



SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES



SERIES INTRO

A mighty river of grace flows throughout history. This river is the river of life, which flows toward the healing of the nations and the restoration of all things. Those who swim in this river experience rest, refreshment, hope for the future and strength for today. They are reconciled to God and set apart for good works. They live deeply grounded lives in a world where many are tossed to and fro. They know how to pray and listen and endure. To be sure, they are not perfect, but those who swim in the river of grace are being conformed into the image of Jesus.

Jesus lived, died and rose again to make a way for sinners to swim in the eternal current of God's grace. And as a living Savior, Jesus invites us to enter that river for our sake and for the sake of the world.

Sadly, many Christians trade the richness of swimming for a life spent watching. This happens for all sorts of reasons. It can feel safer to stand on the sandy bank and watch. We might not know, or we might have forgotten, the strokes that help us swim. Other things may seem more important. Linger in prayer may feel like a waste of time. And who wants to study the Bible when the practical value of Bible study is uncertain to us? Sure, there was a time when we were energetic and eager about our faith. Sure, there was a time when a life of sacrifice and compassion, mission and evangelism seemed compelling. But now we are older, and the water looks cold.

Yet the invitation from Jesus remains the same: Enter the river and swim.

So the question becomes, “What spiritual disciplines help us swim?”

Our next series at Faith is about answering that question. In this series, we will discover spiritual disciplines like prayer, Bible study, intentional submission to Jesus, and generosity that untold numbers of Christians have practiced in order to swim with Jesus in the eternal current of God’s grace.

As we prepare for this series, I’d like for you to think for a moment about some of the heroes of the Christian faith, people such as the Apostle Paul, Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, John Calvin, George Whitefield, Mother Teresa, John Bunyan, Lottie Moon, Harriet Tubman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Corrie Ten Boom, Charles Spurgeon, Hudson Taylor, and Elisabeth Elliot. How did these Christians make such an impact for Jesus? How did they develop such a depth of character? It wasn’t that God somehow gave them something he hasn’t given to the rest of us. It was that these men and women practiced spiritual disciplines as a means of abiding in Jesus, and they produced much fruit.

You may be wondering, “What is a spiritual discipline?” A spiritual discipline is a practice found in the Bible that helps Christians abide in Jesus. In saying this, it is important to be clear: we cannot earn a relationship with Jesus. We cannot make the river of grace flow, but we can wade into the water. We can position ourselves to receive what God is continually giving. We can practice the strokes that help us swim.

The very word discipline can be a turnoff. Who wants to be disciplined? Who wants to practice? The image of a ten-year-old boy slouching at a piano while his buddies play basketball outside comes to mind. Yet our character is shaped by what we continually do. We become what we practice, and the alternative to discipline is distraction and distress. So in the coming months we are going to practice several spiritual disciplines that help us abide in Jesus. Our prayer is that this series finds our church getting swept up in God’s eternal river of grace for the sake of our souls and for the sake of the world.

Grace and peace,
Pastor Charlie

SMALL GROUPS

AT FAITH

What is a small group?

Small groups at Faith are small gatherings of people from Faith who meet regularly for friendship, prayer and Bible study.

Each small group is unique because it is shaped by the people who attend. However, at the heart of each small group is a desire to see tight-knit community form that is marked by a growing love for Jesus and for the other people in the small group.

Why should I join a small group?

We are made for friendship with God and others. When we are not known and loved by others, we suffer because we are not experiencing all that God created us to experience. Additionally, life is too difficult to journey alone. Therefore, small groups are a place where we can connect in friendship with other people through the ups and downs of life.

How do I get connected to a small group?

The easiest way to get connected to a small group is to click on “Small Groups” in the Faith Church app or go to faithchurchfortcollins.org/smallgroups. You can also sign up on Sunday by filling out the Connect Card or stopping by the Connection Center. Finally, if you would like to join a small group, you can call the church at **970-226-2095**.

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WEEK ONE

JESUS

Main Passages:

John 15:1-5
Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus is the great end of practicing spiritual disciplines. When all is said and done, our purpose in committing to any spiritual discipline is not becoming better people; our purpose is abiding in Jesus. Spiritual growth and maturity are marvelous benefits of practicing spiritual disciplines, but they are side benefits. The heart behind practicing spiritual disciplines must be seeing, savoring and enjoying Jesus.

It is so important to say this clearly at the outset of our journey. To be unclear about the goal behind practicing spiritual disciplines could set this series in the wrong direction. So again, we do not practice spiritual disciplines to become better people. We do not practice spiritual disciplines to become more mature Christians. We practice spiritual disciplines to know and enjoy Jesus. We practice spiritual disciplines to abide in him. We practice spiritual disciplines not to earn God's love, but because we want to enjoy the God who already loves us.

OPENING QUESTION

- Talk about a time when you did something for the wrong reason.

INTO THE BIBLE

- Read John 15:1-5. What stands out to you from these verses?
- In these verses, Jesus says that he is the vine and we are the branches. What does this metaphor reveal about our relationship with Jesus?
- Our role as branches is to abide in the vine. What are the results of abiding in the vine? How might spiritual disciplines be tools to help us abide in Jesus?
- Read Matthew 11:28-30. What stands out to you from these verses?

- According to Jesus, we are supposed to take his yoke upon us and learn from him. What does this mean and what are the results of doing this?
- Jesus practiced all the spiritual disciplines that we will look at in this series. What do you think Jesus wants us to learn from him about spiritual disciplines? What is the result of coming to Jesus and learning from him?
- Read Mark 10:46-52. Bartimaeus put himself in Jesus' path. What does Bartimaeus' story teach us about what we do to encounter Jesus? How might the spiritual disciplines be tools that place us in Jesus' path?
- When have you been in need like Bartimaeus? What did you do to place yourself in Jesus' path?
- Read Philippians 3:7-8. Based on this passage, what is the main goal for practicing spiritual disciplines?

- Why is it inadequate to say that the goal of practicing spiritual disciplines is spiritual growth and maturity?

INTO YOUR LIFE

- What things do you currently do to help you abide in Jesus?
- What has happened in your life as you have intentionally spent time with Jesus?
- We are at the front end of a journey to discover spiritual disciplines that help us abide in Jesus. Complete the following statements:
 - As I think about discovering spiritual disciplines as a means to abiding in Jesus, I am...
 - As a result of this series, I hope...
 - My prayer for this series is...

- Think about people in your life who need to encounter Jesus. What could you do during this series to share with them what you are learning?

NOTES AND PRAYER

WEEK TWO

SUBMISSION

Main Passage:
Matthew 19:16-30

Submission is at the heart of following Jesus. We can't declare Jesus is Lord without bending our will to his. Only in submission are we truly following Jesus. Only in surrender do we affirm Jesus' goodness and wisdom because in submission we say to Jesus, "You are a good and wise King."

Submission to Jesus is a key spiritual discipline that unlocks all the other spiritual disciplines. Why? Practicing any spiritual discipline is an act of submission. It is a way to say to Jesus, "I trust that you are wise, loving and good, and this discipline is my way of surrendering to you."

A passage that invites us to a life of surrender is Mark 8:34. Here Jesus makes an astonishing invitation: *If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*

We live in a culture that instinctively draws back from these words. We are more comfortable with an invitation to self-fulfillment or control than we are with an invitation to submission, surrender and self-denial. And yet Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and to follow him. This means Christians must embrace the reality that we do not get to have our own way. We are not the captains of our destiny. Our happiness is not found in getting what we want, but in surrendering to Jesus and doing what he wants. This is the surest way to life.

OPENING QUESTION

- When you think of the word submission, what comes to mind?

INTO THE BIBLE

- Read Matthew 19:16-30. What stands out to you from these verses?
- Jesus asked the young man to do something that required radical submission. Why did Jesus do this? Why is submission a key spiritual discipline?
- Read Mark 8:34, Philippians 2:1-8 and Luke 22:39-46. Based on these passages, how would you define and describe the spiritual discipline of submission to Jesus?
- What excuses do you think the young man gave for not surrendering to Jesus?

- What did the young man miss out on by not practicing the spiritual discipline of submission?
- Jesus says that it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Why can wealth make submission to Jesus more difficult?
- The Bible is clear. When we submit to Jesus, we enter into a new, wonderful freedom—the freedom of giving up our will and trusting him. What happens when we don't submit to Jesus?

INTO YOUR LIFE

- In what ways are you like the young man in Matthew 19?
- What hard things has Jesus asked you to do?

- What are some things that make it difficult for you to submit to Jesus?
- What is one thing you can do this week to practice submission to Jesus? What can this group do to support you?
- Jesus said that we need to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. Practically, what does this mean for you?

NOTES AND PRAYER



WEEK THREE

BIBLE STUDY

Main Passages:

John 1:1-4, 14
2 Timothy 3:10-17

Jesus is the complete and climactic revelation of God. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. Jesus is the Word our souls need for growth and godliness. But Jesus isn't physically present with us today. After his resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven and now sits at the right hand of the Father. So how do we access this life-giving Word that we desperately need?

The answer is simple: we create and sustain rhythms that help us encounter Jesus, the incarnate Word, through God's written Word, the Bible.

The Bible is inspired by God, it's living and active, it transforms our minds and it brings about maturity. Reading and reflecting on the Bible is one of the primary means of God's ongoing grace because the Bible is God's perfectly inspired self-revelation. Without the Bible we would not see the beauty and goodness of Jesus. Without the Bible we would not know the depth of our sin. So until we see Jesus face to face, the Bible is our best tool for seeing our Savior.

There are countless creative routines for encountering Jesus through God's written Word. We can read a chapter every morning at breakfast. We can read through the Bible in a year. We can memorize passages. We can pick out a verse to meditate on throughout the day. We can listen to sermons and podcasts as we work out or run

errands. The potential practices around encountering Jesus through the Bible are limitless.

This week we are going to explore the spiritual discipline of Bible study. Personally, I have found the ESV Bible app to be very helpful in my own practice of Bible study. The ESV Bible app has various reading plans, and the app will send you daily reminders to read the section of Scripture that is planned for each day.

OPENING QUESTION

- Other than the Bible, what is your favorite book?

INTO THE BIBLE

- Read John 1:1-4, 14. What stands out to you from these verses?
- Why do you think Jesus is called the Word?
- Read 2 Timothy 3:10–17 and Psalm 119:105-112. How is God’s Word described in these passages?

- Read Romans 12:1-2, James 1:22-25 and Colossians 3:16. What stands out to you from these passages as it relates to Bible study?
- Why do you think regular Bible reading is essential to experiencing Jesus?

INTO YOUR LIFE

- What is your favorite passage in the Bible? Why is that passage so special to you?
- Describe a time when some passage of Scripture became a practical help to you in some difficult conversation, decision, or temptation to sin.
- What thoughts or ideas permeate your mind? What would it look like to have a mind that is saturated with the Bible?

- Memorizing Scripture is a great way to saturate our minds with God's Word. Is there a specific passage that God is asking you to memorize in this season of your life?
- Do you have a regular time of reading and reflecting on God's Word? If so, what does this practice look like for you?
- What could you do this week to cultivate a deeper desire to study God's Word?

NOTES AND PRAYER



WEEK FOUR

PRAYER

Main Passage:
Matthew 6:5-15

Prayer is intrinsically simple and relational. At its core, prayer is a simple conversation with God. The simple and relational dynamic of prayer doesn't mean that we approach God casually. In prayer, we must always remember that God is our Creator and we are his creation. God is our Lord and we are his servants. God is the King of Heaven and we are his happy subjects.

Yet prayer isn't a timid groveling before a grumpy sovereign. Jesus says we are his friends, and the Bible paints a picture of a God who loves us and welcomes us to boldly approach him in prayer. So prayer is an open-handed, humble conversation. In prayer we express our desires, and we wait to receive God's answer. For this reason, I often practice the discipline of prayer with my hands open and my palms facing up. I have found this physical posture with my body helps to remind my soul to be willing to receive what God gives and to let go of what God asks me to release.

It has often been said that if anyone would have been fine without regular prayer, it would have been Jesus. But again and again in the gospels we catch glimpses of a prayer life that was not only personal but also corporate. Jesus often drew away to pray alone, and he often gathered his disciples together to pray. This model of personal and corporate prayer was picked up by the men and women who led the early church and since then prayer has continued as a key spiritual discipline.

OPENING QUESTION

- Who is someone you love talking to?

INTO THE BIBLE

- Read Matthew 6:5-15. What stands out to you from these verses?
- What does Jesus teach about prayer in Matthew 6:5-15?
- Read Matthew 14:23, 26:36-44; Mark 1:35, 6:46; and Luke 5:16, 6:12, 9:28. List some observations about Jesus' practice of prayer.
- Finish this sentence: Jesus saw prayer as...

- Read Acts 4:24, 12:5, 13:1-5, 14:23, 16:25. List some observations about the early church's practice of prayer.
- Finish this sentence: The early church saw prayer as...
- Read Romans 12:12, Colossians 4:2, Ephesians 6:18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17. What do these passages reveal about the importance of prayer for all believers?
- Finish this sentence: I see prayer as...
- In the New Testament we are called to pray without ceasing. What does this look like?
- Read Hebrews 4:15-16. Based on this passage, how should you approach God in prayer?

INTO YOUR LIFE

- Tim Keller wrote, “Everywhere God is, prayer is. Since God is everywhere and infinitely great, prayer must be all-pervasive in our lives.”¹ Describe a time or place where it didn’t seem likely that God was there, but you found yourself sensing the desire to pray.
- What can you do to remind yourself that God is always with you?
- What can you do to remind yourself to talk to God more often throughout your day?
- Describe what the spiritual discipline of prayer looks like in your life today.
- Describe what you would like the spiritual discipline of prayer to look like in your life.

1 *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* by Tim Keller

- List some steps that you want to take to cultivate a richer life of prayer.
- Complete the following statement: In order to cultivate a richer life of prayer, I want God to...
- Think of one person who doesn't yet have access to God because they do not know Jesus. Start praying intentionally for them this week. Ask God to give you creative ideas for sharing Jesus with them, and then do what God says.

NOTES AND PRAYER

WEEK FIVE

DEEP FRIENDSHIP

Main Passages:

Luke 6:12-16

Acts 16:1-5

Romans 16:1-16

Sadly, many Christians feel lukewarm about engaging in deep Christian community. The thinking is often, “Who has time to form deep and abiding friendships? Do I really need to bother with a small group? Can’t I just show up to church when I feel like it? My life is busy.”

Yet, the pattern of Jesus and the early church is one of deep and abiding friendship. Jesus was known, loved and encouraged by his friends. He spent three years doing life and ministry with his friends. He went to his friends’ houses for dinner and wept with them when

they wept. Paul often wrote about how he longed to be with his Christian friends. In 1 Thessalonians 3:10 we see that Paul prayed earnestly to see other Christians face to face.

In the Bible, deep friendship is a discipline because deep friendship doesn’t come easy and it isn’t developed overnight. The author of Hebrews encourages Christians to continue to meet together, and James reminds believers to confess their sins to each other. Why doesn’t deep friendship come easy or quick? It is hard to be vulnerable, and vulnerability requires deep trust. Trust grows like trees, not weeds. This means deep Christian friendship is more like a marriage than it is like gathering together to watch a game. This isn’t to say that deep Christian friendship doesn’t include watching a game or talking about surface level stuff. But Christian friendship also includes being known as a sinner and being encouraged in your faith. This means your sin and your weakness must be known, and this only happens over time.

OPENING QUESTION

- What are the qualities of a great friend?

INTO THE BIBLE

- Read Luke 6:12-16, 9:28, 10:38-42 and John 15:15. What observation do you have about the discipline of friendship from Jesus?
- Read Acts 16:1-5; Romans 16:1-16; 2 John 12; 1 Thessalonians 3:10; Hebrews 3:12-13, 10:24-25 and James 5:16. What observations about the discipline of friendship do you have from the early church?
- In Hebrews 10:24-25 we are called to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. What encourages you to live a life of love and good works?

- In James 5:16 we are called to confess our sins to one another. What does confession of sin teach you about how to practice the discipline of Christian friendship? What must be present in a relationship for confession of sin to take place?

INTO YOUR LIFE

- How might Faith Church be different if the whole church engaged in the discipline of deep friendship?
- What keeps people from engaging in the discipline of deep friendship?
- What steps might God be inviting you to take to further practice the discipline of deep friendship?
- Ask Jesus to bring to mind one person at Faith in whom you are called to invest deeply. Who is that person? What steps could you take to deepen that relationship?

- Think of a few people at Faith who are spiritually weak and too fragile to fight for their own faith—people who need a Christian friend to actively pursue them. Identify some practical ways you can serve them as a tangible means of God’s grace.

NOTES AND PRAYER

WEEK SIX

CORPORATE WORSHIP

Main Passages:

Acts 2:42-47

Revelation 7:9-10

To worship God with other people is to encounter reality. It is to know, feel, experience and respond to the great Triune God. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the objects of corporate worship, and if God is our God, then worship with the saints must have a priority in our lives.

This doesn't mean that we haven't been made for private worship, but the pattern of both the Old and New Testaments and the culmination of history is a great multitude gathered together in worship. In light of this reality, Christians have wisely practiced the spiritual discipline of gathering together

weekly to be encouraged in their faith and to look forward to the great day when they will worship Jesus with the saints.

Corporate worship is a very life-giving spiritual discipline because it brings God's Word, prayer, worship and fellowship together with a pointed Godward focus. There are elements of the Christian joy and power for life that can't be experienced without corporate worship. This is one reason why Satan often tempts us to not make worship a priority or makes it difficult to make it to church on Sunday. Certainly, there are times and circumstances where we must miss gathering in worship, but we miss out on greater joy, encouragement and nourishment if our church attendance is random or infrequent. Martin Luther was right when he wrote, "At home, in my own house, there is no warmth or vigor in me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through."¹

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Quoted in *Worship by the Book* by D.A. Carson

OPENING QUESTION

- What is one of your favorite places on earth? Why is that place so special to you?

INTO THE BIBLE

- Read Acts 2:42-47, John 4:23, Revelation 7:9-10 and Psalm 73:25-28. What observation do you have about the spiritual discipline of corporate worship from these passages?
- Look at 1 Thessalonians 3:10. From all of Paul's writings in the New Testament, we see that Paul was a gifted writer. His writings were (and are) precious and life-changing. And yet, writing alone was not enough for him—he had a deep desire to be with God's people. Why do you think Paul so desperately wanted to be with people?
- Look at Acts 2:42-47. Here we see that Christians were going to the temple day by day and praising God. Why do you think the early church placed such an emphasis on practicing the spiritual discipline of corporate worship? What are some benefits of worshipping Jesus with other people?

- Look at Matthew 18:20. Why do you think God's presence is more palpable when people are gathered together?

INTO YOUR LIFE

- Describe a time that you experienced a more palpable encounter with God in corporate worship.
- Describe a time when you were indifferent to the spiritual discipline of corporate worship.
- Imagine a friend expresses to you a disillusionment with corporate worship. She is beginning to think there isn't a need to go to church when she can watch services online in her pjs without awkward conversations. She has become convinced that watching church online is the same as being there in person. What might your friend be missing out on if she stops practicing the spiritual discipline of gathering together with the saints in worship? What might you say to her to help her see the benefits of worshiping Jesus with other people?

- Satan works powerfully to keep people from gathering together in worship. What ways does Satan work in your life to keep you from practicing the spiritual discipline of corporate worship? What can you do the night before or the morning of corporate worship to battle Satan?
- Describe how corporate worship strengthens your relationship with Jesus.
- What steps might God be inviting you to take to further practice the discipline of corporate worship?
- Ask Jesus to bring to mind one person who needs to begin coming weekly to Faith with you. What steps could you take this week to invite that person to join you?

NOTES AND PRAYER

WEEK SEVEN

GIVING

Main Passages:

Acts 4:32-37
2 Corinthians 8:1-15;
9:1-15

At the heart of the gospel is a giving God. God the Father gave us his Son, God the Son gave his life, and God the Spirit gives conviction of sin and new life in Jesus. When we consider all that God has given, we quickly realize nothing compares to being as generous as God.

But God's generosity doesn't end with himself. The Bible teaches that we are made in God's image, which means we have been created to reflect God's generosity. Furthermore, those who have experienced new life in Jesus are adopted into God's family. As is the case with

all families, there are certain characteristics that define God's family. One of these characteristics is generosity, so giving is a hallmark spiritual discipline for Christians.

There are many benefits to practicing the spiritual discipline of giving. It empowers us to loosen our grasp on the stuff of this world. It places our treasure in heaven. It frees the soul from selfishness and greed. It blesses other people and alleviates suffering in our world. But the best benefit of giving is that it tunes our hearts to God's heart. As we give, we become more like Jesus. This is one reason why God loves "a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7), and this is why the New Testament boldly proclaims that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

It is important to say that giving is a discipline all of God's children are invited to practice. This needs to be said because we have a tendency to think, "We can't participate in this discipline because we have to get out of debt, or pay for school, or repair the car, or buy groceries, or save for retirement." In other words, we tend to think the discipline of giving is for people with extra money. But this is not true.

The Bible clearly reveals that God will bless us in every way so we can be generous in every way. God is able to make all grace abound to us, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, we may abound in every good work.

OPENING QUESTION

- What is the best gift you have ever received?

INTO THE BIBLE

- Read Acts 4:32-37. What stands out to you from this passage? Based on this passage, how would you describe the early church's practice of the spiritual discipline of giving?

- Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 and 2 Corinthians 9:1-15. What stands out to you from these verses?
- How does Paul describe giving among the churches of Macedonia?
- Based on 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, what promises does God make to those who practice the spiritual discipline of giving?
- The Bible clearly teaches that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). What are the benefits of practicing the discipline of cheerful generosity?
- Read Matthew 17:27, 22:21 and Luke 16:9. Summarize Jesus' view of money.

INTO YOUR LIFE

- Imagine two hearts. One heart is a hoarding heart. The other is a giving heart. What does each heart treasure and value?
- Describe how you are practicing the spiritual discipline of giving?
- What most excites you about the spiritual discipline of giving?
- What things stand in the way of practicing the spiritual discipline of giving?
- What is one thing you can do to simplify your standard of living so that you can increase your giving?

- If you intentionally practice the spiritual discipline of giving, what obstacles have you had to overcome? What has helped you overcome those obstacles?
- Ask Jesus to give you a specific need to meet this week. Respond to what he lays on your heart and share with your small group how it was more blessed for you to give than to receive.

NOTES AND PRAYER

WEEK EIGHT

SERVING

Main Passages:

John 13:1-15

Acts 6:1-7

Jesus came to serve. He laid down his life to save us (Mark 10:45). When God saves us by grace through faith, we are not saved to live for ourselves. We are saved for good works that God prepared for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:8-9). Additionally, at the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to live with every true believer, and he brings a gift with him (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). These gifts are different because there are different good works that believers are destined for, but each believer receives a special gift, intended to be used to serve others (1 Peter 4:10).

The Bible is clear about Jesus' followers practicing the spiritual discipline of service. One of the clearest indications that we are abiding in Jesus is that we have a servant heart that seeks to bless people (Matthew 5:16; John 13:35). Why is this a clear indication of our connection to Jesus? Jesus transforms sinners into servants. As such, a key spiritual discipline for all Christians is serving as Jesus served. Every Christian must discover how to leverage the gifts God has given him or her to bless others. Every Christian must look for opportunities to do for one person what they wish they could do for every person. Can you imagine what would happen in our community if every Christian at Faith served like Jesus? It would be a taste of heaven here on earth!

OPENING QUESTION

- Talk about someone who served you. What do you admire about that person?

INTO THE BIBLE

- Read John 13:1-15. What stands out to you from this passage?
- Think about the fact that Jesus served Judas knowing that Judas was about to betray him. What does this teach you about practicing the spiritual discipline of serving people?
- What particular lesson was Jesus trying to teach his followers by serving them?
- Jesus reveals that his followers will serve. How does this challenge you or change the way you understand your role as a Jesus follower?

- Read Acts 6:1-7. How did the early church practice the spiritual discipline of serving?
- Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. What is the Holy Spirit's role in gifting us to serve?
- Read Romans 12:6-13. Keep in mind this is not an exhaustive list of the ways the Spirit gifts us to serve other people, but these verses do reveal that you have been gifted by God to bless others. What gifts has God given you? How are you using those gifts?

INTO YOUR LIFE

- What things keep you from serving people?
- Are you usually more concerned about being served or finding ways to serve other people?

- In what way can you see yourself serving other people and loving it? What God-given ability can you offer other people? How can you begin to more intentionally practice the spiritual discipline of serving people?
- What neighbor, family member, friend or people group do you want to be intentional about serving in the coming months?
- Who is one person who doesn't know Jesus whom you will serve regularly in hopes that they glorify God because of your good works?

NOTES AND PRAYER

WEEK NINE

EVANGELISM

Main Passages:

Matthew 28:16-20
2 Corinthians 5:20-21

We were made for evangelism. God is at work in the world rescuing sinners from Satan, sin and death, and Jesus' followers are called to join him in this rescue mission. Jesus reveals this in Matthew 28:18-20, *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*

Evangelism is the spiritual discipline that we practice to intentionally join Jesus' mission to seek and to save the lost. We practice this discipline because we believe Christians are not only called to come to Jesus but are also sent by Jesus to share the message of his love (John 20:21). We are his ambassadors, giving witness to his goodness, power and saving grace (2 Corinthians 5:20).

It's easy to get diverted or distracted from practicing the spiritual discipline of evangelism. Satan doesn't want us to share our faith. He doesn't want those he holds captive to be set free. Consequently, Satan tempts us with fear and complacency. He will tell us we don't need to share Jesus with our words; it's enough to do good works. This is a lie. Christians are called to do good works, *and* Christians are called to share The Good News.

Therefore, evangelism is an essential spiritual discipline. The primary way we practice this discipline is to intentionally share the good news of Jesus with people who do not trust him. Practicing this discipline will require that we abandon our agenda and accept God's agenda for our life. We can't just "tack evangelism on" to all the other things we'd like to do. We can't just hope that evangelism magically happens. We must say, like Jesus, "Father, your will, not mine," and then we must head out to intentionally share Jesus with other people.

In many ways this brings us full circle to where we started this series: submission to Jesus. This is a perfect place to end this series because, as we said in Week 2, practicing spiritual disciplines is an act of surrender. It is an intentional way to say to Jesus, "I trust that you are wise, and this discipline is my way of surrendering my life to you."

OPENING QUESTION

- Apart from the gospel, what is some of the best news you have ever received?

INTO THE BIBLE

- Read Matthew 28:16-20. What stands out to you from this passage?

- What mission does Jesus give to his disciples in this passage?
- Why do you think Jesus emphasized his authority when he called his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations?
- How might Jesus' words disrupt the disciples' plans for their lives?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, John 20:21, Acts 1:7-8, Luke 24:45-49, and Mark 16:15. What do these passages reveal about the spiritual discipline of evangelism?
- Read Acts 5:12-29. How would you describe the early church's commitment to the spiritual discipline of evangelism?

INTO YOUR LIFE

- How would you describe your attitude toward the spiritual discipline of evangelism?
- What fears have kept you from fulfilling the mission God has given you to make disciples?
- What steps can you take to practice the spiritual discipline of evangelism?
- What steps can you take to go on a short-term mission trip in the next year to see how the gospel is advancing in this world?
- Share the name of an unbelieving friend, family member, neighbor or co-worker that everyone in your small group can begin praying for.

- What can your small group do together to practice the spiritual discipline of evangelism?

NOTES AND PRAYER

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

PLAN: AN INTRODUCTION

Why develop a Spiritual Discipline Plan?

In short, because spiritual disciplines are the best tool we have for the most important thing: cultivating our relationship with Jesus.

Guidelines for creating your Spiritual Discipline Plan

- **Pray:** Tell Jesus you want him to guide you in creating a plan to connect more deeply with him.
- **Remember the Gospel:** In Jesus you are already loved by God. Your *Spiritual Discipline Plan* isn't a strategy to earn God's love; it's a plan to enjoy more fully the God who already fully loves you.
- **Be Brief:** Keep your plan short. If it's too long or complicated, it will be too cumbersome to practice.
- **Be Realistic:** Tailor your plan to where you are in your relationship with Jesus and where you are in your life. For example, if you currently aren't giving, don't put together a plan to give away 90% of your income. Start with 10% percent and see how that step of faith deepens your relationship with Jesus. If you have a house full of young children, don't make a plan to read the Bible for three hours every day; that's not realistic.

- **Be Specific:** Specificity will help you know if you are actually practicing spiritual disciplines. Specificity will also give Jesus room to tweak your plan. For example, don't write, "My plan is to impact people with the gospel." That's too generic. A more specific plan would be to write, "I want to start intentionally inviting friends from my gym to join me on Sundays for worship" or "I plan to start serving at-risk kids in Fort Collins through the Matthews House."
- **Look at Your *Spiritual Discipline Plan* Weekly:** Print it out. Hang it on your fridge. Put it on your mobile device as your lock screen. Look at your plan weekly, and allow Jesus to remind you of your commitment.
- **Ask God to Empower You:** Unless God works in your life, your work is in vain. So ask him to help you and ask him to bless you as you practice your *Spiritual Discipline Plan*.
- **Hold Your *Spiritual Discipline Plan* with an Open Hand:** Guess what? God is going to change what you wrote down, so keep bringing your plan to him, and when he gives you a new idea, follow where he leads.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

PLAN

Submission

I feel that Jesus is calling me to submit this area of life to him:

This is what I am going to do to grow in submitting this area of life to Jesus:

Bible Study

I plan to read my Bible _____ times per week.

I plan to read my Bible _____ minutes per day.

I plan to read my Bible during this time slot during the day:

I plan to memorize this passage of the Bible in the coming months:

This is my plan for reading the Bible in the coming months:

Prayer

I plan to set aside time to pray for _____ minutes per day.

I plan to intentionally pray during this time slot during the day:

I plan to specifically pray for these people in the coming months:

I plan to specifically pray for God to do these things in the coming months:

Deep Friendship

In this season, I plan to be engaged in Christian community in the following ways:

In this season, I plan to deeply invest in the following person:

In this season, I plan to take the following steps to invest in the person above:

Corporate Worship¹

I plan to engage in corporate worship at Faith _____ times per month.

I plan to bless and encourage my church family in this way during this season:

¹ Because of COVID-19 you may not be able to gather face-to-face for worship. Yet it is still important that you find a rhythm for gathering with Christians to be taught, fed, encouraged and inspired by the ministry of your church. COVID-19 has made this challenging, and many have found online worship services are not ideal. Yet in this season, something is better than nothing. So if you are not comfortable or able to gather with the church due to extenuating circumstances, ask Jesus to give you creative ideas.

Giving

In this season, I plan to give this much money each month to support my local church:

In this season, I plan to give this much money each month to support missionaries and gospel-centered organizations:

In this season, I plan to give this much money each month to bless people and meet needs:

Serving

In the coming months, I plan to intentionally serve the following neighbor, family member, or friend:

In the coming months, I feel that Jesus is asking me to respond to this need in my church or my community:

Evangelism and Discipleship

In the coming months, I plan to share my faith in Jesus with the following people in hopes that God will use me to bring them to salvation:

In the coming months, I plan to intentionally disciple the following person:

In the coming months, I plan to ask the following person to disciple me:

A GOOD EXAMPLE OF A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE PLAN

Submission

I feel that Jesus is calling me to submit this area of life to him: *My anger towards God over my mom's death.*

This is what I am going to do to grow in submitting this area of life to Jesus: *I am going to connect with the Stephen Ministry at Faith to see if I can get some help processing my grief.*

Bible Study

I plan to read my Bible 5 times per week.

I plan to read my Bible 20 minutes per day.

I plan to read my Bible during this time slot during the day: *7-7:20am, Monday - Friday*

I plan to memorize this passage of the Bible in the coming months: *Psalms 103*

This is my plan for reading the Bible in the coming months: *My overall plan for reading the Bible is to use the "Digging Deep into the Bible" plan on the ESV Bible app. I will set my alarm for 6:45am, and I will set a reminder on my phone to read at 7am.*

Prayer

I plan to set aside time to pray for *10* minutes per day.

I plan to intentionally pray during this time slot during the day: *7:20-7:30am, Monday - Friday*

I plan to specifically pray for these people in the coming months: *Ben from my gym and James my neighbor who is going through a divorce.*

I plan to specifically pray for God to do these things in the coming months: *I am going to commit to praying for direction with my job. I don't have peace about where I am working, and I would like God to open up a new opportunity for me.*

Deep Friendship

In this season, I plan to be engaged in Christian community in the following ways: *It's time for me to get involved with a small group. I am going to fill out a Connect Card and take the risk of joining a small group.*

In this season, I plan to deeply invest in the following person: *Jeff Tree. He's a single guy at Faith who I feel needs deeper community.*

In this season, I plan to take the following steps to invest in the person above: *I'm going to invite Jeff out for coffee once a month and see what God does in that relationship.*

Corporate Worship

I plan to engage in corporate worship at Faith 3 times per month.

I plan to bless and encourage my church family in this way during this season: *I am going to start praying for God to be at work protecting my church family.*

Giving

In this season, I plan to give this much money each month to support my local church: *My family and I will give 10% of our income each month. Our monthly family income is \$4,000, so we will give \$400 each month to support the mission of Faith Church.*

In this season, I plan to give this much money each month to support missionaries and gospel-centered organizations: *I don't know any missionaries or gospel-centered organizations to give to. So I'm going to spend this season of my life investigating other giving opportunities. Ideally, I'd like to give another \$50 each month, but I'm just not sure where to give it yet.*

In this season, I plan to give this much money each month to bless people and meet needs: *My family is going to start a giving fund. We will put \$20 dollars a month in that fund and use it to bless people.*

Serving

In the coming months, I plan to intentionally serve the following neighbor, family member, or friend: *My neighbor James is going through a tough divorce and his daughter is on my daughter's soccer team, so I'm going to serve him by taking his daughter to and from soccer this season. Also my mom is in a nursing home, so I will intentionally visit her once a week to serve and bless her.*

In the coming months, I feel that Jesus is asking me to respond to this need in my church or my community: *My family and I want to minister to the families and teammates on my daughter's soccer team. We are going to have them all over for a team BBQ and see what doors Jesus opens.*

Evangelism and Discipleship

In the coming months, I plan to share my faith in Jesus with the following people in hopes that God will use me to bring them to salvation: *Jesus seems to keep bringing my neighbor James to mind. So I'll pray for him, and I'll intentionally share Jesus with him.*

In the coming months, I plan to intentionally disciple the following person: *Jeff Tree comes to mind. I met him a few weeks back at church, and it seems like he would benefit from someone walking with him. I am going to share my Spiritual Discipline Plan with him and challenge him to put one together. If he is open to this, I'll ask if he would like to get together once a week to share what we are learning from our times in God's Word.*

In the coming months, I plan to ask the following person to disciple me: *Honestly, no one comes to mind. I'll keep coming back to this question, and I'll see if Jesus brings someone specific to mind. If not, I'll trust that this isn't something he has for me in this season.*

BAD EXAMPLE OF A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE PLAN

Submission

I feel that Jesus is calling me to submit this area of life to him:

- *My mind **(too much)**.*
- *I feel like Jesus is calling me to love him **(too vague)**.*

This is what I am going to do to grow in submitting this area of life to Jesus:

- *I am going to read the works of John Owen and Jonathan Edwards. I want my mind renewed daily by deep thinkers **(too much)**.*
- *I will be more open to what Jesus wants, and I'll be more willing to follow him with a whole heart **(too vague)**.*

Bible Study

I plan to read my Bible 7 times per week **(too much)**.

I plan to read my Bible 1-5 times per week **(too vague)**.

I plan to read my Bible 120 minutes per day **(too much)**.

I plan to read my Bible 5-30 minutes per day **(too vague)**.

I plan to read my Bible during this time slot during the day:

- *5am - 7am, Monday - Sunday. Good godly people love God's Word, and I want to hide it in my heart **(too much)**.*
- *Sometime before I go to bed **(too vague)**.*

I plan to memorize this passage of the Bible in the coming months:

- *The Gospel of John* **(too much)**.
- *Something that resonates with my heart* **(too vague)**.

This is my plan for reading the Bible in the coming months:

- *My overall plan for reading the Bible is to use the “Digging Deep into the Bible” plan on the ESV app. I will also go through the “Every Day in the Word” and the “Daily Wisdom from the Proverbs.” I just don’t think I can ever get enough time in God’s Word* **(too much)!**
- *I will read the Bible. It is God’s Word. It is precious to me* **(too vague)**.

Prayer

I plan to set aside time to pray for 60 minutes per day **(too much)**.

I plan to set aside time to pray for a few minutes per day **(too vague)**.

I plan to intentionally pray during this time slot during the day:

- *7am-8am, Monday - Sunday* **(too much)**.
- *I don’t want to be legalistic. I can talk to God anytime about anything* **(too vague)**.

I plan to specifically pray for these people in the coming months:

- *Every person that I work with and every person at my gym and every ministry leader at Faith, especially Pastor Charlie and his family. They need it* **(too much)**.
- *See above* **(too vague)**.

I plan to specifically pray for God to do these things in the coming months:

- *I will pray for every need that comes my way. I am going to be a great prayer warrior* **(too much)**.
- *See above* **(too vague)**.

Deep Friendship

In this season, I plan to be engaged in Christian community in the following ways:

- *I will keep up my involvement with my small group, and I think I will start a women's Bible study. You can't get too much of a good thing **(too much)**.*
- *I will be very intentional about saying "yes" to Christian community **(too vague)**.*

In this season, I plan to deeply invest in the following person:

- *Allison, Becky, Liz, Jess, Nicole, Becca. They are all amazing women, and I really want to know all of them **(too much)**.*
- *My brothers and sisters in Christ **(too vague)**.*

In this season, I plan to take the following steps to invest in the person above:

- *I'm going to invite all of them out for coffee once a week. I will also put together a monthly girls' night—so that we can connect **(too much)**.*
- *When I see an opportunity to invest in someone, I will take it **(too vague)**.*

Corporate Worship

I plan to engage in corporate worship at Faith 4-5 times per month **(too much)**.

I plan to engage in corporate worship at Faith *several* times per month **(too vague)**.

I plan to bless and encourage my church family in this way during this season:

- *I heard that the kids ministry needs help, so I am going to start serving there. I don't like kids, but I really feel like God will use this sacrifice to soften my heart. I play guitar, so I might try to serve on the worship team too. Honestly, I will hop in wherever I am needed **(too much)**.*
- *I want to bless and encourage people at Faith with all my heart. I can't wait to see what Jesus does **(too vague)**!*

Giving

In this season, I plan to give this much money each month to support my local church:

- *We have a household income of \$50,000 a year. Our mortgage is \$1,200 a month. Car payment is \$600 a month. Student loan payment is \$500 a month. My husband and I have 4 kids under the age of 7, but we love Faith Church and we want to give \$25,000 this year to support Faith's mission! We know it will be hard, but we are trusting God to provide **(too much)**.*
- *I love Faith Church and I want to give, but I don't want to have a percentage that I'm tied to. My giving needs to be done in secret without my left hand knowing what my right hand is doing. I plan to give according to the need and beyond! Also there are some churches that I follow online that I might want to give to, also **(too vague)**.*

In this season, I plan to give this much money each month to support missionaries and gospel-centered organizations:

- *How could we not support missionaries? We will sacrificially give another \$100 a month to missionaries, and we really care about protecting unborn babies so we'll give another \$20 a month to Alpha Center **(too much)**.*
- *See above **(too vague)**.*

In this season, I plan to give this much money each month to bless people and meet needs:

- *We don't have a specific dollar amount. But God loves a cheerful giver and it's more blessed to give than to receive, so if someone has a need, we'll meet it **(too much)**.*
- *God loves a cheerful giver, so if I see a need, I'll meet it **(too vague)**.*

Serving

In the coming months, I plan to intentionally serve the following neighbor, family member, or friend:

- *There are so many people who need to be served. I am going to focus on all the ladies in my small group and in my spin class and all the young moms in my daughter's class. Also all the teachers at my daughter's school. I know I'll get*

*exhausted sometimes, but God can do great things through my weakness and sacrificial service **(too much)**.*

- *I love my city so much that I want to be on mission to everyone **(too vague)**.*

In the coming months, I feel that Jesus is asking me to respond to this need in my church or my community:

- *Homelessness is a huge need in my community. I am going to work to end it. Also racism is an issue that needs my full attention. Finally, I'm really passionate about becoming a foster mom **(too much)**!*
- *I am going to be committed to missional living in my community **(too vague)**.*

Evangelism and Discipleship

In the coming months, I plan to share my faith in Jesus with the following people in hopes that God will use me to bring them to salvation:

- *I want God to use me to bring 25 people to Christ this year. I have never led anyone to Jesus, but I feel like 25 is a good number **(too much)**.*
- *There are so many people I could share Jesus with. I don't want to be specific. I'll just be open to the Spirit's promptings **(too vague)**.*

In the coming months, I plan to intentionally disciple the following person:

- *I want to disciple 10 people: Natalie, Alli, Lauren, Miki, Rachel, Sarah, Jill, Samantha, Becky, Karen—and Val, if she is interested **(too much)**.*
- *I'm not comfortable with formal discipleship. So, I don't know. Also I don't feel like I know enough to disciple someone. And nobody has asked me to disciple them. So, I don't know **(too vague)**.*

In the coming months, I plan to ask the following person to disciple me:

- *I am going to ask the following people to meet with me weekly and ask me how I am doing with Jesus: Debbie, Margaret, Sally and Thea **(too much)**.*
- *I don't know. I'll just see how things go. I'm open and willing, but I'll need God to move in my heart **(too vague)**.*

