discipleship essentials

LESSON ESSENTIALS

LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 1: PERSONAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Christians typically like rules. We like knowing that we are doing the right things to please God and we hope that He will reward us when we do those right things. While this isn't an entirely false perspective, it is certainly not the right motivation for practicing personal spiritual disciplines. Read on to learn more about true motivations for spiritual disciplines in our life!

We believe we are saved by grace. We ought to believe that the Lord continues to lead, direct, shape, and influence us by grace, too, and a means of His communicating that grace to us is our practice of personal spiritual disciplines.

When we exercise the disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, fasting, worship, service, and so on, we are changed. Not simply because we have completed an item on our to-do list; rather, the Lord blesses us by communicating His grace to us through those disciplines so that we can be changed by Him.

You will be changed from the inside out as the Holy Spirit reveals Himself to you as you read the Word of God, pray, sing, serve, and more.

If you want to get into better physical shape or health, you may buy exercise equipment or pair of running shoes. If you want a physical sickness in your life to improve you may buy the medication recommended to you by your doctor. You may buy a textbook to learn something, tool to complete a project or seed to grow a crop. However, just purchasing these life-changing items does not fix our problems. No: we must consistently, regularly, whole-heartedly attend to the use of these items if we are hoping to see an improvement or a change.

So it is with the spiritual disciplines. There are many activities that can be considered spiritual disciplines, and we will not list all of those here. In this lesson, our goal is to find the motivation within ourselves to commit to practicing the disciplines. When we exercise the disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, fasting, worship, service, and so on, we are changed. Not simply because we have completed an item on our to-do list; rather, the Lord blesses us by communicating His grace to us through those disciplines so that we can be changed by Him. In some ways, it is like learning a new language by being immersed in the new culture. Just being exposed to it does not mean you've learned the language. However, by committed and consistent exposure to, and practice of, the new language, that new culture becomes a part of you. Your ears become attuned to the nuances of the new language, your mouth becomes accustomed to making new sounds, and your mind holds onto the new phrases, grammar, and vocabulary you need to communicate well. Slowly but surely, you are changed and influenced from the inside out.

By posturing yourself to be 'immersed' in the Spirit through the spiritual disciplines, you are giving yourself a similar opportunity to hear the Word and respond to it, to speak the Words and to understand the vocabulary of the Bible. You will be changed from the inside out as the Holy Spirit reveals Himself to you as you read the Word of God, pray, sing, serve, and more.

Because we are human and our hearts can be fickle, there are times that doing personal devotions will feel like rote obedience with no heart behind it at all. Some may ask if they should even continue to have their quiet times, or to attend to any personal devotions if they are in a season when they don't 'feel' like doing them. Still, even if there seems to be no emotional or spiritual response from within us, we know that the Word of God never returns empty but rather always does what it was sent out to do (Isaiah 55:11). That means that when you read the Word, even if you do not feel like doing so, the Lord can use His Word to administer grace to your soul and to draw you nearer to Him. Additionally, it is so important to work at setting new habits of personal disciplines by doing it consistently, until the emotions do come and you do find yourself hungry for those times of praying, reading, singing, or meditating. You need to work hard at setting the routine of the

disciplines so that you can teach yourself how to hear, listen, receive, and experience all that the Lord has in store for you.

Does it sound wrong to say that spiritual disciplines take work? Does it sound unspiritual to say that you need to teach yourself to practice the disciplines and to learn to keep them in your daily routine? Consider any other human relationship in your life. Has the friendship developed on its own with no effort from you? Do you not put in time, energy, devotion, and planning to the relationship? Do you really think you would develop any kind of lasting bond with another person if you did not intentionally set aside time to talk, or to visit, or to investigate the things that they enjoy? No; if you want to make a relationship work in a lasting way, you invest time and hard work. It is very much the same in your relationship with Christ. Simply having a Bible does not mean that you know Him. Simply passively attending services at your church does not mean that you are near to Him. Make the effort; take the time; practice the spiritual disciplines; and then watch how the Lord transforms your life by His grace through the time you take to be in His presence.

For our sake, Jesus went to the cross. Now it is up to us, not out of duty and not out of a sense of debt, but out of gratitude, to be willing to lay down our time and distractions so that we can hear from Him and worship Him and spend these times of spiritual disciplines with our great Lord and Saviour.

For our sake, Jesus went to the cross. Now it is up to us, not out of duty and not out of a sense of debt, but out of gratitude, to be willing to lay down our time and distractions so that we can hear from Him and worship Him and spend these times of spiritual disciplines with our great Lord and Saviour.

IN REVIEW

- Practicing the spiritual disciplines should not be viewed as a legalistic way to earn favour from God, but rather as a means of grace that God uses in our lives to transform us.

- Spiritual disciplines take intentionality and effort both in setting the habit and in getting the most out of them.

- Just like good human relationships don't 'just happen', our relationship with God also doesn't 'just happen'. We need to diligently pursue the Lord and respond to Him when He reveals Himself to us.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Which spiritual discipline do you find to be most helpful in your personal times of devotions? Are there any that are less helpful? How could you add variety to your personal devotions time so that you more fully draw near and receive the grace that the Lord has for you?

- If you have been viewing your personal devotions time as a 'checklist' item or as a way of earning favour with God, confess that to Him now, asking the Lord to change your heart and to help you to see that all the blessings He bestows are from His grace, not our own works.

- Is your heart cold towards your relationship with the Lord? Spend some time praying and asking for a heart that returns to its first love. Also, consider confessing this to a mentor, pastor, or godly friend and ask for them to hold you accountable in your pursuit of the spiritual disciplines and a reigniting of your love for Christ.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All other content is © 2019 Trans World Radio Canada, and may be used in any way you like as long as you use it with the purpose of reaching the world for Christ and do not charge for the use of the material. See more license details at www.discipleshipessentials.org/licensing.