

A 60-day plan of transformation into Christlikeness

Day #15: The Spiritual Disciplines

For the latest pdf edition of this article, see Day 15– The Spiritual Disciplines at <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-15.pdf>

A. SOLITUDE WITH GOD.

1. You need to carve out at least 30 minutes of quiet time with the LORD every day. This needs to be a top priority. Put your smartphone away, make yourself a cup of coffee or tea, and find a comfortable and quiet place. Take this time to reflect on God, His grace, His faithfulness, His goodness, His blessings, your life, your family. Write down all your blessings. Write down prayers for your family, loved ones, and yourself. Write down your most pressing concerns. In your prayers, start with thanksgiving (called “todah” prayers) before moving to prayers for others and yourself. Be honest, confess your sins, and ask God for insight, strength, and to change your heart in those areas that you struggle with. God is greater than any of your sins—past or present—and your weaknesses.
2. If you only have 30 minutes, and the above takes up the entire time, this is all you need to do at this time in this spiritual transformation plan. You can review the lesson below at another time—later in the day, before you go to bed, or on a day that I do not provide a transformation lesson.

B. INTRODUCTION TO SPIRITUAL EXERCISES.

1. Jesus Christ and great men of God through the Bible engaged in what are called spiritual exercises such as solitude, silence, prayer, simple and sacrificial living, intense study and meditation upon God’s Word and ways, service to others, fasting, assembly with fellow believers, et al.
2. These practices are generally viewed with disdain by those who have been secularized, including many modern Christians. Yet, some of these same Christians will readily admit that prayer and Bible study are very important activities for the spiritual life. They just do not like the terms “spiritual exercise” or “spiritual discipline.” To them it conjures up ideas of legalism. However, these exercises are no more inherently legalistic than regular Bible study and prayer, which many of these Christians see as very important for spiritual health. And if you have been following this plan, you have already been engaged in the spiritual discipline of quiet time with the LORD—just like the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. Spiritual exercises in and of themselves do nothing. They are only means whereby the believer puts himself in a position to receive God’s transforming grace.

4. Biblical basis for the notion spiritual exercise: 1 Timothy 4:7 exercise yourself (Γύμναζε δὲ σεαυτὸν πρὸς εὐσέβειαν) *toward godliness.*⁸ *For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.*
- a. This language of “exercise toward godliness” is Paul’s language, expressing a fundamental theme of his life and belief. And Paul was a theologian par excellence who lived in the power and presence of Christ.
 - b. Spiritual disciplines, “exercise unto godliness” are intensely practical. Paul is telling Timothy, his son in the faith, how to succeed in leading God’s people.
 - c. In speaking of exercise, Paul uses the term *gumnaze* (Γύμναζε), from which we get our term “gymnasium.” In this context, Paul tells his young disciple that he should be at work in the “spiritual gymnasium” rather than spending time on godless myths and legends.
 - d. Note the promise, nature, and priority of spiritual discipline: 1 Timothy 4:8, “*For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.*” Physical exercise was something Paul and others in the Aegean world understood very well. Everyone knew what was involved in training for the enhancement of physical skill. In his advice to Timothy, Paul points out that there is a precisely parallel phenomenon in the spiritual realm. Just as one must regularly be engaged in physical exercise to master a physical ability, so it is in the spiritual life. Just as a baseball player practices repeatedly until the skill becomes second nature, the same can be said of the spiritual life: it becomes second nature. Just as a person engaged in certain physical exercises handles difficulties in a way that is natural for him, so it is with spiritual exercises. Likewise, just as an athlete may have all the zeal in the world and not be up to the task without practice, the same holds true for the spiritual life. I will pass over going into detail how this works at this time. In sum, we naturally do what we become, and we become what we practice/actualize in our lives. If we pray, study, assemble with fellow believers, and give to the poor regularly, then these activities become natural, easy, and pleasant—and we increasingly enjoy Christ’s easy yoke and light load. However, when believers do not pray, study the Bible, attend a local church, or give to the poor, then these activities become unnatural, set aside, or forced—a chore.
 - e. Read 1 Cor 9:24-27 on Paul’s view of his body and discipline.
 - f. One of the problems that needs to be overcome in our culture is the “ethic” of feelings/hedonism. The popular idea is that it does not count until it feels good as if feelings were the ruler or standard of what constitutes goodness. The unrestrained hedonism of our own day comes historically from the 18th-century idealization of happiness and is filtered through the 19th-century English ideology of pleasure as the good for the people. Finally, it emerges in the form of our

present “feel good” society—and this is tragically pandered to by the popular culture and much of popular religion as well. Think about it. Isn’t the most generally applied standard of success for a Bible class whether or not people feel good in it and after it? Our American churches are filled with people who are neurotically paralyzed by their devotion and willing bondage to how they feel. Moreover, drug dependence and addiction is epidemic, in part, because of cultural imperative to “feel good.” Again, often a spiritual exercise, like Bible study, prayer, or going to Bible class is evaluated based on how one feels rather than the truth of the message. Spirituality is not determined by our feelings.

- g. Note the promised blessings for those who engage in spiritual exercises. These exercises provide a godliness that colors all aspects of temporal and eternal life, bestowing its blessing on all it touches: 1 Timothy 4:7-8, *“exercise yourself toward godliness. 8 For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.”*
- 1) “For all things”
 - 2) “in the present life” and
 - 3) “in the life to come”—for eternity.

C. SCRIPTURE MEMORY.

1 Timothy 4:7-8, . . . exercise yourself toward godliness. 8 For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

D. The 60-day transformation of the mind, heart, and emotions into Christlikeness

Day 1 – A life that lacks nothing (Psalm 23), <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-1.pdf>
Day 2 - Satan, the enemy (1 John 2:15-16), <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-2.pdf>
Day 3 – Review, reflect, journaling, and Psalm 19, <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-3.pdf>
Day 4 – The six areas of inner transformation, <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-4.pdf>
Day 5 – The Word of God, Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1, <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-5.pdf>
Day 6 – 2 warnings & promise of transformation, <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-6.pdf>
Day 7 - Solitude, Disciplines, Transformation, <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-7.pdf>
Day 8–VIM (Vision-Intent-Means) & transformation, <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-8.pdf>
Day 9–Solitude with God and Christ’s transformative yoke, <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-9.pdf>
Day 10– Discipleship-1, <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-10.pdf>
Day 11– Discipleship-2, <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-11.pdf>
Day 12– The Life-giving Power of the Holy Spirit, <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-12.pdf>
Day 13– The Spirit vs. the Flesh (Part 1), <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-13.pdf>
Day 14– The Spirit vs. the Flesh (Part 2), <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-14.pdf>
Day 15– The Spiritual Disciplines, <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/day-15.pdf>

*Under the discipleship of Jesus Christ,
Pastor Don*