



# First Steps In the Spiritual Disciplines

## Disciplines of Preparation

Scripture

Prayer

Fasting

Solitude

## Disciplines of Participation

Giving

Serving

Evangelism

Disciple making

*An introduction to eight important spiritual disciplines  
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## **Resources for the Disciplines**

### **GENERAL:**

Spirit of the Disciplines: Willard  
Celebration of Discipline: Foster  
Choose the Life: Bill Hull  
Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life: Wm Law  
Respectable Sins: Jerry Bridges NAV Press

### **WORD:**

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: Gordon Fee  
Grasping God's Word: J. Scott Duvall, Daniel Hays  
Journal 1: email [rsb@abwe.org](mailto:rsb@abwe.org) to request

### **Prayer**

Too Busy Not to Pray: Hybels  
How To Worship Jesus Christ: Joseph S. Carroll  
With Christ in the School of Prayer: Andrew Murray

### **Fasting**

<http://www.new-life.net/fasting.htm>  
<http://www.pwoconline.org/LeadershipHub/Discipleship/Fasting.pdf>

### **Solitude**

The Knowledge of the Holy: Tozer  
Knowing God: Packer

### **Giving**

Don't Waste Your Life: Piper  
The Treasure Principle: Alcorn

### **Serving**

Stop Dating the Church: Harris  
What's So Spiritual about Your Gifts? Henry and Mel Blackaby

### **Evangelism**

The Story of Hope: [www.abwe](http://www.abwe.org) training, CEIM resources  
Tell it Often, Tell it Well: McCloskey  
Permission Evangelism: Michael L. Simpson  
Questioning Evangelism: Randy Newman  
Just Walk Across the Room: Hybels

### **Disciple making**

The Way to Joy: [www.abwe.org](http://www.abwe.org) training, CEIM resources  
Lost Art of Disciple Making: Leroy Eims  
Disciples are Made, not Born: [Walter A. Henrichsen](#)  
Jesus Christ Disciple Maker: Hull

## Scripture Memory Suggestions

### **The Gospel**

**John 8:3**  
**God Heb 11:6**  
Hebrews 4:12-13  
Psalm 19:1  
Romans 1:19-20  
Proverbs 14:12  
**Man Gen 2:7**  
Matthew 10:28  
Philippians 1:21  
1 Thess 5:23  
**Sin Rom 3:23**  
Romans 3:19-23  
Romans 5:12-21  
Romans 1:18-32  
**Death Heb 9:27**  
Romans 6:23  
Ephesians 2:1-3  
Rev 20:11-15  
**Christ Jn 14:6**  
John 1:1-4  
Phil 2:5-10  
1 Timothy 2:5-6  
**Cross 1 P 2:24**  
2 Cor 5:14-21  
Heb 10:10-14  
Isaiah 53:1-12  
**Faith Eph 2:8-10**  
Romans 4:19-25  
James 2:19  
Romans 5:1-11  
Hebrews 11:1-19  
**Life Jn 11:25-26**  
1 John 5:11-13  
Mark 8:35-38  
John 3:36  
Romans 8:1

### **The Story**

Genesis 1:1-3, 26-28  
Genesis 2:7-9  
Genesis 3:1-24  
Genesis 6:5-8  
Genesis 12:1-8  
Genesis 15:1-6  
Genesis 22:1-18  
Exodus 12:1-8, 11-13  
Exodus 20:1-17  
Exodus 33:13-23  
Exodus 34:1-9  
Numbers 21:4-9  
Deuteronomy 6:1-18  
2 Samuel 7:12-16  
Psalm 22  
Isaiah 53  
John 1:1-18, 29  
John 3:1-18, 36  
John 14:1-6, 15-18  
John 19:23-24, 28-30  
John 20:1, 18-21

### **Spiritual Growth**

**Matthew 5-7**  
1 Cor 6:19-20  
Romans 12:1-3  
Hebrews 12:1-15  
Philippians 2:1-13  
Philippians 3:1-15  
Romans 14:1-14  
Matthew 18:15-22  
Matthew 28:18-20  
Mark 16:15  
Luke 24:47-48  
John 20:21  
Acts 1:8  
2 Timothy 2:1-9  
Ephesians 4:1-16  
Romans 8

Entire Books  
Ephesians  
1 John  
2 Timothy

### **Forward:**

Scores of works have already been written on the subject of the spiritual disciplines. (Some are suggested in the appendix.) Even so, many will not read these excellent resources without a brief introduction. Our purpose is to whet their appetite. It is our hope that the reader will press beyond this introduction into the richer and deeper literature available, and more than that, into the actual practices of our Lord and His followers, resulting in a deeper and richer walk with Him.

### **Introduction:**

*“Exercise yourself towards godliness...” 2 Tim 4:7* Earthly pilgrims never outgrow the need to maintain and develop the essence of the inner life: the spiritual disciplines Jesus practiced and taught to His followers. It is to our own hurt that we have strayed from this simple yet profound way of life. Our present tendency is to pursue all manner of frenetic activity and technology rather than pursuing a deeper walk with God driven by His priorities lived out by His enablement through the spiritual disciplines.

My *\*present* understanding of the disciplines is twofold.

### ***First, there are four God-ward, vertical disciplines of preparation.***

*Preparation*, that is, for living an obedient life in love for God. Serious athletes live by being disciplined mentally, physically and socially for an earthly goal. (1 Cor 9:25) The purpose of days, months and years of discipline is enablement to do well in the heat of the contest. So it is with the spiritual disciplines. *For the believer, the contest is life itself.* The God-ward disciplines prepare us to abide in God’s love and to love Him in return. The disciplines of preparation focus on responding to God primarily through the use of scripture and the practices of prayer.

### ***Second, there are four Man-ward, horizontal disciplines of participation.***

Participation, that is, in loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. Vertical love must be translated into horizontal love that is lived out practically towards those who do and those who do not know Christ. God makes it clear that we do not achieve the first (vertical) without practicing the second (horizontal)! 1 John 4:20; 5:3

### ***These eight disciplines are means by which our love for God and love for men is practiced.***

Each of these disciplines was evident in Jesus’ life in Matthew chapter four and then pressed upon us as His followers in Matthew chapters five, six and seven: The Sermon on the Mount. These chapters serve as our foundation. (Text in found in the appendix)

*\*(I say “present” because we are all on a journey and other insights are sure to come).*

## LOVING GOD

### The Four God-ward Disciplines of Preparation:

Each discipline is prefaced with *negative observations on our age*. This is done believing that if one recognizes the illness, the cure is more likely to be embraced.

#### *We live in an age of entertainment*

#### **THE DISCIPLINE OF THE WORD**

Entertainment substitutes *observed, temporal and empty* pleasures for *participation* in pleasures that are *everlasting and full*. (Compare Hebrews 11:25 and Psalm 16:11) Entertainment is the capturing of ears, eyes and mind with a message that leads one away from reality and into the realm of imagination. The pervasive entertainment of our age is nearly void of moral instruction, customarily opposing all that is holy, right and pure. (An appreciation of the arts is a far cry from an entertainment industry driven by popular media outlets.) Philippians 4:8-9 exhorts us to center our thoughts on holy realities. Believers must learn to think God's thoughts as revealed in His word or they will be consumed by the messages of the evil one.

First there was the voice of God; then holy angels responded with the voice of praise; then man's voice rose to praise and commune with God; then there was a fourth voice— *the voice of the serpent*. That voice has multiplied into thousands of voices pressing us to pursue health, wealth, stuff, and pleasure *for their own sakes*. We can easily become soil both shallow and choked. Encumbered by the weeds of stress, stuff and seeking after empty pleasures we live lives that are stunted and weak. The only remedy for this endless discontent is to silence the fourth voice by returning to the first: the voice of God. His voice is both the first and final voice. His voice is powerful, true and altogether trustworthy. His voice makes all things plain to the one who will listen to it. (Proverbs 8 and 9)

#### Matthew 4:1-11

The desert experience of our Savior was not only a time of demonic temptation, but also of spiritual preparation. Jesus was about to enter his public ministry years, and they would be filled with a non-stop flow of people, problems and pressure. His time alone in the desert would both test and strengthen Him. Each temptation by Satan received a response from Jesus prefaced by *It is written*. It is evident that His mind was filled with scripture. Jesus heard the voice of His Father in scripture and lived on it. His omniscience didn't preclude long hours spent reading, memorizing and studying the law and the prophets from His youth. The fact that Jesus constantly appealed to and quoted scripture throughout His ministry is evident when reading even a single gospel. From a youth in the temple, to a

## Men's Accountability Questions

(Used in disciple making relationship in addition to Spiritual Growth Plan)

1. Have you fulfilled your weekly growth plan objectives this week?
2. What aspects of your spiritual growth plan are most difficult for you to fulfill? Why?  
What changes could you make to improve your success rate?
3. How have you taken time to minister to your family (wife, kids) this week?
4. Have you been with someone this week that could be considered inappropriate by anyone, or could have looked like you were using poor judgment this week?
5. Have you exposed yourself or been exposed to any explicit material this week?
6. Have you *dwelt* on thoughts that were not Phil. 4:8-9 thoughts this week?
7. Have you been *completely* above reproach in all of your financial dealings including giving at least 10% of your income to the church and kingdom ministry?
8. What serious temptations did you face in the last week and how did you respond?
9. How can you be more Christ-like in your workplace?
10. How have you shared your faith with an unbeliever in the last week or advanced a relationship with an unbeliever?
11. Have you just lied to us?

Develop your own accountability questions as desired.

## Creating Your Own 30 Day Spiritual Growth Plan

Make the commitment to invest 45 minutes daily for your growth  
Be specific. Review monthly and set new goals

### **Developing disciplines for life & ministry growth**

- 1. Bible** - 4 Chapters a Day ó 20 minutes, underline & take notes  
3 chapters plus 1 in Proverbs. Memorize a verse a week.  
Sample Journal 1: email [rsb@abwe.org](mailto:rsb@abwe.org) to request
- 2. Prayer** ó 10-20 minutes daily. ACTS Make a list.  
Salvation, Missionaries, Family, Friends
- 3. Fasting** – Start with one meal a week, then one day a month  
Select prayer focus.
- 4. Solitude** ó Start by setting aside 3 hours, once a month for quiet  
reflection, prayer and meditation. Increase gradually.
- 5. Giving** ó giving at least 10% of gross income to Kingdom work,  
including giving to the poor and needy
- 6. Serving** - encouragement, visiting, teaching, helping ministry  
(Letters & cards, nursing home or elderly visits, meals, needy  
neighbors) What area of ministry do you want to focus on?
- 7. Evangelism** – contact, connect, communicate. Hospitality,  
building friendships, small group Bible studies, etc.  
See “The Story of Hope” in Resources for a Bible study tool.
- 8. Disciple making** ó selecting one or two others to enter a disciple  
making relationship with to assist in intensive, directed growth.  
See “The Way to Joy” in Resources for a simple place to start.

Learning to make the most of your time is a life-long process. Wasting time is one of our most common sins. Take a careful look at the time you have, and begin to discipline yourself to make the best use of that time for the sake of God, your family, and your own soul.

Additional areas for growth include leading family worship, working to build family relationships by spending time together and discipling our own children and developing their talents and interests.

man in the desert, His mind was filled with the Word of God. His heart rested fully on its authority.

Consider the following:

Matt 4:4 (Jesus) said “It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'”

Matt 4:7 Jesus said “It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'”

Matt 4:10 Jesus said “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'”

Matt 5:18 “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”

Mark 12:24 Jesus answered and said to them, “Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures?”

John 10:35 “Scripture cannot be broken.”

John 17:17 “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is Truth.”

Luke 24:27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

Like our Lord, the believer must become “Word saturated.” In order to think and act in accordance with the will of God we must learn to listen to the scriptures constantly, carefully and submissively. This will, more than anything else, cleanse, correct and empower us to obey and enjoy our God. (John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:14-17; Heb 4:12-13; Col 3:16-17)

### **Suggestions for practicing the disciplines of the Word:**

Any discipline requires serious investment of time. Many of my co-workers go to the gym during lunch for a 45 minute workout. Others walk 45 minutes every lunch hour for fitness. Still others do an hour of cardiac rehab every day for health. No one seems to complain about the time involved since they consider the potential benefits worth the investment. How much greater are the potential benefits of the spiritual disciplines? No one can make serious progress in any area of interest without a consistent and serious investment of time and effort. The major challenge is discovering how to subtract time out of existing routine to add it to the pursuit of God. Seek God’s wisdom and guidance to make it happen. If you want it enough, you will find a way to make it happen. Set aside 45 minutes a day to begin seriously practicing the disciplines of the Word and Prayer.

### **How to begin?**

**Bible Reading:** Read a chapter of Proverbs (based on day of month) every AM, then write out a prayer to God based on what is impressed on your mind from the reading. This practice is practical and useful for daily decisions.

Also, read through the entire Bible every year, selecting a different translation at the start of each year. (I read six books of the Bible each month. I usually read an entire book through at one sitting, except I read five Psalms a day during the month of December). Many prefer reading four chapters a day to complete the Bible in a year. Others prefer listening to it on CD or MP3. All major English translations are available on the WEB in these formats.

Whatever method you use, practice reading through the Bible every year. Seeing the big picture of God's story year after year will greatly increase your knowledge and retention of His word.

**Bible Memorization & Meditation:**

Begin memorizing two verses a week. Read the verse slowly, out loud, ten times. If it is a longer verse, break it into two or three segments and then put them together. Five minutes invested twice a day is more than enough for most people to memorize consistently. Review them until you have them firmly in mind. I usually memorize chapters based on what God is presently impressing on my mind. Start your day with scripture review. It starts the day out listening to the right voice!

**Bible Study:**

Write down your discoveries! It is in the act of writing that we complete our thoughts and respond to the Word intelligently. Whether or not you refer back to your journals, it is the act of completing your thoughts by writing them down in a journal that will help you retain the truths you discover. The days I am not reading through a book of the Bible, I spend studying a particular book or theme that captured my interest during my regular reading. This usually takes 30-45 minutes. I use a small spiral notebook as my devotional-study-prayer journal.

**Spiritual Journal:**

The journal "My Time with God", in the appendix, is a simple inductive study method using 1 John. Your search for five things will keep you focused: What does it say about God, man, sin, promise/principle, and command-choice-consequence. The activity of reading with purpose and writing down your discoveries will greatly aid you in remembering what God is teaching you day after day.

**Spiritual Growth Plan**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Bible Reading, Study, Memorization**

When \_\_\_\_\_ Where \_\_\_\_\_ What passages \_\_\_\_\_  
 Selections for first month? \_\_\_\_\_ Plan: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Journaling: (Booklet: My Time with God) Plan: \_\_\_\_\_

**Prayer** (Personal, family, small group)

Where \_\_\_\_\_ When \_\_\_\_\_ Plan: (Journal, lists, etc) \_\_\_\_\_  
 I will daily invest \_\_\_ minutes in focused prayer

**Fasting**

Plan: \_\_\_\_\_

**Solitude & meditation**

Plan: \_\_\_\_\_

**Giving**

I will give at least \_\_\_% of my present income to God's work

**Serving**

Plan: \_\_\_\_\_

My present investment of spiritual gifts will be \_\_\_\_\_

**Evangelism**

E-20 list Top 3 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Efforts to build relationships with unbelievers

**Disciple-making**

D-10 list  
 Top 2 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Efforts to disciple others

## Spiritual Disciplines Inventory

The pursuit of discipline must include an awareness of the danger of legalism. Legalism measures acceptability before God based on human performance standards while ignoring the heart. Yet, making personal self-judgment regarding our pursuit of God is crucial to making spiritual progress. We must become people of God, of the Word, of prayer, of discipline. We grow, share our faith and help others grow by investing our lives in the lives of others. We must know where we are as well as where we need to go. To that end, evaluate yourself regarding the disciplines.

Give a completely honest evaluation of your present practices (not future plans or past history). What is your present practice of the disciplines?

1. Present practice of reading God's word  
(when, where, how long, how regularly in the last week.)  
Memorizing God's Word (when, how, verses in last year)
2. Present prayer life (private, with family & others in the last month)  
Use of a spiritual journal? (how often, method)
3. Present practice of fasting in the last year?
4. Present practice of solitude in the last year?
5. Present regular practice of giving to God and others? (church, para-church, poor, percentages)
6. Present regular practice of serving? (Church, world)
7. Present practice sharing your faith  
(witness, tracts, home Bible study, relationship building in the last month, year)
8. Present practice of intentional disciple making  
(when, who, methods employed in last year)

*Which of the disciplines have you practiced most faithfully?*

*Which of the disciplines do you sense the need to focus on for the next month?*

## *We live in an age of independence and immediacy* The Discipline of Prayer

öDo it Yourselfö and öDo it nowö are as deeply imbedded in the North American psyche as baseball and apple pie.

*"If you want it done right... do it yourself." "Why wait?"*

Rarely do we recognize such independent attitudes as *arrogant* or the expectation of immediate action as *impatience*. But the scriptures speak constantly of the danger of an independent (*öI did it my wayö*) and impatient (*öI want it and I want it nowö*) spirit. We humans are worse than weak. Left to ourselves, we are helpless to do anything of eternal value. Persevering prayer is the only option for accessing Divine enablement to overcome natural arrogance. Jesus' words are still absolute: öWithout me you can do nothing.ö (And the pity is that we do so much of it!) Learning the discipline of abiding in Christ through persevering prayer is not easy. Continual dependence, honest humility, fervent longings and patient endurance are developed only in the throne room of God.

Though the forty days of fasting and solitude in Matthew 4 do not specifically mention Jesus praying, it is unimaginable that He was not in continual prayer with His Father during those weeks alone. Scripture frequently makes mention of Jesus seeking solitude to pray: Lk 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28; Matt 14:23; Mk 1:35; 6:46

Prayer was a constant and evident part of our Lord's life. As the disciples overheard the Master praying, they saw a huge difference between their prayers and His. They knew how to *say prayers*, but He knew how to *pray*. They had a routine but He had a relationship. They had formality, but He had intimacy. His disciples requested that He teach them how to pray. Lk 11:1. Jesus still teaches His own how to pray in His presence.

The gospels contain more than fifty references to Jesus and prayer. Jesus praying: Mt 14:23; Mk 1:35; 6:46 Lk 3:21; 6:12; 9:28-29; 22:44 Teaching on prayer: Mt 5:44; 6:5-15; 21:22; Mk 11:24; Lk 6:28; 11:1-ff; 18:1-ff; Jn 15:16; 16:23 Commanding prayer: Mt 7:7-11; 24:20; 26:41; Mk 14:38; Lk 22:40, 46 Requesting prayer: Matt 9:38 The Sermon on the Mount: (Matt 5-7) contains seven references to prayer as well as öThe Lord's Model Prayer.ö

The teachings of Jesus address both the difficulty and the necessity of prayer. Persevering Prayer Luke 18:1-ff Unanswered prayer: Mark 14:36 In one sense, our salvation is due to an unanswered prayer. Our Lord Jesus cried outí ötake this cup away from meí ö (Mk 14:36) and öif it is possible,

let this cup passí ö (Mt 26:39)í but he surrendered His will to the will of His Father and the Father said önoö to his first request and öyesö to önevertheless, Your will be done.ö (Mt 26:39)

We must accept the wisdom of God when our prayers are denied. But we must not equate delay with denial. Until God makes it clear that we are not praying according to His will in either motive or end, we have every right and every encouragement to press on in prayer. God is changing us in the midst of the process. He will indeed give us good things. But some will take time to mature into the answers that will bring Him the greatest glory and us the greatest good. Prayer is not only the means to accomplish change in the world, but even more so change in our own character and maturity.

### ***How to begin?***

Scripture includes numerous aspects of the discipline of prayer.

Private Mt 1:35; 6:6-9; 26:39-44; Lk 6:12; Acts 10:9; James 5:13

Group Lk 22:40; Col 1:9; 2 Th 1:11; 3:1; James 5:14; Acts 6:6; 13:3;

Adoration and Praise 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:3; 3:21; 2 Tim 4:18; 1 Pet 1:3;

5:11; 2 Peter 3:18; Heb 13:15; Rev 19:5

Thanksgiving Mt 15:36; 26:27; Acts 27:35; 2 Cor 4:15; 9:11; Ph 4:6-7;

Eph 1:16; 5:20; Col 1:3,12; 2:7; 3:17; 4:2; 1 Th 5:16-18; 1 Tim 2:1

Confession James 5:14-16; I John 1:9 - 2:2;

Supplication Acts 1:24; 4:31; 9:40; 14:23; Phil 4:6-7; James 5:17-18

Intercession Lk 22:32; 1 Tim 2:1, 2:8; Acts 20:36; 21:5; 28:8

Married men must lead their wives and families in the discipline of prayer, keeping our prayers God centered, honest, specific, fervent, and non-repetitive. Prayer is both labor and delight.

*Adoration*: drawing out the heart in love to God for who He is. It is focused on His glory, attributes and nature.

*Praise*: giving voice to adoration; uplifting the glory of God for who He is and who He is to us.

*Thanksgiving*: expressing gratitude for the things God has done; remembering His kindness, mercy and goodness toward us in His Son.

*Confession*: freely and honestly naming our sins and failings, seeking both forgiveness through Christ's blood and inner change through His Spirit. In confession we are humbled before the Holy One, seeing Him as He is and ourselves as we are, in desperate need of cleansing. Here we also release all personal hurts and offenses to God, forgiving others as we are forgiven by Christ. (Mt 6:9-15)

*Supplication*: seeking the supply of our needs from God Himself

*Intercession*: seeking the supply of the needs of others

Prayer Requests: God's purposes to be fulfilled for His glory in

Self; Family; Local church leadership; God's global servants;

Believers; Unbelievers; Community; Nation; World

eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

### **EVANGELISM**

6 öDo not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

### **PRAYING**

7 öAsk, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

### **SERVING**

12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. 13 öEnter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because<sup>[a]</sup> narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. 15 öBeware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them<sup>21</sup> öNot everyone who says to Me, -Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, -Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?ø23 And then I will declare to them, -I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness! 24 öTherefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

26 öBut everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.ö

28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, 29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses..

### **FASTING**

16 Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

### **GIVING, SERVING**

19 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great *is* that darkness! 24 No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. 25 Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

28 So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith?

31 Therefore do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble.

### **Matt 7**

1 Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me remove the speck from your eye," and look, a plank *is* in your own

## ***We live in an age of indulgence***

### **The Discipline of Fasting**

Unless it's before some medical test, fasting is a foreign concept to most of us. We are accustomed to think that being uncomfortable is bad, and making oneself uncomfortable by delaying relief is not only foolish but likely harmful. We have totally bought into thinking that eating is a right, and the slightest hunger pang deserves an immediate snack.

Hunger is a God-given gift. Its continual presence alerts us to our need, and therein lays its power to help us develop spiritually. Because hunger is natural and quickly returns, it prompts us to awareness. We are dependent beings. God is the **AM**; we are *because He is*. We are totally dependent on God for every breath, every heartbeat, and every morsel of food. But our greatest need of all is for Him. Jesus, quoting Moses, reminded us that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Fasting is the deliberate, temporary denial of food for the purpose of sharpening our focus on God. When hunger hits, the one fasting turns his thoughts to God, to prayer, to their need of Him. Fasting is vitally linked to prayer as a two-fold discipline to drive us to Christ, finding in Him our life, our strength, our all.

One may fast for the purpose of deepening intimacy with God, using one's hunger to pray more sincerely and more fervently. As hunger for food is real, so our hunger for God must become more real. (Zech 7:5) One may fast and pray for the spiritual needs of others (Mark 9:29) or in preparation for special ministry. (Mt. 4:1) But fasting as a means to achieve spiritual superiority is self-centered and arrogant. (Luke 18:11-12) This is the danger regarding any discipline. When external performance becomes the focus, the heart grows hard and life grows shallow. "*Whitewashed tombs*" was what Jesus called men who were faithful to the disciplines but unfaithful to God!

### **How to begin?**

Only on severe occasions did fasting eliminate water. (Jonah 3) Some fast sunrise to sunset and others for 24 hours. Dependence on God, not duration is the key. If possible, use the meal time hour for additional prayer. Be aware of the needs of others and do not make others must suffer for your discipline. Keep your family and responsibilities in view as you plan your times of fasting. (Matt 6:16-17)

## *We live in an age of intrusion (noisy and busy)* **The Discipline of Solitude**

Silence. Is there such a thing anymore? Cell phones, ipods, music on hold everywhere, all the time noise. Some people absolutely refuse to be immersed in silence. They have a TV or radio on all the time. Noise is more than a companion. It has become an addiction. Why is this? Perhaps it is because in silence we confront our own inner emptiness. We have become so dependent on the thoughts, opinions and distractions of others that to be still in the silence, thinking deeply about the issues of life terrifies us.

Those who learn to love the silent places must come to terms with life, death, purpose, and need. In silence comes strength, if the heart is drawn out to God and the mind is exercised in serious, Word based contemplation.

### Eastern Mysticism

Solitude and meditation for the believer must not be confused with eastern mysticism. Simply contrasted, eastern mysticism calls for solitude and meditation is a call to turn *inward* and to *empty* the mind. The believer calls for solitude and meditation is a call to turn *upward* and *fill* the mind with God's words of truth, replacing the lies of the evil one.

### Western Rationalism

Western society abandoned divine revelation in favor of isolated human reason. We moved first from *Theism to naturalism* and now have abandoned reason for *intuition*. "I think" has fallen captive to "I feel."

*Eastern Mysticism and Western Rationalism are both the products of fallen man.* While man is both a thinking and feeling creature, the clarion call of God is to bring every thought and every feeling captive to God's Word.  
2 Cor 10:3-4

Our Lord constantly sought out lonely, silent places. Luke 5:16; Matt 14:13 & 23; Mark 1:13; 6:47 and John 6:15 are but samples of His practice.

Solitude is not merely a temporary escape from people and pressure. It is a vital preparation for being able to serve people and live with pressure while maintaining an eternal, kingdom perspective. If one does not learn to rebuild and deepen one's inner being alone with God, then there is no inner fountain from which to draw water for the incessant thirsts of those who surround us.

### How to begin?

As with fasting, the duration is not as important as the use of the time devoted to it. Two to three hours is a good beginning. Suggestions: Take nothing but a Bible. This is not a time to write, prepare lessons, or read.

## **Matthew 5** **SERVING**

38 You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'<sup>[1]</sup> 39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. 41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

### **GIVING**

42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. 43 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor'<sup>[2]</sup> and hate your enemy.<sup>[3]</sup> 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,<sup>[4]</sup> 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren<sup>[5]</sup> only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors<sup>[6]</sup> do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

## **Matt 6**

### **GIVING**

1 Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 3 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.<sup>[1]</sup>

### **PRAYING**

5 And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.<sup>[2]</sup> 7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8 Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. 9 In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. 14 For if you forgive men their

## The Forgotten Foundation – Matthew 4-7

### THE DISCIPLINES

**Loving God** Word, Prayer, Fasting, Solitude

**Loving Neighbors** Giving, Serving, Evangelism, Disciple making

#### Matt 4

#### SOLITUDE

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

#### FASTING PRAYER

And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. 3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

#### WORD

4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" 8 Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" 11

#### EVANGELISM

13 And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali. 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

#### DISCIPLE MAKING

18 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 They immediately left their nets and followed Him. 21 Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

#### SERVING

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and

#### GIVING

healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

It is a time slow down, rest the mind, lift your eyes and heart to the eternal God, to think, pray and consider eternal truth in the light of the journey yet before us.

#### Observation

Begin by seeing the hand of God in your surroundings. Observe flora and fauna and begin giving God thanks and praise for His wisdom, power and attention to detail.

#### Contemplation

Consider how God has designed your life from childhood to the present. Observe His hand on your life from your youth. Consider His grace, His goodness, and His faithfulness to you over your lifetime. Let your heart motivate worship as you think about His goodness, preserving grace and guidance. What do you most appreciate about God? What attributes are you most thankful for? What names of God are most precious to you?

**Analysis:** Now is the time to consider the crucial questions.

*Where am I in my walk with God?*

*What are my deepest needs at this point in my journey?*

*Where are my relationships strong, weak or broken?*

*What am I doing about what really matters in life?*

*Am I investing wisely for eternity the time, talent and treasure God has entrusted me with?*

*What specific changes should I make to be more obedient to God?*

(After your time has concluded, you may want to journal a summary of your impressions and conclusions.)

All the God-ward disciplines are *disciplines of preparation: preparation of heart for participation in ministry*. Christ calls us to recognize our emptiness to find in Him our fullness to serve with Him in fruitfulness. Being focused and filled with love for God, we now turn to the outflow of that love expressed in loving others in Jesus Name.

## The Four Man-ward Disciplines of Participation

### LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

#### *We live in an age of accumulation*

#### The Discipline of Giving

We have packed garages, full basements, stuffed closets, crammed schedules, yet empty lives. *Our wealth creates our poverty.*

Western life is reminiscent of Laodiceaí

*Rev. 3:15-17 "I know you inside and out, and find little to my liking. You're not cold; you're not hot—far better to be either cold or hot! You're stale. You're stagnant. You make me want to vomit. You brag, 'I'm rich, I've got it made, I need nothing from anyone,' oblivious that in fact you're a pitiful, blind beggar, threadbare and homeless." (The Message)*

God has blessed us with so much in the way of material goods, technology, and healthcare. We have so much more than we need that it borders on lunacy. More than half of the world's population lives on less than \$3.00 a day! Our normal is so abnormal as to be obscene. And the greed of our sinful natures drives us to believe that *what we have we need and what we want we ought to have*. Adam's fall robbed us of intimacy with God and the resultant inner emptiness that seeks "stuff" as its substitute.

Years ago we had concluded a major building program at our church. The day of dedicating the new facility had arrived. As I stood on the hill overlooking the large building and parking lots, the thought struck me: "I don't make a fine fire some day." No, I am not a latent arsonist. The scripture that came to mind was 2 Peter 3:10-13: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.<sup>[a]</sup> Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

Jesus said we couldn't serve both God and money. *God or greed will rule.* We must learn not to measure ourselves by our neighbor as the standard for either prosperity or generosity.

*Giving demands devotion and discipline.* Managing money is, in reality, managing ourselves and our desires. To be generous means we must have an

**In closing**, remember the purpose of the disciplines is to enable us to follow Christ freely and fully with joy, wisdom and effectiveness. Jesus preached and practiced these disciplines as a lifestyle. They are the essence of living out one's love for God and love for our neighbor.

*Instruction* biblical truth communicated is the teacher's role.  
*Correction* sin exposed and correction imparted is the father's role.  
*Participation* ministry practiced and perfected is the coach's role.  
This is a call to life involvement in the lives of others. Information that leads to transformation that leads to participation in making a difference in the lives of others.

*Direction* Bible based guidance and practical advice is provided by spiritual leaders. This is the heart of mentoring.

*To make a disciple is to grow a spiritual child into full adulthood.*  
Transferring responsibility must be on-going. Each disciple is unique. Their gifts, level of common sense, insights, creativity, abilities, and commitment levels are unique. We must balance our responsibility to lead and guide with their responsibility to choose and change, lest we become careless on the one hand or overbearing on the other.

As with the other seven disciples, Jesus Himself is the model. He chose twelve, not twenty or fifty. He chose them intentionally. He invested in them heavily. He spent some 12,500 waking hours with them. He spent additional time with three particularly gifted individuals named Peter, James and John. It was Word based life in tandem, day after day involvement as He developed their skills, corrected their thoughts, motives and actions and prepared them to be His followers to go and make disciples the world over.

### ***How to begin?***

Perhaps the best place to begin is to take some time to evaluate your life and begin to implement changes that will allow you to put the disciplines into your life.

### ***Change begins by subtraction.***

If you want to make lasting changes in your life, then you must begin by removing those things that are wasteful so you can add those things that are productive.

*Change begins with a single decision to act wisely, followed by hundreds of other good little decisions to obey.*

### ***Questions to consider:***

Who could help me become a more devoted disciple?  
Which of the disciplines do I need help with?  
Who has God brought into my life for a disciple making relationship?

*(See appendix for additional resources for disciple making.)*

income that is larger than our outgo. This requires controlling our desires and making wise decisions based on needs, not wants. While there may be times of emergency need, most of us could manage on far less than we have. Forty years ago there was no easy credit, no home computers or cell phones. A second car was a luxury and most homes had one wage earner. I am not proposing the impossible return to another day. I am simply pointing out that we have assumed we need everything that is possible. Such a perspective keeps one in continual financial bondage, as new needs arise in an endless stream.

To be generous with money, time, and skill requires that we possess money, time and skill. All of these must be managed and developed for God's greater purpose through the means of giving. *Giving is investing what we possess in the lives of others for a greater return in eternity.* For most, it will take time (years) and much discipline (saying no) to live without debt and be able to give to the extent we should. The appendix lists several excellent resources for learning how to manage yourself and thereby manage your resources.

We are called to be conduits, not safety deposit boxes of our resources. We fear being taken advantage of. We fear losing anything. Our normal expectations of wealth and comfort paralyze the inner urgings of the Spirit to give freely. We must return to the realization that *we have been blessed to bless others.*

The only cure for innate greed is determined generosity.

God has called us to poverty of spirit ó a deep recognition of our own spiritual bankruptcy and the resultant joy of having all the riches of His grace. Out of this must flow the practical response of giving freely and generously to meet the needs of others in the material, social and spiritual realm.

The gospels record Jesus saying the words *give* and *giving* over 100 times. The following verses shout at us to be shockingly generous with all that God has entrusted to us. Matt 5:42; 10:8; 19:21; 25:35-46; Mark 10:45; 14:1-9; Luke 3:11; 6:30; 6:38; 11:41; 14:13; 16:12; 19:8.

### **How to begin? Giving should be:**

*Regular:* increase the goal of your giving from 10% to 12% to 20% and more of your regular income. The delightful obligation of generous giving requires thoughtful planning. Carefully analyze all your spending and begin managing your resources with a purpose and a plan.  
*Sacrificial* ó giving up what we would like to have to be able to give to meet others needs is one of the believer's special joys. Sacrificial giving is self denial in action.

*Wise* is not just giving money to charities and churches without knowing on what our resources are spent; it is not faith; it is unwise stewardship. While we need to trust others, we must not be willingly ignorant of what our gifts are used for. Generous people will be taken advantage of from time to time. God will take care of that in His own way and time. But we should be careful to give to genuine needs for justifiable reasons.

*Balanced* giving to the local church is primary. In addition to giving to the body of Christ where we are fed and nourished, we should also consider the needs of world missions and missionaries who are carrying the gospel to the unreached. In addition to this, we need to see the needs of the poor who live around us, in our local church, and in our local communities. It is usually best to do this kind of giving anonymously.

Thorough management of all of life as a steward includes investing our time, energies, skills, abilities, home, money, and everything else for the blessing and benefit of others and the ultimate glory of God. Giving is more than a check! It is a lifestyle.

One does not need large financial resources to demonstrate great generosity. (Luke 2:23) Giving of time may be an even greater sacrifice than money for some. And this brings us to the next discipline!

## *We live in an age of immaturity* **The Discipline of Disciple Making**

The *Great Commission* is a call to make disciples. But what is a disciple? Let me share my working definition with you. A disciple is a *well-grounded, self-disciplined, fully-obedient* follower of Jesus Christ.

“Well grounded” includes knowing what the Bible teaches and how to read and study it personally. Following Christ is a life long process of allowing the Word of Christ to dwell in us richly Col. 3:16. Becoming a serious, obedient student of the Word is foundational to following Christ in a world full of deception and evil.

“Self disciplined” includes the eight disciplines lived out in daily experience in home, work, assembly and community.

“Fully obedient” in attitude, action, motivation and practice obeying the commands of Christ from the heart.

To become a disciple is to engage in a process. W. A. Henrichsen well stated, “Disciples are made, not born.” (See appendix) To become a disciple is to engage in relationships that change us to become more like Christ. We need each other. Those who are more mature and disciplined challenge and assist us to make progress in our own journey. As we walk with those ahead of us spiritually speaking, so we need to walk with those who follow us.

Because of the nature of the relationship, it should be men disciplining men and women disciplining women. Couple on couple is good but one-on-one same-gender interaction is also important for consistent progress to be made.

Simply put, disciple making is “life in tandem.”

The following is my larger working definition of disciple making: Disciple making is an *intentional, intimate relationship* designed to initiate *life-change* through **instruction, correction, participation and direction** resulting in *well grounded, self-disciplined, fruitful followers* of Jesus Christ.

“Intentional”... means not accidental. It is pursuing teachable, committed individuals who demonstrate interest and a willingness to grow and change. Honesty, transparency and teachability lead to life change.

“Intimate”... thoroughly honest and open conversations that are trust based and Christ centered are the means by which growth and change take place.

“Relationship”... it isn't just information imparted, but a life on life interaction that is real. This is the “caught not taught” aspect of relationship that leads to life change. The life model of the disciple maker is foundational.

*Connect:* listen to their stories. People love to talk about themselves. Ask where they're from, what they do, family, etc. Share your own background. Identify where you *share common interests* and knowledge. This may take place over minutes or months. Some will be very open and others very reserved. Listen for three things: pain, pleasure or significance. Pain allows you to show sympathy and understanding. Pleasure allows you to see what they enjoy, are interested in or are excited about. This often includes relationships with family or friends, hobbies and interests. Significance allows you see what really matters to them. It may be religious, political, relational, philanthropic, or philosophical. Pain, pleasure and significance are open doors to move into deeper needs of the human heart and experience. Don't rush it. God is opening a door for you. Seek to keep that door open. As the acquaintance grows, invite the family over for a cookout, meal or just dessert. Singles are wise to include others in the mix. The purpose is to demonstrate genuine concern and interest and to get better acquainted, listen to more stories and determine their spiritual background, perspective and needs. Connecting includes various forms of activity often including expanding their exposure to other believers in a variety of settings.

*Communicate:* share your story. As conversations occur, it becomes more and more natural to speak of really important matters. As needs and concerns are expressed, offering sympathy, compassion, assistance and prayer is appreciated. Sharing your own personal stories of God's grace and comfort naturally flow into the conversation. As you continue to pray for them, God will open doors of opportunity to involve them in Bible study or invite them to small group gatherings where their knowledge of the gospel will grow.

Be patient. Only God can save the lost. But God delights to use His love and grace manifested through us to bring others to Himself.

Balance is a word we have used repeatedly. Balancing our time to include unbelievers is essential. Anything that is a priority includes intentionality. We must intentionally pursue relationships with lost people. God will occasionally "drop them into our laps." But more often than not we will see people come to Christ as a result of intentional effort in prayer and reaching out to spend time with them. Questions to consider:

*Who are the familiar faces without names in my experience?*

(Find out, and begin praying for them by name daily.)

*How can I strike up a conversation or make a gesture of friendship for Christ's sake in the next two weeks?*

*Who is new to the neighborhood that I need to meet and welcome?*

*Where is the stranger I need to befriend this week?*

(Check out the resources list for additional suggestions)

## ***We live in an age of consumerism*** **The Discipline of Serving**

“What do I get out of it?” “What's in it for me?” “Have it your way”

A common excuse for leaving a local church is often expressed in the words: “*I just wasn't getting anything out of it.*” While we do not excuse poor preaching, that expression reveals more about the hearer than the preacher. We must resist the temptation of being merely *an audience that critiques the show*. We are called to be *active participants that play to an audience of ONE*.

The believer is called to a life of serving, not being served. The call to follow Christ is a call to serve others. Matt 6:24; 20:28; Luke 16:13; 17:6-10; Romans 7:6; and Galatians 5:13

Being a *cheerful giver* (2 Cor 9:7) includes investing our time and abilities in service. Selfishness manifests itself in what we do with our money and our time; more often in the latter than the former. Serving our own immediate family is a priority. Serving our employer and fellow workers is also kingdom work. Above this, setting aside several hours a week to bless others by involvement in ministries of evangelism, edification and assistance is also important. *We are to live our lives in relationships*. Relationships bring joy, delight, challenge and growth. Serving by teaching, visiting, counseling, cleaning, repairing, providing meals and transportation for the ill, the elderly and the indigent are just samples of ways to serve Christ. It is in the little acts of service, unseen and even unappreciated, that allow us to demonstrate selfless love for God. Serving God is most often a matter of *doing the next thing that needs to be done with the right heart attitude*.

While serving with our spiritual gifts is a biblical norm (1 Peter 4:10) we must not exclude ourselves from serving in other areas of need. When tragedy strikes, showing mercy is demanded of everyone. Fulfilling the great commission requires every believer's participation. Get involved in meeting needs in your church and in your neighborhood. Family, church and neighborhood relationships each provide fertile soil for planting seeds of service.

### **How to begin?**

The following questions may be useful as you consider how to prioritize and balance your service for Christ.

*How can I serve my spouse and children this week?*

*What would be most appreciated or needed by them?*

*What ministries are most in need of workers in the church right now?*

*Am I able to help out; for how long; how?*

*What people in our church have service needs now?  
What neighbors need a visit or practical help now?*

Serving is not an option. All believers are called to serve. Maintaining priorities (1 Tim 5:8; Gal 6:10 are clear commands) and balance requires thoughtful planning and sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Feeling stressed with all this talk about serving? So was generous, hard working Martha. (Luke 10:38-42) That's why Jesus told her that the first priority is listening to God. Without the God-ward disciplines of Word, prayer, fasting and solitude there is no power to give to others your gifts of serving. Trying to love others apart from the indwelling love of God is an effort in futility. The balanced life includes all the disciplines exercised in an unhurried life style. Remember, *Jesus was always focused, never frantic.*

## ***We live in an age of isolation (loneliness) The Discipline of Evangelism***

“Am I my brother's keeper?”  
“It's not my problem.”  
“What's the use?”

Jesus warned that a time would come when the world would be so wicked and opposed to truth that the “love of many would grow cold.” (Matt 24:12) Regardless of your eschatological position, it's painfully obvious such a situation is upon us. The need is so great and the opposition so formidable, our natural tendency as believers is to become silent in our faith and insulated in our communities. North America is so polarized that “Christian” is more commonly associated with politics than with Christ Himself. Believers seem to avoid rather than engage unbelievers. This must change.

Christ has called His own to reach the world with the gospel one soul at a time. The call to follow Christ is a call to seek opportunities to share Christ's gospel and the impact it's made in our lives.

Jesus continually called people to repentance. He did not minimize His message or demands. But He also welcomed sinners enthusiastically! One of the criticisms leveled at Him was that he “received” sinners and ate with them. Luke 15:2 (The word translated “received” (prosdechomai) means *to eagerly look for and welcome*. It is the very word used for *eagerly looking for Christ's coming*. See Titus 2:14 and Jude 21. It is a *positive welcoming*. Jesus was eager about engaging the lost. He calls us to the same perspective and activity.)

Not only was Jesus' attitude and demeanor positive about interacting with the lost, but He was continually hospitable towards them. *He ate with them.* It has been my experience that effective evangelism is often done around our table as we open our home and lives to the lost. Welcoming acquaintances and neighbors into our home for meals allows for deepening relationships and genuine interaction as we seek to demonstrate and communicate the love and grace of our Savior.

***How to begin?*** Let me suggest a simple process:  
***Contact... Connect... Communicate.***

*Contact:* introduce yourself and learn names. When you learn the names of your neighbors, pray for them by name, and use their names when greeting them. Show yourself friendly and demonstrate that you value them by using their names in your conversations. Most people are lonely. Genuine interest and friendship is a treasure.