

Spiritual Disciplines: Joy and Perseverance bible-sermons.org March 3, 2013

We have come to the concluding sermon in this series on spiritual disciplines. I want to reiterate that my intention is not to make you feel guilty and overwhelmed by all the things you should add to an already busy schedule. It is to challenge you to take a look at your schedule and evaluate your priorities. Is your spiritual growth and becoming more Christ like important to you? How important? And if you see the need and desire this transformation, the spiritual disciplines are the tools that we can apply to help us move in that direction.

The disciplines are a response to the love we continually receive from the Lord. (1John 4:19) If Jesus found time to practice these disciplines in the midst of all the demands placed on Him, then God can certainly help us to adjust our lives to do the same. The Disciplines sound burdensome, but they are actually liberating. Martin Luther said that he had so much to do that he had to take at least three hours to pray. In other words, he didn't see how he could get everything done without the discipline of prayer.

We are so driven in today's culture. Even though we have our microwaves and freeways, we simply add more things to our schedule. Surveys have shown that we are busier today than in times past. The farmer works from sun up to sun down, but we've taken it to the late hours of the evening. Many of the things we do may be necessary, but even more necessary is the need to take them to the Lord and ask Him what is truly important.

I often find myself anxious as I start to run out of time to do the things on my list of the day's activities. But I've been learning a great lesson over the past twenty years (Yes, I'm a slow learner). If I do my best and it doesn't get done, God knows, and it will get done when it needs to get done. I'm learning to trust in the Sovereignty of God. (Psalm 139:16) I'm increasingly aware that I know so little of the factors involved in my world. I should just let go and trust the One who knows every factor. So I'm delayed by this thing and that, traffic, weather, unforeseen circumstances. God knows. He's not surprised. So what if I am late. It's not the end of the world.

Do you remember the verses we memorized? (Philippians 4:4-8) Can we really obey the command to not be anxious about anything? Can we really commit it to God in prayer and trust Him? That is the only way to live in joy and do as the Apostle ordered us, "Rejoice in the Lord always!"

Love is the first fruit of the Spirit, but the second is joy. Jesus led such a joyful life of celebration that they called Him a drunkard, a glutton, and a friend of sinners. (Luke 7:34) Certainly He never sinned or over indulged, but you can't say He didn't enjoy life.

Commented [notes1]: 1 John 4:19 (ESV)
¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

Commented [notes2]: Psalm 139:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Commented [notes3]: Philippians 4:4-8 (ESV)
⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.
⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;
⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Commented [notes4]: Luke 7:34 (ESV)
³⁴ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'

The book of Hebrews says about Jesus, ⁹ *You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.* Hebrews 1:9 (ESV) The life of Jesus teaches us that joy comes from doing the will of God. He even endured the torturous cross because of the joy that was set before Him. (Hebrews 12:2)

I want you to understand that I am not saying that we should rejoice over evil. Evil is a reality and it is to be hated as Jesus hated it. But that did not keep Him from being more joyful than His companions. He was filled with the Spirit and the Spirit's fruit is joy. (Galatians 5:22)

I love those paintings of Jesus with the big smile on His face. And why wouldn't He be almost always wearing a smile? He had come to proclaim the Year of Jubilee. When He opened the scroll in the Nazareth synagogue, He read Isaiah 61:1-2. ¹⁸ *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* Luke 4:18-19 (ESV) The year of the Lord's favor was the year in which slaves were released, land that was rented was returned to the original owner, no crops were planted, and everyone took a one year holiday! It was supposed to happen every 50th year but Israel rarely trusted the Lord enough to actually do it. Jesus said, "I'm telling you it is time to have a year of Jubilee!" (Leviticus 25:10)

We get a little sense of that when we come to Jesus and realize our sin debt is paid and that He will be our guide through life. (Psalm 48:14) I love the joy of the person that first experiences salvation. But pretty soon we get religion. "You shouldn't do that," and that wonderful relationship we started out with gets weighed down with a bunch of duty. The disciplines are not more duty. They are to return us to the joy of relationship with the Lover of our soul! The Great Command is a commandment of love. (Mark 12:30) That should give us an idea why joy is the second fruit of the Spirit.

We can get so weighed down with a sense of obligation and duty that we become the most introspective, depressed people on the planet. That is not God's intention. That's Satan's intention! If Christians look bummed out all the time, who is going to be attracted to Christ? But if we are rejoicing all the time, as we should be, overflowing with joy because of our love relationship with the One who died for us and was raised to life, whose resurrection life we share, then people are going to want to know what it is that makes us so happy. That is especially true in the midst of trials.

If you are going through a financial difficulty or a physical hardship and you are still joyful because your heart is focused on the main thing, the eternal things, and you are satisfied in your heart because you've spent time with Jesus, and live obeying His loving

Commented [notes5]: Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)

² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Commented [notes6]: Galatians 5:22 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Commented [notes7]: Leviticus 25:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan.

Commented [notes8]: Psalm 48:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever.

Commented [notes9]: Mark 12:30 (ESV)

³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. E

instructions, it is noticeable. The joy of the Lord becomes your strength. (Nehemiah 8:10) **You can face anything in this world because you are centered on what is eternal** and that couldn't get any better. Jesus loves you! He never changes. He is perfect! He won't withhold any good thing from you. (Romans 8:32) What more could you ask?

Commented [notes10]: Nehemiah 8:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Joy comes from obedience. Once again we see this is the opposite of the way the world thinks. This is part of the renewal of our minds. (Romans 12:2) Obedience to the Father was Jesus' joy. One day when Jesus was speaking a woman shouted out, "Blessed (which means happy) is the one that nursed you!" Jesus corrected her. **"Happy are those who hear the Word of God and do it!"** (Luke 11:27-28) How did Jesus know that to be true? He was living it every moment. He was always doing the will of the Father and He was always joyful. If you find yourself lacking joy, it may be caused by intentional disobedience. The Spirit convicts us and makes us uncomfortable because He is uncomfortable with sin in our life. (John 16:8)

Commented [notes11]: Romans 8:32 (ESV)

³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Commented [notes12]: Romans 12:2 (ESV)

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Commented [notes13]: Luke 11:27-28 (ESV)

²⁷ As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!"

²⁸ But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Commented [notes14]: John 16:8 (ESV)

⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

Remember that timeless hymn, Trust and Obey? Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. One verse describes what I'm saying quite well. "Then in fellowship sweet, we will sit at His feet, or we'll walk by His side in the way. What He says we will do. Where He sends we will go. Never fear, only trust and obey." That describes the disciplines and the resulting joy!

When we try to find joy in the world, in passing things, we will always find them falling short. (Hebrews 11:25) We will keep setting our sights on a little more, a little more money, a little more time, a little better relationship with that person. It's never enough. Only Jesus' love is enough to satisfy our soul. It is the only lasting source of true joy. And when we love Him we obey Him. (John 14:15) And when we obey Him we find He gave us the instruction for our joy.

Commented [notes15]: Hebrews 11:25 (ESV)

²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Commented [notes16]: John 14:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

Jesus told the disciples on that last night, ¹⁰ *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.* ¹¹ *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.* John 15:10-11 (ESV) Live in Jesus' love and do what He says and your joy will be full to overflowing!

We have too much moralizing and too little talk of living in the love of Jesus. The "do this and do that" sermons that put a load of guilt on people can misdirect them. **It is love that calls us to obey, and obedience that brings joy.** It's no wonder church in America is stagnant. Too many are trying to find joy in what the world offers and neglecting love that inspires obedience resulting in true joy. Have you fallen for the lie of the enemy that being a Christian is a big burden? It's a year of Jubilee! It's a celebration. Paul wrote that it is *"joy and peace in the Holy Spirit!"* (Romans 14:17) Let's remember this true perspective!

Commented [notes17]: Romans 14:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Of course there were times when Jesus wept with those that wept. He wept for the hardness of others hearts. (Luke 13:34) But at the same time He could see the ultimate will of the Father and rejoice in all the good that God would work in and through those painful situations. We can't always see it, but we can believe it by faith because God promised it in Romans 8:28. Grief and joy often coexist within our hearts. We grieve over our sins and yet we rejoice in our salvation. We grieve over the lost, but we rejoice that heaven will not have within it anything that defiles. (Revelation 21:27) Still, the overall attitude of our life should be joy in the Holy Spirit because we know the final outcome.

A word of caution is in order. Some think this means a feeling you get at a special moment in a church service, whether from songs, or the preaching, or prayer. Those moments are wonderful and encouraging, but they are not joy. Joy is deep and abiding. If your joy depends on running from church to church trying to capture that sense of the manifest presence of God, you've missed the constant presence of joy that comes from abiding in His love and obeying Him. And how do we experience this? It is through the disciplines that we have talked about.

You will notice with all the disciplines I have given a number of suggestions of how others have practiced them and how Jesus exemplified them. I have avoided a 1, 2, 3 approach because we are all so unique. The Lord works differently with each of us because we would make a formula out of spirituality and think that if we were doing the routine we are therefore spiritually mature. It's about a personal relationship, and though we will have many things in common with others relationship with Christ, your relationship with Him will develop uniquely. That is a wonderful thing. He loves you how He made you and He made you uniquely different from everyone else for His pleasure and yours. (Psalm 139:15)

The final discipline that I would like you to consider is perseverance. Peter wrote that we should *add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance.* (2Peter 1:5-6) The disciplines are a tool for exercising self-control over the use of our time. It is an effort of the will. That is why we call it a discipline. But in all these disciplines, we must persevere. If we practice them for a week and give up because we haven't become spiritual giants, we've missed the point. They are a love response, a desire to spend the time to know our Savior more intimately and to learn His will for our lives.

If you are in Christ, the Holy Spirit will continually nudge you in the direction of the spiritual disciplines. If you neglect them for long, you will have that uneasiness in your spirit. Don't harden your heart and get used to that uneasiness. **A hunger and thirst to know Jesus is a gift from God via the Holy Spirit.** (Matthew 5:6) Respond. Adjust your schedule. It is better to start with just a ten minute devotional that is Word based than

Commented [notes18]: Luke 13:34 (ESV)

³⁴ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!

Commented [notes19]: Romans 8:28 (ESV)

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Commented [notes20]: Revelation 21:27 (ESV)

²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Commented [notes21]: Psalm 139:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Commented [notes22]: 2 Peter 1:5-6 (NIV)

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;
⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;

Commented [notes23]: Matthew 5:6 (NIV)

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

to do nothing. Start with an obtainable goal and build on it. Like any exercise, consistency is better than big efforts followed by long lapses.

Pray for sensitivity to the Spirit working in you throughout the day so that you can incorporate the disciplines silently into your life as you go about your business. Self-discipline is a work of the Holy Spirit in us, (2Timothy 1:7; Galatians 5:23) but we must choose to cooperate.

Another key component to endurance is fellowship. We need one another's encouragement to keep pressing forward. The author of Hebrews encouraged us to do so all the more as we see the day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25) That's because the world is becoming more and more like Noah's day. (Matthew 24:37) Temptations abound! Many of the disciplines we practice together. Some you can't practice on your own. The accountability fellowship offers us helps us to endure. It also gives us a chance to share what we are learning and learn from others. We were designed to grow in fellowship with other believers. (Ephesians 2:21-22)

Finally, the discipline of the Lord will also help you persevere. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens. (Hebrews 12:6) If we are called, then our struggles and the chastening we receive from the Lord will keep steering us back to the disciplines. We'll see how we failed in a temptation because we were not strengthened by the Word. We'll see how wrong choices led to numerous problems, because we did not wait for the Lord. We'll see how ill equipped we are to answer a young believers questions, because we did not meditate on the Word. Our failures prod us forward. Someone has said, "If you fall, make sure it is forward." Learn from your mistakes. Let them motivate you to be more serious about cooperating with the Holy Spirit in the practice of the disciplines.

The struggle will not end until we see Jesus face to face and His work in us is complete. (1John 3:2) The old nature will always be at war with our spiritual self. (Galatians 5:17) We are in a war. The disciplines help us to prepare for that daily battle and teach us how to wield the sword of the Spirit. (Hebrews 4:12) With or without the disciplines you will be on the battle field. The disciplines help equip you for the fight and give you battle tactics. They strengthen your allegiance to our King. The more disciplined you are, the more of the skirmishes you will win. Like it or not, we are all on the spiritual battlefield. Get equipped or you will suffer the consequences. (Ephesians 6:12)

One last tip to help you persevere, remember what is eternal. Many of our failures come because we get wrapped up in the here and now and fixated on passing things. Keep eternity in view and you'll passionately want to persevere in the disciplines. (2Corinthians 4:18)

Questions

- 1 How do we find time for the disciplines?
- 2 How can we rejoice in the Lord always?

Commented [notes24]: 2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV)
⁷ For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Commented [notes25]: Galatians 5:23 (ESV)
²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Commented [notes26]: Hebrews 10:25 (ESV)
²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Commented [notes27]: Matthew 24:37 (ESV)
³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Commented [notes28]: Ephesians 2:21-22 (ESV)
²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.
²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Commented [notes29]: Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)
⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.

Commented [notes30]: 1 John 3:2 (ESV)
² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Commented [notes31]: Galatians 5:17 (ESV)
¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

Commented [notes32]: Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)
¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Commented [notes33]: Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)
¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Commented [notes34]: 2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)
¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

- 3 What was Jesus' example of joy?
- 4 What did Jesus come to announce?
- 5 Relate the Great Command to joy?
- 6 Where do we find joy in difficulty?
- 7 What results in joy?
- 8 What should Christianity look like?
- 9 Why is there no disciplines formula?
- 10 How do we persevere in the disciplines?