



“Spiritual Disciplines”

*A study by Jim Herzberg based on the book: Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life by Donald S. Whitney.

God intends us to grow toward Christ-likeness. We **can't** wait for holiness, we must pursue it. How? The answer is found in 1 Timothy 4:7: “Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.” Whitney’s book examines the Spiritual Disciplines of Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, service, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and learning that must be practiced and developed for us to mature spiritually.

God works through the Spiritual Disciplines to change us from the inside out, and unlike the people and circumstances that God brings into our lives, He gives us the ability to decide whether or not to practice them. Although we can choose, even the most iron-willed self-discipline will not make us more holy. As Whitney says, God has given us the Spiritual Disciplines as a means of receiving His grace and growing in Godliness.

We must think of the Spiritual Disciplines as ways we can place ourselves in the path of God’s grace to seek Him and His will. We know that we will find Him willing to have mercy on us and to have communion with us. Over time and through effort, we **WILL** be transformed by Him. That is why the Disciplines must become a top priority for us if we will be Godly.

Because God commanded us to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” and because I don’t want my spirituality to be a mile wide and only an inch thick, I want to commit myself to the discipline and perseverance it will take to be more like Christ. I’ve already found out that Godliness doesn’t develop overnight or during a weekend Promise Keeper’s seminar but that it will be a *lifelong* pursuit. The bible also tells us that all believers have been given spiritual gifts and just like natural gifts, spiritual gifts must be developed by discipline in order to bear spiritual fruit. The key to these pursuits is the **purpose--to become more godly**. I will use this paper to summarize the Spiritual Disciplines as presented by Whitney and how they can help me in my journey.

Bible Intake

No Spiritual Discipline is more important or more transforming than the intake of God’s Word. The reasons for this are clear. In the Bible, God tells us about Himself, about Jesus, about His commandments, and about how we must repent and believe in Him to have eternal life. In the Bible we also learn the ways and will of the Lord. To be more Christ-like, we must know about His life and how he modeled the Spiritual Disciplines for us. There are several sub-disciplines of Bible intake.

1. **Hearing God's Word.** The easiest way to intake God's Word is simply by hearing it. We must discipline ourselves to regularly hear it and for most of us that means steadfastly attending a church where the Word of God is faithfully preached. Radio and tapes can be other ways of hearing the Word. The statement, "I don't need to go to church to worship," is somewhat true that God may be worshipped in many places but the ongoing worship of God cannot be separated from the Word of God. Mere passive listening isn't good enough. Preparing ourselves to hear, including reverence and a spirit of seeking God is required.

2. **Reading God's Word.** Because Jesus said, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on EVERY word that comes from the mouth of God," (Matthew 4:4), He intended us to read every word. God promises that those who read and heed His Word will be blessed, but only those who discipline themselves to do it will receive those blessings. As one poll concluded, "no factor is more influential in shaping a person's moral and social behavior than regular Bible reading." Should we choose the bible or TV to shape us and our children? As we face problems, temptations, and pressures from this earthly life everyday, we should read the bible EVERY day. A bible reading guide:

- a. **Find the time.** Morning is best for me so that I can encounter Christ in the Scriptures when it will have the greatest impact on my day. If I don't make time to get up early, it doesn't happen.
- b. **Find a Bible-reading plan** and keep a record of which books you have read.
Examples:
 - Three chapters every day and five on Sundays = the Bible in one year.
 - Three chapters in Old Testament and three in New Testament every day = Old Testament once and New Testament four times in one year.
 - Read in five places each day. Genesis(the Law), Joshua(History), Job(Poetry), Isaiah(the Prophets), and Matthew (the New Testament).
 - Read in three places each day. Genesis, Job and Matthew.
- c. **Find at least one word,** phrase or verse to MEDITATE on each time you read or you may close your bible and not remember a single thing you have read. If that happens, your Bible reading is not likely to change you.

3. **Studying God's Word.** Reading God's word gives us breadth, but studying it gives us depth. Why do so many Christians neglect the study of God's word? Our main problem is that WE ARE LAZY. Other insecurities of how to study or even where to begin can be overcome by starting with some paper and something to write with. Write down the observations about the text as you read and record the questions that come to mind. Look up cross references. Outline the chapter you are reading. Other ways to consider are character studies, topical studies, and book studies. There are many books on how to study the Bible, the key is to NOT SETTLE ONLY ON SPIRITUAL FOOD THAT HAS BEEN "PREDIGESTED" BY OTHERS. As Whitney says, our growth in Godliness is greatly affected by the quality, not just quantity of our Bible intake. Hearing, reading, and studying with a focus on becoming Godlike will provide that quality.

4. **Memorizing God's Word.** 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, providing timely guidance for ourselves. There's added power against temptation when a specific verse can be brought to

mind. The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, can make the difference in the spiritual battles we fight every day. Whitney reinforces that the Holy Spirit cannot give you this weapon to use against Satan until you have stored it in the armory of your mind. Memorizing Scripture also strengthens your faith because it repeatedly reinforces the truth, often just when you need to hear it again. Scripture memory can also prepare us for unexpected witnessing or counseling opportunities that come our way. Some ideas on memorizing Scripture:

- A. **Select verses on a particular topic** where the Lord is working in your life right now. If you're struggling with a habit, find verses that would help you experience victory over it.
- B. **Memorize** a section of Scripture, such as a psalm, rather than isolated verses. Memorize the verses perfectly-word for word and learn the reference too.
- C. **Write out verses.** Make a list of verses on a sheet of paper or write each one on a separate index card.
- D. **Draw picture reminders** to make the verse "visual."
- E. **Find a method of accountability.** Meet with someone regularly to review your verses.
- F. **Review and meditate** on your verses EVERY day. Remember, the goal is not to see how many verses we can memorize, the goal is to memorize the Word of God so that it can transform our minds and our lives.

5. **Meditating on God's Word.** Meditation is both commanded by God and modeled by the godly in Scripture. Christian meditation involves filling your mind with God and truth unlike some kinds of meditation where emptying your mind is the goal. Whitney's definition of meditation is deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer. He says it goes beyond hearing, reading, studying, and even memorizing but that it is like a bag of tea immersed completely and letting it steep until the entire flavor has been extracted. True success is promised (Joshua 1:8) to those who meditate on God's Word, not just at one time each day, but at moments throughout the day and night. The fruit of their meditation is stability, fruitfulness, perseverance, and prosperity. How do we meditate?

- a. **Select an appropriate passage.** Verses that conspicuously relate to your concerns and personal needs are clearly targets for meditation.
- b. **Repeat it** in different ways.
- c. **Rewrite it** in your own words.
- d. **Look for applications of the text.** **The outcome of meditation should be application.
- e. **Pray through the text.** Pray for His illumination in your meditation.

- f. ***Don't Rush, take time!*** Read less in order to have some unhurried time for meditation.

6. ***Applying God's Word.*** The Bible promises (James 1:22-25, John 13:17) the blessing of God on those who apply the Word of God to their lives. Whitney encourages us, that because God wills for us to be a doer of His Word, to open the Book expectantly, anticipating the discovery of a practical use for the truth of God. Take every word as spoken to you. Believe that what you are reading was meant for you as well as the first recipients. To do this and understand how it applies now we must understand how it was intended for those who heard it first. Not every promise is meant to be applied today in exactly the same ways as it originally was. Yet many other promises are general, universal, and perpetual in their application. Our problem continues to be more of a lack of action than comprehension. How does the Word memorized become the Word applied? Whitney answers that it happens through meditation. He also gives examples of application-oriented questions that can help us become a doer of God's Word:

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

Whitney says that an encounter with God through His Word should result in at least one specific response. You should be able to name at least one definite response you have made or will make to what you have read. Regardless of the nature of that response, consciously commit yourself to at least one action to take following the intake of God's Word.

****PRAYER****

God has a Very Large Ear that is continuously open to us. He will hear every prayer of His children, even when our prayers are "weaker than a snowflake." (Whitney) Of all the Spiritual Disciplines, prayer is second only to the intake of God's Word in importance. Whitney says that one of the main reasons for a lack of Godliness is prayerlessness. The fact is that to be like Jesus we must pray. God expects us to pray:

Colossians 4:2, "Devote yourselves to prayer."

1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray continually."

In His love, He desires to communicate with us and to bless us. Prayer is a relationship, an expression of a Christian's unbroken relationship with the Father. **If Jesus needed to pray, how much more do we need to pray?** Why don't we do it then? A lack of discipline. Sometimes doubt about an answer causes us not to pray. Many prayers are answered in ways that cannot be seen in the material realm. Whitney says that prayer is learned:

*By praying. The Holy Spirit teaches praying people how to pray better.

*By meditating on scripture. Meditation is the missing link between Bible intake and prayer. Whitney quotes Thomas Manton who says, "What we take in by the Word we digest by meditation and let out by prayer." William Bridge said that meditation "is the sister of reading and the mother of prayer."

*By praying with others. We pray with other believers to learn principles of prayer, NOT phrases for prayer.

*By reading about prayer. “He who walks with the wise grows wise” is the teaching of Proverbs 27:17 Reading the books of wise men and women of prayer gives us the privilege of “walking” with them and learning the insights God gave them on how to pray.

PRAYER IS ANSWERED!(Matthew 7:7-8) Where God leads you to pray, He means you to receive.(C.H. Spurgeon) We often must pray persistently before the answers come. Sometimes a failure to persist in prayer proves that we were not serious about our request in the first place. At other times God wants us to persist in prayer in order to strengthen our faith in Him.

WORSHIP

Godliness without the worship of God is unthinkable but it is possible to worship God in vain. “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain.”(Matthew 15:8-9) To worship God is to ascribe the proper worth to God, to magnify His worthiness of praise. He is worthy of all the worth and honor we can give Him and then infinitely more.

Worship is focusing on and responding to God. We can focus on God because He is revealed to us through creation, and through His Word, the Bible. That’s why both the public and private worship of God should be based upon and include so much of the Bible. This focus of the mind and heart means being preoccupied with God. We must be sincere in our acts of worship. If it isn’t, hypocrisy is the result.

Believers are expected to participate regularly in corporate worship (Hebrews 10:25). Christianity is not an isolationist religion. If you only express and experience Christianity almost always on the individual level, you will needlessly and sinfully miss much of the blessing and power of God. There is an element of worship and Christianity that CANNOT be experienced in private worship or by watching worship on TV. There are some graces and blessings that God gives only in the “meeting together” with other believers but public worship does not excuse us from secret worship. As Whitney says, “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?” Thank the Lord that He does not limit our access to Him and enjoyment of His presence to one day per week!! The Lord Jesus Christ is willing to meet with you privately for as long as you want, and He is willing-even eager-to meet with us every day. I don’t want to be characterized as the average modern man who, “worships his work, works at his play, and plays at his worship.” Regular corporate worship weekly AND private daily worship must be part of my path to Godliness.

EVANGELISM

Godliness requires that we discipline ourselves in the practice of evangelism. All Christians are not expected to use the same methods of evangelism, but all Christians are expected to evangelize (Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, John 20:21, Acts 1:8). Jesus said, “I am sending you.” That makes it crystal clear that he has commanded us to witness.

What is evangelism? Evangelism is communicating the gospel. *FEAR* is the reason why most don’t speak of Christ more often, but God not only calls us to witness but provides us with both the power to witness AND a powerful message. Having Acts 1:8 power means that God will empower your life and words in the sharing of the gospel in ways you will often not perceive. That’s why we can be confident that some will believe if we will faithfully and

tenaciously share the gospel. Don't doubt the power of God to add His blessing upon your words when you speak of Christ. It is the GOSPEL that is the power of God for salvation and not our own powerful speech or persuasiveness. We need to learn that sharing the gospel IS successful evangelism. Only God can convert someone. We just need to share the good news. There is also a power for evangelism in living a sincere Christian life. The Lord empowers the life and the words of the faithful believer with a power of spiritual attraction.

We must not just wait for witnessing opportunities to happen. Before we make any excuses of "not enough time" for witnessing, Whitney says we need to ask ourselves: Do we really want to say that we are too busy to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to make disciples of unbelievers(Matthew 28:19-20)? Do we expect that at the Judgment Jesus will excuse us from the single most important responsibility He gave to us because we say, "I didn't have time?"

The key is not to just rub shoulders with unbelievers every day but to speak and act with them in such a way that their hearts and minds might be open to the gospel. Whitney says the best way he has found is to ask a person how you can pray for him or her. This means you have to discipline yourself to be with unbelievers. A good way for me to do it is to get with my crew during off-hours or to invite our neighbors over for a meal. Whitney comes right to the point when he says that, "many opportunities for evangelism will never take place if you wait for them to occur spontaneously. The world, the flesh, and the Devil will do their best to see to that." Knowing how to respond to people as individuals implies reflection and preparation. I want to be ready!

SERVING

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. Serving God isn't a short-term responsibility either. Whitney reminds us that many times in service we will be banished to the mundane, the ordinary, the trivial.

Two of the deadliest of our sins--sloth and pride--put chains on our hands and feet so that we don't serve as we know we should or even as we want to. If we don't discipline ourselves to serve for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom (and for the purpose of godliness), we'll serve only occasionally or when it's convenient or self-serving.

There are six motives for serving:

1. ***Motivated by Obedience.*** God commands us to serve Him (Deuteronomy 13:4). We should serve the Lord because we want to obey Him. We disobey God when we are not serving Him. Not to serve God is sinful.
2. ***Motivated by Gratitude.*** It is no burden to serve God when we consider what great things He has done for us (1 Samuel 12:24). If we cannot be grateful servants of Him who is everything and who gave us everything, what will make us grateful?
3. ***Motivated by Gladness.*** We are not to serve God grudgingly or grimly, but gladly (Psalm 100:2). For the believer, serving God is not a burden, it's a privilege.

4. **Motivated by Forgiveness, Not Guilt.** Because God has taken our sins and guilt away, we should be like Isaiah, straining to serve God in some way, any way. We need to respond to the Lord like he did saying, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:6-8) “The child of God works not to be saved, but because he is saved.”(C.H. Spurgeon)
5. **Motivated by Humility.** Jesus is the perfect example of how all His followers should serve with humility (feet washing, etc.). Because self-righteous service requires external rewards, we must reject it as sinful motivation. Serve in humility, considering others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3).
6. **Motivated by Love.** “Serve one another in love.” (Galatians 5:13) The more we love God the more we will live for Him and serve Him, and the more we love others the more we will serve them.

Every Christian is gifted to serve (1 Peter 4:10) with one of the seven spiritual gifts listed in Romans 12:4-8. You may still serve well without knowing the name of your gift. **The best way to discover and confirm which spiritual gift is yours is through serving.** If God didn’t intend for your gift to be used, there would be no longer any purpose for your life. Why would God allow us to live beyond any usefulness to Him?

Sometimes serving God and others is nothing less than hard work. God supplies us with the power to serve Him. As Whitney reminds us, “service costing nothing accomplishes nothing.” Even though serving God can be agonizing and exhausting work, it is also the most fulfilling and rewarding kind of work. “...know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:58) God sees and knows of your service to Him, and He will never forget it. He will reward you in Heaven.(Hebrews 6:10) “...but for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”(Joshua 24:15)

Wanted: Gifted volunteers for difficult service in the local expression of the Kingdom of God. Motivation to serve should be obedience to God, gratitude, gladness, forgiveness, humility, and love. Service will rarely be glorious. Temptation to quit place of service will sometimes be strong. Volunteers must be faithful in spite of long hours, little or no visible results, and possibly no recognition except from God in eternity.

STEWARDSHIP

Time and money are such substantial factors in our lives today that their stewardship must be part of our Spiritual Disciplines.

A. **Time.** Whitney gives us 10 Biblical reasons why time is so important.

1. Use Time Wisely “Because the Days are Evil.” The great thieves of time in our day are the flesh, and the Devil. The natural course of our minds, our bodies, our world, and our days leads us toward evil, NOT toward Christlikeness. Our thoughts must be disciplined.(Colossians 3:2) Our bodies are inclined to ease, pleasure, gluttony, and sloth. Unless we practice self-control, our bodies will tend to serve evil more than God.
2. Wise Use of Time Is the Preparation for Eternity. In this earthly life you must prepare for eternity. There will be no second chance. Whitney comes right to the point when he asks, “Do you realize that whether you experience unending joy or eternal agony

depends on what happens in moments of your life just like this one?” What is more precious than time?

3. Time is Short. Time would not be so precious if we never died, but since we are never more than a breath away from death, the way we use our time has ETERNAL significance. Even the longest earthly life is brief in comparison to eternity.
4. Time is Passing. “The world and its desires pass away” (1 John 2:17). As we grow older, time seems to pass even faster. What’s left of our time on earth is passing quickly away.
5. The Remaining Time Is Uncertain. Not only is time short and passing, we don’t even know how short it is or how quickly it will pass (Proverbs 27:1). Whitney gets my attention when he points out that there are thousands who entered eternity (heaven or hell!) today, including thousands who were younger than you, who yesterday had no idea that today would be their last day. “Our time is in His hands.”(Psalm 31:15)
6. Time Lost Cannot Be Regained. Once time is gone, it is gone forever and can NEVER be regained. Jesus said in John 9:4, “As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.” If you misuse the time God offers to you, He never offers that time again. Despite how you may have wasted time in your past, you can improve the time that remains.
7. You are Accountable to God for Your Time. God will hold us accountable at the Judgment for our use of time. We will have to give an account of every hour spent carelessly. Jonathan Edwards suggested living each day as if at the end of that day you had to give an account to God of how you used your time.
8. Time Is So Easily Lost. The modern day “sluggard” might say, “If I discipline my time for the purpose of Godliness, I might miss interesting things on TV, or become so busy I won’t get enough rest.” Proverbs 24:33-34 warns of time and opportunities lost. If people threw away their money as thoughtlessly as they throw away their time, we would think them insane. Yet time is infinitely more precious than money because money can’t buy time.
9. We Value Time at Death. If you suddenly realized you had no more time, would you regret how you have spent your time in the past and how you spend it now? Won’t you be glad for those parts of your life that you spent in the Scriptures, prayer, worship, evangelism, serving, fasting, etc., for the purpose of godliness.
10. Time’s Valued in Eternity. If there are any regrets in Heaven, they will only be that we did not use our earthly time more for the glory of God and for growth in His grace.

We all need to evaluate our use of time in the following areas to see if we are spending them as God would have it: Bible intake, prayer, worship, the Lord’s Day, family, work, work in and around your home, hobbies, TV, sports, exercise, recreation, sleep, and showering/dressing for the day. **At the heart of the biblical Discipline of time is doing the will of God when it ought to be done!**

B. **Money.** The reasoned use of money and the things it buys is one of the best indicators of spiritual maturity and godliness. Do we exchange a great part of our lives for things of this world? Because we invest most of our days working in exchange for money, there is a very real sense in which our money represents us. Therefore, how we use it expresses who we are, what our priorities are, and what's in our hearts. Whitney gives us ten New Testament principles of giving.

1. **God Owns Everything You Own.** Because He created everything, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." (1 Corinthians 10:26, Psalm 24:1) That means we are the managers or stewards of the things God has given us. God wants us to use and enjoy the things He has allowed us to have, but as temporary stewards we need to remember that they belong to Him and are primarily to be used for His Kingdom. Whitney says the question is not, "How much of my money should I give to God?" but rather, "How much of God's money should I keep for myself?"
2. **Giving Is an Act of Worship.** Giving should bring you joy like singing and giving Him praises.
3. **Giving Reflects Faith in God's Provision.** The proportion of your income that you give back to God is one distinct indication of how much you trust Him to provide for your needs. The more we believe God will provide for our needs, the more we are willing to risk giving to Him. And the less we trust God, the less we will give Him.
4. **Giving Should Be Sacrificial and Generous.** Giving isn't sacrificial unless it's a sacrifice. Only a few professing Christians give sacrificially as shown in a Gallup Poll in 1988 where the more money Americans make, the LESS sacrificially our giving becomes.
5. **Giving Reflects Spiritual Trustworthiness.** 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 with Christ and your spiritual trustworthiness. Your checkbook tells more about you than almost anything else.
6. **Giving—Love, Not Legalism.** Giving should be a way of proving your love for God. Instead of comparing what you give against someone else, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give." (2 Corinthians 9:7)
7. **Give Willingly, Thankfully, and Cheerfully.** God loves a cheerful giver! There are three kinds of giving: grudge giving, duty giving, and thanksgiving. Grudge giving says, "I have to"; duty giving says, "I ought to"; thanksgiving says, "I want to."
8. **Giving—An Appropriate Response to Real Needs.** Christians give through the church in response to specific needs: foreign and home missions, world hunger, etc.
9. **Giving Should Be Planned and Systematic.** There is no excuse to appear empty-handed before the Lord when we come to worship Him. Plan ahead and give regularly. The more you prosper, the higher should be the proportion of your giving. Giving ten percent of your gross income does not necessarily mean you have fulfilled the will of God. That's not a ceiling of giving to stop at, but a floor to move from. Whenever you

get a raise, unless there are unusual circumstances, plan to give a greater percentage than you're now giving.

10. Generous Giving Results in Bountiful Blessing. Jesus said in Luke 6:38, "Give and it will be given to you... For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." If you give to God, God will give to you. If you bountifully give to Him, He will give bountifully to you. I agree with Whitney when he says that financial gain may not be your reward but earthly blessings of an unspecified nature will be given to those who are faithful stewards of God's money.

No matter how much or little you have, as a believer you can discipline yourself to use your money for the greatest purposes on earth: for the glory of God and "for the purpose of godliness."

FASTING

Fasting is the most feared and misunderstood of all the Spiritual Disciplines. Christians in a gluttonous, denial-less, self-indulgent society may struggle to accept and begin the practice of fasting. A biblical definition of fasting is a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. There are several types of fasts:

- *A *normal* fast involves abstaining from all food, but not from water or fruit juices.
- *A *partial* fast is a limitation of the diet but not abstention from all food.
- *An *absolute* fast is the avoidance of all food and liquid, even water.
- *An example of a *supernatural* fast is where Moses fasted for 40 days with no water or food on Mount Sinai.
- *A *private* fast is one where we should fast in a way not to be noticed by others.
- **Congregational* fasts are where at least part of a congregation fasts together.
- *A *regular* fast is one where fasting is done on specific days regularly.
- **Occasional* fasts occur on special occasions as the need arises.

Jesus expected that His followers would fast. "And when you fast..."(Matthew 6:16-17). When you fast you aren't to look like you're fasting. The only Observer of your fast should be the Secret One. No one else should know that you are fasting unless it is absolutely unavoidable or necessary. God promises this about fasting, "And your Father, who sees what is done in secret, WILL REWARD YOU." How long should we fast? See examples from the Bible listed on page 164 in Whitney's book.

Fasting is to be done for a purpose. Without a purpose, fasting can be a miserable, self-centered experience. Whitney has condensed the many purposes for fasting into ten major categories (none of the purposes is to earn God's favor).

1. To Strengthen Prayer. Fasting sharpens the edge of our intercessions and gives passion to our supplications. Fasting is one of the best friends we can introduce to our prayer life.
2. To Seek God's Guidance. Fasting can be used to more clearly discern the will of God. Fasting does not ensure the certainty of receiving clear guidance from God. Rightly practiced, however, it does make us more receptive to the One who loves to guide us.

3. To Express Grief. Death, grief for sins, grief for the sins of others can all be reasons for fasting.
4. To Seek Deliverance or Protection. One of the most common fasts in biblical times was a fast to seek salvation from enemies or circumstances. Fasting, rather than fleshly efforts, should be one of our first defenses against “persecution” from family, schoolmates, neighbors, or coworkers because of our faith.
5. To Express Repentance and the Return to God. Grief over sin that signals a commitment to obedience and a new direction. It is a perversion of fasting to try to use it to balance self-punishment for a sinful part of life we want to continue feeding.
6. To Humble Oneself Before God. Fasting, when practiced with the right motives, is a physical expression of humility before God, just as kneeling or prostrating yourself in prayer can reflect humility before Him.
7. To Express Concern for the Work of God. Christians may fast and pray because they feel a burden for the work of God in a broader scope. A Christian might feel compelled to fast and pray for the work of God in a place that has experienced tragedy, disappointment, or apparent defeat.
8. To Minister to the Needs of Others. The kind of fasting that pleases God is one that results in concern for others and not just for ourselves. Fast for one meal or one day and use that time for ministry. Besides time, some fast so that they can give to the poor or to some ministry the money they would have spent on food during that period.
9. To Overcome Temptation and Dedicate Yourself to God. There are times we struggle with temptation, or we anticipate grappling with it, when we need extra spiritual strength to overcome it. In times of exceptional temptation, exceptional measures are required. Fasting for the purpose of overcoming the temptation and of renewing our dedication to God is a Christ-like response.
10. To Express Love and Worship to God. Disciplining yourself to fast means that you love God more than you love food, seeking Him is more important to you than eating. This means your stomach **isn't** your God. Another way of fasting to express love and worship to God is to spend your mealtime in praise and adoration of God. Delay eating a particular meal until you have had your daily time of Bible intake and prayer. Fasting must always have a spiritual purpose—a God-centered purpose, not a self-centered one—for the Lord to bless our fast. We cannot manipulate God to do our bidding by fasting any more than we can by any other means. When our fast is rightly motivated, we can be sure that God WILL bless us, but perhaps not in the way we wanted. Fasting should always have a purpose, and we must learn to elevate His purposes over ours. It is much more rewarding to feast on God than food (Matthew 4:4). We should not fear the blessings of fasting.

****SILENCE AND SOLITUDE****

There is something both appealing and transforming about silence and solitude. There are times when we must temporarily withdraw into the Disciplines of silence and solitude. We must balance this with the fact that is neither right or desirable to be cloistered from our God-

given responsibilities involving other people. Biblical reality calls us to family, fellowship, evangelism, and ministry for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom.

The Discipline of silence is the voluntary and temporary abstention from speaking so that certain spiritual goals might be sought. This can be called an “outward silence” but silence can also be maintained inwardly so that God’s voice might be heard more clearly.

Solitude is the Spiritual Discipline of voluntarily and temporarily withdrawing to privacy for spiritual purposes. The period of solitude may last only a few minutes or for days. Both silence and solitude may be sought in order to participate without interruption in other Spiritual Disciplines, or just to be alone with God.

There are many biblical reasons for making priorities of the Disciplines of silence and solitude:

1. Follow Jesus’ Example. (Matthew 4:1, 14:23, Mark 1:35, Luke 4:42)
2. To Hear the Voice of God Better. There are times to eliminate the voices of the world in order to hear undistracted the voice of God.
3. To Express Worship to God. The worship of God does not always require words, sounds, or actions. Sometimes worship consists of a God-focused stillness and hush. Worshipping God in silence may occur because your head is so full that words cannot express your love for Him.
4. To Express Faith in God. The simple act of silence before the Lord, as opposed to coming to Him in a wordy fret, can be a demonstration of faith in Him.
5. To Seek the Salvation of the Lord.
6. To Be Physically and Spiritually Restored.
7. To Regain a Spiritual Perspective. Closing our mouths can help us open our minds.
8. To Seek the Will of God.
9. To Learn Control of the Tongue. The skills of observation and listening are also sharpened in those who practice silence and solitude so that when they do speak there’s more of a freshness and depth to their words. Control of the tongue also promotes a Christ-like control of “the whole body.”

Suggestions for silence and solitude:

1. Minute Retreats
2. A Goal of Daily Silence and Solitude. Unless we plan for daily times of solitary silence before God, the devil WILL fill them with noise, hurry, and crowds...
3. Getting Away for Solitude and Silence. This may mean nothing more than finding an empty room in your church in which to spend an afternoon, an evening, or a Saturday. Or it may involve spending a night or a weekend at a retreat center, lodge,

or cabin.

4. Special Places. These places can be found within the home, within walking distance, within a few minutes' drive, and for overnight or longer retreats.
5. Put these times of extended silence and solitude on the calendar.

As sleep and rest are needed each day for the body, so silence and solitude are needed each day for the soul. If you don't, the world, the flesh, and the Enemy of your soul will take over.

JOURNALING

A journal for a Christian is a place to record the works and ways of God in your life. Your journal also can include an account of daily events, a diary of personal relationships, a notebook of insights into Scripture, and a list of prayer requests. The value of journaling:

1. Help in Self-Understanding and Evaluation. Recording the events of the day and noting your reactions to them causes us to examine ourselves much more thoroughly than we would otherwise. A journal can be the means by which the Holy Spirit shows us areas of sin or weakness. Journaling is a way to observe patterns in your life you've not seen before. It also can be a means of propelling us into action for others.
2. Help in Meditation. The discipline of writing down our meditations in a journal helps us to concentrate.
3. Help in Expressing Thoughts and Feelings to the Lord. Journaling can be a good way of expressing our thoughts when spoken words won't do.
4. Help in Remembering the Lord's works. We tend to forget just how many times God has blessed us or answered specific prayers, made timely provision, and done marvelous things in our lives. But having a place to collect all these memories prevents their being forgotten. As Francis Bacon said, "If a man writes little, he need have a great memory."
5. Help in Creating and Preserving a Spiritual Heritage. Journaling is an effective way of teaching the things of God to our children and transmitting our faith into the future.
6. Help in Clarifying and Articulating Insights and Impressions. Thoughts disentangle themselves when passed through the lips and across the fingertips. Writing down the meditations of quiet time with the Lord, those impressions stay with us much longer. Insights from our quiet time written down in our journal can be ready for us later in conversation, counseling, encouraging, and witnessing.
7. Help in Monitoring Goals and Priorities. A journal is a good way to keep before us the things we want to do and to emphasize. Journaling can be a way of maintaining self-accountability for spiritual goals and priorities.

8. Help in Maintaining the Other Spiritual Disciplines. Our journal can be a place where we record our progress with all the Spiritual Disciplines.

****LEARNING****

We should discipline ourselves to be intentional learners like Jesus. There is humility with the truly wise because they know there is so much they have yet to learn. We're commanded in Proverbs 23:12, "Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge." Learning is a lifelong Discipline. God is glorified when we use the mind He made to learn of Him, His ways, His word, and His world. 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. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be TRANSFORMED by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2) We will not become more like Christ if we don't know more of what Christ is like. **NO ONE IS CHANGED BY AN UNREAD BIBLE.** Study is one of the central ways God changes us. We need to be intentional learners, not accidental learners.

****CONCLUSION****

The Godly person is a busy person. The Godly person is devoted to God and to people and that leads to a full life. The Spiritual Disciplines are God-given means by which busy believers become like Christ. Slow, plodding perseverance in the Spiritual Disciplines is better than a sometimes spectacular but generally inconsistent practice. There are three things that will help us persevere in the practice of the Spiritual Disciplines:

1. The Role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's presence creates a hunger for holiness. He gives the believer a desire to be like Christ. Self-control is a direct product or "fruit," of the Spirit's control in a believer's life.
2. The Role of Fellowship. Spiritual maturity also includes growth in fellowship with the children of God. Some Disciplines cannot be practiced without other Christians—public worship, united prayer, serving other disciples, and so on. The common Christian fails to distinguish between socializing and fellowship. It is possible to socialize without having fellowship. Socializing involves the sharing of human and earthly life. Christian fellowship involves the sharing of spiritual life. Whatever the social setting in which fellowship happens, it should involve sharing the life of Christ in both word and deed. As we live like Christ when together, we encourage each other in Christian living. Hebrews 3:13 "But encourage one another daily, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."
3. The Role of Struggle. Don't be misled into thinking that if you drink of the grace God offers through the Spiritual Disciplines then living the Christian life will be easy. **ALL** Christians struggle. 1 Timothy 4:7-8 "And for this we labor and strive." The words labor and strive tell us that becoming like Christ involves a lot more than to "let go and let God." Labor means to work until one is weary. Strive means to struggle. **WE ARE IN A BATTLE, A CONFLICT, A STRUGGLE.** We have a personal Enemy committed to our failure in the Disciplines—the Devil. Self-discipline is not self-punishment. It is instead an attempt to do what, prompted by the Spirit, you actually want in your heart to do!

Whether you realize it or not, **EVERYTHING** you do is for eternity. **NOTHING** has an impact only in this earthly life. We must finally give an account before God of how we have

spent our lives (Romans 14:12) and will suffer reward or loss based upon each of our works in this life (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). There are **no** shortcuts to godliness. The flesh broods for an easier way than through the Spiritual Disciplines. The flesh, our natural inclination toward sin, does not contribute to our spiritual growth. Unless we labor to put to death the misdeeds of the body (Romans 8:13), our progress in godliness will be very slow. Unless we find practical ways to cooperate with the Holy Spirit against our tendency toward spiritual sloth, we will not build ourselves up in the faith (Jude 20): we will drift toward spiritual entropy instead. Life NEVER settles or slows down. The key to being more Christ-like is repetition of the Spiritual Disciplines.

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