

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual Disciplines:

Discuss the following quote.

“Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”

Richard Foster (Celebration of Discipline, p.1)

What do you think he means when he says “Superficiality is the curse of our age”?

In what ways, spiritually speaking, do we tend to expect instant satisfaction?

What does Foster mean when he says our desperate need for today is to have more “deep” people?

How does one become “deep”?

What is your gut reaction to the words “spiritual disciplines”? What are spiritual disciplines?



There are many different spiritual disciplines but the ones we will focus on in this series are:

- a) **Studying the Bible** – learning to let God speak to you through his word.
- b) **Prayer** – learning how to pray, learning to pray with others, learning how to be victorious through prayer.
- c) **Giving** – learning how to surrender everything to God.

Getting Spiritual Control

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NIV)

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

What motivates a serious athlete to change their daily routine, change their diet, train rigorously and spend money on equipment and training?

What is the goal that we are to be striving for in Christ?

Do athletes view these disciplines as obligations or expectations they have to meet?

What does Paul mean when he says he “beats” his body and makes it a “slave”?

In what ways might we “beat” our body and make it our “slave”?



**What will it take for us to bring this type of spiritual determination and discipline into our lives?
Discuss what each passage below reveals about developing spiritual disciplines.**

Philippians 3:7-11 (NIV)

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

1. _____

Why did Paul view all his former accomplishments as rubbish?

In what way did all his previous efforts fail him in his pursuit of life?

In what way was Christ the answer to all he was longing for?

Paul was always a much-disciplined man. The problem was he had the wrong focus for his disciplines. His disciplines were rooted in making him a more righteous person.

**As you think about the disciplines in your life, are they taking you in the right direction?
What are some examples of disciplines that may be good, but will not ultimately bring one the life they are hoping for?**

What are some ways we can strive to better know Christ?



Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NIV)

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: ¹⁰ If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!

2. _____

Why do we so often hate the idea of accountability?

Why is accountability so important?

Accountability is a mark of maturity. We were NOT created to be independent, but inter-dependent, relying on each other to grow into maturity. Accountability simply says we will keep asking you how the journey is going and will pray for your ongoing spiritual growth and encourage you in any way we can. You also are an accountability partner to others within the group, helping them grow in their disciplines. Without the support of God's family you will continue to stumble and will eventually fade away like a burning ember cast from the blaze of the fire.

How good are you at being spiritually inter-dependent?

Why do we strive so much for independence?

How will a decision to become inter-dependent help everyone grow?

What are some steps we could take to become more inter-dependent as a group?

Bible Reading and Prayer Time

We are recommending that you book an appointment with God at least five times each week. Many of you are already spending daily time with God and we want to encourage you to continue to do that.

These times don't need to be long but for now try to set aside half an hour so your time with God doesn't feel rushed. You will need to determine the time and place that works best for you. We do recommend that you try to find a consistent time each day so that it will more quickly become a habit, a regular part of your routine.

BOOK MEMORIZATION

I think it would be embarrassing for us to claim this is the Book of Life given to us by God, upon which we base our hope and eternal future, and we don't even know the basic structure of it. We hope to help you understand not just where the books are but how they are categorized.

History (17)	Poetry (5)	Prophecy (17)
The Law (5) Pentateuch		Major Prophets (5) Large
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs	Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel
Other Historical books (12)		Minor Prophets (12) Small
Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther		Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

This week we want to encourage you to memorize the first 5 books of the Bible. Below is a brief explanation of the nature of each of these books.

Some bibles also include an additional 14 books called the apocrypha. These are books that never met the criteria to be considered the inspired Word of God but held some cultural and historical insights into that era.



GENESIS, EXODUS, LEVITICUS, NUMBERS, DEUTERONOMY

The first section of the Bible consists of 17 books of History. They tell the story of how God is at work to create for himself a people of faith. The first 5 books were written by Moses and are therefore often called the Books of Moses. They have some other names too:

1) **The Law**

2) **Pentateuch** (pent = 5, teuch = Law; the 5 books of the law),

3) **Torah** (Hebrew word for Law – this can refer to just the first 5 books, or may refer to the whole Old Testament)

Genesis: Genesis means “In the beginning”. It deals with Creation, the Fall and the People of God.

Exodus: Exodus deals with the “exit” of God’s people out of slavery in Egypt. It ultimately answers Pharaoh’s and Israel’s question, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?”

Leviticus: Leviticus details what it means for the Israelites to be a “holy” priesthood.

Numbers: Numbers relates the consequences of disobedience. The Israelites’ failure to enter the land resulted in their wandering through the desert until that generation passed away. There are consequences for sin.

Deuteronomy: Deuteronomy means “Second Law”. It is the recommitment to the Covenant before the Israelites enter the Promised Land.

**DEVOTIONAL READING:
The Letter to the Philippians**

To understand Paul's relationship to the church in Philippi read **Acts 16:11-40**.

Paul is in prison (the precise location is up for debate) for proclaiming Jesus Christ. While there, he is visited by Epaphroditus, a delegate sent from the church in Philippi to encourage Paul and bring him a financial gift to help support him during his imprisonment.

As Epaphroditus visits with Paul he starts to share about church life back in Philippi and all the issues they are facing. The church is being pulled in various directions by different people and different perspectives. There are concerns of Judaizers (people who claim you must still keep all the Old Testament ceremonial law) who are having influence. There are people who are claiming to be Christ followers yet are living immoral lives. And then there are good old Euodia and Syntyche, women in the church who are having a quarrel with each other in a manner that is affecting the entire church. On top of all this, there is the constant challenge to represent Christ in a society that is opposed to the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

Paul is deeply concerned that the church maintains unity in Christ and that it not forget why it is there. If the church continues on in this manner it will become ineffective in its mission to transform lives and its community. As he writes this letter to the Philippian church, Paul wants to thank the Philippians for their generous gift but he also has a deep spiritual burden he wants to share with them. He knows he needs to be positive and encouraging, yet forceful enough to break them free from their present perspective and to encourage them to start living life with a greater sense of purpose.

This is a powerful letter speaking of our ultimate purpose on earth and the peace that comes from trusting Jesus Christ. When we stop focusing on our *Relationship* with Christ and we become more concerned about our own agendas versus *Representing* Christ in this world, we start to experience anxiety, stress, and tension with others around us. If we, as a church, stay focused on Jesus Christ and his mission, if we allow the Holy Spirit to direct each of us in the unity of his Spirit, then joy as a community and effectiveness for the kingdom will always accompany us.

This is an extremely practical letter for us as a church. It is easy for small issues to start to divide us and render us ineffective. It is easy for us to start focussing more on our own preferences than the eternal needs of others. It is easy for us to lose sight of why God keeps us on this earth after we are brought into his kingdom. It is easy to value comfort more than mission. This letter sets us free!



Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22 (NIV)

PASSAGE	THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER	APPLY 1 POINT TODAY
<p>DAY 1</p> <p>Read the book of Philippians in ONE SITTING (relax, it is a small book)</p>	<p>What is the overall tone of this letter?</p> <p>How many times do the words joy/rejoice occur in this letter? (Perhaps underline them in your bible.)</p> <p>How is this striking in lieu of Paul's immediate circumstances?</p> <p>Why does he feel he needs to emphasize this point with the Philippians?</p> <p>How is this relevant to you and your circumstances?</p> <p>What people does Paul provide as examples of the self-sacrificing, purpose-driven life?</p> <p>Could Paul use you as an example of someone who joyfully serves God whatever your circumstances?</p> <p>How does our own agenda sometimes create conflict with those around us?</p> <p>What are some perspective shifts that may need to occur in your life?</p>	

In the space below, write out the first 5 books of the Bible.

G _____

E _____

L _____

N _____

D _____

In what literary section of the Bible are these books found? _____



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PASSAGE	THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER	APPLY 1 POINT TODAY
<p>DAY 2</p> <p>Philippians 1:1-2 (NLT) <i>This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the elders and deacons. ² May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.</i></p>	<p>Normally, my guess is, you would just quickly read over these verses without paying too much attention to them. Let's slow down and remember "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">God has something to say to you in this greeting.</p> <p>Why do you think Paul calls himself a slave of Christ Jesus?</p> <p>When you're a slave you are compelled to obey the one in authority over you. Do you feel compelled to obey Jesus Christ? If you want to read more on this topic read Romans 6 which sets up the contrast of being a slave to sin vs. being a slave to righteousness. You are one or the other.</p> <p>Paul writes to "all of God's holy people (saints)" who are in Philippi. If you were in Philippi, would that include you? Are you one of God's holy people? If you are in Christ – you are. You are declared holy by God.</p> <p>The question is, "Are you living that holiness out or are there ways where you are denying it in your life?" What should you do about that?</p> <p>Where does grace and peace come from?</p> <p>GRACE: Blessing that is not earned or deserved in any way.</p> <p>PEACE: A sense that everything is under control and you can rest at ease.</p> <p>Are you experiencing God's gift of peace or are you trying to maintain peace in your life through your own control and manipulation? What can you do about that?</p>	<p>In what way can this passage change my life if I apply what it says? What is one thing I can do differently today as a result of this passage?</p> <p>How might some concepts in this passage tackle the issue of tensions among people in a church setting?</p>



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<p>DAY 3</p> <p>Philippians 1:3-11 (NLT) <i>Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. ⁴ Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, ⁵ for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. ⁶ And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.</i></p> <p><i>⁷ So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. ⁸ God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.</i></p> <p><i>⁹ I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. ¹⁰ For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. ¹¹ May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.</i></p>	<p>How are you partnering in spreading the Good News?</p> <p>What good work has God been accomplishing in your life this past while?</p> <p>Isn't it encouraging to know that you will be perfected by God when Jesus returns?</p> <p>Paul feels this way about the Philippians because he has built into their lives spiritually. Who can you be building into spiritually?</p> <p>This is an incredible prayer Paul prays for those he cares about. This might be a good prayer to pray for yourself and for the people of your church.</p>	<p>In what way can this passage change my life if I apply what it says? What is one thing I can do differently today as a result of this passage?</p> <p>How might some concepts in this passage tackle the issue of tensions among people in a church setting?</p>



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<p>DAY 4</p> <p>Philippians 1:12-19 (NLT) <i>And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. ¹³ For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. ¹⁴ And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear. ¹⁵ It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. ¹⁶ They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. ¹⁷ Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. ¹⁸ But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice. ¹⁹ For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance.</i></p>	<p>Instead of grumbling, what is Paul's perspective about his negative circumstances?</p> <p>Even though he is in chains, Paul is experiencing joy because he is accomplishing his goal. What is his goal in life?</p> <p>Have you ever felt jealous about someone else's effectiveness in ministry?</p> <p>Even when others are preaching Christ out of impure motives, does Paul criticize their ministry? Why not?</p> <p>How is it that he is able to rejoice through such times?</p>	<p>In what way can this passage change my life if I apply what it says? What is one thing I can do differently today as a result of this passage?</p> <p>How might some concepts in this passage tackle the issue of tensions among people in a church setting?</p>



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<p>DAY 5</p> <p>Philippians 1:20-26 (NLT) <i>For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. ²¹ For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. ²² But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. ²³ I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. ²⁴ But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. ²⁵ Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith. ²⁶ And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me. ²⁷ Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing side by side, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. ²⁸ Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. ²⁹ For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. ³⁰ We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.</i></p>	<p>What is Paul's perspective about his life? What is the goal he has whether he lives or dies in prison?</p> <p>In verse 21 the actual words in the Greek are "to live is Christ" What do you think that means?</p> <p>If you had the choice of staying here on earth or going to be with Jesus in heaven right now, what would you choose? Why?</p> <p>What is the only thing worth sticking around for from Paul's perspective?</p> <p>What are you living your life for on this earth?</p> <p>What does it mean to live as a citizen of heaven?</p> <p>In what ways are you contributing to the fight for the faith in your community?</p> <p>What types of things intimidate you in the fight for the faith and proclaiming the good news?</p> <p>Why is it a privilege to suffer for Christ? Have you ever been persecuted for sharing your faith with others?</p> <p>Have you partnered with Paul and Jesus in this way?</p>	<p>In what way can this passage change my life if I apply what it says? What is one thing I can do differently today as a result of this passage?</p> <p>How might some concepts in this passage tackle the issue of tensions among people in a church setting?</p>



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In what literary section of the Bible are these books found? _____