INTRODUCTION

In an era when instant gratification is the way that people approach life, the very idea of discipline does not seem appealing to many. Yet God invites us on a journey that involves discipline; disciplines that -by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit- grow us into a relationship of dependence, intimacy and awe of our Creator and Redeemer.

1. Spiritual disciplines are habits and practices designed to strengthen our relationship with God.

1 Timothy 4:7

_Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness._

2. The spiritual disciplines are a means of grace.

_For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works._

Titus 2:11–14 (ESV)

THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Spiritual disciplines are not the goal in and of themselves. They are means through which we achieve a purpose

1. To know and love God.

The goal of prayer, reading the Bible, fasting, etc. is to know God better. “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the
glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better.” (Ephesians 1:17)

2. To transform us into Christ likeness (I Timothy 4:8)

“Bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

3. To cultivate spiritual maturity

Maturity involves discovering and submitting your will to God’s.

4. To maintain spiritual health

Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:16

5. To be continually empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The spiritual disciplines are not means to attain righteousness; righteousness is a gift from God. Instead, these activities are channels for God’s transforming power to flow through us.

HOW DO WE DEVELOP THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

1. Partner with the Holy Spirit
   • Choose obedience
   • Rely upon the power of the Spirit

2. Commit to learn and cultivate the Spiritual disciplines.
   • The spiritual disciplines can be learned.

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’” (Luke 11:1)
• Set a specific time and place.
  That helps us undertake our minds and bodies as we eliminate the main physical obstacles for the practice of spiritual disciplines:

  o Procrastination.

  o Distraction. (II Corinthians 11:3)

    “But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” (II Corinthians 11:3)

3. Evaluate yourself periodically

   Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore, I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

   1 Corinthians 9:25-27

4. Seek community / accountability

   All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

   Acts 1:14

THE PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

1. Jesus is our motivation for practicing spiritual disciplines

   My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?   Psalms 42:2

2. The Holy Spirit initiates, energizes, and maintains the spiritual disciplines in our lives. However, He does it in partnership with our continuous choice to discipline ourselves.

   “I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you...For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-
"discipline." (II Timothy 1:6, 7)

3. We do not earn God’s grace through the disciplines, but we do put ourselves in a place where God can change us by His Holy Spirit.

The disciplines are a narrow ledge, and we are in danger of falling off either side. On one side we can become passive and not do the disciplines at all. On the other side we can strive for righteousness and make the disciplines into law.

4. We must be vigilant not to convert disciplines into law but to allow them to be what they were intended to be: life and freedom. (II Corinthians 3:6; Matthew 11:29)

“Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples: ‘The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.” (Matthew 23:1-4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BY THE LAW (SELF-RELIANCE)</th>
<th>BY GRACE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeking acceptance from God on the basis of trying hard to obey God</td>
<td>Seeking acceptance from God on the basis of trusting only in Jesus Christ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeking spiritual growth through keeping God’s laws &amp; human rules</td>
<td>Seeking spiritual growth through cultivating relationship with God</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasis on will power</td>
<td>Emphasis on believing God</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dependence on self</td>
<td>Dependence on the Holy Spirit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engages in spiritual disciplines as works to be accomplished</td>
<td>Engages in spiritual disciplines as means of receiving grace</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fruit: either self-righteous pride or self-defeating discouragement</td>
<td>Fruit: peace with God, humility, love for others, joy of salvation</td>
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<td>Result: provocation of the sin nature leading to greater sin</td>
<td>Result: subduing of the sin nature &amp; real transformation</td>
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5. The grace of the disciplined life has an appeal to others.

The disciples saw the prayer life of Jesus, and they wanted what Jesus had. The communion Jesus enjoyed with the Father and the fruit of his
life makes the disciples desire to have a prayer life of their own.

Discussion Questions

1. What was your perspective on spiritual disciplines prior to this class? Has your perspective changed as a result of this class? If so, how?

2. Does God’s grace absolve us of active engagement in our spiritual formation?

Homework:

1. What’s the main obstacle for you to be more consistent in your practice of the spiritual disciplines? Memorize a Bible verse that will help you overcome that obstacle.

2. Read Romans 8. Write down the ways in which the Holy Spirit helps us.