

What is your gut reaction to the words “spiritual disciplines”? What are spiritual disciplines?

Spiritual disciplines are activities we come to value as essential for spiritual life. They are the key to deeper intimacy with God. Without them we will die spiritually. The goal is to learn to see their value and embrace them in such a way that we structure our lives around them and pursue them wholeheartedly.

Example: EATING

Eating is an activity that we make a natural part of our daily routine. We understand the importance of it, we schedule our day around it and we actually enjoy doing it. In fact, we raise it to the level of a “special occasion” when we go out to eat. It is a physical discipline. If we did not embrace it we would die. But eating itself is not something we view as onerous, a hassle, or even a burden (cooking might be, but not eating). We understand its value; we enjoy it; we see it as essential to living. Eating has become a natural part of our day that we do not even think of it as a discipline.

Our desire is to not just “teach” about spiritual disciplines but to embed them into our lives so they become as natural a part of our daily routine as eating.

Getting Spiritual Control**1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (MEV)**

24 Do you not know that all those who run in a race run, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain it. 25 Everyone who strives for the prize exercises self-control in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible one. 26 So, therefore, I run, not with uncertainty. So I fight, not as one who beats the air. 27 But I bring and keep my body under subjection, lest when preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

What motivates a serious athlete to change their daily routine, change their diet, train rigorously and spend money on equipment and training?

A strong desire to reach a goal – the first place prize.

What is the goal that we are to be striving for in Christ?

The goal for every believer is to live the Christ-life to its fullest extent, to live out the righteousness God has given us in Christ and to be holy and blameless before him. Living the Christ-life requires self control and discipline so we are not swept away by our own evil desires or by influences of the world we live in.

The analogy here is that we are to pursue the Christ-life as though we were runners in a race. Paul used this analogy to stress the importance of disciplining our lives to be holy. Paul is concerned that he never stop trying to live out the righteousness he has in Christ Jesus.

Do athletes view these disciplines as obligations or expectations they have to meet?

No. They are a means to a goal – not a goal in and of themselves and not a list of rules. If we approach disciplines as a goal then we miss the point – they are meaningless in and of themselves. Disciplines are simply a means to get us to where we want to go. If we don't want to go anywhere, then disciplines are of no value. However, if we want to progress towards a goal then disciplines are necessary to get us there.

What does Paul mean when he says he “beats” his body and makes it a “slave”?

His body and mind are tainted by a history of a sinful approach to life. If Paul lets his body/mind rule, then he will always default back to a sinful approach to life and his relationship with God. He chooses not to let his “natural” preferences set the agenda or make the decisions for his life. He chooses to do that which will bring him closer to God and make him more effective in representing Christ to others. He tells his body what he is going to do – not the other way around.

2 Corinthians 10:5 (NKJV)

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,

In what ways might we “beat” our body and make it our “slave”?

Our Bodies might feel tired and not want to get up to go to church, Bible study or to read the Bible in the morning – WE DO IT ANYWAY. Our Minds might naturally wander during prayer times or throughout the day to things that are not beneficial – TAKE EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE TO CHRIST.

It might involve setting the alarm clock earlier to spend time with God.

It might involve not giving in to a bad habit that is not glorifying to God or your body.

It might mean stepping out in faith to do something that terrifies your flesh.

It might mean going without something that is not spiritually beneficial: TV, certain foods, work overtime, excess sleep, certain friends, etc.

Philippians 3:7-11 (NKJV)

7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

What will it take for us to bring this type of spiritual determination and discipline into our lives? Discuss what the passage above reveals about having spiritual discipline.

A. Complete surrender

B. A desire to suffer for Christ

Why should we view our accomplishments as rubbish?

How do we surrender daily to Christ? What are some things that we should surrender in order to live for Christ?

What does it mean to suffer for Christ, to share in his sufferings?

What are some examples of suffering for Christ?

Hebrews 13:16 (ESV)

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

In today's culture what do we mean when we "sacrifice" something?

Romans 12:1-2 (MEV)

1 I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship.

2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

What does it mean for us to be a living sacrifice?

We are invited to offer our lives to God as a gift of adoration to him. Since the death penalty has already been paid for us by Jesus, the offering we are to give him is a living gift. In other words, it is the manner in which we live our lives that is the gift to God. We allow him to take our lives and do with them as he wishes, for his purposes.

An old saying goes, “The problem with living sacrifices is that they have a tendency to keep crawling down off the altar.” At what times are we inclined to crawl off the altar?

When an animal was given for a sacrifice, what was the main qualification for it being acceptable? How about us?

It was to be without blemish. (Leviticus 1:10 - If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the sheep or the goats, he is to offer a male without defect.)

We are to be HOLY, without blemish and pleasing to God.

Romans 12:1 (MEV)

1 I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship.

Galatians 5:19-21 (NKJV)

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery,[a] fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders,[b] drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Jesus tells us to pick up our cross and follow him.

Luke 14:27 (ESV)

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

How are we to “pick up our cross” and follow Jesus?

Carrying your cross ultimately means giving your life in service to your God, no matter where that might take you, whatever he might ask you to do and no matter what he asks you to give up, even death. It is the confession of “not my will, but yours be done.” Everything I have, everything I do, is now for his purposes that he wants to work out through me.

Am I really willing to be obedient to the will of God whatever the cost?

Am I willing to be ridiculed for my faith?

Am I willing to suffer for the name of Jesus?

Am I willing to give up my agenda?

Am I willing to give up my desire for comfort?

When are some times you’ve experienced persecution for following Jesus?

Is the “mission” you are currently living out worth dying for?

Romans 12:2 (MEV)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

How do we know what it is God wants us to do?

By having our minds renewed.

How can we renew our minds?

Immerse ourselves in God’s word so that we understand what he desires. Make sure we are living according to his principles and not the world’s. Respond well and immediately when another believer speaks truth to us in love about how we are living. Stop doing what we know is wrong.

As we start listening for the Spirit’s prompting and the word of God, we then develop the ability to know how to discern and test whether or not something is the will of God.

In light of offering ourselves to God as living sacrifices, fully surrendered, and sharing in His suffering, everything we do now becomes an expression of fulfilling HIS purposes on earth.

Read the following verses that spur us on to take seriously the building of the kingdom of God in our lives.

Underline the phrases that encourage you to live with spiritual discipline.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NKJV)

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Hebrews 12:1 (NKJV)

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Ephesians 5:15-16 (MEV)

15 See then that you walk carefully, not as fools, but as wise men, 16 making the most of the time because the days are evil.

Colossians 4:5 (NASB)

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, [b]making the most of the opportunity.

Galatians 6:9 (ESV)

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

What is stopping us from disciplining our lives towards building the kingdom of God?

How can we change these things?

What do you think might be some of the benefits of being spiritually disciplined to do God's will?

Some possibilities:

We experience the joy of partnering with God in his mission.

We experience the joy of making a difference.

We experience the joy of hearing, "Well done, my good and faithful servant".

We experience the joy of spending eternity with those whom our life has touched.

We experience the joy of sharing in the inheritance of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 22:12 (NKJV)

And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.