

## The Disciplines of a Godly Life: Scriptures -

With a new year just around the corner, it is time to rethink our plans and priorities for 2003. To help us settle in on what the Lord desires for each of us, we need to refresh our minds with God's plan. One key passage is 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4.7.

Paul says we are to discipline our selves towards godliness. What are the disciplines that encourage a godly life? This morning we start on that study, The Disciplines of a Godly Life. The 1<sup>st</sup> and foremost discipline is the Discipline of the Scriptures.

Time alone with God in His Word, the Scriptures, is the great necessity of our spiritual lives. We need to be alone with God daily! We need to find times to get away alone. E. Stanley Jones once described time in the Scriptures as a "time exposure to God." He used the analogy of his life being like a photographic plate which, when exposed to God, progressively bore the image of God in keeping with the length of exposure.

Please open with me to the center of your Bibles and find Psalm 16.11.

Psalm 16:11

You will show me the path of life;  
In Your presence is fullness of joy;  
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

This morning let me start with the conclusion of my challenge to you from God's Word. This verse thrills my heart because in these few words God says so much. He offers us three incredible and priceless benefits from the discipline of Scripture.

Now with that conclusion in mind, let me explain in an earthly way, what a life arranged by the Lord can be like. It all started in the fall of 1978. I was doing hospital visitation as a ministerial student in Greenville, SC. As I sped down one floor of the hospital to share Scripture and pray with a sick friend I glanced in the room next door. For that instant I caught sight of one of the most forlorn faces I'd ever seen in a hospital bed. After my visit I purposed to stop in and see if there was anything I could do to cheer that sad man next door. I slipped in, stood by his bed, read Scripture and prayed. I found he was one of the loneliest Christians I'd ever met. So since it was Thanksgiving time I said, "What can I do to encourage you?" To my surprise he brightened up and said "If you would bring me a Wendy's  $\frac{3}{4}$  pound triple burger it would mean so much to me for my Thanksgiving Dinner."

Well, I did it. And an hour later I was back on my way to my apartment after my sharing a bit of Christ's love to cheer that man up. He asked me for my name and address so we could keep in touch. I never knew how much that visit was going to end up impacting my life.

To make a long story short that man was a very wealthy heir to a Texas oil field family. He was alone and away from family and the Lord sent me to his room at a moment he desperately needed comfort and hope.

Two weeks later I got a call from him asking when we could go out to dinner. When he arrived it was in an extended limo. We went to a place that had no prices on the menu, and our meal was prepared at our table. That evening he asked if I would join him for a week with his friends on a little trip. Being young and un-entangled in many responsibilities I said sure. That was the start of one of the amazing 10 days of my life as Carl and two friends (both are now pastors of churches) went on a whirlwind trip to England, Holland, France, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy – all expenses paid.

The point of the story is that Carl made all the arrangements. I never had been to the places he took me. He had, and he arranged everything. We were picked up and chauffeured to sites, museums, restaurants, and plays. It was an unbelievable experience of the world the way the rich and famous travel. But more than that, it was a lesson for me that someone with greater resources, experience and knowledge can do a better job at arranging events than I could.

The Lord wants you to discipline yourself to get in His Scripture each day (daily bread, not by bread alone) so He can arrange, accompany, and authorize your life. Is your life authorized by God? Do you live under His authority? Is He making the arrangements for you to have the best life there can be here on earth? Does He accompany you through every moment of every day – filling your days and nights with joy? That is what the Lord offers us in the Scriptures.

- If you will listen to the Lord speak to you through the Word **you can rest in His arrangements for your life.** “You will show me the path of life”
- If you will listen to the Lord speak to you through the Word **you can enjoy His companionship through life.** “In Your presence is fullness of joy;”
- If you will listen to the Lord speak to you through the Word **you can rest in His authority over your life.** “At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore”

Now, that was fun in an earthly sense, but what about an offer like Carl's -- only **from GOD!** And not just for 10 days -- but for today and forevermore! The Lord God of the Universe wants to Arrange your life, and Accompany you trip through life, and authorize everything needed from now on. Wow, that is the best life there is.

**Joseph had a Stress-Filled Life** (deserted by all) Psalm 105:17-19 He sent a man before them— Joseph—who was sold as a slave. 18 They hurt his feet with fetters,

He was laid in irons. 19 Until the time that his word came to pass, The word of the Lord tested him.

- Spoiled by his dad;
- Hated by his brothers;
- Abused, enslaved, sold, and deported for the financial gain of family members;
- Used, set up, unjustly accused, and imprisoned by his own employer;
- Chained, tormented, and forgotten in jail;
- Vindicated, elevated, and used by God.
- Because his life passed the test of God's Word.

**David had a Rough Life** (bloody man killed more) Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

- David started killing predators (bears and lions) at a young age;
- David graduated to killing a giant while still a teen;
- David went on to slay “his ten thousands” while in his twenties;
- David was such a swordsman, a slinger, a spearman, and a deadly warrior – that God said he was too much a “man of blood” to build the Temple of God.
- Yet he was the man after God’s own heart.

**Paul had a Dangerous Life** (beaten more) Romans 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

- Paul was stoned, ship wrecked, and sleepless;
- Paul was hunted, hounded, and heckled;
- Paul was imprisoned, impoverished, and
- Paul was bruised, beaten, and banished;
- But he never stopped hoping in God’s Word.

**Jeremiah had a Tragic Life** (weeping prophet wept more) Jeremiah 15:16 Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.

But maybe one Biblical figure was the neediest. He is known as the weeping prophet, partly for his compassion, and partly for his condition of sadness.

Jeremiah<sup>1</sup> must have had an incredible childhood. The Scriptures tell us God had chosen him before his birth to be a prophet. His family was notable in their service for the LORD. Life was exciting for the son of a high priest. Jeremiah 1:1 The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, (NASB)

One of the great blessings of Jeremiah’s life was that his dad was the one who found the lost book of the Law. How Jeremiah’s love for the Word showed through in his life

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<sup>1</sup> Sources used are: [The Word of God](#); Baxter, [Explore the Book](#); Scroggie, [The Unfolding Drama](#); [Christ in all the Scriptures](#); [The Criswell Study Bible](#); [Walk through the Bible](#); [The Compact Guide to The Bible](#), Lehman Strauss, CHM, MacArthur, Ashamed of the Gospel, p. 76-77, Sanders, Spiritual Discipleship, P. 129-136.

as God's prophet. He was the "son of Hilkiah" (Jer. 1:1) and as 2 Kings 22:8 records: "And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it." Note also Jeremiah's uncle was Shallum husband of Huldah the prophetess. Jeremiah 32:7 Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it. (KJV)

Jeremiah's woes were unimaginable to our relatively peaceful lives. He lived through the death throes of the final generation of the nation of Judah.

- From an earthly perspective Jeremiah's life was a failure. During his lifetime he watched the decay of God's chosen people, the horrible destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the nation to Babylon.
- He preached for 40 years and saw no visible result among those he served. Instead those countrymen he warned for God sought to kill him if he wouldn't stop preaching doom (Jer. 11:19-23). He had virtually no converts to show for a lifetime of ministry.
- He had no one to find joy and comfort with as his own family and friends were involved in plots against his (12:60).
- He never had the joy of a godly home because God never allowed him to marry, and thus he suffered incredibly agonizing loneliness (16:20).
- He lived under a constant threat of death as there were plots to kill him in secret so no one would find him (18:20-23).
- He lived with physical pain while he was beaten severely and then bound in wooden stocks (20:1-2).
- He lived with emotional pain as his friends spied on him deceitfully and for revenge (20:10).
- He was consumed with sorrow and shame and even cursed the day he was born (20:14-18).
- His life ended with no relief as he was falsely accused of being a traitor to his own country (37:13-14). Jeremiah was arrested, beaten, thrown into a dungeon, and starved many days (37:15-21). If an Ethiopian Gentile had not interceded on his behalf he would have died there. In the end, tradition tells us he was exiled to Egypt, where he was stoned to death by his own people.

Now look again at Jeremiah 15.16. What kept Jeremiah going through the pits? The Discipline of Scripture!

This morning<sup>2</sup>, how can we start cultivating time alone with God? Where do we start?

First, we can get alone with God most readily by *reading* God's Word! This is the voice of God, we must listen. It is amazing that a Christian can imagine that he or she can live a Christian life without regularly reading the Bible, for that is impossible! Our minds are such that we do not retain what we need to know. They need to be refreshed again and again. Some who have been believers for years have never read the Bible through

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<sup>2</sup> This section is a paraphrase adaption of Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

once. There are truths God has for us that we have not inconvenienced ourselves enough to discover. No wonder we are empty. What a difference reading the Word can make in our lives.

Dr. Harry Ironside, a man of little formal education but great power, read the Bible fourteen times by the age of fourteen. His mark is still on Chicago and indeed the entire world. Five pages a day is a good place to begin. Within a year you will have read the entire Bible. We begin to get alone with God only when we take God's Word seriously as more important than our daily meals.

Lt. General William K. Harrison<sup>3</sup> was the most decorated soldier in the 30th Infantry Division, rated by General Eisenhower as the number one infantry division in World War II.

General Harrison was the first American to enter Belgium, which he did at the head of the Allied forces. He received every decoration for valor except the Congressional Medal of Honor - being honored with the Distinguished Silver Cross, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star for Valor, and the Purple Heart (he was one of the few generals to be wounded in action). When the Korean War began, he served as Chief of Staff in the United Nations Command - and because of his character and self-control was ultimately President Eisenhower's choice to head the long and tedious negotiations to end the war.

General Harrison was a soldier's soldier who led a busy, ultra-kinetic life, as also an amazing man of the Word. When he was a twenty-year-old Cadet, he began reading the Old Testament once a year and the New Testament four times. General Harrison did this until the end of his life.

Since it only takes 80 hours to read the entire Bible, this program General Harrison began obligated him to just ½ hour of reading God's Word for each of the days of his life. Let me ask you, do any of us have ½ an hour to give away each day to cultivate the mind of Christ like General Harrison? How about 14 minutes to read God's Word in a year? How about 3 minutes a day for the New Testament in a year?

		HOURS	MINUTES	@ DAY
READ BIBLE		80	4800	13
OLD TESTAMENT	77%	62	3695	10
NEW TESTAMENT	23%	18	1104	3
HARRISON				
OT	1	80	4800	13
NT	4	74	4419	12
MINUTES NEEDED		154	9219	25

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, Discipline of a godly man, p. 76-77.

Even in the thick of war he maintained his commitment by catching up during the two- and three-day respites for replacement and refitting which followed battles, so that when the war ended he was right on schedule.

When, at the age of ninety, his failing eyesight no longer permitted his discipline, he had read the Old Testament seventy times and the New Testament 280 times! No wonder his godliness and wisdom were proverbial, and that the Lord used him for eighteen fruitful years to lead Officers Christian Fellowship (OCF).

General Harrison's story tells us two things: it is possible for the busiest of us, to systematically feed on God's Word. No one could be busier or lead a more demanding life than General Harrison. His life remains a demonstration of a mind programmed with God's Word. His closest associates say that every area of his life (domestic, spiritual, and professional) and each of the great problems he faced was informed by the Scriptures. People marveled at his knowledge of the Bible and the ability to bring its light to every area of life. He lived out the experience of the Psalmist:

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts. (119:97-100)

You must remember this: You can never have a Christian mind without reading the Scriptures regularly because you cannot be deeply influenced by that which you do not know. If you are filled with God's Word, your life can then be informed and directed by God - your domestic relationships, your child-rearing, your career, your ethical decisions, your interior morality. The only way to a Christian mind is through God's Word!

Second, time alone in solitude with God comes through *memorization*. Mrs. Barnhouse said of her famous preacher husband:

Someone once asked him how long it had taken him to prepare a certain sermon. His answer was "Thirty years and thirty minutes!" He had immersed himself in the Bible from the time he was fifteen years old, when he memorized the Book of Philippians a verse a day until he knew the entire book by heart, then went on to other passages. He felt it was not enough to learn by rote — it had to be by heart; because you loved and believed it.

Why not begin with a verse — perhaps a verse a week — fifty-two in one year!

Few have lived as stressful and frenetic a life as Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission. But Taylor lived in God's rest, as his son beautifully attests:

Day and night this was his secret, "just to roll the burden on the Lord." Frequently those who were wakeful in the little house at Chinkingiang might hear, at two or

three in the morning, the soft refrain of Mr. Taylor's favorite hymn ["Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art"]. He had learned that for him, only one life was possible—just that blessed life of resting and rejoicing in the Lord under all circumstances, while He dealt with the difficulties, inward and outward, great and small.

Third, we can learn to be alone with God by *meditating* on it. This is the secret of God's great warriors. Hudson Taylor, the founder of China Inland Mission, conquered immense hardships by daily meditation on God's Word. Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor record this in his biography:

It was not easy for Mr. Taylor, in his changeful life, to make time for prayer and Bible study, but he knew that it was vital. Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China, by cart and wheelbarrow with the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves, with curtains of some sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was poring over the little Bible in two volumes always at hand. From two to four a.m. was the time he usually gave to prayer; the time he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God.

Meditating upon the Word brings us immediately into the intimate presence of God, but too few are willing to pay the price.

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither" (Psalm 1:1–3).

C. T. Studd was one of God's great servants. His life was like his grass hut, there were no doors to shut, he lived with - and for, his beloved pygmy tribes. How did he prepare to teach as many as 5,000 at a time? How did he get ready to disciple the scores of church leaders who came to sit at the foot of his cot every morning, so that he would awake to a sea of black faces and white teeth waiting for him to open the Book of God to them? Simply in his own words, may I read from his diary<sup>4</sup> dated February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1886?

*"The Lord is so good to give me a large dose of spiritual champagne every morning which brace one up for the day and night. Of late I have had such glorious times. I generally awake about 3:30 AM and feel quite wide awake, so I have a good read, and then have an hour's sleep before I finally get up.*

Studd's family described these times as -

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<sup>4</sup> C. T. Studd, *Cricketeer and Pioneer*, p. 57, 206.

*"A Bible is taken down from the shelf, and Bwana is alone with God. What passed between them in those silent hours was known a few hours later to all who had ears to hear."*

Studd continues in his diary,

*" I find then that what I read is then stamped indelibly upon my heart all through the day; and that it is the very quietest of times, not a foot astir, nor a sound to be heard, saving that of God. If I miss this time I feel like Samson shorn of his hair and so of all his strength. I see more and more how much I have to learn of the Lord. I want to be a workman approved of the Lord, not just with a pass degree as it were. Oh how I wish I had devoted my early life, my whole life to God and His Word. How much I have lost by those early years of self pleasing and running after this world's honors and pleasures."*

A modern spiritual Giant was George Mueller. His life may be distilled down to these words he wrote in a diary:

*It has pleased the Lord to teach me a truth, the benefit of which I have not lost for more than 14 years. The point is this: I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, or how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished...Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as a habitual thing, to give myself to prayer in the morning. Now I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God, and to the meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved and instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, while meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Scroggie, Method in Prayer, pp.17-18.