

Arbor Foundations
21 – Spiritual Disciplines
Mar 10, 2019 – John Raquet

Key Ideas / Biblical Basis

1 Timothy 4:7b-8: *...discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; 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.* (NASB)

NKJV: exercise yourself toward godliness

ESV: train yourself for godliness

Something is a spiritual discipline if it is done:

- 1) Routinely (consistently over a long period of time)
- 2) For the purpose of growing in Godliness

What are examples of non-spiritual disciplines (things done routinely for the purpose of something other than growing in Godliness)?

Exercising discipline by itself is drudgery. Exercising discipline for a particular purpose (Godliness) is delight.

God uses three “catalysts” for changing us and conforming us to Christlikeness (Whitney):

1. People (Proverbs 27:17: *Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.*)
2. Circumstances (Romans 8:28: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*)
3. Spiritual Disciplines

Contrast between spiritual disciplines and the other two catalysts for change:

- Spiritual disciplines work from the inside out, rather than the outside in like people and circumstances
- We have a measure of choice in our involvement with spiritual disciplines

Key scriptural passages (in addition to 1 Timothy 4:7-8, shown above):

Hebrews 5:12-14

- Example of what happens when we don't exercise spiritual disciplines
- V. 14: constant practice (ESV) is key

Hebrews 12:7-11

- Discipline described in verses 7-10 slightly different than what we've been considering as spiritual disciplines, in that here discipline is describes as something God is doing to us.
- Principles from v. 11:
 - o Exercising spiritual disciplines is not always pleasant in the moment
 - o Results come "later"—long term, not short term

Do we cause ourselves to grow through exercising spiritual disciplines?

- Not really—maturity is a result of the Spirit working within us (Gal 5:22-23)
- Whitney: The Spiritual Disciplines are like channels of God's transforming grace. As we place ourselves in them to seek communion with Christ, His grace flows to us and we are changed.
 - o Like Bartimaeus (Luke 18:35-43)
 - o Like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

There are many things that could be considered to be spiritual disciplines. Here are some of the more common ones:

- A. Absorbing God's word
 - a. Actively listening to preaching of God's word
 - b. Reading God's word
 - c. Studying God's word
 - d. Meditating on God's word
 - e. Memorizing God's word
- B. Prayer
 - a. With others
 - b. Individually
- C. Participating in the body of Christ (the church)
 - a. Worship
 - b. Pursuing the "one anothers"
 - i. Serve one another (Gal 5:13)
 - ii. Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16)
 - iii. Love one another (1 Peter 1:22)
 - iv. Encourage one another (Hebrews 3:13)
 - v. Comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18)
 - vi. Etc.
- D. Fasting
 - Why should I fast? What are biblical purposes? (Donald Whitney)
 - o To strengthen prayer; foundational for all the other purposes; the two are often linked in scripture, and taking the emphasis off of the physical seems to intensify the urgency of our pleadings with God in prayer; God has ordained a way by which we can show urgency and earnestness; the fasting itself does not win God, but it can intensify the prayers that do (Ezra 8:21-23; before Ezra brought a group of

exiles back to Jerusalem); ²¹ Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. ²² For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, “The hand of our God *is* upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath *are* against all those who forsake Him.” ²³ So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.

- To seek God’s guidance; Acts 14; Paul and Barnabas prayed with fasting before appointing elders in the church
- To express grief; Judges 20, the Israelites wept and fasted because 40,000 brothers had gone down in battle
- To seek deliverance or protection; II Chron. 20; King Jehoshaphat learned that a huge army was bearing down on him, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah
- To express repentance and the return to God; I Sam. 7; Samuel preached against idolatry, and the people fasted and confessed that day; (biblical fasting without repentance does not really exist)
- To humble oneself before the Lord; fasting is not necessarily the sign of a humble heart (Pharisees), but it should be an expression of humility; I Kings 21; King Ahab actually humbled himself with sackcloth and fasting and avoided disaster at God’s hand of judgment
- To express concern for the work of God; Neh. 1:2-4; ...Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. ³ And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province *are* there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem *is* also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.”

⁴ So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *for many* days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

- To minister to the needs of others; Isaiah 58:1-9; Fasting as a duty is worthless without a humble, obedient heart. Instead of turning us inward as perhaps it could do, fasting should result in obedience to God and love for men displayed in concrete action.
- To overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to God; Christ in Matt. 4
- To express love and worship to God; Anna in Luke 2:36-37; Whitney – “Fasting can be an expression of finding your greatest pleasure and enjoyment in life from God. That’s the case when disciplining yourself to fast means that you love God more than food, that seeking Him is more important to you than eating.”

So What?

There has always been a direct correlation between the Spiritual Disciplines and godliness. History has borne this out.

If we neglect spiritual disciplines:

- Little spiritual fruit and much remaining sin
- Lack of peace and joy that comes with righteousness
- Whitney: So many professing Christians are so spiritually undisciplined that they seem to have little fruit and power in their lives. I've seen men and women who discipline themselves for the purpose of excelling in their profession discipline themselves very little "for the purpose of godliness." I've seen Christians who are faithful to the church of God, who frequently demonstrate genuine enthusiasm for the things of God, and who dearly love the Word of God, trivialize their effectiveness for the Kingdom of God through lack of discipline. Spiritually they are a mile wide and an inch deep. There are no deep, time-worn channels of communing discipline between them and God. They have dabbled in everything but disciplined themselves in nothing.

There is freedom in embracing the spiritual disciplines.

- Analogy: An accomplished musician, who has through the discipline of practice over many years, has the freedom to be able to play challenging and beautiful music. Those who have not practiced in this way do not have such freedom.
- Freedom is the reward of discipline

For Further Study

Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life, by Donald Whitney