

## Message 10: Convictions Regarding Spiritual Disciplines

Discipline is not a very pleasant thought to most people. It conjures up images of work, sweat, discomfort, and even pain. Yet the Bible repeatedly describes the Christian life as one of discipline. Jesus called his followers “disciples.” Paul spoke of training, competing, and fighting in his descriptions of the Christian life. So it should be no surprise that discipline plays a major role in the life of a believer.

Modern believers often desire the benefits of Christianity, but avoid the work needed to gain those benefits. They want to know biblical truth without taking the time to read the Bible. They want the strength to withstand temptation, but are unwilling to spend time in prayer and memorization of Scripture. They want to see souls saved, but are too busy to talk with their neighbors about the Lord. They want a vibrant, meaningful relationship with God, but don’t meet with Him on a regular basis. Such unwillingness to engage in spiritual disciplines results in believers who are weak, ignorant, and apathetic.

Discipline is self-control. It’s the commitment to force yourself to do the right thing, the best thing, and the proper thing. It’s not taking the easy road when the hard road is the better way. It’s dedication to duty, and the result of a desire to live an honorable and meaningful Christian life.

**2 Tim 1:7** *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

The original word for “sound mind” in this verse (σωφρονισμός) means “moderation, self-control.” Many versions of the Bible translate it as “discipline.” Someone described it as a well-regulated life. The Christian life is or should be well-regulated, moderate, disciplined, and self-controlled.

What is the standard/basis for this regulation and discipline? Of course, it’s the word of God. The Bible is the foundation for Christian disciplines. That is, we regulate our lives according to biblical expectations and principles.

If the Bible is *not* the standard of self-regulation, what is? If we are not following the Bible, then the basis for life becomes feeling, emotions, impulses, pressures, or traditions. Many people simply refuse to self-regulate. Living that way leads to chaos and sin. But regulating our lives on the basis of the Bible results in stability, strength, and spiritual maturity.

Christians must retain a strong commitment to participation in the spiritual disciplines that are necessary for stability and growth. Without such disciplines, Christian maturity is virtually impossible.

Note several areas in which it is vital for Christians to exercise spiritual discipline.

I. Be disciplined in your intake of the Bible.

1 Timothy 4:13 ... *give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.*

2 Timothy 3:16–17 *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

1 Peter 2:2 *as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*

How do we take in God's word?

A. Read God's Word—establish a regular pattern of Bible reading.

1. Determine to read a portion of the Bible daily. Not necessarily a long portion, but a meaningful amount.
2. Determine to read through the *entire* Bible.
  - a) Some people do this every year.
  - b) Some do it every couple of years.
  - c) Some do it once in a lifetime.
  - d) In any case, it ought to be a goal to read the entire Bible, cover to cover, at some point. That way you can say, "Yes, I've read the whole Bible."

B. Hear God's Word

Romans 10:17 ... *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

1. We can listen to someone read the Bible. We can get recordings or stream it.
2. We can hear teachers and preachers expound or exegete the word of God during Sunday school and church. We may have opportunities to attend seminars or classes on the Bible.

3. We have more ways than ever before to listen to God's word. And we have the privilege of hearing some of the greatest Bible expositors who have ever lived. E.g., John MacArthur
4. We have to be careful/selective; many false teachers and false doctrine out there that we should avoid.

C. Study God's Word

1. Bible study is when we take extra time for analysis and research of particular texts or topics. Study gets us into the finer details of the passage we are considering.
2. Read books that explain the Bible—commentaries, study Bibles.

D. Memorize God's Word

Ps 119:11 *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

1. Memorization seems to be something of a lost art. Many kids these days have a hard time memorizing anything. E.g., VBS
2. Select meaningful passages to commit to memory.
3. I keep a list...
4. Review verses already memorized.

Memorization leads to meditation.

E. Meditate on God's Word

Psalm 1:2 *his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.*

1. Meditation is simply dwelling mentally on a text of Scripture, soaking up the truths and principles of the Bible for the purpose of understanding, application, and prayer. It is thinking about and reviewing the text—what it means, what it implies, whom it affects, how to obey it, etc.
2. Select an appropriate text, read it through a few times, and thoughtfully turns it over in your mind. You reflect on it for a while and considers its importance.
3. We might call this rumination, like cows—they chew the cud.
4. Not like eastern meditation/yoga where you empty your mind.
5. And it's easier if you have the passage memorized already.

F. Apply God's Word

Luke 11:28 *[Jesus] said, "... blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"*

James 1:22 *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*

1. The ultimate goal of Bible intake is applying the principles of the Bible to our lives. We must respond appropriately to the Bible.
2. Application comes after observation and interpretation.
  - a) Find out what the Bible says—observation.
  - b) Figure out what the author likely intended to mean and how the original audience would have understood it—interpretation.
  - c) Then think about how you can apply it to yourself.

**Trans:** The Word of God must be central to your experience of the Christian life. The Word of God is like milk and meat; without it, we lack nourishment. With it, we are healthy and productive. Discipline yourself so that the Word has a prominent place in your life.

II. Be disciplined in your practice of prayer.

Ephesians 6:18 *praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints*

Philippians 4:6 *... in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God*

Colossians 4:2 *Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving*

1 Thessalonians 5:17 *pray without ceasing*

- A. Prayer is an essential part of the Christian life. Jesus prayed, the apostles prayed, the main characters of the Bible prayed, and believers throughout history have prayed. Prayer should be a high priority for every believer. There is no valid reason that would excuse us from this important discipline.

- B. Our attitude toward prayer is important. If we see prayer as nothing but a duty or an obligation, our prayer life will likely be one of drudgery and inconvenience. But we should see prayer as communication with and fellowship with God. We worship God in prayer.
- C. We should be engaged in *formal* times of prayer, such as at church during a worship service. We join with the congregation in prayer.
- D. We should be engaged in *personal* times of prayer, such as when we have personal devotions at home. I.e., private prayer
- E. We should pray over meals; thank God for the food, ask for strength and nourishment.
- F. Discipline in prayer means taking time daily to seek God in prayer. To pray without ceasing means that we pray regularly or frequently throughout the day.  
E.g., devotions in the morning, 3 meals, before bed
- G. BTW, parents ought to teach their children how to pray. We do this mostly through example. Our kids ought to hear us pray. Cf. family devotions. We should teach them to go beyond rote prayers—"now I lay me down to sleep..."

**Trans:** If you are not praying regularly, I don't know how you are living a Christian life.

### III. Be disciplined in worship.

*Ps 29:2 Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.*

*Psalm 95:6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.*

*Matthew 4:10 ... You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.*

- A. Worship is the act of displaying the worth or value of God. It is ascribing to God His worth, or stating and affirming His supreme value.  
*Deut 32:3-4 ... ascribe ye greatness unto our God. [He is] the Rock, his work [is] perfect: for all his ways [are] judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right [is] he.*

- B. The biblical words for worship mean “to bow down, to kiss toward.” When we worship God, we are ascribing greatness to him, honoring him, lifting up his name. Worship happens when our minds and hearts are occupied with sincere and truthful thoughts of God.
- C. Jesus said that worship must be done “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). We approach God with the right attitude and in the right way.
- D. Worshiping God is a requirement; we are obligated to do it.
- E. Although worship can and should be done in *private* (e.g., Luke 5:16), the *public* worship of God is also an important part of personal spirituality. Worshipping in a congregation of like-minded believers ought to be a regular part of our lives.
- F. What are the elements of congregational worship?
  - 1. Listening to God’s Word (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim 2:15)
  - 2. Prayer (Phil 4:6; Col 4:2)
  - 3. Singing (Col 3:16-17)
  - 4. Giving (2 Cor 9:7; Phil 4:18)
  - 5. Serving (Rom 12:1; Gal 5:13)
  - 6. Fellowship (Acts 2:42)
  - 7. The Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 10:16-17) and baptism
- G. We must be careful about how we conduct worship, especially public or congregational worship. The Bible warns us not to engage in corrupt/fraudulent worship
  - 1. Beware of *independent* worship. We should worship God only in the ways that he has established and in no other way.
  - 2. Beware of *hypocritical* worship. The OT prophets complain about how Israel was worshipping God hypocritically. They went through the motions of worship, but their hearts were far from God. Jesus accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy in their worship.

Our worship should be sincere and honest, not hypocritical.

3. Beware of *disorderly* worship: Paul tells us that we should worship God “decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40). The atmosphere of many churches today is more like a circus or a night club than a reverent worship service. We should worship God in an orderly, reverent way.

**Trans:** Worship should be a major part of the Christian life. I don’t know how anyone can live the Christian life without regular times of worship.

#### IV. Be disciplined in evangelism.

Matthew 28:19–20 *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; ...*

Acts 1:8 *... you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

Christ commanded his disciples to reach others with the message of the gospel. The main command in the Great Commission is “make disciples.” We do that by going, by preaching, by baptizing converts, and by teaching disciples to obey whatever Jesus commanded.

Romans 10:14 *How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?*

We should all be looking for opportunities to proclaim the message of the Gospel to those who are not yet saved.

And we should support others who do evangelism and church planting in needy areas around the world. Cf. missions

Those who refuse to be involved in evangelism are simply disobedient.

#### V. Be disciplined in service.

Psalms 100:2 *Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing.*

Romans 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*

Colossians 3:24 *... you serve the Lord Christ.*

We serve God primarily by serving people, and we serve people primarily through our vocations. Our primary vocations are family, church, career, and community. We serve God as we serve his people.

Service costs time, talents, money, and perhaps even one's earthly life.

God asks believers to make service a high priority. All believers ought to be serving God in some way. Normally, we serve God by serving others.

We sometimes call these disciplines the "means of grace." We call them that because we experience God's grace through these practices. We live the Christian life and walk the Christian walk through these disciplines. We are saved by faith in Jesus, but we live the Christian life through these disciplines.

We call them disciplines because it takes some effort and self-control to participate in these practices. We do these things even if we don't feel like doing them. Just like it takes self-discipline to exercise or to learn a skill, it takes discipline to participate in the disciplines of the Christian life.

Christian discipleship is often rather difficult. Jesus demands first place in our lives. Salvation is free, but living the Christian life is often costly and strenuous. But the results are worth the effort.

If you neglect these disciplines, your Christian life suffers. You can't really live the Christian life without Bible reading, prayer, worship, evangelism and service. What is the Christian life without these? It's not much of anything.

Perhaps you need to strengthen or expand some of these disciplines. Maybe you are not particularly disciplined in some of these areas. All of us could do better in most of these disciplines. The more time and effort we spend developing these disciplines, the closer walk with God we'll have. This is how we draw near to God. This is how we live the Christian life.

If you are having a hard time living the Christian life, it's probably because you are lacking something in your Bible intake (reading, hearing, memorizing, meditating, applying), prayer, worship, evangelism and service. If your Christian life is vibrant, stable, and mature, it's probably because you are engaging in these disciplines.

We should have strong convictions regarding the disciplines of the Christian life. Our strong convictions lead us to be engaged in each of these disciplines.