**Sermon Text – Luke 2:46-47**

**02/05/2023**

**Cooperating with God**

**Introduction ~**

Last week we considered what a Christian world view is, and we concluded (I hope) that it’s a reflection of two distinct things. As we learn the Scriptures we apply them to life and they begin to change how we perceive the events taking place around us. But there’s also a spiritual, even supernatural, aspect to our world view since it reflects the work of the Holy Spirit. He actively transforms our minds, and therefore He changes how we think, and therefore how we see the world; Romans 12:2 ~

2And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The interesting thing about this is, as with all of Christianity, there is a divine move of God but it is always coupled with our cooperation. We’re called upon to willingly submit ourselves to His work. We’re called upon to cooperate with what He’s seeking to accomplish.

If that’s the case, what kind of things can we do to cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives? Are there things we can do to promote the kind of change we so desperately need? As it turns out, there are. They’re commonly referred to as Spiritual Disciplines. They’re called this because it will take discipline to do them consistently.

None of us like discipline, we don’t like the need for self-discipline, and we certainly don’t want it imposed on us. But discipline is a necessary and normal part of life. Spiritual Disciplines are necessary if we’re going to mature as Christians, and it is virtually impossible to mature without practicing them. They will, rightly done, produce change in our lives.

**Changed Conduct ~**

A condo committee was screening a couple interested in renting an apartment. “What kind of work do you do?” The woman replied, “My husband is an engineer and I’m a teacher.” “Any children?” The applicant replied, “Two, one is seven, and the other is nine.” “Animals?” “Oh, no!” she replied, “They’re very well behaved!”[[2]](#footnote-2)

As a Christian, how well behaved are you? Would Jesus say your conduct reflects what He wants from you as His disciple? The fact is that Jesus calls us who believe in Him, who are called believers, to move beyond mere belief to being disciples. That calling is for right now, not for some future date.[[3]](#footnote-3)

With that in mind, there are things we can do to cooperate with God as He leads us to grow in our faith. We can cooperate with the work of changing our hearts, and in the process cooperate in promoting the life of Jesus to be expressed through our lives.

What’s more, these things that Church tradition has historically adopted are actually founded in Scripture. And… interestingly enough, we find clear evidence in the Scriptures that even the Lord Jesus Christ exercised these practices we call the Spiritual Disciplines.

**Background ~**

So, if we’re going to seriously consider adding something to our already busy schedules, it’s reasonable to ask, “Is this necessary?” and “Is it biblical?” Almost immediately following these questions is the next one, “Is if worth the effort?” The answer is “Yes!” In fact, Jesus practiced these disciplines Himself. The result is recorded in John 5:19 ~

19Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Doing only what God asks of us has been, and remains, the consistent practice of God’s people throughout the biblical record. In fact, the Spiritual Disciplines are recorded as the normal practice of God’s people. This is true in both the Old and New Testaments.

**Scripture ~**

So let’s look at the things Jesus practiced in order to cultivate an intimate relationship with His Father? We find something indirect, but really interesting, in Luke 2:46-47 ~

46Now so it was *that* after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Now, if you stop to think about what’s happening here, it’s pretty informative. Jesus’ family had gone to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, and then headed home. There was a large group traveling together, so the kids were apparently free to wander around in the caravan. A day later, while traveling, they realized that Jesus was not with them. So, Mary and Joseph turned around and went back to Jerusalem to look for the then twelve year-old Jesus; Luke 2:44-45 ~

… 44but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day’s journey, and sought Him among *their* relatives and acquaintances. 45So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him.[[6]](#footnote-6)

You can imagine the frantic search, the anxiety, and then the worried parents found Jesus, after three days, in the Temple; Luke 2:46-47 ~

46Now so it was *that* after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Think about this with me for a moment. This implies something really important, something we could easily miss. In order for this to happen Jesus had to have done something prior to His time in the Temple, something every good Jewish boy would have done. This is something commanded in multiple places, but one example is Deuteronomy 6:6-9 ~

6“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Jesus had studied the Scriptures. He had memorized Scripture, probably large portions of Scripture. He had used various tools and memory aides to help Him keep them ever before Him. He had discussed them with His parents and with others.

What it boils down to is we find that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the King, our Savior, God Almighty, had practiced the Spiritual Disciplines of Scripture reading, of studying Scripture, of memorizing Scripture, and of meditating on Scripture. That’s the only way this conversation between Jesus and the teachers in the Temple could have taken place.

This had practical implications throughout Jesus’ life since He used the Scriptures and applied them to life as He was being tested and tempted, one such example is found in Luke 4:4, among other places ~

4But Jesus answered him, saying, “It is written, ‘*Man shall not live by bread alone,* *but by every word of God.’ ”*[[9]](#footnote-9)

If it was necessary for Jesus to study Scripture, then it seems reasonable to me, as a disciple of Jesus, that I too will be studying Scripture just as I find my Rabbi did.

**Prayer ~**

This was not the only place where we find Jesus practicing Disciplines that the Church has historically found to be useful for promoting spiritual growth. In addition to knowing the Word of God, Jesus also prayed… often. One such example is found in Luke 6:12 ~

12Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.[[10]](#footnote-10)

This was his normal, regular, consistent practice. Jesus prayed before He made big decisions, like calling His disciples. In fact, Jesus simply assumed His disciples would pray too; Mark 11:25 ~

25“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Jesus’ prayer life was apparently so striking that the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray; Luke 11:1 ~

**11** Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, *that* one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

There are no shortage of tools, guides, and books, available to help with your prayer life. I have several in my personal library. Even so, frankly, it seems to me that as disciples of Jesus it’s most reasonable that we use the prayer He provided in Luke 11:2-4 as the pattern for our own prayers. But regardless of the style, the model, the language, or tongue, we should all be praying regularly, and in fact, continuously; Ephesians 6:17-18 ~

17And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; 18praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—[[13]](#footnote-13) …

At some point I suppose we’re going to need to explore this business of praying in the Spirit, but not today. The point is this, if you are not already doing it regularly, just start. Do what you can, listen to the leading of the Spirit, keep a list with you, and pray.

**Fasting ~**

Closely associated with prayer is the Discipline of fasting. We know that Jesus practiced fasting, as famously shown in Matthew 4:2 ~

2And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.[[14]](#footnote-14)

In fact, what we find is that, again, Jesus simply assumed that those who follow Him would practice the Spiritual Discipline of fasting; Mark 2:20 ~

20But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Again, Jesus anticipated that His disciples would practice the fast, and He therefore provided specific instructions regarding how to go about it; Matthew 6:17 ~

17But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,[[16]](#footnote-16) …

He didn’t say, “If you fast…”, He said, “When you fast...” It was assumed, by the Son of God, that His disciples would practice the discipline of fasting. Now, for some there are medical reasons why you should not fast. But for most of us, there are no good reasons not to.

Frankly, I don’t like to fast. I’ve never found hunger to be entertaining, and I do not feel particularly *spiritual* when I’m fasting. That does not negate the expectation that I will fast. A few years ago we went through a series on the Spiritual Disciplines, and spent an entire Sunday morning exploring this particular discipline. If you’re interested, I can dig out the sermon manuscript and notes on fasting.

Regardless of my personal opinions or experiences, what I find is Jesus asking, “Will you obey me?” “Are you serious about following me?” “How serious are you?” My response is a reluctant, but obedient, “Ohhhkaaaay…”

**Submission ~**

There are other disciplines, we have submission as one. Did Jesus submit to others? Well, we find that Jesus submitted Himself to the Father in John 8:29 ~

29And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

This expressed itself in practical ways, even for Jesus. In one instance we find Jesus paying taxes, even though by rights He should not have needed to. This is found in Matthew 17:24-27 ~

24When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the *temple* tax came to Peter and said, “Does your Teacher not pay the *temple* tax?”

25He said, “Yes.”

And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?”

26Peter said to Him, “From strangers.”

Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free. 27Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

For us, this will also result in our submission to others as we study the Scriptures and apply them to our lives, for example, Romans 13:1-2 ~

**13** Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.[[19]](#footnote-19)

It also has application within the Church, although we tend not to talk about it much; Hebrews 13:17 ~

17Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Submission is a strange, difficult, and counter intuitive discipline. But it does something important. Through submission we’re able to see what our attitudes are, where our priorities are placed, and how much we really trust in God’s sovereign goodness over our lives.

I find this particular discipline to be especially distasteful. But, again, Jesus has not asked me if I like it, He asks me if I will obey Him. Again, my response is “Ohhhkaaaay…”

**Service ~**

The spiritual discipline of “service” is a natural byproduct of our love for God and love for others. As we follow Jesus it will be virtually impossible to follow where He leads and fail to be serving people in some capacity. In fact, for Jesus, His service to others was a reflection of His abiding in the Father; John 14:31 ~

31But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here.[[21]](#footnote-21)

We are also called upon to serve others. In fact, He explicitly makes the point that we’re called to serve others specifically because this is what Jesus had come to do; Mark 10:42-45 ~

42But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.[[22]](#footnote-22)

I don’t think it’s possible to claim to be Jesus’ disciple and fail to be serving others; Luke 6:46 ~

46“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?[[23]](#footnote-23)

This kind of service may be through a lot of different avenues. You may volunteer with various organizations that serve our community. You may be in a situation where your service is necessarily to your family. It may be through leading, or teaching, or counseling. It may be through the various support ministries so necessary to the running of a church, I’m thinking about the cleaning teams, or the deacons and deaconesses.

There are many, many, ways that we might be involved in serving those around us.

**Stewardship ~**

Although Jesus didn’t have much to do with the Spiritual Discipline of stewarding physical possessions, since He didn’t have any, He certainly had a lot to say about it; Matthew 6:24 is one example among many ~

24“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.[[24]](#footnote-24)

In fact, Jesus expanded this business of ownership and stewardship to encompass all of life in Matthew 6:31-34 ~

31“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble.[[25]](#footnote-25)

As His disciples our calling is not to spend our lives pursuing wealth, we are called upon to pursue Jesus, to walk in His Spirit, to allow His life to be lived through us. For some, that may well result in the accumulation of wealth. There is danger in that. Are we able to keep God at the center of our lives when we’re dealing with the things of this world? Some of us can, some of us cannot. Jesus summarized this issue in Luke 12:16-21 ~

16Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ 18So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry.” ’ 20But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’

21“So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

The simple, and uncomfortable, fact is that how we handle our money tells us a lot about how we view our relationship with God. It categorically tells us what’s really important to us, and what’s not. It reveals in hard, cold, numbers where we have our attention focused. We’ll come back to this one again in a few weeks.

**Worship ~**

In some ways this is the easiest of the Spiritual Disciplines, and in some ways it may well be the hardest. That’s because we can go through the motions, and think we’re worshipping God, when in reality we’re just singing along. For Jesus, worship was simply a given; John 4:24 ~

24God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

What is worship? As you might guess for a word so central to religious practices, there are literally nine different words translated into English as “worship.” In the New Testament it is most often used with reference to revering God.[[28]](#footnote-28) Singing is not necessarily worship, but worship may include singing. Worship includes ascribing honor to God, offering up praises and thanksgiving to Him, it includes giving offerings to Him, and serving Him.[[29]](#footnote-29)

As we worship we express our adoration, reverence, trust, love, loyalty, and dependence on God.[[30]](#footnote-30) The need to worship is built into the human soul, and whether we worship God rightly, or worship something else, the truth is we will all worship something.[[31]](#footnote-31)

But, for the Christian disciple, it requires intentionality. We need to be present in worship, present in the presence of the Lord. When we have intentionally come into His presence worship from the heart will naturally follow.

**Simplicity ~**

And then, there is the Discipline of simplicity, which in our culture is a challenge. I’m not talking about the evils of social media. I’m not addressing our televisions and the things we bring into our homes through them. I’m not thinking about trying to withdraw from society and live in a cave, as tempting as that may sometimes be.

In fact, I’m not even talking about possessions, although most of us have a lot more stuff than is probably good for us. Practicing the Spiritual Discipline of simplicity doesn’t necessarily mean not having anything, or even not enjoying things. It means keeping the main thing the main thing. Jesus said this in Matthew 6:31-34 ~

31“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The Discipline of Simplicity is an inward reality that naturally expresses itself outwardly.[[33]](#footnote-33) We live in the modern world, and we must therefore function in it, but we also need to realize that our culture is sick. We can, and must, take steps to prevent being infected as well.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Jesus’ call on everyone who would be His disciple is to a life joyfully free of a concern over possessions.[[35]](#footnote-35) This is not asceticism, which is a forced vow of poverty.[[36]](#footnote-36) Asceticism renounces possessions while simplicity puts them into a proper perspective.[[37]](#footnote-37) It is through the Discipline of Simplicity that we’re able to be content regardless of our financial condition. The Apostle Paul put it this way, in Philippians 4:12-13 ~

12I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.[[38]](#footnote-38)

This allows us to receive whatever God provides for us as what it is, a gift. Not something to cling to.[[39]](#footnote-39) The central point of practicing Simplicity is that we seek the Kingdom of God before anything else, then the necessities of life will take their proper place.[[40]](#footnote-40) It is through the practice of the Spiritual Discipline of Simplicity we refuse to become a slave to anything other than God.[[41]](#footnote-41)

**Rest ~**

Finally, Jesus acknowledged, and practiced, the need for periodic rest. He instructed the disciples to do the same in Mark 6:31 ~

31And He said to them, “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.[[42]](#footnote-42)

The reason this can be so challenging is when we overwork ourselves, ostensibly in the service of God, we get recognized. Pastors are appreciated. Volunteers are praised. But at that point we may well have stopped serving God and are, instead, bowing to the idol of public praise. Be careful.

It is not by accident that the Law required a day of complete rest every week; Exodus 31:15 ~

15Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh *is* the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does *any* work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Now, we’re no longer under the Law, but the principle of regular rest, of retreating from the pressures of work and ministry, remains. Don’t let rest become a law that you cannot rest from, but remember, it is necessary. Take it regularly, consistently, even insistently, if necessary.

**A Choice ~**

None of these things are a Law that we must keep in order to earn God’s pleasure. They are tools that we’re given to promote spiritual growth and intimacy with the Lord. In the physical world they give us tools to change our situation in the spiritual world. For Jesus, doing the will of the Father was not automatic, nor was He coerced into it.[[44]](#footnote-44) He sought the will of the Father, and chose to submit to it;[[45]](#footnote-45) John 5:30 ~

30I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.[[46]](#footnote-46)

What we begin to discover is that the practices that pervaded Jesus’ life were the very same practices that the Church discovered created the best environment for spiritual growth.[[47]](#footnote-47) If Jesus, our Master, Savior, Rabbi, Lord, and God, felt that the Spiritual Disciplines were important, and in fact practiced them Himself, it seems reasonable that, as His disciples, we might consider them for ourselves as well.[[48]](#footnote-48)

For your convenience, I’ve included a list of the most common of the Disciplines in your bulletins this week. There are others, it’s not hard to find books, some of them really good books, regarding instruction in the Spiritual Disciplines.

**The Objective ~**

So with this, let’s consider the Spiritual Disciplines, their purpose, their practice, and their place in the life of each of Jesus’ disciples. These are practices that we find in Scripture that encourage spiritual growth in followers, disciples, of Jesus Christ.[[49]](#footnote-49) This is true because they cultivate an awareness of His presence, His will, and our utter dependence on Him.

The primary objective for each believer who would be a disciple is to do the will of God from the heart.[[50]](#footnote-50) We want to become obedient to the Lord’s will.

The story is told of a boy watching television in the family room downstairs. One evening his father called down to him, “Mike! It’s time to come up for dinner!” Mike ignored the call and continued to watch his program on the television. His dad called out again, and again the call to dinner was ignored.

Finally, as the show was ending, his father called out, “Mike, get-up-here-now!” Mike recognized that tone of voice and immediately leapt up the stairs. Obviously angry, his father asked, “Where have you been?” With an innocent look on his face, Mike responded, “I didn’t hear you when you called the first two times!”[[51]](#footnote-51)

For the disciple, obedience is simply expected. The Spiritual Disciplines help us to do that, they position us for success and growth. We tend to think of the Spiritual Disciplines as something reserved for the spiritual elites among us.[[52]](#footnote-52) This is an incorrect assumption, in reality they’re for ordinary people with jobs, families, and chores.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Their purpose is to deliver us from bondage to self-interest and fear, and instead heighten our awareness of God.[[54]](#footnote-54) They help us to seek the Lord and His purposes in every decision we make.[[55]](#footnote-55) They are tools, tools used to promote spiritual growth.

**Caution ~**

We need to be careful about how we approach this. *The Spiritual Disciplines are a means to an end, not the end in and of themselves*.[[56]](#footnote-56) Through these practices we’re cooperating with God.[[57]](#footnote-57) If we do not keep this in mind, they easily become a source of spiritual pride and a trap. It reduces Christianity to things that we do.

That is not true Christianity, true Christianity is fundamentally about Jesus Christ and what we are in Him. True Christianity is reflected in what we’re told in 2 Corinthians 5:17 ~

17Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Regardless of how hard we try to make Christianity about keeping the rules, it is not and will never be such a religion. Instead of rules, Christianity is about doing the will of God from our hearts;[[59]](#footnote-59) Hebrews 13:20-21 ~

20Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.[[60]](#footnote-60)

**Our Calling ~**

We easily mistake Jesus’ call on our lives. We think that there are discreet things that He calls us to, loving our enemies, turning the other cheek, suffering patiently, but leaving us free to live our lives pretty much like everyone around us does.[[61]](#footnote-61) Instead, these things rightly understood, reflect the production of a new kind of person, one who’s conduct and attitudes reflect a new kind of life, in fact a new quality of life.[[62]](#footnote-62) And, although only God can produce this in our hearts, it is also something that we’re called upon to pursue;[[63]](#footnote-63) Hebrews 12:14 ~

14Pursue peace with all *people,* and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:[[64]](#footnote-64) …

There are no shortcuts, this is a decision to be obedient to the Lord’s call in every aspect of our lives.[[65]](#footnote-65) We need to learn to bring the spiritual reality of our existence into the press of our physical humanity.[[66]](#footnote-66) This is a reflection of a life lived under the rule of God based on a new kind of righteousness;[[67]](#footnote-67) Matthew 6:33 ~

33But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.[[68]](#footnote-68)

**Spiritual Disciplines ~**

It is at this point that the value of the Spiritual Disciplines come into consideration. These are God-given practices, practices found in Scripture, which promotes Christ-likeness in our lives.[[69]](#footnote-69) As already noted, these include incorporating Scripture into our life, prayer, fasting, etc.[[70]](#footnote-70) They are effective because they address the physicality of the human condition even as they serve to produce a practical outworking of the spiritual reality of Christ in us.[[71]](#footnote-71) Colossians 1:27 ~

27To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.[[72]](#footnote-72)

Through the exercise of these Disciplines we learn how to offer our bodies, and therefore our lives, to God.[[73]](#footnote-73) For us, this is a reflection of our willingness to cooperatively interact with God.[[74]](#footnote-74)

At this point we must note that the attitude of the heart is much more important than the mechanics of the exercises.[[75]](#footnote-75) A life pleasing to God is not a life filled with religious activity, it is a life lived in relationship with Himself.[[76]](#footnote-76) What we seek from the Disciplines is God’s work, not ours.[[77]](#footnote-77) But the Disciplines allow us to place ourselves in the Father’s presence, ready to accept the work He desires to do in us.[[78]](#footnote-78)

**Application ~**

An examination of Jesus’ life shows that Jesus’ miracles and unique view of humanity was couched in a life characterized by solitude, prayer, fasting, and service,[[79]](#footnote-79) that is, the Spiritual Disciplines. Even as Jesus had to take into account His physical body and how best to press it into service for His Father, we too must be prepared to do the same.[[80]](#footnote-80)

This is nothing more, or less, than an expression of our obedience to Him, followed by the promises He has made to us; John 14:23 ~

23Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.[[81]](#footnote-81)

The conflict that all of us face is the conflict between our natural state and what God would have of us and for us.[[82]](#footnote-82) It’s through the practice of the Spiritual Disciplines, approached rightly, that allow the Spirit to hold sway over our embodied selves.[[83]](#footnote-83) We no longer seek to act kindly or lovingly, we are kind and loving.[[84]](#footnote-84)

So, at the end of the day, becoming like Jesus, to be recognizable as His disciple, is the purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines.[[85]](#footnote-85) These practices are tools that none of us can afford to ignore if we’re serious about being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

1. [*The New King James Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nkjv?ref=BibleNKJV.Ro12.2&off=0&ctx=reasonable+service.+~2%C2%A0And+c%EF%BB%BFdo+not+be+co) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ro 12:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Michael Hodgin, *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking*, (ZondervanPublishingHouse, Grand Rapids, MI.: 1998), 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, (HarperOne, New York, NY.: 1988), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [*The New King James Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nkjv?ref=BibleNKJV.Jn5.19&off=27&ctx=y+with+God+in+Power%0a~19%C2%A0Then+Jesus+answer) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Jn 5:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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