

WEEK 7: ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES BECOMING MORE IMPORTANT?

This week we look at **what we are actually doing to grow spiritually.**

Are you continuing in the flame that God set in your soul at the beginning of your spiritual walk?

God's work continues in His children; shaping them grooming them into the image of His Son.

Are you utilizing what Scripture prescribes to you to keep your fellowship with Christ burning bright or has your faith and relationship with Christ become complacent?

Whitney: *"Nothing contributes to the growth of spiritual heat and light more than the persevering practice of the Christian spiritual disciplines. Disciplines are the bellows and iron poker . . . to stoke and blow on the eternal fire He has ignited in His people."*

I. THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

- A. Spiritual Disciplines are the God-ordained means found in Scripture that bring us in closer communion with God and help us to become more Christlike.
- B. Whitney: [paraphrased] "If the Lord might be compared to a pure, life-giving river, **spiritual disciplines are those means in which we come to the river to drink from, dive it, eat from and wash in.**"
- C. **Disciplines Can be Divided into 2 Categories**
 1. **Personal (private)**
 - a. Reading and meditating on Scripture; Private prayer, fasting, solitude, Journaling, Evangelism
 2. **Congregational (interpersonal)**
 - a. Public worship, Corporate prayer, Lord's supper, Fellowship, evangelism
- D. **Some Practiced in both Personal and Congregational**
 1. Tendency is to choose one or the other, But to grow spiritually both are needed.
 2. Bible teaches both→Jesus as our example practiced both.
- E. **Spiritual Disciplines are NOT just spiritual habits**→ they are God-given in His Word
 1. There are other practices or spiritual habits that may be OK but not properly considered Christian Spiritual Disciplines.
- F. **Spiritual Disciplines in Scripture are sufficient to Grow Us**
 1. God has included all that we need for spiritual growth in the Bible
 2. 2Ti 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and **profitable** for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 **that the man of God may be complete, equipped** for every good work.
 3. Note Scripture not only trains us to live righteously, but by it we are completed, **"the man of God may be complete, equipped** for every good work."

4. **Every practice that is necessary to experience God as much as we can in this world, is included in Scripture.**
5. No other ceremonies, rites, rituals or spiritual exercises are needed to progress towards Christlikeness.

G. God will work through each of the Disciplines in unique ways.

1. These do not necessarily overlap.
2. All are vital parts of a believer's life and singularly important.

H. Spiritual Disciplines are "PRACTICES" AND NOT ATTITUDES

1. These are not Christian graces or "fruits of the Spirit"
2. Prayer is a discipline; Joy is not. Stewardship of time and money is a discipline, peace of God is not.
3. **Disciplines demand action on behalf of the believer**
4. Joy and Peace are **typically the result of practicing Spiritual Disciplines with correct motives.**
5. We cannot wait for God to give us "joy" → experience **joy as consequence of prayer or other spiritual discipline.**
6. **Spiritual Discipline is then a biblical activity that when practiced biblically will result in biblical fruit, ie will move us towards Christlikeness.**

I. Spiritual Disciplines are derived from the Gospel

1. Gospel is not one shot experience that brings us into the kingdom of God
2. **Gospel**– what God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ, **should be at the center of all our Christian thinking and experience** from the point of salvation until we meet Jesus face to face!
3. **All Spiritual Disciplines take us deeper into the magnificence and glory of the Gospel.**

J. Spiritual Disciplines are a Means TO Godliness, NOT Godliness Itself

1. Performing spiritual disciplines do not in themselves make you godly.
2. **1Ti 4:7 But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; (NASB)**
3. **Spiritual Disciplines are the PATHS to godliness, not the goal.**
4. **One can DO a lot of disciplines, like the Pharisees did, and NOT be like Christ.**

II. WHY PRACTICE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

A. We are exhorted to strive to be holy

1. **Heb 12:14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.**
2. Striving for holiness is NOT what qualifies us to **see the Lord.**
3. **Jesus Himself qualifies us by grace, through faith in the life and death of Christ**

4. **Striving FOR holiness is a characteristic of everyone who knows the Lord and who are already on their way to see the Lord.**

5. **NOT STRIVING FOR HOLINESS** demonstrates that they do not know the Lord!

B. All who have the Holy Spirit in them WILL PURSUE HOLINESS

1. His presence and ministry in the person will cause them to love holiness, desire holiness, and even grieve over the lack of holiness.

2. Scripture doesn't set a level, simply states, without it, **no one will see the Lord!**

C. Most important question becomes, "How do we pursue holiness?"

1. Answer **1Tim 4:7 . . . discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;**

2. If your purpose is godliness, then you must **discipline yourself** to pursue it.

3. **Practical way to discipline yourself is by the disciplines taught in the Bible.**

4. **Christian Spiritual Disciplines are the means to godliness, to the holiness that without which, we will not see the Lord!**

D. Therefore the need for the question, "Are you increasing in spiritual disciplines? Are they increasing in importance in your life?"

1. **Growing appetite for Spiritual Disciplines is a sign of enjoyment of God.**

2. When one is lacking or diminished, could be a lack of spiritual growth in godliness.

E. Those that believe in Christ find fulfillment in Him, and desire to be with Him, be like Him.

1. **Desire to be like Him, then you desire to live like He lived.**

2. Jesus practiced Spiritual Disciplines: read, prayed, fasted and obeyed.

F. More than Imitating Jesus.

1. Biblical avenues of intentional communion with Christ by those who love Him

2. Love craves intimacy, especially the love we have for Christ.

3. As grow closer to Christ will gravitate towards the means of that intimacy.

4. Spiritual Disciplines no longer are vjust your Christian duty, but ways to experience life and light from heaven to your soul!

5. Whitney: *"There will be no sustained growth in Christ without them."*

III. DANGERS OF DISCIPLINES

A. Disciplines themselves can be just Religiosity if the heart is not right!

1. Pharisees fasted twice a week and prayed loud and long prayers-> did much discipline in works but never truly pursued true godliness.

B. NO SPIRIT: Without Holy Spirit living inside the heart of the person, such work is just more sin to account for at the judgement seat.

C. Whitney: *“The spiritual disciplines are not by themselves the marks of Christlikeness as much as they are the means to it.”*

D. Can **practice much of these disciplines and be far from Christ** →not know Him.

E. **WRONG MOTIVES:** Even True Believers can spend much time performing the disciplines and not grow spiritually because their motives are wrong.

F. **Only God’s grace working THROUGH such disciplines can transform those who practice them in faith.**

IV. OUT OF BALANCE

A. **Commanded to participate in both personal and interpersonal spiritual disciplines.**

B. Too Much Corporate Disciplines leave little time for personal disciplines.

1. Or maybe they conclude the corporate excuses them from private time in the disciplines.
2. Serving in the church has become less and less due to a consumer mentality even in church.
3. **It is about what I get out of church, not what I put in.**
4. But in same light we **must never sacrifice private prayer, bible study and meditation on God’s Word which are the most important disciplines to practice.**
5. **Some work hard publically but could not give someone the gospel, some are great at fellowship but could never tell anyone how they could be saved.**
6. Some are at church whenever doors open but never open the Bible at home!
7. **Working for Christ is good, but not at the sacrifice of being alone with Christ and His Word spiritually.**
8. **Christ gave Himself to the daily service of the Father, but never neglected the refreshing of His own soul through communion with the Father through personal spiritual disciplines .**
9. Mt 14:23 **And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray... .**
10. Mr 1:35 **And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.**
11. Lu 6:12 ¶ **In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.**

12. Great you are in corporate Bible study and prayer but are you spending time conversing with your heavenly Father?

13. How can one say, "I had enough worship on Sunday" and not experience any private worship during the week?

14. How does such a person think they can grow with such limitations?

15. Jonathan Edwards: "If persons . . . are often highly affected when with others, and but little moved when they have none but God and Christ to converse with, it looks very darkly upon their religion."

C. Private Only

1. **OTHER EXTREME** some submerge themselves in private spirituality and make little time for corporate.
2. **Balance is key!** Some disregard the need to be in worship with among God's people
3. Private, God-centered worship is a necessity for spiritual growth, but public worship, prayer, fellowship and service is also.
4. Hearing preaching, coming to the Lord's Table were practices of Christ's people since the very beginning.
5. It is a mistake to believe that God is pleased with your private worship only while sacrificing coming together with His people.
6. Heb 10:24 And let us **consider how to stir up one another to love and good works**, Heb 10:25 **not neglecting to meet together**, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another**, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

V. HOW DO I GET ON TRACK?

A. Prioritize Your Life

1. **Devout More of your time to pursuit of Christlikeness and the joy of God through the spiritual disciplines than completion of the to-do lists.**
2. Life is busy- must prioritize your own soul!
3. Many things in our culture pull us away from what will count for eternity.
4. We can become too efficient in managing what is basically a meaningless life spiritually.
5. What good is it to keep adding more stuff and more tasks, if we are not becoming more like Christ?
6. Must continue to Heb 12:14 **Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:**

B. Resist Shortcut Christlikeness

1. R.C. Sproul: *“There are no quick and easy paths to spiritual maturity. . . .If we are to seek the kingdom of God, we must abandon any formulae that promise instant spiritual gratification.”*
2. Seeking to be more like Christ is a long and tiring task→ it requires work!
3. Isa 61:3 . . . that they may be **called oaks of righteousness**, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.
4. Can grow a Leyland Cypress tree 15-20 feet in 3 years→ but never an oak tree!
5. God’s work in you takes time and effort– NO SHORTCUTS TO FINISH WELL!

C. Pick One Spiritual Discipline to Increase in Your Life

1. Examine your life and look for just one discipline that you could commit more time.
2. You commit, God is faithful→ and you will never be disappointed in Him!