

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES – SUMMER 2024

1. Learning

Dear Church Family,

As we enter our Summer 2024, we will explore the Spiritual Disciplines called out in Scripture. So, over the next 10 weeks, we will learn a new spiritual discipline and how it can help us to mature in our Christian faith. I hope that you find this weekly study and exercise helpful in your spiritual journey!

What Is Spiritual Discipline?

The Christian life is a journey, a pilgrimage, a race to be run. As such, we must exercise our bodies, minds, and spirits to contend with the terrain and the obstacles along the way. Spiritual discipline prepares the Christian for the unknown and the unforeseen. Paul encouraged his young protégé Timothy with these words: *Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness* (1 Timothy 4:7b, NASB). The Greek word for “discipline” (also translated as exercise or training) is *gumnasa*. It means to train, to exercise, or to discipline. We get our modern-day word, “gymnasium,” from this Greek word.

The Bible commands all Christians to train themselves for the purpose of godliness. There is only one catalyst for transforming the Christian—the Holy Spirit. However, He uses three influences by which to accomplish such transformation: people, circumstances, and spiritual disciplines. We are all affected by the relationships we have with others, the events of our lives, and the preparations we make on a daily basis. The heart of spiritual discipline is training and preparation for the journey called life.

This summer, we will take a brief survey of the various spiritual disciplines called out in the Word of God. This may seem overwhelming at first, but, again, most of these activities are to be woven into the daily routines of life; they’re not intended to be add-ons to our already busy schedules.

What Are the Spiritual Disciplines?

1. Learning

The first spiritual discipline is learning about God, specifically through the Bible’s teachings. The mere fact that this is God’s Word to man should be motivation enough for us to dedicate our time and energy to this discipline. The Bible challenges and realigns our preconceptions about our faith. It also encourages and comforts us in our struggles and frustrations. It further empowers us with the one weapon we have to fight the spiritual battles in this world—His Word. Jesus quoted Old Testament Scripture in response to each of Satan’s three temptations. For example, when Satan tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread,

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Jesus replied by saying: *It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'* (Matthew 4:4) Jesus is our example in everything! With that said, here are seven keys to knowing God's will through His Word. Just remember the acrostic: **BE SMART!**

1. **Believe** God's Word – Trusting that what God commands is truly best for us and that we can rely on His presence and His promises: *Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ* (Romans 10:17).
2. **Engage** God's Word – Engaging the Bible and using it for training during church and dedicated Bible studies: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness* (2 Timothy 3:16).
3. **Study** God's Word – Applying the Seven Cs of Bible Study (Context, Characters, Content, Central proposition, Christ, Cross-references and Change): *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true* (Acts 17:11).
4. **Meditate** on God's Word – Proactively thinking about key verses or biblical concepts throughout each day; delving into a particular doctrine and determining one's position based on biblical evidence. The psalmist declared: *May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD* (Psalm 104:34).
5. **Apply** God's Word – Looking for practical ways to live out the commands of Scripture or to embody the fruit of the Spirit in our daily interactions with others. James exhorts us: *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says* (James 1:22).
6. **Remember** God's Word – Memorizing key stories, verses and principles of God's Word to bolster our faith, works and witness. The psalmist declared: *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you* (Psalm 119:11).
7. **Teach** God's Word – Teaching it first to ourselves, then to our children, and then to others. God instructed the Israelites in this way: *These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up* (Deuteronomy 6:6–7).

Here are some questions for further reflection:

1. On a scale from 1-10, how would you rate yourself on this Spiritual Discipline?
2. What specific actions will you take to develop this Spiritual Discipline further?
3. Read the larger passages surrounding the verses referenced above and meditate on the Scriptural truths present in those passages.
4. Choose a verse to memorize this week.