

# **The Disciplines of Jesus**

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Jesus never promised that being a good servant would be easy. Facing temptation is hard! Staring the tempter in the face and saying “no!” requires that you “...discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7). Personal spiritual training, therefore, becomes important to you and me as we face the vicissitudes of life, searching for strength to endure unto the end. You simply cannot be an effective servant of Jesus Christ without being committed to rigorous daily spiritual exercise regimen.

Jesus is our perfect pattern of spiritual discipline (1 Pet. 2:21). The Bible tells us that he “kept *increasing* in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man...” (Luke 2:52). He grew intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially while being “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). What sort of moral, spiritual, and intellectual disciplines did he use to help him face the difficulties of life and combat the trials and the temptations He faced?

## **The Discipline of Learning**

Six times in the gospel of Matthew Jesus asked the question, “Have you not read...?” (Cf. Matt. 12:3; 12:5; 19:4; 21:16; 21:42; 22:31) If Jesus felt reading was important to others, surely it was important to him. Luke 4:16 records, “As was his custom, He entered the synagogue... and stood up to read.” We may believe that the reading of our Lord was more for the benefit of others than for his own, but he read nevertheless.

Jesus exhibited an intricate knowledge of the Law of God. Even at the tender age of twelve he amazed the Jewish rabbis with his understanding of Scripture (Luke 2:46-47). In his wilderness temptations his first response to the devil was to quote Scripture (Luke 4:4,8,12). Jesus’ daily conversation was filled with allusions and specific quotes from the Old Testament. On one occasion, in responding to the Sadducees, Jesus made his argument for the resurrection on the tense of a single verb (Matt. 22:29-33).

If Jesus found power to overcome in such knowledge you can also. Maybe this is why knowledge is stressed so much in the New Testament (Cf. Eph. 1:15-17; 3:3-4; 4:11-13; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9-10; 2 Tim. 2:15).

## **The Discipline of Regular Worship**

Worship was a constant in the life of Jesus. It started early with the example of his parents as they responded “according to the custom of the feast”(Luke 2:41-42). The apostle John links much of his gospel with Jesus’ attendance at Jewish feasts (John 2:13-23; 7:1-10; 10:22-25; 13:1ff). Even more, Jesus was no stranger to weekly synagogue visits. “As was his custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read” (Luke 4:16). Regular worship was a part of his life.

Warning against idols, the Psalmist affirmed that we become like what we worship (Psa. 115:8). The power, therefore, to “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4) and overcome sin resides in large measure in our worship. If it was important to Jesus, shouldn’t regular worship be a discipline in your life? **NOT** because God needs it (He doesn’t); **NOT** because it is a commandment (It is! – Heb. 10:25-26) but **BECAUSE** you feel the need for it and see the benefit in it!

### **The Discipline of Fervent Prayer**

Jesus taught prayer as a vital part of a spiritual life (Luke 18:8). My good friend Edwin Crozier in his excellent book *Plugged In: High Voltage Prayer* said, “The greatest example of an unbreakable prayer habit is Jesus. Jesus prayed all the time” (p. 25). He goes on to point out from Scripture that Jesus rose early in the morning to pray (Mark 1:35); prayed in the evening (Matt. 14:23); prayed in preparation for major decisions (Luke 6:12); offered intercessory prayer (John 17:6-9, 14-17); and he prayed in the face of suffering (Matt. 26:39).

Looking further we see that Jesus prayed for specific people (Luke 22:31,32); prayed prayers of thanksgiving (John 11:41; cf. Matt. 11:25-27); prayed prayers of praise (Luke 10:21); and prayed for unity (John 17:20-21). Surely, even this does not exhaust the list. Prayer, therefore, was a dominant part of the Savior’s life.

Jesus’ prayer life also teaches us the need for time spent in solitude with God. He prayed “while it was dark...in a secluded place” (Mark. 1:35) and “on the mountain by himself” (Matt. 14:23). He “would often slip away to the wilderness and pray” (Luke 5:16). If Jesus sought time alone with the Father, away from the distractions of life, don’t you think that you need to do the same. The busy affairs of every day life with all of its noise can choke the prayer right out of you.

On occasion Jesus “spent the whole night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12). I’ve asked myself how such is possible? How is it possible to spend an *entire night* praying? Was it that this prayer was so important, so emotionally involved, so urgent, so detailed that it demanded the time? After all, the next day he would choose the twelve (Luke 6:13) which involved not one but twelve important decisions. It might also be that his prayer was coupled with meditation – a natural combination. David prayed, “When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches” (Psa. 63:6). To *meditate* means to dwell on any thing in thought; to study; to turn or revolve any subject in the mind. In prayer and meditation considerable thought is given to the need before it is taken to the throne of God. We are not told specifically but it is reasonable to believe that Jesus gave thought to each disciple and perhaps took each by name before the Father’s throne? This process can consume a lot of time!

Here’s the point: If solitude with God, meditation, and prayer were so important to Jesus, do you not believe that these should be equally as important to us? “We do not have high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses... Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15,16).

## **The Discipline of Hard Work**

Jesus was no stranger to hard work. He “went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues... and healing...” and “large crowds followed Him” (Matt. 4:23-25; cf. 9:35-38; Mark 10:1; 6:31). Such a schedule is both demanding and exhausting! Yet, there was no other work that he wanted to do. He said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work” (John 4:34). To Jesus, the work of saving souls was an urgent matter. “We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4). Further, in all that he did, he was committed to excellence for, as some observed, “He has done all things well” (Mark 7:37).

Sometimes overcoming temptation is simply a matter of seeing a need, recognizing the importance and urgency of it, and getting busy. If Jesus was willing to do the hard stuff, shouldn't you? “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

## **The Discipline of Commitment to People**

As I study the life of Jesus I am amazed that, as great as the demands were upon his time, he had time for people. He had time for children (Matt 19:14), time for sinful women (John 4:9; Matt. 15:21-28), time to tax collectors (Luke 19:1-10; Matt. 9:9-12), and especially time for his disciples (Matt. 16:13). The time he spent with others reflects an attitude about his mission – and it was all about people. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Matt. 10:28; cf. Luke 19:10).

In Luke 22 Jesus and his disciples are gathered in an to observe the Passover. The disciples broke into an argument concerning which one of them would be the greatest (Luke 22:24-27). With twenty four dirty feet and twelve proud hearts before him, Jesus girded himself with a towel and began to wash their feet (John 13). Peter, resisting, said to the Lord, “Never shall You wash my feet” (13:8). Jesus rebuked him then addressed all saying, "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.” (John 13:13-15).

I find it easier to overcome my own temptations when I'm focused on other folks. If you are self-absorbed, jockeying for position in line, you can be overcome with sin before you get started good. Think about others. Jesus did.

## **Final Thoughts**

In order to get into top physical condition a person must eat the right things and exercise regularly. Similarly, spiritual discipline demands the right spiritual diet and consistent spiritual activity. There are too many spiritual “couch potatoes.” Spiritual strength demands spiritual exercise.

These five disciplines we observe in the life of Jesus do not present a smorgasbord. You can't approach your spiritual development thinking that you can pick and choose, cafeteria style, which you want to develop and which you can leave for others. *All five are essential for success!* If used in your life, these can help you achieve a level of spiritual strength that will enable you to resist the devil.