

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES LIST

Celebration

Confession

Grieving

Guidance

Fasting

Meditation

Memorization

Prayer

Service

Silence

Simplicity

Solitude

Study

Submission

Thanksgiving

Waiting

Worship

Oswald Chambers views them as:

Discipline of divine guidance

Discipline of peril

Discipline of prayer

Discipline of loneliness

Discipline of patience

Any spiritual practices which you have observed in the life of Christ are worthy to be modeled and followed in your own life.

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The inward disciplines

Meditation

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The outward disciplines

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The corporate disciplines

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SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES DEFINED

Spiritual disciplines may be defined as activities which promote and nurture the believer's growth and development to the end that Christ is glorified.

When I speak of spiritual disciplines or practices, I am not referring to anything mystical. Disciplines are practices or acts that are prompted and strengthened by God's Spirit within the believer.

In the book of Acts, these practices could be traced as the followers of Christ *gave, prayed, served*, etc.

Our Lord practiced *solitude* when He withdrew to a solitary place.

In Matthew 6, He said, "When you *pray* ... when you *fast* ... when you *give*," **not if**.

The Lord is concerned first with our being and then our doing. But our doing will flow out of our being.

These practices are not laws in the sense of legalistic rituals.

But, as the psalmist says, "Open my eyes ... I will meditate." Ps. 119:15, 18

"Revive me in Your ways." 119:37

The practices our Lord engaged in and the psalmist promotes are a vehicle for reviving each believer in His ways.

When he writes, "I delight in Your commandments which I love ... I delight in Your law" (119:47, 70), he has moved beyond mere reading into a practice which we would do well to learn.

God's law is perfect because He is perfect. We are not here talking about the Ten Commandments alone – but God's holy standard – being identified with Him.

Matt. 5:48 "Therefore you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

When we practice the same disciplines as our Lord we are identifying with Him and training ourselves to live the life of our Lord, following in His steps.

Within each of the stanzas of Psalm 119, there is at least one discipline for the Christian to develop in his life that will strengthen his walk with the Lord.

As you read the psalm, try to discover these spiritual disciplines. Learn how to adapt – no, more than adapt- revolutionize your life by daily walking in these disciplines. The word discipline means "to train" – you are a soldier, Ranger, Marine, Navy Seal in the Lord's army. Without training, these soldiers are in great peril. But with proper training, each soldier is confident and equipped to face the battle that he will face that day.

Are you equipped to face your daily battle?

Arm yourself by engaging in the spiritual disciplines.

Celebration

While worship and celebration have much in common, there is a difference. When we worship, we are declaring the worth of our majestic Sovereign; when we celebrate, we are breathing in the life of Christ and breathing out the joy which He brings to our life. When you celebrate an occasion like a birthday, you are rejoicing in the person behind the event. It is not the birthday which brings you joy, but the life of the one honored.

- Historical significance of *celebration*

For the Old Testament believer, the year of Jubilee was a great celebration. At this time, all debts were canceled, slaves were released, land was returned to its original owner, no planting was done because even the earth was celebrating its rest. All of this celebration took place because the Lord required it and because He would be recognized as Jehovah-jireh ... the Lord provides. Because of Who He is, the people would celebrate. But this celebration required trust that He was Who He said He was.

Today the same is true. To celebrate our Jehovah-jireh, we must actively celebrate even when we do not “see” the “crops” that we are longing for. It is by the act of faith and by the act of the will that we celebrate.

- ✓ Celebrate: #7673 *shabat*-to repose, to rest, to rid of, to still

*“It is to be a Sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep (**celebrate**) your Sabbath.”*

Lev. 23:32

“Then the land will enjoy its Sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies’ land; then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your Sabbaths, while you were living on it.”

Lev. 26:34, 35

- ✓ Celebrate: #2287 *hagag*-to hold a feast, to celebrate a holy day

*“You shall thus **celebrate** it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall **celebrate** it in the seventh month.”*

Lev. 23:41

*“These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God, with the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping **festival** (2287).” **Ps. 42:4***

*“Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace! **Celebrate** your feasts, O Judah; pay your vows. For never again will the wicked one pass through you; he is cut off completely.”*

Nahum 1:15

- ✓ Joy # 2304: *hedwah*-joy, gladness

*“The joy of the Lord is our strength.” **Neh. 8:10***

*“Splendor and majesty are before Him, strength and **joy** are in His place.” **Ps. 96:6***

*“And the sons of Israel, the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles, **celebrated** the dedication of this temple of God with **joy** (2305).” **Ezra 6:16***

- ✓ Great mirth #8057: *shimhah*-joy, rejoicing, gladness, pleasure

*“Also in the day of your **gladness** and in your appointed feasts, and on the first days of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be as a reminder of you before your God. I am the LORD your God.” Num. 10:10*

- ❖ **To blow these trumpets required a full breath of air. No half-hearted trumpeters! The sound is only produced by a hearty effort. To celebrate with trumpet really meant business when it came to celebrating! A weak marginally committed effort would get no sound. The same is true of our weak, marginally committed celebration.**

We can learn much from the early followers of Yahweh. Our Sovereign Lord instructed His people to gather three times a year to **celebrate** their identity as the people of Jehovah-jireh. By having these annual festivals, Israel developed a national cohesion which gave them strength and unity.

Our rejoicing before the Lord in celebration each day is to be like a wedding feast.

*“Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and gaze on King Solomon with the crown with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of his **gladness of heart.**”*

Eccl. 3:11

Read Luke 4:18, 19.

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD.”

Here Jesus begins His public ministry by announcing **the year of Jubilee**.

As we practice these spiritual disciplines, we must be infused with the **Lord’s joy**. **Joy** makes us strong. If we do not have a **joyful spirit of celebration** we will become Pharisees as we heap law upon law.

*“Because you did not serve the LORD your God with **joy** and a **glad heart**, for the abundance of all things (curses will come upon you.)”*

Deut. 28:47 Read v. 45-48 to gain a better understanding.

Remember that true joy, true celebration originates with the Lord. We cannot generate it with our own effort. Just as the Lord gives joy; He can take it away from those who refuse to walk in covenant relationship with Him. ***He does not revoke the covenant, but the blessings of the covenant experience are removed.***

“Gladness and joy are taken away from the fruitful field; in the vineyards also there will be no cries of joy or jubilant shouting, no treader treads out wine in the presses, for I have made the shouting to cease.” Is. 16:10

- **We are desperate to know how to celebrate the Lord and maintain a heart of celebration.**

Psalms 1 tells us that the blessed man delights in the law of the Lord.

The psalmist in **Psalms 119** tells us that the blessed man is the one whose way is blameless.

Psalms 119:111, *“I have inherited Your testimonies forever, for they are the joy of my heart.”*

The psalmist understood that joy lies in obedience.

- What does the wisest Man ever to live say about joy and blessing?

“While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, “Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed.”

But He said, ‘On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.’”

Luke 11:27, 28

As we practice these spiritual disciplines, the only true and lasting joy which we will find is the joy of obedience. **To celebrate means to follow Him wholeheartedly.**

God is not interested in removing our trials. God is not our Sovereign King so He can make our lives easier. God is greatly interested in transforming us. He is transforming us by the renewing of our minds into the mind of Christ *“Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* **Heb. 12:2**

“You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.” **Ps. 16:11**

We as God’s people are lacking the joyous occupation of life as a festival of praise.

Celebration is not found in a worship service where the songs and music you prefer is performed.

Celebration is not being pumped up.

Celebration is not getting a spiritual pep talk or momentary high from a thrilling message.

Many believers try to come into joy far too soon.

Celebration is obedience.

- How is celebration a discipline?

It is a discipline because it is an act of the will to rejoice in the Lord at all times.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” **Phil. 4:4-7**

The little book of Philippians is a treasure of how to have joy no matter what ... in spite of circumstances, people, worries, and things. This book teaches us how to “set our thermostat” on joy. Once it is set, nothing and no one can change it!

“Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.” **1 Pet.1:8, 9**

Rejoicing is not a byproduct of circumstances; it is an act of the will. Our Lord commanded it in the Old Testament believer and He commands it for today’s believer. **Celebration is an antidote to taking ourselves too seriously.** Christians can become too heavy-hearted and burdened. Our Lord told us that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. **Matt. 11:30** In fact, the Greek for “easy” is *chrestos* and it means profitable, fit, good for any use, well-fitting. The Lord has just the yoke that is tailor-made for each one of us. He has not only taken great care and time to create us in His image but has provided the yoke that will transform us into Christlikeness. He also has gone before us to prepare a place for us in His Father’s house. **John 14:2**

With this realization, celebration becomes the heart’s response.

Our Lord also told us that we must become like little children to enter His kingdom.

What do children do when they celebrate?

They make a lot of noise!

We have become so proper, so mechanical in our worship and celebration.

Follow the lead of the psalmist (**Psalm 150**) who says,

“Praise the LORD!

Praise Him in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty expanse.

Praise him for His mighty deeds; praise Him according to his excellent greatness.

Praise Him with trumpet sound; praise Him with harp and lyre.

Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe.

Praise Him with loud cymbals. Praise Him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!”

Begin to celebrate your own festivals of joy!

Confession

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 Jn. 1:9

Much of the Bible is concerned with God’s righteousness and our reconciliation to Him by declaring us righteous as well. Confession is a large part of that process.

“*The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works.*” St. Augustine

**“Confess”: Greek *homologeō* # 3670 means literally to say the same thing as, to assent, to consent, admit, to agree with, to concede, to acknowledge openly, to confess

The opposite means to deny, to refuse, to avoid, to reject, to disapprove, to despise.

“Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers ... they have **abandoned** the Lord, they **have despised** the Holy One of Israel, they **have turned from Him.**”

Is. 1:4

The above is the opposite of a people who routinely confess their sins.

When we confess our sins, our falling short of God’s glory, God’s design for us, we are agreeing or saying the same thing that God says about our sin. We do not *explain* it, *excuse* it, *rationalize* it, we confess it and then we are restored to righteousness. In error, we try to be righteous in our own efforts to cover up or explain away our sin. Or worse, we compare ourselves to those “more sinful” and perform the job of self-absolution.

“Mourning” is necessary to confession. Our Lord told us that the mourners are blessed because they will be comforted. (Matt. 5:4) Confession begins with mourning and ends with joy. There is a tendency to remain in the self-indulgence of reprimanding ourselves. There must be an end to mourning and an embrace of the forgiveness. Confession serves the purpose of restoration. It would be a mutant of another kind to remain in confession. It is self-serving to continue self-condemnation.

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Rom. 8:1

“For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.” 2 Cor. 7:10

The following verses depict a coming to terms with confession.

- The act of confession is a realization of what is true about oneself and one’s relationship with God.

“He saved others; he cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him... The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.” Matt. 27:42-44

“One of the criminals who was hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, ‘Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!’ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, ‘Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ And he was saying, ‘Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!’ And He said to him, ‘Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.’” Lk. 23:39-43

The criminal on the cross at first did not “see” Jesus as He truly is. At some point, he recognized Jesus as innocent and true and therefore the criminal saw himself more clearly.

The cure for our own sin is to spend whatever amount of time we need to develop eyes which “see” God.

- When we truly see Him with spiritual eyes, we become aware of our own condition and immediately cry out to God to, “Save us from ourselves!”

The criminal on the cross “saw” Jesus and immediately confessed.

This is the heart of confession.

“Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when you judge... Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones which You have broken rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit... then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness... a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” Ps. 51:2-17

Not only do we confess our sins to our Heavenly Father, we are instructed to confess them to one another.

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” Jms. 5:16

“And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.” Mk. 1:5

- What is the purpose of confessing to one another?

Humility and prayer. When we appropriately confess to others, we are humbling ourselves. God gives grace to the humble yet God resists the proud. (Jms. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5) When we confess to those we offended, they can be restored to us and they can pray for us. We can always benefit from godly prayer.

Always remember, the heart is deceitful and wicked (Jer. 17:9, 10). We are in desperate need of God’s Spirit to guide and direct us in the area of confession.

“Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not rule over me; then I will be blameless, and I shall be acquitted of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.” Ps. 19:12-14

“For evils beyond number have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to see; they are more numerous than the hairs of my head, and my heart has failed me.” Ps. 40:12

But praise God ...

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for those of the whole world.”

1 John 2:1, 2

It would be wonderful to end on a high note with no worries, but look at the end of the letter John wrote.

“And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him Who is true; and we are in Him Who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

Little children, guard yourselves from idols.” 1 John 5:20, 21

And so ends the epistle.

Ever be on guard against the enemy of your souls. Ever be ready to confess to your Father any separations from Him.

Some questions for you.

1. Do you readily ask others for forgiveness?
2. Do you accept forgiveness or beat yourself up about your shortcomings?
3. Do you have a teachable spirit or do you resist being corrected?
4. Do you view every criticism as an opportunity to take it to the Lord and ask Him to examine your heart and see if there is any harmful way in you?
5. Do you agree with God about your sin?
6. Do you more readily see others' sins and not your own?
7. Do you regularly “make an appointment” with God to examine your heart?
8. Do you make excuses when confronted with other's disappointment in you?
9. Do you consider God's righteousness unattainable and therefore not worth the effort to seek forgiveness?
10. Will God forgive you if you do not forgive others?
11. What do you think would happen to the kingdom of God on earth if we practiced confession as He desires us to practice it?
12. What do you think would happen to the lost world if they saw Christians living in a perpetual state of confession and restoration, unfettered by unconfessed sin?
13. Do you practice the discipline of confessing your sins to one another?
14. Does the idea of confessing your sins to God and /or to others make you cringe?

Hopefully the answers you provide for these questions will give you some insight into your attitude regarding confession.

Confession is an absolute necessity as a discipline for the follower of Christ.

To shame our sins He blushed in blood;
He closed His eyes to show us God;
Let all the world fall down and know
That none but God such love can show.

- Bernard of Clairvaux

Fasting

“Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father Who is in secret; and your Father Who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” Matt 6:16-18

Notice here that Jesus does not say, “If you fast”, but He says “When you fast.”

Some people who considered fasting important are: Moses, David, Nehemiah, Esther, Elijah, Anna the prophetess, Paul, and even Jesus Christ Who is the Lord of lords. Also many of the great leaders and teachers fasted regularly. Martin Luther, John Knox of Scotland, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, David Brainerd, C.H. Spurgeon followed the example of our Lord in fasting.

Even those who were not followers of Jehovah fasted: Plato, Aristotle, Socrates are a few.

In our society even when fasting is practiced, it is usually for vain purposes and not for spiritual ones. The Biblical purpose of fasting is to draw closer to the Lord in obedience.

- Some Biblical background on fasting

Originally, God’s people were instructed to fast only one day a year, the Day of Atonement.

“On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the LORD. You shall not do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the LORD your God.” Lev. 23:27, 28 (also Lev. 16:29-30; Num 29:7) It was understood that to humble themselves and do no work included fasting for this event.

The Day of Atonement was to be a time of sorrow, affliction and reflection of their sin and separation from God.

Over time, fasts were added by the leaders at the direction of God and also for their own legalistic appeasement so that now there are over twenty fasts!

“Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.” Esther 4:16

“Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and the nursing infants. Let the bridegroom come out of his room and the bride out of her bridal chamber. Let the priests, the LORD’s ministers weep ...” Joel 2:15-17

When threatened by foreign invasion, “Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to seek help from the LORD; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the LORD.”

2 Chron. 20:3, 4

Moses “went up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, and the tablets of the covenant which the LORD had made with you, then I remained on the mountain forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water.” Deut. 9:9

Speaking of Elijah, the prophet, we read that he “arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.” 1 Kings 19:8

“I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed.” Dan. 10:3

Even Darius fasted when he had to follow his own decree and put Daniel in the lions’ den.

“Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him. Then the king arose at dawn ... and went in haste to the lions’ den... The king said to Daniel, ‘Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, Whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?’” Dan. 6:18-20

When Jonah preached to the people of Nineveh, a key city of the fierce Assyrians, the people “believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them... the king of Nineveh issued a proclamation and it said, ‘In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles. Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.’”

Jonah 3:5-8 Note that here even the animals were required to fast!

When Ezra embarked on his journey back to Jerusalem, he “proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, ‘The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him.’ So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter; and He listened to our entreaty.” Ezra 8:21-23

By the time of Zechariah, there were four fasts which were observed. “Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth months will become joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah; so love truth and peace.’” Zech. 8:19

By the time of Christ, the Pharisees fasted twice a week: Mondays and Thursdays. These were also market days which would provide the Pharisees more opportunity to be seen for their “piety.”

We see the early church involved in fasting. “While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart from Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” Acts 13: 2, 3 At Paul’s conversion, before being selected for the above work, “And he (Paul) was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.” Acts 9:9

The *Didache* (an early Christian treatise for believers) instructed followers to fast twice a week: Wednesday and Friday. At the Second Council of Orleans in the sixth century specific fasting was made obligatory.

- **Is fasting too demanding? Is it old-fashioned and unnecessary?**

Then why does the church of today resist this discipline and call it fanatical or optional?

“*Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross.*”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer The Cost of Discipleship

Once it has been established that fasting is a positive activity for the believer to observe, the questions become *how* and *why*.

Why Do We Fast

First the motive of fasting must be addressed. As with all the disciplines, this cannot become a legalistic practice. It will not honor or please the Lord if it is done in the flesh.

“Say to all the people of the land and to the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted? When you eat and drink, do you not eat for yourselves and do you not drink for yourselves? Are not these the words which the LORD proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous along with its cities around it...’” Zech. 7:5, 6

“ ‘Even now’, declares the LORD, ‘return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting and weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments.’ ” Joel 2:12, 13a

“When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Acts 14:23

Each discipline must center on God. God must call you, equip you and sustain you through your offering of faith. Fasting is an offering to the Lord.

He has called us through His word to observe fasting.

He has equipped us through His word to deny self, deny the flesh in order to hear Him more clearly.

He has sustained us with His word by abiding with us. He has sustained us with His very **Presence** as we obediently yield to His word. Do you know that the daily bread which was placed by the priest on the table of showbread was referred to as **the Presence**? “You shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me at all times.” Ex. 25:30

Anna is our example here. She “never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.” Lk. 2:37, 38

Anna saw and recognized the Messiah because she was so very in tune with God that she did not miss His appearing as so many others did. She was willing to pay the cost and she was rewarded for her faithfulness.

Fasting is so closely associated with prayer that the two become a form of communication with the Giver of life. **We must ever be on guard that we are not more interested in the blessing than in the Blesser.**

In times of fasting, we are really feasting and not fasting. We are feasting on the Bread of Life Himself. We are more intimately abiding in Him because we are denying the flesh for a period of time. Once we deny the flesh in this way, the power of the flesh is not as strong. The real strength in our lives is the resurrected life of Christ. “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him Who sent Me and to accomplish His work.’” Jn. 4:34

At times we fast because we are desperate. When Nehemiah heard the news of the devastated condition of Jerusalem, he “sat down and wept and mourned for days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” Neh. 1:4

How Do We Fast

With this discipline in particular, you must begin in stages. To attempt a 40 day fast might be “biting” off too much.

Begin with a short, partial fast. Here you may fast from certain foods for a time. As you fast, let your hunger pains or your denial of desires be a reminder of Who you serve.

As you progress, you may fast from any food for one meal or even two meals.

Next you may want to fast a specific amount of time, for instance 24 hours, from all food.

It is important to stay hydrated, so drink plenty of water.

You may fast for a longer period of time. Some experience fasting for three days or more.

A forty day fast has been successfully attempted by many including Bill Bright.

Check out [Your Personal Guide to Fasting and Prayer](#) which you will find by simply searching under this title online.

John Wesley was so adamant about fasting that he refused to ordain anyone to the Methodist ministry who did not fast two days a week.

Many times when prayer does not satisfy the inner longings, fasting will close the gap of that sense of separation. I have prayed for things that I did not gain a peace about. I continued praying, but sensed no response. This is the time when I might ask the Lord if He would direct me to fast. So many times a fast is what will break through within my spirit and allow me to hear the Lord's answer to my prayer.

In Wayne Grudem's [Systematic Theology](#), he points out several benefits from fasting.

1. Fasting increases our sense of humility and dependence on the Lord
2. Fasting allows us to give more attention to prayer
3. Fasting reminds us that we are to sacrifice ourselves entirely to our God
4. Fasting is a good exercise in disciplining the body to refrain from food and strengthens our ability to refrain also from sin as we gain more and more control over our desires
5. Fasting heightens our spiritual alertness and offers a sense of God's presence as we focus less on the material things of this world
6. Fasting expresses earnestness and urgency in our prayers

Remember also that we can fast from other things besides food. Fasting from food is the prescribed, biblical form of fasting, but you may also fast from television, radio, activities, habits that have begun to master you too much. As your Father, Lord and Designer, He knows what you need to put aside for a time. This laying aside of our desires is a sure way of disciplining our bodies and our wills.

“Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” 1 Cor. 7:5

These instructions were to married people regarding abstaining from sexual involvement for the right purposes. The main objective in the denying of the flesh here was to devote oneself to prayer.

“David answered the priest and said to him, “Surely women have been kept from us as previously when I set out and the vessels of the young men were holy, though it was an ordinary journey; how much more then today will their vessels be holy?” 1 Sam. 21:5

Check out this reference and you will be amazed to see that it has to do with bread!

At the giving of the Law, God instructed Moses to tell the people, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.” Ex. 19:15

There are many ways we can humble ourselves and acknowledge the Lord as our Master and King. Listen to His voice and He will direct in this matter. But you and I must be willing to obey as He leads.

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst... I am the bread of life... This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever, and the bread also which I will give, for the life of the world is My flesh.’” Jn. 6:35, 48, 50, 51

Grieving

When was the last time you went to the Christian bookstore and saw a book on “How to Be Blessed through Grieving?” You probably will not. People are not interested in grieving. People want to talk about, read about, think about joy and happiness. Where is the place for grieving?

Since our Lord told us, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt. 5:4), I believe we need to learn His perspective concerning grieving and mourning.

Mourning takes up a large amount of Scripture. An entire book is called “Lamentations!”

Psalms of Lament are a large section of the book of Psalms.

So why is mourning/grieving so crucial to a proper understanding of God and His ways?

“He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Is. 53:3b

If our Lord was called a “man of sorrows”, then we would do well to understand what this means.

Grief #2483 *holiy* indicates disease, sickness; suffering brought on by loss; sickness due to idolatry

Sorrow #4341 *mak’ob* refers to pain, suffering, sorrow; it is used to refer to our Lord; also refers to the Hebrews under the bondage of the Egyptians

* How did the writers of Scripture feel about grief?

Did they like it?

Where did it come from?

Jer. 45:3, “Ah, woe is me! For the Lord has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning and have found no rest.” Words of Jeremiah to Baruch

But what does Lam. 3:32 tell us? “For if He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness.” By the way, Jeremiah wrote both the book named for him and this book of Lamentations. He understood grieving.

Even the rebellious prophet Jonah was delivered from his grief by the Lord. “And the Lord prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.” Jonah 4:6

But then read what happens because of his relief. Jonah 4:7-11

Relief is not always what we need. The Lord knows this. Jonah was grieved again because his first relief only hardened his heart more.

Jer. 6:7 refers to Jerusalem. “As a well keeps its waters fresh, so she keeps fresh her wickedness. Violence and destruction are heard in her; sickness (*grief:holiy*) and wounds are ever before Me.” Here, Jerusalem is sick with wickedness. But never fear, God has the remedy. Exile to Babylon. Because she will not grieve over her evil, she will be brought to her knees in grief in exile.

This is what Solomon said about wisdom: “Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.” Eccl. 1:18 Solomon grieved his soul because he endeavored to find the answers to life’s questions with the human intellect. He found no satisfaction there. In the end of this book, he discovers the true path of wisdom. You will have to open your Bible and go to Eccl. 12 to find that answer.

Who is the man you think of as well acquainted with grief? Look at Job.

Job 2:13, "Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights, with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw his pain (grief #3511 *ke'eb*) was very great."
Job 6:2 "Oh that my grief were actually weighed and laid in the balances together with my calamity!"

Job 16:6, "If I speak, my pain is not lessened, and if I hold back, what is left me?"

We always disparage Job's friends, but at least they stay with him for seven days in silence. Sometimes we do not need a lot of words. In Job 6, it is as though Job desires to know that God indeed sees and measures his sorrow.

What about David? What was his response to grief?

"My eye has wasted away with grief; it has become old because of all my adversaries." Ps. 6:7

"Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted away from grief, my soul and my body also. For my life is spent with sorrow and my years with sighing; my strength has failed because of my iniquity, and my body has wasted away." Ps. 31:9, 10

What do you learn about grieving here?

David understood that his relief would come only from God. He also recognized the role his own sin had played in his grief. There is also an awareness of the effects of distress on the body. Opposition from adversaries can cause the very life to be sapped away. So what is to be done?

David does it. He cries out to his God, knowing that He will answer.

Another psalmist, Asaph, can enlighten us regarding grief also.

Ps. 73:21-28, "When my heart was embittered (grieved) and I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant, I was like a beast before You ... Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but my God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever ... I have made the Lord my refuge."

Psalms 95:10 tells us that God grieves (#6962 *qut*) in the sense that He abhors, feels disgust at the sin of His people. "For forty years I loathed (grieved) that generation, and said they are a people who err in their heart and they do not know My ways."

There is something key here about grief. Not knowing God's ways causes Him grief and causes us to err in our hearts.

In Psalm 119:158, the same word used of God's grief (*qut*) is here used of the psalmist's grief when he sees those who do not regard God's ways and keep God's word.

"I behold the treacherous and loathe (#6962) them, because they do not keep Your word."

*This brings us to the point of recognizing that we should be mourners
over our own sin and the sin of our world.

Ps. 78:40 "How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness and grieved Him in the desert!"

Amos 6:6, "Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls while they anoint themselves with the finest of oils, yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph." God desires us to grieve over the sin and misfortune of others, especially those united with us in covenant with our Lord.

Jer. 5:3, "O LORD, do not Your eyes look for truth? You have smitten them, but they did not weaken (are not grieved); You have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent." Does this not break your heart to read?

We must mourn over the unrepentant around us. Ask God to break our hearts for what breaks His heart. Then we will be a people who truly worship, adore and identify with our Lord.

Dan. 7:15, "As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed within me, and the visions in my mind kept alarming me."

Have you ever been grieved to this degree? Most of us are so foreign to the depths of grief that we have no awareness of this distress of Daniel's.

Paul felt grief. 2 Cor. 2:4, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you."

Peter tells us, "For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly." 1 Pet. 2:19

Mark 3:5, "After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored."

What grieved Jesus? Hardness of heart. Do you see any of that around you? Are you grieved over it?

Mark also tells us what grieved a potential follower of Christ. "But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property." 10:22

What you grieve over tells you where your heart truly is. For this rich young man, his heart was wrapped up in his possessions. **What causes you to grieve? There is your god!**

*Now that I am grieving, what do I do with the grief?

Habakkuk (1:3) says, "Why do you make me see iniquity and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; strife exists and contention arises."

Yet, as he ends his powerful little book, he says, "Yet I will exult (have tremendous joy) in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation." 3:18

Peter learned something about grief. Jn. 21:17, "Jesus said to him for the third time, 'Simon, son of John (Note the name which Jesus used here. He used the former name of Peter. Will you choose to be Simon or Peter?), do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'"

Never fear, beloved of the Lord, He always desires to restore you. After Peter grieved over his denial of his Lord, he was restored. But for Peter to do the work the Lord had for him, he must be refined as through a furnace. Peter came through the flames because Jesus was always with him, He never denied him and He strengthened him to be a vessel fitted for glory.

A final word about grief/sorrow.

2 Cor. 7:9, 10, "I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance, for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death."

Grief is only holy grief if it achieves God's purposes. Beware of self-motivated grief. Do not conjure up grief. Ask God to open your eyes to the grief He sees. There is plenty of that. You do not need to look for it. He will show you what grieves His heart about you and about your world.

Grief in the New Testament is observed in at least nine words. In Matt. 5:4 (below), the word is *pentheo*, the most severe word for grief. It is devastating grief.

I believe our Lord is telling us that the road to happiness is by the path of grief, the way to rejoicing is mourning. Sin, anyone's sin, is a cause for grief. See and define sin as God does (1 Jn. 1:9). This awareness leads to grief, but "a shout of joy comes in the morning." Ps. 30:5b

"Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted."

Guidance

“*The child’s mind is the only mind to which God can appeal.*” Oswald Chambers

Mark 9:36-37

- In **1 Sam. 3:9**, young Samuel says, “Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.”

Why was Samuel able to hear God? What must we do?

- When God revealed Himself to Moses, God captured the childlike curiosity and attention of the man He would use to lead His people.

Ex. 3:3, 4, “Then Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.’ So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’” and he said, ‘Here I am.’”

- Not only are we to be like children to our Lord, but like sheep as well. As His sheep, we will respond only to *His* voice.

John 10:4-5, “When He (the Shepherd) puts forth all His own, He goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow Him because they know His voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

How does God guide us?

- Jesus was directed by God’s Spirit. Jesus is our example.

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.” **Matt. 4:1**

- In following the example of Jesus, we only desire to do *the will of the Lord*.

“I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but *the will of Him* Who sent Me.” **Jn. 5:30**

John 7:17 also tells us concerning *God’s will*, “If anyone is willing to *do His will*, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.”

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the *will of God is*, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” **Rom. 12:1, 2**

For us to really discover *God’s will*, we must crucify our own. “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” **Gal. 2:20**

- In seeking *the will of God* and not our own will, we are *led by the Spirit of God*. But what does that really mean?

Gal. 5:16, 18, 24, 25, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh... But if you are *led* by the Spirit, you are not under the Law... Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”

Rom. 8:14, “For all who are being *led by the Spirit of God*, these are sons of God.”

- ✓ Even in Old Testament times people were *led by the Spirit of God*.

1 Sam. 23:2, 4, “So David inquired of the LORD, saying, ‘Shall I go and attack these Philistines?’ And the LORD said to David, ‘Go and attack the Philistines and deliver Keilah.’... Then David inquired of the LORD once more.”

2 Sam. 5:10, “David became greater and greater, for the LORD God of hosts was with him.”

But he did not forget to inquire of the LORD.

2 Sam. 5: 19, “Then David inquired of the LORD, saying, ‘Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You give them into my hand?’ And the LORD said to David, ‘Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand.’”

- ✓ But there were those who were not patient for the direction of the Lord. They would seek other means of guidance.

1 Sam. 28:6-7, “When Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets. Then Saul said to his servants, ‘Seek for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.’ And his servants said to him, ‘Behold there is a woman who is a medium at En-dor.’”

- ✓ We also see Paul directed by the Spirit.

Acts 16:6, 7, “They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, **having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit** to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them.”

Acts 20:22-23, “And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that **the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies** to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.”

- But the Lord does not direct us to go alone. He was there with Jesus in the wilderness; He was with David during his exile; He was with Paul in the songs in the prison; God is always there because His word has been established in our hearts. His Presence, Hebrew = *paneḥ*, is His face.

“My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” **Ex. 33:14**

“Then Moses said to Him, ‘If Your Presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here.’”

Ex. 33:15

We need to have the same dread and fear of moving one single step without the Presence of our God.

- What does it mean to “go with God?” What is it about God that goes with you?

This is where your diligence in the discipline of hearing your Shepherd’s voice through the Scriptures is vital.

In the letters of Brother Lawrence, the seventeenth-century French monk, he explains to us how to live a life practicing the presence of God. He wrote, “*sometimes I consider myself there as a stone before a carver, whereof He is able to make a statue; presenting myself there before God, I desire Him to form His perfect image in my soul, and make me entirely like Himself.*” Note that Brother Lawrence sees this as “practicing” the presence of God. All of these disciplines are to be practiced and lived. They are not automatic because we have lost a portion of the image of God which we bore before the fall.

In order for the Lord to guide us, we must first humble ourselves as children, as sheep and as stones ready for the Master to do His work.

“Lord of all pots and pans and things ...

Make me a saint by getting meals
And washing up the plates!” Brother Lawrence

Brother Lawrence was able to turn the most basic task into a living hymn of praise to the glory of God. If we desire the Lord to guide us, we must be completely willing to go where He directs. This is not a “hear from God, contemplate, weigh the pros and cons and see if God knows what He is talking about.”

The discipline of guidance is to seek the Lord and respond in faith to His direction.

Speaking of Brother Lawrence, “he was never hasty nor loitering, but did each thing in its season, with an even, uninterrupted composure and tranquility of spirit.”

“The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament.”

“God is not an outward gush of sentiment, not a vague abstraction of impersonal good nature: God is a living, intense reality, and until this truth is grasped, the puzzles and the questions are more than can be met.” Oswald Chambers

Remove the puzzle, follow the Presence where He leads through the counsel of His word.

Follow the voice of the Shepherd. His voice and His word will never be in discord.

So Jesus said to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?”

Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, **to whom shall we go?** You have words of eternal life.”

John 6:67, 68

- ❖ Have you made that commitment? Have you decided that you will not go anywhere without your God leading your way?

Learn and practice the discipline of guidance.

Is the *Discipline of Gratitude* Working in You?

Principle Scriptures on the *Discipline of Gratitude*: 1 Sam. 12:24; Matt. 5:17-20; Luke 17:11-19; Romans 12:10; 1 Corinthians 4:7; Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5: 12-18; 1 Tim. 5:17; 6:1; 1 Pet. 2:17; Heb. 12:28-29

Here is how you can find out. Take a careful look at this *Discipline of Gratitude* from God's most precious Word by examining your life and the passages above. Now ask yourself:

1. How do I exhibit a life of *Gratitude* in my life now?
2. How can I develop the willingness to be a more disciplined person who will realize *I am grateful for His work in me*?
3. What blocks *Gratitude* from working and being exhibited in me?
4. How can I initiate an attitude of *Gratitude*, and discipline myself to carry it out?
5. What can I do to make *Gratitude* function better, stronger, and faster, even in times of uncertainty and stress?

· Here are positive examples from Scripture: 2 Sam. 2:5-7; Dan. 2:17-23; Luke 17:15-18; Rom. 16:1-12; Phil. 1:3-7

· Here are negative examples from Scripture: Gen. 31:36-42; Ex. 17:1-4; Luke 17:11-14; 17; Romans 1:18-21

The *Discipline of Gratitude* means we are practicing and producing an attitude of Gratitude, of being thankful, even when we cannot see what we have. This is an aspect of our worship of Christ-expressing to Him our appreciation and reverence for how He has benefited our lives. We are grateful because His blood has redeemed us. This also has a relational application in that it helps us deal with others as we show our support, appreciation, and benevolence to them for how they have benefited our lives. As a discipline, this means we are to realize our indebtedness to God and "practice" our faith and church life because of what He has done for us. Thus, this Discipline of Gratitude enables us to know Him and His will more and do for Him more as we keep our focus on God's promises and not our circumstances-His provision and care, not merely our experiences. Christianity is not for our personal benefit; it is for His glory. Seeing life from the perspective of *what I can't get* or *what I deserve* rather than what I have already been given will create grave problems. We must discipline ourselves to see His gifts of eternal life, grace, and forgiveness-such things that could never be earned or merited-so that we are willing to grow closer to Him and to lead others to Him.

What *Gratitude* is not is mindless joy or a good attitude without a reason behind it, because it will not last. Good attitudes are important and essential, but we have to have a basis for them to keep them, to hone them, and further develop them.

What happens when we do not practice this discipline? We will be fueled and filled with ingratitude, refusing to acknowledge and respond to what Christ has done for us. This will produce in us a very unhealthy attitude and a life that is not Spirit-led. We will not realize what we have or could have, but rather focus on an "entitlement" mentality that says we deserve this or that, and where humbleness and servitude are absent. It will create for us a life of dissatisfaction and dysfunction. This can happen to a Christian who does little to nothing with his or her faith and remains in the ways of the world, or someone who refuses to grow and respond to God. This places a barrier to seeing the great, incompressible gift of grace we have received, and then refusing, or forgetting, to respond to Christ as our LORD. When we refuse to be partakers of gratefulness, the waywardness of our sinful ingratitude will rise up and continue to fester and build and eventually take control of who we are and what we do, even as Christians. Then, pride will come in, causing us to hurt others and cutting us off our relationships and growth while creating self-defeating anger and bitterness that worsens to produce more ingratitude. We must be careful that ingratitude does not take root in us!

Further Questions

1. How would you define the *Discipline of Gratitude*? Are you a person who is Grateful? If so, why? If not, why not? How does knowing who and what Christ has done help you to be grateful? How does ingratitude affect the way people treat one another? What about your church's vision and agenda (whether you are in leadership or not)?
2. What part does *Gratitude* play in your relationships with church members, friends, coworkers, and family? Have you ever met a person who is ungrateful yet happy? Why do you suppose he or she is that way? How would the *Discipline of Gratitude* help your church handle problems and overcome difficulties?
3. How does the *Discipline of Gratitude* give us rewards and successes in life? Do you realize that gratitude creates a happy heart and a functional Christian life and that ingratitude creates chaos, confusion, strife, and discontentment? What about Christians who think they are entitled to something?
4. What happens when your church does not engage in *Gratitude* or teach and model to its people their indebtedness to Christ?
5. What happens to your relationship with God, with others in your church's community, and with the opportunities God gives you when your church refuses to be grateful for whom Christ is and what He has done-such as taking Him for granted?
6. When have you exercised *Gratitude* the most? How does gratitude produce happiness? How does ingratitude produce bitterness and unhappiness? Why do so many Christians engage in ingratitude and bitterness and not pursue His promises? What do you suppose their rationalization is? How would Christ feel about it?
7. In what situation did you or your church fail to engage in *Gratitude* when you should have? How would people respond to your church if you all actually and sincerely gave God the glory for all that you do and practice?

8. Do you have a sense of His presence in your daily life? If so, how does this help you be grateful? If not, why? What can you do to have a heart that is aware of His care for you?
9. How does a list of agendas and personal motivations show ingratitude? Do you have a stilled soul or a raging cry? What would real, authentic *Gratitude* look like in your church fellowship, meetings, and other doings?
10. What issue is in your church that would improve with a dose of *Gratitude*? What do you need to do to raise your trust in Christ? How does *Gratitude* play out here?
11. Do you come to Christ only when you feel that things are going great, or only when you are facing a crisis? Do you realize that gratitude creates a happy heart and a functional Christian life and that ingratitude creates chaos, confusion, strife and discontentment?
12. Think through the steps that you need to take to put *Gratitude* into action in a specific instance. For example, what can you do to instill within yourself a sense of gratitude, even when you do not see a reason for being thankful? What will you do to get rid of it ingratitude in you and prevent its reprisal? How can the *Discipline of Gratitude* help your church focus on being edifying and equipping for its people? What will you do about this? What can your church do to make this a priority?

Are you a Christian who is overflowing with praise, or overflowing with criticism? Do you have a sense of His presence or a list of agendas? Do you have a stilled soul or a raging cry? Do you come to Christ only when you feel that things are great, or only when you are facing a crisis? How you answer these questions may indicate if you are practicing a discipline of thankfulness or a life of stress and fear. We must realize that gratitude creates a happy heart and a functional Christian life as well as a triumphant church and that ingratitude creates chaos, confusion, strife and discontentment! Gratitude comes from the relationship we have in Christ; when we are happy in Him, we are happy in general and content, humble, and mature. Our hearts are secure and at rest in Him! When our relationship with Christ is not working, it is usually because we messed it up by our attitudes, refusal to work at it and focusing on our disappointments and not Him. Thus, we become ungrateful, and in turn, unhappy and immature (Psalm 131; John 13:17; Philippians 4:6-13).

Gratitude shows character because it is a temperament that comes from the spiritual growth we are called to emulate; it is also a discipline because it fuels our spiritual growth. But, it does not come to us naturally and we have to work at it. Just like the other disciplines, we need to do it consciously, constantly, and carefully. We need to think through and meditate on the things of God and in so doing, be aware of His presence and practice His presence by being thankful to Him. This stimulates our spiritual formation. Gratitude should be a daily practice, as any discipline, and not just at set times. Like prayer; it is a way we commune and grow with and in Him.

Gratitude is fueled from our heartfelt thanks to God for what we have, for what He has done, and is a lifestyle of worship and adoration. This also allows us to give to and value others with respect and honor because it takes the focus off us and places it on God's purpose and direction. This aspect is central in producing our character by focusing our heart on Christ and thus taking the focus off ourselves and our situation, fears, and self-centeredness. When we are making God our complete focus, we will see what we have and what we can have. This helps us develop a good attitude of gratitude. We are not consumed just with our needs and desires; being thankful is an essential aspect to growing deeper in Christ, and in character and maturity.

Our focus needs to be on our gratitude for the gift of grace we received from Christ's work on the cross, and disciplining ourselves to keep *front and center* in our Christian walk. Gratitude is the *carrot on the stick* for our scriptural and relational growth. This helps us focus on God and live a life of Christian maturity, faith, and character as well as being happy and fulfilled. Grateful people realize that God indeed cares, even when they can not see it. This forms a mindset that cultivates happiness and enthusiasm and subsequently inspires love toward others. Those who are ingrates promote anger and bitterness. If Gratitude is not our focus, then ingratitude will be what leads us-what we do or do not get. Ingratitude says, "I did not get what I deserved," or "I am not going where I want to go." So, we become consumed with our wants and desires. This causes mistrust, an absence of hope, and/or a mindset that one is unworthy of love and acceptance. All produce a lack of love, lack of Fruit of the Spirit, of hospitality, generosity, and of good stewardship. This further escalates when the hurts, pains, and disappointments of life come knocking on the door. Disappointments come when our expectations and our experiences collide. Disappointments for a Christian come also by ignoring God, His promises, and His provisions. Then, ingratitude will turn into hostility and bitterness.

When we fully recognize our dependence on Christ, and fully feel the love and acceptance we have from Him, then our spiritual walk will increase. When our walk increases, then the flow of love and care will proceed from us in a powerful and focused way. We will then see that we already have all that we could ever want or need because all that we are and could ever be is found in Christ.

Gratitude also shows that our obedience to God is motivated by the fullness we receive from our Christian life and the joy that can't be found without Jesus. Thus, we are able, and should give God the glory for that all that we do and practice in life, no matter what happens. Holding on to Him in our struggles and fears and still having Gratitude means we are maturing in Him. If all we have is ungratefulness, then all we will have is stress and fear and not the holding on of faith in Christ, a life of disappointments without meaning, and a hope that is not seen. Then, all we will produce is bitterness and malevolence to self and others.

I have found something very interesting through the years of my counseling experiences and that is people in causes that are self-defeating or are chaotic to society are started, run, and staffed by people who are very ungrateful in life. (I have not seen any study on this subject, just my observations.) Ingratitude produces a firm desire to destroy and cause havoc to others out of jealousy or contempt or for whatever reason. Ungrateful people hate and desire to destroy. For example, when I was involved with "Operation Rescue" in the 80s, we would go to abortion clinics to pray and hand out literature showing pictures of unborn fetuses as

a "proof" for their humanity, showing they were persons. But, such people who perform abortions or work with those who carry them out do not see the humanity of the unborn. They demonize or rationalize that a fetus is like a tumor even though the biological evidences clearly show it is fully human. And primary, I noticed they tend to be people of extreme ingratitude who are motivated by anger and bitterness. While rational, honest, and even some grateful people will think through this issue and say it is human, they say that the mother's rights supercede its rights (which is flawed logic and I strongly disagree with). The same attitudes, arguments and rational were used by Nazi Germany to show the Jewish people as inhuman and deserving of extermination. And, having met some of the doctors who experimented on the Jews and researched this ("Logo-therapy Center," run by holocaust survivor Victor Frankel in San Jose in the early 80s, was a goldmine for such research!), I found them to be extremely ungrateful in their character makeup; they also had entitlement issues. Ingratitude can produce great amounts of evil and rationalization that a lie is a truth. The ingratitude mindset is extremely dangerous to a Christian personally, because it stagnates. We will never realize what we have, nor will we be able to grow in faith or worship God with this mindset. And, if we remain in it, we may even become evil in our thinking and eventually in our actions. It is essential that this discipline of Gratitude is pursued for the sake of contentment and for the sake of humanity.

Be aware: when we become infected with these age-old diseases of ingratitude, ungratefulness, and thanklessness, they will lead to apathy, envy, anger, lust, misplaced ambition, greed, aloofness, and bitterness. They will block the growth of our relationship with Christ and cut us off from the character and reflection of Christ to the world. It has been said we cannot control our circumstances, but we can control our attitudes. I have found, both from Scripture and my personal experiences and research, that if we forget who we are in Christ, we will actually dismiss God from our lives and replace Him with the gods of *self* and *ingratitude*.

The reason the Discipline of Gratitude is a discipline is because it comes easy theoretically and actually; all we have to do is recognize Christ and His work in our lives. But, the "practice" seems to come hard; we have to work at it. To cover ourselves in the call and blessings that Christ has for us should be easy; He says so. *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* (Matt. 11:29-30). Christ actually offers to us His love in place of His wrath. Grace takes the Law off our shoulders when we turn to Him, and away from all that is false; this means freedom (Jer. 6: 13-20; 27:2; Gal. 5:1; 1 Cor. 1:26-31)! But we complicate it, so we must discipline our focus and work at it.

Take this subject seriously. As a church growth consultant and a pastor, I have seen lives as well as churches destroyed by ingratitude! A church that allows the ungrateful Christian to run *amok* will cause enormous damage that may never be repaired. Such a person will quickly turn to legalism and/or connive with his or her ill begotten feelings and agendas to manipulate others and in turn produce the various forms of discontentment toward others. Because he or she is unwilling to see the love that Christ has for him or her, he or she is unable to give it to others. They do not see appreciation from others or even from God, so their focus becomes "entitlement" or the "poor me" attitude. This attitude will reciprocate discontentment in a very powerful and focused way. If you want your Christian walk disarmed and muted, be ungrateful; if you want your church destroyed, all you need to do is allow people who are ingrates to be in leadership; your pews will either soon be empty, or your church will become a festering haven for ingrates who fuel off one another. Ingratitude is a serious disease that must be cut out like a malignant cancer and healed by the sowing of love, serious counseling, and awareness of Christ. If you or another person refuses to heal, then you must be removed from others until healing and forgiveness can take place and help can be obtained. If you are in leadership, it is essential to help these people while at the same time keeping them away from others until they are able to be people of gratitude. If they refuse, they need to be under church discipline and be cut off from the rest of the flock, if necessary, until they accept and realize healing and forgiveness. If not, they will spread their disease to others.

Ideas: Use these Scriptures to count your blessings (start off by taking two a day and read them several times): Psalm 30:4-5; 12; 75:1; 97:10-12; 105:1; I Chron. 29:6-13; Dan. 2:23; Mark 1:15; John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 27:34-35; Rom. 1:8; 6:17-18; 8:26-27; 1 Cor. 1:4; 15:55-57; 2 Cor. 2:14; 9:15; 12:9; Eph. 1:18; 5:20; Phil. 1:3-5; 2:9-11; 4:6; Col. 1:12; 2 Thess.1:2-3; 5:18; 1 Tim. 4:3-5; Heb. 2:3; 12:28; James 1:2-4; Rev. 11:16-17. Now, consider what it is like in a third world country, 100 years ago, and compare it to all the conveniences we have today!

Thanksgiving of faith for who Christ is and what He has done (Rom. 15:1; 25-27; 1 Cor. 11:4; Phil. 1:3; Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:1; Philemon 4

Some practices for Grateful Living

- Begin and end the day with giving thanks
- Tell at least 3 people you interact with during the day what you appreciate about them
- Send a card, note, or leave a voicemail of gratitude
- Send an e-card or e-mail of gratitude to someone
- Write a poem about being grateful
- Declare a fast from complaints for period of time
- Create a piece of art that reflects gratitude
- Journal daily about how you experienced gratitude
- Find scriptures or quotes about gratefulness and repeat one during the day
- Play songs that inspire gratitude during day

In the words of the Apostle Paul, this is an invitation to be “Rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness” (Colossians 2:7, NIV).

A Summary of the Recommendations for Growing and Sustaining Gratitude
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make a habit of thinking about the blessings in your life and thanking God for them. Make this a practice throughout every day. Consider keeping a daily “gratitude journal” to formalize this process of identifying the blessings.• Watch for envy. Regularly examine yourself to identify where and when you are envious and work toward rejecting such thoughts when they creep into your mind. Replace those thoughts with thanks to God for what you do have in life.• Practice the disciplines of periodic fasting and regular confession of sin with one aim being a clearer understanding of the gifts bestowed on you in life.• Expose yourself to information about the dire condition of others around the world and make prayer for these people a staple of your prayer life.• Create other habits that remind you of how blessed you are and of how much worse life could be.• Engage in this gratitude-growth program as part of a broader program to become a more God-centered person.

Meditation

❖ What is meditation?

It is not mystical. Sometimes it helps to know what something is NOT. Eastern meditation is the practice of emptying the mind (Luke 11:24-26). Christian meditation is **not** emptying the mind, but **filling** the mind with God's thoughts and words. There is hard work that goes into meditation.

When you meditate on God and His Word, it is like a running conversation with verses coming to your mind. In order to do this, the verses must be there. That is where the work comes in. The more familiar you are with God's Word, the more ready will be the "conversation" with God. This is not unlike prayer, but it is a conversation in which we are unaccustomed to engage in because it is not immediately responsive in the sense with which we are familiar. Do not let familiarity or the lack of it rob you of the great joy of meditating on our great God.

❖ How to meditate:

- Read Scripture.
- Allow the truths of this Scripture to "sink in;" think deeply about what God's Word just said; digest it.

By beginning your meditation with God's Word, you have confidence that you are praying God's thoughts to Him.

"Confidence" = Latin *con*: with + *fide*: faith

We build our faith by building our confidence in Him and **not** in ourselves.

- Speak to God about what you read, your thoughts about it and your need for the Lord to renew your mind.
- Listen to His personalized message to your heart.

Take a verse which tells you something of the nature of the Lord. For instance, you wish to worship the Lord by meditating on **Is. 6:3** "**And one called out to another and said, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory."**

Rev. 4:8, "And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God, the Almighty, Who was and Who is and Who is to come."

One way you can meditate on a verse is to think about each word, talking to the Lord about what it means.

"*Holy*" – the first thing that popped into my mind here was the worship song which says, "Holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, holy, holy." I sing that before the Lord. Singing is a form of meditating because it slows you down and causes you to ponder the words concerning God and His kingdom slowly enough to pass from mere decoding that we must do in reading to the "decoding" that your spirit must do to meditate.

The next word "*is*" now becomes your focus. God "*is*" holy. His state of being is holy. When God told Moses Who He was and how He was to be referred to, He said His identity was to be thought of as "I Am": Yahweh. God's *self-existent* nature is one of the most important things about Him. He needs no other to exist. Unlike us, He is truly **the Existent One**. In **Acts 17:28**, Paul tells us that "we live and move and have our existence in Him". Apart from Him, there is no "*is*" for us. **Col. 1:17b** says, "in Christ all things hold together". We would not remain alive for a second if it were not for Him.

"*The*" is the next word. Our God is not "*a*" lord, He is "**THE**" LORD! There is no one like our God. He stands alone and separate (by the way, that is one translation of "holy" – separate and distinct, consecrated, set apart). He alone is worthy of our worship. Meditate on that.

"*Lord*" is the next word. Really think of how He is Lord of all. He is Lord of your life. He is Lord of your family. He is Lord of your job and all the lives you encounter every day. He holds their very breath of life in His hands. He is Lord of your state, country, world. And if you care to take a look at space, realize how vast it is, how many systems there are so many light years away that we are even unaware of them, so many stars, galaxies, things that defy our concept of time

and space. We begin to realize our Lord is so other than us that we could meditate thousands of years and still have so far to go to even scratch the surface of Who this Great God is.

“*Almighty*”. Think about that word. Who else is almighty? **Gen. 17:1; Ps. 91:1; Ex. 6:3**, these all refer to *God as Almighty* or *El Shaddai*. No one has anything near the might of our God. Much of scripture declares the might of our God. His name **Jehovah Sabaoth** is His Warrior name. This is the name He uses as He goes to battle for His people. **Jehovah Sabaoth** has never and will never be defeated because He is all-powerful, almighty, all-consuming. Nothing can prevail against Him. So if you are trying to do anything your way and against His way, remember you are dealing with the all-powerful Lord. If anyone is trying to harm you, remember that foolish one is not fighting against you but your Shield and Defender: the Almighty God.

Do you get the idea? Meditation is slowing down so you can hear the voice and thoughts of God, learning His ways and closing out the thoughts and ways of this world that shout so much louder to you unless you take the time to meditate on His word.

- Hearing the voice of God as you meditate

Take a minute to look at **1 Sam. 3**. Here is a lesson on hearing the voice of God, *which is what meditation really is*. Samuel needed help and direction from Eli to learn to hear the Lord correctly. So there is a school, so to speak, of meditating. Read scripture and observe how the Lord’s servants heard from Him.

Some would say, “A baby does not need to be taught to cry and a Christian does not need to be taught to pray.”

This type of crying is minimal, infantile communication. We must grow beyond that infancy.

We must pray as the Bible teaches. Pray for the glory of God, in His will, in faith, in the name of Jesus, with persistence, continually and with devotion and so much more that we must learn about meditative praying.

Just as a child learning his native language is not left to his own, but studies every year in school how to speak and communicate with increasing development and clarity, so we need to learn to communicate with the God of all – the Lord God Almighty. His “school” for learning how to communicate with Him is in His Word.

- Also important and probably the most important lesson in meditating is that once you have heard from the Lord, you MUST OBEY His voice. If you fail to respond to His voice, guess what? You will probably not hear from Him again for some time. Our Lord does not waste His words – they will not return void to Him. He takes His word very seriously, we had better do the same.

Puritan preacher William Bates said, “*The great reason why our prayers are not effective is because we do not meditate before them.*”

William Bridge said, “*Meditation is the sister of reading and the mother of prayer.*”

“*Meditation is the missing link between Bible intake and prayer output. Meditation was a catalyst that catapulted David from the truth of God into talking with God.*” Donald Whitney

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in You sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.” Ps. 19:14

David’s prayers were not just words ... his words, his prayers were born out of his meditations. Meditation is the best preparation for prayer and prayer is the best outcome of meditation.

If you desire renewal in your life of prayer you must **plan** to see it. Meditation is not accidental; it is hard work.

- We Christians have replaced meditation with devotional or Christian reading. By abdicating our personal role in meditation, we allow others’ words and ideas to supplant the communion that our Lord would have with us – one to one.

Memorization

“Your word I have treasured (hidden) in my heart, that I may not sin against You.” Ps. 119:11

Throughout Scripture, we are urged to hide God’s word in our hearts.

Why is this discipline so important for the believer?

What happens if we choose not to follow the wisdom of memorizing Scripture?

Chuck Swindoll writes, “I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture ... No other single exercise pays greater spiritual dividends! Your prayer life will be strengthened. Your witnessing will be sharper and much more effective. Your attitudes and outlook will begin to change. Your mind will become alert and observant. Your confidence and assurance will be enhanced. Your faith will be solidified” (Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], p. 61).

Ps. 119:9 says, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.” Then the psalmist tells us (v. 11) that he has treasured God’s word in his heart in order not to sin against God. Both of the Hebrew words in these verses shed insight into the value of keeping and treasuring God’s word.

- v.9 “keep” is *samar*: to watch, to keep, to preserve, to guard, to be careful, to watch over, to watch carefully over

Adam and Eve were to care for and watch over the Garden of Eden. This was to be their occupation. This activity, had it been done to God’s specifications, would have prevented them from the idle thoughts and deeds which cost man so dearly. If we were to take this activity seriously of guarding God’s word carefully in our hearts, what dark deeds would we be protected from committing? What do we fall into when we fail to commit God’s word to our hearts?

This verb is true of God as well. God watches over us as His children.

“The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will *keep* your soul.” Ps. 121:7

“If I sin, then You would *take note* of me, and would not acquit me of my guilt.” Job 10:14

Peter understood this connection between God guarding us and our guarding our way from sin.

“And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For *you were continually straying* like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and **Guardian** of your souls.” 1 Pet.2:24, 25

- The verb in v. 11 is “to hide” which in Hebrew is *sapan*: to hide, to keep secret, to conceal, often something of great value.

Rahab concealed the Israelite spies (Josh. 2:4).

“They make shrewd plans against Your people, and conspire together against Your treasured ones.” Ps. 83:3 Here God’s people are referred to as His treasure.

Even the Temple is referred to as God’s hidden, secret treasure (Ezek.7:22).

God has gone to great lengths to preserve and protect His treasured ones. He has given us the example of viewing appropriately what needs to be treasured in this life and in the next. Jesus likewise has told us that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matt. 6:21

We are encouraged to regard God’s word as a treasure worth obtaining and guarding.

Also, we are to guard this treasure in our hearts, not in our mind alone. This truth of God’s word is to penetrate beyond our thinking into our very soul and remain there to produce eternal fruit.

So how do we go about training ourselves to treasure God's word?

As with all the disciplines, this must not become a legalistic endeavor but an exertion, a working out of what God is working into our lives through His word.

Martin Luther loved God's word. He had committed much of it to memory. Johann Staupitz, Luther's senior during his days in the Augustinian monastery, had encouraged him to devote himself to the Scriptures. As Luther was pondering Rom. 1:17, his eyes were opened and he "ran through the Scriptures from memory" as he came to understand from the Lord the meaning of justification by faith. If Luther had followed the pattern of his day, he would not even have owned a Bible most likely. People were earning doctorates in theology without even reading the Bible at this time. So we must not regard what others deem worthy of our time as the rule. Luther was not swayed by his peers; he heard from God because he knew God's voice through His word. He was able to think about it at all times because he was not limited to reading it alone. He had hidden it in his heart.

1. Commit God's word to memory. Make the decision to do this and it really does not matter the method you employ; just be faithful to your commitment.
2. Memorize small sections, such as one or two verses.
3. Memorize larger passages, such as chapters or parts of a chapter.
4. Review the verses you have memorized even as you are adding more new verses.

There are many ways you may choose to memorize.

Breaking it down into smaller phrases can make it more manageable.

Saying the verse stressing different words each time will help you focus on the individual words.

Saying it in a whisper and then loudly will be a technic that aids your memory.

Repeating the verse frequently throughout the day is helpful.

Writing it down repeatedly can cause you to remember it.

Saying it aloud, writing it and using it as you talk with others will cause it to become yours.

Reciting the verse or verses to the mirror and then to a real person will help.

Singing the verse is a great way which the psalmists used to speak God's word.

Recording yourself and playing it back will help.

This list could continue, but the key is for you to get started memorizing God's word and not stop!

Why do this?

Well, if the above reasons are not enough. Here is what Dallas Willard (professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California) says about memorization. "Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our minds with what it needs. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. That's where you need it! How does it get in your Mouth? Memorization" (Spiritual Formation in Christ for the Whole Life and Whole Person" in *Vocatio*, Vol. 12, no. 2, Spring, 2001, p.7).

The psalmist in 119, tells us that God's word will aid the young man in keeping his way pure.

Memorizing Scripture will strengthen us in our fight with the enemy of our souls. Memorizing is not a magic potion, it is the voice of God in our heads telling us the way of life versus the way of death. Rom 8:13 "... if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." This occurs because you have become "transformed by the renewing of you mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Rom. 12:2 We must take up the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Eph. 6:17

A soldier who took up a weapon with which he was unfamiliar, would soon be victim to a more powerful enemy. But a soldier well-trained with his weapon of choice was a mighty warrior!

In Matt. 4, our Lord Himself used the word of God to combat the devil. Can we do better?

As we train our minds and hearts in God's word, we will become more and more like the Author Himself because we will see Him in His word. "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." 2 Cor. 3:18

"And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD." 1 Sam. 3:21

If you are longing for God to reveal Himself to you, follow the example of the great men and women of the Bible of and of history. They valued the Lord's word and treasured it in their hearts.

One of the great advantages of memorizing Scripture is that you will have it available to share with others even when you do not have a Bible handy. Also a word fitly spoken from the heart is "like apples of gold" Prov. 25:11

Paul told Timothy to preach the word; be ready in season and out of season ..." 2 Tim. 4:2

It is wise to have a few verses on critical points from memory. There are topics in Scripture which the believer must have a firm grasp upon in order to be effective in the body of Christ and in the world. Remember the times you have wished you knew a verse and stumbled for a way to say what God had already said in His word. Memorize that verse!

Have in your memory verses on God's glory, love, holiness, justice, righteousness, comfort, etc.

You will want to learn about man's condition: sin, lostness, need for a savior, redemption, etc.

The work of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit and the finality of rejecting God's gift of eternal life are all areas that we need to be prepared to talk about with others. Learning verses to speak about God's encouragement to those in need of hope and assurance will be time well-spent.

Memorizing Scripture ministers to your soul and to the soul of those the Lord leads you to bless.

Who is the Lord?

By memorizing Scripture, you can ponder that great truth all the days of your life.

What better employment of your time could you undertake?

"Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, bless His name; proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day. Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples.

For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before Him, strength and beauty are in His sanctuary."

Ps. 96:1-6

Prayer

“Help me.”

“Save me.”

“Teach me.”

“Revive me.”

“Incline my heart to Your testimonies.”

“Give me understanding that I may observe Your law.”

So much has been written on the discipline of prayer. We can all learn more about prayer, but the real education for this discipline is accomplished in “the school of prayer.”

This is one of the most talked about and read about practices, yet one of the least exercised.

- Follow the practice of Christ

When asked to teach His disciples regarding prayer, our Lord offered a simple yet profound example. He did not tell them “about” prayer, He prayed.

“Our Father Who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” **Luke 11:1-4**

Each point in this prayer can be a stopping point to dwell and talk with the Lord. This is called an *index prayer*, meaning each point is one which can be elaborated upon.

For instance, “Our Father.” Stop here and thank the Father that He has called you His own. Thank Him that He will provide, protect, love and guide you as a father does his beloved child.

“Who is in heaven” reminds us that our Father is the Sovereign God of all the universe.

- Pause to praise and adore Him.

“Hallowed be Your name.” God is holy. He is altogether other than we are. We must approach a holy God with the reverence and awe He deserves. The only reason we can boldly enter the holy place is because of “the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh.” **Heb. 10:19, 20**

“Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” **Heb. 4:16**

As you progress through each point of the prayer Jesus gave as an example,

- Allow the Spirit Who lives in you to speak. “In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He Who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” **Rom. 8:26, 27**
- By the way, the disciples had probably prayed all their lives. So why did they ask Jesus how to pray? Because they heard **Him** pray and it was not like anything they had ever heard! Do not be satisfied with vain, empty Santa Claus prayers. Do not bring God your grocery lists.
 - To deepen your prayer life, go throughout the Scriptures and learn from the prayers – the people who prayed. Start with Cain in **Genesis 4:13-15**. If God can hear the prayer of Cain, that should give you confidence that He will certainly hear you. Look at **Gen. 5:24**. “Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.”

Is walking with God similar to prayer?

Read the Bible in this manner, searching and asking God to teach you everything He wants to reveal to you about talking with Him. Literally talk out loud to God as you read the Scriptures.

What do you learn about prayer?

- Another hindrance to prayer is lack of discipline and lack of planning.

“We Protestants are an undisciplined people. Therein lies the reason for much of the dearth of spiritual insights and serious lack of moral power.”

Albert Edward Day

While lip service is given to the practice of prayer, in actuality, prayer is always demoted to non-essential status. We think we can manage without prayer. Therefore prayer is never planned, but sporadic. Would you plan a two week vacation which has a far less significant impact on your life? Then why do you not plan for prayer?

“As it is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray.” Martin Luther

The average believer prays less than five minutes a day. (From a survey taken while attendees participated in a seminar on spiritual awakening)

Christian, we are in a battle. John Piper encourages us that **“prayer is a walkie-talkie for warfare, not a domestic intercom for increasing our conveniences.”** If you are not in constant communication with your Commander, you are at RISK!

Colossians 4:2 tells us to “Devote yourselves to prayer.”

- ✓ How do you know if you are devoted to prayer?

When you are devoted to something or someone, you make sacrifices for them, you make time with them a priority, you will give energy and resources to them.

1 Thes. 5:17, “Pray continually.”

Prayer, in a sense, in the Christian’s expression of an unbroken relationship with the Father, with Abba.

Eph. 6:18, “With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for the saints.”

So after all of this encouragement, WHY DO WE NOT PRAY?

Prayer is learned and we have not been “With Christ in the School of Prayer.” (a book by Andrew Murray)

❖ We learn to pray by:

1. Praying
2. Praying with others who have a passion for prayer **Prov. 13:20**
3. Meditating on Scripture {there should be a smooth, almost unnoticeable transition between Scripture input and prayer output as we move closer to our Father}
We learn to pray by meditating on Scripture, for **meditation** is the missing link between Bible intake and prayer.
4. Reading about prayer and those who are devoted to prayer ... and then, pray
5. Examining the content of our prayers to ensure their content is in line with Scripture
6. Expecting God to answer
7. Continuing in faithful prayer regardless of what we see with our eyes
Ask, Seek, Knock **Matt. 6:7, 8** These verbs are in the present tense, which means they are continuous. Remember, faith would never grow if all prayers were answered immediately.

Many books have been written *about* prayer; put them aside ... and pray!

The Discipline of Service

While there is no particular discipline for companionship or fellowship, our Lord definitely taught us about investing our lives in others. When we examine the life of Christ, we see that He poured out His life for others in service and availability. Yes, He healed, taught, performed miracles, but His disciples also saw the heart of a servant when they looked at their Teacher.

- ✓ This heart of service had been foretold by the prophets as part of the messianic fulfillment.

“And now says the LORD, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (for I am honored in the sight of the LORD and My God is My strength), He says, ‘Is it too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’” **Is. 49: 5-6**

(Also look at **Is. 50: 4-9**)

“Behold My Servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were astonished at you, so His appearance was marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men. Thus He will sprinkle many nations, kings will shut their mouths on account of Him ... As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many as He will bear their iniquities.” **Is. 52:13, 14; 53: 11**

- ✓ And in the New Testament we see the fulfillment of these prophecies.

“Jesus got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded... So when He had washed their feet and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.’”

Jn. 13:4, 5, 12-17

- ❖ Service is very ordinary from the world’s point of view, but in **John 13**, Jesus completely changes that concept. With His life, Jesus had been showing His disciples what service was – the many little deaths to our own agenda. Here, hours before His death on the cross, He teaches His followers what true love and service are: ministering, bending low, to wash another’s dirty feet with no regard for status or fairness. He even washed the feet of Judas who had already betrayed Him. The same feet Jesus was washing, were the feet Judas had walked on to the temple just hours before to be

bribed with thirty pieces of silver for the life of His Teacher. (**Matt. 26:14-16**)

Judas did not understand service and it cost him his life and his soul.

Jesus also tells us in **Jn. 12:26**, “*If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor Him.*” (Read also **Matt. 20:26-28**)

If our Lord, Who left His seat in glory to become a servant, embraces the role of servant, can we do less?

Paul tells us, “*For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*” **Gal. 5:13**

Paul, speaking of the gifts within the church says, they are “*for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.*” **Eph. 4:12**

Paul also tells Timothy in the first epistle to his son in the faith, “*In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.*” **4:6**

- ✓ Here the blending of service and doctrine equips the man of God.

The writer to the Hebrews further explains true service. “*Since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire. Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.*” **Heb. 12:28- 13:3**

All of this service is very purposeful.

Heb. 9:14, “*How much more will the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*”

Col. 3:24b, “*It is the Lord Christ Whom you serve.*”

- ✓ What service teaches us is “hiddenness”. We are content to serve the Lord, dying to self and the need for approval, because we are serving Him and blessing others. What matters if it is anonymous?

“Servant”, Greek <i>doulos</i> : a slave who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another, his will being altogether consumed in the will of the other
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Many times when writing the epistles, the authors would refer to themselves as *douloi* because of their devotion to the Lord. In the Old Testament, the prophets were the servants of the Lord. Moses is referred to as the servant of the Lord. When Joshua took the mantle of leadership from Moses, he became the “servant of the Lord.” This is a title of great purpose and honor. But the cost is great as well. The servant of the Lord has now been consumed by the will of the Lord.

When we truly serve, we do not concern ourselves with the results; those are in God’s hands. He calls us to invest in a life and we do not need to calculate the outcome.

Be assured, this type of service, genuine service, is a lifestyle, not a whimsical, guilt-driven activity.

There are so many opportunities for service in the body of Christ. Listening, truly listening, is rare. Faithful rebuking, when you have earned the trust through deep levels of investment, strengthens the body.

Seeing needs in areas that are unfamiliar to your own world must be accomplished by a true servant. Aware of the loneliness of a nursing home resident, time spent reading from the Bible or a book is a great service. Smiling at a child who has had a hard day at school ministers Christ’s love. Singing to those in your own family serves by example to infuse your home with joy. Sacrifices of large amounts of time, energy and expense may be required of the servant of our God. Stopping whatever you are doing to be the eyes, ears, arms, lips of Jesus is a service He has called us to perform.

All of this requires humility. The flesh cries out for notice, for its own way, for fairness, for equality. Humility recognizes the truth that large tasks require great sacrifice only temporarily, whereas small tasks go unnoticed and require constant sacrifice and death to self.

*“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, Who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking on the form of a **bond-servant**, and being made in the likeness of men, being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Phil. 2:5-11*

Interview for the greatest job of all time: following Jesus Christ in His service that remains to this world.

He is not finished serving, but He calls you and me to be His hands and feet, His eyes and ears, His heart and soul to a needy world.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF SILENCE

"Silence is very important. The silence between the notes is as important as the notes themselves".

Mozart quote

We will examine the discipline of Silence, but we must be familiar with the discipline of Solitude as well because these two practices go hand in hand.

Donald Whitney reminds us why these two disciplines are *spiritual* disciplines: "The discipline of silence is the voluntary and temporary abstention from speaking *so that certain spiritual goals might be sought*. Solitude is the spiritual discipline of voluntarily and temporarily withdrawing to privacy *for spiritual purposes*."

Reclaiming silence and solitude as practices for the Christian believer is crucial to growing in Christ. The Lord Himself was a disciple of these practices because He knew their invaluable importance to a holy life, set apart for God.

But we have lost the practice of Silence and Solitude.

- We commonly walk into our houses and immediately turn on the television.
- Step into an elevator and preprogrammed music automatically plays.
- Visit a doctor's office and the ubiquitous television is already on.
- Get into your car and drive away, and the radio, CD player, or MP3 is usually blaring.
- An unplanned moment of silence in church is usually filled by the pianist, organist, or guitarist.
- In the city, the noise of trains, planes, cars, and trucks is so common that we barely notice anymore.
- Joggers with wires in their ears drown out the beat of their own hearts.

We simply need times of silence as a spiritual discipline as an essential habit for spiritual recalibration.

We must STOP and consider everything through the eyes of our Lord. We cannot do that unless we practice Silence and Solitude.

In Silence we close off our souls from noise – from other sounds competing with the Lord's voice in our lives.

Many people have never experienced Silence and are not even aware that they are starved from this neglected practice.

"Silence is frightening because it strips us as nothing else does, throwing us upon the stark realities of our life. It reminds us of death, which will cut us off from this world and leave only us and God. And in that quiet, what if there turns out to be very little to 'just us and God?'" Dallas Willard

We must be sure to reserve the best place in our day for the Lord; this means finding Silence in His Presence.

When we die, hearing is many times the last of the senses to go.

"Sound always strikes deeply and disturbingly into our souls." Willard

"Only Silence will allow us life-transforming concentration upon God." Willard

Without Silence in our lives, we are deprived of true fellowship with our Lord.

Are we doomed to experience the deafness described in **Matt. 12: 19**?

The Son of God *"shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice above the street noise."*

Yet, if we will commit to make Silence a part of our lives ...

Isaiah 30: 15 tells us, *"The Holy One of Israel has said, 'In repentance and rest you will be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength.'"*

Practice in not speaking can build our control over our tongues. As we yield to the Spirit of the Lord in this area, we can experience what it means to speak when the Lord would have us speak and to be silent when He desires our silence.

James 1: 19 *"Let everyone be quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to anger."*

As has been said about communication, *"We need to pay less attention to what people are trying to tell us and more to what they tell us without trying."*

Ps. 46: 10 tells us to *"Be still and know that I am God."*

This word "be still" can mean many things. One of them is "Hush."

"Be silent and know that I am God," is one way of saying this.

"Be still and know that I am God," the first half of Psalms 46:10, is a popular verse used to encourage believers to be still and silent before the Lord. This interpretation promotes a healthy rest in the presence of the Lord.

Mark 4: 39, "And He got up and rebuked the wind and said, **'Hush, be still.'** And the wind died down and became perfectly calm."

"Peace" is from the Greek root word *siopao* which literally means to be quiet or to refrain from speaking. "Still" comes from the Greek root word *phimoo* which is to keep quiet as with a muzzle, keep under control, or silence. It's interesting that Jesus addresses elements of the weather like we would a living creature. While God gave humans authority over animals and plants (Genesis 1:28), Jesus created everything on earth and, therefore, has dominion over all creation (Colossians 1:16).

<https://www.bibleref.com/Mark/4/Mark-4-39.html>

Ecclesiastes 9:17 The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools.

Ecclesiastes 3:7-8 a time to tear and a time to sew; a time to be silent and a time to speak; a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.

Proverbs 17:28 Even fools are thought wise when they keep silent; with their mouths shut, they seem intelligent.

Psalm 141:3 O LORD, set a guard at my mouth. Keep watch over the door of my lips.

Psalm 62:5-6 My soul, wait in silence for God only, For my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be shaken.

Zephaniah 1:7 Stand in silence in the presence of the Sovereign LORD, for the awesome day of the LORD's judgment is near.

Psalm 37:7 Be silent in the LORD's presence and wait patiently for him.

Rev. 8: 1 – When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Hab. 2: 20 But the Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth be silent before Him.

Lam. 3: 26 It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the Lord.

Ex. 14: 14 The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.

Is. 53: 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth.

Zech. 2: 13 Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD; for he is aroused from His holy habitation.

“In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.”
(Isaiah 30:15)

Solitude Can be Difficult and Beneficial, Practice is Needed

“I was silent and still... my anguish increased. My heart grew hot within me... I meditated... Show me, O Lord... how fleeting is my life... Each man’s life is but a breath. Selah.” (Ps. 39:2-5)

In Old Testament Times God’s People Practiced Solitude

“Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the ‘tent of meeting’... The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.” (Exodus 33:7, 11)

“[Elijah] went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him... a gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:9, 12).

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.”(David; Psalm 23:1-3)

“Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him.” (Lamentations 3:28)

Jesus Practiced Solitude and Silence (If He Needed it How Much More do We!)

“At once the Spirit sent [Jesus] out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.” (Mark 1:12-13)

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (Mark 1:35)

“Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” (Luke 5:16)

“Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them.” (Luke 6:12-13)

“When Jesus heard what had happened [that John the Baptist was beheaded], he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.” (Matthew 14:13)

These are just a few Bible verses that show us Jesus’ pattern of going into solitude and silence to be with the Father in a special way, praying and listening to him. There are many more examples in the Bible of [Jesus’ Solitude and Silence](#). This was an essential part of [Jesus’ Rhythm of Life](#).

Jesus Calls his Disciples (including us!) to Join Him in Solitude and Silence

“Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, [Jesus] said to [his disciples], ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So, they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.” (Mark 6:31-32)

Jesus said to his disciples and a crowd of people: “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*” (Matthew 11:28-30)

“*Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.*” (Matthew 17:1-2)

Jesus’ Disciples Prayed in Solitude and Silence

“*When [the disciples and other followers of Christ] arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying [waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit as Jesus had told them to do]... They all joined together constantly in prayer... When the day of Pentecost came [ten days later], they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.*” (Acts 1:13-14, 2:1-2)

Peter went away from his traveling companions to go into solitude and silence and seek God. He had a vision and heard the voice of the Lord three times. His experience led to the Gospel being spread among the Gentiles. “*About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened...*” Acts 10:9-11).

Apparently, Paul spent *three years* mostly in solitude and silence in the Arabian desert with the resurrected Christ before he began his ministry. (The other Apostles were with Jesus physically for three years, but for Paul, like us, he was with Jesus *in Spirit* for his

discipleship and training.) Paul wrote, “*God chose me and called me by his marvelous grace... to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles. When this happened, I did not rush out to consult with any human being. Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was. Instead, I went away into Arabia.*” (**Galatians 1:15-17**)

Paul experienced times of profound revelation from God. Probably this came in solitude, at least in some instances. “The mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly” (**Ephesians 3:2**). “I know a man who was caught up in the third heaven” (**2 Corinthians 12:2**).

Paul meditated on God in nature. Probably he often did this in solitude. “*For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature— have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.*” (**Romans 1:20**)

According to tradition, John was in solitude and silence for years, exiled on Patmos Island. It is here that he received the Revelation. “*I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet...*” (**Revelation 1:9-10**)

Solitude is for being alone with God. It is completed by silence. There’s much to be said about solitude, but what’s most important is that it is a way to *do nothing*. Yes, do nothing. Don’t try to be productive — even in Bible study! Solitude and silence is an

opportunity to focus on your [Intimacy with Jesus](#), to unhook from your daily responsibilities and the people you interact with, in order to attend to the Lord alone. In solitude we don't try to make anything happen. We just bring our naked self to the Lord to be with him.

<https://www.soulshpherd.org/bible-verses-on-solitude-and-silence/>

These are some thoughts to get you going on your journey with the Lord. Practice both Silence and Solitude in order to know Him better.

Simplicity

“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Matt. 6:33

- **As with all the disciplines, a look at the life of Christ is the inspiration and standard which gives us direction.**

Jesus led a life unencumbered by possessions and burdens. He did have deadlines and projects to complete. But these all were focused on one thing, one simple, single thing, to do the will of His Heavenly Father. He was the most focused, single-minded Person to ever live.

How can we follow His example in the pursuit of simplicity?

“Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.” **1 Pet. 2:2**

“To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity; to give prudence to the naïve, to the youth knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.” **Prov. 1:2-5**

“Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me.” **Ps. 131:2**

“The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” **Ps. 119:130**

“The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. Return to your rest, O my soul, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.” **Ps. 116:6, 7**

“The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.” **Ps. 19:7**

“The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters; for he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” **Matt. 6:22-24**

“But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will he not much more clothe you? You of little faith. Do not worry then, saying ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ ... For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” **Matt. 6:30-32**

Driving Focus

We must have one, single focus. Truly in life all people are **driven by one, single focus**. What is your driving focus? This is the most important question you can ask yourself today!

When you examine the actions of each day, you will see what **your driving focus** really is.

- **The Lord is opposed to the double-minded, because it is contrary to His clear instruction to be single-minded.**

“For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” **Js. 1:7, 8**

“But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” **2 Cor. 11:3**

- **Do not be deceived by the world's culture regarding wisdom.**

“Let no man deceive himself, if any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, ‘He is the one Who catches the wise in their craftiness’; and again, ‘The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless.’” 1 Cor. 3:18-20

“At that time Jesus said, ‘I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.’” Matt. 11:25

“Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.” 1 Cor. 14:20

“And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, ‘Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’” Matt. 18:2-4

What else can we learn about our faith and simplicity?

- **The power of the gospel resides in its purity and simplicity.**

“For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, not with a pretext for greed – God is witness – not did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.” 1 Thes. 2:5-7

“For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world and especially toward you.” 2 Cor. 1:12

- **The power of the church is in her unity and simplicity.**

“Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all Who is over all and through all and in all.” Eph. 4:3-6

“Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.” Acts 2:46

“And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.” Acts 4:32, 33

- **Simplicity wars with legalism.**

In the entire twenty-third chapter of Matthew, our Lord is making a strong pronouncement against the complicated and burdensome laws that the Pharisees have heaped on man. God has always desired whole-hearted commitment to Himself and not to a legal code. Jesus, by His life and teaching, proclaimed a life of purity and devotion. This is the ***simplicity of purpose and life*** which the Pharisees and indeed, the church today, have lost. We must *“throw off everything that hinders and the sin which so easily entangles, and run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.” Heb. 12:1,2*

The word ***“fix”*** means to turn your gaze from one thing so as to properly see another. Our lives are so complicated and our eyes are running in so many directions that we must commit to look only at Jesus. This means we must turn from whatever we are currently fascinated with in order to truly ***“see”*** Him. Then we will be living the life of simplicity: a life devoted to our Sovereign.

When we truly ***see Him in His majesty and holiness***, all else will fall away and will be seen for what is really is, a decoy to get us off track. As the song says, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.” This is simplicity.

- **Busyness wars with simplicity.**

There is so much busyness in our lives that drain us and rob us of the vitality that the Lord would give to us. We must be vigilant to be aware of these insidious thieves and mockers of the true value in this life which our Father has loaned to us. We are stewards of our lives, our time, our loved ones and definitely of our possessions. As the psalmist says, *“This has become mine, that I observe Your precepts.”* **Ps. 119:56** The one true possession we have is our relationship with our Lord. In singleness of mind and heart, be devoted to that one treasure.

“Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

Jesus spoke these words in response to Martha’s busyness. **Lk. 10:41, 42**

- ❖ **Some things we can actively do to simplify our lives:**

1. Examine your physical belongings and eliminate the things that you realize are unnecessary.
✓ De-clutter. (Boy, is this hard for me!)
2. Examine your schedule and eliminate the things that you realize the Lord does not wish to be a part of your life.
3. Make purchases for their usefulness and not for the status which the world tells you they provide.
4. Routinely give things away.
5. Refuse to be a part of anything that breeds oppression. God does not like oppressors, as we clearly see in the Psalms.
6. Appreciate things without owning them. Life is not about control and possession; it is about the people that the Lord brings into your sphere of influence. Not stuff!
7. Do not become addicted to anything; that complicates your life.
8. Let your speech reflect your life of simplicity. Let your words be honest and clear. Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no.’

All Creation is moving toward one thing, one single thing.

“At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father.” **Phil. 2:10, 11**

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ... For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.” **Rom. 11:33, 36**

Solitude

“Let him who cannot be alone beware of community ... Let him who is not in community beware of being alone ... Each by itself has profound pitfalls and perils. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation, and despair.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer

- As with all the disciplines, Jesus is our example. He spent much time in solitude. Why?

His public ministry began after His forty days spent alone in the wilderness. **Matt. 4:1-11**

After healing many all day, Jesus retired to a solitary place, alone. **Mark 1:35**

Prior to selecting the twelve disciples, Jesus *“went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles.”* **Luke 6:12, 13**

In **Mark 6:31**, Jesus instructs His disciples to *“come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.”*

Upon hearing the news of John the Baptist’s beheading, Jesus withdrew to a secluded place by Himself. **Matt. 14:13**

After feeding the five thousand, Jesus *“went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.”* **Matt. 14:23**

The Transfiguration took place up on a high mountain with only three of His disciples. **Matt. 17**

As Jesus faced His greatest task, He prepared Himself by seeking the solitude of the Garden of Gethsemane. **Matt 26:35-46**

<p>“Down to Gehenna, and up to the throne, He travels the fastest who travels alone.” Matthew Arnold</p>
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“Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment.” Foster

- We desperately need silence in our lives. Without silence as a routine part of our lives, we will not hear what is truly important and vital to our spirit. With no silence there will be no solitude.

“A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; a time to be silent and a time to speak.”

Eccl. 3:7

“Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.” **Eccl. 5:2**

“...Draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools.” **Eccl. 5:1**

Prov. 25:11, *“Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.”*

As we develop this discipline, we learn when to speak and when to be silent. This is wisdom. We need to hear the divine Whisper better.

- Our Lord understood solitude. There are others in Scripture as well who were masters of this discipline. Joseph was alone in Egypt as a slave and then as a prisoner. He was a solitary Hebrew among godless men and women. He probably did not even speak his own language to anyone for many years. Yet, he was unshakeable when faced with temptation. He had spent time alone with his God. It did not matter where, with whom, how long, or even why he suffered. He was always in the presence of his King and Lord. Even in his solitude.
- When we have come to the point of submitting to the path our Lord chose in solitude, we embark on what has been called the “*dark night of the soul*.” This is a stripping away of all our dependences on our verbal and emotional crutches. We yield to the Lord alone.

Our culture would tell us to avoid this at all costs. But this dark night is one of the ways in which the Lord brings us into a stillness of the soul so that He transforms us to the image of His Son. **Living in peace, joy, celebration and comfort will not always provide us with the “spiritual soil and climate” which is necessary to grow in His grace and knowledge.**

“In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.” Heb. 5:7-9

So where do we begin?

- **Recognize the culprit.**

The tongue is like a thermometer. It reveals our spiritual temperature.

The book of James has much to say about the tongue. The same instrument which praises God is at times used to curse our brother. This is an abuse of the tongue we have been given.

I have never met a Christian who believes they have tamed the tongue. One sure way is to silence it and control it by fasting from its use for a time. This will regain some of the control that has been lost.

- **Begin with small steps.**

Do not speak in the car when alone. No phone calls.

At home, screen phone calls. Set aside an hour when you will not speak.

- **Next take bigger chunks of time.**

Like exercise, discipline the tongue not to speak for a full morning.

- **Eventually, you may be led to not speak for a full day or even a weekend.**

At these times the Lord can speak and you can listen better than you have ever done before. This can happen because you are not distracted with superfluous chatter and empty words. Only the Word Himself can be heard.

❖ Solitude is not merely neglecting to speak.

Our Lord used His solitude to pray and cry out to God. He removed Himself from distractions so He could think clearly and communicate deeply with His Father.

Does our Father not deserve this commitment from us?

One other question: what do non-believers think about, what fills their thoughts when they are in solitude? As a believer, rejoice that Almighty God comes and fills your mind, your spirit, your soul with His Presence! Hallelujah, what a gift!

We have a desperate need to practice this discipline at this time in history. Man has never had so many pieces of information rolling around in his mind as he does now. Yes, we have modern conveniences, but at what cost?

“It’s harder for us today to concentrate our thoughts, especially on God and Scripture, than it ever has been.” D. Whitney

But we can restore an order to our thinking and recapture some of the ability to concentrate through solitude and meditation on God and His Word to us.

Ps. 46:10, *“Be still (cease striving) and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”*

Here the psalmist tells us to *“Be still”* but that is not all. *“Know that I am God.”*

While you are being still, know that He is God. In solitude you will find a new depth to *“knowing”* that He is God.

- **Remember, this is not a law. This is a wise decision to follow the example set by Jesus.**

Do not make this a legalistic endeavor to please God or impress other believers. This must be a discipline the Lord puts on your heart.

“Solitude with God repairs the damage done by the fret and noise and clamor of the world.” Oswald Chambers

“Alone! Relinquish all! You cannot consecrate your children, your wife, your lover, your friend, your father, your mother, or your own life as yours. You must abandon all and fling yourself on God as a mere conscious being, and unperplexed, seeking you’ll find Him... Abandonment of ourselves is the kernel of consecration, not presenting our gifts, but presenting ourselves without reserve.” Chambers

Solitude is walking alone with God. The disciple who walks alone with Almighty God is not dependent on places and moods, but carries himself with dignity, serenity and an unshakeable devotion to his Sovereign and King.

- Remember also that many will follow one who has just been on the mountaintop. Many will clamor around the one with the spectacular experience with God. But few are the fans of solitude.

Do not let this deter you.

*“Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” **Matt. 8:19-20***

“The only road to Jesus is Alone.” Chambers

Study

What is study?

How would you define “study”?

Bible studies come in many varieties, shapes and sizes. So what is God’s viewpoint on a true study?

Think of the places in the Bible that refer to *studying* God’s word. Is that specific terminology in the Bible? So what do we mean by *study*?

Webster defines “study” as:

1. “the act or process of applying the mind so as to acquire knowledge or understanding, as by reading, investigating, etc.”
2. “careful attention to, and critical examination and investigation of, any subject, event, etc.”

For those of us who love Bible study, we do not often contemplate the simple act of study itself.

- But as with all the disciplines, the purpose of *study* is the complete transformation of the disciple of Christ.

Read Romans 12:1, 2 and see how it relates to study.

“... by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

- ❖ How important is what you think?

Read Phil. 4:6-8.

*“Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension (another thinking word), will guard your hearts and your **minds** in Christ Jesus.*

*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, **dwel**l on these things.*

2 Tim. 2:15 tells us, “*Be diligent to present yourself **approved** to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, **accurately handling** the word of truth.*”

- “Approved” = *dokimos* – to accept, receive, proved, receiveable; tried as metals by fire and thus purified. “To be approved as acceptable in the furnace of adversity”

Approval does not mean self-commendation but the commendation of the Lord. **2 Cor. 10:18**

“For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.”

- “Accurately handling” = *orthotomeo* – rightly cut or divide, to handle correctly, skillfully, to correctly teach the word of truth

Antonym is to “pervert, twist, lead astray, deceive”

2 Pet. 1:5 tells us, “*Now for this very reason also, applying all **diligence**, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge.*”

- “Diligence” = *spoudazo* – to be earnest, diligent or eager, to make every effort to do one’s best

- ❖ What if you are lazy or careless about the *study* of God’s word?

2 Cor. 10:5

*“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking **every thought** captive to the obedience of Christ..”*

If you do not realize it, the battle for your **mind** is raging around you. Whether you take it seriously or not, this battle will continue. Your decision to study to show yourself approved is your only safeguard against false teaching and corruption. Not only does study prepare you for the wolves in sheep’s clothing and their false doctrine, but true, transforming study will prepare your heart and mind for the battle.

❖ Why does the passage on spiritual warfare include God’s word?

What is the Word of God in spiritual warfare?

Look at Eph. 6:16, 17.

“In addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take up the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

How can you take up a sword with which you are unfamiliar? It becomes a liability to carry around a weapon which is unfamiliar and clumsily used. This is why David chose his sling and stones and not the heavy armor of King Saul. You must be able to wield the sword of God’s word as adeptly as David maneuvered with his tried and true weapons. The result for David was the death of his mortal enemy and the enemy of God.

Much can be done through study.

But unfortunately, many people are in Bible study and are not transformed.

❖ So how do you study so as to be changed into His glorious image?

That is the *discipline of study* in contrast to the activity of study.

The discipline of study is not an activity; study is the heartbeat of what God has to say to you when you open His word. You are observing God’s truth with the intent to carve away “the dead flesh” that slows you down.

Heb. 12:1

“... let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

The discipline of study is more like a strenuous race than a gentle stroll through the park.

The disciplines are for those who have come to realize the deadly battle between the way of our Sovereign and King and the way of His enemy.

Arm yourself with the discipline of study.

Submission

As with all the disciplines, you cannot make the discipline itself the central focus – that can become legalistic. We must guard against making the discipline a law.

The act of submission must come from a willing, loving heart. Then the disciple yields to his Lord, bowing in reverence to a worthy and majestic Sovereign.

Submission is a degrading word to some people. But willing submission is the most regal, honorable thing we can do because it is the example set by our Lord and King Himself. To submit to God and follow His way instead of demanding *my* way, is the mark of wisdom. Submission is just another word for trust.

- Do you trust God with the life He has loaned to you?
- How can you practice submission as a daily discipline?

Examine your day today. Was there a situation in which you knew you were doing something *your* way because *God's* way seemed *unreasonable or too costly*?

In contrast to this, the proper spiritually disciplined response would be to guard your heart the next day (really the next moment) so that you yield to God's way revealed through His Word.

Practice yielding to Him and it will become a reflection of the yielded life of our Lord – more than a reflection, the very life of Jesus Christ will manifest itself through you.

- “Yield, submit”: *hupotasso* – a military term, to place or arrange under, to place in order, to place under in an orderly fashion

“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” Jam. 4:7

It is appropriate that *hupotasso* is a military term because this points to the fact that we are in a battle. Without being aware of the danger of ignoring or delaying in carrying out military orders, we are oblivious to the war raging around us. We suffer casualties because we do not *hupotasso* to the Lord.

❖ Follow the example of Christ in submission:

“I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him Who sent Me.” Jn. 5:30

*“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men, being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled** Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.” Phil 2:5-9*

*“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept **entrusting** Himself to Him who judges righteously.” 1 Pet. 2:21-23*

❖ Yield your life to God:

“He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.”
Matt. 10:39

“And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.” **Mark 8:34**

“But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.’” **Acts 9:16**

❖ **Submit to God’s Word:**

“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him... Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.’... If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”

Jn. 14:21, 23; 15:10

“You have ordained Your precepts, that we should **keep them diligently**. Oh that my ways may be established **to keep Your statutes!**” **Ps. 119:4, 5**

❖ **Submit to Godly authority:**

Submission is first of all to the Lord. But as we yield our lives to Him, *our* rights to *our* time is forfeit. The Lord then calls us into service to others. While the spiritual discipline of service will be explored in a later lesson, **the practices of submission and service are prompted by the same obedient heart.**

“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.”

1 Cor. 9:19

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” **Ga. 5:13**

“Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” **Eph. 5:21**

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.” **1 Pet. 2:13, 14**

❖ **When submission to man is in conflict to God’s word:**

“But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.’” **Acts 4:19, 20**

“But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’” **Acts 5:29**

In true submission, we are finally free to release our lives back to our Creator. Then we work in unison with Him to live the life for which He has perfectly designed us. We no longer struggle to do things our way because we are submitted to His will and His will alone. This is

freedom.

Thanksgiving

*“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.” Psalm 118:1*

While thanksgiving is not mentioned in most lists for spiritual disciplines, we see our Lord practicing thanksgiving throughout His life. If our Lord demonstrated His appreciation for the value of this discipline, then we are wise to follow in His footsteps.

Matt. 15:36; 26:27; Luke 22:17, 19; John 11:41

- Giving thanks is an often repeated topic in the psalms as well. The practice of giving thanks displays a grateful heart, dependent on the Lord and acknowledges the Sovereign King as worthy of thanks.

In contrast, an ungrateful heart betrays a stingy attitude toward God. If the practice of thanksgiving is foreign to you, if you do not have time for it, if it seems child-like, or if it is not spiritually deep enough for you, then why was it a practice of our Lord? Can we ignore something which was a priority to Him?

Thanksgiving is not simply the offering of a prayer at a meal and then you are done. Anyone can do this out of habit or tradition. **True thanksgiving is an act born out of a heart which acknowledges that each and every (every single one, without exception) good thing comes from the Father of lights. James 1:17**

❖ The Historic Significance of Biblical Thanksgiving

God specified *certain offerings* to be a staple activity of His chosen people. He prescribed offerings for His people in several areas: trespass or guilt offerings, sin offerings, peace offerings, meal and drink offerings, burnt offerings, wave and heave offerings and thank offerings.

Each offering had a particular purpose. The *sin offering* was a general recognition of sin as a separating element between God and man. The *trespass or guilt offering* was for a specific offense against God, offered to restore fellowship with God. The *meal offerings* were acknowledgements to God as the Provider for His people, etc.

“When you sacrifice a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord, you shall sacrifice it so that you may be accepted.” Lev. 22:29

Jesus has been that sacrifice because through the offering of His life, we have been found acceptable. (**Jesus is pictured in all the sacrifices.** Do not miss that blessed truth.)

The *thanksgiving offerings* came under the *peace offerings*. The *peace offering* is divided into three categories: *thanksgiving, votive and freewill offerings*. The *thanksgiving offering* was given primarily in times of prosperity and success to demonstrate the gratitude of the offerer.

As Christians we experience spiritual abundance at all times and hence should offer this sacrifice of thanksgiving constantly. **John 10:10**

“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” 2 Cor. 9:15

❖ Exercises in Thanksgiving

Read through these verses on giving thanks and see what you learn. Use the *who what when where why* and *how* questions to aid you in your discovery.

“The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart exults, and with my song I shall thank Him.” Ps. 28:7

(For instance, here you might note HOW you thank Him.)

“That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving and declare all Your wonders.” Ps. 26:7

“It is good to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High.” Ps. 92:1

“Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.” Ps. 95:2

“Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise.” Ps. 110:4

*“Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; sing praises to our God on the lyre,
Who covers the heavens with clouds, Who provides rain for the earth.” Ps. 147:7, 8*

*“Then on that day David first assigned Asaph and his relatives to give thanks to the Lord.
Oh, give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples.”
1 Chron. 16:7, 8*

“But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed.” Rom. 6:17

“I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Cor. 1:4

“And there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.” Eph. 5:4

“Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.” Eph. 5:20

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” Phil. 4:6

“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” Col. 3:17

- ✓ How is our national Thanksgiving different than the thanksgiving a Christian offers to God?

In the United States we celebrate Thanksgiving once a year; for us, it is a reminder of our national ancestry. As our forebears faced difficulties they relied on God as their Jehovah-jireh.

At this one time each year we remember and reflect on this desperate point in our national identity.

It would be wise and effective to pause and reflect daily (really multiple times throughout each day) on the cause for our spiritual identity.

If you truly understand what the Lord has done for you, you will live a life of thanksgiving. **Practicing the discipline of thanksgiving is not optional for the Christian who loves his Father; it will be as natural as the air you breathe.**

“Oh give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples. Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; speak of all His wonders. Glory in His holy name; let the heart of those who seek the Lord be glad. Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face continually. Remember His wonders which He has done, His marvels and the judgments uttered by His mouth. O seed of Abraham, His servant, O sons of Jacob, His chosen ones! He is the Lord our God; His judgments are in all the earth.” Ps. 105:1-7

there's nothing that man has created that will even come close to the complexity of the human brain. Far too often, we take lightly the wonderful and dynamic gift that God has given us when we consider ourselves dumb or less than brilliant! Each one of us were created in the very image of God, and gifted in many ways, and it is a crying shame when we refer to ourselves as anything less than downright amazing!

Unthankful people are never satisfied with what they have been given, but always want more. This is an obvious sign of an unthankful heart. Greed is a sin that causes us to become unthankful for the things that God has blessed us with. When we become greedy, we are thinking about things we don't have, rather than things we do have.

Unthankful people don't take care of the things God has given them. Those who are thankful for the good things that God has given them will take good care of those things, whether it be their mind, car, body, spouse, children, job, etc. Taking good care of the things which God has given us shows Him that those things mean something to us and we are thankful for them. Not that we ever should worship the things God gives us, but we should take good care of them.

All of these symptoms should not be found in our lives, but if they exist (and I doubt many of us are immune!), there is something we can do about it. Develop a thankful heart! So the next question is....

One of the vital steps to developing a thankful personality, is to meditate (that is to think about often) the things that you have in your life to be thankful for. Make a list of the things God has done for you, and keep those things on your mind throughout the day. It may take a little more work at first, especially if your mind is programmed to think negatively. This process is the tearing down of strongholds and the renewing of your mind as God's Word tells us:

If you want to develop a thankful heart, then you'll need to meditate and think about the good things God has blessed you with. Even if it seems you have nothing to be thankful for, you have been blessed far beyond those living in the OT era, because of what Jesus has done for YOU! Healing, prosperity, joy, peace, and deliverance are all parts of what Jesus has done for YOU! God's Word tells us that ear hath not heard, nor eye seen the great things that lie ahead for those who love God! Every one of us have a LOT to be thankful for!

1 Corinthians 2:9, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

My husband, Stuart, preaches a wonderful sermon called "the gratitude attitude." I need to listen to it regularly. I find my rebel heart much more engaged with the "bratitute attitude." Being discontent comes naturally to the race from Eden who weren't content with paradise! Living with resentment is quite understandable in the sinner, but what part does it play in the lives of the redeemed? How can sinners saved by grace dare to whine and mutter their way through life? It all started in Eden when Eve, having bitten into the apple, began to whine about it being too sour, or not hard enough, or not as nice as a Granny Smith's! Her dissatisfaction was catching and she hastened to find a recruit for her cause. Adam bit - and so it began.

I call it the G virus or the grumble germ. From the moment man moved outside the garden gate, grumpy human beings have grumbled their way through the centuries. And neither does it stop when we are lost to grace. The forces that tempted man at the dawn of ‘man time’ are the same forces that tempt us to be unthankful and resentful today. Satan still whispers, “If you can’t think of anything to whine about because you’re trying to cultivate a thankful heart, I’ll give you a hand. Have an apple!”

He tempts us to think we never have enough of anything or anybody. “You poor thing,” he hisses. “That husband of yours is always out looking after other people. He doesn’t have anything left for you! I’d complain if I were you. When he comes in tonight try pouting until he notices and then when he asks you what’s wrong say, ‘Nothing!’ Make him guess what’s wrong.” We whine about the fact that we don’t have enough money, or time for ourselves, our church, our friends. Have you noticed it’s not that we have nothing? It’s just that something in our hearts called the ‘greed need’ is telling us we would like just a little bit more! The devil is into this “little bit more” thing. Have you noticed nothing is ever enough? But then paradise wasn’t enough for Adam and Eve, so what’s new? Next time you hear the hiss of the snake in your garden, resist him and say “thank you Jesus” out loud - he will disappear in a hurry. The evil can’t stand being around thankful Christians. If you’re going to cultivate a thankful heart, try going to sleep singing hymns and spiritual songs. Allow the wind of His Spirit to grace you with a “gratitude attitude.”

Having traveled extensively in Third World countries these last years, I have been greatly convicted by the attitude of my sisters and brothers who live incredibly difficult lives with much to complain about. But what we would call hardship, they call inconvenience. While teaching in a restricted country where a knock on the door could mean imprisonment for daring to gather to study the Scriptures, I thought about all the whining we do in the West. We, who are drowning in our freedoms, comforts, and materialism get hardship and inconvenience mixed up. These people don’t! I asked the Lord to show me how to, like them, cultivate a thankful heart. Here are a few practical suggestions: *Stop whining!* Go on, you can do it; it’s a decisio. *Count your blessings.* Choose one blessing a day to think about. *Share something you are thankful about* with your husband, parents, or friend. *Write a personal note* to someone you’ve never thanked for something. *And Smile at God.* That’s called praise!

And remember “a thank-you a day keeps the devil away!” He hates it when you’re thankful, but God loves it! Who do you want to please?

We are made to offer our lives, and all that is in them, back to God in thanksgiving. **Question: How do you cultivate gratitude in your life? How has the discipline of thankfulness changed your heart?**

A spiritual discipline has been defined as a regular practice that brings us into closer relationship with God/the Divine, self and others. The practice of gratitude as a spiritual discipline has the potential to lead us to look at our lives with new eyes, seeing the great abundance that we already enjoy, regardless of our income level or life circumstances. AND, it is a practice that can lead us to experience more joy in our lives and an opening of the heart that promotes generosity and the desire to share of our abundance with others who are less fortunate.

Could the discipline of gratefulness be the key that unlocks an abundant life for the Christian, even in times of deep sorrow, and physical and emotional suffering?

Gratitude doesn’t always come easily, though. It takes practice; we have to train our minds to be thankful. As M. Craig Barnes observes in his book, *When God Interrupts*, only one of the ten lepers whom Jesus heals, a Samaritan — an outcast — returns to thank God ([Luke 17:11-19](#)).

Gratitude is a “Parent Virtue”

Centuries ago, the philosopher Cicero argued that among virtues, gratitude is “the parent of all the others,” a virtue that begets other virtues. There seems to be a lot of truth to that claim. Growing one’s gratitude appears to have a radical and transformational effect on character because it is one of God’s primary vehicles for inducing (or “parenting”) other Christian qualities. Stated from a Christian worldview, gratitude is a vehicle that makes us better, more Christ-like people. Call it a “parent virtue,” call it “the gratitude effect,” call it miraculous, call it whatever you’d like. Regardless the label, gratitude is a powerful disposition that provides us with a very efficient, very effective mechanism for developing

myriad character traits. Want more inner peace? Work on gratitude. Want more patience? Work on gratitude. Want to be more compassionate? You get the idea.

Gratitude does all this by setting a new thought context for processing our circumstances in life—a context of an abundant life. A context where everything we have is a gift. A context where we see clearly all that we really do have in life, and where we recognize that things could always be worse. Within this context, our view of the entire world is different and we are suddenly empowered to be the people God calls us to be—to more deeply love God, to love neighbor, and to love our own lives. To be authentic salt and light at home, at work, at church, and everywhere else.

This theory of gratitude as a parent virtue derives not only from ancient philosophers like Cicero, but, not surprisingly, from theologians as well. Exegetes of the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament and even the Qur'an have all seated gratitude as central among virtues. What may surprise some people, though, is that contemporary social scientists have also advanced and empirically-tested this theory, concluding that gratitude "stimulates moral behavior" and encourages people to behave in a "pro-social manner." Stated more concretely, they have shown that gratitude is positively related to such critical outcomes as life satisfaction, vitality, happiness, optimism, hope, empathy, and the willingness to provide emotional and tangible support for other people, while being negatively related to anxiety, depression, and overall disposition.^[21] Collectively, such studies present credible evidence that feeling grateful generates a ripple effect through every area of our lives, potentially satisfying some of our deepest yearnings—our desire for happiness, our pursuit of better relationships, and our incessant quest for inner peace and contentment.

Pop psychology has piggy-backed on these research findings, introducing gratitude to the mass market as a potential panacea. Simply peruse the self-help section of any major bookstore these days and you'll find that many of the best-selling books propagate the premise that gratitude is a key to joy, to replenishment of the soul, to inner transformation, and to blessing others with our lives. "Gratitude journals"—diaries with little more than flamboyant artwork and blank, lined pages—flank these best-sellers on each side. Now these journals have become best-sellers, too.

Given all this, it should be clear that what I report in this article regarding the effects of gratitude is not new information. Quite the contrary, it's old and very public news. It's news that's been around for millennia. But that's a testimony to its merits. The advice to cultivate character through growing gratitude is time-honored wisdom that transcends generations, cultures, and religious traditions.

Growing Gratitude by Disciplining Your Mind

Much of the above reasoning may ring true for you. We've all experienced moments in life when we suddenly become cognizant of the enormity of blessing in our life. A narrowly-averted collision with a tractor-trailer. A momentarily-lost child at the store. A news segment about some illness that's plaguing a third world country. A phone call at three a.m. that, contrary to our fears, is not tragic news, but only a wrong number. An eye-opening missions trip to a destitute area. A clarifying moment of watching our children sleep.

A wave of thankfulness quickly follows such events and lasts for as long as we remain mindful of the blessing. During that time, we experience significant manifestations of Christian virtues. We become more Christ-like in our disposition toward everyone and everything. But—and most of us have experienced this as well—the empowerment vanishes

as suddenly as it appeared, and we're back to being the people we were before. The transformation, while welcome and wonderful, was fleeting. That's the nature of gratitude. It's a generator of other virtues, but only so long as it exists.

I found that one of the major secrets to success for "high-virtue Christians"—those who are most consistently Christ-like—is that they have mastered the art of *maintaining* a grateful disposition. Gratitude is simply part of who they are, rather than being some sporadic, refreshing occurrence. How do they do it? How do they nurture and sustain a grateful spirit?

In a sentence, they **think differently from the way many of the rest of us think**. The mind of the high-virtue Christian, it seems, is a disciplined mind, a pure and godly mind. A mind that is adept at immediately clearing away sinful thoughts. It is a mind that is focused on what one has rather than what one does not have. A mind that refuses to think in terms of what's missing from life—in terms of how much better life could be "if only..." Instead, the high-virtue Christians in my study want what they have. They are fully content with what's been conferred upon them, and they frequently thank God for their blessings.

an envious frame of mind, we are blinded to God's providence, ungrateful for what He has done, and ungrateful for what He continues to do in our lives.

suggest keeping a "gratitude journal." This is a daily diary that focuses exclusively on the blessings in your life thereby re-centering you on God's providence. Beyond that, a journal permits you to look back over several days, weeks, and months to review the numerous blessings that you might have forgotten had you not written them down.

Many claim there is power in the spiritual discipline of journaling, so to grow gratitude, you may want to give it a try. If you do, remember that there's no one right way to do this. Just use a format that you find helpful. You don't need to buy a special edition, full-color, twenty-dollar journal at your local bookstore. You don't need to be concerned about whether your writing makes sense. You don't need to worry about *why* you are grateful for these things. Just let the words flow.

The standard recommendation is to log five blessings per day. List more, list fewer. The exact number is not important. Just list some daily. For the first couple weeks, the blessings you list may be a bit repetitive from one day to the next. Over time, though, people generally find themselves including in their journal many new and formerly unrecognized gifts from God. linkage exists between confession of sin and greater gratitude. Why would this be? It is likely that regularly bringing our sin before God reminds us of both our flaws and God's grace. The combination of contritely admitting sin and knowing it has been cleansed will automatically generate feelings of thanksgiving. The relationship works the other way as well: A stronger spirit of gratitude toward God leads us to a greater willingness to bring our sins before Him ... which leads to more cleansing ... which leads to more gratitude on our part ... which leads to more willingness to bring our sins before Him, and so on. It's a theory of an upward spiral—a theory that is now bolstered by this finding of a positive association between confession and gratitude.

However, it's important to remember that fundamentally shifting your outlook from "I want" to "I have" takes time and perseverance. For those of us who seek quick results (and that may be the majority of us), this endeavor is fraught with setbacks and frustration.

The good news, though, is that you need not pursue this change by yourself. God is your ally in this transformation. As you grow closer to God, the many habits that generate gratitude become natural.

Some practices for Grateful Living

- Begin and end the day with giving thanks
- Tell at least 3 people you interact with during the day what you appreciate about them
- Send a card, note, or leave a voicemail of gratitude
- Send an e-card or e-mail of gratitude to someone
- Write a poem about being grateful
- Declare a fast from complaints for period of time
- Create a piece of art that reflects gratitude
- Journal daily about how you experienced gratitude
- Find scriptures or quotes about gratefulness and repeat one during the day
- Play songs that inspire gratitude during day

In the words of the Apostle Paul, this is an invitation to be "Rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:7, NIV).

A Summary of the Recommendations

for Growing and Sustaining Gratitude

- Make a habit of thinking about the blessings in your life and thanking God for them. Make this a practice throughout every day. Consider keeping a daily "gratitude journal" to formalize this process of identifying the blessings.
- Watch for envy. Regularly examine yourself to identify where and when you are envious and work toward rejecting such thoughts when they creep into your mind. Replace those thoughts with thanks to God for what you do have in life.
- Practice the disciplines of periodic fasting and regular confession of sin with one aim being a clearer understanding of the gifts bestowed on you in life.
- Expose yourself to information about the dire condition of others around the world and make prayer for these people a staple of your prayer life.
- Create other habits that remind you of how blessed you are and of how much worse life could be.
- Engage in this gratitude-growth program as part of a broader program to become a more God-centered person.

Waiting

“And do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I wait for Your ordinances.”

Ps. 119:42

If Christians do anything, it is **wait**. We are waiting for complete redemption; we are waiting for our Lord; we are waiting to be freed from the presence of sin; we are waiting for our loved ones to come to Christ; we are waiting to be reunited with other loved ones who have died; we are waiting for the consummation of the ages.

But what is our countenance as we wait? Do we endure waiting or do we thrive as we wait?

- The Hebrew word for “*wait*” in this verse in **Psalm 119** is *yahal*: a verb which means to wait, to hope, to tarry

Noah waited in **Gen. 8:12**.

Jacob waited seven years and a week to receive his beloved bride.

Job waited in **Job 6:11**

Psalm 33:18 tells us, “Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who *hope* for His lovingkindness.”

Ps. 38:15, “For I *hope* in You, O LORD; You will answer, O Lord my God.”

These verses stress the aspect of hope involved in waiting. Waiting is not like a diet where the object is to be devoid of something. ***Waiting is to be filled with something: hope.***

Ps. 42:5, “Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? *Hope* in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.”

Lam. 3:21, 24; “This I recall to my mind, therefore I have *hope*... ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, Therefore I have *hope* in Him.”

Micah 7:7. “But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the LORD; I will *wait* for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me.”

As students of the Bible, we read many times of saints and sinners alike who wait and wait. Why is waiting such a large part of the life of the creatures which God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit made in their image? Does God wait? Is part of being made in the *imago dei* to wait?

“For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.” **Gal. 5:5**

- ❖ We wait through the Spirit. As we wait, we enter into a sweet communion with the Spirit of God. Believing this, we can rejoice as we wait and not just endure waiting.

1 Cor. 1:7, 8 “So that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Our waiting is a valuable element in the process of our being transformed into the likeness of our Lord. **1 John 3:2** tells us that we will see Him at His appearing and we will be made like Him because we will see Him as He is.

Rom. 8:23, 24 “And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of

our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.”

The Greek word for wait is *apekdechomai*. It means to expect, to look for, to wait for. The opposite word is *helpful*. It is *exaporeomai*, which means to be without a way of escape, despair, to give up in despair.

➤ Do you see what God has done for us by giving us the opportunity to hope and wait?

The world can see the difference in our lives of hope and the godless life of despair.

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly *wait* for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” **Phil. 3:20**

Oswald Chambers tells us, “*Patience is the result of well-centered strength. To ‘wait on the Lord,’ and to ‘rest in the Lord,’ is an indication of a healthy, holy faith, while impatience is an indication of an unhealthy, unholy unbelief.*”

Do you pass this test on waiting? On patience?

An analogy which Chambers uses to explain true patience is the act of scaffolding. “*The scaffolding may be so skillfully erected and admirably proportioned and may be there for so long that we come to consider this the scheme in the mind of the architect. Then one day we see the loosening of ropes and planks and ladders, and the turmoil destroys forever the skill and beautiful proportion of the scaffolding; all that is happening is but to clear the real building that it may stand nobly before all as a thing of beauty.*”

Do you want your life to be the scaffolding or the beautiful building, the temple of the Lord that He, as the Master Architect, has designed your life to be? Then patiently wait as He performs His masterpiece: your life.

“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient, strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.” **Jam. 5:7, 8**

Do you love Jesus?

Remember in **1 Cor. 13:4**, the first thing Paul tells us is that love is patient.

You honor the Lord greatly by your *practice of patience* ... hoping, trusting, eagerly expecting His return.

A note to remember as you wait.

Satan will try to undermine you by removing the “first thing.” Just as he tempted Jesus with this “first thing”; so he will try with you. What is this? The “first thing” is this, “First, you must do the will of God.” Jesus made it clear that He was going to do the will of the Father.

John 6:38, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him Who sent Me.”

Heb. 10:7, “Behold, I have come – in the scroll of the book it is written of Me – to do Your will, O God.”

Patience is truly a discipline which we are in desperate need of developing. Christians are growing weary; we must grow strong in the practice of waiting.

Worship

According to A.W. Tozer, the reason Christ came, the reason He suffered and died was to “*make worshipers out of rebels... We were created to worship, worship is the normal employment of moral beings.*”

When we read passages about heaven, the consistent activity there is worship. **Ez. 1:1-5**

✓ Tozer says that “*you cannot worship a Being you cannot trust.*”

The church is not well because we do not see God as He is ... in His majesty.

“*The God of the modern evangelical rarely astonishes anybody... He is very much one of us.*”

❖ **Are you captivated by God? Are you fascinated by Him? Are you struck with His splendor?**

If not, then you have not been dwelling in His presence because that is where His splendor, His majesty, His perfection abides.

Worship is the only time we truly live and experience **Reality**. When we worship we are responding to the heart of God.

When we look at worship in the Bible, we see a people who expected to hear from God. They were waiting to hear the *Kol Yahweh*, the voice of God.

Acts 2:2, “And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.”

Acts 4:31, “And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.”
Read **Acts 5:1-11; 9:36-43; 20:7-10** to see more of this God we worship.

God was among them and they were aware of it. The response to His Presence was worship.

❖ **Are you aware of His Presence?**

Worship is the activity of glorifying God in His presence with our voices and hearts.

Grudem’s Systematic Theology

✓ Worship happens when the creature understands that he is not the Creator and bows in adoration and submission before the One Who is the Creator.

Worship is not nor was it ever intended to be a spectator sport.

“*Christians believe that true worship is the highest and noblest activity of which man, by the grace of god, is capable.*” James Montgomery Boice

The Origins of Worship

In early times, our ancestors worshiped in simple ways. We are not told in Scripture the nature of the worship offered by our first parents; but we understand from the early records that their sons were motivated to offer a portion of the product of their labor in sacrifice to God. Worship appears to be an appropriate act toward a divine benefactor.

Later in biblical accounts, a simple form of worship occurs. Wherever Abraham and his progeny would pitch their tents for a protracted amount of time, they would build altars and call upon the name of the Lord. **Gen. 12:8**, “Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.”

As time went on, the direction for worship became more specific. The Mosaic ritual included a description of the place of worship, a distinct order of sacred functions, religious ceremonies,

and observation of particular feasts. Included in worship, the offerings of sacrifices demonstrated the worshiper's symbolic devotion and utter surrender to the Lord. For the most part Mosaic worship was expressed in outward form and ceremonies. As long as worshipers inhabit earthly bodies the expression of religious thought directed to the Creator is accomplished through *corporeal media*.

God had commanded Pharaoh, "Let My people go, so that they may worship Me in the desert." **Ex. 7:16b**

- The place of worship in the Old Testament eventually became the temple. The physical locale of worship for the Hebrew was of great importance because the temple was the place where heaven met earth.

"In unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the LORD saying, 'He is indeed good for His lovingkindness is everlasting,' then the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the God." **2 Chron. 5:13, 14**

Isaiah's vision of the Holy One occurred in the temple. **Is. 6:1-8**

"But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer Me the fat and the blood," declares the Lord God. **Ez. 44:15** is referring to future temple activity.

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was performing his priestly tasks when the angel of the Lord appeared to him declaring the birth of his son. **Luke 1**

While the temple is clearly important in the Old Testament cultus, we learn in **Heb. 10:19, 22** that "we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus... Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." When we worship, we enter before His throne. This is genuine worship.

Jesus in **John 4**, makes clear that worship is no longer a matter of space but of **spirit and truth**.

Rev. 1:10-13 John's vision occurred as he "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying 'Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches ...'"

❖ Do you long to know and worship God?

Then become acquainted with the One Who explains the Father - Jesus Christ.

John 1:18 (Amplified Bible)

^aNo man has ever seen God at any time; the only ^bunique Son, or ^cthe only begotten God, Who is in the bosom [in the intimate presence] of the Father, He has declared Him [He has revealed Him and brought Him out where He can be seen; He has interpreted Him and He has made Him known].^(A)

Knowing God as He is will result in true worship. Going to church will **not** guarantee that you will truly worship. **True worship is found in the Person of Jesus Christ.**

Has there ever been someone you longed to know and someone else had access to that person? How wonderful would it be to know your favorite writer or president or favorite actor or for me, Beethoven? I am jealous of whoever was able to spend time with Beethoven and really know him.

What did that person have that I do not have? **Access, time and interest of the desired one.**

We have all three of those in order to know God. Well, we have access and time. The interest is each individual's choice. What must I do to really see God?

The psalmist says, "With all my heart I have **sought** You." **Ps. 119:10a**

1. The first step of seeking God is to accept, learn, treasure and store up His Word.
2. Next you must be submissive to that Word; you must have a desire to be taught by His Word.
3. Develop a passionate prayer life. The psalmist also prays. “Blessed are You, O LORD; teach me Your statutes... Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall observe it to the end. Give me understanding that I may observe Your law and keep it with all my heart.” **Ps. 119:12, 33, 34**
4. To **see** God you must faithfully **follow** Him each day not sporadically. The **seeking** of God needs to occur as your priority in life.

“O LORD, I remember Your name in the night, and keep Your law... At midnight I shall rise to give thanks to You because of Your righteous ordinances.” **Ps. 119: 55, 62**

“This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” **Ps. 118:24**

“O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” **Ps. 119:97**

✓ *Somehow, the more we see of God the more we become like Him. Grudem*

Even the best description of God will never compare to knowing Him yourself. Truly seeing God as He is cannot be experienced as fully by hearing another person talk of Him – it must be experienced by you personally: you and God.

“The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express the same delight in God which made David dance.” C. S. Lewis

❖ How do you define worship?

Doxa: Greek for “glory” from the verb *Dokeo*: Greek for “to appear” or “to seem”; it also refers to the worth something is assigned; giving an appropriate estimate of; opinion of

Proskuneo: do reverence to (from *pros*: towards and *kuneo*: to kiss), it is an act of homage or reverence

Latreuo: to serve, to render religious service or homage; term used of priestly service in the OT; Worship is active!

Corporate Worship

Just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are One, something divine and reflective of majesty occurs as the body of Christ is one. We are most like our Father when we are in unity.

❖ **What is involved in worship?**

Silence

“But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him.” **Hab. 2:20**

“Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD; for He is aroused from His holy habitation.” **Zech. 2:13**

Remove all busyness from your human activity. Be still before Him. Live in a state of constant listening silence before the King. Now God is the source of our words and actions.

For most human beings, focused attention is slowly attained and easily lost. Grudem

Singing

More than forty psalms command us to sing unto the Lord.

Singing ushers us into the presence of the One to Whom we address these worship songs.

“Yet You are holy, O You Who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.” **Ps. 22:3**

We are told to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Worship involves our whole being. Body, mind, spirit and emotions are present on the altar of worship to our Sovereign King.

Learn to accept distractions in the worship experience. Perhaps God is speaking to you through these distractions. Do not become fixated on the idea that these distractions should not be there and are someone's fault.

❖ **What about when you do not feel like worshipping?**

Offer a sacrifice of praise. This is the opportunity to yield your body, mind, soul and strength to the LORD. One Hebrew word for bless means “to kneel”. We kneel in submission to our King. If we do not bow the knee to Him and we choose to go our own way, then we have not worshiped Him but ourselves.

As we worship we expect God to move. So we begin with pregnant hearts, but if it is true worship the delivery and birth will be the fruit of obedience. If we are not obedient, then we have not worshiped.

To offer praise before the Holy One of Eternity, the Ancient of Days is to experience change. To worship is to be changed to reflect Him.

Service

“Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” **Heb. 12:28, 29** To gain context, read **Heb. 12:18-29**.

“Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” **Rom. 12:1, 2**

Simply put, worship is doing the will of God.

“Worship is therefore a direct expression of our ultimate purpose for living, “to glorify God and fully to enjoy Him forever.” Grudem

Service is so very important in the body of Christ. But service must originate in worship to be eternally effectual.

There are many words for worship. The following are in Greek.

Proskuneo means to kiss the hand toward one, in token of reverence, by kneeling or prostration to do homage

Latreuo means to serve, to render religious service or honor

Ethelothreskeia is voluntary worship.

Therapeuo means to do service.

Sebomai means to revere a deity.

When digging deeper these terms almost all originate from a concept of service. Worship and service are inextricably woven together.

In Hebrew, the same is true.

Abad means to work, to serve

Sagad means to fall down, to bow down, to lie down in worship

Shachah means to bow down, to prostrate oneself, to crouch, to fall down, to humbly beseech, to do reverence, to worship In **Ps. 66:4**, the whole earth is bowing down to worship God

Finally, worship is much like prayer: we must practice it. We learn to pray by praying. We learn to worship by worshipping.

✓ Dwell on this: what does God do when we worship Him?

“The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.” **Zeph. 3:17**

“You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. It will no longer be said to you, “Forsaken,” nor to your land will it any longer be said, “Desolation”; but you will be called, “My delight is in her,” and your land, “Married”; for the LORD delights in you, and to Him your land will be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you.” **Is. 62:3-5**

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” **James 4:8**

“As we love God and praise Him we realize that we are bringing joy and delight to His heart. And the deepest joy of love is the joy of bringing delight to the heart of the one you love.”
Grudem

True worship comes from the same source as genuine salvation ... the same source as living water. ..Worship is the ultimate aim of salvation.

Worship is the ultimate ethical act on earth, the most important act on earth because it is the ultimate fulfillment of the Shema, the Great Commandment, and indeed the First and Second Commandments.

Ben Witherington in We Have Seen His Glory

Genuine worship is not something we generate ourselves, it is the outpouring of our hearts as an expression of the realization of Who God is.

Worship changes the worshiper into the image of the One worshiped. Jack Hayford