



# Spiritual Disciplines Anthology

## Introduction

This anthology is a database of ideas for cultivating a warm-hearted, ever-deepening relationship with Jesus—ways to “lift our sails to catch the wind of His Spirit.” Read each chapter. Click on all the links to other online resources and read them too. After that you’ll be ready to create a proposal for your spiritual disciplines exercise. You’ll select disciplines using this formula:

- 1 daily discipline from Prayer **OR** Bible Reading
- +1 weekly discipline from The Church, Worship & Sunday as a Special Day
- +1 discipline of any kind from Fasting & Solitude **OR** Lifestyle Habits/Choices

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Spiritual Disciplines Exercise

**May God use this exercise to keep us "spiraling upward" in knowing, loving, obeying, and living with Jesus—until we actually see Him face to face!**

### A Note on Daily Devotional Times with the Lord

The daily disciplines for prayer and Bible reading relate most logically to a special, daily time we spend *f2f* with Jesus. If you have yet to establish a regular pattern of meeting with Him or have gotten away from a pattern you once had (it happens), this exercise is an ideal opportunity to grow in this important contributor to our ever growing spiritual formation. Here are a few tips from *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods\** book for us and as we help other believers:

1. **Don't try for a two-hour quiet time at first.** | Begin with a consistent seven minutes and let it grow. It's better to be consistent with a short time than to meet for an hour every other week. [Pastor Warren, writing to a general audience, suggests starting with 7 minutes for people just beginning a daily devotional time. For MIN 5300 purposes, if you are starting or restarting a devotional time, why not start with 15 consistent minutes and let it grow from there. Still, his point is a good one: Encourage people not to try way too much lest they get discouraged.]
2. **Don't watch the clock.** | Decide what you can and want to do in the Word and prayer during the time you have selected; write it down; then do it.
3. **Emphasize quality, not quantity.** | Aim for a quality relational time with the Lord.

[\*See p. 243-244 for these and other tips. Zondervan, 2006.]



## Chapter 1

# Prayer

### All Daily Disciplines

## Dialogical/Listening Prayer

The goal of all of the exercises in this chapter is to experience your prayer times as much like actual conversations with Jesus as possible. Begin your prayer time with an intentional awareness of meeting with Him (Christ-consciousness). Use your sanctified imagination. Greet Jesus as One who loves you and longs to spend time with you—for both are true of Him! Tell Him of your love, gratitude, praise. Confess; get things straight and surrendered. Share wholeheartedly your joys, needs, hurts, problems. Listen for Him, if He chooses, to confirm, exhort, convict, or encourage you through His Spirit and His Word. (This may take allocating more time in the future.) Remember that dialogue implies sharing back and forth. Tell the Lord of your desire to know more of what is on His heart, to be more aware of His presence throughout the day. Read more on this here: [The Basics of Listening Prayer](#).

As you come to the end of your prayer time with Jesus, approach it as you would when reluctantly and temporarily parting from a much loved friend. Jesus, of course, never leaves us or forsakes us! So the temporary parting is not from His presence, but from uninterrupted relational time to walking with Him throughout the many activities of your day.

## New Structure for Prayer Times

Prayer times can sometimes get unbalanced. Sometimes we may realize that most of the time is taken up with supplication, or personal needs and requests. Or maybe long periods of time go by where we never remember to confess our sins and to gratefully experience the grace and forgiven already given. It's not that every day needs to be exactly the same, but sometimes trying new or different organizational patterns can help us make the best use of our conversations with the Lord. Some possibilities:

- **ACTS** (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication). Click on ACTS Prayer guide for some tips.
- **PRAY** (Praise the Lord; Repent of your sins; Ask for yourself and others; Yield yourself to God's will)
- **The Lord's Prayer** (Slowly pray through the lines of the prayer making personal applications)
- **Thinking about when you pray as a part of a devotional time.** It's worth considering and experimenting here: Should you have a prayer time before you read your biblical passage for the day? Should you pray after your time in the Word? Should you divide time for prayer before and after Bible reading? Figure out what works best for you. One thing for sure, be sure you have time for prayer, which is more likely to be left out unless we're very intentional about not letting that happen.

## Create & Use a Prayer Journal

As the Lord lays more people, ministries, missionaries, and other issues on our hearts for which we want to faithfully pray, a prayer journal can be a very helpful tool so that the important ministry of intercession is not hindered because we feel overwhelmed with too many requests. In a notebook, divide the requests you want to regularly pray for across five or six days of the week. That way you'll be sure to pray for each need at least once a week. Determine how many of these "regular" prayer requests you can handle per day. Leave room for recording God's work under each request. Take a tip from Dr. McQuilkin and leave the first few pages of the notebook blank for urgent needs that arise. Watch for and record (with dates) God's work. Periodically update or replace your journal, most likely every 2-3 years.

## Pray for the Nations with *Operation World*

Praying daily for the nations can be a rich experience of active engagement in God's global mission. It sharpens our eternal perspective, putting our own situations in perspective. Every CIU seminary student should be familiar with *Operation World*. Click on [Operation World](#) then "Pray for Today's Country." If you choose to do this as a daily discipline, pick one or more strategic needs for which you feel led to intercede. Don't try to pray for all of them! An alternative is to select one nation God has laid on your heart, click on the complete article, and pray through all the requests over the three weeks.

## Use a Different Strategy (or more than one) for Prayer

Most believers struggle sometimes with wandering thoughts or dry, dull, passionless prayer times. While there can be many reasons, one thing that can help is to alter how we pray in a physical sense. You may want to experiment with one or more of these ideas:

- Pray with your eyes open as if talking directly to Jesus. You are!
- Pray out loud – a **great** antidote to fuzzy, distracted praying.
- Pray kneeling (or sometimes face down on the floor).
- Pray outside or in a different location inside.
- Pray prayers written by others as a way to break out of ruts. God's people have used prayers penned by others (notably the Psalms) for millennia, both individually and corporately. Try praying through the Psalms. Or, click on the link for [The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions](#). Skim a few of these great prayers. Another source is to keep a hymnal or collection of praise music with your devotional materials (as Dr. McQuilkin always did). Sing or speak to the Lord using lyrics that express the longings of your heart.

## Allocate More Time for Prayer

Keep doing what you are doing, but add an additional 10 or more minutes (which could mean waking up 10 minutes earlier).



## Chapter 2

# Bible Reading

### All Daily Disciplines

### Interactive Bible Reading

The goal here is to engage with your daily passage with a fresh, more curious and expectant mindset. Pray before you start. Ask the Spirit to illuminate the Word like never before. Read the passage once to get the big picture. Then go back and read with rapt attention to details. Use pens and markers to “dialogue” with the text. Underline words or phrases that stand out to you. Write comments, question marks, exclamation points, cross references—whatever captures your personal, passionate reaction to the text. When a verse or passage is particularly relevant, record the date and a brief note on your current circumstances. Later, you’ll remember how God ministered to you through His Word at a key point in your journey. This discipline is about fighting back against a passive, distracted, perfunctory reading of the Word. **Note:** See the end of this chapter for an interesting historical insight on Bible reading.

### Bible Journaling

Many mature believers find that journaling in conjunction with Bible reading deepens their understanding, retention, and application of the Word. Rephrasing one or more key insights in print in your own words—on paper or screen—greatly increases your likelihood of keeping those insights active in memory. The next day the same insights are reinforced as you review them before making a new entry. The heart of this discipline is a refusal to conclude your daily reading until the Spirit has applied the “daily living bread” He has for you that day. A caution: Avoid spending more time writing in your journal than you do in reading the Word. Find and maintain a good proportion. Here’s a simple and effective 2-question Bible journaling strategy:

- What is the big idea of this passage?
- What is God saying *to me* today?

### Add Variety to Bible Reading

Our daily times in the Word need consistency, but also variety. It can be helpful to periodically alter your strategy to avoid getting into ruts. Several ideas include:

- Read a different translation (NKJV, HCSV, NLT, ESV, etc.)
- Read the Bible straight through in one year or two years.
- Read using a different schedule. One example is an online 3 year Bible reading schedule with really cool bookmarks provided on the website of [North Coast Calvary Church Bible Reading Plan](#).
- Read one Bible book in depth.

- Read a shorter portion each day than you are used to, may just a few verses, but meditate deeply on them and pray them back to the Lord.
- New Place or Time of Day for Bible Reading. Sometimes it helps to change the location (e.g., different room in your home) or time of day for your daily reading. For many people—possibly even most—early in the day is better because the end of each day is less predictable and/or we end up too tired to concentrate or companion. If this is true for you, consider establishing a set morning time and then determine what you do the day before so you can meet with the Lord each morning, e.g., get to bed earlier; get up earlier, etc.

## Allocate More Time for Bible Reading

Continue doing what you are doing in reading Scripture , but add 10 minutes or more increments of 10 minutes so you have more time to go deeper.

## Bible Memorization

You won't pick memorization for your exercise, since you're already working on it for MIN 5300. However, we acknowledge here that Scripture memorization is a powerful spiritual discipline that helps us literally hide God's Word in our hearts and minds. Keep it up after this course is over. Check out D. Bruce Lockerbie's beautiful quote on this:

*Memorizing Scripture serves as the interior decoration of the soul by hanging beautiful texts on the walls of the mind.* [In *A Christian Paideia: The Habitual Vision of Greatness*, p. 132.]

### **Note: Historical insight on the reading of the Word of God:**

"In ancient times, people read [the portions of Scripture they had access to] out loud and thought it strange when a reader would not do so. Indeed, the Jewish rabbis were of the opinion that reading a manuscript aloud was an aid to memorization, and silent reading a cause of forgetfulness."

In Kistemaker, Simon. *Acts* (New Testament Commentary Series), Baker Book House, 1990, p. 313. [Footnote 56 at the bottom of the same page says, "Augustine mentions that Ambrose, by reading silently, failed to explain the text." - *Confessions* 6.3.]

Of course, in our day, public readings of the Word in church services are common, but there are probably few individuals who read the Bible out loud in private. But maybe these ancients were on to something. Maybe reading Scripture out loud could make our f2f times with the Lord more dynamic, conversational, and meaningful. Maybe "quiet times" should be more like "noisy times!"



## Chapter 3

# The Church, Worship, & Sunday as a Special Day

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are two indispensable, life-sustaining means of grace for the worldwide Church through the millennia. Though they will not factor into our exercise, take some time to reflect on the significance of these sacraments for spiritual growth. In your own mind and heart, within your family, and in ministry settings, encourage God's people to keep fresh the awe and amazement of God's grace whenever they engage in these experiences. Here are a few ideas:

*Baptism:* Every baptism should be a vibrant reminder and celebration of the work of God in the remission of sins, regeneration, and our in-grafting into the Body of Christ. Baptisms are not just for the one being baptized, but for the entire community of baptized saints to surrender anew, or as Dr. McQuilkin might put it, to go back to where they started with a new sense of God's awesome grace. Don't let baptismal services get too routine to be meaningful.

*Lord's Supper:* Every communion service is a time to receive spiritual nourishment, to feed on Christ in our hearts by faith, to remind ourselves of our utter dependence on Him for life and health. Every gathering around the table is a call to celebrate and participate together in the spiritual covenant fellowship we share as members of one Body. Again, guard against the tendency for communion services to be so routine that they lose their true significance.

### Once a Week Disciplines

#### Preparing for the Lord's Day on Saturday Evening

For this discipline you'll create a special time Saturday evening to anticipate and prepare for Sunday. This could be included as a part of a family meal or be a special time of prayer before you go to bed. You could even light candles as Jewish people do to welcome Shabbat. However you create this experience, here's some possible prayer requests:

- Pray for your pastor and others who will communicate the Word the next day (Bible teachers for adults and kids, etc.).
- Pray for God's work in and through your church.
- Pray that you (and your family) will be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit while at church and that you'll have a heightened sense of the joy of gathering with other saints to collectively worship and pour out your love for the Lord of the worldwide church.
- Pray for God's work in other churches in your city.
- Looking at a world map, picture the waves of worship rising to Jesus time zone by time zone. Pray that more from every tongue and tribe and nation will recognize our great God. Pray for missionaries you know as they minister on Sunday and also for their need for rest and re-creation. **In all of these requests, remember that Sunday is a special day, a gift God gives His us.**

Skim this article to learn more about the [Jewish Sabbath roots of our celebration of Sunday](#). The website of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops also includes a truly wonderful perspective on [Sunday as the Lord's Day](#).

## Practicing Christ-Consciousness in Church

This exercise involves assessing your current practice of “doing church” and experimenting with ways to make time at church on Sunday more meaningful. You may want to begin by considering what happens between home and church. If you often arrive late, exhausted, and/or with a million things on your mind other than gathering as God’s family, how could that be changed? This can be especially challenging for parents. One discipline you could select for this category is **getting yourself and your children as ready as possible Saturday evening**, picking our clothes, getting breakfast ready ahead of time, going over memory verses or other preparation. The goal would be to make this a fun time if possible, drawing children into the idea of getting ready for something special the next day.

Another discipline is to **train your mind to be more intentional in focusing on the Lord and being with His body**. Do you come to church with a sense of anticipation and joy? With a longing to be with fellow saints for worship and equipping? Should you ask the Spirit to help you enter into the worship service more joyfully expectant? Do you need His help to guard against an on-going mental critique of the music, sermon, and other elements of the service? Do you need His power to rein in wandering thoughts? Here’s one idea to try: As you arrive at church, imagine that you live in a place where Christians are persecuted and Bibles are scarce. How would brothers and sisters in these situations feel when they gather as the Church despite the danger? How would they greet each other? How would they feel about worshipping together in music? Would their minds be wandering during the preaching of the Word? The heart of this discipline is to fight back against complacency, dissatisfaction, boredom, or any distraction that hinders what God wants to do in us and the entire group of believers gathered. Read a preview of an excellent article about [the importance of preaching for spiritual transformation](#) and our part in receiving the Word. (You may need to subscribe to *Christianity Today* online to read the entire article, however this is not required for this assignment.)

## Creating a Special Time After Church to Experience God’s Sabbath Rest

Here the goal is to view the Lord’s Day as the entire day, not just the hours spent in church—and not in a legalistic way, but with a desire for more Christ-focused balance in our hectic lives. Create a special activity on Sunday afternoon or evening in which to honor, enjoy, rest in, and/or serve the Lord in joy and peace. Even secular research consistently demonstrates the need for rest and relaxation to deal with the effects of stress and strain. God did not create us to go non-stop, seven days a week. Weekly schedules with no ebb and flow can lead to burn-out, and also make us more subject to temptation. Here are some possibilities for prolonging the joy of God’s special day. You might try one or a combination:

- Share a simple meal with others aware of Jesus’ presence too. Focus on encouragement, and spiritual growth—not just current events and trivia. Maybe invite unbelievers.
- Visit someone unable to attend church for health or other reasons, and lovingly recreate parts of the church service, singing hymns, sharing about the sermon, etc.
- Take a leisurely walk in a park or forest. Worship the Lord in the beauty of His creation.
- Take a nap.
- Spend some time in unhurried, dialogical prayer with the Lord.
- Do something dramatic like reading [The Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards](#) by yourself or with friends or family or both. Edwards read this document *every week* to keep his mind on his duty before God.
- Whatever you do, spend more of the day actively thinking about Jesus and resting in Him, knowing you don’t have to control everything on this special day.

**Note to pastors:** Many pastors observe their *sabbath* on another day because Sundays are filled with responsibilities. For the purposes of this assignment, however, it is hoped that one of the weekly disciplines above (or some adaptation that you describe in your proposal) can make the Lord's Day even more of a blessing for you.

**Note to everyone:** No matter what discipline you experiment with in this chapter, may it encourage a life-long determination to make the Lord's Day a special day, a weekly spiritual retreat, if you will, from the relentless pressure of 21st century life. Even those of us with many responsibilities at church need the ebb and flow God modeled in His own work schedule (Gen 2:2-3).



## Chapter 4



# Fasting & Solitude

## Fasting

Richard Foster defines fasting as “abstaining from food for spiritual purposes” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 42) and explains the primary purpose for fasting this way: “Fasting must forever center on God. It must be God-initiated and God-ordained” (41). Secondary purposes include: (1) “More than any other single discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface” (48). (2) “Fasting helps us keep our balance in life. How easily we begin to allow non-essentials to take precedence in our lives. How quickly we crave things we do not need until we are enslaved by them” (48-49). (3) Other purposes include “increased effectiveness in intercessory prayer, guidance in decisions, increased concentration, deliverance for those in bondage, physical well-being, revelations, etc.” (49). Foster quotes John Wesley as saying: “Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason; and others have utterly disregarded it.” (41). See [The Spiritual Discipline of Fasting](#).

**Ideas for fasting:** Ask the Spirit’s guidance in deciding on a strategy. You might try a one-time, one-day fast for 1, 2, or 3 meals, abstaining from food and liquids except water. Or observe a liquids-only fast for 1, 2, or 3 meal times (no milkshakes! 😊). If you have medical or medication issues, consult your doctor. For people without medical issues, a short fast with water is likely to have only positive health benefits plus the spiritual ones. Use the time freed from meal prep, eating, and clean-up for great times with the Lord. The late Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, dispelled the idea that fasting is always an individual discipline hidden from others. It can be, but it can also be an adventure for a couple, family, or group who willingly partner together for the right reasons.

## Solitude

Our spiritual ancestors needed times of solitude to escape the grip of the world. In 1 Kings 19:9-18, Elijah desperately needed the solitude God planned to restore His troubled and exhausted prophet. Many *Devotional Classics* authors practiced times of solitude. This discipline, however, is getting harder to pull off. “Our fear of being alone drives us to noise and crowds. We keep up a constant stream of words even if they are inane. We buy radios [and TVs, cell phones, iPads, etc.] . . . so that if no one else is around at least we are not condemned to silence.” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 84). Yet Foster encourages us to cultivate “an inner solitude and silence that sets us free from loneliness and fear. Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment. Solitude is not first a place but a state of mind and heart” (Foster, 84). How can solitude bring fulfillment and freedom from loneliness and fear? It happens as we determine to *Be still, and know that I am God.* (Psalm 46:10)

**Ideas for solitude:** Go somewhere peaceful and ideally beautiful. Turn cell phones off. Whatever else you do, allocate time to simply experience God’s presence in stillness, peace, and rest. Allow yourself to slow down, unwind, and rest in Him. Cultivating inner solitude helps us hear His still small voice even in the middle of the clamor of our busy lives.



## Chapter 5

# Lifestyle Habits & Choices

### Media: Daily or (at least) Several Times a Week Disciplines

The technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brings many benefits, but one glaring danger is simply the vast amount of time that can be taken up with various forms of media—sometimes without our awareness that it is happening. Read the article "[What is a Media Fast?](#)" and the linked article "Understanding Media's Light Pollution" Of course, the potential for mind pollution and time wasting is hardly a new phenomenon for Christians; we just have more access to sources of both than many who've walked before us.

**Ideas for Media Fasting:** Select this discipline to assess your use of electronic media. Is the time you spend online or watching other flickering screens the best use you can make of your time? Here are some ideas you could try out just for one or more days per week:

- Don't turn the TV on first thing in the morning—and maybe not at all.
- Turn the TV off at \_\_\_ pm for X nights to get to bed earlier so you are more rested and have more time in the morning (including for your devotional time).
- Conduct a complete or partial fast of TV, internet, movies, video games, Facebook, and/or any other forms of social/electronic media for X hours on X days. With the time you gain from any of these strategies, ask the Spirit to help you use it wisely. How easy or hard will this be for you?

However you create it, use this "fast" as a way to step back and reflect on the effects of the media on your life. What positive or negative contributions do you see? Does everything you watch/read meet the criteria of Phil. 4:8? Does your use of media and the time you spend on it bring true relaxation (as many people believe) or simply numb your brain and keep your body stimulated when it needs rest (as research tells us)? Does it encourage or impede your spiritual formation? Does it encourage or impeded your relationships with your family? What took the place of the media when time was freed up during your media fast and what was the impact on your life?

Another area we must address in terms of media use among Christians is pornography, for it has become an extensive and deadly problem effecting families and churches in the U.S. and around the world. Read the entire article [Your Brain on Porn](#). Be on your guard. Be bold in holding brothers and sisters accountable in this area. Be vigilant in guarding media use of children.

### Health: Daily Disciplines

As Willard and Simpson point out, our bodies are "our primary allies in Christlikeness." Healthy physical habits are a part of loving and honoring God with all of our being. Improved discipline in these very personal areas also reinforces our discipline in other areas of our lives. In whatever time God grants us on earth, let's be good stewards of the bodies He has given us for His glory. The purpose of the disciplines below are aimed at that goal.



**Ideas for Making Healthier Eating Choices:** Prayerfully consider where your current diet should be improved. Ideas: Too much fast food? Too much processed food? Too much sugar? Too much salt? Too many refined carbohydrates (white rice, potatoes, bread, pasta, baked goods, etc.)? Too many sodas, not enough water? Just plain too much food? Commit to one or more ways to improve your diet and then carry out your plan during our exercise with the goal of continuing it on a regular basis after that. Other people (family or friends) can be involved in this exercise too if they want to be. Click on [a guide to healthy eating](#). Skim this article and read more carefully if you'll include healthier eating in your exercise.



### **Ideas for Beginning or Increasing Physical**

**Exercise:** Prayerfully consider a realistic way to build time for exercise into your daily routine. Even ten or fifteen minutes a day can make a big difference! Walking is an outstanding form of exercise with few risks for injury. How about getting a Fitbit or another device to track your walking? Give serious consideration to adding strength training with weights to build upper body strength, build muscle, and improve bone health. Reasonably healthy people should have no problem easing into an exercise program. Don't fall into the trap of doing too much too fast! Start slow and ramp up. Involve others if possible. Many exercise programs recommend checking with a doctor at the beginning, especially for people with medical issues. Click on [a guide for a healthy approach to exercise](#). Skim this article and read more carefully if you'll include physical exercise in your spiritual disciplines exercise.

### **Giving**

Do not select this category for your exercise. However, no discussion of means of grace and growth should exclude the powerful influence our personal choices related to money can have on our lives. All believers should be mindful of the continuum between an affluent lifestyle and a simple lifestyle—and how to distinguish between wants and needs. Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* addresses this issue in a chapter entitled "The Discipline of Simplicity," as does Willard in *The Spirit of the Disciplines* in a chapter entitled "Is Poverty Spiritual?" Both chapters are well worth reading. Ron Sider's classic book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* also strongly challenged middle class Christians with the concept of the "graduated tithe." Click on the link and read about how believers can increase [giving of money for kingdom purposes](#).



Finally, read an article by Robertson McQuilkin entitled [Jesus' Material Yardstick for Measuring Spiritual Maturity](#) that shows the connection between spiritual formation and our use of the resources God gives us. Keep thinking and learning and changing in this important area of spiritual life.

## Chapter 6



# Evangelism, Missions, Compassion & Justice Ministry

The disciplines in this category will not be a part of your exercise, only because of the practice you'll gain in GLS 5110, *Missions and Evangelism in the 21st Century*. It would be misleading, however, to exclude this category from a database of spiritual disciplines. The people of the One True God have always been set apart

***to know and worship Him and to make Him known in the world.***

Believers cannot grow to full maturity without gaining God's heart for the lost and powerless in the world. Here's a partial list of ideas for helping God's people grow in spiritual formation by carrying out the Lord's work.

### **Life-Long Disciplines for Sharing the Truth and Love of Christ**

- Build Relationships with People Who Don't Yet Know Jesus.
- Get out of your comfort zone! Pray for & look for opportunities to share Christ!
- Write and be comfortable sharing your story (testimony).
- Share the Good News of the Gospel in a winsome, conversational way.
- Get equipped to share about Jesus in a variety of ways, depending on the person, group, and/or setting.
- Pray *fervently & faithfully* for people who don't yet know Jesus. As the Spirit to make you sensitive to opportunities to engage with the people you regularly pray for—and others He leads to you.
- Go on a missions trip with a humble, servant's heart to make Jesus known and to serve national churches & full time missionaries.
- Serve in holistic/compassion ministry carried out in the name of Jesus & to represent Him in the world.

A common theme in all of those examples is that of relational conversations. There will always be a place for monological presentations of the gospel. However, in today's world of skepticism and sometimes even hostility to Christianity, we need to be prepared to engage in building relationships through not just talking, but respectful listening as well. Watch this episode of Dr. Tim Keller's unusual video series [The Reason for God](#) to see him demonstrate this approach.



## Chapter 7

# Suffering, Circumstances, Submission

No one will pick a discipline from this category! God sovereignly allows and uses a wide array of circumstances in our lives for His own purposes. Some circumstances lead to joy, some to heartbreak. Some are normal human events connected with family, work, ministry, leisure; some are seemingly random events including natural disasters or terrorism. Suffering occurs when the circumstances in our lives cause pain, anxiety, fear, stress, and the temptation to doubt God's goodness. Yet, in his article that we read on *VCL: A Biblical Exposition of Sanctification*, Robertson McQuilkin states that

*“Suffering may be God’s great shortcut to spiritual growth. Our response to suffering determines its benefit to us, of course, for the same adversity may be destructive or life building. The response of faith, that is, confidence that God has permitted the trial for His glory and our own good, transforms a potentially evil circumstance into a means of making us more like the Suffering Servant Himself.”* (30)

May God enable us to see the unfolding of the circumstances in our lives as we do the other spiritual disciplines in this book, and willingly submit our habits, goals, and desires to the greater good of coming to know Him more and becoming more like Him. The chorus of an old gospel song are worth pondering:

*Not where I wish to go, or what I wish to do,  
for who am I, that I should choose my way?  
The Lord shall choose for me!  
T'is better far that way,  
so let Him bid me go or stay.*

Song title: *Submission*

The hymn was often sung at missions conferences, challenging listeners to be open to God's call to cross-cultural missions service. Were they (are we) willing to go and do whatever the Lord had in mind no matter the inconvenience or the consequences? But the lyrics also fit countless decisions we must make in our lives when confronted with circumstances, good or bad. Who is really in control? If God, do we fully trust Him to know what is best for us, even when hard things have happened or will happen? Will we gladly surrender all that we have and are to Him? As the answers to these questions are increasingly yes, yes, yes ... the upward spiral of victorious Christian living continues.

## Chapter 8



# My Spiritual Disciplines Exercise

- **Submit Exercise Proposal via e-mail to instructor by due date in syllabus.**
  - **Begin and end exercise by due dates in the syllabus.**
  - **Submit report of completed exercise by the due date in the syllabus.**
1. After carefully reading this Anthology, ask for the Lord's leading in selecting the ones you will practice during the three week spiritual disciplines exercise.
    - One daily discipline practiced at least five days a week from **Prayer** or **Bible Reading**.
    - One weekly discipline practiced on three Sundays from **The Church, Worship & Sunday as a Special Day**.
    - One discipline of any kind from **Fasting & Solitude** or **Lifestyle Habits**. Prayerfully decide how often it is best to practice this discipline, for example a media fast, exercise, etc.
    - [Note: It's rarely good to try too many things at once. Select a fourth discipline only if you feel strongly led to do so.]
  2. Write and e-mail to the instructor a proposal prior to the start of the exercise. Your proposal should use the headings below and include the following information for each discipline you select:
    - a. The exact name of the discipline as it is listed in the Anthology.
    - b. A brief description of how you plan to practice this discipline over the weeks of the exercise.
    - c. A brief explanation of why you chose what you did.

**Daily discipline from Prayer or Bible Reading.**

**Weekly discipline from The Church, Worship & Sunday as a Special Day.**

**Discipline from Fasting & Solitude or Lifestyle Habits.**

**Spiritual Formation Retreat Plans**
  3. Wait to receive feedback from the instructor before beginning the exercise on the start date. Learn from and have fun with your exercise, and remember that it is also . . .

*Our Spiritual Disciplines Exercise that We're Doing Together*

## Chapter 9



## Spiritual Disciplines: A Short Bibliography

*An introduction to five spiritual classics: The confessions of St. Augustine, Aurelius Augustine; The imitation of Christ, Thomas a Kempis; The practice of the presence of God, Brother Lawrence; A serious call to a devout and holy life, William Law; A testament of devotion, Thomas R. Kelly / chapters by Louise Killingsworth ...[et. al.]* cNew York: Women's Division of Christian Service, Board of Missions, The Methodist Church, 1955. CIU Library: BV 4818 I57

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Website of Renovaré USA: Renovaré USA: a Christian nonprofit that models, resources, and advocates fullness of life with God experienced, by grace, through the spiritual practices of Jesus and of the historical Church. Christian in commitment, ecumenical in breadth, and international in scope, Renovaré helps people in becoming like Jesus.