Disciplines of the Christian Life

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Course Description

This is one of the courses in the Tools for Teens curriculum. Disciplines of the Christian Life will examine several aspects of discipleship. The goal of these lessons is to show the student what a disciple is, what discipleship is, and how to engage in spiritual disciplines.

(1 Quarter: 11 Lessons)

About “Tools for Teens”

Tools for Teens is a complete discipleship curriculum designed to ground teens in biblical/theological content. The authors of this material believe in the following:

• Teens must be enabled to understand the doctrines of the Bible.
• Teens must be enabled to understand the content of the Bible.
• Teens must be enabled to understand the historical roots of Baptists, Christianity, and Fundamentalism.
• Teens must be enabled to relate to one another, authorities, and their community from a biblical perspective.

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DISCIPLINE – not a very pleasant thought to most people. It conjures up images of work, sweat, discomfort, and even pain. Yet the Bible repeatedly describes the Christian life as one of discipline. It was not without reason that Jesus called his followers “disciples.” Paul spoke of training, competing, and fighting in his descriptions of the Christian life. So it should be no surprise that discipline plays a major role in the life of a believer. No pain, no gain!

A study of the disciplines of the Christian life is valuable, especially in an age in which any requirements laid down for believers are criticized as being legalistic or unnecessary. Modern believers often desire the benefits of Christianity, but they are unwilling to exert the energy needed to attain them. They want to know biblical truth without taking the time to read the Bible. They want the strength to withstand temptation, but are unwilling to spend time in prayer and memorization of Scripture. They want to see souls saved, but are too busy to talk with their neighbors about the Lord. They want a vibrant, meaningful relationship with God, but don’t meet with Him on a regular basis. Such unwillingness to engage in spiritual disciplines results in believers who are weak, ignorant, and apathetic.

This series of lessons will examine several aspects of discipleship and the disciplines of the Christian life. The goal of these lessons is to show the student what a disciple is, what discipleship is, and how to engage in spiritual disciplines. This will hopefully encourage the student to commit himself or herself to pursuing such disciplines throughout life. The ultimate goal is the growth and strengthening of the student to the glory of God.
Series Plan

Introduction

Part 1: What is a Disciple?

Lesson 1: Definitions: disciple, discipleship, discipline

Lesson 2: Characteristics and Costs of a Disciple

Part 2: Living a Disciplined Life

Lesson 3: The Disciplined Life

Lesson 4: Bible Intake

- Lesson 5: Part a: hearing, reading, and studying
- Lesson 6: Part b: memorizing, meditating, and applying

Lesson 7: Prayer

Lesson 8: Devotions

Lesson 9: Worship

Lesson 10: Evangelism

Lesson 11: Service

Lesson 12: Stewardship

Lesson 13: Other Disciplines: Learning, Fasting

Theme text:

1 Timothy 4:7–8 But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

These verses compare physical exercise to spiritual exercise. What does Paul mean here by “exercise
thyself rather unto godliness”? If we look at the words closely, we will find parallels between physical and spiritual fitness.

exercise = train, discipline. From gymnadzo. The picture is that of a Greek gymnasium, where young people would work out, race, wrestle, box, etc.

- not easy – requires work, rigorous effort
- regular, periodic or else ineffective
- requires ridding oneself of all encumbrances [The Greek word gumnos means “naked.” Athletes used to compete without clothes so that nothing would inhibit their efforts.]
- think of spiritual disciplines as exercise, like a trip to the gym for your soul.

thyself = yourself. Self-discipline. Nobody can do this for you.

unto = toward, for. Emphasis on goal, result.

godliness = conduct that honors God.

Thus, “train yourself with the goal of living in a way that honors God.”

Spiritual fitness ought to be the goal for every Christian. Notice two reasons why spiritual fitness (godliness) should be your goal:

**Spiritual fitness is profitable (valuable, beneficial).**

**Spiritual fitness is more profitable than physical fitness.**

Physical fitness benefits “a little.” What are some ways?

- strength, stamina, health, feel better
• improved appearance – weight loss, muscle tone, etc.

On the other hand, physical exercise is only a “little” beneficial.

• Temporary – affects this life only, and most eventually lose their physical fitness
• External – helps the body but not the soul.
• Limited usefulness. Won’t help many areas.

**Spiritual fitness if beneficial for “all things.”**

Name an area in life that spiritual fitness has no bearing upon. There is none. Godliness (conduct that honors God) should be displayed in every area of life.

• home – kids obey parents, husbands love wives, wives submit to husbands
• business – pay fair wages, be a good worker/employer, work hard, ethical
• church – be a member, respect the pastor, separation from erring brothers, financial support.

If spiritual fitness (conduct that honors God) is so valuable, why do we not spend more time in pursuit of it? It is ironic that many Christians expend lots of effort and spend lots of money on improving their health and physical fitness, yet they are unwilling to expend any effort toward spiritual fitness.

“No pain, No gain” is true spiritually and physically. If you expend no effort to train yourself spiritually, you will never grow or get strong.

Heb. 5:12–14 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.
Question: What would you look like if your body reflected your spiritual fitness?

All of us should exercise ourselves toward conduct that honors God because it is profitable to do so.

**Spiritual fitness is promising.**

Spiritual fitness is the best kind of investment. Most investments either pay now or later, not both. Spiritual fitness pays now and later.

**Spiritual fitness is promising now.**

What promises are given to those who live godly lives?

*negative: You’ll avoid many problems*
- You will never get drunk or be an alcoholic
- You will never use illegal drugs
- You will never cheat at school, on taxes, on wife, etc.

*positive: You’ll do right by:*
- pleasing God
- pleasing your family
- pleasing the state – by being a good citizen
- pleasing your employer – by being a good worker
- pleasing your church – by working, tithing, praying, and being faithful

**Spiritual fitness has a promise of life to come.**

Spiritual fitness pays eternal dividends. Can the same be said of physical fitness? No. We will be paid back for our efforts.

Matthew 6:20: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.
Conclusion

Every Christian ought to strive for spiritual fitness because doing so is profitable for the present and promising for your future. Physical exercise is good, but spiritual exercise is better.

How much time have you been spending in “God’s Gym” lately? You’ll never develop any spiritual strength until you begin exercising yourself toward godliness. Paul is calling believers to a life of discipline, labor, and commitment. No discipline, no discipleship; no sweat, no sainthood.

For Further Discussion:

1. Is Paul saying that physical exercise has no value?

   No, it has “a little” value, i.e., little in comparison with spiritual exercise/discipline.

2. Should we be more concerned about our physical appearance or our spiritual condition? Why?

   More time and effort should go into our spiritual well-being than into our physical appearance because it’s more important, valuable, and lasting.
What is a Disciple?

Basic to any discussion of discipleship or discipline is a definition of the term “disciple.” When they hear the word, most people probably think of the twelve disciples – Peter, James, John and the other apostles. But the term is broader, encompassing more than just the original followers of Jesus.

A disciple is a follower, a learner, anyone who believes and practices the doctrines of his teacher. The New Testament mentions several kinds of disciples. There are:

- followers of John the Baptist (Mk 2:18)
- followers of the Pharisees (John 3:25)
- followers of Moses (John 9:28)
- followers of Jesus (Mk 2:18)

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, that is, if you are a Christian, then you are a disciple.

Discipline implies instruction and correction, the training that improves, molds, strengthens, and perfects character. It is the moral education obtained by the enforcement of obedience through supervision and control. Discipline is associated with correction, chastening, and instruction. It’s often illustrated by the relationship of a father to his son: “As a man chastens his son, so the LORD chastens you” (Deut 8:5). “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in” (Prov 3:11–12). Discipline is a sign of love. “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten” (Rev 3:19).¹

¹ V. R. Edman, in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, p. 320.
A discipline refers to a practice or habit that strengthens or sets apart a disciple. Just as practicing scales on an instrument helps the musician develop his talent, so participation in various practices helps the believer develop and grow in his Christian life. The disciplines that we’ll study in this series include Bible reading, prayer, devotions, worship, evangelism, service, stewardship, and learning.

Discipleship suggests the active pursuit of those things that makes one a good disciple. Discipleship is following your teacher, obeying what he says, seeking to be more like him, engaging in those disciplines that will result in growth and education.

The Value of Spiritual Discipline

You may recall that our theme text for this series is 1 Timothy 4:7–8.

But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

There is a purpose or goal for discipleship. Spiritual disciplines are the God-given means we are to use in the pursuit of godliness. Godly, spiritually mature people are disciplined people. In fact, the only means of attaining spiritual maturity and strength is through discipleship. It’s a necessary part of growth. All the great heroes of church history were disciplined people – Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Bunyon, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, George Muller – all of them spent much time and effort pursuing the disciplines necessary for spiritual maturity.

There are several ways that God has ordained to produce spiritual growth. People and circumstances often mold and shape us. These are external factors that we often have no control over. But it’s totally up to us whether, and to what extent, we choose to be involved in disciplines. Spiritual exercise is like physical exercise – we know that it’s good for us, and we desire the end results, but we often neglect it.
Spiritual growth is a cooperative effort between God and the believer. We do not achieve it by pure self-will, determination, and commitment to the disciplines. Neither do we passively sit back and wait for it to arrive with no effort from us. Rather, as we pursue godliness through the disciplines, God causes our spiritual growth. This is why God can command us to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18). If we do our part, God will do His part.

Note the words of Christ in Matthew 11:28–30

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

This passage tells that to be a disciple of Jesus means to learn from and follow Him. Learning and following involve discipline – he refers to it as a yoke. Those who refuse such discipline are not true followers.

The Danger of Neglecting Spiritual Discipline

What is the state of those believers who refuse to engage in spiritual discipline? Such people have little fruit, little strength, and little to offer their Lord. Note the following from William Barclay:

Nothing was ever achieved without discipline; and many an athlete and many a man has been ruined because he abandoned discipline and let himself grow slack. Coleridge is the supreme tragedy of indiscipline. Never did so great a mind produce so little. He left Cambridge University to join the army; but he left the army because . . . he could not rub down a horse; he returned to Oxford and left without a de-
gree. He began a paper called *The Watchman* which lived for ten [editions] and then died. It has been said of him: “He lost himself in visions of work to be done, that always remained to be done. Coleridge had every poetic gift but one – the gift of sustained and concentrated effort.” . . . No one ever reached any eminence, and no one having reached it ever maintained it, without discipline.²

The same could be said of believers. All Christians have at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:4–7). But one must develop such gifts through discipline in order to become more fruitful. It’s a great shame when a believer, who has great potential for service, neglects discipline, thereby squandering his abilities and producing little or nothing of value.

**The Freedom Gained Through Spiritual Discipline**

It may seem contradictory to suggest that one gains freedom through discipline, but it’s true. It would seem that the requirements and limitations discipline imposes would be restrictive and binding, not freeing. But it is only through discipline that believers are free to fully develop their relationship with God. For example, only those who spend hours practicing music have the ability (freedom) to become professional musicians. Only those athletes who spend hours conditioning themselves are free to excel in their sports. Almost anything worth doing well requires commitment, restriction, and effort. Those who refuse discipline will never reach the heights or achievements of those who accept discipline.

How does spiritual discipline “free” the believer? Only those who have spent time memorizing Scripture can recall the text when called upon to do so. Only those who have shown themselves to be faithful in little things will be asked to assume more significant tasks. Only those who have developed spiritual insight and knowledge through intense study have

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1 Quoted in Whitney, p. 22.

2 Quoted in Whitney, p. 22.
the answers to the difficult questions. Only those who have developed an unfailing trust in God through great trials have words of wisdom for those experiencing similar trials. So it’s through the fires of discipline that one is freed to fully express their faith.

Misunderstanding discipleship

There are those who draw a distinction between regular believers and disciples. They suggest that at the point of salvation, one accepts Christ as Savior, but one need not recognize Him as Lord. No submission, commitment or loyalty is necessary. They hope that at a later point in time, one hopefully will submit himself to Christ as Lord. Thus, in their opinion, one may be a believer but not a disciple.

Such a distinction between regular believers and disciples simply does not hold up under biblical scrutiny. All Christians are followers of Christ, and are thus legitimately called disciples. Disciples are not “super” believers. Jesus said, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mk 8:34). The requirements for discipleship hold true for anyone who follows Christ. If you are a follower of Christ, then you are a disciple, and the requirements of a disciple are binding for you.

There is a further misunderstanding about discipline. Some would say that those who advocate a disciplined life are really just legalists, insisting that others adopt their own subjective standards. But discipline and legalism are worlds apart. Legalism is self-centered effort to gain merit with God through self-denial or sacrifice. Discipline is engaging in spiritual practices with the goal of pleasing God and growing in the faith. The two are not the same.

The imperative of discipleship

If you closely examine the life of Jesus, you’ll find that he spent a great deal of time preparing the
twelve disciples to carry on His work after He left. Of the twelve, Peter, James and John seemed to compose an inner circle of those closest to Jesus. Jesus’ parting words to the disciples were, “Make disciples of all nations. Teach them to obey everything I taught you” (Mt 28:18–20). Paul taught the same thing: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). It is not enough to preach the gospel to all nations. Those who believe must also be taught to obey all that Christ has taught. This is the essence of discipleship.

God calls upon us not only to be disciples, but also to make disciples. Each one of us is uniquely connected to a network of lost people who constitute our calling. We can become what the twelve became – workers sent by God to those who are lost. If the gospel is truly to penetrate a place, it will be through the people Jesus calls salt, light, and good seed – people for whom indifference has been replaced by love and concern. Those who become believers should then be channeled into a discipleship program to encourage their growth. The cycle continues as new believers learn, grow, and eventually reach others for Christ.

Conclusion

“Personal discipline is the indispensable key for accomplishing anything in this life. . . . We will never get anywhere in life without discipline, be it in the arts, business, athletics or academics. This is doubly so in spiritual matters. . . . Spiritual discipline is everything.”

A disciple is simply a follower or a learner. Followers of Christ are disciples. Spiritual disciplines are beneficial in that they are the God-given means by which we pursue godliness. Those who neglect spiritual discipline have little fruit, little strength, and little to offer their Lord. It is only through discipline that believers are free to fully develop their relationship with God.

3 Jim Petersen, “A Disciple’s Vision” Discipleship Journal July/Aug 97
4 Hughes, p. 13, 15.
God calls all believers not only to personal discipleship, but also to make and mature more disciples.

Engaging in spiritual disciplines is much like practicing an instrument. At times it may seem like drudgery, and you may not really feel like doing it. But if you persevere, you’ll be glad you did. The payoff is worth the effort.

For Further Discussion

1. What would cause one to believe that there is a difference between regular believers and disciples?

   Easy-believism. NT discipleship is costly. Those who preach EB assert that there is no cost involved in salvation. Thus, in order to have a cost-free salvation, one must posit a difference between regular believers and disciples.

2. Explain the idea of gaining freedom through discipline.

   Training yields the ability to perform at a high level. Discipline leads to a greater experience of the Christian life.

3. What are some reasons believers don’t participate in the disciplines more fully?

   Various reasons – too busy, lazy, ignorant, not emphasized at church, disobedience, etc.

4. Describe the disciple-making process.

   Preach the gospel, those who get saved are channeled into discipleship opportunities (classes, service), then sent out to reach others.
Characters of a Disciple

We’ve already determined that a disciple is a follower or learner, and that all Christians are disciples of Christ. Disciples are not a separate class of “super” believers – all Christians are called upon to fulfill the requirements of a disciple. We’ve also discovered that believers are not only called upon to be disciples, but they are also responsible to make disciples.

So what does a disciple look like? In other words, what are the characteristics that distinguish a disciple? We’ll find out by examining what Jesus said to and about his disciples.

Disciples follow Christ (Matt 10:24; Mark 1:16–20)

The primary definition of a disciple is a follower. The twelve disciples were the primary audience in Matthew 10, but the application of Jesus’ words broadens out to all followers of Christ. Jesus uses words like “whoever” and “he that” which suggest he had all future disciples in mind.

Following Christ means learning from Him, adopting His values and obeying His commands.
Disciples are like Christ

The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. (Matt 10:24–25)

He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. (1 John 2:6)

The goal of the Christian life is to conform to the likeness of Christ. A true disciple is content to be like his teacher. This is what Paul meant when he said that he wanted to “know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Phil 3:10).

A disciple doesn’t try to escape what his Lord experienced. It is sufficient for him to be treated as He was. Christ’s enemies treated Him in the most cruel and brutal ways. We should not be surprised if we receive the same kind of treatment.

Disciples are not afraid to confess Christ publicly

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. (Matt 10:32–33)

Note the word “therefore” in the above verse. Jesus had just given several reasons why his disciples should not fear to confess Him publicly:

1. Time would bring all things to light, when the wickedness of men would be discovered, their evil designs seen through. The innocence and integrity of Jesus and his disciples would be made manifest. God is just. He will reward the righteous and punish the wicked.
2. God is more to be feared more than evil men. While men may kill the body, they are unable to kill the soul. God can destroy both soul and body in hell.

3. Nothing can happen to a disciple without God’s approval. Even seemingly minor details of life are under God’s sovereign control. One should not fear the consequences of confessing Christ, because anything that happens as a result is under God’s control.

The word “confess” means “to acknowledge,” “to claim,” or “to agree.” Those who confess Christ acknowledge Him or claim Him to be their Savior. Many believers today are Christians “in camouflage.” That is, there is nothing different about them, nothing that marks them out as followers of Christ. Believers may seek to blend in with the world to avoid the problems involved with confessing Christ publicly. In other words, they are more afraid of what people think then they are of what God thinks. Personal popularity is more important to them than loyalty to Jesus is. But one of the marks of a disciple is the courage to publicly take a stand for Christ. Disciples boldly proclaim, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ” (Rom 1:16).

Disciples count the cost

Unlike many modern evangelists, Jesus didn’t hide the cost of following Him. He didn’t present all the benefits without first discussing the costs involved. We don’t do anyone a favor by trying to get him or her to become a disciple of Christ without explaining what belonging to Him will cost. Many false believers come into the church because they are never presented with the costs of discipleship. Others show some initial interest in being saved, and may even profess to be saved, but soon lose interest when they find out the costs of discipleship.

Other texts on the costs of discipleship:

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. . . . Many, therefore, of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? . . . From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. (John 6:53–66)

Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33)

Then Peter said, “Lo, we have left all, and followed thee.” (Luke 18:28)

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. (Philippians 3:7)

It’s the height of dishonesty to fail to mention what Christ requires from disciples when we are presenting the gospel to someone. We must inform our audience of both the benefits and the costs of being saved.

Disciples leave all

As we’ve already seen, Jesus requires a major, life-changing commitment from His disciples. Peter and the other disciples knew what they were doing when they decided to follow Christ – they left all. At times, they wondered if it was worth it. In some cases, following Christ may mean leaving home, career, and even family. Jesus asserts that a disciple must release all claims over his own former life. Fortunately, those who lose their lives find true life. That is, it’s only when we deny ourselves that we are able to enjoy the kind of abundant life that Christ promised.

Commitment is one aspect of the Christian life that is not popular today. People want to go to heaven and avoid hell, but they are not interested in self-denial or sacrifice for the cause of Christ. Unfortunately, evangelists often advertise salvation as an easy, no obligation, no cost decision. Thus, people think they
can be Christians with no strings attached. But this is not the gospel Jesus or the apostles preached.

**Disciples practice self-denial**

Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. (Mark 8:34–35)

Jesus repeatedly told his disciples to “take up the cross.” Believers often think of “crosses to bear” as physical problems, annoying family members, or anything else that causes pain or discomfort. But when Jesus talks about a cross to bear, He is not talking about putting up with annoying people or pain. He’s talking about death. Over 2,000 Christians were crucified in Galilee by the Roman authorities. People were hanging on crosses all over the Roman Empire. Jesus was saying that following Him may result in one’s physical death. In the early church, one had to be willing to literally give up his life to be a follower of Christ.

Today, in many parts of the world, disciples of Christ may suffer the same fate as those early believers. But those of us who enjoy life under democratic governments will probably not be physically persecuted for confessing Christ. Nevertheless, a disciple “takes up the cross” when he puts his own desires and plans to death and begins to live for Christ. This is the way of the cross for most of us – deny your self and live for Christ.

[Believers] should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again. (2 Cor 5:15)

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)
Who Can’t be a Disciple? Luke 14:26–33

Discipleship is clearly not for everyone. In the story of the rich young ruler (Luke 18:22–23), the man was unwilling to “forsake all” to follow Jesus. Earthly riches were more important to him than eternal life. Jesus made several statements that put limits on discipleship.

Those who put other relationships ahead of their relationship with Christ

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26)

Christ demands the highest priority in your life. No other relationship can come between you and God. In fact, if it comes down to choosing between pleasing your family or obeying God, Jesus calls upon you to obey God. A true disciple will value his relationship with God above all other relationships.

It’s common in many parts of the world for those who confess Christ to be totally cut off from their families as a result. This is what Jesus meant when he said,

“For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.” (Matt 10:35–36)

Those who refuse to bear the cross

And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:27)

Those who refuse to forsake all for Christ

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33)

The twelve disciples had forsaken all to follow Jesus (Luke 5:11, 28; 18:28). Jesus calls upon all disciples to do the same thing. Some are unwilling to be disci-
Review

What is a disciple? A disciple is one who:

- Follows Christ
- Strives to be like Christ
- Confesses Christ publicly and fearlessly
- Leaves all to follow Christ
- Practices self-denial

You can be a disciple of Christ only if you are willing to make your relationship with God your top priority, take up your cross, and forsake all to follow Christ.

Conclusion

Discipleship isn’t for sissies or slackers. Christ calls us to sacrifice our lives for Him. Many people are not willing to embrace such requirements. At various times in His ministry, Jesus had thousands of “disciples.” Yet at the end of His life, only a handful were loyal to Him. What kind of a disciple are you?

For Further Discussion:

1. Is discipleship only for committed, mature believers, or is it required of all followers of Christ?

Discipleship is for all. All believers are to strive to fulfill the characteristics of being disciples. There’s only one category of believer – disciple of Christ.

2. Is discipleship a lengthy process or do you achieve the characteristics of a disciple at the point of salvation?
Both. You become a disciple at the point of salvation, but not a mature one. As you strive to fulfill the requirements of a disciple, you grow in spiritual maturity. So discipleship is both a standing and a process.

3. Why doesn’t the idea of discipleship fit very well with modern man?

Because Jesus requires things that are anathema to the modern mindset – commitment, self-denial, discomfort, sacrifice, putting someone else first.

4. Can one “confess Christ” and still not be saved?

Yes. Most cultists confess Christ, but they are not saved. Others confess Christ, yet in their works they deny Him (Titus 1:15–16).
REMEMBER our theme text for this series: “Exercise thyself . . . unto godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7–8). The Christian life is serious, challenging, and demanding. It’s not a picnic or a parade; it’s a battle. Believers are to approach their lives with a sense of commitment, eagerness, and passion for the cause of Christ. Yet many believers lead very undisciplined lives. They are highly disorganized, always late for appointments, irresponsible, unreliable, unstable, and more of a hindrance to the work of the Lord than an asset. Their basic character flaw is a lack of self-discipline. We live in an undisciplined age and culture. Modern people put themselves first, and anything that hinders their pursuit of “happiness” must go. Such people often evidence little or no commitment, restraint, or loyalty. Self-indulgence, rather than self-discipline is the order of the day. Unfortunately, such an attitude often surfaces in the church.

The purpose of this lesson is to show the student how important self-discipline is, and to develop within him or her a desire to become more disciplined in his or her daily life.¹

What is Discipline?

**Discipline is self-control.**

It’s the commitment to force yourself to do the right thing, the best thing, and the proper thing. It’s not taking the easy road when the hard road is the better way. It’s a refusal to do less than your best. It’s dedication to duty, and the result of a desire to live an honorable and meaningful life.

¹ Much of the material in this lesson is based on Richard S. Taylor’s work *The Disciplined Life*. 
Discipline is commitment

From a Christian perspective, discipline is the result of a commitment to honor and glorify God in everything you do. Discipline is the ability to regulate your behavior and attitudes by the principles of Scripture rather than by feelings, impulses, pressure, or tradition.

Discipline may be either external or internal.

As kids are growing up, much of the discipline they experience is external, from their parents. As they mature, children are given more responsibility and privilege, and must begin to discipline themselves. As one moves on to adulthood, most of the discipline in his or her life is self-imposed.

Why is a Disciplined Life Desirable?

A. Practically speaking, almost anything worth doing takes discipline to master. Any professional career requires training, study, commitment, and work. To play a sport on a high level takes hours of practice and self-denial. Those who excel in the arts (music, painting, sculpture, etc.) must spend years in preparation. In any field of endeavor, those who wish to succeed must exercise self-discipline, restraint, practice, and commitment to the goal.

“Prod yourself!” – kick yourself! – it’s the only way.”

—Winston Churchill

B. The Bible often encourages believers to live disciplined lives. Note some texts.

Proverbs 24:10 If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.

Matthew 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.
1 Cor 9:25 Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Titus 2:12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

Hebrews 5:14 Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

2 Peter 1:5–7 Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

List the words from the above verses that talk about discipline. Strength, deny your self, strive for the mastery, temperate, run, fight, keep under my body, denying lusts, soberly, exercise, temperance

“Discipline is the mark of maturity. Without discipline the character will remain weak and infantile.” —Richard Taylor

What aspects of life must the believer discipline?

Appetites and urges

The believer must not be flabby, either physically or morally. One must control his urges to eat, lest his additional weight prohibit him from serving as well as he could. He must also control his sexual desires, lest he disqualify himself for ministry.

Emotions

Feelings must be subordinate to the intellect. Those who allow themselves to follow their emotions will
likely not find themselves useful in the service of God. The giddy impulsiveness of a child will not take one where he needs to go. Depression saps one’s strength and resolve. Romance and infatuation are powerful emotions, but the Christian must bring them under control. A mind submitted to God, not one’s fickle emotional moods, must rule.

Speech

James tells us (3:2) that if a man can control his tongue, he can control his whole body.

Proverbs 17:27–28 He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.

Priorities

The essence of discipline is the ability to subordinate the lesser to the greater. Many things cry out for our attention. It takes discipline to do those things that are necessary and important. Make sure those things that assume first place in your life are worthy of that position. Put first things first, and do what needs to be done. Good intentions are worthless.

How to become a disciplined person

Accept discipline as the route to success.

There are no substitutes or shortcuts to the goal. Undisciplined people are forever seeking quick and easy ways to find success. They carefully avoid the grind of hard work, study, and commitment. But those who achieve great things do so by discipline and willingness to work.

Start with the little things.

Organize yourself and your things. Don’t live in a pigsty. Make sure you look presentable.

**Exercise foresight, carefulness, and thoughtfulness.**

Plan your work, and then work your plan. Try to be well organized in everything you do. Don’t approach things haphazardly. Instead, plan for the future. Avoid the “fly by the seat of your pants” approach.

**Control your body.**

Avoid constant movement – shuffling, rocking, popping your knuckles, shifting, etc. Try to maintain a good posture. Look people in the eye when you talk to them. Use a firm handshake. Exercise and eat right. Lose excess weight. Get enough sleep. Make your body into a strong and effective tool in the Lord’s service.

“During his term as President of the U.S., Lyndon Johnson was somewhat overweight. One day his wife challenged him with this blunt assertion: “You can’t run the country if you can’t run yourself.” Respecting Mrs. Johnson’s wise observation, the President lost 23 pounds.”

E. Get your priorities right. Do the hard things first. Don’t procrastinate. Seek to complete one job before moving on to the next. Don’t waste time needed to do important work. Get right at it, complete it, and rest when you’re done.

“You have no right to be mediocre if you are capable of something better.—Richard Taylor
Accept the goal of Christlikeness rather than happiness.

If personal happiness is one’s main pursuit in life, then fun and entertainment become high priorities. But such should not be the case for Christians. Although rest, refreshment, and recreation do have a proper place in a believer’s life, they should not be top priorities. Christians must never become preoccupied with the frantic quest for pleasure for its own sake. When hobbies and vacations become central, one’s effectiveness suffers.

Conclusion

One might think that living a disciplined life would take all the joy and spontaneity out of living. One might complain that self-discipline and duty don’t sound like much fun. Remember that fun (self-gratification, amusement, “happiness”) is not the primary goal for a Christian; effective, honorable service to the Lord is. Oddly enough, a disciplined life is a joyful life. In fact, it is those who seek to live a disciplined life who are most free to serve God and enjoy His blessings.

For Further Discussion:

1. What are some excuses for lack of discipline?

   Too hard, no fun, I just can’t live that way, it’s unrealistic

2. List some everyday ways that believers can discipline themselves.

   Keep your room neat and clean, keep your stuff organized, hang up your clothes, finish things you start, do your daily devotions, arrive on time (or even a little early) for appointments, exercise, eat right.

3. Why is a disciplined life better than an undisciplined life?

   Almost any meaningful aspect of life takes discipline and work to accomplish. If you want a joyful life, you have to exercise a little self-discipline. Those who re-
fuse discipline often end up in ruin, pain, and unhappiness.

4. What is the ultimate goal of discipline?

Christlikeness; to live an honorable and meaningful and fruitful life in the Lord’s service. Discipline is necessary to fulfill one’s duties as a believer.

5. What is true of those who refuse to discipline themselves?

It’s highly unlikely that they’ll ever amount to much, either personally or as a worker for the Lord.

“The world belongs to the disciplined.”
—Richard Taylor
Now that we’ve defined a few terms and looked at the characteristics of disciples, we’re ready to move on to a study of the disciplines of the Christian life.

First, here is a little review.

**Theme Text:**

1 Timothy 4:7–8 But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

The purpose of discipline is godliness. We participate in these disciplines, even though they are often inconvenient, time consuming, and unpopular, because they help us grow spiritually.

**Key Terms:**

A *disciple* is a follower, a learner, anyone who believes and practices the doctrines of his teacher.

*Discipline* implies instruction and correction, the training that improves, molds, strengthens, and perfects character.

A *discipline* refers to a practice or habit that strengthens or sets apart a disciple.

*Discipleship* suggests the active pursuit of those things that makes one a good disciple.

The first discipline we’ll study is Bible intake. “No spiritual discipline is more important than the intake of God’s Word. Nothing can substitute for it. . . . If we would know God and be godly, we must know the Word of
Growth and sanctification are directly linked to one’s access to the Bible. Little intake leads to little maturity or strength.

We enjoy something that the early church and other believers for many centuries did not – easy access to the Word of God. Most of us have several Bibles, perhaps even different translations. We should appreciate and make use of such freedom.

The purpose or goal of all methods of Bible intake is obedience to what God says and the development of Christlikeness. As Jesus said, those who hear the Word and don’t obey it are like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

Aspects of Bible intake

Hearing God’s Word

Texts:

Luke 11:28 Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

Romans 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

1 Timothy 4:13 Till I come, give attendance to [public] reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

Why is hearing God’s Word a discipline? Because we have to take steps/make plans to do it. It’s not automatic.

What are some opportunities we have to hear God’s Word? 1. Listen to preaching at church and Sunday school; 2. Listen to sermon or Bible tapes; 3. Listen to media (TV, radio). Be very careful here – lots of false doctrine floating over the air waves.

One of the primary opportunities Christians have to hear the Word of God on a regular basis is at their church. Because the regular preaching of God’s Word is so important in the believer’s life, it is critical that one attends a church where the Word is pro-
Some Tips To Help You Listen To A Sermon:

1. Take notes. Try to follow the outline. If the outline is printed, take notes in the margins. Try to compose your own outline as you listen and then compare it to the published one.

2. Get plenty of rest the night before. It’s easy to nod off during a long sermon. Make sure you aren’t sleepy when you go to church. Drink some coffee or pop if you need to.

3. Turn to the passages the preacher mentions. Follow along in your Bible.

4. Sit toward the front of the auditorium. This prevents distractions. Sit with people who won’t distract you. Don’t distract others.

5. Pray before going to church that you might be alert and obedient to what you hear.

6. Prepare early so you are not rushed on Sundays. Arrive at church early and prepare yourself to listen.

Some statistics (among those claiming to be “born again” Christians):

- 18% read the Bible daily.
- 23% say they never read the Bible.
- An average reader could read through the entire Bible in about 70 hours.

Texts:

- Matthew 4:4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

- 2 Timothy 3:16–17 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

- Revelation 1:3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

Bible reading is the most influential factor in shaping a person’s moral and social behavior. If you want to be changed, if you desire Christlikeness, you must
read your Bible. Having the Bible in your language and dialect is a great privilege and blessing which many people do not enjoy. You should consider daily Bible reading a privilege and a pleasure much more than a duty.

**Bible Study**

Bible study differs from Bible reading. Both are valuable and necessary. Bible study implies intense analysis and research of the text. The goal of all Bible study is to accurately discern what the text means and how one can apply it to his or her life. Sometimes the meaning of a passage is clear; at other times, the meaning will surface only after intense investigation. This careful, systematic investigative process is called exegesis. One exeges Scripture to find out the original intent of the author’s words. It’s only after finding out what the text meant that one can determine what the text means.

*Texts:*

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

Acts 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

How do you study out a passage?

- Check how various versions handle the passage. A more literal translation, like the KJV, NKJV, or the NASB, will be helpful here.
- Try to define all significant words in the passage.
- Research the background of the book. Find out who the author was, who the original readers were, and what the problems or issues the book addresses are.
- Trace the author’s argument. Find out what point the author was trying to make in the text.

Suggestions for Consistent Success in Bible Reading:

1. Arrange a time and a place. Work it into your daily schedule. Find a quiet place away from distractions. Do it the same time and place daily. Make it a habit. It’s usually best not to read before bed.

2. Follow a plan. Don’t just open the book randomly and read. Many different plans are available that make Bible reading a pleasure.

3. Look for application as you read. Note verses and principles to live by.

4. Use a version that is accurate and understandable. Reading words you don’t understand is not very helpful. Compare two or three translations on difficult passages. The NKJV, NASB, and NIV are good modern translations.

5. DISCIPLINE YOURSELF! Don’t give yourself any excuses for not reading daily. Do whatever it takes to carve out some time to read the Bible.
you are studying. See if the author addresses the same issue in another part of the Bible.

• Write down questions or observations about the text.

• Consult an expert. Bible scholars have spent years studying your passage, and likely can explain the meaning of the text. Most of this research is found in books.

Tools for exegesis: Bible translations, dictionary, handbook, commentaries, and concordance. Many Bible study tools are currently available in books, magazines, journals, and computer software.3

The ability to participate in Bible study is largely based on having the tools, the books (or software) that will help you. Determine to buy good Bible study tools as you are able.

Bible study is an important discipline to participate in. Those who are able to exegete the Bible for themselves are able to be “self-feeders,” that is, they can understand and apply the Bible on their own without depending upon others to teach them. They also may avoid following a teacher into error. The best teachers are those who can exegete the text.

Review

Bible intake consists of:

1. Hearing the Bible – discipline yourself to hear the Word of God preached whenever you have an opportunity.

2. Reading the Bible – discipline yourself to reading the Bible on a daily basis.

3. Studying the Bible – discipline yourself to exegete the Bible. Acquire the necessary tools for Bible study.

3 One excellent and inexpensive Bible software package is the Online Bible. Another, available for free, is Logos software distributed by the E4 Group. www.freebiblesoftware.com
Conclusion

There is no excuse for not partaking of the Bible every day. Good translations are available, as is good preaching and profitable Bible study tools. Commit yourself to hearing, reading, and studying the Bible.

For Further Discussion

1. What can a pastor or professor offer that the average layman cannot?

Most pastors and teachers have more education and background in Bible study and interpretation than layman do. They probably know the original languages and can spend much more time in analysis of the text than others can. Thus, they should be able to understand and communicate the meaning and application of a text better than the average layman. It’s their profession, what they’ve been trained to do.

2. Some suggest that if one can read and study the Bible for himself, he doesn’t need to attend church. Do you agree?

No. We are commanded to participate in church no matter what the level of our understanding. Those who excel at Bible knowledge should teach. Further, church is more than just hearing from the Bible. Worship and fellowship are equally as important.

3. Some suggest that it’s only the experts or the church authorities who can accurately explain and interpret the Bible. Do you agree?

No. We believe that the Bible is accessible and understandable to the average believer. Expertise and education is certainly beneficial, but average believers can understand a great deal of the text.
LAST time we began a discussion of the importance of the Bible in the Christian life. We studied three aspects of Bible intake:

1. Hearing the Bible – discipline yourself to listen to the Word of God as it is proclaimed whenever you have an opportunity.

2. Reading the Bible – discipline yourself to reading the Bible on a daily basis.

3. Studying the Bible – discipline yourself to exegesis the Bible. Acquire the necessary tools for Bible study.

Today we’ll consider three more aspects of Bible intake.

4. Memorizing God’s Word

Texts:

Psalms 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Psalms 119:97 O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.

Proverbs 22:17–19 Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips. That thy trust may be in the LORD, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee.
Matthew 4:4 But [Jesus] answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Memorizing Scripture is a difficult and time-consuming discipline, but one that is worth far more than it costs. When the Bible is stored in your mind, it is readily available when you need it. If a friend needs to hear a word of comfort, encouragement, or even rebuke, you have that capacity if you’ve memorized Scripture. When tempted to sin, you have a defense – quote Scripture, just like Jesus did when He was tempted. When faced by false doctrine, you know the truth and can give a ready defense if you’ve got the passages memorized. Further, the New Testament authors repeatedly demonstrate that they memorized passages from the Old Testament. All the great Christian leaders from the past memorized passages from the Bible. Some have memorized vast sections of it. Clearly, memorizing Scripture is a valuable and necessary part of the Christian life.

Scripture memory is a matter of commitment, labor, and motivation. If you think that it’s important and you work hard at it (i.e., discipline yourself), you can do it. You’ve memorized a lot of other data – birthdays, phone numbers, addresses, speeches, poems, jokes, etc. You can memorize the Bible.

So how does one go about memorizing Scripture?

Have a plan.

There are many published Scripture memory plans. The easiest plan is to select several verses that are meaningful to you and start working on these. Then as you read the Bible and find more memorable passages, add them to the list. Every day review the verses you already have memorized and work on memorizing the new ones.

Write or print out the verses on 3x5 cards.

This makes review easier. Cards are also portable. Work on them when waiting in line or when you have free time. Post the cards where you’ll see them – on the fridge, on a mirror, on your steering wheel, etc.
Memorize the verses word perfectly.
Learn the reference as well.

Categorize the verses.
Arrange them according to topics.

REVIEW CONSTANTLY.
If you don’t review the verses you’ve memorized, you’ll soon lose them.

Find an accountability partner.
Work with someone who will encourage you to stay with it. Share the fun with someone else.

Like the other disciplines, memorization doesn’t just happen. You’ve got to actively discipline yourself to memorize. If you work on it a little each day, you’ll be surprised how quickly your list of memorized verses expands.

The goal in memorizing is not to see how many verses you can commit to memory. The goal is godliness. Memorizing Scripture helps transform your mind and life (Rom 12:2). If you are committed to growth and godliness, you’ll also be committed to memorizing Scripture.

Meditate on God’s Word

Texts:

Joshua 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Psalms 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

Psalms 119:99 I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.
The word “meditation” often prompts thoughts of Eastern religions or the New Age movement. But biblical meditation differs from other kinds of meditation in several ways:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Christian Meditation</th>
<th>Christian Meditation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empty your mind</td>
<td>Fill your mind with the Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentally passive</td>
<td>Mentally active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create your own reality</td>
<td>Think about God's reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unite with the universe</td>
<td>Fellowship with God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meditation is simply dwelling mentally on a text of Scripture, soaking up the truths and principles of the Bible for the purpose of understanding, application and prayer. It is thinking about and appreciating the text – what it means, what it implies, whom it affects, how to obey it, etc. One selects an appropriate text, reads it a few times, and thoughtfully turns it over in his mind. He reflects on it for a while and considers its importance. One might then use it in prayer. It’s often beneficial to jot down the results of meditation – your thoughts about the text, how you’ll apply it, questions about it, etc.

Biblical meditation has nothing to do with chanting, yoga, channeling, or any other similar mystical ideas. You don’t go into a trance or lose touch with reality. Quite the opposite is true. Times of meditation ought to be some of the most intellectually and spiritually stimulating occasions we experience.

“I seemed often to see so much light exhibited by every sentence, and such a refreshing food communicated, that I could not get along in reading; often dwelling long on one sentence to see the wonders contained in it, and yet almost every sentence seemed to be full of wonders.” – Jonathan Edwards

**Applying God’s Word**

Applying the principles we learn as we partake of the Bible is one of the chief goals of Bible intake. We want to use what we learn.

Luke 6:46 And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?
John 13:17 If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

James 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

Application answers the question, “So what?” One should apply the principles of the Word to his life. Application is actually the third step in the exegetical process. One must first note what the text says (observation) and then figure out what it meant to the original audience (interpretation). Only after these first two critical steps is one ready to work out how one should apply the text personally. Great errors are made when the reader jumps right from what the text says to personal application without working out the interpretive details. Much of Scripture is not directly applicable to modern believers. For example, most of the Old Testament does not apply directly to the church. It’s an error to apply Scripture in a way not intended by the author or by the Holy Spirit. This is where many of the cults and fringe groups go wrong.

Look for application as you read and study. The following questions may help you notice when application is necessary:

- Does this text reveal something I should believe?
- Does this text reveal something to praise or thank God for?
- Does this text reveal something I should pray about?
- Does this text reveal something I should change my attitude about?
- Does this text reveal something I should accept or reject?
- Does this text reveal something I should do for others or for myself?
- Does this text reveal a sin I should confess?
- How should I change my life in response to this text?
Whenever we access God’s Word, we should go away with something we can apply to our lives. You must continually think about what actions you should take in response to Bible intake.

Review of Bible Intake

Bible intake consists of:

1. Hearing the Bible – discipline yourself to hear the Word of God preached whenever you have an opportunity.

2. Reading the Bible – discipline yourself to reading the Bible on a daily basis.

3. Studying the Bible – discipline yourself to exegete the Bible. Acquire the necessary tools for Bible study.

4. Memorizing the Bible – discipline yourself to commit portions of the Word to your memory.

5. Meditating on the Bible – discipline yourself to patiently contemplate passages for increased understanding.

6. Applying the Bible – discipline yourself to actively respond to biblical principles.

Conclusion

Bible intake is the single most important discipline in which believers participate. Nothing can take its place. There is no excuse for not having regular access to the Word. Bible intake is absolutely necessary for a healthy, growing, discerning Christian life. Remember the words of Jesus: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

For Further Discussion

1. What are some of the benefits of participating in the discipline of Bible intake?

   - spiritual strength
   - knowledge
   - it’s pleasing to God
   - helps others
   - helps the church
   - avoids errors, etc.
2. Why do so few believers (less than 20%) read their Bibles daily?

Laziness, wrong priorities, too busy, apathy, ignorance, sin.

3. Why is the Bible so important to the Christian faith?

Because Christianity is based on the Bible. Some forms of Christianity add lots of tradition to the faith, which tends to weaken the influence of the Bible.

4. Name one thing you can do to increase your intake of God’s Word.
Prayer

All believers acknowledge that prayer is a central, necessary part of the Christian life. Most believers participate in prayer, some more than others. Prayer is a discipline that requires time, concentration and faith. Those who desire to grow in godliness spend time in prayer. Yet most believers will admit that their prayer lives are less than what they should be. When they do stop to pray, their prayers are often of the “Lord, help me out of this mess” variety. While God does hear even this type of prayer, believers can and should do much better.

What is prayer? Here’s what John Bunyon said:

“Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things a God has promised, or according to the Word of God, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God.”

Note several important truths about prayer:

God expects us to pray.

Texts:

Matthew 6:5–9 And when thou prayest, . . . But thou, when thou prayest, . . . But when ye pray, . . . After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Luke 11:9 [Jesus said,] Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

1 Bedford Prison, 1662. Quoted in Hughes, p. 95.
Ephesians 6:18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

Philippians 4:6 . . . in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

Colossians 4:2 Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Pray without ceasing.

Prayer is an expected part of the Christian life.

Jesus prayed, the apostles prayed, the main characters of the Bible prayed, and great believers throughout history have prayed. God expects us to pray as well. Prayer should be a high priority for every believer. There is no valid reason that would excuse us from this important discipline.

Prayer is communication and fellowship.

God communicates to believers through the Scripture, and believers respond through prayer. Without such two-way communication, there can be no fellowship.

How we view prayer is important.

If we see prayer as nothing but a duty or an obligation, our prayer life will likely be one of drudgery and inconvenience. But prayer is really a response to an invitation from God. God calls us to communicate and fellowship with Him. Prayer is an opportunity to receive divine mercy and grace.

Obstacles to prayer:

- Lack of discipline, laziness, disobedience
- Doubts about the results of prayer – it doesn’t seem to work. This is really a misunderstanding of God or a lack of faith in God.
- Apathy – a lack of care for others
Ignorance – a lack of information about the necessity of prayer, or a lack of training regarding prayer

Prayer is a learned art.

It’s natural for us to talk to people, but it’s not natural to talk to someone we can’t see. Prayer is an exercise of faith. We have to trust that God is there, that He hears our prayer, and that He is both willing and able to do what we ask.

Jesus’ disciples asked, “Teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Jesus proceeds to lead his disciples in a model prayer. From this text and others we learn the following:

- Prayer is a personal matter, one that should be done “in secret.” We do not pray to be seen by others. Public prayer is allowed as long as one does not use it to call attention to himself.
- Prayer is not just repeating the same words over and over again. However, using biblical prayers is beneficial and proper. For example, the prayers found in passages such as 1 Chronicles 29:10–13; Nehemiah 9:5b–6; Psalm 18:1–3; Revelation 4:11 may be used as part of your own prayers.
- God is sovereign – he knows what we need before we ask. Prayer doesn’t inform God of anything He doesn’t already know.
- Start prayer with an acknowledgment of the greatness and goodness of God.
- Ask for your needs, and the needs of others.
- Confess your sins. Forgive others for their sins against you.
- Conclude by praising God (Matt 6:11).
- God answers prayer according to His own will and purposes. We don’t change God’s mind on a matter by repeated, sincere, or desperate pleas (2 Cor 12:7–9).
Prayer is the believer talking with God, not God directly communicating with the believer. God communicates to believers through His Word, not through prayer.\(^2\)

Prayer is a discipline you learn by doing, like learning a foreign language or practicing an instrument. The more you do it, the more natural it becomes.

God answers prayer.

Psalm 102:1–2 Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily.

Matthew 7:7–8 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

God would not command and encourage believers to pray if prayer was futile. God may not answer our prayers as we desire, but He does answer. Sometimes He says “no” or “wait.” Sometimes He requires that we pray persistently before granting a request. God often fulfills His purpose and program through answer to prayer.

Why does God answer prayer? For His own good pleasure; when it falls within His will.

Why would God decline a prayer request? If the request is not part of His will; if sin is in the life of the requester (Isa 59:1–2); if the request comes from the wrong motivation (asking “amiss” James 4:3).

If a request is not a part of God’s program, will prayer change God’s mind? While there does seem to be a couple of cases where this occurred (Ex 32), normally prayer doesn’t change God’s mind. God is immutable – His purposes and plans do not change.

\(^2\) If you believe the canon of Scripture is closed, then you’d have to say that God does not directly communicate to people as He used to do. If that’s the case, then God does not “speak” to us in prayer.
If God is going to do whatever He planned anyway, what is the value of prayer? We are commanded to pray; we don't know God’s will on most prayer requests; the primary purpose of prayer is the worship of God, not getting things from God. Our desires always have to be submitted to His will.

Note the Quote:

“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.”

When should I pray?

1Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to “pray without ceasing.” The early believers “joined together constantly in prayer” (Ac 1:14). David cried unto the Lord day and night (Ps 88:1). Paul suggests that one should pray when he eats (1 Tim 4:5). There is no prescribed time of the day for prayer. There are likely several times throughout the day that one should engage in prayer. Following the examples of David, Jesus and other great men of prayer, the morning seems to be suitable for one’s regular prayer time. It makes sense to seek the Lord at the beginning of the day to ask for wisdom and strength to meet the trials the coming day will bring. At the end of the day is another good time to pray. It seems appropriate to thank God for the blessings and lessons of the day, confess one’s sins, and make other requests at the end of the day.

Conclusion

God expects us to pray. Prayer is an essential part of the Christian life – don’t neglect it.

3 C.H. Spurgeon, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, quoted in Whitney, p. 79.
Prayer is a learned art. Drop your false or inaccurate assumptions about prayer and learn to pray as God has instructed.

God answers prayer. God repeatedly instructs believers to pray and believe that He will answer them. God hears all prayer; whether He answers according to our desires is another matter.

For Further Discussion

1. What are some excuses people might give for failure to pray?

   No time, no suitable place, don’t know what to pray for, it doesn’t seem to work, it’s not necessary since God knows everything anyway.

2. If prayer is a primary aspect of the Christian life, and if one doesn’t make time to pray, what does that say about one’s Christianity?

   It’s pretty weak. Neglecting prayer is simply not an option.

3. What steps should a believer take to make sure he or she takes time to pray daily?

   Make it part of the normal routine; find a good place and time for it; make a prayer list.
WE’VE ALREADY LEARNED about the necessity for both Bible intake and prayer. When we do both in a private situation, we usually call it “devotions” or having a “quiet time.” The idea of devotions is to spend some time reading, meditating on, and memorizing the Bible, and some time in prayer. Doing this on a daily basis is a fundamental part of a mature Christian life.

Why do we consider devotions to be a discipline? Because they take time and effort; one must discipline himself to engage in them; like exercise, the discipline makes one stronger – the effort pays off, it’s worthwhile.

What ought devotions to include? Minimum: Bible reading, meditation, memorization, and prayer. Can add Bible study (i.e., taking notes, reading commentaries, etc), singing or reading hymns, devotional books, etc.

Since we’ve previously studied the elements of a devotional life (i.e., Bible intake and prayer), we’ll not cover that ground again. This lesson will focus on how to make the discipline of devotions a normal and important part of your life.

**Bible Reading**

Since reading the Bible is so important, we need a plan or strategy to do it. Here are some tips:

1. Determine what time of day you’re going to do it. For many people, mornings are the best because it prepares you for the rest of the day. If the mornings won’t work, find another time.

2. Find a quiet, comfortable spot away from distractions.
3. Before you start, ask God to help you understand what the passage means and if there is a direct application to your life.

4. Read according to a plan or schedule. Don’t just flip open your Bible and start reading.

Potential plans:

- Read from various parts of the Bible
  - a section from the OT and from the NT. If you read 3 chapters from the OT and the NT daily, you’ll get through the NT about 3 times in the time it takes to get through the OT.
  - from the Law (Gen–Dt), History (Jos – Est), Poetry (Job – SoS), Prophets (Isa – Mal), and the NT
  - Start in Genesis, Job, and Matthew. If you read equal numbers of chapters in each section, you’ll end at about the same time.

- Read the whole Bible through in a year. You can do so if you read 3–4 chapters every day. Follow a published plan, or buy a one-year Bible.

- Read sections repeatedly (this works especially well in the NT). Examples: loop through Luke–Romans, Galatians–Colossians, or 1 Thessalonians–Titus. Or read the same book over and over again.

- Read through a chronological Bible. This Bible arranges the information into a chronological order, so you read the events in the order in which they occurred.

- Read and meditate on a small passage (a paragraph or a chapter). Concentrate on understanding that passage very well.

5. Read a portion that is comfortable for you, maybe 1–3 chapters.

6. Take notes as you read.

- Outline the book.
• Write down questions and comments to study or discuss later.

• Note verses you’d like to work on memorizing.

7. For a change of pace, read from a different text than you normally do.

• Versions: The NKJV updates the language of the KJV without departing totally from the well-known phrasing and language of the KJV. The NASB is a good literal translation. The NIV is quite interpretive, often giving the translator’s view of what the author meant. Nevertheless, it’s generally pretty accurate and is quite clear and readable. Avoid paraphrases.

• Study Bibles: Explanatory notes can add much to your understanding of the text. The NIV Study Bible has a very good notes section. The New Scofield Reference Bible has many helpful notes, as does The Open Bible and the New Geneva Study Bible. Various publishers put out Student Bibles, which are formatted especially for teens. As always, remember that the notes are not inspired and may be contrary to what you have been taught.

• Parallel Bibles: These volumes have the text of several translations side by side so you can see how the different translators handled the text. This is especially helpful when one translation is unclear.

• Interlinears: An interlinear Bible has the text of the original language (Hebrew or Greek) along side the English translation. Interlinears are especially helpful for those who have a basic knowledge of the original languages.

8. Use another book in conjunction with your reading, such as a good commentary, or a devotional book. Many devotional books include interesting stories but don’t aid in your understanding of the text. Use those that explain the Bible.
9. Find a partner. Agree to read a certain section and then meet to discuss it.

Prayer

Prayer is simply talking to God. In prayer we acknowledge our dependence upon God, confess our sins, and ask for what we need, and ask for God to help others.

- Use the ACTS format:
  - Adoration (i.e., praising God for who he is) Nehemiah 9:6–7
  - Confession 1 John 1:9
  - Thanksgiving 1 Thes 5:18
  - Supplication Phil 4:6
- Pray after you’ve read the Bible. One naturally follows the other. As you read and meditate upon the Bible, you’ll see principles or issues that you should pray about.
- Start a prayer list. Get a piece of paper and write down all the things and people you’d like to pray about or for.
  - Pray for others: parents, friends, pastor, church members, missionaries
  - Pray for events: church services, activities, plans
  - Pray for yourself: confess sin, help with problems

You might want to break it up into different things for each day.

Conclusion

Discipline yourself to take time daily to meet with God in devotions. Bible reading, memorization, meditation and prayer are essential parts of the Christian life. Without them, there will be little if any growth or strength possible.
Worship

“WORSHIP” is one of those vague, nebulous terms that’s hard to define. We talk about it and claim to do it, but it seems that nobody is sure what it is.

Short Definition: Worship is focusing on and responding to God.

Worship is a discipline because one must be disciplined in his approach to and worship of God. As we will see, there are prescribed ways and means of worshiping God which we must not neglect.

Worship Explained

Texts:

Psalms 95:6 O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.

John 9:37–38 And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him.

Matthew 4:10 It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Revelation 4:8–11 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory

1 Teacher’s Note: This lesson will likely take two weeks. Much of the material in this lesson from John MacArthur, The Ultimate Priority (Chicago: Moody, 1983).
and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

The English word “worship” was once spelled “weorthscype.” Worship is the act of displaying the worth or value of someone or something. It is ascribing to God His worth, or stating and affirming His supreme value. Theologically speaking, worship is any activity whereby believers display the worth or value of God.

To worship God is to ascribe the proper worth to God, to magnify his worthiness of praise, to approach and address God as He is worthy. As we understand and appreciate Who God is, we naturally respond in praise and adoration.²

Worship is honor and adoration directed toward God. The biblical words for worship literally mean, “to kiss toward,” “to kiss the hand,” and “to bow down,” thus signifying humble adoration. Worship is the “boiling over” of a heart filled with praise and adoration for who God is and what he has done. By its very definition, worship is God-centered. That is, it has God as its focus. Worship is about God and for God. Man-centered worship is a contradiction in terms.

Worship is something we give to God; we render honor, homage and adoration to God. Most people focus on getting something out of the worship service. Instead, we should come with the intention of giving our worship to God.

² Whitney, p. 87.
Worship is one of the chief objectives of the church. For most churches, the Sunday services (especially the morning service) are their primary corporate worship opportunities. By “corporate” I mean as a church. We do worship God independently/personally. Although worship can and should be done in private (e.g., Luke 5:16), the public worship of God is the focus of this section. When the church meets, its primary purpose is the worship of God. One should not overlook or neglect this corporate nature of worship.

Whatever means we use to express worship to God, it must be done “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Worship occurs when one’s mind and heart are occupied with sincere and truthful thoughts of God.

Generally speaking, there are five ways in which a church expresses its worship to God:

**Preaching**

1. The responsibility of the speaker: preach the Word accurately (2 Timothy 2:15), thoroughly (Acts 20:27) and convincingly (Titus 2:15). He is to bring out the sense of the text (exegesis) and explain how it applies to modern life.

2. The responsibility of the listener:
   - Actively listen, do not passively hear (see James 1:22–25).
   - Evaluate what the preacher says in the light of the Bible (Acts 17:11). This is not a critique of the preacher’s performance or style, but of the truthfulness of his message.
   - Obey the biblical commands.

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3 Note that worship, not evangelism, is primary. Evangelism is important, but when the church meets, worship is (or should be) the purpose.
Preaching should be the focal point of every worship service, for it is the medium which God has ordained to save the lost (1 Corinthians 1:21) and sanctify the saved (1 Corinthians 2).

Note the Quote: “Word and worship belong indissolubly to each other. All worship is an intelligent and loving response to the revelation of God, because it is the adoration of his Name. Therefore acceptable worship is impossible without preaching. For preaching is making known the Name of the Lord, and worship is praising the Name of the Lord made known.

. . . Our worship is poor because our knowledge of God is poor, and our knowledge of God is poor because our preaching is poor. But when the Word of God is expounded in its fullness, and the congregation begins to glimpse the glory of the living God, they bow down in solemn awe and joyful wonder before His throne. It is preaching which accomplishes this, the proclamation of the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God. That is why preaching is unique and irreplaceable.”

Singing

Singing is an excellent vehicle for expressing one’s adoration for God. The Book of Psalms, the hymnal for Israel, is full of praise and worship directed toward God. The NT also affirms the importance of music in worship (Col 3:16–17). In most church services, music plays a prominent role. We must insist, however, that both the music and the musicians be pleasing to God. The following is an excerpt from one church’s music guidelines:

Understanding that music is an integral part of the worship service; that it prepares the heart for the preaching of the Word of God; and that it ministers to the souls and spirits of men and women, all music at the Calvary Baptist Church will be aimed at bringing honor and glory to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Music should be neither shoddy nor cheap in an attempt to imitate the world.

One of the most heated and divisive debates raging in Christianity today concerns music. Traditionalists insist that music should be conservative, reverent and doctrinal, relying mostly on hymns. Advocates of contemporary music suggest that church music should mirror popular culture. Many churches have disposed of the hymnal and replaced it with catchy choruses, and traded in the song leader for a “worship team.”

**Giving**

We don’t often think of giving as an aspect of worship, but it is. Both the OT and the NT command sacrificial giving to the Lord’s work. The Levitical system was centered around worshiping the Lord through offerings. In the burnt offering, for example, the worshiper offers a sacrifice that is wholly burnt up – offered totally to God. This was one of the ways God prescribed to worship Him. In the NT, we no longer worship the Lord with animal sacrifices; we worship through financial giving. See Philippians 4:18.

**Praying**

Yet another way in which we can express our adoration for God is through prayer. Even though someone else may be leading in prayer, you can and should silently pray along with him or her. The following elements should be included in prayer:

1. Adoration: praising God for who he is and what he has done. This element is often neglected or missing altogether.

2. Confession of sin: acknowledging our sin before God and asking him to forgive us.

3. Thanksgiving: acknowledging that God is responsible for the blessings we enjoy.

Serving

A final expression of corporate worship is service. God is pleased when His children use the abilities He has given them in the corporate worship of their local church, provided He gets the glory.

It’s interesting to note that one of the NT words for service (latreuo) also suggests paying homage or rendering honor (c.f. Rom 14:18).

Worship defiled

Is the form of worship really all that important? As long as one is sincere in his desire to worship God, any form of worship is acceptable, right? Wrong. In fact, God repeatedly judged those who failed to worship Him properly.

Worship should be done in a way that is both disciplined and appropriate. That is, we don’t bring elements into the worship service that are out of place or unsuitable for the occasion. Worship should be a somewhat formal, traditional, and even dignified event. It’s not a casual, lax, or slap-stick matter.

False worship: worshiping the wrong god.

Independent worship: not following the prescribed forms.

Nadab and Abihu were high priests who offered “strange fire” before the Lord (Lev 10). They acted independently of the direct revelation of God, and God killed them on the spot. Saul did a similar thing, usurping the role of the priest by preparing the burnt offering (1 Sam 13:8–14). Such disobedience cost him the throne. In another example, Aaron made a golden calf for the people to worship, reducing the true God to an image (Ex 32). The prophet Malachi told the Israelites that God would not accept their offerings of lame, blind, and sick animals. In each case, people were endeavoring to carry out a responsibil-
Hypocritical worship: worshiping with the right form but with wrong attitude

The Lord does not accept worship from arrogant, self-righteous people, even if they offer their sacrifices using the right forms. Amos 5:1 “I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight I your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them.” Hypocrisy may also be defined as doing the act without understanding or sincerity. Empty worship is worse than no worship at all. See Isaiah 1:11–15.

Disorderly worship: worshiping in disorderly, chaotic, or unprescribed ways.

God has told us quite clearly how to worship Him, and it’s our responsibility to worship in the ways He has prescribed. Those who fail to worship in the right way are guilty of disorderly worship. The worship service at Corinth, for example, was apparently very disorganized and chaotic. Paul had to rebuke them for allowing disorder to reign at their church (1 Cor 14).

The acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture. From the Westminster Confession of Faith

Even among those who attempt to worship God according to his word and with the right attitude, a debate rages about the appropriateness of some forms of worship. Does God delight in traditional hymns or in contemporary rock, or in both (or perhaps neither)? Does God want a long, serious sermon or a short, funny one? Is it OK to read prayers? Can we have communion with Coke and potato chips?
Should the format be liturgical or free form? These are the issues the modern church is struggling with.

It should be clear that God does indeed care about how we worship Him. Some forms of worship are unacceptable to God. We have to follow the prescribed forms and have the right heart attitude. The NT tells us how to worship God, and we shouldn’t attempt to worship God independent of that plan. Neither should we think that God is pleased when we attempt to worship Him if we are guilty of sinful attitudes. We can do everything right and still be wrong. The form of worship and the attitude of the worshipper are equally important.

**Worship Enhanced**

Having examined what worship is and how it is expressed in the local church, we conclude by examining some practical ways in which we can enhance the corporate worship of our local church.

**Preparation**

1. **During the week:** The more we personally worship the Lord during the week (in Bible study, prayer, song, righteous living, etc.), the more prepared we will be to corporately worship Him on Sunday.

2. **Saturday night:** Don’t stay out so late on Saturday night that you can’t function on Sunday morning. Get to bed early enough to get a good night’s sleep. Have Sunday morning planned out beforehand (clothing, breakfast, travel plans, etc.).

3. **Sunday morning:**
   - Prior to arrival: Spend time in personal worship before leaving for church. Allow plenty of time to get ready and get to church early.
   - Prior to the service: Spend time in silent contemplation (in the sanctuary during the prelude...
works well). Prepare your heart for the service to follow. Save fellowship for after the service. Don’t rush in after the service has begun. Sit up front in order to eliminate distractions.

**Expectation**

Come with a heart filled to overflowing, ready to worship the God of the universe. Once present, don’t be a “pew potato.” Be an active, enthusiastic participant.

**Conclusion**

Worship is any activity whereby believers display the worth or value of God. Public worship includes the following activities: preaching, praying, singing, giving, and serving. One should worship God in private, too. Worshiping God with the wrong forms or with wrong attitudes is unacceptable. We can enhance our worship experience by preparing for it ahead of time and by enthusiastically participating in the worship services.

As you can tell, there are many issues revolving around the idea of worship. All believers must discipline themselves to be involved in sincere, appropriate and acceptable worship, both in private and as part of a community of believers.

Worship is both an end and a means. It is an end, or goal, in that there is no higher activity than ascribing glory and honor to God. It is a means in that worship helps us become more godly.

**For Further Discussion**

Many churches either have or are considering moving to a “contemporary” worship format. That is, instead of a piano and/or organ, they use a worship band. Instead of traditional hymns, they use short, catchy choruses. Instead of a 30-minute sermon, they use stand-up comedy, drama, and/or multi-media productions. Instead of dressing up for church, they dress casually. Instead of a serious, reverent atmosphere, a celebratory, easygoing attitude prevails.

1. How culture-bound is worship? That is, should worship reflect the modern culture, or should it be somehow different? Is a “traditional” worship style just a reflection of the culture of the 1950s?
Worship is by necessity somewhat culture-bound. It uses the language and abilities of the people. The problem with worship reflecting modern culture is that modern/pop culture is morally bankrupt. If we import that into the church, we’ve got trouble. Traditional worship does seem stuck in that era, mostly because the culture of that day was far less secular, less immoral.

2. What should be the character of our worship? That is, should we approach God haphazardly and casually, or in a serious, reverent and humble manner? Should worship be formalized or spontaneous?

We should approach God with a sense of awe and humble reverence. This explains why our services are more serious than glitzy. Some see worship as a kind of celebration, so their services are very upbeat and happy. There’s room for celebration within a service, but the attitudes of humility and contrition for sin must also be present.

3. Is there anything wrong with substituting drama or video for the sermon?

Yes, preaching is the means God designed to communicate the gospel. We can learn from drama and video, but we can’t neglect or forsake preaching as the primary method of communication during a service. A sermon on video tape would be OK.

4. What about using choruses instead of hymns?

Choruses tend to be quite self-centered, focusing on what God has done for the individual. They also can be trite and repetitive. Choruses appeal to/play upon the emotions more than do hymns. Hymns, on the other hand, tend to be more doctrinally centered, focusing on the person of God, the atonement, sin, and other great themes. Hymns more directly ascribe honor and glory to God. They’re more rational than emotional.

5. Whose desires are to be satisfied in a worship service, God’s or man’s? Is human fulfillment the goal or byproduct of worship?
The primary objective is honoring God, not the audience. Worship is to be theocentric.

Human fulfillment (a good feeling) is a result, not a goal, of worship. In fact, worship may make us feel pretty bad about ourselves.

6. Many contemporary services are designed to be “seeker-sensitive.” That is, they appeal to the ordinary unsaved person. Is there anything wrong with designing your service to appeal to the unsaved?

Services should be designed to honor God, not unsaved people. The worship service is primarily for the saints, not for the unsaved. The unsaved cannot worship God, so they should be uncomfortable in that kind of setting.

7. You may have seen the following: a person standing with upraised hands and face, eyes closed, swaying or dancing to the music, murmuring or singing, apparently in a trance-like state. Is such a posture necessary for true worship?

No. Getting on your knees, prostrating yourself, or raising your hands are biblical postures for worship. Such actions as those above seem to be closely associated with the Charismatic movement. Charismatics are generally seeking an emotional experience, a “spiritual high,” or some special feeling/sensation of God’s presence. But a worship service is designed to give believers an opportunity to worship God, not to give them a special feeling or experience. Beware of experience-based, emotionally driven “worship” practices.
HERE ARE FEW THINGS in the Christian life more important than telling others about Jesus Christ. The Savior’s last commission to His disciples was to “make disciples of all nations.” All believers have the responsibility of telling the good news of Jesus Christ to others. Unfortunately, there are few activities more intimidating and uncomfortable for some people than doing so. Fear, in other words, often prevents believers from speaking when they should. But evangelism is a discipline that is necessary, not only for the one being evangelized, but also for the one trying to evangelize. As with the other disciplines, evangelism in the life of a believer has a goal—godliness. Participation in evangelism aids in the development of godliness in the life of a Christian. If one wants to grow in godliness, he’ll practice the discipline of evangelism.

Many Christian groups and individuals practice evangelism in many different ways—street preaching, drama, music, TV programs, posters, tee shirts, bumper stickers, etc. What exactly is evangelism? Here’s a good definition:

Evangelism is to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinful people, in order that they may come to put their trust in God through Him, to receive Him as their Savior, and serve Him as their king in the fellowship of His Church.2

More generally speaking, evangelism is communicating the gospel to the unsaved. The goal of evangelism is the conversion of the lost and their addition to a good church. All believers should be involved in some aspect of evangelism.

Why should evangelism be considered a discipline? It takes effort and purpose and determination and preparation to be involved in it.

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1 For a lengthy treatment of the topic of evangelism, see the author’s material Biblical Evangelism.
Evangelism is a command.

*Texts:*

Matthew 28:18–20 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Mark 16:15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Disciples of Christ really have no choice in the matter. Christ commanded his disciples to reach others with the message of the gospel. Those who refuse to be involved in evangelism are simply disobedient. However, a sense of duty is not the primary motivation for evangelism. Believers ought to pursue evangelism as an expression of love, both for God and for the unsaved.

Evangelism is difficult.

*Problems*

1. Fear is probably the leading factor that prevents Christians from carrying out their responsibility to tell others of Christ. Fear of rejection, of appearing foolish, of losing popularity or friends, and/or of failure will shut up all but the most intrepid believer.

2. Ignorance or misinformation is another factor that hinders evangelism. Some people think that advanced theological training is necessary. Others as-
sociate evangelism with certain methods that they find uncomfortable.

3. Some find it very difficult to express their faith clearly. When asked exactly how a person comes to know Christ, they may be at a loss for words. They know the basic information, but are unable to organize it or explain it very well.

4. One major hindrance in communicating the gospel is repeated failure. Many believers have attempted to share the gospel and have failed. They may have tried several times and never enjoyed success. Perhaps they were even embarrassed or humiliated. After several such unsuccessful attempts, it’s common for believers simply to give up. A “what’s the use” attitude prevails in the minds of many who don’t see any results of their efforts.

Solutions

1. Believers should fear God more than they fear men. Fear should not prevent one from obeying God. Further, one can evangelize even if he is afraid. And the more one does it, the less fearful he will become. Remember that God has promised to supply the power necessary to evangelize. Part of the Great Commission is Jesus’ promise “I am with you always.” God empowers every Christian to evangelize, and the gospel itself contains its own power (Rom 1:16).

2. Ignorance is no excuse for not evangelizing. While advanced training may be good and beneficial, it’s not a prerequisite to effective evangelism. Anyone who understands the gospel well enough to be saved should be able to communicate the message to others (see John 9:25). Also, evangelism is not tied to any certain method. In fact, the most effective evangelism takes place during the normal course of one’s life.

3. If one finds it difficult to express the gospel very well, he should seek to educate himself. There
are plenty of books, classes and seminars available to give an average believer the knowledge and ability to communicate the facts of the gospel effectively.

4. Success in evangelism is not measured by the response of the one being evangelized, but by the faithfulness of the evangelist. Whenever one has accurately communicated the gospel to an unsaved person, successful evangelism has taken place, irrespective of the person’s response to the message. Further, one should remember that planting, weeding and watering are all part of the process. Even if someone rejects the message from one person, God may use that occasion to bring the person to salvation through someone else.

**Evangelism is a discipline.**

Reaching others with the gospel is an active pursuit, not something that happens automatically. The believer does not wait for the unsaved to come to him; he actively seeks to reach them. Like any other discipline, one must plan to participate in evangelism.

**Corporate evangelism**

Participate in evangelistic programs as part of your church. Most churches carry on outreach programs or activities specifically designed to reach people with the gospel. Get involved in these programs.

**Personal evangelism**

Almost all believers have some interaction with unsaved people, whether at school, at work, or in the general community. Make it a point to pray for the salvation of such people, and be ready to announce the gospel message whenever you have an opportunity. It’s a good idea to carry tracts and/or a small New Testament with you.
Seek advanced training in evangelism.

Go to seminars or classes designed to help you understand the gospel and to be better able to communicate it. Read books on the subject. Learn how to express accurately and clearly the content of the gospel and the required response to it.

Seek interaction with those who need the gospel.

Join a club or a group where you can “let your light shine before men.” Take whatever opportunities the Lord gives you to proclaim the gospel.

Conclusion

Evangelism is a discipline in that it takes effort, purpose, determination and preparation to be involved in it. Every believer must discipline himself to participate in some of the evangelistic opportunities are available to him.

For Further Discussion

1. List several evangelistic programs that our church provides.

   Visitation, children’s clubs (e.g., AWANA), various youth activities, various church services

2. If one is involved with a corporate (church-oriented) evangelistic program, does that mean that there is no need for personal evangelism?

   No. In fact, the emphasis should be on personal evangelism over corporate. Most people come to Christ thru the influence of a personal friend, not thru the influence of a church program.

3. What do you see as the main hindrances to evangelism in your life?
O NE WAY OF EXERCISING ourselves toward godliness is through service (often called “ministry”). Many aspects of the Christian life revolve around serving the Lord in some capacity within the church. Unfortunately, service for God often takes a back seat to service for self.

Serving God is not a job for the casually interested or the uncommitted. Service costs time, talents, money, and perhaps even one’s earthly life. God asks believers to make service a high priority. He wants first place, not leftovers. Serving God is not a short-term, temporary, only-if-it’s-convenient proposition. Believers should be willing to invest their entire lives in the service of their Lord.

Note: The primary location or context for ministry is the local church. Believers serve God through the opportunities available within their churches. New Testament ministry is church ministry. There should be no such thing as “Lone Ranger” ministry. One’s church should be the starting point and ending point of all ministries.

There are many areas of service within a church. What are some examples? Usher, SS teacher or helper, Jr. church, setting up for special events, speaking, singing, other music, nursery, office work, etc.

Texts

Deuteronomy 13:4 Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.

Psalms 100:2 Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

Colossians 3:24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.
Hebrews 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

The biblical words for service include *doulos*, meaning “slave” or “bond servant,” and *latreuo*, meaning “to act as a servant.”¹ The word “deacon” is based on the word, *diakonia*, which denotes any kind of service or work in general. Thus, the believer’s service for God is to be from a lowly, humble position, like that of a household servant. Paul often called himself a servant of Jesus Christ.

**Truths about Service**

**Serving God is hard work.**

Paul uses words like work, labor, struggle, and energy when talking about ministry (c.f. Eph 4:12; Col 1:29). Many aspects of service are difficult and frustrating. Service will rarely be glorious, nor will hard working servants often be recognized. Ministry is not the place to make much money or gain great popularity. Ministry often requires long hours, low (or no) pay, and few if any discernible results. To persevere in service requires discipline, patience, and faith that one’s labor is not in vain.

**Serving God is enduring work.**

God sees and acknowledges services rendered on His behalf (1 Cor 15:58). God doesn’t forget our labor (Heb 6:10). Your rewards will be based on service.

**Serving God is satisfying work.**

For the believer, there’s nothing better than knowing that he has faithfully served his Lord. Ministry often yields a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

¹ *latreuo* may also be translated “worship.”
that those who don’t serve never know. There’s an excitement and exhilaration in being used by God.

Reasons God Expects Believers to Serve

**to be obedient.**

Service is a command. God has called believers to serve Him and to serve others. Lack of service is sin.

**to express gratitude for what God has done**

1 Samuel 12:24 Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.

**in answer to God’s invitation**

Isaiah 6:8 I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

1 Timothy 3:1 If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

There’s an urgent need for qualified laborers to enter the service of the Lord, both as volunteers and as vocational ministers.

**to follow the example of Jesus**

John 13:12–14 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.

**to express godly love for others**

Galatians 5:13 By love serve one another.
Limitations on Service

God has designed the church so that certain rolls are to be fulfilled by specific kinds of people. For example, the qualifications for pastors and deacons are set quite high. Many believers simply do not meet the standards and should not serve in those positions. One should not seek to serve in those areas for which he is not qualified. If one has disqualified himself for certain service positions, he should seek other places to serve. Believers must submit themselves to biblical principles of service.

Conclusion

Believers must discipline themselves to participate in the service opportunities that are available to them. The primary context for such service is through the local church. Service for the Lord is often hard work, and the immediate rewards may be lacking. But God has promised great eternal rewards for those who faithfully and humbly serve. Believers should be active in service in order to obey biblical commands, to follow the example of Christ, and to express their love for others. Those not qualified for certain service positions should seek other avenues of service.

For Further Discussion

1. What is the appropriate age for one to begin serving the Lord?

There is no specific age. As soon as one is converted, he can start serving.

2. Why do some people seek areas of service for which they are not qualified?

To be prominent or noticeable; out of pride and rebellion against the policies of the church or the teaching of the Bible.

3. Why is discipline so important in God’s service?

Because it takes commitment and perseverance to faithfully carry out one’s area of ministry. Ministry is
frequently filled with frustrations and difficulties. To stick with it takes discipline.

4. What are some potential problems associated with a ministry that is not directly associated with a church?

1. The church is God’s program for today; hence, it’s the proper place to base all ministry. It’s biblical. 2. Those ministries not directly associated with a church often are unaccountable and may drift into various problems. 3. Such ministries often become substitutes for churches, drawing away both workers and financial support that should be directed toward a legitimate church.
A STEWARD is a manager or administrator. He takes care of other people’s property, and is rewarded or punished for how well he does his job. Jesus used the idea of stewards in his parables (e.g., Luke 12:42, 16:3). Believers are stewards in that God has entrusted to them various tools, and He expects them to use them properly. To do so requires discipline. It’s easy to squander what God has given, or to think that the things God gives are really one’s own. But believers don’t own anything. They are just taking care of God’s property.

Texts

Matthew 25:21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Luke 16:10 He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

1 Corinthians 4:2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

Colossians 4:17 And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.

Note some important areas of stewardship:

Time

Time is not our own to be used as we see fit, but is a gift or resource from God that believers are to use in ways that would please and honor God. Paul tells us
to “redeem the time,” that is, make the most of every opportunity. We don’t know how much time we have; therefore, we should use our time to accomplish the most for God as possible.

How one uses time is a telling commentary on his or her level of discipline. One who can fritter away hours doing nothing of value or merit shows a low level of discipline. While believers should carve out time for rest and relaxation, too much time spent on unprofitable activities can be destructive. There’s some truth in the old saying, “Idle hands are the Devil’s workshop.” Time on earth must be spent doing God’s business and preparing for eternity. Time is short and is passing away. Believers will give an account to God regarding how they spent their time. Discipline yourself to “redeem the time.”

Money

There is no excuse for financial irresponsibility. You may not have much money, and you may wish you had more, but whatever amount you have comes from God, and you must handle it as a careful steward.

Biblical principles regarding money and its use:

- God owns everything. He entrusts His resources to stewards (Ps 24:1).
- Don’t love money or be materialistic. Greed gets one into trouble (Luke 12:15; 1 Tim 6:8–10).
- Being rich should not be a primary goal of life (Prov 23:4).
- Labor to meet the needs of your family (1 Tim 5:8).
- Give generously and cheerfully to support the work of the ministry (2 Cor 9:6–8). Generous giving results in generous blessing (Luke 6:38). Giving is an act of worship (Phil 4:18). Giving reflects your level of faith (Mark 12:41f).
should be planned and systematic (1 Cor 16:1–2).

- Save money now for later (Pro 6:6–8).

Body

Think of your body as a tool that God has given you to serve Him. Just like any tool, it can be used for good or for evil, in appropriate or inappropriate ways. It takes discipline to use your body for the glory of God and not for your own purposes.

Remember Paul’s words: “Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit . . . and you are not your own. Therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor 6:19–20). He further tells us to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Rom 12:1).

We may be tempted to think that if we own anything, we own our own bodies. But such is not the case. God owns our bodies, and He tells us very clearly what He wants us to do with them. It takes discipline to follow God’s commands regarding how we use or refuse to use our bodies.

Believers must discipline (“keep under” 1 Cor 9:27) their bodies. One should take care of his body. Eat the right kinds of foods, avoid destructive foods and activities, and exercise. Keep your body healthy and fit. Doing so prevents sin and allows one to be an effective tool in God’s service.

Note: Part of your body is your mind, your brain. Believers must discipline themselves to use their brains in a way that would honor God. Christianity is an intellectual, mind-intensive way of life. Christians must not be undisciplined and unguarded in their thinking. They are to renew their mind through exposure to God’s Word (Rom 12:2). Remember: you can’t learn from God’s Word if you don’t take time to study it.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are
just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

**Gifts/talents**

God has given every believer at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:7). He is responsible to use whatever gifts and talents he has for the good of others. The church is the context for the use of one’s spiritual gifts. One should use his talents and abilities to enhance the ministry of his church. Believers are accountable for how well they managed and employed their gifts. For one to be gifted, and then not to use that gift in God’s service, is a great shame.

1 Peter 4:10 As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

**Conclusion**

Every Christian is a steward or manager of the things God has given him. One’s time, money, body, and talents should all be employed in God’s service. Strive to be a good steward.

**For Further Discussion**

1. How can one say that all things come from God? Don’t people work for their money and things?

   God is sovereignly permitting you to work for money. God gives us abilities and talents that we use to make money. He works it out so that you have a job or some other source of income. So everything goes back to God.

2. When will believers give an account of their stewardship?

   **At the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor 3:11)**
Other Disciplines: Learning and Fasting

So far in this series, we’ve discussed how discipline and discipleship affect the Christian life. In this last lesson, we’ll focus on two other often-ignored, disciplines that have a place in a believer’s life – learning and fasting.

Learning

Attitudes among church members regarding education vary from one extreme to the other. Some see education as a primary goal of the church. Pastors and people alike strive for advanced degrees and extended training in theology, philosophy, apologetics, history, and other disciplines. On the other hand, there are those within the church who are downright anti-intellectual in their approach. They think that if someone needs “book larnin’” then he must not be filled with the Holy Spirit. In their opinion, “semitary” (a deliberate mispronunciation of seminary) education stifles warm-hearted devotion and produces theological “smarty pants” with no heart for God.

What should be one’s attitude toward education? Are education and zeal mutually exclusive? Of course not. Christians should have both a “full head and a full heart.” ¹ Obviously, devotion to and zeal for God are more necessary than are diplomas hang-

¹ Whitney, p. 224.
ing on a wall. Nevertheless, there is value in theological education. Part of the disciplined Christian life is a commitment to extending and expanding one’s education.

Texts

Proverbs 9:9  Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.

Proverbs 18:15  The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.

Proverbs 19:2  Also without knowledge the soul is not good, and he who hurries with his feet sins.

Hosea 4:6  My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

Jeremiah 4:22  For My people are foolish; they have not known Me; they are stupid sons, and they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.

Ephesians 1:17  That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

Colossians 1:10  That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

2 Peter 3:18  But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

One of the characteristics of a wise person is his commitment to education, to seeking wisdom and knowledge. Such a person can never get enough. On the other hand, one of the characteristics of a fool is his rejection of wisdom and instruction. He refuses to learn.

Part of the Great Commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your ... mind” (Mark 12:29–30). God takes pleasure when the believer fills his mind with God’s Word and God’s ways. Further, learning about the world God has made is certainly a valid and beneficial use of one’s mind. It’s proper and honorable to pursue education to the highest possible degree in order to serve God better.
The Bible warns us not to be foolish, untaught, and ignorant. Those who are not disciplined learners lack discernment and are often prime targets of cults, false prophets, and bad theology.

Learning happens on purpose. No one accidentally pursues education – it’s a purposeful pursuit. Disciples are intentional learners; that is, they make it their purpose and plan to advance their education. They take every opportunity to learn more. They attend seminars, classes, lectures, and any other event that may extend or improve their education.

Disciples must be readers. They should have a voracious appetite for good books. It’s unfortunate that so many young people, and even adults, rarely read anything more challenging than the comic page or a romance novel. (45% of Americans say they never read a book. The average college graduate does not read one serious book in an entire year.) Believers should make it their business to read theological and devotional books that will inform and challenge them.

Note the Quote:

It always amazes me that there are pastors who don’t read. I can’t imagine being effective in the pulpit or being able to provide dynamic leadership without reading. Although I am no longer a pastor, I find it equally necessary to read extensively if I am going to maintain an effective ministry in days ahead. (Charles Wood, The Pastoral Epistle [March ’99])

The same could be said of any serious believer – reading is a necessary part of an effective, growing Christian life. Discipline yourself to read. Choose good books, and set aside some time daily to learn by reading.

2 Whitney, p. 232.
Fasting

Fasting is not often thought of as a necessary part of the Christian life, because, frankly, it is not. One is not required to fast in order to live a godly Christian life. Fasting is a practice that Christians may participate in from time to time for certain reasons. It’s OK to fast or not to fast.

Biblically speaking, fasting is a voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual reasons. One may fast from food or from any number of regular activities like watching TV, using certain products, participating in certain events, etc. A fast is any time you refrain from doing something you usually do, for spiritual reasons. The Bible refers only to fasting from food.

The NT indicates that there will be times for fasting. Jesus stated more than once that his disciples would fast (Matt 6:16–17, 9:14–15, 17:21) and the early church participated in fasting (Acts 13:2, 14:23). However, Paul mentions it only once (1Cor 7:5) and does not suggest that fasting is a necessary part of the Christian life.

Types of fasts:

- In a normal fast, one abstains from all food except water (or other liquids). The human body cannot normally function without water for more than 2–3 days (Luke 4:2).
- In a limited fast, one abstains from certain kinds of foods or liquids (Dan 1:12).
- In a congregational fast, the whole congregation agrees to abstain for a designated period in order to pursue spiritual goals (Acts 13:2).
- In a supernatural (miraculous) fast, biblical characters abstained from both food and water for extended periods without sensing any need for such. For example, Moses spent 40 days on the mountain without eating food or drinking any water (Deut 9:9). This was a miracle, and
we should not expect the same to be repeated today.

- Other fasts: in the OT, several occasions are mentioned that require fasting.

**Reasons to fast**

Remember that biblical fasting must have spiritual reasons. There may be beneficial health reasons to fast, but that’s not what we are concerned with here. If one fasts, it should be for one of the following biblical reasons.

- To strengthen prayer: Fasting brings a note of urgency and sincerity to our prayers. Fasting doesn’t guarantee that God will answer prayer in the way that we desire, but it does show that we are serious and sincere about a matter. Fasting is often associated with prayer (Ezra 8:23; Neh 1:4; Dan 9:3; Acts 13:3). Take meal times to pray instead of eating.
  - Pray and fast for wisdom in making decisions (Acts 14:23)
  - Pray and fast for deliverance or protection (Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:16).
  - Pray and fast to express repentance for sin (1 Sam 7:6; Joel 2:12).
  - Pray and fast to express and/or renew your dedication to God and to worship Him (Luke 2:37).

- To humble yourself before God (1 King 21:27–29) (Note: it’s possible to fast without humility [Luke 18:12]).

- To express grief: Especially in the OT, fasting is associated with death and grief (Judg 20:26; 1 Sam 31:13).

- To discipline your body and/or to overcome temptation

While fasting is not an essential, required aspect of the Christian life, it may be a common part of it, depending on one’s circumstances. It should be more common than it is. Fasting is thoroughly appropriate
in many situations, and participation in fasting may serve to strengthen and support your spiritual health.

Matthew 6:17–18 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Note: Always seek medical advice before fasting. Some physical conditions make fasting dangerous.

Conclusion

Believers should develop and maintain a commitment to education. They should discipline themselves to participate in various educational opportunities. They should also read theological and devotional books. Fasting is an ignored discipline, but one that should play more of a part in believers’ lives.

For Further Discussion

1. Where can you find a list of good books to read?
   Consult with your pastor.

2. What are some ways one can pursue further theological education?
   1. Some churches have Bible institutes or other training available; 2. There may be a seminary or college near by; 3. Lots of organizations produce good material on audio and/or video tape; 4. Various seminars and conferences.

3. Why do we rarely hear preaching on fasting?
   1. Because it’s usually not considered to be a primary/essential aspect of the faith; 2. Paul doesn’t say much about it. If it were a significant part of NT Christian life, you’d think he would have mentioned it. There’s no systematic teaching on the subject in the NT; 3. It has not traditionally been part of Baptist or evangelical church life; 4. The fact that some believers are physically unable to fast shows that it is not a necessity.
4. What are some circumstances that would lead a believer to fast?

Death in the family, repentance for sin, urgent prayer requests, major decisions, temptations, special needs, an outpouring of worship, etc.
The following books were helpful in the preparation of this material.


R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Crossway, 1991)

