

Term 2 Study Guide

Spiritual **Disciplines**

TRAINING FOR GODLINESS



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Welcome to Term 2

Is it possible that, when you heard what we were doing this term, your first thought was, "We don't need a series on Spiritual Disciplines. We need to hear the gospel!"? You wouldn't be alone if it was. Maybe earlier generations would be drawn to discipline as a great virtue. But in our day and age, the very word smacks of authoritarianism and oppressive rules.

And yet social media is full of amazing examples of self-discipline. Health goals pursued through exercise regimes and exacting diets. Business success promised through time management and goal setting. Here are rhythms and practices offered for self-improvement through personal discipline. We know that pursuing our passions and life-goals takes self-discipline.

And when it comes to our spiritual life, the Bible expects it will take self-discipline. Both as we turn **away** from sin ("*abstain from sinful desires*" 1 Pet 2:11; "*put to death the misdeeds of the body*" Rom 8:13), and in choosing to **do good** ("*pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness*" 1 Tim 6:11; "*follow God's example ... and walk in the way of love*" Eph 5:1). Perhaps one of the most helpful verses is found in Titus 2:

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,

Self-discipline is clearly on show in verse 12. But most helpful of all, verse 11 assures us that this self-discipline **isn't opposed to God's grace in the gospel**. Rather, self-discipline arises from, is empowered by, and consistently returns us to God's grace.

Christian self-discipline *arises from* the gospel, because the gospel tells us God has a specific goal in saving us: he saves us so we can confidently pursue the righteousness he has planned for us. Titus even says as much in the next two verses,

¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

The right sort of self-discipline is also *empowered by* the gospel because it comes about through our union with Christ. That is, Christ graciously gives us his Spirit so that we will participate, by faith, in his resurrected righteous life. As Romans 8:13 says, it is "*by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body*".

And the sort of self-discipline we need will always *return us to*, and root us in, the gospel. Because the more we seek the righteousness God wants for us, the more we discover **we can't do it!** So, I can't focus my self-discipline on being better at putting sin to death myself, but on how I will seek the One who can. My self-discipline drives me to live by faith.

And that's what we find the Spiritual Disciplines are. Practices in faith. Rhythms and routines in life that teach me that I can't defeat sin and do good on my own, but only by relying on God's work in me. We'll only get the Spiritual Disciplines right by going deeper into the gospel. Which is what we pray we'll be doing this term.

In Christ,

Russell, Josh, Sam and Jen

Vision Update | Where to Next?

Last July we began our Vision Setting process to plan what we need to focus on for the next three to five years. It's been great hearing people share where they think God might be calling us to grow in the years ahead.

I want to particularly thank the Vision Team. They've been working hard helping me draft the vision document, as we seek to be guided by God and his word, while also incorporating the input of congregations from the Vision Setting Day last July. The Vision Team is made up of Joel Iedema, Jen Baddeley, Pam Jay, Will Langridge, Steve Ballinger, Sue Robinson, Janet Kohlmannhuber, and Douglas Catchpole.

In the last month, the Vision Team has met with Home Groups and a gathering between the Early Church and 10:30 Church services to hear the congregation's feedback on the vision document. The plan from here is to collate the feedback and look for patterns in responses. If there is something clear we've missed, or an improvement that can be made, the Vision Team will consider how best to incorporate that into the vision document.

Driving the vision in the document is the belief that God placed us here in the Redlands - a city of 160,000 people - to live for him and share the good news of Jesus. He's also placed us here at a time where the pressures on our faith are growing. Our vision is therefore to become a church that is moving toward sustainable growth patterns, that are producing resilient followers of Jesus, on the path of counter-cultural Christian maturity. The five vision elements we've presented so far include:

1. Living as people of prayer
2. Reaching the Redlands region and beyond with the message and love of Jesus
3. Belonging to small groups that deepen our discipleship to Jesus and relationships with others
4. Equipping the church through regular rhythms of training for leadership, service, and Christian living
5. Gathering in three healthy congregations that are welcoming and growing

These may change somewhat depending on the feedback. But we believe they're where we should focus our attention.

The next steps are for the Vision Team to consider the feedback and make any changes it deems necessary. It'll then go to Session for their approval before being launched. Depending on how many changes need to be made, we envisage this happening sometime between May to July.

I'd love you to continue to pray for the process. I'd also love you to be praying for how you could get involved in moving toward our vision when we begin work on it.

God bless, Josh

Redlands Youth | Summit Camp Update



In March, Redlands Youth set out on our first camp in a number of years. We went to Eighteen Mile Homestead at Darlington, near Beaudesert. One of our leaders, Ruth Ament, was asked a few questions about her experience - here are her answers.

Q. What was your highlight from Summit Camp 2023?

A. Probably a toss up between capture the flag with coloured chalk bombs and the beautiful views on the summit hike.

Q. What's one thing you took away from the Bible on camp?

A. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) After seeing a little too much of myself in our first study of the parable of the rich fool, it was especially comforting to continue reading Luke 12 and focus on God's promises to care for us: mind, body, and soul.

Q. The theme on camp this year was "what are you living for?". How were you encouraged to live for Jesus?

A. I think the main thing I took away from our talks, small group studies, and quiet times was how important it is to have an eternal focus in a world that tells us we need to have more, to be more, and that we are in charge of our success and happiness. The passages we focused on made it clear how foolish that is. Instead, we have a God who cares and gives beyond what the world offers, and in response, our lives should look different since, "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required." (Luke 12:48)



Q. What would you say to someone who was thinking about going next year?

A. Come along! Whether crazy outdoor games or quieter campfire chats are more your speed, there was a good balance of both. We had a solid routine of shared meals and worship/prayer/Bible study time, all in a beautiful setting.

Q. If you had to describe camp in three words, what would you say?

A. Entertaining, engaging, encouraging

Sam

Our Mission Partners



EARLY CHURCH

E & L
South East Asia



VICTORIA POINT

Tim & Jeanne Iedema
FOCUS
QUT Christians



10:30 CHURCH

L & C
South East Asia



REDLAND BAY

A & S
South Asia



NIGHT CHURCH

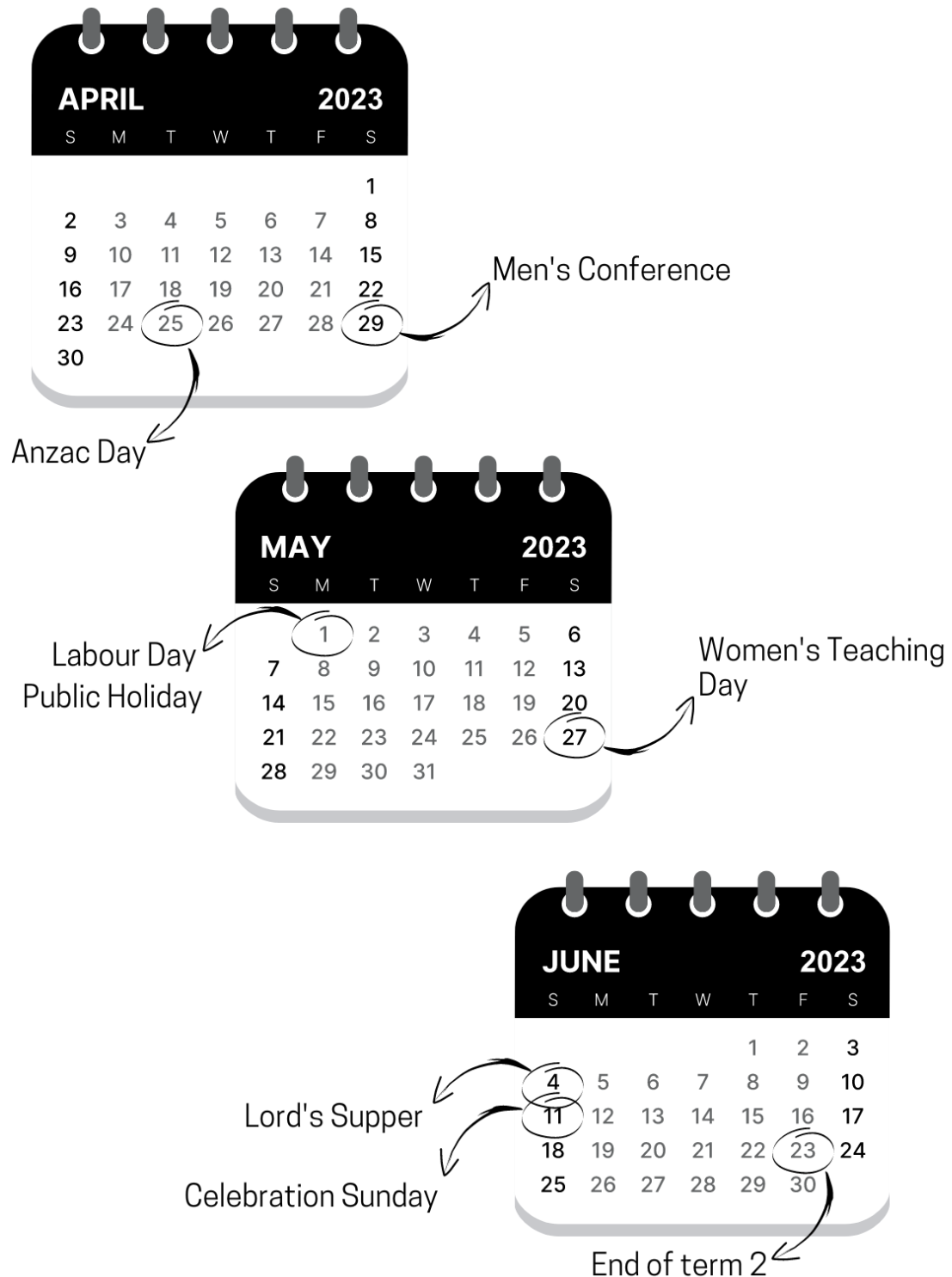
Izaac & Sarah
Cowling Griffith Uni



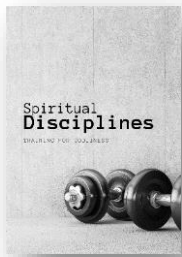
REDLANDS YOUTH

L & E
East Asia

Term 2 Calendar



Term 3 save the date
Church Camp @ Home



STUDY ONE

Bible Reading

What are we talking about?

1. How important is it to read the Bible for ourselves?
2. Describe your Bible reading habit in a typical week.
3. What do you find encouraging about reading the Bible?

Explore the Bible

4. What value does God want us to place on his Word? Why?
2 Timothy 3:16
Ephesians 6:17
Hebrews 4:12
Psalm 119:9-16
5. How does Jesus' example help us to take the Bible seriously? (Luke 4:3-4; 16-21)
6. How does Jesus' setting up and endorsing specific witnesses help us take the New Testament seriously as Scripture? (John 20:19-23; Luke 24:48-49)

When is this a false practise and why?

7. How does 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 help us to be careful with our attitude to our Bible reading?

8. What kinds of things disrupt our Bible reading?
9. How are the Pharisees a warning to us of appearing to love God's word but actually setting it aside? (Matthew 15:1-6)

How does this help us grow in our relationship with God in Christ?

10. Matthew 7:24-27 contains an important warning. How does this help us to understand about Jesus' words?
11. How does Jesus help the disciples to understand Scripture better? (Luke 24:45-47) Why is it important to understand how central Jesus is to the entire Bible?
12. How do the Scriptures help us to know Christ better?

How do we do this in our lives?

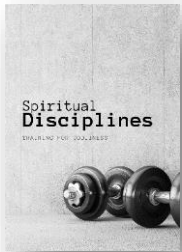
13. What ways have worked for you as you've read the Bible?
14. What things have not worked?
15. How does being busy threaten this spiritual discipline for you?
16. Are there things you pay more attention to than the Bible that are having an impact on your Christian growth? How might you repent of this?

17. What kinds of things should we pray for as we open God's Word?
18. What are some different ways that someone might engage with the Bible if they were not able to read it?
19. What is one thing you might do this week to try and make reading God's word a reality in your life?
20. What difference does it make to you that Jesus is with you by his Spirit as you read the Bible?

Prayer Ideas:

Praise God for his Word, which has come to us, preserved over so many years and so important for us to God know in Christ. Thank God that he faithfully still saves and transforms us as his Spirit opens our eyes as we read his Word.

Pray that we will be diligent readers of God's Word, thinking and praying over what we read and that we will consider his words with soft hearts, ready to be obedient to our Lord.



STUDY TWO

Prayer

What are we talking about?

1. How important is it to pray?
2. Describe how you pray across a normal week.
3. What do you find encouraging about prayer? How does praying change your experience of life?

Explore the Bible

4. What value does God want us to place on prayer? Why?
5. How does Jesus' example help us to take prayer seriously?
6. What are our prayer lives to be like? (Ephesians 6:18, 1 Timothy 2:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17; James 5:16-18)
7. What is God's Spirit doing for us as we pray? (Romans 8:26-27) How does this encourage us to pray?

8. What does the Lord's Prayer teach us about prayer? (Matthew 6:9-13)

When is this a false practise and why?

9. What are wrong reasons to pray?
10. What should we avoid doing when we pray? (Matthew 6:7-8)
11. What kinds of things disrupt our prayer times?

How does this help us grow in our relationship with God in Christ?

12. How does prayer help us to know Christ better?
13. Often, Christians adopt something like an 'ACTS' model to remind us that prayer is made up of different attitudes and responses to God. (Adoration/Confession/Thanksgiving/Supplication) How do these types of prayers help us express our dependence on God? How do they help us to respond to God?
14. Can people tell from your prayers that you depend on God? How can we bring our prayers in line with the reality that everything we have comes from God and we depend on him for everything?
15. Paul was focussed on praying most for the spiritual welfare of the people he ministered to and with. Why? (Philippians 1:3-11)

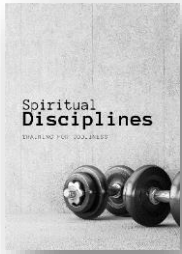
How do we do this in our lives?

16. Choose a word to describe your prayer-life now. What word would you like to describe your prayer-life a year from now? What one thing might you do to try and shift in that direction? How can your group help you to be accountable?
17. What areas of your life do you not pray about? Write a couple of one sentence prayers about these issues.
18. How are you at praying with the important people in your life? How would you like to grow in this area?
19. What kinds of things do you pray for your most precious people? If you aren't praying for their spiritual health and their relationship with Jesus, how might you change that? If you are praying for these things, are your desires for their spiritual growth up to date or are there more or different things you could be praying for?
20. What do you most admire about God? Why? Have you told God about this lately?

Prayer Ideas

Praise God that we come to him in prayer and he welcomes us in his Son, who brings us into the throne room of God, as his own Spirit takes our prayers and makes them suitable for Almighty God. Thank God for his generosity towards us as he graciously draws us to himself in prayer.

Pray that we will be as relaxed with our neediness and dependence on God as God is, and that we will come quickly to him for everything we need. Pray that we will trust him and grow in our willingness to pray and pray in ways that are shaped by God's word.



STUDY THREE

Sabbath

What are we talking about?

1. How important is it to have a day of rest?
2. If you feel comfortable to share, how would you describe your practice of 'Sabbath'?
3. What do you find encouraging about taking a day of rest?

Explore the Bible

4. What value does God place on rest? (Genesis 1:27-2:4)
5. List the people who were to rest on the Sabbath. (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15)
What kind of planning would be required for all of these people to rest on the Sabbath in an agrarian society? What does this tell you about God's attitude to the Sabbath?
6. What does it mean that the Sabbath was 'holy to the Lord'? (Exodus 31:15)
7. What does it mean for us today that the Sabbath was made for people? (Mark 2:27)

8. How does Jesus' example help us to understand rest? (Luke 4:16)

9. In what critical way do we keep the Sabbath? (Hebrews 4:1-11)

When is this a false practise and why?

10. Can you think of examples of people thinking about this poorly? What is wrong with these attitudes?

11. What kinds of things get in the way of us having a Sabbath?

12. How is a Sabbath different to 'me time'?

How does this help us grow in our relationship with God in Christ?

13. How does having a Sabbath help us to depend on God more?

14. What does it mean for us that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath? (Mark 2:28)

15. How might we plan and prepare to have a Sabbath in order to know Christ more?

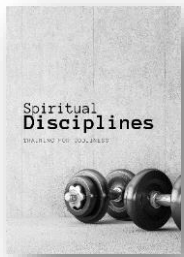
How do we do this in our lives?

16. What would it mean for you to stop from your usual work and spend time more focussed on Christ for one day in seven? What would you have to organise to do differently?
17. If you keep a Sabbath, what are the key things that you would miss if you stopped? Is there anything that you would like to refine or change about how you keep the Sabbath in light of what you've thought about in this study?
18. If you can't see how you can possibly have one day off in seven, what section of time could you take to spend more time with God and slow down? How can your group help you be accountable to do this over the next week?
19. What would it mean for you to 'rest in Jesus' more consciously all week? How could you bring this aspect of Sabbath into your daily life and practice?
20. How would you like to pray about keeping the Sabbath? What would you most like God's wisdom and care for as you try and do life his way?

Prayer Ideas

Praise God that he understands and endorses our humanity, and instead of trying to get whatever he can out of us, he graciously commands us to rest for our own spiritual and physical good. Thank God for the chance to deepen our relationship with him as we rest.

Pray that we will adopt God's priorities for ourselves and explore how to rest properly and worshipfully, even in our busy lives. Ask God for wisdom and determination to know how to follow Jesus in this way.



STUDY FOUR

Fasting

What are we talking about?

1. What do you understand when you hear the word 'fast'?
2. Have you ever done this? If you have, describe your experience. If you haven't, would you? Why or why not?

Explore the Bible

3. Why were people to fast on the Day of Atonement? (Leviticus 23:27-30)
4. Why do others fast in the Old Testament? (Judges 20:26; Psalm 69:6-12, 2 Samuel 12:15-17)
5. What does Jesus say about why his disciples don't fast (Mark 2:18-20) What is the implication for us now?
6. Why do the apostles fast in Acts 13:1-3?
7. Summarise why people fast in the Bible.

When is this a false practise and why?

8. Why does God hate the people's fasts in Amos 5:21? What does this tell us about what to avoid?
9. How does Matthew 6 help us to avoid 'false fasting'? (Matthew 6:16-18)
10. Why does the Pharisee fast in Luke 18:9-14? How does fasting shape his view of himself falsely?

How does this help us grow in our relationship with God in Christ?

11. How do Jesus' words in John 6 help us to think about this issue? (John 6:35-40)
12. How does the crowd 'fast' in Mark 8:1-3? What does this add to our understanding of fasting?

How do we do this in our lives?

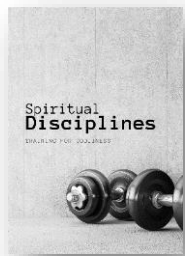
13. If you've never fasted before, would you consider it now? Why or why not?
14. If you have fasted before, would you change how or why you fasted in the future? Why or why not?
15. When would it be unwise for someone to fast?

16. If you decide to fast, why is having a limit to your fast a good idea?
17. How does fasting free us up logistically to pray?
18. If you can't fast, how might you think about giving up something else in order to focus on prayer?
19. What do you think about national days of prayer and fasting?

Prayer Ideas

Praise God that Jesus is better even than his good gift of food, which most of us have in abundance. Thank God that we can choose to set aside food or something else in order to devote ourselves to prayer and this isn't something we are forced to do to please God.

Pray that we will think about ourselves and our lives in such a way as to prioritise our relationship with God rather than putting our own comfort central.



STUDY FIVE

Gathering with God's People

What are we talking about?

1. What is going to church usually like for you?
2. Do you do anything to prepare to meet with God's people? Do you have a way of reflecting on church after it is over?
3. What other ways do we have of 'gathering' as God's people? What do these different ways of gathering mean to you?

Explore the Bible

4. How did God gather his people in the Old Testament? (Ex 19:16-19, Deuteronomy 16:9-12, 1 Kings 8:62-66)
5. According to God's Word, why do we go to church at all? How is that like the Old Testament? How is it different? (Hebrews 10:19-25)
6. What kinds of things do we do for each other when we gather? (1 Cor 12:27-31, Romans 12:6-8, 2 Corinthians 8:1-7, 13-14, Eph 4:11-15, Col 3:15-16)
7. What do we express about knowing Jesus as we gather? (John 13:34-35, Matthew 18:20, Eph 4:1-5)

8. How does God's Word shape how we go to church each week? How does it affect how we go to home group or other gatherings?

When is this a false practise and why?

9. When would going to church be likely to displease God?
10. Is there a way you go to church or home group that gets in the way of how God wants you to meet with his people?
11. Do you have attitudes you have to gathering or to your brothers and sisters that might need to be changed?

How does this help us grow in our relationship with God in Christ?

12. How does knowing of the final gathering of the church in Revelation affect how we think about gathering together? (Revelation 21:1-4)
13. Thinking about when church or home group has been really helpful for you, what did it do for you? How?
14. Jesus gives us each other as he gives us himself. Why? Why do we need each other? How does loving others help us to love Jesus more? (1 John 4:7-12;15-21)

How do we do this in our lives?

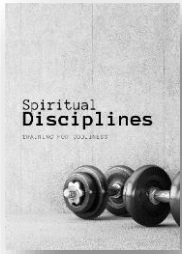
15. What would you like your contribution to church or home group to be like? How might you move towards making that a reality?

16. Do you have time to go to church or home group in a way that benefits you and others? How might you change your priorities to make this more central? What kinds of things would you need to pray about and prepare for?
17. Are you confident that your presence at church or home group matters? If you aren't, ask yourself how you might be able to grow in this confidence. How could you pray about this to ask God to help you see how he uses you in the lives of others?
18. Who in your life needs some words of encouragement from you to bolster their confidence that they matter at church and/or home group? How could you plan to speak or write those words this week?
19. How would you like to change how you go to church? What is one specific way that you'd like to behave or think differently about this?
20. If you were going to prepare your heart to gather with God's people, what would that look like for you?
21. How does praying for your brothers and sisters through the week affect how you think about going to church on Sunday?

Prayer Ideas

Praise God for giving us each other in Christ and for all the ways we contribute to one another by his Spirit, whether we are conscious of it or not. Thank God that he gathers us and will bring us all together in heaven at the end of all things.

Pray that we will live out the reality that he has given us in Christ by thinking about how we might contribute to others and being committed to being with each other week after week in church and home groups.



STUDY SIX

Sacraments

What are we talking about?

1. What is a 'sacrament'?
2. What difference does it make to you that you have been baptised and that you take the Lord's Supper?

Explore the Bible

3. What do these Scriptures help us to understand about:

Baptism:

Mark 1:4-11

Acts 19:2-7

Romans 6:1-7

Colossians 2:9-12

Matthew 28:16-20

Lord's Supper:

Mark 14:22-26

1 Corinthians 10:14-17

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

4. How does Scripture help us to take these sacraments seriously?

When is this a false practise and why?

5. When is baptism not honouring to God?

6. A few years ago, we heard of someone dressing up in a clown costume to give out the Lord's Supper. Does this matter? Why or why not?
7. Why does it matter if we take the Lord's Supper without thinking about our own sinfulness and confessing it to God?
8. What would you say to your non-Christian friend who wanted their kids to be baptised so they'd go to heaven?

How does this help us grow in our relationship with God in Christ?

9. How does celebrating the sacraments help us to grow in humility?
10. Why don't we just baptise someone we meet?
11. Why don't we take the Lord's Supper on our own?
12. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper or baptism, who are we receiving these sacraments from and why does that matter?

How do we do this in our lives?

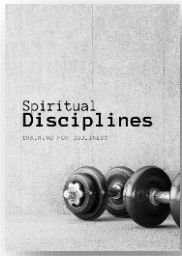
13. How does understanding the sacraments as a means of grace make a difference to you as you celebrate them?

14. Luther is said to have had a plaque on his wall to help him when he was doubtful that he was truly a Christian that read 'Remember your baptism!' Why might this help with assurance?
15. Do you regularly pray for the children and young people you've supported by standing at their baptisms? If you don't, how do you show your commitment to them? Would you like to change that?
16. How can you prepare your heart to celebrate the Lord's Supper? What might you read? How might you pray about this? Who might you talk with about this and what might you talk about, if that were likely to be helpful for you?
17. Have you been baptised? If you haven't, what is stopping you? If you have, what did it mean to you?
18. Think of a non-Christian friend or family member. Imagine that they asked you why you celebrated the Lord's Supper, what might you say? What would you say if they wanted to come to church with you and have the Lord's Supper as well? Pray for whoever you were thinking of that they might come to know Jesus.

Prayer Ideas

Thank God for his kindness in giving us baptism and the Lord's Supper as a means of grace to feed our faith in his Son and draw us to himself. Praise God that we have the freedom in our country to celebrate the sacraments without fear.

Pray that we will respect the sacraments that God has given us and engage with them reverently and prayerfully, seeing the gospel of the Lord Jesus as we celebrate them.



STUDY SEVEN

Silence/Solitude

What are we talking about?

1. When have you taken time out of life to be completely alone and/or silent?
2. Why might someone do this regularly?
3. How possible does it seem to you to do this at this point in your life? If you consider this to be impossible, what gets in the way?
4. How does your phone interfere with your solitude and silence?

Explore the Bible

5. What does Jesus' example teach us about this? (Mark 1:35; 6:30-32)
6. Why does Scripture encourage us to reflect on the state of our own hearts? (Proverbs 27:19)
7. Why does Jesus command us to pray by ourselves? (Matthew 6:5-6)

8. How do silence and solitude help us to meditate on God's word? (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 48:9)

When is this a false practise and why?

9. When might doing this get in the way of knowing and loving God and our neighbour better?
10. When is solitude a context for temptation for you (or others)?
11. What makes this a discipline and not just an excuse to disengage from all the demanding people in our lives?

How does this help us grow in our relationship with God in Christ?

12. How can spending time alone in nature help us to focus on God? See Psalm 8 and Luke 12:24 for possible examples.
13. If you are very busy, how would doing this express your faith in Christ?
14. Why are silence and solitude so helpful to us as we seek to know Christ more?

How do we do this in our lives?

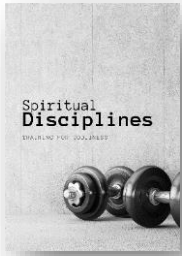
12. Where would you go or do you go for this? How long do you devote to this?

13. How can you 'tame your phone' to make this work for you?
14. If you'd like to do this, but it sounds a bit adventurous, what might be a mini-version of this that you could try?
15. How would you like your group help you to be accountable with this spiritual discipline?
16. If you could spend an hour or a day by yourself, just thinking about God's word and praying, what would you most like to pray about? What part of God's word might you read? Is there a way you can take that desire and make it work – even for a few minutes – in your life now?
17. How might someone try and take some time out in silence and/or solitude if they have young children or are caring for someone full time?
18. If someone has mental health issues, what kinds of safeguards would they be wise to put into place?

Prayer Ideas

Praise God that we are never alone when we are Christians, but he is always with us by his Spirit because we are in Christ. Thank God that we can come apart from the hurry of life and spend time with God.

Pray that we will take seriously God's call on our life to spend time with him, reflecting on his call on our lives and thinking seriously about the challenges of living for him, as well as praising him for who he is and how he has saved us in Christ.



STUDY EIGHT

Singing

What are we talking about?

Why might singing be considered a 'discipline'? How is thinking about singing this way different to how our society thinks of singing?

1. Does it matter if we are musical? Does it matter if we enjoy singing?
2. How do you feel at church if people around you are not singing or singing unenthusiastically?
3. Do you sing as an individual to God regularly? Why? How does this help your trust in Jesus to grow?

Explore the Bible

4. Singing is all through Scripture, including Revelation. Why might it be so important?
5. Why do people sing in the Bible? Look up some of these references:
 - Exodus 15
 - Judges 5
 - 1 Samuel 2:1-10
 - 1 Samuel 18:6
 - Ezra 3:11
 - Nehemiah 9:5-6
 - Luke 1:67-79
 - Luke 1:46-55
 - Matthew 26:30
 - Acts 16:25

6. What kind of songs do we find in Psalms?
Look up one or more of these:
 - Psalm 146:1, Psalm 103:1-2, 22; Psalm 104:1, 35.
 - Psalm 22 or 44
7. How important is singing in Revelation? What are God's people singing about here? How does this help our thinking about singing as Christians today?
 - Revelation 5:9
 - Revelation 14:3
8. What kinds of things do believers sing about? Why is this important to understanding how and why we sing as Christians today?

When is this a false practise and why?

9. When do we sing poorly? Why?
10. When is a good musical performance actually bad Christian singing?

How does this help us grow in our relationship with God in Christ?

11. Read Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. How important is singing in our life together as followers of Jesus? What is different about our singing (compared to just general singing)?
12. Philippians 2:5-11 is an example of an early Christian hymn. What is it about? How does this help us to understand more about Christian singing?
13. Why is the content of what we sing so important?

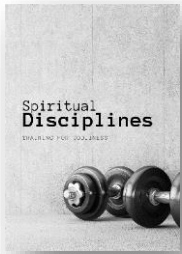
How do we do this in our lives?

14. How can you sing more wholeheartedly?
15. What gets in the way of you singing?
16. When do you make singing more about you than the people around you and/or God?
How might you push back on that?
17. Why might some of the martyrs have chosen to die singing (while being burned to death, etc)?
18. How are musicians helpful to you in your singing? How might you express your appreciation to them? What might shape your attitude when their performance is distracting to you?
19. Do you ever sing Christian songs outside of church? Is that something you'd like to change? How might you do that?
20. How can you prepare to sing well in church? What would that look like for you?

Prayer Ideas

Praise God for the gift of music and singing. Thank God that he has given us each other to sing to and to be encouraged by, and that we sing out our joy and sorrow to him and in Christ he always hears and receives us.

Pray that we will take seriously our Lord's command to sing for one another and centred around Jesus. Pray that we grow in our love for him and for each other.



STUDY NINE

Thanksgiving

What are we talking about?

1. Do you practice 'thanksgiving' or 'gratitude'?
2. What difference does it make to your life?
3. Why is this a popular practice in our society? Who do non-Christians thank?

Explore the Bible

4. The Bible is full of instructions about thankfulness. Why does it command us to be thankful and what kinds of things should we be thankful for? (Ephesians 5:4; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Timothy 2:1; 4:3-4)
5. What does Romans 1:21 teach us about ingratitude?
6. Why should all people be grateful to God? (Matthew 5:45, Acts 17:25)
7. What is to be the Christian's particular focus of thankfulness? (John 3:16, Eph 1:16, Phil 4:4-6)

When is this a false practise and why?

8. What kind of worship and thanksgiving does God hate? Why? (Isaiah 29:13)
9. When is thanksgiving a kind of false positivity? How is this different to genuine Christian thankfulness?

How does this help us grow in our relationship with God in Christ?

10. Why are we specifically to give thanks for everything in the name of Jesus? What does this mean and what does it have to do with Jesus' name? (Ephesians 5:20)
11. How does knowing Jesus lead to thankfulness? How might knowing him more lead to greater thankfulness? (Colossians 2:6-7)

How do we do this in our lives?

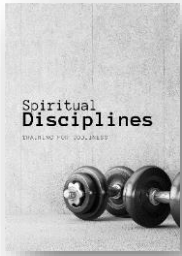
12. How would you like to build more thanksgiving into your life?
13. What kinds of things are you easily grateful for? How do you express this? Are there ways you can build thankfulness into your prayer life more reflexively?
14. Do your friends and family hear your gratitude or your complaining most of all? If you are in the habit of being ungrateful, how might you start to shift that with God's help?
15. How is your thankfulness affected by how you are going at trusting God with your life? When does your lack of thankfulness act as a kind of indicator of your spiritual (ill)health?

16. Can you be thankful when you are in grief? How? What does it look like?
17. When you are in a conversation that is full of bitterness or frustration, how might you be able to nudge the focus towards thankfulness? What would you need to be aware of as you try and do this?
18. What has worked for you in the past when you have tried to become thankful?

Prayer Ideas

Praise God for his great kindness in giving us so many things to be genuinely thankful for, most especially for giving us his own Son and in him, pouring his grace and love into our lives. Thank God for knowing him and being able to direct our thanksgiving to him.

Pray for more thankfulness that might arise spontaneously in our hearts as a work of God's own Spirit in our lives. Pray for greater readiness to see the gifts that God gives us in Christ each day, and that in fixing our eyes on Jesus more steadily our thankfulness might grow stronger.



STUDY TEN

Confession

What are we talking about?

1. Describe what confessing your sins to God looks like for you.
2. If this is something you do, how regularly do you do this?

Explore the Bible

3. Read Mark 1:15 and Titus 2:11-14. What does repentance mean? What relationship does this have to Jesus' message of good news? How does confession fit with repentance?
4. To whom and how might we confess our sins? (Choose one or two to look up)
 - Psalm 32:5, 38:18, 51, Leviticus 5:5, Isa 43:25, Jer 31:34, Heb 8:12, 10:17
 - Numbers 5:7, James 5:16, Matthew 5:23; Proverbs 28:13
 - Lev 16:21, 26:40, Neh 1:6, 9:3
5. How does 1 John 1:5-2:2 help us to understand how central Jesus is to how we confess our sins? Why is this important?

When is this a false practise and why?

Read Luke 18:9-14.

6. How does the Pharisee help us to see when 'confessing sins' is fake? When do we do this?

7. What are other ways that we might falsely confess our sins?

8. How can we guard against falsely confessing our sins?

How does this help us grow in our relationship with God in Christ?

9. Read Hebrews 12:1-3. What does this passage encourage us to stop doing and start (or continue) to do? How might confession fit with putting this into practice in our lives?

10. Why does Scripture encourage us to confess our sins to God if Jesus has already died for them?

11. How does confessing our sins to God help us to know and love Christ more?

How do we do this in our lives?

12. How could confessing your sins to God become more of a pattern of your life?

13. Reading a prayer of confession, or a Psalm (like Psalm 51) is a way believers have practiced this discipline in the past. If this is something you would like to explore for yourself, what would be helpful to include or guard against as you do this?

14. Is there a safe person or small group of people that you could be accountable to with sins that you might be struggling with? How might you go about talking to each other about this without gossiping?

15. As you think about coming to church and saying 'Amen' to the public confession that we often do at the beginning of our services, how might you prepare yourself for this?

16. In the past, the church has come together to confess sins generally (so, Ash Wednesday for example) and specifically (in days of prayer and fasting because of drought, etc). What do you think about this?

Prayer Ideas

Thank God that Jesus has paid for all our sins - the ones we know about and the ones we are unaware of - and that we can come to him freely in Jesus' name, knowing we are fully cleansed.

Pray that God will help us to be sorry for our sins and that his Spirit will prompt us to repentance and to confess our sins to him. Pray that we will seek and find assurance for our sin in Jesus' faithfulness to us and his death for us.

