Introduction to Spiritual Disciplines

Psalm 42:1-2
“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”

As every part of the deer desires a drink, so every part of David craves God. His inward parts thirst for the living God. He wants to be near God; wants to enjoy God; wants to experience God; and wants to be satisfied by God. You and I want the same thing. We have tried many things that left our souls dry.

Exploration – personal, private Spiritual Disciplines; learn about many and experience some; discover those God is calling you to at this time

Introduce selves

Two Keys:
1. We’re all beginners – we get better at being beginners
2. Just do them – don’t need to know it all or be “good” at them; just do them

We must not think that the Spiritual Disciplines are only for spiritual giants and beyond our reach or only for contemplatives who devote all their time to prayer and meditation. God intends the Spiritual Disciplines for ordinary folks. The disciplines are best exercised in the midst of our relationship with our spouses, our coworkers, our friends, our children.
Neither should we think of the Disciplines as some dull drudgery aimed at stopping laughter from this life. Joy is a keynote of all the disciplines. One purpose of the disciplines is freedom from the slavery to self-interest and fear. When we’re set free from all that weighs us down, it’s liberating and joyful.

The best place to get started is right where we are.

I. Introduction to the Spiritual Disciplines
A. What Is a “Spiritual Discipline”?
- Spiritual Disciplines are not the desired end product of our spiritual lives – but rather they are a means to an end. They are the intentional development of authentic spiritual lives and intimacy with God.
Spiritual disciplines are **not** simply a means of changing our behavior or winning approval from God for our faithfulness and hard work. What they do is open doors to connecting with the Lord in deepening intimacy. They help us to focus our lives so we can be present to the inner longings that drive us.

Quotes about the disciplines:
- “God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving His grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us. They are God’s means of grace.”
  Richard Foster
- “A discipline is something to which we submit in order to effect change. God has given us the disciplines of grace as a means to help us grow in our love for him and our neighbors.”
  T. M. Moore
- “A discipline is any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.”
  Dallas Willard
- “A means to develop soul memory for reflexive spiritual responsiveness.”
  Douglas Rumford

**B. Basic Definition of a Spiritual Discipline**
- A deliberately self-imposed habit that nurtures spiritual health and fosters spiritual growth leading to maturity.
- You may think of them as actions to alter our current life patterns, thereby breaking the normal cycle of life.
- It’s an action driven by spiritual decisions rather than natural reactions.
- And at their heart, they’re practices to engage in intentional spirituality in the pursuit of intimacy with God.

**C. Basic Concepts Behind Spiritual Disciplines**
- These are called disciplines because they are not the natural intuitive thing to do. Physical disciplines include developmental exercises within the natural order. Spiritual disciplines are developmental exercises that open us into the spiritual realm.
- *A key is they’re spiritual – God is spirit (John 4) and as such we need to approach Him with our spirits. Man is composed of Spirit – Soul (Mind,
Will, Emotions) – Body (1 Thess. 5:23); Spiritual disciplines engage our bodies and souls in service to our spirits.

- They’re disciplines because we need to make a conscious choice to engage in them – they are not what we would otherwise do of our own accord.
- Trying is not enough. To paraphrase 1 Tim. 4:7 “Don’t try — train!” Our training is connecting us with God.
- There are times we don’t feel like doing what we know to be necessary for our spiritual health. Disciplines provide methods, structure and order to carry us through the times we would otherwise ignore our spiritual health.

**D. Cautions!**

- Spiritual disciplines are not the same as spiritual maturity. Though they are intended to enable spiritual growth, actual spiritual maturity is the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Spiritual disciplines seek to create a more disciplined approach to God. There’s a danger that they may become a trap to a more legalistic approach to spirituality. The proper focus of the disciplines is to know God at a deeper and more relational level. The great enemy of successful application of the Spiritual Disciplines is legalism.
- Spiritual disciplines focus primarily on the relational and qualitative aspects of knowing God, not the intellectual and quantitative aspects. We engage in the disciplines because we love God and want to press into Him and know Him better.
- They’re not about accomplishing acts or an amount of time – having a prayer life, a quite time. They are about creating a praying life, a God-seeking life. They’re not about a result or feeling.
- Spiritual disciplines are not a guarantee for spiritual growth; rather they open the opportunity for growth by creating space for God to allow something good to happen.
- Illustration
  A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He cultivates the ground, he plants the seed, he waters the plants, and then the natural forces of the earth take over, and up comes the grain.
  The disciplines are God’s way of getting us into the ground; they put us where He can work within us and transform us. By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done. They are God’s means of grace.
While the Spiritual Disciplines involve human effort, but that effort doesn’t earn us anything.

II. The Role of the Disciplines in Our Spiritual Lives

A. Developing and Deepening Our Relationships with God
   - Relational intimacy with God is reinforced when we engage in the disciplines.
   - It is a myth to believe that intimacy develops by chance or occurs under neglect.
   - We need to be deliberate and intentional about desiring God.
   - To know Him and love Him is the heart of discipleship. It really comes down to understanding what the call to discipleship is all about. And spiritual disciplines are a vehicle for this.
   - The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This allows us to do just that.

B. Attaining and Maintaining Spiritual Health
   - Developing physical health requires the disciplines of a healthy diet and exercise and rest.
   - Developing mental health requires study and learning.
   - Developing emotional health requires determining and resolving emotional issues.
   - Developing spiritual health requires appropriate disciplines intentionally pursued. They are a necessary practice to foster spiritual health and awareness of God just like every other part of us.

C. Affording and Nurturing Spiritual Maturity
   - Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines moves you from where you are naturally to where God would have you be. It is moving from the natural into the supernatural.
   - It involves submitting our wills as living sacrifices to God’s will and purposes. It is deliberate movement toward God’s goals for us.
   - They are what keep us upon the pathway of our spiritual journey with God.
   - Their goal is forming the nature of Jesus within us – spiritual transformation – that’s spiritual maturity.
• Just as a disciplined athlete is able do what needs to be done when it needs to be done – e.g., executing a perfect serve – a disciplined Christian is able to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done – e.g., showing love to a difficult person.
• This is the process of indirection. Where we participate in something we can do by direct effort – the practice of a Spiritual Discipline – in order to receive resources to do what we could never do by direct effort – loving our enemies.

D. The Practice of Spiritual Disciplines
• Routine and specific activities are required to develop the habit of spiritual practice.
• It requires our setting necessary and appropriate priorities. We make time for the things that are important to us.
• And there is a purposeful nature to the practices – we perform them because we seek greater intimacy with God and to be more like Jesus who demonstrated the practices in His walk – teaching His disciples to do likewise.

Jesus, who is our perfect example, modeled this for us:
“Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” Mark 1:35
“So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.” Luke 6:16

o Jesus left us an example of practicing spiritual disciplines. If anyone was in union with God it was Jesus. Yet He made it a priority to get alone with the Father consistently.

o Relationships demand quality and quantity time. In order to truly know someone you need to have focused time with them. Talking with God throughout the day is great, but nothing can take the place of concentrated time with Him.

• Disciples seek to become like their Master. If we desire to become like Jesus, we will do the things He did including practicing the spiritual disciplines.
• Set a time and place to practice.

Disciplines that We’ll Explore
Week 2, 2/15 – Simple Prayer, Petitionary Prayer, Praying the Ordinary, The Prayer of Adoration, Intercessory Prayer


Week 4, 3/1 – Unceasing Prayer, Formation Prayer, The Prayer of the Forsaken, Healing Prayer, Authoritative Prayer

Week 5, 3/8 – Listening to, Reading and Memorizing the Bible

Week 6, 3/15 – Studying the Bible

Week 7, 3/22 – Meditating on the Bible

Week 8, 3/29 – Enjoying Solitude and Silence