Read the text aloud (if at all possible - www.BibleGateway.com is a great resource!)

- The reading touches multiple senses (hearing, seeing).
- This is the way the epistles and much of the Bible was read in ancient times. When an epistle came to a church they read it aloud before the brethren (cf. Luke 4:16-17; Acts 13:15; Col. 4:16; 1 Tim. 4:13).
- The epistles were often composed orally with a transcriber (Rom. 16:22; cf. 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17; Philemon 19). Much of the writings of the prophets were also transcribed public sermons.

Read a book in one or two sittings

This requires a different reading “strategy” than those plans above, but provides great value to us.

- It allows us to read the letter the way it was originally intended. Epistles were typically read in one sitting.
- This allows one to see the big picture of the book – its overall theme, emphasis, and better capture the tenor and tone of the author/speaker.
- Better enables the reader to see & hear familiar texts or “proof texts” in their full context. It may, and often does, awake the reader to potentially misused texts.

LESSON 3

THE DISCIPLINE OF BIBLE INTAKE (STUDY AND MEMORIZATION)

STUDY

"If reading the Bible can be compared to cruising the width of a clear, sparkling lake in a motorboat, studying the Bible is like slowly crossing that same lake in a glass-bottomed boat." - Donald Whitney

Many today equate reading the Bible with Bible study. While both are ways of Bible intake and tools to help us toward godliness, Bible study is vastly different from reading the Bible.

How would you explain the concept of studying the Bible to someone?

How do you study the Bible?

To begin Bible study we must first have a heart to study. Note the following passages and the intent of the heart in each.

Ezra 7:10 What sequence do you see in this verse?

Acts 1:10-12 How is the character of being "noble minded" defined according to verse 11?

If Bible study is so vital to our intake of God's word why do we struggle to do it? Note what R.C. Sproul comments on the idea of lack of study: *"Hear then, is the real problem of our negligence. We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy."*

I want to study but I just don't know how.

The basic difference between Bible reading and Bible study is simply a pencil and a piece of paper. Let's now look at the "How to" of Bible study.

Method 1

- Write down observations about the text as you read.
- Write down any questions that come to mind.
- Use cross references to look up verses related to your questions and write down your findings.

Method 2

- Find a key word in your reading.
- Use a concordance to find other references of the word.
- See how the word is used in different contexts.
- Write down your findings.

Method 3

- Outline a chapter of a book
- Begin with one paragraph at a time (not just one verse).
- Ask the following questions of the text:
 - What is the context of the passage?
 - What are the author's main points in the passage?
 - What was the author's purpose in writing the passage?

As we will see with all the disciplines, Bible study will not come easy after one or two tries. We must make it a habit, and habits are developed only after significant practice and repetition. It is very possible that we will have more questions than answers as we study. This is ok. Don't get discouraged. We need to keep in mind that we never study alone. The Holy Spirit is there to guide us unto knowledge and the knowledge will be revealed in time. **(John 14:26)**

MEMORIZATION

"Many Christians look on the Spiritual Discipline of memorizing God's Word as something tantamount to modern-day martyrdom. Ask them to memorize Bible verses and they react with about as much eagerness as a request for volunteers to face Nero's lions." - Donald Whitney

How much time do you actively spend memorizing God's word? How many verses can you recall from memory right now?

Why Memorize?

"When Scripture is stored in the mind, it is available for the Holy Spirit to take and bring to your attention when you need it most." - Donald Whitney

Psalm 119 : 11 - *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."*

Memorizing Scripture gives us another tool to battle against Satan.

Note the way Jesus defeated Satan in **Matthew 4:1-11**:

Did Jesus carry physical scrolls of the Old Law into the desert?

How was Jesus able to know the Scripture to battle Satan?

Who else is shown to know Scripture in these verses? How should this impact our effort to memorize and know God's word?

Benefits of Memorizing Scripture

Memorizing Scripture is not just something we do but there are many benefits that we can gain from recalling God's word at any time.

- It strengthens our faith - **Proverbs 22:17-19**
- It aids us to tell others about Christ
- It guides us in certain situations
- It brings us to meditation

"The Word of God is the 'sword of the Spirit,' but the Holy Spirit cannot give you a weapon you have not stored in the armory of your mind. Imagine yourself in the midst of a decision and needing guidance, or struggling with a difficult temptation and needing victory. The Holy Spirit rushes to your mental arsenal, flings open the door, but all He finds is a John 3:16, a Genesis 1:1, and a Great Commission. Those are great swords, but they're not made for every battle. How do we go about filling our personal spiritual arsenal with a supply of swords for the Holy Spirit to use?" - Donald Whitney

Yes, You Can Memorize Scripture

1. Develop a plan –
 - List Scriptures to memorize
 - Select one from your daily readings.
 - Select a # to memorize weekly: 1/2 wks (25/yr); 1 (50/yr); 2 (100/yr.); 3 (150/yr.)
 - Set aside time to start and then review each day, throughout day.
 - Get a partner (husband, wife, son, daughter, friend) or group to work with.

2. Actual Memorization –
 - Write out the passage neatly.
 - Collect Index cards (box).
 - Or, memorize from text in Bible (visualize location on page). This will help you get to know your Bible better (if you forget the verse, you can find it more easily).
 - Use a more literal translation (KJV; ASV; NKJV; NASB – are easier to memorize).
 - Memorize one phrase at a time (e.g., “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth// before the evil days come// and the years draw near// when you will say, ‘I have no delight in them.’” – Ecclesiastes 12:1).

3. Memorization is not an end in itself. It is a tool to get the Scriptures inside our minds and hearts to –
 - Improve our lives and fight against Sin (Jesus - Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).
 - Be better equipped to help others grow in the Lord or to find the Lord.

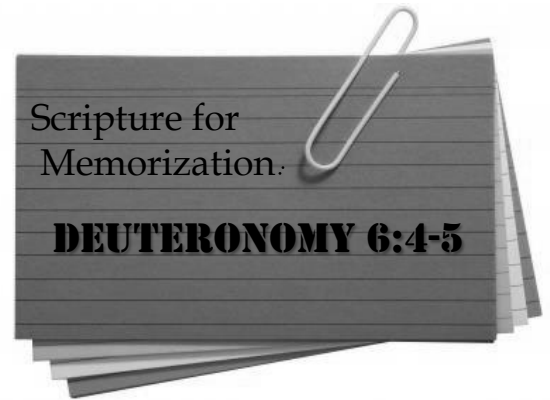
LESSON 4

THE DISCIPLINE OF BIBLE INTAKE (MEDITATION AND APPLICATION)

MEDITATION

"In contemporary society our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in 'muchness' and 'manyness' he will rest satisfied." - Richard Foster

Why do we need meditation? For the very reasons mentioned in the quote above. With so much "hurry" in our lives today we think we have little time for godly things. With meditation we place our focus not on the "hurry" but on God.



Meditation - What it Is and is Not

What is your understanding of meditation?

"Because meditation is so prominent in many spiritually counterfeit groups and movements, some Christians are uncomfortable with the whole subject and suspicious of those who engage in it. But we must remember that meditation is both commanded by God and modeled by the Godly in Scripture." - Donald Whitney

What do the following passages tell us about meditation?

Gen. 24:63 -

Ps. 63:6 -

Ps. 119: 148 -

Ps. 1:2 -

1 Tim. 4:15 -

Godly Meditation is **NOT** - like Eastern meditation which focuses on emptying one's mind and seeking to achieve complete mental passivity.

Godly Meditation **IS** - just the opposite of Eastern meditation. Biblical meditation is "active". It involves filling our mind with God and truth. It is deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purpose of understanding, application, and prayer.

"Merely hearing or reading the Bible, for example, can be like a short rainfall on hard ground. Regardless of the amount or intensity of the rain, most runs off and little sinks in. Meditation opens the soil of the soul and lets the water of God's Word percolate in deeply." - Donald Whitney

Ways to Meditate

Meditation begins by selecting an appropriate passage to think and dwell upon.

1. Turn and inspect the verse like the facets of a Diamond -
 - a) Read through the verse, each time emphasizing a different word:
 - i. "**I** am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me shall live even if he dies" *Jn. 11:25*
 - ii. "I am the **resurrection** and the life, he who believes in me shall live even if he dies" *Jn. 11:25*
 - iii. As you emphasize each different word - consider the implications.
2. Ponder a verse, paragraph, or story throughout the day. Consider the meaning in its context. Consider applications to your personal life. Find reasons to praise, give thanks to, or remember God.
3. Rewrite a verse or passage in your own words.

While meditation can be done throughout the day and in any place the purpose and focus of meditation is to gain deeper insight into God's word and God Himself. The most effective way to accomplish this is when we remove all other distractions from us or remove us from all other distractions. Nothing can be substituted for quiet time alone - just you and the Creator of the universe - contemplating His word.

APPLICATION

What should be the end result of our meditation?

Meditation must ultimately lead us somewhere. It must have an outcome and that outcome is application to our lives.

What should be the result of one who "looks intently" in James 1:25?

As we open God's word and meditate on it we should expect to find some application in life (personal or otherwise). This requires that we read with FAITH! *"Anticipate the discovery of a practical response to the truth of God. It makes a big difference to come to the Bible with the faith that you will find an application for it as opposed to believing you won't."* - Donald Whitney

How to Make Application

1. Seek to understand in historical and written context before applying.
2. Meditate to discern the meaning for you.
3. Ask "application questions" ("Interview the text"). "Does the Text reveal something..."
 - a) ...I should believe about God?
 - b) ...I should praise, thank, or trust God for?
 - c) ...I should pray about?
 - d) ...I should have a new attitude about?
 - e) ...I should make a decision about?
 - f) ...I should do for Christ, others, or myself?
 - g) ...I should be warned about (an instruction or example)?
4. Try to respond specifically to what you have meditated upon (find a small application so you can take immediate action). Again you can make this application from a single verse; chapter; story; etc.

Keep in mind that we are seeking to create habits of meditation. And as we have said, creating a habit is not easy and does not happen overnight. While we should read and meditate upon God's word with expectation to find some application, we must also remember to not get discouraged if we come away from meditating on God's word without any new understanding.

"The best over-all preparation for successful meditation is a personal conviction of its importance and a staunch determination to persevere in its practice. Like any serious work, it is more difficult in the apprentice stages; once we are skilled - journeymen - it is part of our ingrained habit patterns. 'Waiting upon God is not idleness,' said Bernard of Clairvaux, 'but work which beats all other work to one unskilled in it.'" - Richard Foster



LESSON 5

THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

As we seek to look at prayer as a spiritual discipline, prayer is second only to the intake of God's Word in importance as a discipline. With prayer we seek to initiate and deepen a relationship with God as we communicate with Him.

SELF EVALUATION

On a sheet of paper begin to compile Scriptures that deal with the idea of prayer. Along with others you come up with, you may wish to consider these passages as you answer the following questions:

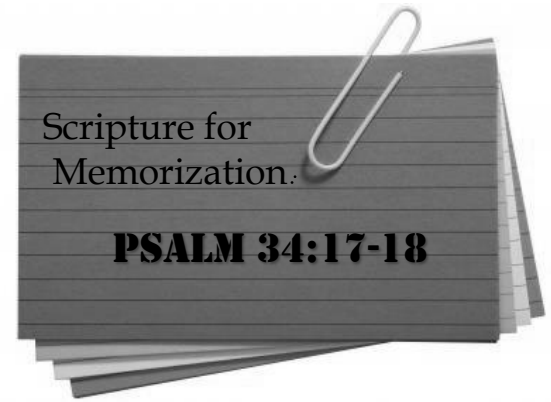
Luke 11:1; Mt. 6:6-11; Luke 18:1-8; Acts 2:41-42; 4:23-31; Phil. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:17; Acts 16:25-26; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; 2 Cor. 1:9-11; Rev. 8:3-5

- ⇒ Do you think we are as devoted in prayer as the NT disciples were? Try to give a 'why' behind your answer:

- ⇒ On average, how much prayer would you say we offer collectively when we are together during the week?

- ⇒ What do you think of your personal prayer life? How often do you pray? (Be honest with yourself – this is as much about your improvement as everyone else's). What suggestions can you come up with for improving your own prayer life?

- ⇒ When was the last time you gathered together with a group of brethren (however small), beyond your own family, for the sole purpose of prayer? How often do you do this? Think about the amount of time you gather with friends for entertainment (watching football, movies, etc.) compared to gathering together for prayer. What do you think about this?



⇒ What should be the focus of your prayer life? What do you think of the content of your private and public prayers?

⇒ How do you approach prayer in your life? (For example: attitude and thought process)

⇒ What do you think prayer is? How would you describe it?

⇒ What does prayer accomplish? What are its purposes?




LESSON 6

THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

(PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER)

Prayer is not something we do haphazardly but purposefully in our lives. We fail to see the power of prayer if we only view it as a duty in our Christian life. Prayer can be so much more to us if we are willing to discipline ourselves. To take prayer from being just a duty to part of our everyday life requires that we develop a greater understanding of prayer.



Scripture for
Memorization.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

GOD'S PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER

What principles about prayer can you glean from the following passages?

- **Matthew 6:5** –
- **Matthew 17:21** –
- **Matthew 21:22** –
- **Mark 1:35** –
- **Mark 14:38** –
- **Luke 11:1** –
- **Luke 15:5-6** –
- **Luke 18:1-8** –
- **Acts 1:14** –
- **Ephesians 6:18** –
- **Philippians 4:6** –
- **Colossians 4:2** –
- **Colossians 4:12** –
- **1 Thessalonians 3:10, 5:17** –

- **1 Tim. 2:1-2** –
- **James 5:13-18**
- **1 Peter 3:7** –
- **Revelation 8:4-5** –

TYPES OF PRAYERS

As we understand the principles of prayer we see different types of prayers in Scripture that help us to respond and draw closer to God. These different types can guide us as we seek to establish our habits of prayer.

Prayer of Praise and Adoration

As we come to know God, we gain a greater understanding of His worth and that He is worthy of our adoration and worship. This is prayer centered wholly upon God and His eternal characteristics—His majesty, glory, and power; His beauty and lavish love; His mercy and grace. **1 Chronicles 29:10-13** is one of many examples of a prayer of praise.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Joined together many times with the prayer of praise is a prayer of thanksgiving. This is a prayer of appreciation for all that God has given us and done for us. As with the prayer of praise the focus is completely upon God. When we take the time to recognize and show our gratitude unto God for what He has done it brings us to realize how totally dependent we are upon Him. **Ps. 118** exemplifies this sentiment of the heart.

Prayer of Confession

This prayer is an acknowledgment of our utter worthlessness in light of such a loving and just God. It is a pouring out of our hearts unto God expressing our sin and our sorrow for how it has affected God. David's prayer in **Psalm 51** is a great example of such a penitent heart.

Prayer of Supplication

A prayer of supplication is a prayer of request. God calls us to ask of Him, to bring our needs and wants to Him, and to open our souls to Him. This is probably the most utilized type of prayer in the lives of saints. In supplication we recognize our dependence upon God and humbly ask Him to provide that which we have no power to do on our own. **Psalm 5** expresses David's request for help and protection from His enemies.

Prayer of Intercession

Intercessory prayer is simply the act of praying unto God on behalf of others. Intercession literally means “to soften the face by stroking” as a child does to a parent to change their mind. This type of prayer places the person praying between God and the one they are praying for. It is asking for blessing and gifts for others that they themselves cannot ask for. Both Moses and Daniel show us the great responsibility and power of intercession (Moses – **Exodus 32:11-14**, Daniel – **Daniel 9:4-19**).

DEVELOPING OURSELVES TO BE PRAYERFUL PEOPLE

“What if God does not demand prayer as much as gives prayer? What if God wants prayer in order to satisfy us? What if prayer is a means of God nourishing, restoring, healing, converting us? Suppose prayer is primarily allowing ourselves to be loved, addressed and claimed by God. What if praying means opening ourselves to the gift of God's own self and presence? What if our part in prayer is primarily letting God be giver? Suppose prayer is not a duty but the opportunity to experience healing and transforming love?” - Martin Smith

Jeremiah 33:3 - *Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.*

We see all that prayer is and can do for us if we are willing to discipline ourselves in prayer. The question then becomes how do we bring ourselves to the point that we have a life of prayer?

What ideas or suggestions do you have for ...

⇒ Increasing our motivation to pray?

⇒ Enhancing our devotion to our prayer life?

⇒ Improving the content of our prayer?

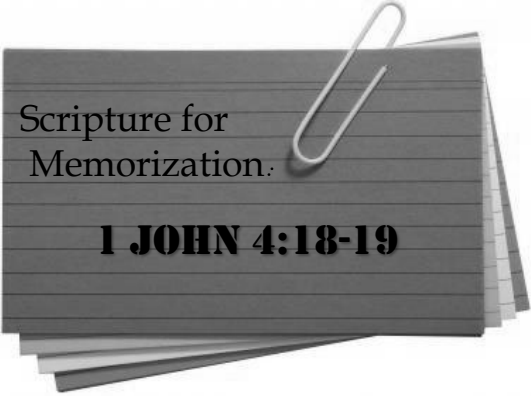


LESSON 7

THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

(HINDRANCES TO PRAYER)

Paul says in **Col. 4:2** *“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.”* We all can see the command to pray. But how do we make this a real part of our lives? How do we become a people devoted to prayer? One way to do this is to look at those things that hinder us in our life of prayer.



Scripture for
Memorization.

1 JOHN 4:18-19

COMMITMENT TO PRAYER

To be devoted to anything requires a commitment from us. And it is the importance that we place upon something that determines our level of commitment. Note the commitment that is asked of us in the following passages.

1 Thess. 5:17 – How do we pray continually?

What aspect of prayer is seen in these passages? Mk. 1:35; 6:45-46; Luke 5:15-16; 6:12-13; Luke 18:1-8

What is the effect of a lack of commitment in our life of prayer?

TRUST IN PRAYER

“John D. Grassmic writes, ‘Faith that rests in God is unwavering trust in His omnipotent power and unfailing goodness.’ If we go to a certain friend with a special request, we usually go and ask because we believe that friend can and will help us. So it is with the Lord. It pleases Him when we ask believing that He hears and will answer.” – Cynthia Heald

While we want to trust in God many times doubt enters our mind and we are left to struggle between what we know God has said and what we feel within our hearts.

How can a lack of trust impact our prayers?

What are some reasons we don't have the confidence we should in prayer?

Read Mark 11:20-25 What applications are we to make from this passage?

FEAR IN PRAYER

Fear may not be something many Christians are ready to admit is a hindrance to their life of prayer. Yet if we reflect upon why we don't pray as we should fear may be at the very heart of our struggles.

How might the following fears affect our attempts to pray?

⇒ Fear of Inferiority –

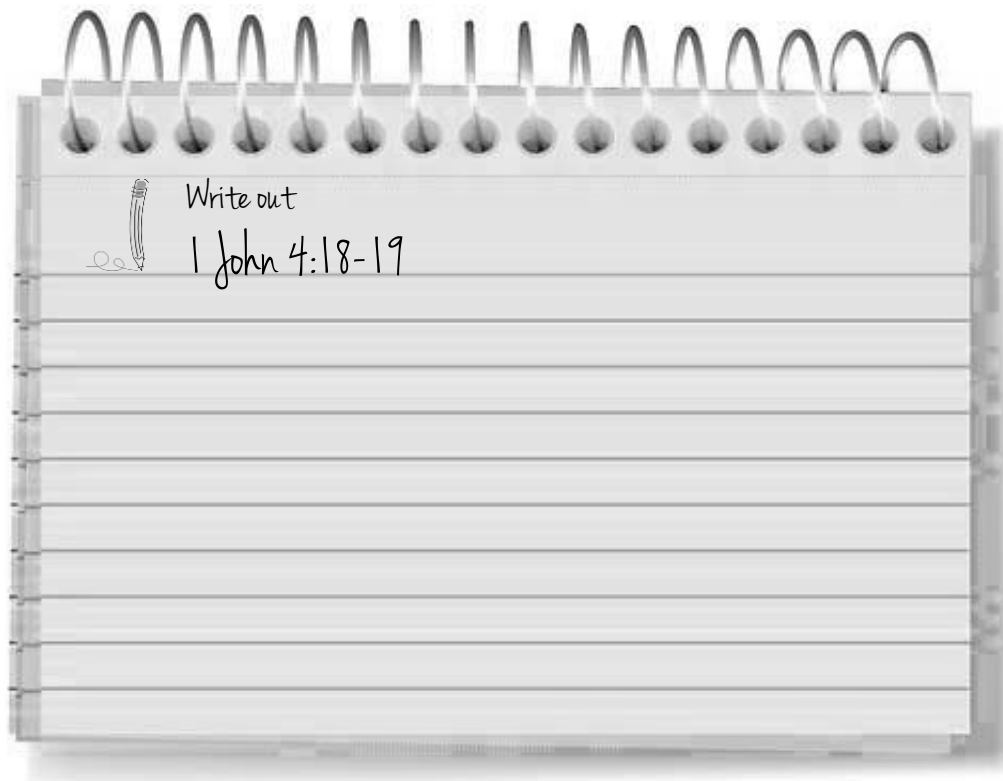
⇒ Fear of Weakness and Failure –

⇒ Fear of Being Disappointed –

⇒ Fear of Intimacy with God –

Read **1 John 4:18** How might this help us overcome fear in our life of prayer?


“When we feel least like praying is the time when we most need to pray. We should wait quietly before God and tell Him how cold and prayerless our hearts are, and look up to Him and trust Him and expect Him to send the Holy Spirit to warm our hearts and draw them out in prayer. It will not be long before the glow of the Spirit’s presence will fill our hearts, and we will begin to pray with freedom, directness, earnestness and power.” – R. A. Torrey



LESSON 8

THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER (HOW TO PRAY)

“There is a sense in which prayer needs to be taught to a child of God no more than a baby needs to be taught to cry. But crying for basic needs is minimal communication, and we must soon grow beyond that infancy. The Bible says we must pray for the glory of God, in His will, in faith, in the name of Jesus, with persistence, and more. A child of God gradually learns to pray like this in the same way that a growing child learns to talk. To pray as expected, to pray as a maturing Christian, and to pray effectively, we must say with the disciples in Luke 11:1 ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’” – Donald Whitney



Scripture for
Memorization.

JEREMIAH 29:12-13

I LEARN TO PRAY BY PRAYING

We tell our children that the way to get better at something is by practice, practice, practice. This applies to prayer as well. We can read a book or listen to someone talk about prayer but that does not teach us to pray. *“I get nothing without exercise, without practice. I might listen for a year to a professor of music playing the most beautiful music, but that won’t teach me to play an instrument.” – Donald Whitney*

Meditating on Scripture

One of the ways we practice our prayers is by meditating on Scripture.

How do you think meditating on Scripture would help your prayer life?

Read **Psalms 5:1-3**. In verse 1 what does David ask God to consider? Why?

Read **Psalms 19:7-14**. What is the bridge between God’s truth and David’s prayer?

The process of coming to prayer:

- 1) We input a passage of God's word.
- 2) Meditation allows us to take what God has said and think on it deeply and digest it.
- 3) Then we speak to God about it in meaningful prayer.

The result is that we pray about what we've encountered in the Bible, now made personal through meditation.

Praying with others

The disciples learned to pray not only by hearing Jesus teach about prayer, but also by being with Him when He prayed. Praying with others is one way that we can learn and improve our life of prayer.

In what ways might praying with others help your prayers?

What examples do we have in the New Testament of Christians praying together?

In praying with others we can learn the principles of prayer and be with those that can model true prayer for us.

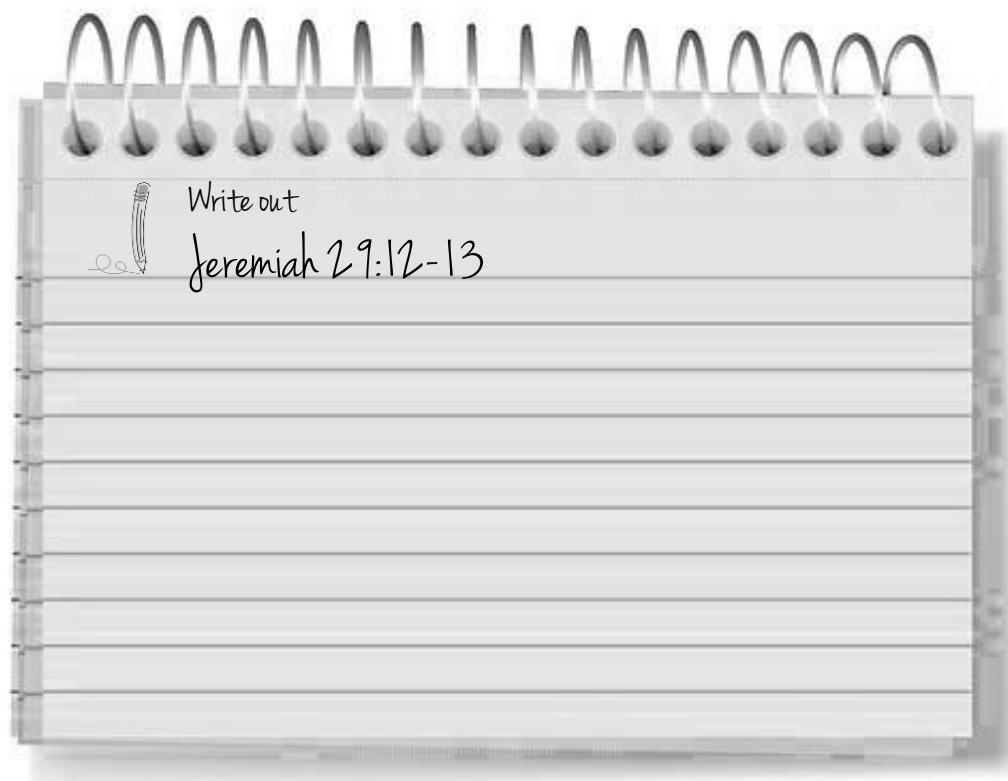
I LEARN TO PRAY BY ANSWERED PRAYERS

This principle of prayer is probably taken for granted by many Christians. Yet if we can truly have an understanding that prayer is answered it will greatly help us improve our prayer life. Matthew 7:7-8 gives us the promise of Jesus that if we ask we will receive. We must believe and trust in this promise.

What prayers has God answered in your life that have helped you in prayer?

Is there ever a time that God will not answer our prayers if we are seeking to do His will?
Explain your answer.

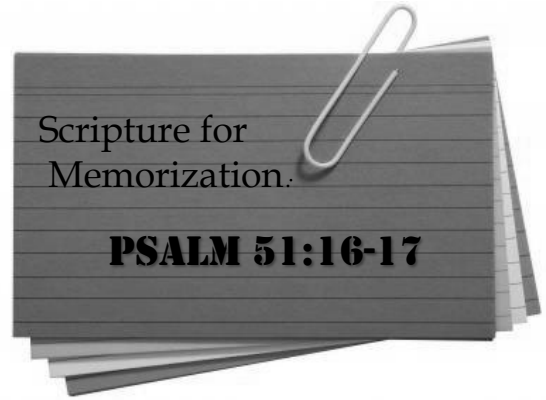
"I cannot imagine any one of you tantalizing your child by exciting in him a desire that you did not intend to gratify. It were a very ungenerous thing to offer alms to the poor, and then when they hold out their hand for it, to mock their poverty with a denial. It were a cruel addition to the miseries of the sick if they were taken to the hospital and there left to die untended and uncared for. Where God leads you to pray, He means you to receive." – C. H. Spurgeon



LESSON 9

THE DISCIPLINE OF FASTING

“Few disciplines go so radically against the flesh and the mainstream of culture as fasting. ... In most Christian circles you will rarely hear fasting mentioned, and few will have read anything about it. And yet it’s mentioned in Scripture more times than even something as important as baptism.” - Donald Whitney



If Scripture has so much to say about fasting then we would do well to study its implications for us as God’s children. Are we to fast? What is the purpose of a fast? Should we neglect this spiritual discipline? We will look at these questions as we study the idea of fasting.

FASTING IN THE SCRIPTURES

Survey the following passages on fasting and briefly write down what you learn about fasting (its nature; purpose; benefit; etc.)?

1. 1 Samuel 7:3-6 –
2. 2 Samuel 12:21-23 –
3. 1 Kings 21:27-29 –
4. 2 Chronicles 20:1-4 –
5. Nehemiah 1:1-4 –
6. Esther 4:16 –
7. Psalms 35:13 –
8. Isaiah 58:5-11 –

9. Daniel 9:2-4 –
10. Joel 2:15-16 –
11. Matthew 4:1-2 –
12. Matthew 6:16-18 –
13. Matthew 17:19-21 –
14. Luke 18:9-12 –
15. Acts 13:2-3 –
16. Acts 14:23 –

Based upon the Scriptures above how would you define fasting?

AM I COMMANDED TO FAST?

One issue that understandably concerns many people is whether or not Scripture makes fasting obligatory upon all Christians. Let's consider two texts that deal with this subject.

Read **Matt. 6:16-18**. What does Jesus say about fasting?

Read **Mark 2:18-20** When will fasting take place?

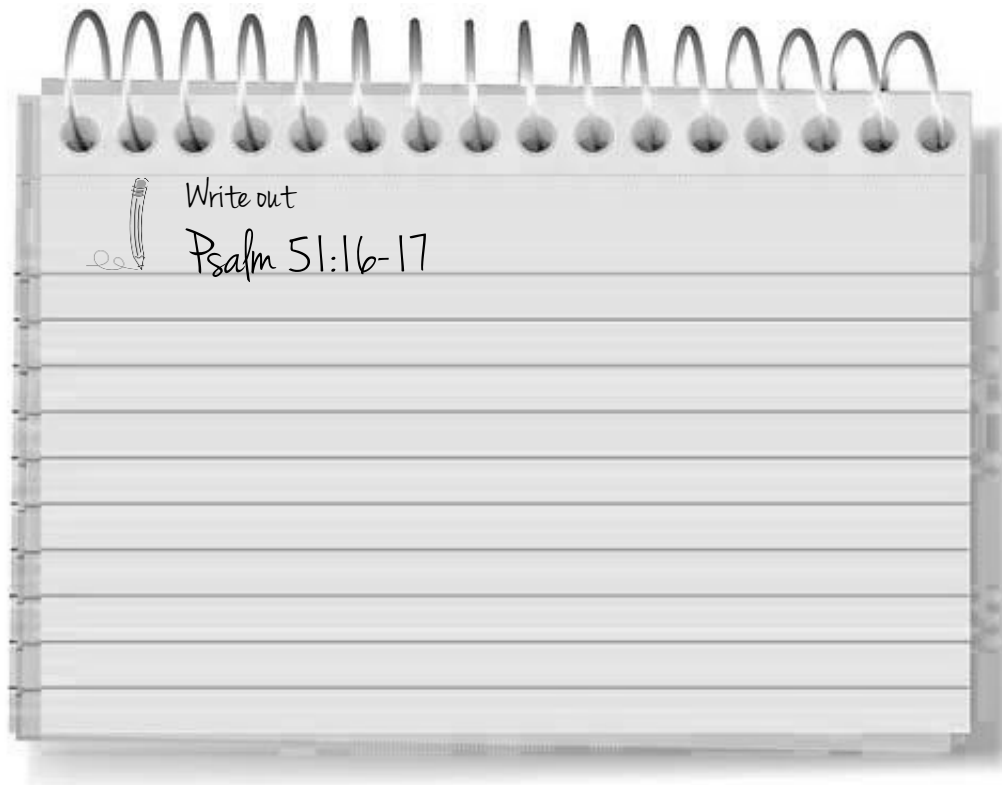
Should Christians fast? Is there any spiritual benefit or is it just some strange, ancient custom?

THE PURPOSE OF FASTING

“There’s more to a biblical fast than abstaining from food. Without a spiritual purpose for your fast it’s just a weight-loss fast. ... And without a purpose, fasting can be a miserable, self-centered experience.” - Donald Whitney

What should be the primary purpose for fasting? (See Zech. 7:5-6)

How can fasting aid us in our spiritual development in Christ?



Write out

Psalm 51:16-17

LESSON 10

THE DISCIPLINE OF SILENCE & SOLITUDE

“And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a **lonely** place, and was praying there.” **Mark 1:35**

“We live in a noisy, busy world. Silence and solitude are not twentieth-century words. They fit the era of Victorian lace, high-button shoes, and kerosene lamps better than our age of television, video arcades, and joggers wired with earphones. We have become a people with an aversion to quiet and an uneasiness with being alone.” – Jean Fleming



UNDERSTANDING SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

Silence and solitude are really the fundamental disciplines in building our spiritual life. In conjunction with these we discipline ourselves for Bible intake, prayer, and fasting. They can provide a sense of closeness to God that cannot be experienced anywhere else.

Define Silence and Solitude in your own words:

Silence –

Solitude –

Do you think we have a fear of silence and solitude? Why or Why not?

Reasons for Silence and Solitude

Read **Matt. 4:1, 14:23; Mk. 1:35; Lk. 4:42**

Why did Jesus spend so much time alone?

To be like Jesus we must discipline ourselves to find times of silence and solitude. It is in these times that we find strength just like Christ and Paul did. Their examples show us what we must do. *“In stark aloneness it is possible to have silence, to be still, and to know that Jehovah indeed is God (Ps. 46:10), to set the Lord before our minds with sufficient intensity and duration that we stay centered upon Him – our hearts fixed, established in trust (Ps. 112:7-8) – even when back in the office, shop, or home.”* – Dallas Willard

What benefits do we gain from spending time in silence and solitude?

The Following are possible reasons for silence and solitude. Dwell on these reasons and the verses given and then answer how these things might be accomplished in silence and solitude.

⇒ To hear the voice of God better (1 Kings 19:11-13, Habakkuk 2:1, Gal. 1:17)

⇒ To express worship to God (Habakkuk 2:20, Zephaniah 1:7)

⇒ To express faith in God (Ps. 62:1-6; Isaiah 30:15)

⇒ To regain a spiritual perspective and seek the will of God (Lk. 1:20, 63-64;
Lk. 6:12-13)

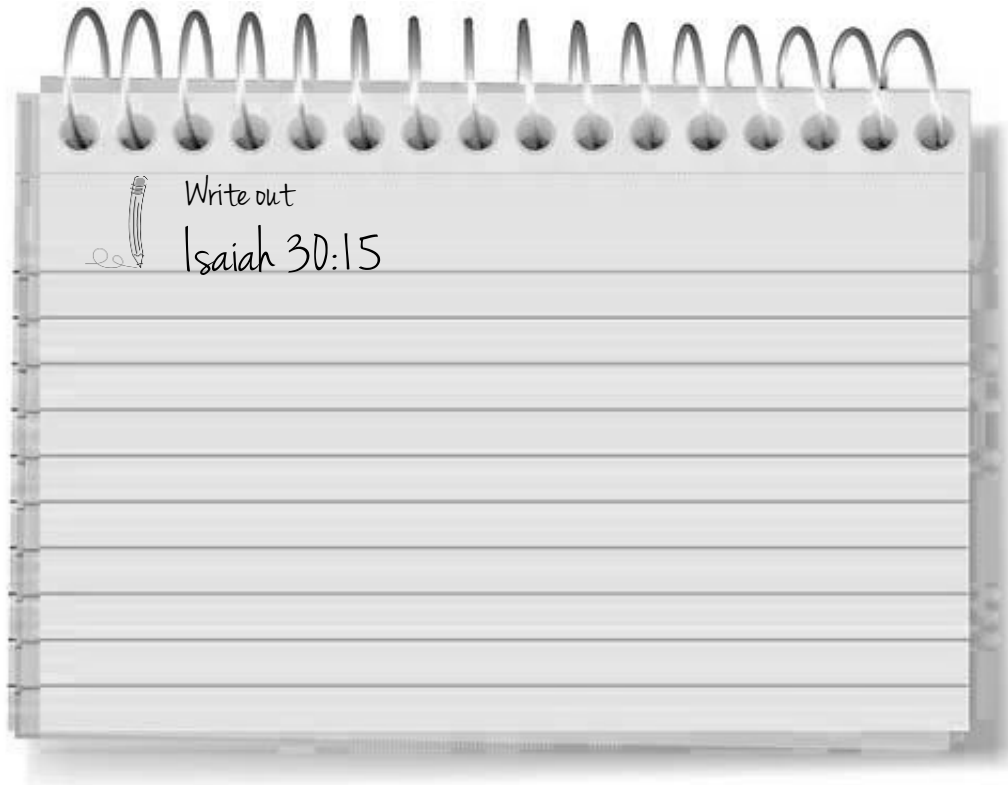
⇒ To learn control of the tongue (Jam. 1:19; Eccl. 3:7)

TAKING STEPS INTO SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

As with any discipline if we do not plan to create this habit we will never begin. And just like anything else we don't learn the habit by jumping in but by step after step after step.

1. Find "minute retreats". Consider the solitude of those early morning moments in bed before the family awakens. Think of the solitude of a morning cup of coffee before beginning the work of the day. Enjoy the solitude of the "windshield time" during rush hour traffic. During these times look to Christ and listen to His Spirit. Seize the unexpected opportunities given you and concentrate exclusively on Him and life in the Spirit.
2. Find a "quiet place". Find a place somewhere in your house where you can be alone. Find a place outside your home: a spot in a park, a trail in the woods, even a storage closet somewhere. Make that place a place designed for your solitude and silence.
3. "Get away" Find a place that you can spend a night, or a weekend in solitude and silence. Getting away gets us out of our routine and maybe helps us see things differently. Plan a get-away for a night where all you take is your Bible and a notebook.

The purpose of silence and solitude is to be able to see and hear God. What things of God are we not seeing and hearing because we won't shut off the noise?



Write out

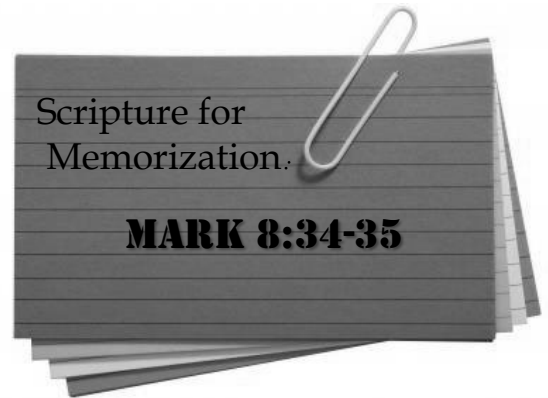
Isaiah 30:15

LESSON 11

THE DISCIPLINE OF SUBMISSION

“To have no opinion of ourselves, and to think always well and highly of others, is great wisdom and perfection.” – Thomas á Kempis

If we are to pursue godliness then the discipline of submission must be developed in our lives. Yet many have mutilated the idea of biblical submission so that we either accept the deformity or we have rejected the Discipline altogether. Let us seek to understand submission as God intended.



THE FREEDOM IN SUBMISSION

If every discipline has a corresponding freedom, then what is the freedom in submission? It has been said that submission's freedom is the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way and that we are free to value other people.

Explain how not needing to get our own way and valuing other people would be freedoms that come from the discipline of submission.

What principles can we draw from the following passages in regards to submission?

⇒ Matt. 19:30 –

⇒ Rom. 12:3-5, 10-16 –

⇒ Col. 3:18-24 –

⇒ 1 Pet. 2:18-23 –

⇒ Phil. 2:1-8 –

⇒ Eph. 5:21 –

THE SPIRIT OF SUBMISSION

As in other areas Jesus deals with the heart or attitude of man. It is possible to submit outwardly to someone and inwardly hate every moment of it. This is not submission as defined by Christ.

Mark 8:34-35 *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s sake shall save it.”*

How does Jesus define submission according to Mark 8:34-35?

TO WHOM AM I TO SUBMIT?

If Christ requires submission in every part of my life then I must submit to all men. But how do we do that? Here in lies the discipline of submission.

Explain how we as Christians are to submit to the following aspects of our lives:

⇒ The Divine God Head –

⇒ The Word of God –

⇒ Our Family –

⇒ My Brothers and Sister in Christ –

⇒ My Neighbor –

⇒ The World –

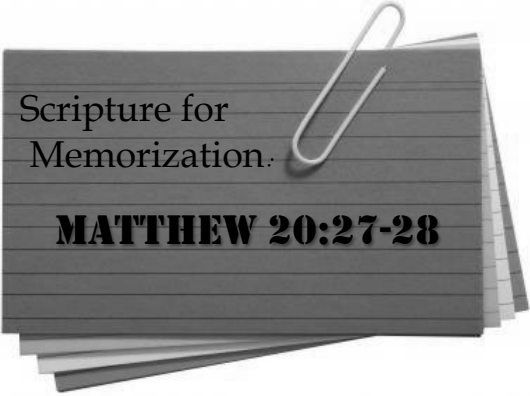


LESSON 12

THE DISCIPLINE OF SERVICE

“Serving God is not a job for the casually interested. It’s costly service. He asks for your life. He asks for service to Him to become a priority, not a pastime. He doesn’t want servants who will give Him the leftovers of their life’s commitments.” – Donald Whitney

“Although Christ’s summons to service is the most spiritually grand and noble way to live a life, it is typically as pedestrian as washing someone’s feet. Richard Foster put it starkly: ‘In some ways we would prefer to hear Jesus’ call to deny father and mother, houses and land for the sake of the gospel, than His word to wash feet. Radical self-denial gives the feel of adventure. If we forsake all, we even have the chance of glorious martyrdom. But in service we are banished to the mundane, the ordinary, the trivial.’” – Donald Whitney



Scripture for
Memorization:

MATTHEW 20:27-28

Why do you think we need to view service as a spiritual discipline?

How did Jesus demonstrate that service had become a spiritual discipline in his own life?
John 13:1-15

In what ways did Paul incorporate “service” as a discipline? How was this illustrated or manifested? **1 Cor. 9:19-23; Acts 20:18-19**

Beyond just rendering service as an occasional event (i.e., when the need arises), what steps can we take – practically and prayerfully – to make service become a regular spiritual discipline in our life?

MY ATTITUDE IN SERVICE

Many times my attitude towards serving others can affect the very service I give.

Col. 3:23-24 *“Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ.”*

In what ways will our view of others impact our ability to incorporate this discipline into our lives? (i.e. only certain people deserve my service)

In what ways will our view of ourselves impact our ability to incorporate this discipline into our lives?

SERVICE AS A BENEFIT TO ME

Matt. 20:25-28 *“Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”*

Do these verses give us instruction on how to become great? Explain.

What **benefits** do you see that might accrue by developing the discipline of service in one’s life? What will such ‘training’ lead to?

This may seem paradoxical, but how might the discipline of **service free us from bondage** to others? (consider: **Col. 3:22-24; 1 Cor. 7:22**)

Thought Question: How can we as Christians in Concord truly make service a discipline in our lives?

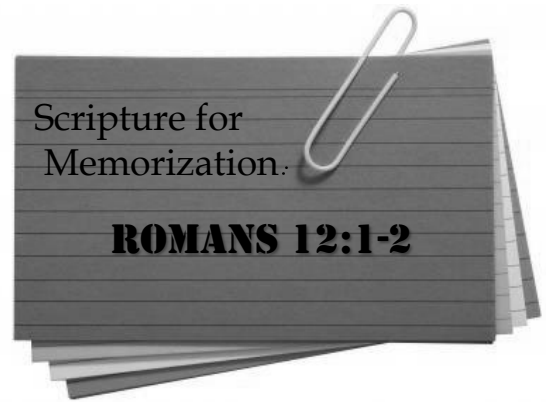


LESSON 13

THE DISCIPLINE OF WORSHIP

“To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.” – William Temple

Jesus said, *“Worship the Lord your God”* (Matt. 4:10). Yet our God does not need our worship, so why is there the command to worship? The answer comes in seeing worship as a discipline that places us on the path to His presence.



WHAT IS WORSHIP?

Before we can discipline ourselves to worship we must first know the true meaning of worship.

How would you describe worship? (Jn. 20:27-29; Rev. 4:5-11; 5:11-14)

“Just as an indescribable sunset or a breathtaking mountaintop vista evokes a spontaneous response, so we cannot encounter the worthiness of God without the response of worship”
Donald Whitney

How has God revealed His worth to us? (Rom. 1:20; 2 Tim. 3:16; Jn. 1:1,14,18; Heb. 1:1-2)

Since God has revealed Himself it is our responsibility to seek God by means of Christ and the Bible. The more that we focus on Christ and His Word the more we will understand what God is like. And the greater understanding we have of what God is like, we will respond to Him in worship.

Is it possible to sing hymns or listen to a sermon in a worship service and not be worshipping God? Explain your answer.

THE DISCIPLINE OF WORSHIP

“Worship is a Spiritual Discipline insofar as it is both an end and a means. The worship of God is an end in itself because worship, is to focus on and respond to God. There is no higher goal than focusing on and responding to God. But worship is also a means in the sense that it is a means to godliness. The more truly we worship God, the more we become like Him.” – Donald Whitney

To truly worship God as He desires requires certain elements. Without these elements we aren't worshipping but only going through the motions of worship. John gives us two of these elements in **John 4:23-24** *“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. (24) “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

Truth

“We worship God as He is revealed in the Bible, not as we might want Him to be. We worship Him as a God of both mercy and justice, of love and wrath, as God who both welcomes into Heaven and condemns into hell.” – Donald Whitney

Why is it necessary to worship God in His truth?

Spirit

The spirit of worship refers to our attitude of heart with which we enter into worship and approach God. If we come in truth but fail to have the proper heart towards God our worship is in vain. **Matt. 15:8-9** Jesus said *“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.”*⁹ *But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.”*

1) “Worship is my duty.”

2) “Worship is my joy.”

Which statement brings honor to God and which brings dishonor to Him?

Explain your answer.

Sacrifice

Since the beginning God has required worship unto Him to be a sacrifice. We see this with Cain and Able, the children of Israel and with us today. The idea sacrifice requires that we bring our very best and nothing less unto God. David said in **2 Samuel 24:24** in speaking to Araunah concerning the building of an altar to the Lord, *“No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing.”*

As we join together with other saints to worship God how is this a sacrifice unto Him?

THE END RESULT

While worship is directed towards God because of His worth, this discipline if done with the elements above will have an impact upon us. True worship brings us to see and ascribe the ultimate value to God with our whole being. When we see the worth of God it changes how we live. No longer are we living for ourselves because we are nothing compared to Him, but we live in accordance with His worth. We desire to be in His presence because He is the ultimate value in our lives.

In viewing worship as a discipline evaluate the worship that you have offered to God in the past. Has it been your best?

In what ways can you better discipline yourself in worship as you consider the great worth of God?

