

(JUST) DO (IT)

DISCIPLINE EQUALS FREEDOM, WEEK 2

I. OUR CALL TO DISCIPLINE

2 Peter 1:3-11

The Cost of Non-Discipleship (Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 1-2)

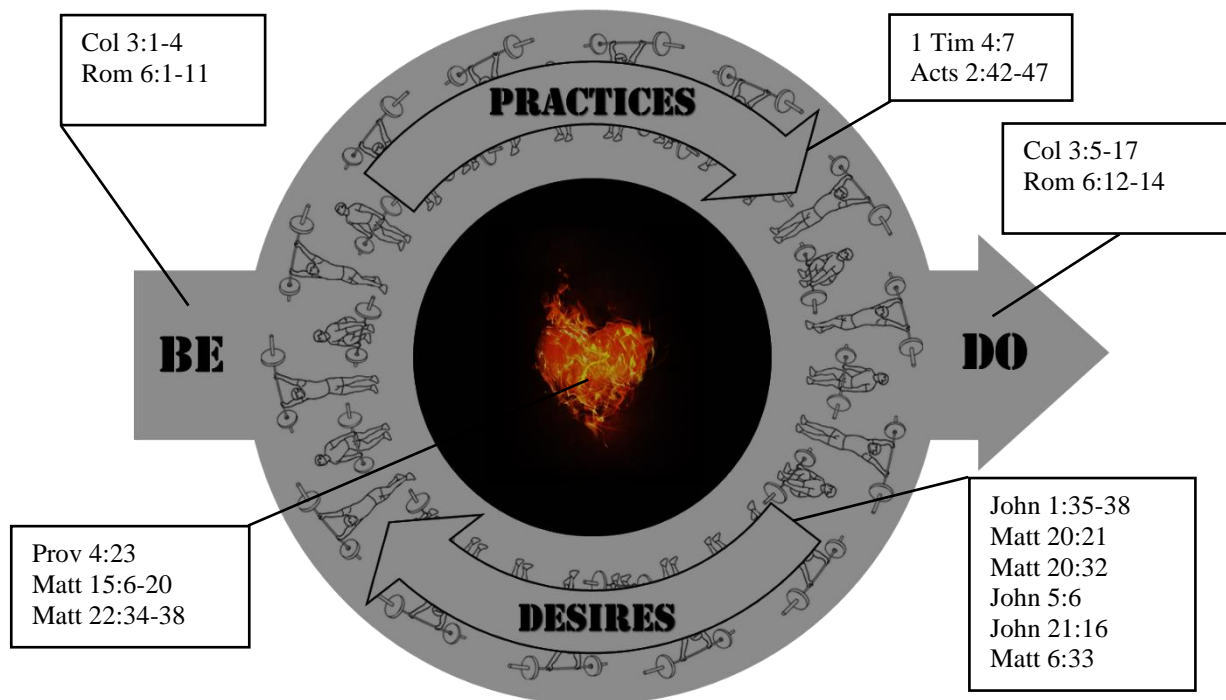
“‘Christianity has not so much been tried and found wanting, as it has been found difficult and left untried.’ So said that insightful and clever Christian, G. K. Chesterton. Whether or not he was totally serious, there is almost universal belief in the immense difficulty of being a *real* Christian. The vast, grim ‘cost of discipleship’ is something we hear constantly emphasized. Chesterton’s observation can at least be taken as reflecting the attitude of many serious people toward The Way of Christ.

But it must not be left to stand as the whole truth. We would do far better to lay a clear, constant emphasis upon the cost of *non*-discipleship as well. As Søren Kierkegaard reminds us, ‘It costs a man just as much or even more to go to hell than to come to heaven. Narrow, exceedingly narrow is the way to perdition!’”

Proverbs 13:15 tells us that it is the way of the transgressor that is hard. We can also learn this by candid observation of life. Actually, a large part of the Old Testament book of Proverbs merely records the results of such observation. The whole book is a song of praise for the path of the righteous over that of the wicked, leaving no doubt in which life, joy and strength are to be found.

To depart from righteousness is to choose a life of crushing burdens, failures, and disappointments, a life caught in the toils of endless problems that are never resolved. Here is the source of that unending soap opera, that sometimes horror show known as normal human life. The ‘cost of discipleship,’ though it may take all we have, is small when compared to the lot of those who don’t accept Christ’s invitation to be a part of his company in The Way of life.”

II. OUR MODEL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH



Recommended Reading for This Series
Celebration of Discipline, by Richard J. Foster.
The Spirit of the Disciplines, by Dallas Willard.
You Are What You Love, by James K. A. Smith.

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook, by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun.
The Life You’ve Always Wanted, by John Ortberg.
Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, by Donald S. Whitney.
Discipline Equals Freedom, by Jocko Willink.

III. (JUST) DO (IT)

Okay, I Believe You That These Practices Should Help Change My Desires and Help My Relationship with God. Any Other Reason I Should Do This?

Another key reason is that we are simply called to act as Jesus did, as John writes: “Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6). One reason Jesus was able to act as he did was that Jesus had built into his life the regular practice of spiritual disciplines. It was, in part, this understructure to Jesus’ life that allowed to him to obey his Father, God, when put on the spot.

Spiritual practices, or disciplines, that Jesus himself practiced included: prayer (Mark 14:32); solitude (Luke 5:16); fasting (Luke 4:1); study of Scripture (See Luke 4:14-20); memorization of Scripture (See Matt 4:1-10); submission (Luke 2:51); feasting (John 2:1-12); celebration (Luke 22:15); spoken praise (Luke 10:21); worship by singing (Mark 14:26); rest (Mark 6:31); and service (John 13:1-17).

So How Should We Define Spiritual Disciplines Precisely?

“The Spiritual Disciplines are those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times” (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 4).

“The disciplines are activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order. They enable us more and more to live in a power that is, strictly speaking, beyond us, deriving from the spiritual realm itself” (Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 68).

These definitions allow for a wide variety of activities that could be leveraged as spiritual disciplines (see Reading #1 below). In fact, over the centuries of Christian history, many spiritual disciplines have been developed and practiced (see Reading #2 below).

How Do These Spiritual Disciplines Work?

“The apostle Paul says, ‘he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life’ (Gal 6:8). Paul’s analogy is instructive. A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He cultivates the ground, he plants the seed, he waters the plants, and then the natural forces of the earth take over and up comes the grain. This is the way it is with the Spiritual Disciplines—they are a way of sowing to the Spirit. The disciplines are God’s way of getting us into the ground; they put us where he can work within us and transform us. By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done. They are God’s means of grace. The inner righteousness we seek is not something that is poured on our heads. God has ordained the Disciplines of the spiritual life as the means by which we place ourselves where he can bless us” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 7).

But Part of Me Doesn’t Want to Do Any of This Stuff—Is That Normal?

That is very normal. There are many reasons why we might shy away from practicing spiritual disciplines, but one of the key reasons is that the spiritual disciplines force us to confront the desires of our “flesh,” meaning our natural inclinations toward selfishness and away from God. As Paul writes, “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want” (Gal 5:17).

If we feel this resistance when attempting spiritual disciplines, that is not a bad thing. *This is one of the very goals of the spiritual disciplines.* Remember that Jesus himself was directed by the Spirit into a season of testing and wrestling with temptation and normal human instincts: “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread” (Matt 4:1-3). Very often, the way God actually enables us to grow in victory over our flesh comes through seasons of struggle and temptation. Just like a body-builder will not gain muscle without the resistance of the weights he or she lifts, so too we will probably not advance in our battle against our flesh without resistance. *Spiritual disciplines then become an arena we deliberately enter to battle the flesh.*

TRAINING PLAN

“To reach goals and overcome obstacles and become the best version of you possible will not happen by itself. It will not happen cutting corners, taking shortcuts, or looking for the easy way. THERE IS NO EASY WAY.”
—Jocko Willink, *Discipline Equals Freedom*, 2

Circle the Level of Engagement You Are Committing to This Week

All four are good choices, and you don't need to pick the same level every week. You can also choose to continue a previous week's plan instead of something new. Try to discern where God is calling you!

First Steps:

- Think through your history of following Jesus (however short or long). Brainstorm 2 practices or habits that you have used in the past, which you are not practicing as much now, that have helped you to grow spiritually or made you feel closer to God in the past.
- 2 days this week set aside 15 minutes to practice one of these habits that has helped you in the past. After the second day, think through these questions: (1) How did this experience help me? (2) Where did I experience a struggle with my flesh? (3) What would be the long-term benefit of continuing this practice more consistently? (3) What would be the costs of continuing this process?

Hit Harder:

- Do all the above
- Instead of practicing your choice 2 days this week, practice it on 3 different days.
- During this series we will process our experiences in discussion with another person or a small group of people. Sometime this week, meet up with one person discuss your experiences and encourage one another. Consider including people who are not part of our church as well. Use *Discussion Guide #1* below to guide your conversation.

Hard Core:

- Do all the above.
- Instead of practicing your choice 3 days this week, practice it on 6 different days (taking Sunday off). Instead of 15 minutes every day, devote 25 minutes a day.

Beast Mode:

- Do all the above.
- In addition to your practice on 6 days this week, choose a second key spiritual practice that has helped you in the past. Set aside 90 minutes somewhere in your week to engage in this specific spiritual practice 1 time. After you are done, think through the questions given above in “first steps” for this second practice as well.
- Seriously consider buying the book, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, by Adele Calhoun, so you have detailed guidance on all the spiritual disciplines listed below in Reading #1.
- If you started a fitness and nutrition plan last week, keep it up. Is there any way you can incorporate a more specifically spiritual practice within one of your fitness practices?
- If you commit to Beast Mode, please email, text, or call me so I know about it and can be praying for you. *Please also tell me what disciplines you have chosen to practice this week.* As time allows I will try to reach out to see how it is going. grhodea@grandgrace.org; 469-250-0825.

Reading #1: An Extensive List of Spiritual Disciplines

Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 11-13

<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Desire of the Discipline</i>
Accountability Partner	To give a regular and honest account of my choices, priorities and temptations to a godly and wise companion who points me to Christ.
Bible Study	To know what the Bible says and how it intersects with my life
Breath Prayer	To pray a simple, intimate prayer of heartfelt desire before God
Care of the Earth	To honor the Creator by loving, nurturing and stewarding his creation
Celebration	To take joyful, passionate pleasure in God and the radically glorious nature of God's people, Word, world and purposes
Centering Prayer	To quiet the heart and rest in God alone
Chastity	To revere God by revering and honoring my body and the bodies of others with purity of thought and action
Community	To express and reflect the self-donating love of the Trinity by investing in and journeying with others
Compassion	To become the healing presence of Christ to others
Confession and Self-Examination	To surrender my weaknesses and faults to the forgiving love of Christ and intentionally desire and embrace practices that lead to transformation
Contemplation	To wake up to the presence of God in all things
Contemplative Prayer	To develop an open, restful receptivity to the Trinity that enables me to always be with God just as I am
Control of the Tongue	To turn the destructive way I use words into authentic, loving and healing speech
Conversational Prayer	To talk naturally and unself-consciously to God in prayer times with others
Covenant Group	To enter into authentic, confidential and healing relationships with a committed group of fellow pilgrims
Detachment	To nurture the spirit of trust that is attached to God alone
Devotional Reading	To prayerfully encounter and surrender to the Living God through attending to Scripture
Discernment	To delight in and recognize the voice and will of God
Discipling	To be in a relationship where I am encouraged or where I encourage another to become an apprentice of Jesus
Examen	To notice both God and my God-given desires throughout the day
Fasting	To let go of an appetite in order to seek God on matters of deep concern for others, myself and the world
Fixed-Hour Prayer	To stop my work and pray throughout the day
Gratitude	To be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's prompting to live with a grateful heart, cognizant of God's work in my life and my abundant resources
Holy Communion	To be nourished by Christ, tasting the sweet depths of redemption
Hospitality	To be a safe person who offers others the grace, shelter and presence of Jesus
Humility	To become like Jesus in his willingness to choose the hidden way of love rather than the way of power
Inner-Healing Prayer	To assist the emotionally broken and wounded as they seek God for the healing only he can give
Intercessory Prayer	To turn my concerns and worries into prayer; to enter God's heart for the world and then pray from there
Journaling	To be alert to my life through writing and reflecting on God's presence and activity in, around and through me
Justice	To love others by seeking their good, protection, gain and fair treatment
Labyrinth Prayer	To make a quiet, listening pilgrimage to God
Liturgical Prayer	To open myself to God through established patterns or traditions of written prayers and readings
Meditation	To more deeply gaze on God in his works and words

Memorization	To carry the life-shaping words of God in me at all times and in all places
Mentoring	To accompany and encourage others to grow to their God-given potential
Practicing the Presence	To develop a continual openness and awareness of Christ's presence living in me
Prayer of Recollection	To rest in God, allowing him to calm and heal my fragmented and distracted self
Prayer Partners	To share the journey of prayer with a trusted companion
Praying Scripture	To allow God to shape my prayer life through the words of Scripture
Prayer Walking	To align myself, while walking in particular places, with Christ and his intercession for the kingdom to come
Rest	To honor God and my human limitations through restful rhythms
Retreat	To make space in my life for God alone
Rule for Life	To live a sane and holy rhythm that reflects a deep love for God and respect for how he has made me
Sabbath	To set apart one day a week for rest and worship of God
Secrecy	To follow the simple and often hidden way of Christ
Self-Care	To value myself as my heavenly Father values me
Service	To reflect the helping, caring and sharing love of God in the world
Silence	To free myself from the addiction to and distraction of noise so I can be totally present to the Lord; to open myself to God in the place beyond words
Simplicity	To uncomplicate and untangle my life so I can focus on what really matters
Slowing	To curb my addiction to business, hurry and workaholism; to learn to savor the moment
Small Group	To make my spiritual journey with a community of trusted friends
Solitude	To leave people behind and enter into time alone with God
Spiritual Direction	To give caring attention to my relationship with God, accompanied by the prayerful presence of someone who helps me listen well to God
Spiritual Friendship	To develop a friendship that encourages and challenges me to love God with all my heart, soul, strength and mind
Stewardship	To live as a steward of God's resources in all areas of life; to live out of the awareness that nothing I have is my own
Submission	To have Jesus as the Master of my life in absolutely every way
Teachability	To remain a lifelong learner who is continually open to the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit
Truth Telling	To live an authentically truthful life
Unity	To live in harmony with Christ's desire for the church to be one; to be a bridge-builder and peacemaker in the body of Christ
Unplugging	To be fully present to and uninterrupted in my interactions with God and others
Witness	To reveal the life-changing love of Jesus to others
Worship	To honor and adore the Trinity as the supreme treasure of life

Reading #2: Centuries of Connection between Discipline and Desire

Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 17-19 (bold emphases added by me)

From its beginning the church linked the desire for more of God to intentional practices, relationships and experiences that gave people space in their lives to “keep company” with Jesus. These intentional practices, relationships and experiences we know as *spiritual disciplines*. The basic rhythm of disciplines (or rule) for the first believers is found in Acts 2:42: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ **teaching** [a practice] and to **fellowship** [relationships], to the **breaking of bread** [an experience] and to **prayer** [another practice].”

The desire to know and love God fueled these disciplines. But as the early church community ran into new situations of want, conflict, temptation and persecution, they wanted and needed help to persevere in keeping company with Jesus. The book of Acts recounts a variety of ways the first-century believers made space for God as they faced difficulties:

- Acts 3—the discipline of **compassion**
- Acts 4—the disciplines of **witness, intercession and detachment**
- Acts 7—the discipline of **service**
- Acts 3:1; 10:9—the discipline of **fixed hour prayer**
- Acts 14:23—the discipline of **fasting**
- Acts 15—the discipline of **discernment**

It can be freeing as well as overwhelming to realize how many disciplines thread their way through the church era. As the gospel spread throughout the Roman world, the church continued to respond to people’s desires to keep company with Jesus. The *Didache*, an early Christian text, gave instruction to believers on how to grow in love of God and neighbor. It addressed disciplines like **stewardship, chastity, fasting, prayer, humility and the Lord’s Supper**. In the fourth and fifth centuries, as the church was relieved of its persecution, the desert fathers found that the politicized and nominal nature of Christianity sabotaged their first love. Longing to recover the passionate flame of love for God that characterized the early church, they moved into the desert where they could more intentionally partner with Jesus for transformation. Their longing to be conformed to the image of Christ gave rise to spiritual disciplines of **silence, solitude, contemplation, spiritual direction and detachment**. The desert fathers’ passion to love and keep company with Jesus reverberated through the secular life of Rome. Believers who shared a desire to go deep with God established communities characterized by spiritual rhythms that made space in their lives for God. These monastic communities forged their lives around disciplines of **fixed-hour prayer, memorization, devotional reading, service, chastity, simplicity, hospitality, meditation and service**. During this period of church growth, public **worship** also developed into **fixed liturgies** that guarded the church from heresy. These liturgies and their derivatives are still in use in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions today.

In the sixteenth century the coinciding advent of the printing press, world-class sailing ships and the Reformation fanned the flames of change. The Bible was translated from Latin into native tongues and made available to ordinary people. God’s written Word could literally go to the world’s end. Ministries focusing on mission outreach and service were launched by both Catholics and Protestants. **Bible study, witness, stewardship, discernment and intercessory prayer** became the property of common people, not just the educated elite.

The modern era ushered in industrialization, individualism, psychology, ecology and global awareness into the mainstream of Western life. People began to keep company with Jesus through **journaling, self-care, care of the earth, conversational prayer, accountability partners, small groups, mentoring and inner-healing prayer**.

The technological age, with its peculiar temptations and desires, is opening paths into disciplines like **slowing, centering prayer and unplugging**. Furthermore, classical disciplines like **solitude, silence, rest, spiritual direction and retreat** are resurging as people desperately seek a quiet, still center in the midst of the whirlwind.

Throughout the centuries the disciplines of **prayer, confession, worship, stewardship, fellowship, service, attending to Scripture and the Lord's Supper** have remained constant channels and disciplines of grace. These time-resilient disciplines give the church in every age and culture ways to keep company with Jesus. In Christ's presence, temptations, weakness, sin, and life's desire and desperations are addressed. It is not spiritual disciplines per se that transform us into the likeness of Christ. Without the work of God's Spirit within, practices guarantee nothing. Paul says, "Such regulations [disciplines] indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Col 2:23). Disciplines done for the wrong reasons actually sabotage transformation and numb us toward God and the truth. When we use spiritual practices to gain secondary things like spiritual cachet, success, approval and respect, we rob the discipline of its God-given grace. Jesus said of the most spiritually disciplined people of his day: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by mere men" (Matt 15:8-9).

Spiritual practices don't give us "spiritual brownie points" or help us "work the system" for a passing grade from God. They simply put us in a place where we can begin to notice God and respond to his word to us.

Spiritual disciplines give the Holy Spirit space to brood over our souls. Just as the Spirit hovered over the face of the deep at the dawn of creation, so he hovers over us today, birthing the ever-fresh Christ-life within. The Christ-in-me identity is not bound to a generic one-size-fits-all program for union with God. The Holy Spirit knows the spiritual practices, relationships and experiences that best suit our unique communion with God. He knows how to help us move into the "unforced rhythms of grace" that Jesus offers to teach us.

Spiritual transformation, "recovering your life," comes from partnering with the Trinity for change. That doesn't mean we give the Holy Spirit an agenda or a demand. We simply *desire*. We bring our ache for change, our longing for belonging, our desperation to make a difference. Then we keep company with Jesus by making space for him through a spiritual discipline. Our part is to offer ourselves lovingly and obediently to God. God then works within us doing what he alone can do. Our desires don't obligate the Holy One. God is free to come to us in spiritual disciplines as he wills, not as we demand. But unless we open ourselves to him through spiritual practices, we will miss his coming altogether. Keeping company with Jesus in the space between wanting to change and not being able to change through effort alone can be a difficult thing to do. Desiring God and not demanding an outcome keeps us in the risky place of waiting and longing. The truth is that we do not know how God intends to conform us to the image of his Son. God's Spirit of truth may use our spiritual practice to reveal false self-conceptions and idols of our heart. Becoming aware of what is true and false about us is essential for spiritual growth, and it is not always comfortable. So when we find ourselves in the space between desire and demand, when we are waiting on God and nothing seems to be happening, we must remember this space is an opportunity. In the unfixables of our lives we are invited to keep company with Jesus and take a risk that God's intentions toward us are good. Day after day this is what Jesus did. It is called trust. He calls us: "Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly" (Matt 11:30 *The Message*).

Discussion Guide #1: (Just) Do (It)

Meet together this week with at least one other person to discuss your experiences with spiritual disciplines. Later in the week would be ideal so you have some time to practice the disciplines. Meeting in person is best, but over the phone or via video chat would work too.

*Before meeting, each person should read **The Cost of Non-Disciplines** on the first page of this handout and **Part III. (Just) Do (It)** on the second page of this handout. Each person should also read **Reading #1** and **Reading #2** in this handout above. Underline key parts of these readings and write down any questions you might have.*

Questions for Your Group

1. Briefly recount your overall history of practicing spiritual disciplines within your Christian life. How have these practices helped you or not helped you in the past?
2. Which of the four levels of engagement on our training plan did you commit to this week? Share what old practices you reengaged with this week. How has it been to return to them?
3. How did you experience resistance from your flesh this week as you tried to practice spiritual disciplines? How should we think about this resistance of our flesh?
4. What are your thoughts after reading the list of spiritual disciplines in **Reading #1**?
5. What impacted you or challenged you in **Reading #2**?
6. In evangelical circles, often our essential spiritual advice has been “pray and read your Bible.” As valuable as this emphasis is, how might the sheer variety of practices seen in our readings provide advantages beyond only the essential advice to read the Bible and pray?
7. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 together. Paul is describing his hard-core approach to fulfilling his apostolic ministry (see the whole first part of 1 Cor 9). How does Paul’s attitude encourage our own approach to life and ministry? In what areas of your life are you most in need of self-discipline right now?

Pray for one another as you embark on this journey together!