

# What are Spiritual Disciplines?

Understanding the power of sin over us will help us grasp the meaning and necessity for spiritual disciplines.

## Sin

The Bible explains sin with several metaphors. Sin:

- Captures (Prov. 5:22; Heb. 12:1)
- Enslaves (Gen. 4:7; John 8:34; Rom. 7:14, 23; Gal. 3:22)
- Is deadly (Rom. 6:23; 5:12; Eph. 2:1)
- Is a sickness (Ps. 32:1–5; Isa. 53:5; Matt. 9:2, 5; 1 Peter 2:24)
- Is impurity (Zech. 13:1; Ps. 51:2; Isa. 1:18)
- Separates (Isa. 59:1–2; Eph. 2:12–16; 4:18)

Sin disguises itself as habits—that is, behaviors and thoughts that have become “second-nature.” Many of the sins we commit come so naturally to us that we hardly notice them—whether they occur while driving on a busy freeway, having conversations about other people, abusing substances or other harmful things that may temporarily make us feel better. Habits require time and repetition to become entrenched. These habits enslave us, lead us to deadly consequences, make us sick, corrupt us, and ultimately separate us from God. We have to unlearn many of these behaviors and learn behaviors that are fit for the citizens of God’s kingdom.

*Spiritual disciplines are practices we do regularly that can help us change, with the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, our sinful habits into good habits that make us more like Christ and connect us closer to God.*

## Spiritual Disciplines and Salvation

We are saved by and through God’s grace alone. We can do nothing to earn our salvation. Spiritual disciplines are not behaviors or practices that make us right with God in any way. They are tools that the Holy Spirit can use to renew our hearts. When we practice spiritual disciplines:

- We recognize that Jesus is the King of our lives.
- We acknowledge that we belong to him alone.
- We also seek to live out the fruit of the Spirit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23).

Spiritual disciplines *do not* help God to make our lives holy. Instead:

- They help us recognize God’s callings and promptings in our lives, and identify those areas in our lives that still need to be renewed.
- They make us sensitive and humble to follow God’s leading.
- They help us realize that we depend completely on God’s grace at every moment and for everything.
- They train and equip us to respond in a worthy manner when life throws problems and storms at us.

# Fasting

## BIBLICAL BASIS AND EXAMPLES

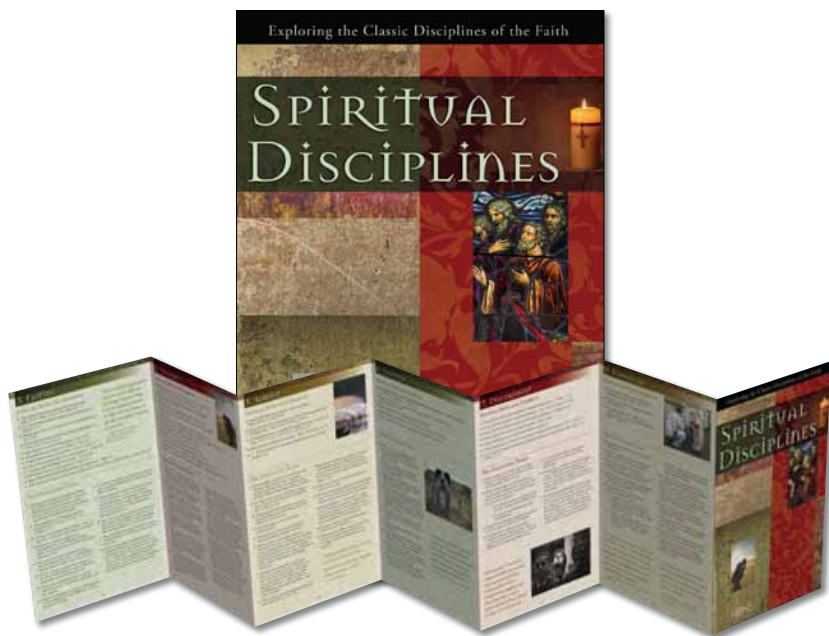
- The nation Israel fasted asking God’s forgiveness—Judg. 20:26; 1 Sam. 7:6; Jer. 36:9; Ezra 8:21–23
- The city of Nineveh fasted asking God’s forgiveness—Jonah 3:5–10
- Moses fasted when he received God’s commandments—Ex. 34:28
- David fasted seeking God’s forgiveness and guidance—2 Sam. 1:12, 3:35, 12:16–22
- Ezra fasted to ask God’s forgiveness—Ezra 10:6
- Nehemiah fasted seeking God’s favor—Neh. 1:4
- Daniel fasted seeking God’s favor—Dan. 9:3, 10:2–3
- Anna fasted seeking God’s favor and guidance—Luke 2:37
- Cornelius fasted seeking God’s favor—Acts 10:30
- Paul fasted seeking God’s guidance—Acts 9:9
- Jesus fasted in the wilderness seeking God’s guidance—Matt. 4:2
- The manner of fasting is to be sincere, dedicated to God, without a public show—Matt. 6:16–18

“First, let [fasting] be done unto the Lord with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father which is in heaven.”

—(John Wesley, as found in the collection *Sermons On Several Occasions*)

## THE DISCIPLINES TODAY

- Fasting may be the most neglected of all the spiritual disciplines today. It is easy to dismiss it as an old and quaint practice. But we miss an important and meaningful opportunity for spiritual growth.
- The central point of fasting is training for self-control (2 Peter 1:6; Gal. 5:23; 1 Peter 1:13).
- If we are to break the hold of habits—sin—in our lives, training for self-control is essential.
- Fasting is an effective approach to developing self-control because it deals with a very fundamental necessity of human existence: food.
- We need food to live; however, we can become enslaved by food—or other things we may need or simply want for our lives.
- If we are able to control things essential for life, we will be able to keep in check the things that are not essential for life.
- The practice of fasting fosters humility, reliance on God, compassion, gratitude, and self-control.
- Begin by fasting from food for a short period, such as skipping a meal. Build your fasting time up from there.
- As much as possible, use the time it takes to get or prepare food and eat it for prayer and Bible reflection.
- Fasting from food is the most obvious way to do it. However, you can also abstain from other things. For example, watching television (or other media) often consumes too much of our lives. That central place belongs to God alone.
- If you find you rely too much on caffeine to stay awake or for energy, it may be a good idea to fast from caffeine and be reminded that our dependence on God is sufficient.
- We can extend the same principle to many things around us: technology, music, sports, and so on.
- Internet, although a wonderful tool of communication, can absorb our time and attention in ways not even television could. Try a “media fast.” Turning the computer off in order to be completely present in the lives of others has become a wonderful spiritual practice for many people today.



## Spiritual Disciplines

God has called us to make disciples and be his disciples (Matt. 28:19). What does it mean to be a disciple? *Spiritual Disciplines*, a 14-panel, full-color pamphlet, looks at the classical spiritual disciplines that help us follow Jesus: Scripture reading, prayer, fasting, worshiping, and more.

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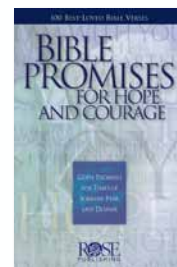


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