

We are beginning a new series on spiritual disciplines. This is not intended to be laundry list of things you have to add to your schedule. Nor is this series intended to be a formula for being a godly person. It isn't a list of behaviors you must perform to earn God's favor, but rather things that we practice on a regular basis that can help our spiritual growth into Christian maturity. (1Tim.4:7)

**Commented [notes1]: 1 Timothy 4:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness;

This series is about some of the disciplines that have been observed in the life of Jesus and His followers. There are things that Jesus did on a regular basis. We can observe these same things in successful men and women of God. By successful I don't mean they were famous or that they had a large number of followers, but that their life bore fruit because of the depth of their relationship with God. As you've heard me say many times before, doing flows out of being.

We are all given spiritual gifts and some are anointed for particular ministries (Ephesians 4:6-7), but **our effectiveness in exercising those gifts will be proportional to our relationship with God.** Samson's life illustrates an anointed person that was given a great gift. Though he used it for its intended purpose, he was not a good example or as effective as he could have been had he disciplined his life. (Judges 16:30)

**Commented [notes2]: Ephesians 4:7-8 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

<sup>8</sup> Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

**Commented [notes3]: Judges 16:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines. EThen he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.

The one question we could ask almost any believer and be certain of negative response is this, "**Are you satisfied with your prayer life?**" Pause for a moment and think of what your response would be. Now ask yourself why that is so. Let me first say that I do not mean to put you on a guilt trip. If you think you are fully satisfied with your prayer life, I'm concerned about you. Our dissatisfaction is spiritually healthy as long as we do not grow calloused to it. As followers of Jesus we should long to be more intimate with our Savior. That longing is for our unbroken fellowship with Him in heaven. (Revelation 22:3-4) It spurs us to deepen our prayer life now. If you think you have reached the fullness of that intimacy already, you aren't on a guilt trip; you are more likely on a pride trip.

**Commented [notes4]: Revelation 22:3-4 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

<sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

These disciplines we will be looking at are not stripes on a uniform that make you a super saint. They are part of a healthy and growing relationship with our Savior. Prayer is one of the essential disciplines for our growth in Christ. We instinctively know how vital it is to us. **It is the spiritual breath of the believer.** In every influential Christian's biography, you will find that they rose early to spend time in prayer. They learned this from the gospel account of Jesus. After a very taxing day, Mark tells us of Jesus, *<sup>35</sup> And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.* Mark 1:35 (ESV) If Jesus needed to spend time with His Father in prayer, what does that tell us about our need? He spent an entire

night in prayer before choosing the twelve. (Luke 6:12) We see Him breaking out in prayer before the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:41), for the disciples during that last week (John 17:1), before going to the cross (Mark 14:34-35), and even on the cross.

By looking at the prayers of Jesus we can see several types of prayers. Not much is said about His morning prayer time, except that He found an isolated place. He wanted to be free from distraction. That is perhaps **one of the most helpful ingredients of our prayer life, freedom from distraction**. We live in a very different world in the sense that we have a watch on our wrist, a phone in our pocket and some of those have our daily schedule with warning tones, calls, texts, emails, not to mention our own family and their needs. All the busyness can keep us from taking that quiet undistracted time to share our heart and listen to His heart and direction for us. I would recommend that you find a place that is free from all those distractions. If possible, leave your phone and watch behind. (Matthew 6:6)

As we enter into that quiet space, we'll find the need to discipline our mind. Your thoughts will jump all over. It helps to pray out loud, which is another reason to find an isolated place. You might start with the Lord's Prayer with the freedom to elaborate on any line in it. Many people use the acronym **ACTS as a guide, adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication**. You'll find many of the prayers in Scripture roughly follow this pattern. It can help to keep us on track and put first things first. Another aid to help in concentration is to picture yourself coming before the throne of Almighty God. We read about it in Revelation chapter 5. (Revelation 5:8) That is what you are doing after all. To keep that picture in your mind will help you maintain an attitude of reverence.

**Adoration** is seen in the first line of the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name." (Matthew 6:9) The name of the Lord is all that the Lord is in His nature. This line is declaring the holiness of God's character and declaring that it should be held in reverence. You can adore God for the ways you have seen His nature expressed in your life recently, or for what you have read of Him in His word.

**Confession** is a part of prayer we often avoid, and yet it is so needed for our spiritual growth. (Psalm 32:5) The Holy Spirit will convict us of areas in which we have failed. Spiritual progress is made when we acknowledge where we have failed. When we confess our shortcomings, it not only relieves us of guilt, but it reminds us of patterns that need to change in our life. When we come to the final portion of our prayer time, we can ask for the strength to walk in freedom from the sins we have confessed. Confession gives us an open line of communication with God. Unconfessed sin will hinder our prayer life. (Proverbs 28:13)

**Commented [notes5]: Luke 6:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.

**Commented [notes6]: John 11:41 (ESV)**

<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

**Commented [notes7]: John 17:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,

**Commented [notes8]: Mark 14:34-35 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch."<sup>35</sup> And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.

**Commented [notes9]: Matthew 6:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**Commented [notes10]: Revelation 5:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

**Commented [notes11]: Matthew 6:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

**Commented [notes12]: Psalm 32:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

**Commented [notes13]: Proverbs 28:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

**Thanksgiving** naturally follows confession, for we have the promise that when we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1John 1:9) That is something to be thankful for. Thanksgiving is the necessary and (should be) natural response to God's gracious and merciful nature. The prayers we have seen answered, the privilege of prayer, the physical and spiritual provision we receive should all evoke a spirit of thanksgiving. Believers have an endless list of things for which to be thankful. (Psalm 86:12)

**Commented [notes14]: 1 John 1:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

**Supplication** is often how we begin our prayer time, but is best here at the end. After adoring God for who He is and confessing our sins, and thanking Him for all He is and does will often change the requests we want to present to God. There are so many we know who have serious needs or illness. There are countries in turmoil, brothers and sisters that are being persecuted, ministries that need support and encouragement, and on and on. (Ephesians 6:18)

**Commented [notes15]: Psalm 86:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever.

Don't think it is wrong to pray for yourself. God encourages us to pray for wisdom (James 1:5), His strength and anointing on your life, your daily needs, spiritual growth and that your desires conform to His desires. (Matthew 6:11; Psalm 40:8) Prayer to help you be all that God has called you to be is not selfish; it is for the glory of God.

**Commented [notes16]: Ephesians 6:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

**Commented [notes17]: James 1:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

**Commented [notes18]: Matthew 6:11 (NIV)**

<sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.

**Commented [notes19]: Psalm 40:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

A prayer list has been helpful to many for the supplication portion of their prayer time. To list the people and situations in order of their importance can also help to focus and aid your memory. We often tell someone we will pray for them, but do we really follow up? They should go on our list at least for a time. Our list should change over time as needs change. But never let the list limit your prayers. Be sure to search your heart and let the Spirit of God lead you. He may bring things to your mind that you would never have thought of on your own.

To the ACTS pattern, I would add a **time of silence** before the throne. You've had your say, now let God have His. Communion implies two sides. We have one mouth and two ears for a reason. Listen for His prompting in your heart. Sometimes a Scripture may come to mind for you to contemplate.

A word of caution is in order here. This is not a time for you to hear from God for others, or to step into the role of the Old Testament prophet. This is a time for *you* to draw near to God. (Psalm 73:28) **We need to discern the difference from our own inner voice and the voice of the Lord.** It takes time, just as baby learns to speak and understand a language. Whenever you think you are hearing self-exalting things or that which would condemn others, you can be fairly certain you are hearing your own spirit. The Lord will not feed your pride. (Proverbs 8:13) Hearing from the Lord always results

**Commented [notes20]: Psalm 73:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

**Commented [notes21]: Proverbs 8:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

in greater humility, but it does not condemn us or make us feel worthless. (Romans 8:1) What we believe we are hearing should always be taken to the Scriptures to see if it lines up with the Word. (Isaiah 8:20)

**Commented [notes22]: Romans 8:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

**Commented [notes23]: Isaiah 8:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

Sometimes an incident will be brought to mind in which we didn't represent the Lord as we should have. It may be an opportunity to correct the impression we gave others or to do something differently the next time you are in a similar situation. The Holy Spirit may convict us during this time of silence regarding something we never even thought twice about. We'll have more on this subject of waiting on the Lord.

Another type of prayer we see Jesus employing was the sudden calling out to the Lord. One of Jesus' short prayers was simply, *"Father, glorify your name!"* (John 12:28) Another of Jesus brief prayers expressed His thanks for the way God was working in the world. <sup>25</sup> *At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.* Matthew 11:25-26 (ESV) He was rejoicing in the gracious aspect of God's revelation to the humble. He couldn't hold that thought in and so He turned it into an audible expression of gratitude to God. Would that seem strange to you, if someone you were talking with suddenly prayed aloud a short prayer of thanks for their appreciation of the way God was working? Would you be hesitant to do the same? Why? We should have the freedom to do whatever the Spirit of God prompts us to do. I call these short spontaneous prayers "bullet prayers". We can send them up all day long.

**Commented [notes24]: John 12:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

Once again I want to emphasize that this is not an exercise that makes you holy. It is the freedom and discipline of doing what is good at the leading of the Holy Spirit. It will often be unique, just as Jesus' prayers were.

That said, I should also point out that there is a place for memorized prayers. Evangelicals tend to look down on wrote prayers of Anglican and Catholic churches. However, the Lord Himself gave us one, The Lord's Prayer, which was to be put to memory and prayed together. You'll notice that the pronouns are plural, *"Our Father...forgive us as we..."* (Matthew 6:12) While we desire to pray from the heart and avoid reciting something that means little to us (Matthew 6:7), some written prayers express exactly what is on our heart better than we could. Writing out a prayer can be a way to really think deeply about just what you want to say to the Lord. I would encourage you to occasionally take time to write your prayer down.

**Commented [notes25]: Matthew 6:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

**Commented [notes26]: Matthew 6:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

There is a wonderful little book called [The Valley of Vision](#). It is a compilation of the prayers of Puritans from several centuries ago. The Call to Worship came from that book. That particular prayer just expressed my heart so perfectly that I pray through it

most evenings. I'm sure I'll move on to the other prayers in the book. As we go through stages in our spiritual growth, we will find our prayers and the emphasis of them changes.

Another type of Jesus' prayers was an intense time of seeking the Father's heart. The author of Hebrews describes it this way, *<sup>7</sup> In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.* Hebrews 5:7 (ESV) "Loud cries and tears with reverence" is quite a description. This is no half-hearted prayer. There are times in our life when our hearts are torn. The Psalms are great examples of these. God is not offended when we voice our fears and doubts to Him reverently. Where else would we take them? When we are honest about our condition and lay these at His feet, He helps us work through them. He helps us surrender to His will and face what lies ahead. We might as well be honest with God, for we cannot hide our heart from Him. (Hebrews 4:13)

I think these are the prayers that are most acceptable to God. They are the most sincere ones and without pretense. (Luke 18:13) We are rarely distracted by externals when we cry out like this with our whole heart. These difficult times are when we are desperate to hear from Him as well. Peter called these times of testing that prove the genuineness of our faith as more valuable than refined gold. (1Peter 1:6-7) The Psalmists almost always ended their prayers of desperation with words of confidence in God and His help that they knew by faith was coming. (Psalm 42:11)

Faith is an essential ingredient to prayer. (Mark 11:23) Faith is not just believing you are right; it is confidence in the will and Word of God. Faith grows by reading and meditating on the Word of God. (Romans 10:17) **The promises to those who pray God's will with faith are staggering!** (Matthew 21:22)

One of the most prolific writers on the topic of prayer, E.M. Bounds, addresses the issue of these open ended promises. *"If Jesus dwells at the fountain of my life; if the currents of his life have displaced and superseded all self-currents; if implicit obedience to him is the inspiration and force of every movement of my life, then he can safely commit the praying to my will, and pledge himself, by an obligation as profound as his own nature, that whatsoever is asked shall be granted."* When our lives are surrendered to the will of God and our hearts are to please Him, we invite the Spirit of God to lead us to pray His will into the earth.

**Prayer should be the continual breath of our spirit as we walk with our Lord.** (1Thessalonians 5:17) We breathe out our adoration, confession, thanks, and supplication. We breathe in His directions, comfort, and peace. Whether it is in our

**Commented [notes27]: Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

**Commented [notes28]: Luke 18:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

**Commented [notes29]: 1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

**Commented [notes30]: Psalm 42:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

**Commented [notes31]: Mark 11:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.

**Commented [notes32]: Romans 10:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

**Commented [notes33]: Matthew 21:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

**Commented [notes34]: 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing,

quiet place where we tune all else out, or the overflow of our heart in anguish or in joy as we are going about our day, prayer should be as natural to a believer as speaking to one's spouse. Since Jesus calls us His friends (John 15:15), brothers (Romans 8:29), and bride (Revelation 19:7), consider the freedom we have to speak with Him about all we are experiencing (Ephesians 3:12), and to hear the wisest counsel of all. Without the spiritual breath of prayer, our spirit will suffocate. Breathe!

#### Questions

- 1 What is the purpose of spiritual disciplines?
- 2 Why is prayer so important?
- 3 What does ACTS stand for?
- 4 Have those of you who have heard this before put it into practice?
- 5 Discuss each part.
- 6 What did Pastor Paul add to ACTS. Why?
- 7 What is the caution regarding hearing from God?
- 8 Give examples of bullet prayers Jesus prayed.
- 9 What is the value of written prayers?
- 10 Review Hebrews 5:7 and discuss.
- 11 How can God promise to give us what we ask in His name?

**Commented [notes35]: John 15:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

**Commented [notes36]: Romans 8:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

**Commented [notes37]: Revelation 19:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;

**Commented [notes38]: Ephesians 3:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.