

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study Guide

LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE LESSON 1: PERSONAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Leadership Lifestyle. The lessons examine the practical and spiritual requirements for those in Christian leadership. Being a leader is so much more than standing up in front of a group of people asking them to follow you! To be a great leader, one must maintain high standards in both public and private life. While every one of us struggles in many ways, a leader faces unique challenges. This module identifies some of these struggles and how to combat them, with practical advice from men and women who have experienced the trials and joys of following God's calling in leadership. Each lesson concludes with a Leader to Leader page. It features quotes from historical Christians, current Christian leaders, and people (not in leadership) who share their perspective on the topic.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 1: PERSONAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This lesson looks at the personal spiritual disciplines that will enable you to effectively lead others, as well as sustain you in times of difficulty.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

This lesson applies to every Christian regardless of how young or old they are in the faith. It does, however, particularly relate to those in Christian leadership. They must be disciplined and focused in order to lead well. This involves connecting with God daily through reading and studying His Word, worshiping God and asking for His guidance and strength, praying for those they are leading, and keeping one's life pure. What is true for church leaders is true for every Christian. Starting to practice all the disciplines at once is likely to fail and not necessary – but this lesson may help you begin new spiritual disciplines that will help you in your relationship with God! It isn't just theory, but practical advice and help to accomplish the deepest spiritual needs you have.

GETTING STARTED

1. Do you know any athletes? How does their physical fitness regimen differ from yours? How are spiritual disciplines similar to physical fitness workouts? How are the two different?
2. What are some regular activities you engage in that promote your spiritual health? How often do you consider your spiritual health?



STUDY

- ❖ **TRAINING THAT IS OF GREATER VALUE:** Most people will never become a world-class athlete, but all would agree that a little exercise is good for our bodies. As adults, we rarely exercise just because it is fun; we usually do it in order to feel better or be able to participate in a sport. Every Christian needs spiritual disciplines; they are the exercises that allow us to grow in godliness, and are certainly necessary for anyone in leadership!

- The book of 1 Timothy was written by the Apostle Paul to a young church leader named Timothy. In it, Paul encouraged Timothy to set an example to others and pursue excellence in the faith. Read 1Timothy 4:6-16. What does it is necessary for growing in our faith?

- This passage tells us that while bodily training (exercise, rehearsing dance, practicing a sport or training to run long distances) is of limited value, godliness is of greater value.

Spiritual disciplines are the means by which we train ourselves for godliness, and the intentional actions we take to depend on God for our deepest needs.

- ❖ **PRACTICING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES WITH PURPOSE:** When we want to improve ourselves in any area, it requires hard work and persistence. In order to learn, we must read, attend school, and do assignments. If we want our bodies to be healthy and fit, we must eat well and exercise. Every discipline (spiritual or otherwise) has a purpose.

- **Spiritual Disciplines are not the result of a godly life, but rather a means to that end.** They are intentional acts which strengthen our relationship with God and our ability to serve Him.
- **Spiritual Disciplines help us see our deepest needs fulfilled.** If we long for a closer relationship with God, a deeper understanding of His will, the ability to love others, and the purging of sin from our lives, we must practise specific spiritual disciplines. Since God has placed these desires within us, He will help us achieve them. But we must do the work!
- Godliness devotion to God that results in a life that pleases Him. It is focusing our lives on God and His purposes rather than ourselves. What does God's Word tell us about striving towards godliness?



1 Corinthians 9:24-27	
Hebrews 12:1	
1 Peter 1:13	
Hebrews 5: 12-14	
2 Timothy 2:1-7	

❖ **WHO ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR?** They are for ALL believers. There is no list of them in the Bible, nor is the term ‘spiritual disciplines’ used, but there are countless examples of disciples of God engaging in them and the voices of early church leaders who wrote about their benefit.

- **If you are weary, Spiritual Disciplines are for you:** They will give you a greater ability to deal with the stresses of life, and bring joy and fulfillment to your relationship with Jesus Christ. What does Matthew 11:28-30 teach you?

- **If you hunger and thirst for God, Spiritual Disciplines are for you:** Our cravings, restless spirit and unfulfilled desires indicate that we hunger for God. Engaging in spiritual disciplines is like sitting down to a wonderful meal! What does Matthew 5:6 teach you?

- **If you desire a deeper sense of God’s presence, Spiritual Disciplines are for you:** Too often, we allow the pressures of life to crowd out spiritual disciplines. Spending time in God's Word and in prayer results in a renewed sense of God’s presence with us. What do Jeremiah 29:13 and James 4:8 teach you?



- **If you are a new believer, Spiritual Disciplines are for you:** They are not only for very experienced Christians, in fact they are necessary to give spiritual nourishment to those who are babies in Jesus Christ. New believers begin their life in Christ by learning the discipline of prayer and regular Bible study. What does 1 Peter 2:2 teach you?

- **If you are in leadership, Spiritual Disciplines are for you:** When you are continually carrying the burdens of those you lead or teach, it is essential that you spend quality time with the Lord. If you are not meeting your own spiritual needs, you will neglect the needs of others. What does Acts 20:28 teach you?

❖ **CAUTIONS:** While spiritual disciplines are essential for Christian growth, especially for a Christian leader, they can be misunderstood. We must be cautious of the following:

- **Spiritual Disciplines aren't magic:** Meeting regularly with God doesn't automatically fix all our problems. God is at work in us to produce the strength and character needed to face difficulties. The fruit of these disciplines comes from God.
- **Spiritual Disciplines are not currency:** We cannot buy favour with God by them! Practising self-denial, fasting, doing good deeds will not make God do what we ask Him to. That is not their purpose. God cannot be bought.
- **Spiritual Disciplines should increase our love for God and others:** If we feel more holy or better than other Christians because of our good works, we are missing the point. Disciplines should humble us, not make us proud.
- **Spiritual Disciplines are not all for everybody at all times:** Never try to accomplish all the spiritual disciplines at once! Start small, and work on one at a time based on your spiritual needs and the prompting of God's Spirit within you. Some disciplines will be practised your whole life, while some may be just for a time.
- **Spiritual Disciplines take time:** They are called disciplines because they require discipline! They are not an easy fix. When practised regularly over a period of time, you will grow in your faith.



❖ **THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES:** The remainder of this lesson examines six categories of disciplines, each prompted by a basic need or desire. This is merely a sampling of disciplines that are found in Scripture, and have been helpful and useful to other Christians.

- The following charts may help you see the various ways God can meet your spiritual needs. They provide a brief overview of the disciplines, but enough to get you started. Much has been written on these topics, so further research may be helpful.

TO CONNECT WITH GOD	
If we desire a deeper connection with God, it requires some action. Learning to pay attention to God's presence during the discipline will help us throughout the day.	
Retreat	To temporarily get away from the distractions of life to spend some personal time with God. It is a scheduled, quiet, prolonged encounter with God – start with a day or weekend away.
Practising the Presence of God	To cultivate a constant awareness of God's presence in the midst of your daily tasks through constant prayer and gratitude to God. Look for God's work all day long in your life.
Journaling	To keep an ongoing account of our journey with God, our spiritual reflections and prayers to God. Write in a note book or use a computer. Be honest, write regularly, see God's hand.
Silence	To block out distractions, and achieve quietness inside and out in order to listen to God. Do not force prayer or speak, just listen and detach from the chaos of life and noise of life.
God's Word:	<i>Luke 5:16, 1 Kings 19:12, John 5:39-40, Psalm 23:2-3, Mark 6:31, Psalm 46:10</i>

TO HEAR FROM GOD	
If we desire to hear God speaking to us, the primary means is through His Word. Listening to Him is different than merely reading to absorb facts and information. It is relational. As we approach God and His Word with questions, it is through His Word He answers!	
Bible Study	To give us a deeper understanding of God's Word through careful reading and studying entire books, individual topics or a survey of the whole Bible. It is to help us grow spiritually, not just to prepare us to teach others.
Devotional Reading	To discover what God is saying to you through reading specific passages of Scripture. It involves carefully and slowly reading one passage of Scripture, writing down any words that stand out. Pray about what you read, write down what God is saying to you.
Memorization	To have specific parts of God's Word committed to memory for instant recall and application. Start with one verse, and recite and review it until you have it memorized. After a verse, move on to short passages or memorization of entire books of the Bible.
Meditation	To allow specific Scripture to change the way we think and live as we dwell on it over a period of time. To fill our mind with God's Word rather than emptying it (as some other religions suggest). Still your heart and mind, consider a piece of God's word and think on it. Ask what its meaning, purpose, application is. Talk to God about what you think and feel.
God's Word:	<i>Psalm 119:11, Hebrews 4:12-13, Deuteronomy 30:14, Psalm 119:97, Joshua 1:8</i>



TO PURGE SIN IN OUR LIVES	
We are easily distracted and deceived, and without coming face to face with our sin, we may never acknowledge it. The spiritual disciplines can reveal sin and allow God to convict us, forgive us, and change us. The Spirit gives us power to live a changed life – but it will require work on our part.	
Self-Examination	To acknowledge unconfessed sin in our life and confess it to God. Consider stopping at days end to questions yourself – ask ‘was I loving?’ ‘when was I selfish?’ ‘Did I keep my commitments?’ ‘was God honoured in my thoughts and actions?’ etc.
Detachment	To distance ourselves from anything that hinders our relationship with God. Ask God to reveal what is hindering your Christian growth. Consider stopping unhelpful behaviours, relationships, attitudes, or reactions. Turn off or unplug electronic devices, TV, computer if they are addictive.
Confession	To have a clean and open heart before God through acknowledgement of sin, and to heal broken relationships with people we have wronged. Ask God to reveal unconfessed sin, confess sin each day, and accept God’s forgiveness. Resolve not to return to past sins, and accept God’s grace.
Accountability	To develop close friends or mentor relationships to support, pray for us and keep us on track in our Christian life and ministry – to be held responsible for our actions. Find a person willing to hold you accountable and meet with them regularly in honest conversation.
God’s Word:	1 John 1:9, James 5:16, Galatians 6:1-2, Luke 12:15, Galatians 2:20

TO LOVE OTHERS	
As followers of Jesus Christ we are not alone. We belong to the family of God. Relationships are very important in the Church, and Jesus emphasized that we are to love one another even as He loves us. Maintaining a loving relationship takes time and effort.	
Humility	To honour others before ourselves, secretly rather than to gain applause and prestige. We refrain from boasting, remain silent about abilities accomplishments and talents, elevate others rather than manipulating control, and allow God to define who you are rather than others.
Serving	To intentionally love others by putting our hands, money, time energy and talents to work on for God. To honour God with our gifts and abilities by practicing love. To help others even when it is hard, behind the scenes rather than in the spotlight.
Giving	To meet the practical needs of others with resources God has given us. To be reminded of our dependence on Jesus Christ, and be freed from anchoring our security in things. Ask God to direct giving, and respond with generosity.
Mentoring	To encourage, strengthen and teach someone younger in the faith. Choose a disciple and offer to meet with them as a mentor for a fixed period of time, on a regular basis to help them reach their God given potential. Give away your time for someone else’s benefit and growth.
God’s Word:	John 3:30, Matthew 22:37-39, Acts 20:35, Matthew 6:1-4, Titus 2:3-5



TO WORSHIP GOD	
We worship God by living every moment of our day with gratitude towards Him. Acknowledging Him constantly in our thoughts, actions and attitudes takes discipline, but brings abundant joy because we serve a great, holy, loving and perfect God!	
Gratitude	To Express deep appreciation to God for who He is and His bountiful blessings. To acknowledge God's help even in our trials and difficulties. Write down the good things God has done for you. Practice thanking God for all things that may hurt us, or prove difficult for a time. Practice thanking and encouraging others in our life, and choose grateful thankful thoughts.
Celebration	To exalt God with joy and praise by bringing attention to what God is doing in our lives, the Church, and the world. To express happiness as a community for answers to prayer, births, marriages, or other milestones. Celebrate alone or in company with others. Keep celebrations.
Worship	To glorify God and enjoy Him forever, and to put Him first in our life. To exalt and praise God together as a Church. It involves participating regularly in corporate worship with other believers, and observing set times for praise of God through song, reading, instruments or dance.
Sabbath and Rest	To set aside one day in seven for worship and rest from our work, remembering that God rested after creation and that Israel was given rest from slavery, and there is perfect rest in Christ who frees us from the bondage of sin.
God's Word:	<i>1 Thessalonians 5:18, Romans 12:1, Psalm 29:2, Exodus 33:14, Mark 2:27</i>

TO PRAY EFFECTIVELY	
Prayer is at the heart of our relationship with God. Sometimes our prayers become repetitive and unfocused. There are many ways to pray – prayer walking, praying scripture, reading liturgical prayers. Here are a few ways you can pray as a spiritual discipline.	
Prayer Partners	To be accountable and disciplined in our prayers by designating a time and place to meet with another person to pray on a regular basis. Choose one person to meet with regularly, and share prayer requests. Intercede together for world concerns, missions and the church.
Fasting	To abstain from food, drink (or other activities) in order to focus on an extended time of prayer, to train ourselves to be satisfied in God, to temporarily detach from dependence on worldly things. You may choose to fast from all food for a meal or more, or from a specific food such as meat. You can also fast from shopping, media, internet, sweets or other activity that would give you time to pray and focus on God.
Watching	To refrain from sleeping in order to pray for a heavy concern, or to have extended uninterrupted time to pray to God. To eagerly await God's answer, knowing it could come at any time. Set an alarm to wake at a fixed time in order to pray, and wait on God.
Fixed Prayer	To set aside a specific period of time each day for extended prayer to ensure that it happens, or to interrupt work or other activities at regular intervals for the more important work of prayer. Develop a list of prayer needs and set times to pray.
God's Word:	<i>Matthew 6:16-18, Matthew 26:38-40, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Deuteronomy 4:7</i>



- Which category of spiritual disciplines most reflects the desire of your heart today?

- Read Mark 6:30-31. Can you identify with this passage? Do you feel God calling you to 'go to a desolate place and rest'?

- What spiritual discipline do you need to begin to practice in your life? What steps do you need to take to get started?

SUMMARY

- ❖ The Bible teaches us that spiritual training is of great value, and we should pursue growth in our walk with God.
- ❖ Spiritual disciplines are the means by which we train ourselves for godliness, and the intentional actions we take to depend on God for our deepest needs.
- ❖ Spiritual disciplines are for all Christians, at every stage of our walk with God. They are for new believers as well as leaders, those who are weary and those who thirst for God.
- ❖ Spiritual disciplines are not the means by which we buy favour with God, rather they should increase our love for God and others, and our intimacy with God.
- ❖ There are many spiritual disciplines practiced by Christians today, and throughout the history of the Church. Some include prayer, Bible reading, memorization, self-examination, confession, fasting, serving, giving, and worship.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In this lesson spiritual disciplines are compared to physical fitness exercises, eating of food to satisfy what you crave, a school that will advance your understanding, and a seed that is sown in order to produce a harvest. Which metaphor resonates most with you?

2. There is a misunderstanding among some people that practising many disciplines, or doing a lot of holy things, will cause God to love us more or grant us what we desire. Why is this untrue?

3. One danger of practising spiritual disciplines is that we rely on the practice itself to have power, or upon our own perfect execution of the discipline. The power is found in our renewed and deepened relationship with God, and HIS ability to change us. What are some signs that a person is not practising spiritual disciplines with the right motives?



LEADER TO LEADER

QUOTATIONS FROM LEADERS PAST AND PRESENT ON THE TOPIC OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

"Spiritual disciplines are means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. It means to create a space in which something can happen that you hadn't planned or counted on."

-Henri Nouwen, Christian Writer

"A spiritual discipline is an intentionally directed action which places us in a position to receive from God the power to do what we cannot accomplish on our own."

- Richard Foster, Christian writer

"I find it best to incorporate spiritual disciplines into my daily life. I practice gratitude while at the market, I confess sin while washing clothing, I meditate on spiritual food while I prepare meals for my family."

- Medina, mother

"Spending time with God in His Word and in prayer is essential to effective ministry. I never have felt that I have spent enough time in spiritual disciplines. The tyranny of the urgent too often wins out! It is an on-going battle with the enemy who loves to steal quality time from us, or deceive us into thinking we are self-sufficient."

- David, Pastor

I could not be a leader and disobey the mandates the Bible lays out for leaders. I believe the Lord would not honour my service to Him if I was unfaithful to His commands. As I immerse myself in the Word, study the Word, fellowship with other believers, pray, tithe and live as righteously as I can with a mind to keeping short accounts with God concerning my sin, I believe God transforms me. I can't feel it happening but as I look back on my life doing these things has changed me and I believe, made me fit for His service.

- Shawna, Christian Ministry Director

"Spiritual disciplines are provided for our good, not for our bondage. They are privileges to be used, not duties to be performed...They are absolutely necessary for growth in our Christians lives. But we should promote them as benefits, not as duties. Perhaps we should stop talking about being 'faithful' to have a quiet time with God each day, as if we were doing something to earn a reward. It would be better to talk about the privilege of spending time with the God of the universe and the importance for our own sake being consistent in that practice."

- Jerry Bridges, Christian Writer

"The first part of church leadership is being an example of what a church member's life should be, so the first way in which the practice of spiritual discipline enriches my ability to be a leader is by qualifying me to lead. Besides that, spiritual disciplines keep me abiding in Christ and so qualifying to bear fruit as a branch bears the fruit of the vine. For disciplines to be effective, you need a time, a place and a plan. I plan portions of God's word to read, and select a specific time and place to meet with God to ensure that it happens."

- Michael, Pastor