

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION AND MATURITY IN GODLINESS

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- Have you ever wondered how to grow in Christ? What is the believer's role in his or her own sanctification? How can we move from simply wanting to grow to actually seeing real spiritual growth in a way that honors God and avoids self-reliance? What examples can we follow in growing in godliness?
- This multi-week course will look at the biblical call for believers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, while wholly leaning on God's strength as he powerfully works within us!
- God calls us to pursue holiness, train up our children, grow in spiritual wisdom, knowledge and understanding, and be transformed by the renewing of our minds. So, this course will look practically at the training we do as we trust in the Lord with all of our heart!
- We will discover through personal testimony, biblical foundations, and historical accounts how to get the spiritual workout we need to walk worthy. No discipline is easy, so we will also talk about where the pitfalls and hurdles are that keep us from running the race well.
- **Class Schedule:**
 - **April 26: Introduction and Maturity in Godliness**
 - May 3: Discipline of Bible Intake
 - May 10: Discipline of the Mind
 - May 17: Discipline of Time and Money
 - May 24: No Class, Memorial Day Weekend
 - May 31: Discipline of Prayer
 - June 7: Discipline of Service
 - June 14: Discipline of Perseverance
 - June 21: Discipline of Worship
 - June 28: Discipline of Evangelism

INTRODUCTION TO SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

“Discipline without direction is drudgery.” – Don Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*

- God has not given us a miserable task of becoming perfect without any reason or result.
- He has given us the reason that we should discipline to become mature and godly (1 Timothy 4:7)
- He has promised that we shall become like the Son (Romans 8:29).
- He has given us an example in our Lord, who likewise practiced regular disciplines (Luke 4:16)

BIBLICAL GROWTH IN GODLINESS

- Just like a baby, there are factors that affect our spiritual growth. Food, nurture and affection, activity...
- Spiritual growth is not passive either. God uses all several catalysts for our growth!

1. People

- **Proverbs 27:17** ~ Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.
- **Colossians 1:5-8** ~ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which **you previously heard** in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is **constantly bearing fruit and increasing**, even as *it has been doing* in you also since the day you heard *of it* and understood the grace of God in truth; **7** just as **you learned it from Epaphras**, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, **8** and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.
- **Philippians 4:9** ~ The things you have **learned** and **received** and **heard** and **seen in me**, **practice these things**, and the God of peace will be with you.

2. Circumstances

- **James 1:2-4** ~ Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith **produces endurance**. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.
- **Romans 5:3-5** ~ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, **proven character**; and proven character, hope; ⁵ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.
- **Romans 8:28** ~ And we know that God causes all things to **work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

3. Spiritual Disciplines

- **Titus 2:11-12** ~ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to **deny ungodliness** and worldly desires and to **live sensibly**, righteously and godly in the present age
- **1 John 2:29** ~ If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who **practices righteousness** is born of Him.
- **Colossians 3:9-10** ~ Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, ¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—

Key Practices that Lead to our Growth in Christ¹

1. The Bible prescribes both **personal** and **interpersonal** Spiritual Disciplines.
 - Some are practiced alone (study the Bible on your own)
 - Some require others (hear the Bible and study it with the church)
2. Spiritual Disciplines are **activities**, not attitudes.
 - These are not attitudes of the heart, fruit of the Spirit, or character traits ex. **I am *STRONG***
 - These are things you can do toward growth. ex. **I do *LIFT***
 - These cultivate being like Christ through ongoing activity
3. Spiritual Disciplines are **biblical**, that is, practices taught or modeled in the Bible.
 - Gardening, walking, or reading may be relaxing and life-giving for you, but not universal
 - Bible intake and prayer are expected of all believers
4. Spiritual Disciplines found in Scripture are **sufficient for knowing and experiencing God**, and for growing in Christlikeness.
 - “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
5. Spiritual Disciplines are practices derived from the gospel, **not divorced from the gospel**.
 - Discipline is for new and old believers. No one *moves on* from the gospel.
 - Spirituality, higher-level living, or advanced status are not our goals, but God himself.
 - No one graduates from the Gospel. We continue to preach and believe the gospel
6. Spiritual Disciplines are **means**, not ends.
 - Godliness = “closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ in heart and life”
 - Without the purpose of Christlikeness, we pursue activities that are vain and empty
 - Some may refer to these as “means of grace”

Spiritual Disciplines are those personal and interpersonal activities given by God in the Bible as the sufficient means believers in Jesus Christ are to use in the Spirit-filled, gospel-driven pursuit of godliness, that is, closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ.

¹ This list is taken and adapted from Don Whitney’s book, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 4-9.

TRAINING GROUNDS FOR CHRIST-LIKENESS

1 Timothy 4:7 ~ But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, **discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;**

8 for bodily discipline is only of little profit,
but godliness is profitable for all things,

since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

9 It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance.

10 For it is for this we labor and strive,

because we have fixed our hope on the living God,
who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

- Discipline:
 - **Exercise** thyself (KJV)
 - **Train** yourself (ESV)
 - **Gym-nify** yourself! (The Greek word is *gymnazo* and is reflexive, meaning an action that affects yourself. Probably a better word is *gymnasticize*). A spiritual workout for your soul!
 - The athlete who trains strips away the unnecessary clothing to run/wrestle/compete.
 - Serious, rigorous, purposeful, efficient training toward the goal to win (1 Cor 9:24-27).
- As an **athlete** works hard to become the best, the Christian likewise strives **toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus** (Phil 3:14),
 - By no means is the working hard to earn salvation.
 - The goal isn't initial salvation, it is your growth in ongoing sanctification.
 - "For Paul genuine godliness involved both right belief and obedient action. Godly habits would not appear without determined human purpose and effort."²
- The **farmer** also works hard and at the end of each season will see the fruit, (2 Tim 2:6)
 - not because he grew the plants,
 - but because he was used by God to be the means fruit was supplied.

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 ~ I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

Philippians 2:12-13 ~ So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

- We *keep on working out* our salvation (already accomplished initially), while God effectually, energetically, works in us. HE is the one willing and performing as we obediently become God's instruments³

² Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, vol. 34, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 134.

³ George Zemek, *Tethered to the Text*, 137.

Trajectory toward Holiness

- **Permanently** Set apart for Christ (Romans 5:1-11) Past Sanctification
- **Presently** Conformed to the Image of Christ (Romans 8:29; 12:2) Present Sanctification
- **Perfectly** glorified in the likeness of Christ (Rom 6:22; 1 John 3:2) Future Sanctification

- On the one hand the believer has been **initially** set apart (sanctified) by the Spirit (Hebrews 10:14)
- And we understand that we will one day be **finally** and perfectly set apart (1 Jn 3:2)
- But we are currently being sanctified as well. “It is that process of being progressively set apart from sin toward a moral conformity to the image of Christ” (Trevor Craigen Systematic Theology notes).

- Snapshots of our life may reveal prevailing sin and the fleshly desires.
- We stumble in many ways (James 3:2).
- Yet the overall trajectory, the video of our life looks like a gradually clearer image of the sanctification of Jesus (Heb 1:1-3).
- The holiness of God commanded for believers is to humbly and fervently strive in the Spirit. “Sanctification- in the progressive sense- requires our personal effort to imitate and display God’s character, because no one can have assurance that he will see God apart from the evidence of holiness. “[Pursue... the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord](#)” (Hebrews 10:14).⁴

- As result of their new creature status in Christ,
 - The born-again believer doesn’t simply BECOME instantly mature,
 - But he matures... abounds.... walks.... runs, strives, works...PURSUES righteousness.
 - Romand 8:13; 1 Cor 9:24; 2 Cor 7:1; Phil 3:13-14; Col 1:10; Titus 2:7, 14; Hebrews 10:24, 12:4; 2 Pet 1:5; 3:17-18; 1 John 3:3
- We are commanded, equipped, and warned against the opposite of movement toward Christlikeness.
- This is not a work of our own because we must depend on God to supply that growth!

How do we grow in Christlikeness? In one way, it is quite simple. **Trust** and **Obey**.

- Wholly lean on Him who saved you and sustains you. Humble faith (Prov 3:5-6)
- God works through our “faith-filled efforts” to obey Him at his word⁵
- And He will be faithful to supply all of your needs.

⁴Jerry Wragg, *Free to Be Holy*, 24.

⁵ Wragg, 144-145.

COMMUNION WITH GOD

Genesis 6:9 ~ ...Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.

What does it mean to walk with God?

- In a wicked generation, Noah demonstrated 5 things for us:⁶
 1. **Walking as under God's eye.** Noah revered God. "I have set the Lord always before me" (Ps 16:8).
 2. **The familiarity and intimacy** which the soul has with God. Friends walk together and console themselves with one another. The godly make known their requests to God--and he makes known his love to them. There is a sweet fellowship between God and his people: "Our fellowship (koinonia) is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).
 3. **Walking above the earth.** A godly man is elevated above all sublunary objects. The person who walks with God must ascend very high. A dwarf cannot walk among the stars, nor can a dwarfish, earthly soul walk with God. [*Consider Col. 3:1-4. Noah walked with God in a crooked generation*]
 4. **Visible piety.** Walking is a visible posture. Grace must be conspicuous to the onlookers. He who reveals something of God in his behavior, walks with God. He shines forth in biblical conduct. [*Consider that it is out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks Mt. 12:34*]
 5. **Continued progress in grace.** It is not only a step--but a walk. There is a going on towards maturity. A godly man does not sit down in the middle of the way--but goes on until he comes to the "end of his faith" (1 Pet. 1:9). Though a good man may be out of the path, he is not out of the way. He may through infirmity step aside (as Peter did)—but he recovers by repentance and goes on in progressive holiness: "The righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger" (Job 17:9).

The believer has been reconciled to God, now has peace with God, lives in the light and pursues the truth that he might remain in the light.

Elihu in Job 34:32 ~ Teach me what I do not see; If I have done iniquity, I will not do it again?'

Psalms 25:4-5 ~ Make me know Your ways, O Lord; Teach me Your paths.

⁵Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; For You I wait all the day.

Psalms 27:4 ~ One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek:

That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord

And to meditate in His temple.

John 15 Abiding in Christ: intention is understanding of union with Christ so that they may have full joy (v.11)

Ephesians 2:13, 18 ~ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off **have been brought near** by the blood of Christ... 18 through Him **we both have our access** in one Spirit to the Father.

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are **fellow citizens** with the saints, and are of **God's household**,

⁶ Thomas Watson, *A Godly Man's Picture*, 175. Or accessible here on page 163:

<https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/watson/The%20Godly%20Man's%20Picture%20-%20Thomas%20Watson.pdf>.

- Our communion with God relies fully on the union which is in Christ Jesus. It will only ever be partial until future perfection. We have access to the Father, through the son in the Spirit

How should one begin communing with God?

- Walking with God does require stepping. Start by moving toward him. Draw near to him.
- Watson again helps us here:⁷
 1. **Forsake the old roads of sin** you once walked on.
 2. If you wish to walk with God--**get acquainted with him**. "Acquaint now yourself with him" (Job 22:21). Know God in his attributes and promises. Strangers do not walk together.
 3. **Get all differences removed** [this refers to reconciliation with God by faith]
 4. **Get a liking for the ways of God**. they are sweetened with pleasure (Proverbs 3:17)
 5. **Take hold of His arm**. He strengthens and provides the endurance needed for the way.

John 14:23-25 ~ 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. 24** “He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me.

Philippians 2:12-13 ~ So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation** with fear and trembling; 13 for it is **God who is at work in you**, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

DISCUSSION:

1. As Scripture teaches us, what leads to our godliness?
2. Is there a correlation between your growth (and rate of growth) and the hard work you put in?
3. Is there a correlation between your growth and the grace God supplies?
4. Describe the difference between corporate disciplines and personal disciplines.

⁷ Watson, 182-183 or pages 170-172 in the link above.