



AN INTRO TO THE

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*Spiritual*  
**DISCIPLINES**

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# **Welcome to An Intro to the Spiritual Disciplines**

Hello, and welcome to An Intro to the Spiritual Disciplines – I'm so glad you are joining us!

We know that to stay healthy, we need to care for our bodies by moving, fueling and resting them. Habits like good sleep, healthy eating and regular exercise help us function at our best. It's the same with our spiritual lives! Spiritual disciplines are habits Christians have practiced throughout the centuries to keep our spiritual lives healthy and help us grow closer to God. In this class, we will explore several spiritual disciplines we can practice, helping us stay in step with Jesus and grow deeper in love with our heavenly Father.

During this class, you will have an opportunity to process the information with your small group using the discussion questions developed for each session. There are also suggested exercises that you can use on your own to practice the discipline we explored that week.

I'm excited to see what God is going to do in your life as you explore the world of the spiritual disciplines!

In Him,  
Pastor Caroline

# INTRO TO THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

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## Introduction and Foundations

Class 1

**The spiritual disciplines help us develop a healthy and mature faith**

**The spiritual disciplines train us to turn our hearts toward God**

*Student: "Is there anything I can do to make myself Enlightened?"*

*Teacher: "As little as you can do to make the sun rise in the morning."*

*Student: "Then of what use are the spiritual exercises you prescribe?"*

*Teacher: "To make sure you are not asleep when the sun begins to rise."*

—Anthony de Mello

**The spiritual disciplines are not**

- A barometer of spirituality
- A way to earn favor with God
- Dull and boring

**Answering the call to follow Jesus in John 15**

- Connect to Jesus, the vine
- Fruit happens naturally
- Times of dormancy are necessary and normal
- Pruning corrects and restores

**Characteristics of wise training**

- Includes observation, direct contact and active involvement
- Respects the Holy Spirit
- Respects our unique gifts
- Respects our season in life
- Respects the mountains and valleys in life

**Ditches: Do's and Don'ts**

- Don't ignore the Holy Spirit
- Don't ignore the resources you have
- Do use your head *and* heart
- Don't fall into legalism

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## Introduction and Foundations

Class 1

### **The menu of spiritual disciplines can**

- Produce freedom
- Produce endurance
- Produce focus

### **The spiritual disciplines we'll explore in this class:**

- Prayer
- Meditation
- Fasting
- Study
- Simplicity
- Silence
- Service

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## **Important takeaways**

- Spiritual disciplines are practices to help keep our faith healthy and growing
- The disciplines help us turn our attention to God and his action in the world
- Spiritual training respects the Holy Spirit, our unique gifts and our season in life
- The disciplines produce more freedom, endurance and focus

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## Introduction and Foundations

Class 1

**Discussion  
starters  
for groups  
and  
individuals**

1

Have you ever practiced a spiritual discipline? What did you experience? How might your experience influence your expectations of the disciplines?

2

How does thinking about the disciplines as “training” differ from “trying”?

3

Which characteristic of wise spiritual training surprised you? Why?

4

Have you ever fallen into one of the “ditches”? What happened?

5

Which season do you find yourself in currently? How will that influence how you practice the disciplines?

**End your discussion time with prayer.** You may want to ask God to increase your longing to remain attached to Jesus, the vine.

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## Prayer and Meditation

Class 2

**Prayer is an essential part of our lives**

**Prayer trains us to see things from God's point of view**

**If you want to change the world, pray!**

*For we are **co-workers** in God's service ... 1 Corinthians 3:9*

### **Learning how to pray**

- From Jesus
- From leaders in the faith
- From children

### **Praying for others**

- Start small
- Feel compassion for others
- Simply ask God for what you want for the other
- Start with those people closest to you
- Float prayers toward strangers
- Pray for your enemies

### **Hints for praying**

- Schedule a time to pray and make it a priority
- Write your prayers or read them out loud
- Pray the Psalms

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## Prayer and Meditation

Class 2

**Meditation is the antidote to noise, hurry, crowds, busyness and distractions**

**Meditation trains us to listen to God**

**Christian meditation differs from Eastern meditation**

- The goal of Eastern meditation is to empty your mind and detach from the world
- The goal of Christian meditation is to detach from the noise and confusion of the world and attach to God

**Misconceptions about meditation**

- It's too complicated
- It's impractical
- It's merely deep breathing exercises

**Examples of meditation**

- Lectio divina – prayerful reading of a text, placing yourself in the story
- Centering prayer – hands down, hands up prayer

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**Important takeaways**

- Prayer trains us to see things from God's point of view
- In prayer, God meets us where we are and moves us to where we need to be
- Meditation trains us to listen to God and tune out distractions
- In meditation, we grow closer to God and experience his love

*"A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer is listening."*

—Soren Kierkegaard

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## Prayer and Meditation

## Class 2

**Discussion  
starters  
for groups  
and  
individuals**

1

What is your experience with prayer?  
How have these experiences affected  
your prayer life?

2

Do you feel prayer can be life-changing?  
Why or why not?

3

Have you prayed for yourself? Your  
family and friends? Strangers? Your  
“enemies”? Who are the easiest people  
to pray for? Why? Who are the hardest  
people to pray for? Why?

4

When have you found your greatest  
comfort in prayer? Your greatest  
challenges?

5

Have you practiced meditation? If so,  
what kinds of meditation have you tried?  
If not, why not?

6

What obstacles to meditation are  
you likely to encounter in your daily  
life? How could you deal with  
those obstacles?

**End your discussion time with prayer.** You may want to ask God to increase your longing to be in conversation with him through prayer and meditation.

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### **Fasting is a component of many faiths**

### **Biblically, fasting is abstaining from something for spiritual reasons**

- Usually done privately
- Occasionally the whole community fasted

### **Jesus assumed prayer and fasting happened together in the life of a believer**

- Fasting is an opportunity, not an obligation

### **Fasting trains us to understand what controls us**

- Fasting reminds us God is the only foundation that lasts forever
- Fasting helps us distinguish between wants and needs

### **Fasting from things other than food**

- Busyness
- Social media
- Workaholism

### **Practical hints for fasting from food**

- Start small
- Fast from lunch to lunch
- Observe your body
- Observe your emotions
- Break your fast with a light meal

### **Fasting from screens**

- Use the time to reconnect with others
- Use the time to reconsider the role of technology and social media

### Important takeaways

- The discipline of fasting always has a spiritual purpose
- Fasting trains us to understand what controls us
- Fasting opens space for God to feed us with his love





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## Study

## Class 4

### **The spiritual discipline of study is learning the truth about God and others**

*Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. John 8:31-32*

### **The spiritual discipline of study trains us to think and to discover the truth about God**

### **Studying the Bible is different from using the Bible for devotions**

- Study focuses on what the Bible means; devotions focus on what the Bible means to me

### **Steps in Bible study**

- Repetition
- Concentration
- Comprehension
- Reflection

### **The goal of Bible study isn't simply knowledge, but wisdom**

### **Six key questions for Bible study**

1. What is the author saying?
2. What does the author mean?
3. Is the author correct?
4. What is our own experience?
5. What do other sources say?
6. What does the faith community understand about the text?

### **Choosing what to study**

- Read a major book straight through
- Read a small book once a day for a week
- Trace a biblical character

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Study

Class 4

**We never graduate from learning about God!**

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## Important takeaways

- The spiritual discipline of study trains us to think and discover the truth about God
- The goal of study isn't simply knowledge, but wisdom
- Humility must be the foundation of study, for we never graduate from learning about God

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Study

Class 4

**Discussion  
starters  
for groups  
and  
individuals**

1

What images, emotions or experiences does the word study conjure for you? Were your experiences in school mostly positive or mostly negative? How will those experiences influence how you think about the spiritual discipline of study?

2

Read John 8:31-32. What do you think Jesus means when he says “knowing” the truth will “make you free? Free from what? Free for what?

3

How do patterns or habits of thought shape behavior, beliefs and values? How influential are thought patterns on behavior, beliefs and values?

4

Where have you already practiced the steps of repetition, concentration, comprehension and reflection in different areas of your life?

5

How does live discussion of a book you are reading (think book club) affect how you understand the material? Do you seek opportunities to discuss what you are reading? Why or why not? Do you enjoy discussing what you are reading with others? Why or why not?

6

Calvin Miller has written, “Mystics without study are only spiritual romantics who want relationship without effort.” What is Miller saying? Is he correct? What is Miller challenging Christians to understand about the balance between personal experience and knowledge of the truth?

**End your discussion time with prayer.** You may want to ask God to show you what truth he has for you to learn.

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## Simplicity and Solitude

Class 5

**The spiritual disciplines of simplicity and solitude allow us to assess how cluttered our lives are**

**The spiritual discipline of simplicity trains us to know where our security comes from**

- We strip away the clutter of our possessions to see them from God's perspective
- Our culture values affluence and power
- God values us for who we are, not for what we produce
- We are short-term caretakers of all God has created and continues to control

**We can serve only one master – Luke 16:13**

- We should trust God and use our money to do good – 1 Timothy 6:17-19

**God cares for us and provides the security that cannot disappear**

- We are freed from anxiety for tomorrow
- We are freed from striving to prove we are worthy
- We are freed from an obsessive need to guard what we have
- We are freed from a need to hoard for ourselves

**Simplicity principles**

- Buy for usefulness
- Understand wants and needs
- Give things away
- Avoid things that cause oppression for others

**Jesus chose solitude**

- At the beginning of his ministry
- Before big decisions
- To regain his strength

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## Simplicity and Solitude

Class 5

### **The spiritual discipline of solitude and silence trains us that we are not alone**

- We strip away the clutter of crowds and noise to listen to God's still small voice

### **Jesus chose solitude**

- At the beginning of his ministry
- Before big decisions
- To regain his strength

### **The discipline of solitude and silence teaches us to control when we speak and when we stay silent**

### **Movements into solitude and silence**

- Little moments during the day
- A quiet space to simply breathe and listen

*"It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness  
with which I can truly love my brothers."*

—Thomas Merton

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## **Important takeaways**

- The disciplines of simplicity and solitude help us declutter
- Simplicity trains us to focus on where our true security lies
- The goal of simplicity is to discover we are valued for who we are, not what we produce
- Solitude trains us to know we are not alone
- The goal of solitude and silence is to tune into God's voice

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## Simplicity and Solitude

Class 5

**Discussion  
starters  
for groups  
and  
individuals**

1

What images or emotions does the word “simplicity” conjure for you? Are there legalistic or ascetic overtones? Does the word have to do only with possessions or are there other areas of our lives to which God calls us to simplicity?

2

What things most often get in the way of you living out a simplicity of spirit?

3

How do you think practicing the discipline of simplicity would affect your attitudes and behavior regarding possessions?

4

How would you define “solitude” in your own words? What kinds of positive and negative images come to mind with the word “solitude”?

5

When have you experienced periods of solitude that provided an inner fulfillment or stillness?

**End your discussion time with prayer.** You may want to ask God to show you what areas of life you need to declutter.

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## Service

## Class 6

**The world is preoccupied with who will rule, have position and wield power**

**Jesus has a different vision of greatness and power**

- John 13:2-5
- John 13:12-15
- Matthew 20:25-28

**Service trains us in humility**

**Motivation of the heart**

- Whose agenda?
- Who gets the recognition?
- What rewards are expected?
- What is the bottom line?
- What is the role of our feelings?

**Types of service**

- The service of small things
- The service of hospitality
- The service of listening
- The service of courtesy
- The service of guarding the reputation of others

*“Not all of us can do great things,  
but we can do small things with great love.”  
—Mother Teresa*

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**Important takeaways**

- The spiritual discipline of service trains us in humility
- The goal of service is freedom from our pride and arrogance

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Service

Class 6

**Discussion  
starters  
for groups  
and  
individuals**

1

How would you define the discipline of service? How does our society view service? How does Jesus define service?

2

Reread John 13:1-17. What stands out to you in this passage? What challenges you? What comforts you?

3

How comfortable are you with the idea of serving others? What experiences have influenced your answer?

4

In your life, where do you need to remember the difference between self-righteous motivations and true servant motivations?

5

What kinds of service are you already practicing in your daily life? What other areas of service would you like to explore?

**End your discussion time with prayer.** You may want to ask God to show you where he is calling you to serve.

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925 Jordan Creek Parkway | West Des Moines, Iowa 50266 | (515) 222-1520 | [hopewdm.org](http://hopewdm.org)