

Introduction to the Spiritual Disciplines

Week 1



Talk Outline

Why practice the spiritual disciplines?

Seasons in the disciplines

Characteristics of wise training in the disciplines

Range of disciplines

Ditches to avoid

Discussion starters

- Read Ps 42:1-2. How would you describe your own spiritual longings?
- Have you ever practiced a spiritual discipline? What did you experience? How may that experience influence your expectations of the disciplines during Lent?
- Does thinking of the spiritual disciplines as an opportunity to train in the Christian life differ from just trying harder and harder to be a good Christian? How?
- Which characteristic of wise spiritual training surprised you? Why?
- Have you ever fallen into one of the “ditches” discussed on the DVD? What happened?
- Which season (growth, fruit-bearing, dormancy) do you find yourself in currently? How will that season influence how you practice the disciplines?
- What type of spiritual discipline most intrigues you from the menu of disciplines?

To Consider This Week

Personalizing Your Journey

Now that you've heard about spiritual disciplines, think about their place in your life. If you are new to the disciplines, complete the first section to help you find out where you might start. If you already have some experience with spiritual disciplines, complete the second section to assess where God may be leading you.

Getting Started

1. One way to tell where a spiritual discipline may be needed is to look at your spiritual longings or where you feel promptings from the Holy Spirit. One or more of the following questions may help you discover those areas.
 - a. Are there areas of your life where you regularly find yourself expressing regret or frustration? If so, what are they?
 - b. Are there habits or sins where you feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit (which is a good thing!) to change but feel powerless to actually change? If so, what are they?
 - c. Do you ever hear about an aspect of life with God and think, "I wish that were true of my relationship with God"? If so, describe it.
 - d. Is there a way you'd like to serve or relate to God but find that your ordinary life and habits create obstacles? (e.g., "I'd really like to pray more but I can't seem to remember to do it."). If so, describe them.
2. Look back over the areas of life you described in Question 1 and ask God to direct you to the place he'd like you to start. Which area resonates with you most?
3. What would be needed to address this area – more freedom, endurance, focus?
4. Looking at the list of spiritual disciplines, which one seems like it would be a good fit for you at this time? For now, choose just one discipline – you have all your life to explore the others!
5. How might that discipline draw you closer to God?

Taking Stock

1. Make a list of the spiritual discipline(s) you are currently practicing. Then write the reason you are practicing each discipline.
2. Are your current disciplines effective? Beside each discipline, put a (+) if it is drawing you closer to God, a (-) if you haven't noticed an effect on your life, or a (?) if you aren't sure.
3. If a spiritual discipline is no longer forming you into Christlikeness, then it is time to let it go and explore another discipline. Sometimes it's difficult to assess whether a discipline is continuing to form us, so we turn to God for help. Pray about each of the disciplines you marked with a (-) or a (?):

God, I've been faithfully practicing _____, but I can't see that it's producing fruit in my walk with you. Will you show me if you want me to continue this discipline regardless of the results or if you might want me to let it go for this season of my life?
4. Receiving guidance from God regarding your disciplines may come quickly or it may be a longer process. Make notes about your first impressions of what God is saying, but be open to a longer conversation with him as well.
5. If you feel led to let go of a discipline, is it time to replace it or do you need a space of time before you do so?
6. If it's time to replace a discipline, consider the questions under "Getting Started."

Additional Resources

"Celebration of Discipline" by Richard J Foster

"The Life You've Always Wanted" by John Ortberg

For the purposes of our study this Lent, we compiled the following list of spiritual disciplines: study, prayer, celebration, service, simplicity, fasting, fellowship and confession.