

Spiritual Disciplines: An Introduction

Goals: The goal of this study is to provide a basic intro to spiritual disciplines. What are they? What are they not? What's their role? Why are they important? This study should give some basic insight into the different types of spiritual disciplines (fasting, sabbath, etc) and end with some ideas on how to begin incorporating one or two into our Christian walk.

Openers:

- What were some rules that your parents made for you growing up or that your teachers made in school and why do you think they gave you those rules to follow?
- When you hear the word “discipline” what do you usually think of, what first comes to mind?
- What about when you hear the word “training”? What comes to mind? Is it different than what you picture when you hear “discipline”? How are these words related?

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NIV)

24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

1 Timothy 4:7-8 (NIV)

...train yourself to be godly. 8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Hebrews 12:10-11 (NIV)

10 They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Digging Deeper:

Observations

- What is the main imagery used in these passages? (*hint: note all the verbs*)
OR
- Circle or underline all the words that have to do with that imagery. What did you come up with?
- Looking at the text, what's the difference between someone who trains with a goal in mind and someone who runs aimlessly or beats the air?
- What does the scripture say the benefit of training to be godly is? (*hint: look at second half of 1 Tim 4:8*) What does that mean?

Interpretations

- Why do you think Paul compares our life in Jesus to an athlete in training for competition? What does this tell us about our walk with Jesus?
- In regards to his spiritual walk, what do you think it means that Paul says he does not run aimlessly? What would it look like to run our spiritual “race” with intention?
- What do you think it means when Paul says he makes his body his slave? And what do you think that has to do with spiritual disciplines?
- What is the prize that we strive for? (*our ultimate prize is relationship with the Lord*)
Heart Check/Personal Reflection: Is this prize worth the effort for you? Why/why not?

Further Teaching/Activity

Discipline is defined as “an activity, exercise, or regimen, that develop and improves a skill; training

Spiritual Discipline is defined as “an activity, exercise, or regimen that puts us in a posture where we can grow closer to the Lord, where He can move in our lives and transform our nature.

While Spiritual Disciplines are not the goal themselves, they can provide a helpful scaffolding for us to grow in our relationship with the Lord. In talking about Spiritual Disciplines we must remember that God’s grace is not earned, but like athletes who train, these disciplines can help us have a more full and focused relationship with the Lord and grow in ways we may not naturally relate to Him on our own. Richard Foster’s Celebration of Discipline outlines three categories of disciplines:

Inner Disciplines: These focus on our personal inner lives and are done alone - meditation, prayer, fasting, solitude, and studying scripture

Outer Disciplines: These are done in consideration of others (they affect others’ lives somehow) - simplicity, submission, and service

Corporate Disciplines: These are done together in the context of Christian community - confession, worship, guidance, and celebration

Activity:

- Which of these have you heard of before? Which are new?
- Divide Core into pairs and assign them a spiritual discipline (you don’t have to use all the disciplines listed). Have them take a few minutes to write down how practicing it can grow us closer to Jesus and a few practical ways it can be practiced. Share out loud with the group.

Applications

- Reflect: What areas of my life need to be refocused on the Lord that these disciplines can help with? Pick one that the Lord is inviting you to focus on and set one goal to begin putting into practice this week.