

Follow Jesus

GROWING IN **GRACE**

Growing in Grace



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P R O D U C T I O N S

Who Is Jesus?

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INTRODUCTION

God's grace is the unmerited and undeserved favor, goodness, kindness, and mercy shown toward human beings. God showed the world the ultimate example of the grace He gives through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus redeemed us and restored us back to a right relationship with God, despite us being alienated from the life of God because of sin. He did this not because of anything we have done, but simply because He loves us. As believers, this truth and its implications grow deeper in our hearts the more we position ourselves to respond to God's grace through spiritual disciplines.

In this small group material, we will focus on the importance of spiritual disciplines as means of growing in faith and experiencing God's grace in the lives of Christians. Spiritual disciplines, as outlined in the Bible, are a foundational aspect of the Christian faith, guiding believers toward a deeper connection with God, a transformative inner journey, and a fruitful life focused on fulfilling His plans and purposes.

At the heart of spiritual disciplines is the recognition that nurturing one's spiritual life requires intentional effort and commitment. The Bible provides numerous examples of individuals who engaged in practices such as prayer, fasting, and study of Scripture to draw nearer to God. They practice these disciplines not to earn their way to a right standing with Him nor to twist His arm to their favor. God does as He pleases, and no one can ever manipulate Him.

Through spiritual disciplines, we as believers acknowledge our dependence on God. We recognize that these disciplines are not something we can develop on our own effort but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through God's power and grace, they become transformative tools that enable us to align our hearts and minds with His will, fostering a greater sense of humility, gratitude, trust, and love.

Spiritual disciplines also play a crucial role in shaping our character. As we engage in practices that cultivate virtues like patience, self-control, and compassion, we become more attuned to the teachings of Jesus, who exemplified these qualities, and we position ourselves to receive from Him. Through disciplines like meditating on God's word and fasting, we can quiet the noise of the world and set our ears to listen to the voice of God, gaining clarity and wisdom in our decisions and actions.

May this material give us not only an understanding of the importance of spiritual disciplines but also a desire for us to grow in them as we know and love God more. May this help transform our lives and empower us to help others grow in spiritual disciplines as well. As Christians, let us continue to *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* and be strengthened in our faith and advance God's kingdom here on earth.

Other materials available for Victory groups, which can provide a foundational understanding on spiritual disciplines, include:

- *God & Government*
- *Kingdom & Discipleship*

1 What Are Spiritual Disciplines?

WARM-UP

- Do you do any activities or practices that help you develop new skills or grow as a person? If so, what are they, and how do they affect you?
- Would you describe yourself as a disciplined person? Why or why not? Share some instances that show this.
- What is one routine you enjoy doing over and over again? What makes it worth doing?

WORD *⁷Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*

1 TIMOTHY 4:7-8

In his letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul emphasizes the value of training oneself for godliness. One way we can do this is through spiritual disciplines, which allow our faith in Jesus to be reflected in how we live our lives. As we become more like Christ, these intentional practices help us grow in our relationship with God and experience His grace. Though they require time and effort, they have tremendous benefits for the life and ministry God has entrusted to us. In this lesson, we will study some of the purposes of spiritual disciplines.

Spiritual disciplines are practices that help us to grow in our relationship with God.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. **2 PETER 3:18**

“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” **JOHN 17:3**

When we place our faith in Jesus, we not only receive the forgiveness of our sins, but also enter into a new relationship with God. We become adopted children, welcomed into God’s own family. In doing so, we also receive eternal life. It means more than just living in God’s presence forever. It involves knowing God intimately in the present. Knowing God goes beyond head knowledge and means experiencing Him in every area of our lives.

Spiritual disciplines help us know God more and guide us in embracing His grace in our lives. Through practices like prayer, reading the Bible, and fasting, we seek to know God better and encounter Him more fully in our lives. Communication is vital in growing our relationship with others. Spiritual disciplines are ways of communicating with God so that we can grow in our relationship with Him. How could you relate different forms of spiritual disciplines to communication with God?

Spiritual disciplines are not ways to earn God's favor or approval but are means of experiencing His grace.

*¹Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. **ROMANS 5:1-2***

*⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. **EPHESIANS 2:8-10***

*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. **ROMANS 10:17***

In practicing spiritual disciplines, we must avoid neglecting them or being legalistic about the way we do them. Everything that God does in our lives is always by grace through faith—unearned gifts paid for by the blood of Jesus. God's power that transforms us and empowers us is not merely a reward for how well or how often we practice these disciplines.

By making them a part of our lifestyle, spiritual disciplines put us in position to know God more. The more we know Him, the more our faith in Him grows (Romans 10:17), allowing us to experience more of His grace. How has your life been transformed by practicing a particular spiritual discipline?

Spiritual disciplines are a means through which the Holy Spirit makes us more like Christ.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

All believers in Christ have been spiritually reborn through the work of the Holy Spirit. We were reborn as spiritual infants who still needed to mature and become more and more Christlike. Spiritual disciplines play a role in accomplishing this. We all have the tendency to be like those whom we are with the most. This is also true with our relationship with God. The more we know and experience God's greatness and goodness, the more we become like Jesus in our thoughts, heart, words, and actions. What is one characteristic of Jesus that you want to grow in?

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APPLICATION

- What do you think is the value of growing in your relationship with God? Why should this relationship be more important than others?
- Have you ever thought that spiritual disciplines help earn God's favor and blessing? If so, how has this affected how you relate with God? How will this lesson change how you see and practice spiritual disciplines?
- What hinders or distracts you from practicing the different spiritual disciplines? What are some practical things you can do to overcome them this week?

PRAYER

- Thank God for the different ways by which we get to know Him and get transformed into His image. Thank Him for the abundant grace given to us as we practice spiritual disciplines and grow in our relationship with Him.
- Ask God to help you overcome any obstacles that get in the way of living out the spiritual disciplines. Pray that you would continue to be transformed into the image of God as you do so.
- Pray that God would surround you with people you can grow with in knowing and loving God. Ask God to transform your life into a powerful testimony for others to know God also.

2 Grace in God's Word

WARM-UP

- What do you enjoy reading or listening to the most? What keeps you engaged in that?
- If you could learn and master one thing, what would it be and why?
- Whose words have the most meaning to you? Why? Share an instance that shows this.

WORD *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ACTS 2:42*

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

The Bible is God's only written revelation to man. It is the final authority on the teachings about God and how we live our lives. It is useful for knowing God's attributes, heart, words, works, and plans. It is also useful for training us to live righteously and for equipping us to do all that God wants us to do. This includes how we practice spiritual disciplines. The disciples of the early church saw the value of God's word and devoted time and effort to preach and live it out. Here are five things we could do to express and grow in our devotion to God's word.

1 | Cultivate a desire for God's word.

²Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. **1 PETER 2:2-3**

Being devoted to God's word involves having a strong commitment, loyalty, and affection for it. These come from cultivating a strong desire for God's word. In 1 Peter 2:2-3, Peter encourages believers to be *like newborn infants* who long for *pure spiritual milk*, which refers to God's word. This is so that they may grow up more in their experience of God's salvation.

Have you ever had food so delicious that the taste lingers in your mouth and makes you want to eat more of it? Likewise, when we have tasted God's grace, mercy, and goodness, and allow our hearts to linger on them, this will deepen our desire to know and experience Him more through His word. What are some ways you could recall personally, and as a group, the goodness of God?

2 | Study God's word.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. **ACTS 2:42**

Studying God's word takes many shapes and forms. One way to do this is to read the Bible for ourselves, where we set time daily to immerse ourselves in it. Studying God's word can also be done as a community. A lot of people during biblical times, both in the Old and New Testaments, did not have their own personal Bibles. They studied God's word as a community of believers. Some of the ways they did this was

by listening to the preaching of the word and studying the word together in small groups.

Doing this helps us learn from one another's insights that we can't get on our own. We also have the advantage of more mature believers guiding others in their understanding of Scripture. What are some truths you discovered in your personal and communal reading of the word?

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3 | Meditate on God's word.

¹Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ²but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. PSALM 1:1-3

From a biblical perspective, to meditate can mean to thoroughly and continuously reflect on a certain thing or idea so that it may be applied to one's life. It is different from the meditation practiced in many Eastern religions, where their goal is to empty their minds of all thought. On the other hand, the goal of biblical meditation is to renew the mind by filling it with God's word and to reflect on how it can be lived out. What would an ideal environment to meditate on God's word look like?

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4 | Memorize God's word.

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. **PSALM 119:11**

We are faced with many different situations in our lives, such as temptations, decision-making, and ministering to others. However, we may not always have a Bible with us or we may not have the time to look things up. When we have memorized passages of Scripture, we always have access to them to help us in our time of need. The Holy Spirit reminds us of God's word (John 14:26), but God's word should be in our minds in the first place, so He could bring the word to our attention. Jesus Himself memorized Scripture. In Matthew 4:1-11, He defeated the devil in the wilderness by quoting God's word. How has a verse you had memorized helped you at a crucial time?

5 | Obey God's word.

²²But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

JAMES 1:22-25

²⁴"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and

does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." **MATTHEW 7:24-27**

The Bible shows us multiple times the importance of obeying God's word. The author of James talks about how believers are blessed in what they do when they obey God's word. Matthew shows us how we should not just hear the word but also put it into practice. Doing so establishes and strengthens us so that when the storms of life come, we will be able to stand firm. When we only hear the word and don't put it into practice, we face consequences that can harm us.

Obeying God's word is powerful because it helps us know God and experience His goodness. For example, it is one thing to read about God being a faithful provider and another thing to experience His miraculous provision when we give to God's kingdom even while we are experiencing financial challenges. It is one thing to read about God and another to experience who He is and what He has done and will do. When we obey God's word, it becomes real and alive. Our knowledge of God does not remain in our heads but is experienced in our lives. What are some things about God that you really know because you have experienced Him at work in your life?

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APPLICATION

- How has God's word transformed your life? What are some things you noticed when you began reading and obeying the word?
- Which of the five activities do you enjoy doing? Which do you need help with?
- How do you think your love for God's word could influence others?

PRAYER

- Praise God for the preservation of and access to His word that is made available to us today. Thank God that His word remains true to this day and will continue to do so.
- Meditate on a passage of encouragement from the Bible this week. Pray that you may discover ways to apply it in the midst of challenges you may face.
- Ask God to deepen your desire for His word so that you will also have the heart to preach His word to the people around you.

3 Grace in Prayer (Part 1)

WARM-UP

- Do you prefer talking to someone on a device or in person? What makes it preferable for you?
- Why do you think communication and quality time are important in growing a relationship with someone?
- Think of the closest person you know. How well do you know each other? How did you get to that point of closeness?

WORD *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ACTS 2:42*

(Read also **MATTHEW 6:5-8.**)

While there are different kinds of prayers, the primary reason we as believers pray is to commune with God. Even though ministry and the mission are important, our true calling is to have an intimate relationship with God and glorify Him. One way we do so is by praying regularly and consistently. Prayer isn't just about asking God for things. It's mainly about meeting God and experiencing intimate fellowship with Him.

Before Jesus taught His disciples what to pray for, He first focused on the proper attitude and disposition in praying. As we begin studying devotional prayer as a spiritual discipline, we will examine these so that we too would have the right perspectives and motivations when we pray.

1 | We pray with a focus on seeking God, not seeking to be seen by others.

*⁵“And when you pray, you must **not be like the hypocrites**. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, **that they may be seen by others**. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶But 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.”*

MATTHEW 6:5-6

When we pray, our goal is to seek God and connect deeply with Him. Jesus instructed people not to pray in front of others to get their praise. He was not against churches praying together or people praying in public. What He was addressing was the motive of the heart. If we pray so that people will praise us, then when people do notice us, we would have already gotten the reward for our actions: praise from men. We should not then expect to receive anything from God. But if we pray to seek God, we will receive the reward of finding the One we have been seeking for. We will know and experience God intimately. How has your motivation in prayer changed as you grow in your relationship with God?

2 | We pray with the intention of spending time alone with God.

*“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.”* **MATTHEW 6:6**

Since our goal in devotional prayer is to seek God above all, it is important that we create an environment where we could

focus on Him. Jesus told His disciples to go to a place where there were no distractions. It did not necessarily have to be a room. Jesus Himself chose to pray very early in the morning while it was still dark. He chose a time that was unhurried and a place where He could focus on His Father.

It's much like a husband and a wife going on a date. Though they are always together and talking to each other, they need time alone to focus on each other. The purpose is to set aside time and be in a place fit for intimate conversations. In the same way, we can pray to God anytime and anywhere. However, there is a deeper level of intimacy when we take time to be alone with God. We get to hear Him more clearly as well as fully pour our hearts out to Him. What does an ideal time and space for spending time with God look like for you?

3

We pray, knowing that God hears us and knows our needs even before we ask Him.

*⁷"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. ⁸Do not be like them, for **your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**" MATTHEW 6:7-8*

Jesus tells His followers that God hears them and knows what they need even before they pray or ask. When we pray, we usually think about what we need and how God can help us. By assuring us, Jesus wants us to be more than just desperate to have our needs met. While our needs are important, growing in our relationship with God should precede everything else. He wants us to experience the true joy of what prayer was intended for. We don't have to say a

lot of words for God to hear us—He already does. When we pray, we can be assured of His full attention. What does time alone with God without worrying about anything else look like for you?

APPLICATION

- Reflect on your current prayer habits and environment. Do you find yourself easily distracted during prayer? How can you create a space that fosters greater focus and intimacy with God during prayer?
- Consider your current attitudes, perspectives, and dispositions when you pray. In light of what we learned today, which of them need to change?
- Spiritual disciplines are not only to be done personally but also corporately. How can we apply setting aside time and a place for meeting God together as His people? What avenues are you currently using? Which ones do you believe you need to participate in more?

PRAYER

- Praise God that He is relational and desires for us to be intimate with Him through prayer. Thank Jesus for setting the example of what it means to truly pray.
- Ask God to help you build a consistent and committed prayer lifestyle as you walk and grow in your relationship with Him.
- Ask God to lead you to people who would regularly meet and encourage one another through prayer. Pray for someone this week who is in need of encouragement.

4 Grace in Prayer (Part 2)

WARM-UP

- Who is the greatest person you know? How would you react if you met him or her in person?
- What are some things you can't live without? Why are they so important to you?
- In a school project, business meeting, or family trip, who usually makes the plans? Are you a planner or a follower? Why do you think so?

WORD *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ACTS 2:42*

⁹Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread, ¹²and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. MATTHEW 6:9-13

(Study **LUKE 11:1-13.**)

Sometimes, even with the right heart and attitude, we find ourselves thinking about what exactly we should pray for. Thankfully, Jesus shows us the perfect example of this. When we consider the different wordings found in the passages above, we see that Jesus was not teaching the disciples to memorize a prayer word-for-word or to use a particular religious formula. Rather, He was teaching them principles on how and what to pray. Though the Bible doesn't say that all our prayers should contain these or follow a particular order, the principles Jesus taught contain wisdom and can transform our prayer lives. In this lesson, we will examine them one by one.

1 | We pray acknowledging God as our Father in heaven.

“Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” **MATTHEW 6:9**

Jesus taught His disciples to first address God as “*Our Father in heaven*” when they pray. In doing so, Jesus emphasized that acknowledging who we are praying to comes before what we are asking for. When Jesus pointed out that God is in heaven, He wanted us to realize that the God we are praying to is far above all things and is the Creator who is great and powerful. Nothing is too difficult for Him.

However, Jesus also taught that God has given us the privilege of calling the almighty, all-powerful God as our Father. He is not someone who is far and distant, or removed from our situation. He is our loving Father who wants to be intimate with us and is concerned about us and our needs. Why do you think Jesus taught His disciples to start with this first? What do you think our disposition in prayer would be if we first started with our needs as compared to starting with who God is?

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2 | When we pray, we should seek for God’s name to be regarded as holy.

*“Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, **hallowed be your name.**”* **MATTHEW 6:9**

Once we recognize God as our Father in heaven, Jesus taught that we should seek to honor and treat God’s name as holy—this means unique and above all others. We should pray for a deeper understanding of God’s holiness and greatness. This way, we can respond to Him with the respect and reverence

He deserves in all aspects of our lives and communities. In our practice of devotional prayer, we can confidently draw near to Him in praise, thanksgiving, and worship for who our Father is and what He has done for us. How do you think knowing God's holiness and greatness can change the way you pray to God?

3 | When we pray, we should seek God's rule and will in our lives and situation.

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." **MATTHEW 6:10**

After we have sought for God to be magnified, we then submit our will to Him. When we ask God to make His kingdom come and His will be done, we are asking for His rule and purposes to prevail in our lives and communities. Recognizing God as the all-powerful and gracious Father who allows us to call Him such, it becomes fitting and reasonable to submit ourselves to Him. When we pray, we acknowledge that it is not our agenda that we seek, but His. How do 1 John 5:14 and James 4:3 show us the importance of first submitting ourselves to God's will before we ask for our needs?

4 | When we pray, we could ask for our material needs.

"Give us this day our daily bread . . ." **MATTHEW 6:11**

Though Jesus already mentioned that the Father already knows what we need even before we ask, He still invites us to ask the Father for them. God wants us to bring our needs to Him. By doing so, we are acknowledging that He is our ultimate source and that we know He is great, powerful, and willing to meet our needs. God also knows that our material needs matter a lot to us. Telling Him about our needs is part of communing with Him and surrendering our hearts before Him. He gives us what we need because He is good, not because we are good. Knowing this, what should our attitude be when we approach Him? Instead of coming to him in fear and desperation, why can we approach our Father with confidence and expectation?

5 | When we pray, we could ask for forgiveness.

“ . . . and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” **MATTHEW 6:12**

On the cross, Jesus already paid for all of our sins: past, present, and future. Through faith in His name, we already have the forgiveness of all of our sins. Why then does Jesus teach us to ask God for forgiveness? In the passage above, Jesus is talking to believers who already have a relationship with God as their Father. Therefore, this forgiveness is not so that we could have a relationship with God, but about restoring our fellowship with Him. When we hurt our family members, this does not cause us to no longer be related to them. However, the reason we apologize and ask for forgiveness is to restore our fellowship with them. The same is true with our fellowship with God. Confession and asking for forgiveness deals with the shame, condemnation, and sense of alienation and awkwardness that sin causes. Could

this part of the prayer also be applied broadly to asking God to meet the rest of our spiritual needs?

6 | When we pray, we could ask for guidance, protection, and deliverance.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

MATTHEW 6:13

Jesus taught His disciples that we should ask God for guidance so that we would not fall into temptation. He also taught us that we could seek God for deliverance from evil. When we pray, we recognize that God is our ultimate source of guidance, protection, and deliverance. Jesus Himself, being God incarnated as a man, needed guidance and direction from the Father with regard to what He was to say and do (John 5:19–20). He was also tempted by Satan in the wilderness for forty days while He was fasting. If the Son of God needed guidance and protection, how much more do we?

We can pray to God anytime and with all kinds of prayers. Jesus took this truth further by teaching His disciples how to pray effectively. We need to have the right heart before we pray. When we pray according to how Jesus taught us, we will have the right response as we commune with God.

APPLICATION

- How does relating to God as our heavenly Father affect the way you pray? Are there similarities or differences to how you relate to your earthly father?
- Worship is also a form of prayer to God, both personally and corporately. Which part of Jesus' teaching on prayer does worship fall under? How does Jesus' example of prayer show us how we are to position ourselves in an attitude of worship?
- Are there any needs, unresolved issues, or guidance that you'd like to pray for? Surrender these things to God and find someone you can comfortably share these concerns with.

PRAYER

- Thank God for allowing us to relate to Him as our Father who loves us and is always concerned for us.
- Pray that God would open your heart to forgive as He forgave you and to trust Him as your provider and deliverer.
- Ask God for His will to be made known to you and the people around you. Pray that everything you do would honor and glorify His name.

5 Grace in Fasting

WARM-UP

- Have you ever given up something to be in a favorable situation or to grow? What was the outcome?
- How do you usually respond when others are in need?
- Is there someone you share your deepest secrets with? What qualities do you find in this person?

WORD *¹"Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. ²Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. ³Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?' Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. ⁴Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. ⁵Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD? ⁶Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"* **ISAIAH 58:1-7**

(Read also **ISAIAH 58:8-12.**)

To fast means to abstain from food for a period of time. As a spiritual discipline, fasting means we abstain from food and devote a greater amount of time than usual to prayer. Fasting can be done personally or as a community. This was a normal practice in both the Old and New Testaments.

Today, many Christians have an incomplete and sometimes inaccurate understanding of the purpose and practice of fasting. Because of this, they are not able to experience its full benefits as a spiritual discipline. In this lesson, we will examine what the Bible says about fasting in order for us to know the purpose and heart behind it.

1

True fasting is for the purpose of drawing near to God and knowing Him more.

*“Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; **they delight to draw near to God.**”* **ISAIAH 58:2**

In this passage, the Israelites complained to God, wondering why He did not notice them or hear their prayers as they fasted. Through Isaiah, God rebuked them for fasting in a wrong and incomplete manner. He corrected their attitude and manner, explained what true fasting should be about, and promised breakthrough if they fasted properly.

Though their practice of fasting was wrong and incomplete, the Israelites' goal was correct. The primary reason we should fast is to draw near to God so we can know Him. We should not just come to God with our own agenda or to simply ask Him to grant our requests. The right motivation in fasting should be to know God, hear Him, and seek His will. We ought to take joy and delight in spending time with Him.

Just as we sometimes forgo eating in order to finish work or to be with someone we love, fasting is about forgoing eating and taking time off our busy schedules in order to spend

time with God. As we know God, experience His closeness, and seek His will, our faith in Him will grow. How do you think God will feel if the only reason we draw near to Him is not primarily to be with Him but only to get something from Him?

2

True fasting is for the purpose of asking God for His righteous will and rule to be carried out.

*"Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; **they ask of me righteous judgments**; they delight to draw near to God."* **ISAIAH 58:2**

The phrase "*righteous judgments*" here means "righteous or just decisions." The Israelites were fasting to seek God to carry out His will and act in their behalf. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word which is often translated as "judgment" can also be described as "rule." In the New Testament, Jesus told His disciples to pray to God for His kingdom—His rule—to come, and for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2). Though God has all power to carry out His will, He sovereignly chose to involve believers in His plans by making their prayers, fasting, and co-laboring with Him a means for His rule and will to be established on earth. Through prayer and fasting, we align ourselves to God's will and plans. Why should we pray according to God's will and plans over our own (Isaiah 55:8–9)?

3

True fasting involves humbling ourselves before God.

"Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD?" **ISAIAH 58:5**

God was asking a rhetorical question: Is fasting merely about humbling ourselves? Our posture when we fast should be one of humility, but there is more to it than humbling oneself. Our attitude should be one of transparency, vulnerability, and submission before God, being open for Him to deal with us and transform us as He wishes. How does Jesus show in Matthew 6:16–18 the importance of the internal attitude over superficial expressions of humility? What do you think are the implications of this passage on posting about our fasting on our personal social media?

4

True fasting involves turning away from wickedness and sin.

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" **ISAIAH 58:6**

On the day of fasting, the Israelites were engaging in selfish pleasures and indulging themselves, while at the same time oppressing their workers. Moreover, they were quarreling, and had brawls and fistfights (Isaiah 58:3–4). God addressed them, clarifying that true fasting goes beyond mere external expressions of humility and repentance for a specific time period.

The kind of fast that God seeks involves humbling oneself and turning away from one's own sins that results in changes

in external behavior. Many health practitioners recommend avoiding unhealthy food that contain harmful ingredients. How is this similar to the spiritual aspect of fasting?

5 True fasting involves showing mercy and compassion to those who are in need.

⁶“Is not this the fast that I choose . . . ⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?” **ISAIAH 58:6-7**

Aside from humility and turning away from sin, the true fast that God seeks also involves showing mercy, compassion, and kindness to those who are in need. Depriving ourselves as we fast then can also be expressed by showing mercy and compassion to others at our own expense, like taking care of the hungry and homeless and not hiding from those who need help. This is the kind of self-deprivation that God seeks. It is not just about depriving oneself of food but sacrificing our time, resources, and effort for the benefit of others. What does James 1:27 say about this?

Isaiah 58:8-11 lists many of the wonderful results of practicing the true kind of fasting that God seeks. When we fast with the right motives and in the right manner, completing our humility with repentance and good deeds, not only will we grow spiritually but breakthroughs will happen in our midst.

APPLICATION

- Do you fast regularly? How has today's lesson changed or confirmed the way you perceive fasting?
- What are the attitudes you see in yourself when it comes to fasting? How may you respond and practice the spiritual discipline of fasting when the opportunity arises?
- What do you think are the implications and benefits of fasting corporately in one's walk with God? How may you take part in prayer and fasting gatherings in the future?

PRAYER

- Thank God for continually showing us the right purpose of fasting. Thank God that He is our true source of strength and motivation as we fast.
- Ask God to deepen your desire for Him when you fast. Pray that you would always have the right heart and mind as you do so.
- As you pray and fast, ask God to show you people or places that you can intercede for. Find one or two partners and pray together for these things.

6 Grace in Devotional Worship

WARM-UP

- Recall your favorite song, poem, or work of art. What are the emotions you feel the most whenever you hear or see these?
- What do you usually do if something is hard to see or understand?
- What helps calm you down in the midst of a stressful or challenging situation?

WORD *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

ROMANS 12:1

True worship, in the broad sense, involves offering our entire selves and lives to God as a sacrifice in response to His mercy. Because *God is spirit*, worshiping Him is not limited to a particular place or time (John 4:21–24). In contrast, devotional worship, as a spiritual discipline, involves being in a certain place and time to express to God His greatness and worth, as well as our gratitude and love for Him. Through it, we convey to Him our awe and appreciation of who He is and what He has done.

Devotional worship can take on many forms such as music and singing. It may be done during our personal devotional time in addition to personal Bible reading and study, prayer, and meditation. It also may be done corporately as a church community (in worship services, worship nights, prayer meetings) or in smaller groups (in family devotions, prayer ministry meetings). God, through His word, gives examples of the spiritual benefits of devotional worship.

Our faith grows and our fears vanish as God is magnified and glorified in our eyes.

*¹I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. ²My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. ³Oh, **magnify the LORD** with me, and let us **exalt his name** together! ⁴I sought the LORD, and he answered me and **delivered me from all my fears.** PSALM 34:1-4*

¹⁹He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

*²⁰No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but **he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,** ²¹fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*

ROMANS 4:19-21

Many times in Scripture, we are told to magnify and glorify God. It is not because He is insecure or because He needs it. We cannot do anything to add to His perfect glory. Rather, God commands us to glorify and magnify Him for our benefit.

We have the tendency to magnify the problems and challenges we face, that they brew fear and despair in our hearts. We end up being overwhelmed and doubting God. But when we glorify and magnify God, we see Him as truly, incomparably bigger than everything else. No matter how big the problems, temptations, and even all attacks of the devil may be, ultimately they are a tiny speck of dust compared to the greatness of God. When we see God and these other things in the correct light, we are delivered from fear and our faith grows. As our faith grows, we increasingly experience the grace that God has already given to us. How do you respond when you are faced with a challenging situation? Do you magnify the problem or magnify God?

2 | We have a greater sense or awareness of God's presence.

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. **PSALM 22:3**

While God is often depicted as being enthroned above the angels in the Most Holy Place, He is also described as seated on the praises of His people. The Hebrew word translated as “enthroned” is commonly translated as “sit, dwell, or inhabit.” Though God is present everywhere, He makes His presence specially experienced when His people praise and worship Him. Because of the greater sense of God’s nearness, our intimacy with God and our faith in Him grows. What are some of the things you feel whenever you recognize God’s presence in your life?

3 | We are filled with the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .

EPHESIANS 5:18–20

Scripture exhorts believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit, both individually and corporately. This can be understood as yielding to the influence and control of the Holy Spirit. It is depicted in Scripture as sometimes manifested with a greater expression of God’s presence and power.

In Ephesians 5:18–20, Paul talks about different activities related to being filled with the Spirit. These can be understood as the circumstances that help bring out being

filled with the Spirit, or activities that result from being filled by the Spirit, or both. Among them include:

- addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs
- singing and making melody to the Lord with one's heart
- giving thanks to God, and
- submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

When we exalt and thank God and sing truths about Him, we have a greater sense of His presence and our faith arises. As a result of trusting in Him more, we yield even more to His influence and move in our lives. Also, when we are under the influence of the Spirit, we also have a greater desire to worship God. What do you think a community of believers filled with the Spirit looks like?

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APPLICATION

- The book of Psalms is full of David's instances of devotional worship unto God. What do the different emotions described in Psalms tell us about who God is and how we are to position ourselves in worship?
- In your experience of devotional worship, what are some things that God reveals about Himself and your own life? How can you respond in gratitude knowing that?
- In light of today's lesson, how may you participate in corporate devotional worship in your church community?

PRAYER

- Praise God for the ability to worship Him in every situation. Thank God for the transforming power that takes place when we set aside a place and time to express His greatness and goodness in our lives.
- Ask God to help you to continually fix your eyes on Him amidst fear and temptation. Pray that you would set aside time for personal devotional worship so that you may be aware of His presence and be filled with the Holy Spirit every day.
- Ask God to surround you with family and friends who would have the same desire for worship.

7 Grace in Serving

WARM-UP

- What is one hobby or activity that you enjoy doing? How much have you learned about it as you continued doing it?
- When working on a group project or task, how do you usually contribute or participate? How do you complement each other's strengths?
- How do you show your love for someone or something? What are the things you do for those things or people?

WORD *¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. . . .
⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them . . .* **ROMANS 12:1, 6**

(Read also **ROMANS 12:7-8.**)

Serving as a spiritual discipline is about using our resources, abilities, and spiritual gifts to serve God and others. Serving usually isn't the first to come to mind when we think about spiritual disciplines. However, it proves to be very powerful and helpful in knowing God and growing in our faith. In this lesson, we will study serving as a spiritual discipline including its benefits for us and for others.

1 | Serving is an act of worshiping God with our bodies.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ROMANS 12:1

(Read also **ROMANS 12:6–8**.)

Paul speaks of true spiritual worship as offering our *bodies as a living sacrifice* in view of God's mercy to us. The first application he gives is to serve others with our spiritual gifts. Just as acts of service are one of the ways we express our love to our loved ones, we express our worship and devotion to God when we serve others. How does Matthew 25:34–40 reinforce this truth?

2 | Serving is an act of faith that God uses to convey His grace to others.

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. . . . ⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them . . . ROMANS 12:1, 6

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace . . . 1 PETER 4:10

(Read also **ROMANS 12:7–8** and **1 PETER 4:11**.)

God has given every believer different talents, abilities, and spiritual gifts according to the grace He has given us. When we use these to serve others, we are being good stewards and channels of His *varied grace*. Others experience God's grace through us. When we serve, we get to know God more

and our faith grows. This is because we gain a totally new perspective of God's grace. Not only are we recipients of His grace, but we also see His grace working through us. How have you personally experienced God when you served others with your gifts?

3 | Serving is a means by which God matures us.

¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ . . . **EPHESIANS 4:11-13**

(Read also **EPHESIANS 4:14-16.**)

When believers are equipped in using their gifts and use them to serve and minister to one another, it is not just the individual but the entire church that is built up. We all grow in unity and our knowledge of Christ, and increasingly become more like Him. We are also strengthened against the scheme of the devil. How has God used others to build you up in areas of weakness? How has God used you to help others in areas where they are weak?

APPLICATION

- How do you respond whenever someone thanks you or recognizes you for your service? How may you help yourself and others acknowledge God in every act of service?
- How have you matured whenever you served others? What areas can you grow in as you continue to serve?
- What are some talents, skills, and abilities God has given you? How can you use these gifts to serve the people around you this week?

PRAYER

- Praise God for the gifts He has given you so that you may serve. Thank Jesus for becoming the perfect example of serving others.
- Ask God to give you the joy and strength to serve the people around you. Pray that you may not do it in vain, but as worship unto God.
- Pray that God would give you opportunities to bless and serve others this week. Pray that others would know Him more through your acts of service.

8 Grace in Giving

WARM-UP

- Have you received something that you really needed at that exact moment? How did you feel?
- What is the best thing or action you've given to or done for someone you love? Were you concerned about the cost or did you give wholeheartedly?
- Is there an advocacy, movement, or cause that you support? How have you shown your support for it?

WORD *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* **MATTHEW 6:21**

Giving, as a spiritual discipline, is a specific application of worship and service that is practiced in different ways. This includes giving through our tithes and offerings to God. We can also give to others in order to express God's love. When we give to God and His kingdom, we are expressing to God our allegiance and devotion to Him. Here are some truths that the Bible teaches us about giving.

1 Giving to God is an act of faith that places all that we have in God's hands.

If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. **ROMANS 11:16**

¹⁸"Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land to which I bring you ¹⁹and when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall present a contribution to the LORD. ²⁰Of the first of your dough you shall present a loaf as a contribution; like a contribution from the threshing floor, so shall you present it. ²¹Some of the first of your dough you shall

give to the LORD as a contribution throughout your generations.”

NUMBERS 15:18-21

The firstfruit offering is about giving the first and best portion of our income to God. It is similar to giving our tithes and offerings. They are a symbol or a representative of one's entire harvest. Though the apostle Paul metaphorically applies the Old Testament idea of firstfruits to Israel in Romans 11:6, it reflects the common understanding of offering firstfruits among the Jews: if what is offered as firstfruits is holy or set apart for God, then the rest is also holy or set apart for God. This means that when we give our tithes and offerings to God through the church, we are placing in God's gracious hands and care, not just what is offered, but also all that we have. Giving to God our tithe and offering does not make us earn God's blessings and provision. Rather, it is an act of faith where we entrust to God what we own. What does Proverbs 3:9-10 say about the results of not only honoring God with our firstfruits but also with the rest of our wealth?

2 | Giving directs our hearts toward God.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

MATTHEW 6:21

²²“You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year. ²³And before the LORD your God, in the place that he will choose, to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.” **DEUTERONOMY 14:22-23**

When we give to God and support the advancement of His kingdom, our hearts shift toward God and the things

of God. In Matthew 6:19–21, Jesus explained how storing our treasures in heaven leads our hearts to value heavenly things more. Giving then becomes a means of grace that strengthens our relationship with God and helps us grow spiritually. In the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 14:22–23), God commanded His people to give their tithe in the designated place. By doing so, they not only enjoyed the blessings, but also developed a reverence for God.

Similarly, when we give our tithes and offerings through our local church, we not only benefit from its services but it also directs our hearts towards God and teaches us to always revere Him. When we give towards missions, our hearts align with God’s mission, developing a concern and passion for reaching the nations and campuses worldwide. What are some things that you value more as you learn more about God?

3 | Giving makes us channels of God’s grace to others.

*¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. **2 CORINTHIANS 9:10–11***

Because giving to those in need is a practical application of the spiritual discipline of serving, there is a similar benefit and outcome to using our gifts to serve others: We become channels of God’s grace to others. Paul teaches this principle in the passage above, when he encourages the members of the Corinthian church to help provide for the needy in Jerusalem. When we sow by giving to others, we reap the harvest of righteousness. This means that people will be glorifying and thanking God, while the recipients pray for and

bless the givers because of the grace they received through their generosity. Furthermore, as we become channels of God's blessing, God increases our capacity to give. This is not a reward for our generosity, but because God wants us to be even more generous so that others may experience God's grace. In Philippians 4:18–19, what is the standard according to which God will supply the needs of those who were giving to Paul's ministry?

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APPLICATION

- Do you believe that God is your provider? How does this belief shape the way you give to God and give to others?
- Do you have any reservations towards giving? How may you overcome these as you know more about God?
- Are there people you know who are in need of provision? How may you be a blessing and witness of God's love to them?

PRAYER

- Thank God for supplying us with everything that we need and more so that we can be a channel of blessing to others.
- Ask God to always give you the right heart in giving. Pray that you would fix your eyes on Him and His kingdom as your greatest reward.
- Pray that God would give opportunities for you to be a blessing to your local church or to those in need. Ask God to lead you to specific places and people so that His name would be known and His kingdom advanced.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.
Amen. **2 PETER 3:18**

Spiritual disciplines, as outlined in the Bible, are means of receiving God's grace that are foundational to the Christian faith. They guide believers toward a deeper connection with God, a transformative inner journey, and a fruitful life focused on fulfilling His plans and purposes. At its heart, spiritual disciplines is the recognition that nurturing one's spiritual life requires intentional effort and commitment. As we grow in these means of grace, we are acknowledging our dependence on God. We also recognize that these disciplines are not something we can develop on our own effort but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through God's power, they become transformative tools that enable us to align our hearts and minds with His will, fostering a greater sense of humility, gratitude, trust, and love.

May this material give us not only an understanding of the importance of spiritual disciplines but also a desire for us to grow in them as we know and love God more. May this help transform our lives and empower us to help others grow in spiritual disciplines as well. As Christians, let us continue to *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* and be strengthened in our faith and advance God's kingdom here on earth.

TOPICS

- What Are Spiritual Disciplines?
- Grace in Fasting
- Grace in God's Word
- Grace in Devotional Worship
- Grace in Prayer (Part 1)
- Grace in Serving
- Grace in Prayer (Part 2)
- Grace in Giving



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