

# Disciplines of a Disciple

## Private Devotion *continued*

Rob Rogers      September 4, 2022

### Introduction

Before we begin today's message, I want to address a few things about the Sabbath.

For many of us, actually working toward *keeping the Sabbath*, a 24-hour period with no productivity, to delight in God and the people around you — there's a temptation to look at that invitation from God and immediately conclude that it's impossible.

- Just to remind us... Jesus kept the Sabbath. His followers kept the Sabbath. And if you think you can become like Jesus without changing anything else about your life — it won't happen.

When Jesus called Peter and John to follow Him, He did not say... *grab your fishing nets and drag them along with you while you're following me.*

No, Jesus said, "*Leave your nets and follow me.*"

- Implementing a Sabbath, or any of the spiritual practices, is not impossible. But if you think you can become like Jesus without changing anything else about your life — that's what's impossible.

It is challenging. It requires something of you, absolutely. The question for you is, "*Are you actually going to follow and practice the ways of Jesus as revealed in His Word, or are you just going to settle for a half-hearted, shallow, 21<sup>st</sup> century western cultural Christianity?*"

**Are you going to press into what it means to live under the easy yoke,  
the abundant life that Jesus promises —  
or are you going to live life having a  
“form of godliness, but deny it's power,” as it says in 2 Timothy 3:5.  
That really is the question we have to wrestle with.**

With the culture that we live in — this is not easy to implement. But it's worth it.  
How do I know that? *Because God says so.*

*The pathway is comprised of Spiritual Practices that are placed into four specific categories.*

1. **Private Devotion**
2. **Biblical Community**
3. **Missional Living**
4. **Kingdom Stewardship**

**Today**, we're going to look at a passage out of the life of Jesus that reveals to us the other three practices that fall under the category of **PRIVATE DEVOTION**

*If taking a full Sabbath is too big of leap to begin with for you — today’s teaching will be helpful for you as a starting point — as you work your way toward keeping a full Sabbath day.*

### **Matthew 3:13-17**

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?” <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. <sup>16</sup> And when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him; <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

### **Matthew 4:1-4**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit **into the wilderness** to be tempted by the devil <sup>2</sup> And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup> But He answered, “It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Three practices in this one passage are...

**SOLITUDE**  
**FASTING**  
**PRAYER**

*We’re going to spend the bulk of our time on Solitude today, because it’s one of the hardest and most important disciplines to practice.*

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## **Solitude**

The very first thing that Jesus does after His baptism is **not**: preach to thousands of people, hold a rally, start an Instagram account, or take a bunch of selfies to show everyone how much of a difference He’s making, or how He’s a big deal. The very first thing Jesus does after His baptism, the mark of the beginning of His public ministry — the first thing is...

**He goes into the Wilderness. Alone. To Fast. To Pray. In Solitude.**

The word for wilderness in the original Greek is the word *eremos*.

### **Wilderness (ἐρημος)**

**erēmos**: A solitary, remote, desolate, quiet, lonely place.

All throughout the gospels, Jesus goes off to a solitary or desolate places.

### **Mark 1:35-37**

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He departed and went out to **a desolate place**, and there He prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him, <sup>37</sup> and they found Him and said to Him, “Everyone is looking for You.”

### **Mark 6:30-32**

The apostles returned to Jesus and told Him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> And He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to **a desolate place** and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

Does Jesus say... *“The demands on your lives are so high... you’re running at such a frantic pace... what you need is just to get away and binge some Netflix. Just escape the demands through a bunch of distractions and diversions. Movies, scrolling your socials — or just escaping reality through stimulating your mind, your body with substances, synthetics, and sitcoms.”*

**No, Jesus says,** *“What you need is to get alone with your own soul... with Me.” All the introverts said, “Amen!” But then life happens...*

### **Mark 6:32-33**

And they went away in the boat to **a desolate place** by themselves. <sup>33</sup> Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

*Have you ever tried to get alone — and no matter how hard you try, you just keep getting interrupted?*

*Susanna Wesley, the mother of John and Charles that would shape the course of Christianity’s influence in world history, raised 10 children (nine had died in infancy). Try finding solitude with 10 little ones and no technology. The only way she could get time in solitude with Jesus is that she would sit in her favorite chair in their little house, take her apron, and drape it over her own head. She would stay there for two hours a day. And when the kids saw that she was under her apron, they knew not to mess with mama Wesley, because she was meeting with God under there!<sup>1</sup>*

In her situation — we’d throw in the towel before we even attempted Solitude. But she pressed in, and her legacy of devotion to God is seen in the lives of her children.

### **Why is this spiritual practice of solitude so important?**

Because our pace of life is so fast, so hurried, so frantic — we are so distracted and overstimulated that we are literally gaining the whole world and losing our own souls.

*“Let him who cannot be alone beware of community... Let him who is not in community beware of being alone... One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and the one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation and despair.”<sup>2</sup>*  
~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the solitary place, and Jesus continued to return there over and over again. We have no idea how to do this — which is why our culture is in the mental health crisis that it’s in.

*“We are distracting ourselves into spiritual oblivion.”<sup>3</sup>*  
~ Ronald Rolheiser

We’re all addicted to our phones and technology... every time we get a like or a comment, a text, or an email — we get hit with a shot of dopamine. As a result, we’re radically codependent, we’re always accessible... and often when we face problems in our lives, we don’t choose to get alone with God... we go to others first.

<sup>1</sup> <https://faithgateway.com/blogs/christian-books/praying-example-susanna-wesley>

<sup>2</sup> Dale Larsen, Sandy Larsen. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Costly Grace* (InterVarsity Press, May 1, 2022) p.44

<sup>3</sup> John Mark Conner. *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Crown Publishing Group, Oct 29, 2019) p. 122

- We don't go to God because maybe He won't validate our perspective or our experience.
  - We don't ask God because we're afraid of what He might say to us. — and what we might need to do as a result.
- Or we refuse to get alone and slow down, so that we can avoid unpleasant emotions or thoughts.
  - Something is chasing you and you're running from it.
  - Two choices, keep running and hope it stops chasing you (*it won't*), *OR stop and face it, with God's help!*

**Solitude**, and often the **silence and slowing down** that goes with it, teaches us to be alone with our own soul, with God, and to live at an undistracted, unhurried pace of life.

Whether you believe it or not, you can slow down, be alone, be in the quiet, unhurried solitary place with God without feeling terrible — if you'll invite God to meet you there.

### ***Practical, how do we practice Solitude?***

#### **1. Schedule a Time**

You won't accidentally find yourself practicing solitude. It's why it's a spiritual discipline. Step 1 is put it on the calendar. Determine the time. Maybe early in the morning for 10 minutes each day, or at night after everyone has gone to sleep.

You might even try to schedule a solitude retreat once a quarter. Just getting away. Getting alone. And paying attention to what's going on within you and inviting God into those moments.

#### **2. Choose a Place**

Choose a location where you won't be interrupted or distracted. Leave your phone behind. Leave technology behind. If the idea of leaving your phone behind terrifies you — all the more reason to press into this practice. God has not given you a spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind. Bring a journal with you to write about what is in your heart and mind and process those things with the Lord.

#### **3. Find "Brief Solitudes"**

*Richard Foster calls it recognizing "little solitudes" throughout your day.<sup>4</sup>*

The early morning moments before you rise from bed. Or even moments alone in the car while you're in traffic... take advantage of those moments to pay attention to your soul and listen for God.

There is a practice in Christian tradition of showing up early to meetings you've scheduled throughout the day, to simply sit and be present with God before your meeting begins.

Or right before bed. Take two minutes on the porch to breathe and be alone with yourself and present with the Lord.

*I love what Moses tells the Israelites when they're about to be overrun by the pursuing Egyptians after they were delivered from slavery...*

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<sup>4</sup> Richard J. Foster. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (Zondervan, Oct 5, 1988)

**Exodus 14:13-14** And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. <sup>14</sup> The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be **silent**.”

- Another translation says, be **still**. Don’t panic, don’t launch into frenetic activity. Be still and trust the Lord to fight for you. To work IN you.

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## Fasting

### Matthew 4:2-4

And after **fasting** forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup> But He answered, “It is written, “**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**”

- Jesus is going toe to toe with the devil... the devil knows He hasn’t eaten in 40 days... so tempts Him. Jesus’ response (*quoting scripture*) gives us some insight as to the purpose of fasting.

***Fasting is a way of saying that food, drink, physical sustenance is actually secondary to something else.***

While fasting is a discipline of self-denial... it’s not **JUST** about self-denial.

Dallas Willard defines fasting this way...

*“The voluntary abstention from an otherwise normal function—most often eating—  
for the sake of intense spiritual activity.”<sup>5</sup>*

*~ Dallas Willard*

What Willard is saying is that you’re not just depriving yourself of something to say you did it. Fasting is not going without, just to go without. Willard’s definition tells us that ***the purpose of fasting is to go without something temporal, in order to hunger for the eternal.***

**Fasting is physical abstinence  
for the purpose of spiritual engagement.**

*You’re going without something that you need, for something that you need more.  
You’re going without something important, for something of utmost importance.*

Jesus said to the crowd...

### Luke 9:23

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him **deny himself**, and take up his cross daily, and **follow Me**.

- Jesus describes the essence of discipleship as self-denial, for the purpose of spiritual engagement.
- You deny yourself, in order to follow Jesus, in order to become like Jesus.

**Every time you see the discipline of fasting in the Bible... it is never an isolated practice.  
Fasting is always intimately linked with the practice of prayer.**

- Fasting and prayer go hand in hand! ***And while you can have prayer without fasting, you can’t have fasting (in the biblical sense) without prayer.***

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<sup>5</sup> Dallas Willard. *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (Zondervan, Dec 7, 1990)

***You're going without something, in order to engage in a greater thing.  
You're fasting in order to develop greater levels of intimacy, dependence, communion, and communication with God.***

### **Matthew 6:16–18**

“And **when you fast**, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

- **WHEN** you fast (not **IF** you fast), Don't be all mopey about it. Or else that's your reward. And in my opinion, getting accolades from people for fasting is a pretty dumb reward, don't you think?

### **2 Corinthians 4:16-17**

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, <sup>18</sup> while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

- Paul is referring to the persecution of the church, but the principle applies to fasting also.

**Fasting is simply letting go of that which is seen,  
to reach for that which is unseen.**

We may view it as a sacrifice for God, but it's not that at all. According to Paul, it's not even a sacrifice — Paul says, anything you give up in this life is building something much greater for you in the life to come!

And when that truth sinks in, ***we can then view fasting not as a sacrifice but an investment.*** Disciplines of abstinence become a delight for us because we know ***that our light affliction is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!***

In January, we're going to start our calendar year with a fast, so we'll be talking about different types of fasts then. But if you'd like some resources on it now, they are listed below.

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## **Prayer**

1. Praying isn't just about asking God for things — although we're invited to ask.
2. Praying isn't about manipulating God to do what you want — but about submitting your will to God and agreeing with what God wants.
3. Prayer isn't a futile effort to change circumstances or outcomes — prayer is co-laboring with God in a way that shapes outcomes.
4. Prayer is not just saying things to God — prayer is listening as well.

*Praying effectively, or to pray without ceasing as we're commanded in 1 Thessalonians 5 — is a learning process.*

One of my favorite sentences in the Bible is when the disciples look at Jesus and say, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

- They’d been praying since childhood, but when they saw Jesus pray, they recognized that there was something different, something more to His prayers than they were experiencing. And I love their humility of just asking... will you teach us?

There are prayer giants, and there are prayer infants. No matter where you are on that spectrum, every single one of us can grow in this discipline.

*“Of all the spiritual disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father. Prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life.”<sup>6</sup>  
~ Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline*

### **Jeremiah 33:3**

*“Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”*

Call to Me — and listen for my response. That’s prayer. It’s conversational.

#### ***Prayer overlaps with every other discipline.***

- *Solitude without prayer is just isolation.*
- *Fasting without prayer is without significance.*
- *Reading scripture without relationship is just religious.*
- *Keeping a Sabbath, without attuning yourself to God throughout the day will not satisfy.*

All of these practices in Private Devotion — all are **saturated by prayer**.

*Because prayer is how we enter into relationship with Yahweh, who is first and foremost, a relational being.*

*There are some resources on prayer at the end of the sermon notes.*

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## **Private Devotion**

**SCRIPTURE, SABBATH, SOLITUDE, FASTING, PRAYER**

...is to conform us to the image of Christ. To make us LIKE JESUS.

**We want to be people who follow Jesus. Be changed by Jesus. Live on mission with Jesus.**

Paul tells young Timothy...

### **1 Timothy 4:7**

**...train yourself for godliness;** <sup>8</sup> for 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. <sup>9</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. <sup>10</sup> For to this end we **toil and strive**, because we have our hope set on the living God.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard J. Foster. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (Zondervan, Oct 5, 1988)



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## Discussion Questions

1. Discuss: *If you think that you can become like Jesus without changing anything else about your life — that's what's impossible.*
2. Have you been able to work toward “keeping the Sabbath”? How — or why not?
3. Why did Jesus spend so much of his time in solitude? Is that a good reason for us to follow suit?
4. What are some practical steps you can implement in your own life to practice solitude?
5. What is the real purpose of fasting? Does this change how you think about your personal fasting?
6. Why is prayer the most important of all the Spiritual Disciplines? How does it relate to the others?

### **RESOURCES ON SOLITUDE, FASTING, AND PRAYER.**

#### **Books:**

Michael Eagle, Shodankeh Johnson, David Roadcup. ***Prayer and Fasting*** (Amazon Digital Services, Nov 20, 2020)

Ed Cyzewski. ***Flee, Be Silent, Pray*** (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, May 28, 2017)

Richard J. Foster. ***Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*** (Zondervan, Oct 5, 1988)

Peter Scazzero. ***Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*** (Zondervan, Apr 25, 2017)

#### **Links, Videos, Websites**

##### **What is Biblical Fasting?**

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting/biblical-fasting.html>

##### **Fasting Starter Kit**

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting/fasting-starter-kit.html>

##### **Exploring and Beginning Prayer**

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/prayer/prayer-starter-kit.html>

##### **The Practice of Silence and Solitude – Donald Whitney (12 minutes) (Practical Steps @ 4:45)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cx9Oe3W4A6M>



# NOTES