

## **DELIGHT: An Introduction to Spiritual Disciplines Series**

I'm going to ask you to think about relationships of different kinds. Think about friendships, husbands and wives, parents and children.

Imagine with me, two friends who did not really speak to each other for whatever reason. There was no real falling out. They just stopped getting together as often. Days became weeks, weeks became months and months became years.

Now imagine a husband and wife, where the wife only comes to the husband with complaints and rarely speaks positive or encouraging words to him. Their communication devolves into merely synching calendar events and to-do lists.

Imagine with me a parent who asks their teen to do something. Their teen does not listen to their parent. They do not obey. Instead, they ignore their parent's words and do their own thing.

In all these relationships one would assume that if people continued in these patterns they would not be growing closer. Instead, there would be a growing sense of relational distance. These relationships would not be headed in a positive or healthy direction. It would probably be accurate to say that the people in each of these relationships would not grow in their delight with each other.

Now, why would that be? Because in each of these examples one or more of the people involved are either doing nothing to make the relationship grow OR are doing the opposite of what it takes to make relationships healthy and grow. The same can be true of our relationship with God. Sometimes we do nothing to deepen our relationship with God, and sometimes we do things opposite of what would help our relationship with God grow.

In this summer's sermon series, we intend to lead you on a journey, a journey where you will be able to consider how you might pursue growing your relationship with Jesus. The overarching theme for this series is DELIGHT. Think of delight in the context of relationships. One where you delight in God and as a result, you also find delight in relationships with others. Each week of this summer series, the sermon will be covering a different way to interact with God and deepen your relationship with Him.

The pastoral staff has designed this series in the hope that you would choose to grow closer to God. We would encourage you to challenge yourself to engage and implement some of the teachings. Colossians 2:6-7 encourages us in this same vein,

*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*

**So how does one do that? How do you get to know God better?** Are there any tools we can use to help reach the goal of knowing Jesus better? Yes – there are tools to help us. These tools have traditionally been called “spiritual disciplines”.

**So what exactly is a spiritual discipline?** According to Professor Don Whitney, at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

“The spiritual disciplines are those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are habits of devotion, habits of experiential Christianity that have been practiced by God’s people.”

Perhaps some of you are thinking either consciously or subconsciously, “When you say “spiritual discipline”, that sounds like something I need to do. Yet the sermon series is titled DELIGHT. What does discipline have to do with delight?”

Going back to our relational examples. Remember the two friends who were not talking to one another and their relationship was not going in a positive direction? Because they were not talking to one another, their relationship was growing more distant.

Now let’s say that one of the friends decides to be proactive and put in the effort to call their friend once a week. They “discipline” themselves to make and keep an appointment and actually talk to one another. By the one friend becoming more disciplined in their pursuit that will create the possibility that this relationship will begin to move in a positive direction becoming closer and DEEPER.

Regarding the husband/wife where the wife only expresses her complaints or grievances to her husband. It would be safe to say that her words are creating emotional DISTANCE in this relationship. Let’s say the wife decides she is going to be proactive and change her behavior. Her new goal is to discipline herself to come up with one thing per day that she can say to her husband that she appreciates about him. As she follows through with this goal...it’s possible she will notice her relationship beginning to improve, grow closer, and DEEPEN.

The Parent/Teen – Let’s say that the teen begins to see their relationship with their parent from a different perspective. They begin to realize that with their current action of ignoring their parents’ they are making things strained and stressful. Conversations are awkward, they are receiving different types of discipline and so on. Then the teen decides to discipline themselves to begin listening to their parent. Not only to hear the words their parents say but actually choosing to obey what the parents have said. The practice of this discipline will give this parent/teen relationship the chance to grow closer and DEEPEN.

So when we proactively make an effort in any relationship to discipline ourselves to positive action toward another. The payoff, the reward, and the outcome are usually a deepening of that relationship. The more you invest in a relationship the more likely you will grow in DELIGHT for the other person in that relationship.

Delight comes when we proactively apply principles or disciplines in our relationships! This process of relationship-building takes intentionality. It takes understanding who the

other person is. It takes understanding who we are. Being intentional over time builds good habits, habits that can help us become more connected to each other and Jesus. That is why certain choices combined with actions are called disciplines.

I realize that we come from many church backgrounds. Some of us are hearing about spiritual disciplines for the first time while others have had these same disciplines taught to them from an early age.

Two extremes need to be avoided concerning spiritual disciplines. First, when it comes to having a great relationship with God, the tools or spiritual disciplines that can help us, frequently become an end in themselves. This approach to spirituality focuses more on the steps we take than on the actual quality of our walk with God.

We would be wise to understand that growing in our relationship with Jesus cannot be found in a one-size-fits-all approach. The danger of having this very formulaic approach is that it can lead a person to think that if they merely accomplish a set of predetermined tasks they have arrived. There, I'm done! I have finished the list – I have arrived! I am spiritually mature!

To illustrate, a husband may understand that his wife needs to hear the words, "I love you!" But if he gets up in the morning, gets his clipboard out, looks at his wife and says I love you, makes a checkmark on the clipboard, drops it, and walks away. It's probably fair to say that the wife will not receive this as a genuine display of his most heartfelt emotions toward her. If his words are not genuine – they will not have the intended result of deepening the relationship through words.

So it is with our relationship with God. We cannot treat God, in the same way, by thinking there is this list that needs to be satisfied and as long as I do the list, I'm good with God. This approach is primarily focused on our accomplishments rather than the relationship.

For spiritual disciplines to have their intended result we must keep them in the context of Deepening our relationship with the Lord. Not earning favor with God. Not appeasing God. Not trying to impress God. Rather... think in terms of connection with God. How do you know what He is like? Or what He wants you to do? Or what He appreciates and values in you? It is through a relational connection with Him.

The other extreme to avoid is personal passivity. We should not look at our relationship with God through the lens of "I know God loves me, I've got my ticket to heaven so, I don't have to do anything in my relationship with God for it to grow."

Let's say you have a good friendship you made in college. After graduation you choose not to call them up, to not remember their birthday or other significant experiences in their life. You never get together to visit, share life with them, or connect in any significant way. You do nothing. That other person is no longer going to consider your relationship to be good and growing. They would describe what has happened as "distant, cooling at best, or perhaps non-existent. We grew apart..."

So to summarize, the two ditches, that we want to avoid, include the legalistic approach where one engages the spiritual disciplines but without any focus on the relational connection.

Then the other ditch to avoid is the passivity, where one chooses to do nothing, to pursue growth in their relationship with God.

It is also very important at the outset of this summer series to provide context on the spiritual disciplines. I was encouraged by the approach Larry Osborne takes in his book [The Contrarians Guide to Knowing God](#). Osborne's perspective on spiritual disciplines is one where he sees the disciplines as "tools" rather than "rules". Let me say that again. One would be wise to view spiritual disciplines as tools rather than rules.

Allow me to read an excerpt from Osborne...He says, *"The difference between a tool and a rule is very important. Rules must be obeyed, all the time, by everyone. No exceptions.*

*Tools are different. They are task-specific. A hammer is a wonderful device. When I need to pound a nail into a piece of wood, it is indispensable. But, if I am trying to polish glass, it's best left in the toolbox.*

*There is no value in using any tool for the tool's sake. If the tool helps accomplish the task, it is a wise choice. If it doesn't, it is a foolish choice. The same principle that is true for tools is true for spiritual disciplines. Depending on what you need to accomplish or build into your life, look through the spiritual toolbox and pick the right discipline for the task at hand. When applied to the right situation at the right time, it will get the job done."*

So I hope this helps you see that we as a staff are not trying to lay out some big list of rules you must follow or you are a "bad Christian". No instead we will do our best to give you some helpful and useful tools to assist you in your pursuit of a relationship with God.

So far, you have heard the definition of a spiritual discipline. Practices found in Scripture that promotes spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You've heard about the two extremes to avoid when approaching the subject of spiritual disciplines. A legalistic to-do list and personal passivity.

You've been encouraged to view spiritual disciplines as tools rather than rules.

### **But what if you do not know the names of the various spiritual discipline tools?**

Allow me to give you some of the main disciplines we will be exploring through the sermon times this summer.

- One of them is Bible study – it's using the words God wrote down for us to listen to Him and understand what he said.

- Another discipline we will talk about is Prayer – which is simply talking to God our Creator and Lord. Why? Because you talk with those you have a relationship with and He wants to hear from us.
- I hope to talk more about Sabbath rest, this is when we choose a time to stop working and truly rest in God's presence, trusting Him to meet all of our needs. Spiritual, Physical, Emotional, Mental, and Financial.
- Pastor Kyle will share with us about the spiritual discipline of Worship – which is to regard God with great or extravagant respect, honor, and devotion.
- Pastor Zach is going to talk about Fasting – this is when a person chooses to give up eating and perhaps drinking for a time for a spiritual purpose.
- Another discipline is Service – which is helping others who need assistance.
- Then there is Confession – this is when a person acknowledges to God and if needed, to others a sin they have committed.

There are many more in the Bible for you to explore as needed – Bible memorization, meditation, generosity, simplicity, solitude, submission, and celebration to name a few.

### **So why would anyone want to engage in “spiritual disciplines”? Why is this important?**

(Insert Liberty University story here)

Because relationships are the most important thing in God's economy, in His Kingdom. Of first importance is a relationship with Him and then a relationship with others.

Think back with me to what we have been learning through Pastor Curt's sermon series. We have been learning what is most important in life. Jesus himself said...

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” Matt 22:37-40*

Jesus in this passage summed up the key to a meaningful life, a healthy life, and to a satisfying life. It is a relationship with Jesus Christ! If a person does not have a relationship with Jesus they are without hope.

Then out of this primary relationship with Jesus should flow our pursuit of healthy relationships with others. Pastor Curt taught how we should love our neighbors as yourself in Matthew 7:12

<sup>12</sup> *“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

Again, the reason the pastoral staff decided to pursue this series on spiritual disciplines is that we want you to learn and experience the delight that comes with a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. Yet many of us do not yet understand how to engage in this relationship.

We want to expose you to several spiritual disciplines this summer, not so you can check them off a list and pat yourself on the back or compare your level of spirituality against others. NO!

We want you to choose to connect with God so you learn to DELIGHT in talking to Him. Delight in listening to Him by spending time reading and applying His Word. Because of all He has done we can show our gratitude by serving Him. You can learn to delight in worshipping Him – which is speaking well of Him both to God and to others. You can learn to delight in telling others what God has done for you – this is the spiritual discipline of evangelism or sharing the truth of the Gospel with others.

All of the spiritual disciplines can help keep you out of the ditch of passivity if you choose to engage them. However, be careful to guard your heart against drifting off into the other ditch of using spiritual disciplines in a ritualistic, check it off my “to-do-list” mentality.

We are here this summer to help you learn to engage and deepen your relationship with God so we can experience the delight of being in a loving and growing relationship with Jesus!

## **CHALLENGE**

So the challenge to you is to **Engage with this series** over the summer. Many times summer is a time when we give ourselves permission to check out and “coast”. But I would encourage you to make it a priority to connect with God in a relationship over the summer.

**Assess yourself** – ask, “Where do I most need to grow in my relationship with Jesus?” Begin by asking God to reveal to you through the Holy Spirit where you need growth.

**Try it** – If the disciplines are new to you, I would suggest starting with reading or study of God’s Word. If you already have a habit of reading or studying the Bible, try to experience a new spiritual discipline, one per month throughout this summer sermon series.

Just as when a person applies healthy relationship practices in human relationships. There’s often a corresponding deepening of that relationship. So it is our prayer that as you apply healthy spiritual disciplines to your relationship with God, you will see that relationship deepen and grow, and you will find delight in your relationship with God.