

# 10 STEPS TO THE NEW SPIRITUAL YOU



A SMALL GROUP STUDY  
FOR MATURE CHRISTIANS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. THE FOUNDATION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. DRAWING CLOSER</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3. DECLUTTERING OUR LIVES</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>4. STILLNESS AND SOLITUDE</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>5. SURRENDER</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>6. PRAYER</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>7. HUMILITY</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>8. SELF-CONTROL</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>9. SACRIFICE</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>10. PERSEVERANCE</b>	<b>74</b>

# 1. The Foundation

Before we begin, I want to credit a book by Chuck Swindoll entitled "*So You Want to be Like Christ*" which served as a guide in developing this small group study for mature Christians. A typical "icebreaker" question used to get people in a small group setting to open up and speak is,

**IF YOU COULD BE LIKE ANYONE IN HISTORY,  
WHO WOULD THAT BE? AND WHY?**

It is non-threatening and easy to answer:

- A family member
- A favorite teacher or coach
- Perhaps a successful artist or historical figure
- The list goes on and on.

But if the question was, "What do you need to be like – in order to be like Jesus?" This question might not be as easy to answer or discuss.

You see, we can learn a lot from great achievers and people we love but as Christians the one person we should strive to actually be like, is Jesus Christ.

And so, in the following devotional lessons and accompanying discussion questions we will examine 10 steps that will help each believer come much closer to this spiritual ideal.

## **THE FIRST STEP TO THE NEW SPIRITUAL YOU: DISCIPLINE**

A transformation of any kind begins with a first step and the beginning of the new spiritual you, the you that is more like Christ, is **discipline**.

Now, some may have thought that the first step should be faith, repentance, baptism, good works, etc. but remember that this course is for mature Christians who have already mastered these basic things and should as the Hebrew writer says:

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and press on to maturity...  
- Hebrews 6:1

The road to spiritual maturity begins at the point of discipline.

I quote the great NFL coach of the past, Tom Landry, who defined his job as football coach in the following way.



My job is to get men to do what they don't want to do in order to achieve what they have always wanted to achieve.

Preachers might define their work in similar fashion,



My job is to make people do things they don't want to do in order to receive the things they **need!**

So in this sense, we can say that discipline is a virtue or skill that enables a person to perform determined, deliberate, definable actions towards a clear goal in mind.

Preachers, therefore, are like coaches in that they help church members discipline themselves for the goal of Christlikeness, a goal that requires change in the individual – and this change at every step requires discipline to be accomplished.

## **THE ROLE OF DISCIPLINE IN SPIRITUAL MATURATION**

An important passage relative to the pursuit of spiritual maturity or "godliness" as it is referred to in the Bible is I Timothy 4:7. In this passage Paul writes:

But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;

Timothy lived in Ephesus, a rich, sexually impure, worldly and cosmopolitan city – a place with many distractions and temptations for a young Christian man without much experience in life or ministry.

What does Paul do? He encourages him to cultivate the first step on the road to spiritual maturity, piety or godliness which is personal discipline.

Paul uses the Greek word "GUMNAZO" from which we get the English word gymnasium. Other words that come from this root word are:

1. Train yourself
2. Condition yourself

This activity (discipline/exercise) has two features:

The first is repetitive training.

- Making the right choices over and over again.
- Repeatably resisting temptation.
- Constantly prioritizing the things of God over the things of the world.

Discipline requires doing these things over and over again until they become second nature, a part of who you are and how you are known by others.

The second feature of this activity of discipline is that it cultivates a sense of personal responsibility where you take ownership of the process for your own spirituality.

This is no longer the goal of your parents or minister but you have taken on the full responsibility for growing in Christ.

## **THE GOAL**

The goal is spiritual maturity, or in other words the ability to experience the full presence of God in your life.

This experience becomes a preview of what heaven will be like and enables the believer to have no doubt or fear about his salvation and no anxiety about the world he presently lives in no matter how dark and dangerous it might become at times.

It is this spiritual condition that allowed Paul to say with all assurance to this same Timothy as he contemplated his fast-approaching execution in a Roman arena:

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.  
- II Timothy 4:6-8

Now, to arrive at this level of spiritual maturity, one has to master several spiritual exercises that each enable the believer to grow in godliness, piety and Christlikeness.

I mentioned the first of these, personal discipline, which is essentially training yourself to do and think those things that your flesh resists in order to gain the things you need to obtain what you desire – spiritual maturity.

In this small group series, we will discuss 9 further steps you will need to take in order to reach your goal of spiritual maturity.

The next part of this session consists of 5 discussion questions you will need to answer and discuss among your group, which should consist of about 5 people to guarantee good participation and input by all.

## **SUGGESTION**

Because of the nature of this course material, it is recommended that the group meet on a monthly schedule to provide the time necessary to complete the discussion questions and practice the spiritual disciplines taught.





# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. What thought, feeling or event led you to this study?
2. Describe your best spiritual attribute. Describe your worst fleshly weakness (to the degree you are comfortable sharing).
3. Aside from Jesus, which Bible character inspires you? Why?
4. Which of the following Bible characters can you relate to best? Why?
  - Martha
  - Jacob
  - The elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal son
  - King Saul
  - Peter
  - Noah
  - Sarah
  - Ruth
  - King David
  - Barnabas
  - Abraham
5. What is the usual cause of your lack of personal discipline? What do you do/say when you fail?



## 2. Drawing Closer

We are in the process of learning 10 spiritual steps that will help us become more godly, pious, or as the title suggests, spiritually mature. Someone might ask, "If we are already saved, why make the effort to attain spiritual maturity? Why not relax and enjoy the ride?" This type of question reminds me of the student who, after having been given a homework assignment, wants to know what the minimum number of pages is required for the work to be accepted.

Like many other things in life, what you get out of Christianity is largely determined by what you put into your faith. Acquiring spiritual maturity is important for at least two reasons:

1. In spiritual matters, if we do not consciously move forward, then we unconsciously move backward.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, <sup>13</sup> and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

- Romans 6:12-13

2. Pursuing spiritual maturity is the second stage in the 4-stage transformation God has planned for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

## **Stage #1 - Regeneration/salvation**

Through faith in Jesus expressed in repentance and baptism we go from being a lost and condemned sinner to a saved saint - forgiven and made alive through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- Acts 2:38

## **Stage #2 - Sanctification**

The process of developing spiritual maturity (godliness) with the help of God's Word (the Bible), God's Spirit (Holy Spirit), and God's people (the Church). This series is an instrument to facilitate that process.

<sup>9</sup> For this reason we also, since the day we heard about it, have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

- Colossians 1:9-10

### **Stage #3 - Glorification**

The putting on of our glorified heavenly bodies when Jesus raises us from the dead at the end of the world.

<sup>42</sup> So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; <sup>43</sup> it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup> it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.  
- I Corinthians 15:42-44

### **Stage #4 - Exaltation**

The reason for the glorified bodies is to enable us to exist with God as part of the Godhead at the right hand of God in Christ.

<sup>11</sup> It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; <sup>12</sup> If we endure, we will also reign with Him;  
- II Timothy 2:11-12a

Spiritual maturity is important, therefore, because it protects us from sliding back to our worldly ways and prepares us for entry into the spiritual realm of heaven when Jesus returns.

We have spoken about the first step to spiritual maturity which is discipline. Developing this virtue is important because without control of self or authority over our own spirit, we will not be able to cultivate and master the other nine steps of this journey.

## **INTIMACY**

The second step to spiritual maturity is intimacy, more specifically intimacy with God. Intimacy means belonging to

someone else, close contact, familiarity or close association. Intimacy is both a state and a feeling. Intimacy feels warm, satisfying, accepting, personal, deep, private, exclusive, safe or comfortable.

In Genesis 2:25 for example, it says of Adam and Eve that, "*...the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*" They were not simply physically naked and not ashamed but were also emotionally and spiritually naked (transparent) and were not afraid or ashamed. This transparency meant that they knew each other intimately with nothing hidden and nothing camouflaged as something else.

This is the type of relationship we strive for in marriage and the type of relationship we must cultivate with God in order to arrive at spiritual maturity. If this be so, how then do we discipline ourselves for intimacy with God? Two things to start growing in this area:

## **1. Conform to His way and will for our lives**

In other words, do not let the physical world rule your time, priorities, desire or life. Godliness (maturity) does not happen by accident; you have to work at it. Cultivating intimacy with God requires us to actually pay attention to God - real attention is what He wants - Jesus said:

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'  
- Matthew 22:37

Intimacy is not religiosity (fake external spirituality). It is developed and seen in sincere praying, serving, worshiping and giving.

*The second way to intimacy with God:*

## **2. Allow God to deal with you on His terms, not yours**

Our terms with God always serve our purposes. For example, "Dear God make me healthy, more wealthy, happier, take care of my family and my things."

In his book, Swindoll says,



God often does His best work in us when He catches us by surprise and introduces a change that is completely against our own desire.

For example: in Acts 16:6, Paul wanted to go preach in the East where the territory was vast and without the gospel. God, however, frustrated his plan and sent him West to Rome where he was eventually martyred - something that was not in Paul's plan. However, he established the Church in the Roman Empire and because of this it flourished and spread throughout the world.

We know that despite this change that led to his suffering, opposition, imprisonment and death, Paul grew closer (intimate) with God and died praising and glorifying God for His blessings (II Timothy 4:6-8).

In the end, Paul was close to and very much like God - the end result of intimacy. When, therefore, you allow God to deal with you on His terms and you accept it, several things naturally stem from this:

1. It moves you to seek Him more intensely.
2. It makes you more dependent on Him.
3. It produces a godly character in you.



The closer you draw to God, the more He deals with you. The more He deals with you, the closer you draw to Him - this is how the dynamic of spiritual intimacy works.

Godliness/spiritual maturity become the result of being molded by God because you are intimate with Him.

## SUMMARY

In our effort to be like God we need to go deep with Him, not just enjoy the view from the mountaintop. We want substance in our relationship with Him, not just a speedy worship service. We want to feel love and closeness with God not just talk about religion. The way to all of these is to cultivate the second step in our journey to spiritual maturity, intimacy with God.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Would you describe yourself as an "open" person or a "closed" person?

Explain why you think that might be.

2. On a scale of 1 (very far) to 10 (very close), how near to God do you feel?

What reason has kept you where you are at with God?

3. Share a time or experience when you felt the closest/furthest from God.

4. What is your strongest spiritual discipline (prayer, praise, giving, service, etc.)?

Your weakest?

5. How is God dealing with you today?

What do you think He wants from you?



# 3.

## Decluttering our Lives

<sup>16</sup> but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. <sup>18</sup> 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.  
- II Corinthians 3:16-18

Note that in this passage Paul says that the Christian experience is one of transformation and ongoing change. Spiritual maturity is a journey, not simply a destination. Because it is so, the process is often difficult, uncomfortable and quite challenging at times. However, the satisfaction and peace obtained by the experience far outweigh any inconveniences.

In our last session, I said that intimacy with God helped us become more like God or godly. The idea was that the closer we drew to God, the more He would mold us into His image and the likeness of Christ. It is the simple idea that we tend to copy and repeat the character and behavior of those we closely associate with, good or bad.

So, an intimate relationship with God yields a greater imprint of his character on us. I also said that for intimacy with God to develop, we must:

- a. Conform to His will. This is where the first step to maturity, personal discipline factors in.
- b. Let Him deal with us on His terms and His timetable.

In this session we will talk about the 3rd step to spiritual maturity, the condition that permits intimacy to take place, and that is:

## **SIMPLICITY**

A simple life promotes intimacy with God. In the book, "So You Want to be Like Christ", Chuck Swindoll lists five sources of mind/life clutter common to the 21st Century lifestyle:

1. We say yes to too many things.
2. We do not plan for regular leisure and rest.
3. We rarely take the time to savor and enjoy the pleasure of accomplishments.
4. We owe more than we can repay comfortably.
5. We think technology is actually simplifying and improving our lives.

I will give you a chance to comment on these in the discussion part of this session. For now, let's read II Corinthians 11:2-3.

<sup>2</sup> For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. <sup>3</sup> But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his trickery, your minds will be led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Note that Paul says that whatever physical goals we may have (finish college, save for retirement, lose weight, etc.), our spiritual and thus primary goal is simple faith and devotion to Christ. The Greek word for simple (Haplotes) ... is a word referring to "...a piece of cloth without a crease in it." Too much clutter in your mind and life leaves too little room for simple devotion to God and Christ. For intimacy to grow, we need to simplify (weed out) the garden of our minds and hearts in everyday life.

## **SIMPLIFYING MY LIFE**

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Here are a few strategies you can use in order to simplify your life:

### **1. Learn to say no**

Not every opportunity or need is a calling from God. There will always be more to do, more needs to care for than there is time or strength. Choose carefully what you can do well and trust that God can raise others to do the rest.

For example, Jesus had only 12 apostles. He stayed in His own region. He preached primarily to the Jews. The restricted nature of His ministry and simplicity of His life should serve as an example for us to not overcomplicate our lives, and the best way to do this is by learning to say no to requests for more of our time and energy. If it is truly God who is calling you, He will find a way to reach you and convince you to invest your life into a particular service or cause.

### **2. Make time for rest without guilt**

God designed us in such a way that we need rest - and a lot of it. Jesus rested and He encouraged His apostles to rest. It is quite

acceptable to do nothing at times, to shut down the machinery of thought, the constant turning of our ambitions and the ever growing and demanding "to do" list.

### **3. Take charge of debt!**

Get rid of junk and material overload by paying down debt. Instead of staying on the treadmill of materialism by buying more stuff - invest in your peace of mind by lightening your debt load. Of course, the best way to control debt is to prioritize spending. Here is an example of a simplified spending plan:

1. God's portion first - it is the sanctified part.
2. Caesar's portion - taxes, dues, etc.
3. Obligations - family needs, debts, transport.
4. Yourself - savings, investments, education.
5. Recreation - holidays, outings, new purchases.

By putting God first, you discipline yourself for greater simplicity in life since you are consciously putting God first and new stuff, playthings, last. That financial shift will ultimately make your entire life more about Him and less about stuff - and thus much simpler to manage.

### **4. Make time for you and God alone**

<sup>6</sup> Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you at the proper time,  
<sup>7</sup> having cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares about you.  
- I Peter 5:6-7

The famous retailer J.C. Penney, who was a devout Christian, once said:



If you are too busy to worship God on the Lord's Day, you are just too busy.

## SUMMARY

Simplifying your life will not only give you more time with God, but it will also give you more time.





# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Describe what your day would be like if you lost your cell phone. How would it be different?
2. In your opinion, which of the 5 sources of clutter mentioned in the devotional (listed below) most complicates your life? Why?
  - Say yes to too many things
  - No plan for rest or leisure
  - Don't take time to savor accomplishments
  - Owe more than we can repay
  - Reliance on tech to simplify life
3. Describe in your own words how the Greek word for simplicity (Haplotēs)... a piece of cloth with no crease... adequately describes simplicity. As a group, try to come up with 5 examples.
  - For example, "A piece of cloth with no crease is like simplicity in that..."
4. Describe the first step you would need to take in order to simplify your life.
5. In your opinion, what do you think would be the greatest benefit for you personally if your life was more simple? What is holding you back from making a change?



# 4.

## Stillness and Solitude

In this session we will examine steps #4 and #5 in the process of spiritual maturity as we pursue the goal of godliness - what all Christians should be striving for.

In the last session we concluded that simplifying our lives helps us achieve greater intimacy with God. This is so because:

- Removing the clutter leaves more time to be with God.
- Being with or closer to God enables Him to mold us into the character of Christ.

In this chapter, therefore, we will review the 4th step in our journey to Christian maturity, the virtue of stillness, and its companion virtue and 5th step, solitude.

### **SLOWING THE PACE**

Doug Harvey was a defenseman who played for the Montreal Canadiens in the 1950's and 60's. He was a great hockey player because he could single-handedly change the pace of the game.

For example, he could speed it up by making a one-man rush into the opposing team's zone with the puck, or he could slow it down

by holding on to the puck in his own defensive area. As a defenseman, he did not score a lot of goals, but he could change the rhythm of the game which often gave his teammates a lift and frustrated his opponents.

Speaking of rhythm, on a scale of 1 (very slow) to 10 (super-fast), what rhythm would you say that your overall life is at? 1 - 10? Here is another question, "What speed do you think your life needs to be at in order to develop godliness/spiritual maturity?" The Psalmist explains at what speed we learn the most about God and come to resemble Him. You will note that the writer breaks up this psalm by repeating the word *Selah* three times. *Selah* means to stop, cease or pause.

With this repeated instruction he is saying to the reader, "stop, pause and let this sink in." In this psalm, he describes the upheaval of nature; the assault of enemies; and the violence of war. Now, faced with these level 10-speed type of events, God says to man, stop, pause and consider that God is in control, He is with us and protects us:

1 God is our refuge and strength,  
A very present help in trouble.  
2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should  
change  
And though the mountains slip into the heart of the  
sea;  
3 Though its waters roar and foam,  
Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride.  
*Selah.*  
- Psalms 46:1-3

He begins by saying that despite natural disasters, godly people know that God will help them, no need to panic.

<sup>6</sup> The nations made an uproar, the kingdoms tottered;  
He raised His voice, the earth melted.

<sup>7</sup> The Lord of hosts is with us;  
The God of Jacob is our stronghold. *Selah.*

- Psalms 46:6-7

Despite the attacks of all kinds (enemies, disease, financial ruin, etc.) God is still able to protect His people.

<sup>8</sup> Come, behold the works of the Lord,  
Who has wrought desolations in the earth.

<sup>9</sup> He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth;  
He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two;  
He burns the chariots with fire.

<sup>10</sup> "Cease striving and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in  
the earth."

<sup>11</sup> The Lord of hosts is with us;  
The God of Jacob is our stronghold. *Selah.*

- Psalms 46:8-11

Even at times of war! Godly people are told to stop, cease striving, be quiet, do nothing. This is the opposite reaction that is normal - with our lives moving at the 8-10 level it never crosses our minds to simply stop! Most of us cannot or will not do this.

As a consequence, we miss an opportunity to deepen our knowledge of God. Simplifying our lives draws us near to God, being still when we are close enables us to know Him better. If you cannot discipline (there is that #1 step again)... discipline yourself to be still, you may know about God, but you cannot know Him personally.

To know Him is the beginning of our transformation into becoming like Him. When we are still before God, the Holy Spirit is able to reveal and clarify the meaning and application of God's

Word as it pertains to our own lives. This understanding is what changes our character into the image of His character. As we truly grasp what He is saying in His Word, our minds and character are slowly becoming more like Christ's mind and character:

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- John 1:14

Now, the Word becomes flesh once again but this time the Word becomes our flesh, not the flesh of the baby Jesus. So, what do we mean by stillness? A few things.

For example,

- Not talking to God, but quietly listening.
- Not worrying but simply trusting.
- Not constantly reviewing our needs and fears but giving them over to God without instructions. He already knows, He does not need clarification.
- Not figuring out the answers and proper solutions but simply waiting on God patiently.
- Not working on or out our perfection but accepting God's imputed perfection in Christ.

Our goal is not the stillness of the body (we are not monks), it is stillness of the heart when facing or near to God.

Be still and know that I am God.

- Psalms 46:10

## SOLITUDE

The question that arises next is, "How do we cultivate stillness and the answer to that is the 5th step to spiritual maturity - **solitude**. Just as simplicity enables intimacy, solitude facilitates stillness.

In his book, Swindoll says,

“ People rarely learn something while in a crowd.

Purposefully keeping busy and cramming every single moment with activity is a sign of fear and insecurity. Jesus was always busy, always in demand but always made time to be alone (solitude) with the Father so He could listen. Do not be afraid of being alone and still - it is uncomfortable because it is unfamiliar. Realize that purposeful solitude is an investment in your spiritual development.

Here are some suggestions on cultivating stillness through solitude:

1. **Pick a time** and place when and where you can be alone for 30 minutes. Bring a notebook and pen.
2. **Let your mind run** to empty out all thoughts concerning family, work, problems, plans and projects. Do this until you are quiet of mind.
3. **Write down** what you think as a way of dialoguing with God - a kind of private spiritual diary. Let this be your way of practicing the state of solitude so that you can become comfortable in solitude and thus begin to reap the rewards that are found only there.





# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. On a scale of 1 (very slow) to 10 (super fast), how would you rate the pace of your life? Are you satisfied with the pace and why?
2. In your opinion what is the number one factor that determines the pace of your life? What/who should be the primary factor?
3. With all the encouragements and proofs of God's care, why do you think so many believers do not turn to Him in time of need? Why is this so?
4. What stops you from being alone with God?
5. Have the group stop all discussion and movement for 10 minutes and let each write down any thoughts that occur during that time. Share with the group when time is up.

**Note:** This silent exercise needs to be done by all groups at the same time. Leave 10 minutes at the end of the session for feedback.



# 5.

## Surrender

We have said that our primary goal is to become more Christlike - this is the "new you" we are aiming for with these sessions. This pursuit requires that we develop certain spiritual disciplines which we have been studying. So far, we have looked at:

1. Intimacy - developing a closer walk with God.
2. Simplicity - removing and reordering those things that tend to spoil our intimacy with God.
3. Silence and 4. Solitude - which is learning to be still and listening or hearing what God says once we detach from the world in order to draw nearer to Him.

One of the more difficult disciplines to learn is the 5th in the series and the one we will be looking at in this session - the discipline of surrender.

So, what does surrender to God mean? Releasing our grip or hold on our rights, plans, dreams and putting these into God's hands. For example, not my will, but Your will be done, Lord. Not my plan, dream, rights, but Your plans, visions, righteousness be done.

Surrender is the most difficult discipline because it goes against our most powerful drive - self-interest. How then, do we actually surrender to God? What method do we use to accomplish this?

## 1. Study Christ

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- Hebrews 12:2

We need to study His life not simply to know the facts of it, but rather to imitate Him. Paul gives us some practical information concerning some things required by the discipline of surrender:

<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; <sup>4</sup> do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

- Philippians 2:3-5

Note 4 things:

1. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit. (vs. 3)
2. With humility lift up others before self. How to do this? Listen instead of talk. (vs. 3)
3. Do not only look out for self. (vs. 4)
4. Look out for the interests of others. (vs. 4)

These are things that Jesus did as He modeled surrender for us.

<sup>5</sup> Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- Philippians 2:5-11

- A. He released His grip on His position.
- B. He emptied Himself of power.
- C. He became not just a man but a poor, lowly servant of a man.
- D. He accepted a cruel, undeserved death - total surrender.

And so, the first step toward surrender is the study and imitation of the One who perfectly accomplished it.

So we study Christ, then we...

## **2. Compare Ourselves to Christ**

What does comparing ourselves to Him mean and how does it cultivate surrender within ourselves?

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

- Hebrews 12:3

The next time you feel unfairly criticized, feel discouraged because of your burden, are afraid to give up something pleasant and comfortable - think of Him and compare your situation to His. In other words, keep Jesus as your standard. All other human examples are driven by the instinct to survive. Only Jesus modeled perfect submission. While we, and others, seek to preserve our lives - He came to lay His down for sinners like us.

When we compare our lives to His (not ours, not sports figures or other heroes) and imitate His life... When we do this, it gives us the strength to carry on with our own Christian lives even when we grow weary.

### 3. Let go

Releasing your grip on things you want to possess or control frees you to be in submission to God. It is the effort to "hold tightly" to your life and your goods that exhausts and enslaves you. Letting these things go by submitting them to God is what frees us.

<sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.

- John 12:24-25

True life (freedom) can only be found in submission to God. The question, therefore, is, "How do we let go, how is it done in practical terms?"

<sup>5</sup> Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
And do not lean on your own understanding.  
<sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He will make your paths straight.  
<sup>7</sup> Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.  
<sup>8</sup> It will be healing to your body  
And refreshment to your bones.  
- Proverbs 3:5-8

## **PRACTICAL WAYS TO LET GO/SURRENDER**

### **1. Let go your possessions**

Acknowledge before God in prayer that all of what you have actually belongs to Him, you are only a steward.

### **2. Let go your desire for a position**

Release your hunger for recognition, benefits and advantages to God. Begin to find your security, value and identity in Him only.

### **3. Let go your plans**

Of course, we have to make plans but be ready and patient when God changes them. Not becoming angry and discouraged when plans are changed is a clear and sincere way of demonstrating that we have let go the exclusive control over our plans.

### **4. Let go your people**

Enjoy your family and friends but realize that they are only temporary. Give them and your hopes for them over to God, transfer the responsibility for their lives and happiness to God.



The rewards of surrender are the surprises that God has in store for you when you surrender to Him. The greater the struggle to surrender, the greater the surprise.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. On a scale of 1 (very relaxed) to 10 (very controlling), where would you be positioned? What positive/negative effects has this had on your life?
2. What would be the equivalent of "Jesus emptied Himself" for you? What would emptying yourself mean in your life?
3. How are you most/least like Christ?
4. Describe a person you know who is most like Christ and what trait you most admire about them.
5. What do you think this comment means, "The greater the struggle to surrender, the greater the surprise"?



# 6.

## Prayer

We have stated that the goal of this book is that we become more like God and more Christlike - this would be the character of the new spiritual you. Another question is, "Why this goal or purpose?"

The answer would be the following: this goal fulfills the purpose of our lives (Why am I here?)

<sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; <sup>8</sup> we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; <sup>10</sup> always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. <sup>11</sup> For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

- II Corinthians 4:7-11

We are studying disciplines that help us in this spiritual transformation:

- Intimacy - consciously drawing near to God.
- Simplicity - uncluttering our lives

- Silence and solitude - quietly listening to and for God
- Surrender - letting go the responsibility for our transformation to God.

In this session we will look at the 6th step/discipline which is prayer. In other words, understanding how to communicate with God when we do speak to Him.

## **PRAYER IS NOT...**

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Complete this sentence:

"FOR ME, PRAYER IS \_\_\_\_\_."

### **1. Prayer is not bargaining.**

In this type of exchange, a person attempts to change God's mind, or offer Him something in order to move Him to take action in our favor. (i.e. If you heal me, I will be good, I will come to church.)

### **2. Prayer is not a get-rich scheme.**

Prayer does not automatically result in an abundance of blessings. Sometimes God lets people die or remain in suffering or difficulty.

### **3. Prayer is not a wish list.**

We do not use God as a rubber stamp for getting all we want. Some think that prayer is just the expression of our desires before God.

#### **4. Prayer is not a ritual or a charm.**

For example, if you say a certain number of prayers, or say them in a certain way, or on a particular day or order - they will be effective. This is the basis of magic and the occult, not of mature spirituality.

## **WHAT PRAYER NEEDS TO BE**

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In order to be effective in the development of a godly character, prayer needs to be the following:

### **1. A calling out to God**

Prayer is a personal conversation with God that includes praise, thanksgiving, request, and repentance... to name a few elements. In prayer we call out to God to know His will concerning the matters we have put before Him.

### **2. Prayer needs to be a priority**

<sup>1</sup> First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

- I Timothy 2:1-2

### **3. Prayer needs to become our remedy... for worry**

Jesus reveals the truth about the value of worry which is zero.

And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that

they will be heard for their many words.  
- Matthew 6:7

Godly mature Christians replace worry with prayer in their lives. We seek God's solutions for our troubles through prayer instead of more worry.

#### **4. Prayer needs to be constant**

Paul says, "Pray without ceasing" in Philippians 4:4-7. Worry about nothing, pray about everything. Why, you ask? Because trouble and stress are always there, so prayer must also be there each day as well.

As human beings we are naturally concerned about illness and trials, but concern is different than worry. Concern treats matters seriously, relying on God to provide what is needed through prayer. Worry is choosing to fret and review the problem without giving it to God in prayer. The problem with worry is that it has no faith attached to it so it is a nonspiritual action that has no effect on the situation other than weakening the individual.

### **THE PERILS AND PROMISES OF PRAYER**

Here, then, are a few tips for those ready to devote more time and energy to prayer. Remember:

#### **1. Prayer is not a substitute for human responsibility.**

Pray and work and serve and seek and persevere. Yes, pray for success on the exam, but do not forget to study!

## 2. Pray to the true God.

The true God is not your grandfather, or your buddy, or a faraway judge... He is the creator of everything and an all-powerful being for whom nothing is impossible - trust in that when you pray.

## 3. God answers prayers in His way, not yours.

God always hears the prayers of the saints, but His answers fulfill His will and purpose. Paul's prayer in II Corinthians 12.

<sup>7</sup> Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! <sup>8</sup> Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. <sup>9</sup> And He has said to me "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.  
- II Corinthians 12:7-10

Note that God gave Paul what he needed (humility) and not what he wanted (healing). God wanted to be glorified through Paul's weakness rather than by his strength.

## 4. No matter what - God is with you!

Regardless of the answer or time frame, because you are praying - God is with you. In the end, being with God is what brings peace and joy - not having your prayers answered.





# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Share with the group a prayer of yours that was answered/not answered and how that affected your faith?
2. In your opinion, what is the greatest misconception people have about prayer? Why?
3. What is the greatest hindrance in your prayer life?

How has this affected you?

4. How would you encourage someone who has given up on prayer?

What would you say or do to revive their prayer life?

5. If you had the time or opportunity to offer only one prayer, share with the group what that prayer would be.



# 7.

## Humility

We are studying the various spiritual disciplines that help us become godlier.

The definition of discipline:

- A. Something no one likes but all admire.
- B. What is done in obscurity for the sake of excellence.

For example, Olympic 100-meter runners practice and discipline themselves for 4 years for an event that lasts 10 seconds. On the spiritual level, you cannot achieve godliness without developing discipline. As Paul says,

discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;  
- I Timothy 4:7

Godliness, however, is not like music or sport, etc., because there is no public performance in mind - we pursue spiritual disciplines for only one reason - to achieve godliness.

In this session we will examine the 7th spiritual discipline in our study - humility. Now, most people see humility as a virtue (a quality of character) rather than a discipline. What is the difference? A virtue is something you possess whereas a discipline is something you practice. You practice humility, you

do not possess it. As you practice it, it becomes part of your character. The greatest danger is thinking you possess or can use humility because when you do this, it becomes pride.

## **COMMON ATTITUDES REGARDING HUMILITY**

### **1. It is not popular or admired in our culture.**

We want to be first or famous, and humility (true humility) gets in the way of this.

### **2. We appreciate humility in others but rarely want it for ourselves**

We like humble people around us because for the most part they do not threaten our position. We would rather work on humility after we get to the top. For example, we see that even Jesus' disciples were like this as they debated who among their number was the greatest (Mark 9:33-35). Humility is more about what we seek than who we become.

### **3. Humility is not the result of low self-esteem**

People who do not like themselves are not automatically humble. On the contrary, people who practice the discipline of humility are usually secure and aware of their talents and gifts. An honest assessment of your true value helps one to practice the disciplines necessary to cultivate true humility (we will discuss these later).

### **4. We can measure our success in practicing humility as a discipline**

The things that we do to practice humility can be seen and measured. When, however, we stop practicing and simply

consider ourselves humble, we easily fall into pride and the errors that a proud person makes.

## THE BATTLE FOR A HUMBLE HEART

I think we all like the idea of having a humble heart but pause when considering the struggle this may require.

<sup>43</sup> But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; <sup>44</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

- Mark 10:43-45

Disciples practice humility as a natural part of Christian living.

<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; <sup>4</sup> do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

- Philippians 2:3-4

What Christian humility looks like in the church.

1. Remove selfish motivation (not just my wants).
2. Become less conceited (actively think of others).
3. Consider others more important than self (others' needs and priorities before my own).
4. Serve others (our focus is on serving others not just self).

Question: Why can I do this? What is my motivation?

- Jesus' person (perfect)
- Jesus' life (service)
- Jesus' sacrifice (complete)
- Jesus' motivation (His love for me!)

My focus on Jesus produces gratitude, and my gratitude motivates my discipline of humility.

## **EVERYDAY PRACTICE TIPS IN THE DISCIPLINE OF HUMILITY**

Here are three things to do in order to practice the discipline of humility:

### **1. Sit-on the desire to promote self**

God gives to each his/her talents, He can also create opportunities to use them. Trust God to promote you when the time is right. Rely on Him when your calling comes.

### **2. Stand-up for others**

Look for opportunities to serve those who seem less deserving. It is easy to dismiss the poor, those who are weak but God has called on us to serve these very ones. Standing up to meet the needs of others truly develops a humble character in ourselves.

### **3. Bow low before God**

Give God all your worries, offer Him all your thanks for blessings, rely on Him completely for every part of your life. This practice of lowering yourself will train your spirit in the discipline of humility. The discipline of humility is always an act of faith and always difficult, however, God rewards a humble heart with peace of mind and spirit in Christ.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Describe the type of pride (or its display) that you dislike the most.
2. What do you believe is the greatest obstacle in your efforts to develop a humble heart?
3. Describe a time or situation when you were able to truly exhibit a humble attitude.
4. Who is your hero of humility (aside from Jesus)? Why?
5. Which of the "tips" is the most difficult for you to practice? Why?

Which one do you find easy? Why?





# 8.

## Self-Control

Becoming godly is each Christian's true calling in response to the question, "What shall I do with my life and why am I here?" We are, therefore, studying 10 spiritual disciplines that will help us move forward in this process: intimacy, simplicity, silence, solitude, surrender, prayer and humility. We will review these in the last lesson but for now, let us examine the eighth spiritual discipline which is self-control.

### THE PROBLEM

<sup>14</sup> For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. <sup>15</sup> For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. <sup>17</sup> So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. <sup>19</sup> For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. <sup>20</sup> But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which

dwells in me.

<sup>21</sup> I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. <sup>22</sup> For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, <sup>23</sup> but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

- Romans 7:14-25

In this passage, Paul is describing the battle taking place within every believer, the struggle between the flesh and the spirit. Does every Christian have this problem? Yes! Even the great apostle Paul.

What, exactly, is the danger here? The threat Paul describes is a situation where the flesh will overpower and dominate us. What is the Christian's objective in this situation? The believer wants the spirit to dominate the flesh. Sin and the desire of the flesh is still present, still felt but it is the spirit that dominates, not the flesh. How do you get to this point? Exercise self-control.

You cannot become a godly person unless the Spirit dominates, and the Spirit cannot dominate unless we practice self-control.

## **KNOW YOUR ENEMY**

Many people fail to cultivate self-control in their lives because they do not really know their enemy very well. Our enemy, when it comes to self-control, is ourselves.

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

- Galatians 5:17

Paul says that the battle raging within us leaves us not able to do what we want, good or bad. My faith spoils the pleasures of evil. My flesh interrupts my communion with God.

When you become a Christian, you receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) and your life is redirected, however, your old habits and sinful desires remain and continually draw you back. The Spirit and flesh battle for domination and you can usually tell who is winning by the nature of the fruit or actions your life is producing.

<sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. <sup>19</sup> Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

- Galatians 5:18-24

Giving in to our temptations, weaknesses, evil desires, and worldly influences empowers the flesh to dominate and eventually destroy us. However, exercising self-control enables the Spirit to dominate and strengthen, and ultimately deliver us

from the hold of the flesh and its natural result which is both physical and spiritual death.

If humility's reward in this life is peace, then self-control's prize is the ability to experience joy as faithful disciples of Jesus.

## WINNING THE WAR

It is not enough just to know the enemy and how it operates, we have to have our own strategy for victory. Here are some strategies on how to cultivate self-control so that the Spirit can dominate and bless your lives:

### 1. Eyes on the prize

The Olympic athletes motivate themselves by imagining the moment they win the gold and what that would mean:

- Names in the history books
- Prestige, fame, wealth
- To be the greatest in the world at a particular event

<sup>24</sup> Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. <sup>25</sup> Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; <sup>27</sup> but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

- I Corinthians 9:24-27

Paul uses this same sport analogy to emphasize the idea that self-control is the basis for success both in competitive sport as well as the competition between the Spirit and the flesh for the dominance over our bodies. Initially our prize is the joy we experience as we see the Spirit dominating our lives with the spiritual fruit being produced as the proof.

Ultimately our crown or wreath is eternal life and the call of the Lord to be with Him in heaven as good and faithful servants. The answer to give to temptation in all of its forms is, "You are not worth it."

## **2. Show your body who's the boss**

The adage, "No pain, no gain" is just as true in the spiritual battle we fight as it is in motivating athletes to train hard. Self-control is painful because the body, the belly, the eyes and the heart all want something and if you don't give in, your flesh will extract a price of suffering for having denied it. You have to run, as Paul says, in such a way as to win, not to lose. Doing right, avoiding wrong and resisting the pull to give in are not easy or painless, but with time and practice each of these becomes easier and less painful. The key is to remember that it is always worth the effort - always!

## **3. Self-control is a personal matter**

Your spouse, friend, parent or minister cannot instill self-control in you - it is all you with help from God. If you choose the flesh, the flesh will dominate you, if you appeal to the Spirit, the Spirit will empower you and dominate your life and it will show.

<sup>12</sup> So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— <sup>13</sup> for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body,

you will live <sup>14</sup> For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

- Romans 8:12-15

Remember this important rule of thumb - you usually have only 3 seconds to decide who wins the battle of giving into the flesh or following the Spirit's lead.

If in those 3 seconds you use your self-control to call on the Spirit, He will empower you to do right and move closer to the godliness you are pursuing. You grow 3 seconds at a time.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Which are you more vulnerable to, temptations of the body (consumption, illicit pleasure, violence, etc.) or temptations of the heart (pride, honesty, jealousy, self-pity, etc.)?

Why do you think this is so?

2. Why do you think some people believe that God will not forgive their sins (or one sin in particular)?

3. When you fail to resist a temptation, what is the usual reason for your failure?

4. Describe your greatest success in exercising your self-control to resist temptation or the return to a bad habit.

- How did this make you feel?
- How did it affect other parts of your spiritual walk with Christ?

5. Do you believe in the 3-second rule mentioned at the end of the lesson?

- If yes, why and describe how it works.
- If no, why?





# 9.

## Sacrifice

We have come to the second to last spiritual discipline that helps create in us a godly and Christlike character. Chuck Swindoll writes:

“ If the disciplines we have studied were a mound of precious stones, then sacrifice is the diamond on top.

No other spiritual discipline is more closely associated with the character and mission of Jesus Christ than the discipline of sacrifice.

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;  
- Philippians 3:10

If a person wants to become like Jesus, he/she must practice the discipline of sacrifice because this is what His life was about. No sacrifice - no resemblance to Christ

## WHAT IS SACRIFICE?

Think of someone you know (aside from Christ) who sacrificed for another or for a cause or idea. For example:

- A parent who sacrifices for their child.
- Gives up a kidney to save their child.
- In California, I knew a young man who gave up part of his liver to save his mother.

In this or any type of sacrifice, you will note that:

### **Sacrifice is an action or attitude that violates our basic urge of self-preservation.**

Now, self-preservation is prompted by our human nature. However, sacrifice is prompted by our spiritual nature. As Christians seeking godliness, we are continually called upon to not only make sacrifices (that is the best that the human nature can aspire to). However, as Christians we are called upon to go beyond simply making sacrifices but to become living sacrifices.

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.

- Romans 12:1-2

As Christians, the sacrifice of ourselves is pleasing to God because, like Christ, we choose freely to offer ourselves to Him in obedience and service - this is not imposed or forced upon us.

# CULTIVATING THE DISCIPLINE OF SACRIFICE

To cultivate the discipline of sacrifice, we have to practice it in 3 areas of our lives:

## 1. Personal sacrifice

Personal sacrifice begins with a choice:

- Who will we trust to meet our needs?
- We naturally serve who we trust.

For the Christian the choice always comes down to trusting God or trusting self, someone or something else. The idea is that we sacrifice (give up) trust in wealth (even our own) in order to trust only in God. We sacrifice confidence in human systems like personal abilities, government, etc. We still use these because we are in and part of the world but our trust is not in these things.

You see, in the area of personal sacrifice we practice giving up the natural human urge to protect, preserve and promote ourselves by ourselves and turn over that responsibility to God. For example, allowing God rather than ourselves to secure justice or vengeance for an offense against us personally. This is why we forgive and pray for our enemies because God's justice will be perfect and His punishment will be appropriate. When it comes to our enemies, let God's will be done, not ours.

## 2. Relational sacrifice

In Genesis 22:2-12 Abraham offered Isaac. Isaac trusted Abraham and Abraham trusted God. God may not ask us to give up our children in sacrifice but there are times when we need to "give them up to God." We sometimes have to sacrifice their well-being to God. At other times we may be asked to leave a

comfortable place or situation in order to answer a call to service somewhere else.

A relational sacrifice is the willingness to give up relationships that are either broken by sin (i.e., the Prodigal son) or that are harmful (i.e., bad influences) and give them up to God for His purpose. The natural human urge is to hold on and try to fix things by ourselves. Spiritual growth, however, requires that we make a relational sacrifice at times for healing to begin or even be possible.

So far, two types of sacrifice:

1. **Personal sacrifice** - giving up the urge to preserve and promote self and trusting God to care for us and set us down where He wants us to be.
2. **Relational sacrifice** - giving up the constant impulse to control or fix relationships according to our standards instead of trusting God's ways and His standards.

### **3. Material sacrifice**

This type of sacrifice involves generosity clearly expressed in the giving up of material things, personal advantages and comforts for the good of others. For example, Jesus gave up heaven to suffer the cross in order to save us.

Our greatest fear when it comes to material sacrifice is that we will not have enough left for ourselves. We fear that sacrifice will make us poorer, vulnerable or uncomfortable. However, who or what are the true obstacles in material sacrifice?

- **Satan** - will make you procrastinate using these fears and the temptation to selfishness.

- **People** - Who will accuse you of being unreasonable or too zealous usually because sacrificial giving exposes their own lack of generosity, love and faith.
- **Your own mind and flesh** - who are naturally disposed to preserve and maintain the status quo, not give sacrificially!

<sup>31</sup> Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.  
- Matthew 6:31-32

Do we truly believe this or not? If we do, then we can sacrifice without fear or doubt.

Only a few among us are called upon by God to sacrifice our lives as martyrs. For most Christians the discipline of sacrifice is exercised one decision at a time until sacrifice simply becomes embedded in us as part of our Christian character.



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Describe the nature and reason for a great sacrifice you have made in your life?
  - What part, if any, did God play in your decision?
  - Describe, if possible, the results of your sacrifice.
  - Looking back, would you make the same decision? Why yes? Why no?
2. What holds you back from making material sacrifices?
3. How would adding a sacrificial element to your spiritual personality change you?
4. Name someone who has or would sacrifice for you.

Describe other elements of their character.

5. What sacrifice is still out of reach for you?

What do you think it would take for you to make it?





# 10. Perseverance

This is our last session in the series so before giving you the final step to the New Spiritual You which ties everything together, let's review the first 9 steps we have studied and discussed.

## REVIEW:

### THE PURPOSE AND REWARD OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

The main idea we have tried to get our spirits around is that our personal goal as Christians is to become more like Christ in every area of our lives - this is the substance of the new spiritual you - you become more like Jesus Christ and these spiritual disciplines facilitate that goal.

<sup>7</sup> But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; <sup>8</sup> 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.

- I Timothy 4:7-8

Here Paul explains that Christlikeness is godliness because God in human form is Jesus and so to be like Christ is to be like God since Christ is God. Note that he says, "Discipline yourselves for the purpose of godliness" in the passage in I Timothy 4. Not

simply disciplining the body (as in "working out") but getting the body/flesh under control. Not depriving the body (asceticism) which does not accomplish much spiritually in Christ.

What he means is the discipline to train the spirit within you so that you are able to enjoy the promise (results) that come from this kind of spiritual training regimen.

This is how it works:

## **NOW**

- Spiritual training = Godliness/Christlikeness
- Godliness = The experience of God
- The experience of God = Fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, etc.)

## **AFTER**

- Godliness perfected =  
Eternal life in the world to come

## **WHY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE?**

It develops godliness/Christlikeness within us which in turn produces the fruit of the Spirit which in turn provide us with a first taste of the experience of eternal life. It is the means, not the end.

The godlier I become, the more I am able to experience the existence that awaits me after death. Why is this worth striving for? The more confident I become about life after death, the less I fear living a godly life here and leaving this place when the time comes.

## **REVIEW OF THE TEN SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES**

Godliness, then is developed by exercising "spiritual disciplines", not just physical disciplines. So far, we have looked at nine spiritual disciplines that help cultivate godliness in us as faithful Christians. The foundation is personal discipline without which the others are not possible

### **1. Intimacy**

A conscious drawing nearer to God by conforming our lives to His will and way. In the pursuit of godliness, we are continually drawing nearer to Him as an ongoing action.

### **2. Simplicity**

Getting rid of the things that hamper our relationship with God (both physical and spiritual). Simplicity is constantly making room for God in our lives.

### **3 & 4. Stillness and solitude**

Making the time to be alone and quiet before God. It is not stillness and solitude of the body; it is stillness and solitude of the heart before the Lord.

### **5. Surrender**

Learning to let go and let God lead your life. The more we surrender our fears, plans, sorrows, people and failures to God , the more He surprises and blesses us.

### **6. Prayer**

Calling out to God, not for things, but for the knowledge of His will. The answer to this kind of prayer is what brings peace.

## **7. Humility**

The knowledge of what God has done for us produces gratitude and this gratitude naturally leads us to humility. Humility is expressed by sitting on the urge to promote self, standing up on behalf of others and bowing low before God.

## **8. Self-control**

The discipline of self-control is the battle over who will dominate our lives, the Spirit or the flesh. This war is fought in 3 second battles.

## **9. Sacrifice**

Sacrifice is giving up the urge to save or to gratify self in the interest of another. To sacrifice because of Christ is the truest and highest manifestation of Christ-like character.

## **10. Perseverance**

We did not do a session on this step or discipline until now because perseverance is the companion of all the other disciplines. The dictionary defines this word to mean:

*"to try hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties"*  
(Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary).

The Greek word (PROSKARTERISIS) sometimes translated by the English word "STEADFASTNESS" means to be devoted to standing ready. Paul, in Ephesians 6:18, says we should be on the alert with all perseverance. Peter explains the steppingstones to the highest virtue, Christian love, but note what discipline he mentions just before godliness - the virtue we have been studying and aspiring to:

<sup>5</sup> Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness,  
- II Peter 1:5-6

My point with all of this is that we must persevere in cultivating each of these steps or disciplines in order to perfect them (they become a natural part of our Christian character) and we must persevere in order to maintain them (or fall to the ever-present temptations of this world).

10 steps to the new spiritual you which will be a person who will be able to serve God as Christ did.

<sup>6</sup> and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, <sup>7</sup> and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. <sup>8</sup> For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
- II Peter 1:6-8

and a person who will be able to love others as Christ did.

You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.  
- John 15:3

This is who the new spiritual you will become and be able to do!



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Which of the disciplines do you find the easiest to practice/implement in your life? Why?
2. Which of the disciplines have created the greatest changes in your life? In what way?
3. If you were to teach this course would there be steps you would add or delete? Which ones? Why?
4. In your opinion which is the most difficult step/discipline to maintain? Why?
5. Give a brief testimonial about how this course has changed your life in Christ for the better.







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