



BUILD CHARACTER

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Jesus said in John 10:10 that He came that we might have an abundant life. As Christ-followers, we look forward to the abundant life we will have in Heaven but also wonder if there isn't more joy, freedom, blessings, and abundance we can experience in the here and now. After all, life can get hard, painful, or sometimes just mundane and boring. Our hearts long for something real . . . something more.

That is why you are reading this, isn't it? You want to grow, mature, and experience something new, better, different and more. You don't just want something *now* that will fade, you want spiritual growth and life change that will last. You want to be one of those ships sailing through the ocean of life that doesn't get tipped over by the storms. Regardless of what life's weather holds, you want to be able to stay anchored and not crash upon the shore.

How?

How can you have real, sustaining spiritual growth and have it last?

Ask any weathered warrior of the faith, and they will tell you that the best way to grow, mature, and stay strong in your faith is to develop a rhythm of meeting with and experiencing God.

As you ponder that, notice what wasn't said.

They didn't say the best way to grow and mature is to learn to follow rules. Or, to learn to check the box on some item of your spiritual "must-do" list. Jesus abolished rule-following-religion a long, long time ago.

What He brought instead was a rhythm and way of life for the heart that could be modeled and followed. We see it in the way he lived. He got away for solitude and silence. He prayed. He fasted. He celebrated. He worshipped. These practices that were used regularly, rhythmically, and seasonally to help Him stay connected to the Father are

intimate invitations of connection. We too are invited into this connection as we try out and take on these practices. For some, they are called spiritual disciplines. To avoid “should-do” or “have-to” thinking, we can call them Spiritual Essentials. Spiritual Opportunities. Spiritual rhythms for life.

They brought life to Jesus and they can bring life to us.

So let's jump in.

First step: Clean out the Closet

It's always good to take time to clean out the closet before you try to add in new stuff, so let's pause to take a look at what's in the closet of your life. If you're like many, there's some good stuff in your closet. There's some awful stuff you can't believe you still have that you should have gotten rid of long ago. And, there's that middle ground stuff that isn't really that bad but you don't necessarily need or use often enough to keep.

Our life is full of all three of these areas. Good stuff to keep, stinky stuff to toss, and the middle ground stuff that's not bad or good but might serve a purpose from time to time. In Hebrews 12:1 (ESV) we learn some names for the later two categories as the writer calls them “weights and sins.”

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...”

Sin in this verse is pretty self-explanatory. It's the stinky stuff in the closet of your life that shows up when you are not connected to God. Simply put, sin is “when you miss the mark”. It's the stuff you know you need to get rid of that's keeping you from the good stuff of life and of the heart that God has for you. God definitely wants to help you clean that out and lay that aside.

What about the weights? What's that about?

It's the stuff that isn't really bad. It may even from time to time be good. Its presence takes up needed space, energy, and time, possibly even to the point of cluttering up your life. God, like any quality organizational specialist, wants to help clean out that okay stuff in your life and heart so that you can have great.

Take a moment and invite the Holy Spirit to help you look into the closet of your life and identify, what needs to be taken out? What activities, relationships, or escapes are cluttering your calendar and weighing you down? If these physical, emotional, mental, or time wasting weights were removed or decreased, would they allow you more space and energy for God? *(Examples included to get your heart started.)*

- Watching more than _____ minutes of TV or movies a night.
- Checking Facebook more than _____ per day.
- Listening to music that makes it hard to think pure or positive thoughts.
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Step Two: Add in Good

As mentioned above, Jesus added in regular practices and rhythms of life that helped him stay connected intimately with the Father. Look over the list and descriptions below and answer the questions that follow:

1. **Prayer:** Conversing and communicating with God. Prayer is most effective when partnered with other spiritual disciplines, especially solitude, silence, and scripture.
2. **Solitude:** Intentionally removing yourself from interaction and connection with others so you can open up your heart and mind for connection with God. This allows you the physical, mental, and emotional space needed to be able to hear and share with God the longings and desires of your heart as well as hear the longings and desires of his.
3. **Scripture:** Intentionally pursuing growth in the knowledge of God by reading, meditating on and memorizing scripture. Spending time in Scripture gives you the opportunity to hear directly and intimately from God. *(If you have never prayed and asked the Holy Spirit to make Scripture come alive for you, consider doing so when you read and study. Remember, there isn't anyone who has ever studied the Bible who hasn't had questions along the way so it's great to reach out to someone that knows the Bible well and ask!)*
4. **Silence:** Intentionally working to silence the noise pollution around you that frequents your life and mental space so that you can hear God. Remember, the deepest places in you are only heard when the world is allowed to go silent.
5. **Fasting:** Intentionally abstaining from food or drink so that you may feast on the goodness of God. Fasting can also include abstaining from technology or other activities for a specific period of time in order to be physically, mentally, and emotionally available to experience God.
6. **Confession:** Intentionally letting your safe community know your weakness and failures. This allows you to humbly ask for and receive prayer, support, encouragement, and accountability in areas of struggle as well as celebration when the Holy Spirit moves in you to help you grow and overcome.
7. **Celebration:** One of the most overlooked spiritual disciplines, celebration, includes intentionally taking time to celebrate who God is, what He has been up to in your life is right and good, and not just be grateful but show gratefulness for what he is doing. We see throughout the Bible festivals, celebrations, and thankfulness being put in the rhythms of life by God! He invented the original party! (And yes, some of you need to consider and maybe abstain from certain foods or beverages if addictions are a struggle or problem. Even so, there is still so much good out there to celebrate with!)

8. **Worship:** Intentionally giving your attention to God's glory, majesty, and greatness. This can be through song, prayer, solitude, scripture, celebration, and thankfulness. It's opening up your heart wide enough to be overwhelmed by the goodness of God and responding in worship and praise.
9. **Sabbath:** Intentionally abstaining from work which allows God to be the one to work for you and allows you a period of time to rest your heart, mind, and body. How might ceasing from one day of work a week reshape your attitudes on the other six? This allows opportunities to grow in your ability to trust Him as your Protector and Provider.

Which practices listed above are new that you need to commit to trying? (Remember, sometimes spiritual disciplines can be like a new pair of shoes. They might feel awkward or uncomfortable at first but will definitely be worth it after a time or two of breaking them in.)

Consider the habits and rhythm of your life. Which practices or disciplines need to be put in your life in a new rhythm or way? How might you grow or your relationship with God be different if you put those rhythms in place?

Step Three: Take the Challenge

Take one or more of the following challenges and invite your spiritual running partners and/or life group to support and pray for you along the way. (Pray and ask the Holy Spirit which one or ones you should take!)

1. **The Solitude challenge:** Commit to either 4 or 8 hours away from friends, family, and loved ones for solitude time with God. Consider spending the time away from home at somewhere beautiful and life giving! A journal, Bible, worship music, etc can be great to take along with you and all technology can be left in your purse or at home! Don't be afraid to reach out and ask your life group or community to help watch the kiddos if that is a need!
2. **The Silence challenge:** Commit to getting away for 30 minutes to an hour and spending it with God in silence. Finding somewhere peaceful and quiet is recommended where the noise or city distraction is at a minimum. Turn off all music and noise and just allow your inner heart space to speak to God and to let him speak back.
3. **The Fasting Challenge:** Commit to either a 4, 8, 16, or 24 hour fast. Ask God what He wants you to fast from. Is it food? Technology? Social Media? In the time and space that you have open, spend time with him in prayer and listening to His heart for you.
4. **The Scripture Challenge:** Commit to either a 24 hour or week long break from TV, Netflix, movies, etc and spend that time instead diving into and meditating on Scripture!
5. **The You Challenge:** Design your own Spiritual Practices challenge:

Commit to your Challenge:

I, _____, commit to taking the _____ Challenge listed above. I commit to completing it by _____ date. I also commit to letting _____ and _____ know so that they can pray for me during this challenge!