

Spiritual Discipline in Chaotic Lives

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E STEPPED OFF THE ELEVATOR TOGETHER, and I could tell this CEO was angry. We had just come from a Bible study where I showed some statistics that indicated that the more successful a person was in business, the less likely they were to have a working knowledge of Scripture. During the meeting, he questioned the accuracy of my quote, then questioned the source's credentials, and finally the way the survey was conducted. Unfortunately, the data was from a reputable firm using statistically significant data. He sat sullenly through the rest of the study, then stalked out after the session.

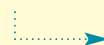
Still bothered, he waited around at the elevator until I was leaving and rode down with me. Under his left arm was that morning's *Wall Street Journal*.

"Okay, so maybe I don't know the Bible very well. In fact, maybe I don't know it at all. I object to your idea that I need to know the Bible in order to please God in my work. I'm a smart, savvy, streetwise and successful business leader. Politicians come to me for advice. Employees, customers, investors, even my competitors

want my opinion. So who are you to tell me I need the Bible to work well? I think that's a bunch of religious hooey." Pointing to his head and heart, he continued, "I've got all the stuff I need right here and here to make it in this world. Save me the Bible-babble. That's for people who can't think things through. Give me any issue, and I promise you I'll always do what I think is right."

Finished with his little tirade, he stood just inches from my face, daring me to respond.

What should I say? Do?



Scripture Passages

Luke 10:38-42

Philippians 4:8-10

John 11:21-35

Study

Prayer. Bible study. Fellowship. Rest. Fasting. Silence or solitude. These are spiritual disciplines we often yearn to incorporate into our lives. Yet many if not most of us struggle to squeeze in even one of them. In earlier studies, we've addressed balance, time management's goals, and prudent stewardship. Success in any of those areas should make it easier to have success in this area. Unfortunately, freed-up time quickly gets gobbled up by pent-up to-do lists.

The vital truth is this: We cannot wait until we have the time to do our spiritual disciplines; we must carve out the time.

Make a list of the things you really enjoy doing. What about these things brings you pleasure?

Do any of them require discipline, concentration or meticulous attention? If so, with such busy schedules, why and how do we still find time to do them?

Spiritual disciplines also require concentration and meticulous attention. How can we cultivate these traits in this area of our lives? Read Luke 10:38-42. What was the "one thing" Jesus commended Mary for choosing?

Describe the traits of Martha that you see in your life and how they interfere with your practice of the spiritual disciplines.

Now describe what your life would look like if you emulated Mary and her choice.

What changes would you need to make?

A possible road map for making these changes is offered by Paul in Philippians 4:4-9. Identify the principle or instruction from each passage:

4:4

4:6

4:6 (again)

4:7

4:8

4:9

Rejoice. Be anxious for nothing. Let God hear you voice your requests. Guarded hearts (God does the guarding, not us). Dwelling on goodness. Practice. To reinforce their importance, compare these principles found in Paul's writing in Philippians 4:4-9 with Matthew 6:9-13, the Lord's prayer.

If prayer is a petition to God, and these things can be found in the petition, then what is the source of our ability to discipline ourselves in these spiritual practices?

Read John 11:21-35 for a glimpse of Jesus' response to Mary and her heart. Can you picture Christ responding to you in this manner? Why or why not? What do you think prompted His reaction.

Sitting at the feet of Jesus, Mary was also listening. We often spend so much time speaking our needs to Him that we've forgotten to listen.

Can you remember falling in love? Squeezing in every chance to be with the object of your affection? Stealing time from other activities to increase your time together? The things that move our heart are most likely to move us to respond with actions. Seek God's aid as you follow Paul's road map to practicing the things that will give us a more intimate relationship with the Father.

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- God is the author of spiritual discipline. Until we yield our hearts to an intimate relationship with Him, spiritual discipline is a matter of willpower destined to failure.
- These spiritual discipline—fasting, prayer, Bible study, Sabbath rest, fellowship, solitude—form the basis for healthy and successful service in every area of our lives.
- The Apostle Paul in Philippians and Jesus in Matthew 6 offer the same thoughts when they describe the things a Christian's life should center on.