



by Justin McCorkle

# Building Godly HABITS



# Foreword

Have you ever set a goal to accomplish some task or achieve some personal benchmark? Most of us have and many times we even achieve our goal. But what happens after that? Oftentimes we lose whatever progress we had made because our goal, once completed, is no longer a consideration. So, how do we affect lasting change in our lives?

Aristotle says, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit." We need to build habits into our lives in order to have lasting change. Runners have long used this tactic to build endurance training into their normal schedules. By knowing that days of the week and what distances they will run they will pass by their goals and still continue to improve. It becomes a lifestyle rather than a temporary effort.

Christians can learn from the principles of habit building. Godliness in our life is attained through forming better habits that will stand the test of time. This study book will consider habits that build godliness, how to incorporate them into our lives, and what the specific benefits of each habit is. I pray that this work will be a blessing to you as you run the road of faith and help build the endurance necessary to reach our heavenly home!

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." (Luke 9:23)



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# How to Build Habits

## IN PREPARATION...

### Mark 7:14-23

Does the thing that goes into a man defile him?


Where does the thing that goes into a man "not go"?


What things that does Jesus mention that defile a man?


What is the point that Jesus is making?


Before our faith in Christ we sinned as a matter of habit. Since the moment we put Christ on in baptism (Galatians 3:26-27) we have been striving to unlearn our old ways and point our path toward truth.

*"Put away from you a deceitful mouth and put devious speech far from you. Let your eyes look directly ahead and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right nor to the left; turn your foot from evil." (Proverbs 4:24-27)*

Now it is time to turn the tables on our bad habits by replacing them with good ones.

We are about to embark on a study of 11 different habits you can put into your life in order to build a stronger faith and increase your joy in Christ. Some of them may be things you are already doing while others may seem difficult to implement. In this introductory lesson we will consider a few tips that can help to make these habits a part of your regular life.

### **Commit to a trial schedule.**

Some of the habits we are going to look to are daily habits while others are meant to be less frequent. Regardless, if you want a habit to stick then it is a good idea to commit to a trial schedule to try it out. Usually a time period of about one month is to find out if a daily habit is worth keeping and to form that habit as a part of your schedule.

It is said that it takes 30-40 days to form a habit but only seven days to break one. Committing to a trial schedule of

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about a month will give you time to get used to doing the activity and will also give you time to start seeing the impact of the activity on your life. In other words, run your trial period as an experiment to see if the activity is even worth keeping to you!

## **Give yourself reminders.**

Some of us are more forgetful than others, and some of us can't function without constant reminders. After committing to a trial schedule build reminders into your day so that the activity will be accomplished. Phone alerts and post it notes in strategic locations are a couple of ways you can bring the activity to mind. Do not depend on your memory!

## **Get a friend's help.**

*"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)*

Someone who is trying to do the same thing as you can pick you up when you are slacking off, and you can do the same for them. You will be much more likely to stick with the habit if someone else agrees to work through the trial schedule with you. A quick daily correspondence via email or text message is a great way to keep tabs on one another's progress.

## **Don't give up when you mess up.**

Striving for perfection is great but it has one drawback: When you slip up it can be so demoralizing that you give up altogether on what you were trying to accomplish. Building a trial schedule is essential to building a habit, but you will most likely fail to keep your schedule perfectly. Don't give up when that happens! The habit can still be formed and good can still be accomplished in your life even if you miss a couple of times. It is important to simply press on the next day and forget about the times you have missed.

Building a habit is a mental game you are playing with yourself. Moments of failures are perfect opportunities for your mind to convince you to give up. However, pressing

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forward at those times is a great way to show your fortitude and beat your mind at its own game.

## **Focus on the benefits.**

With such busy lives we are often like Martha being focused too much on the inconsequential. And what does Jesus say? "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things..." (Luke 10:41) You may think that building these habits into your life is not worth the effort it takes to see it through.

However, each of these habits have proven to be of great spiritual benefit to Christians. Each can improve your outlook on life, ability to resist temptation, and aid you in your spiritual walk. Therefore, when struggling with implementing these habits focus on the benefits you will receive if you see it through. Answer the negativity in your mind with reasons that reflect the good you are going to receive!

## **Measure the impact.**

*"That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." (Mark 7:20-23)*

Purity of heart is a great goal for anyone. Jesus longs for us to be converted within. Each of these habits has the potential for helping that goal to be attained in your life.

Maybe you will not make every one of these activities lasting habits. While some are essential, others are simply beneficial and you will not necessarily fall away or lose your soul if you do not do each of them. But giving an honest assessment to each habit will enable you to identify those which are most beneficial to you. You can adopt those!



Lesson 1

# How to Build Habits

Why is it so difficult to build new habits?

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What are the benefits of committing to a trial period to try out a new habit?

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Where do the things come from that defile a man? With that in mind, how can forming new habits help us?

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Who is going to be your friend to help put these habits into place? How are you going to communicate and how often?

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## Lesson 2

# Daily Prayer

### IN PREPARATION...

#### Luke 11:1-13

What are the main divisions of Jesus' model prayer?

  
  

In Jesus' parable what leads the friend to give the loaves?

  
  

He who asks, \_\_\_\_\_.

  
  

If you know how to give good gifts to your children, then:

  
  

Prayer has always been a staple in the daily life of God's people. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and virtually all of the prophets are shown to be people of prayer. Yet, despite this, prayer can be a difficult habit for some people to form. There are various reasons that different people struggle with praying regularly but it is certainly a struggle that many Christians share.

A great model of habitual prayer is found in Daniel. When his enemies conspired to pass a law criminalizing prayer to any besides the king, Daniel shows that nothing would cause him to depart from this godly habit.

*"Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously." (Daniel 6:10)*

For the sake of this lesson we will be discussing building a habit of one intent prayer per day. Obviously having a more frequent prayer schedule, as Daniel did, is even better, but for the one who is struggling to build this habit we may presume that once per day is a great start and a worthwhile habit to form. As we consider this prayerful habit, let us first consider what it is that we are seeking to achieve.

### **The Power of Prayer**

Prayer, especially as we are considering it, refers to far more than simply repeating some lines or mindlessly speaking some phrase to check off our daily list. It is not position of body or time of day that holds relevance to us, either.

Consider the mindset of Hannah:



# Daily Prayer

*"Now it came about, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli was watching her mouth. As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. So Eli thought she was drunk... But Hannah replied, 'No, my lord, I am a woman oppressed in spirit... but I have poured out my soul before the LORD.'" (1 Samuel 1:12-15)*

We see from this godly woman that prayer does not need to be announced loudly or performed in some specific way in order for it to be valid. Rather, it is 'pouring out our souls before the Lord.' Prayer is a blessing given to us by our God in which we are able to spiritually approach His throne and lay ourselves out before Him.

This avenue of approaching our God is soothing to our souls. Religious people around the world reap the therapeutic benefits of pausing to speak to their own gods and speak to the silence around them. Yet, prayer holds greater benefits for the Christian as well. James says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." (James 5:16) Our prayers are effective and heard by God. When we speak before His throne we are to know that He hears and will respond appropriately.

## **God Wants to Hear from You**

More than that, we must also understand that God desires to hear from us. The Law of Moses states, "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry." (Exodus 22:22-23) God is waiting to hear from His creation and will be quick to answer those that are wronged in whatever way is best. Many find it easy to pray when times turn to trouble in this way. That is not to be discouraged, but all the more encouraged and also when times are good.

Our God desires to hear from us and that is why His inspired word is so replete with prayers and exhortations to pray. Small or great matters or simply prayers of thanksgiving are welcomed by our God. His Son died so that He could gain a relationship and fellowship with you. He intends, then, to hear from you often as His child.

# Daily Prayer

## **How to Pray**

It is useful to consider how it is we are to be praying. While there is much that can be said about this topic we will first consider the 'when and where' of it. Jesus repeatedly shows an example of seeking solitude and stillness to pray. "In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there." (Mark 1:35, plus many others) It is worth mentioning that we can pray at any time or place such as in the car, on an elevator, or in our homes. However, for the purposes of this study and a once daily, purposeful prayer, it is good to find a time of solitude if only for a few moments.

What should we be praying about during this time? It is good to consider Jesus' model prayer in Luke 11:1-4 where God is exalted, thanked, His mercy entreated, and care requested. Paul instructs as to the heart we should have toward God saying, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." (Colossians 4:2) If you find yourself turning to your daily prayer and have no thought of what to say, merely consider all that you are thankful for spiritually and physically, today and in general, now and in the future. There is surely much to pray about if we are sincere in speaking to God.

## **Prayer as a Habit**

"Now [Jesus] was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart..." (Luke 18:1) Making prayer a part of our daily routine can be as simple as devoting a few minutes in the confines of our bathrooms in quietness during our morning ritual. Or it can be a moment where the entire family sits quietly to speak to God in the evenings before bed. To make this a lasting habit for you, simply identify a time that you can make it consistently fit and spend those moments talking with God.

Spending time praying daily will not only help you to feel closer to God, it will also actually make you closer to Him. Speaking to Him daily will help you to always remember that He is near during moments of praise and those of temptation.



Lesson 2

# Daily Prayer

Why is Daniel a great model of habitual prayer?

How did Hannah explain the purpose of her prayer?

What leads us to believe that God wants to hear from us?

How can you incorporate a daily, heartfelt, prayer into your routine?

# A Scripture a Day

## IN PREPARATION...

### Psalm 119:9-24

How can a young man keep his way pure?


“Open my eyes...”  
For what reason?


Who does God rebuke?


What is David’s primary counselor?


“Jesus said to them, ‘Did you never read in the Scriptures...’” (Matthew 21:42) The Jews had read the Scriptures, but Jesus was trying to draw their minds to a teaching they had overlooked or disregarded. It is good to recognize that the Son of God assumed that those desiring to be God’s people would have a working knowledge of the Bible.

God’s people should be well versed in Scripture and have an understanding of its teachings. How else can we “always [be] ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence”? (1 Peter 3:15) Despite this fact, many Christians struggle with prioritizing Bible study into their lives. The goal for this lesson is to build a habit of daily Bible study.

### Appreciating What We Have

Perhaps we struggle to read and reflect regularly because we do not truly appreciate the blessing we have to own copies of Scripture. These texts, we are told by inspired men who died for their teachings, are delivered by God through His chosen prophets. Peter writes, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) We are reading words from the mind of God when we open the Bible. Nowhere else can we find such wisdom and guidance!

Great efforts have been made throughout the centuries to learn these writings by those who did not own them and to

# A Scripture a Day

reprint the words by those who desired to spread them. There was a time when it was not uncommon for the only copy of the completed Scripture to be owned by the local church and Christians would take turns studying from it. Each copy of the Bible had to be made by hand. The primary motivation of Johannes Gutenberg for inventing the printing press was to spread the word of God. Many died to carry the Bible to places where rulers had forbidden it. How blessed are we to have such easy access to it? Every home has a copy or more, it can be downloaded for free onto smart phones and tablets, and most are now capable of reading! Instead of taking this for granted we ought to rejoice that we have the opportunity!

## **What Scripture Does for You**

The Bible is not meant to be purely intellectual. That is to say, simply having a knowledge of its teachings is not beneficial by itself. The inspired word is meant to bring about an understanding that helps us to change our lives to live more in accordance with the divine will.

*"How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night." (Psalm 1:1-2)*

God's word gives us much to "delight" in. It imparts wisdom to deal with life's trials and temptations, gives counsel for our path, gives comfort to the weary, and teaches of salvation to the lost. It, then, is reasonable for David to have announced, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105)

Spending time daily in Bible study will help the word to be firmly planted within our hearts so that its teachings become natural to us. We are striving to renew our minds so that God's thoughts are our thoughts and His ways are our ways. (Romans 12:1-2) This does not happen without spending a great deal of time, over time, with our minds in His word.

## **Reading with Purpose**

One mistake Christians often make in Bible study, particularly in daily study, is to give

# A Scripture a Day

a cursory reading to the text, checking off their requirement, and moving on with their day. There is far more to be gained from our daily readings if we will invest the time afterward to reflect upon what we have read. "I will meditate on Your precepts and regard Your ways." (Psalm 119:115) It can actually be more beneficial to read less Scripture per day if we invest the time afterward to reflect upon what we have studied. For instance, if I read three chapters but lose focus and fail to reflect upon what I have read, I will make quicker progress through whatever reading program I am doing. However, if I would have read one chapter but spent time afterwards thinking about the words, their meaning, and what I can learn from them I will have gained greater understanding and direction for my life. Of course, this is not to discourage reading greater amounts, but simply to illustrate the need for reflection after daily Bible study.

## **Little by Little**

If you have struggled in the past with dedicating time to a daily Scripture there are a few tips that may help you to finally incorporate this habit into your life. First, set a time for Scripture every day. It could be during your morning coffee or just before you go to bed or any other time that you can consistently do. Having this as part of your routine will increase the likelihood of you accomplishing it.

Secondly, assign an easy reading schedule for yourself, especially at the beginning. You may find that you have difficulty reading multiple chapters per day or, maybe, even one single chapter. Do not be discouraged. Simply lighten your load as you build the happen. One verse thoroughly considered is of greater value than an entire book that you failed to read.

Be sure to contemplate the words of the passage. Ask yourself who wrote them, why, what impact the author was hoping for and what their meaning was, and what may be applicable to you today. Deeper and richer meaning is sure to be found by those who make contemplation as much of a priority as Bible reading itself!

"Great are the works of the LORD; They are studied by all who delight in them." (Psalm 111:2) May the Lord help us to cultivate hearts that love His word and build this godly habit of daily Scripture study into our lives.



Lesson 3

# A Scripture a Day

What are two reasons that we should be grateful for having the Bible today?

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Why should we delight in God's word?

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Why might it potentially be better to read less of the Scripture during our daily study time?

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What time of day is best for you to incorporate a daily study? Explain the reading or study plan you are going to follow while trying to build this habit.

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# Meditation

## IN PREPARATION...

### Philippians 4:4-14

What should we be anxious for? Why?


What will guard our hearts and minds if we take Paul's advice?


What should we dwell on?


When could Paul be content?


We are westerners raised in a western society with a western culture. We read the Scriptures with a western mindset. However, Christianity is an eastern religion. This oft ignored truth has contributed to the loss of some customs that were formerly a normal part of Christianity. One of the habits that Christians have forgotten is that of meditation.

One early example of meditation is that of Isaac meditating in the field. (Genesis 24:63) It is spoken of as a normal practice with little explanation given. This action was apparently typical during Isaac's day and hundreds of years later when Moses was writing for the Jews. We know that the early Christians were partaking in this practice, also. One writes,

*"Being of noble character, the one who is intimate with God gives himself to meditation. And he retains in his soul the permanent energy of the very thing he meditates about. he possesses the most precious thing of all—keen perception of the Divine. He strives to his utmost to acquire this power by controlling all outside influences that attack his mind. He ponders and meditates without ceasing."* (Clement of Alexandria, *Intimacy with God*, c. 150-200)

Let us consider meditation, its benefits, and how we can make it a daily habit.

### **Understanding Meditation**

Many people are confused about what meditation is. The thought is in many minds that you need to sit in a temple and hum loudly in order to meditate. In truth, meditation is a training of the mind to focus on a single idea or concept while silencing distracting thoughts. The early church viewed



# Meditation

Philippians 4:8 to be a literal reference to meditation and taught it as such.

*“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell [meditate- NKJV] on these things.”*

Depending upon the process one is using, it can be difficult to distinguish meditating from the prayer time of Lesson 2 or the Scripture contemplation of Lesson 3.

However, the topic deserves its own lesson so that it can be more fully explained that the nature of meditation is more conscious and less distracted than simply sitting and thinking.

## **Planting Yourself on Holiness**

Meditation can help bring a calmness to your mind and a foundation from which you can put all else during the day into perspective, emotionally especially. Some see the words of Psalm 46:10 to be a reference to meditation: “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (NKJV) “Be still” carries with it the idea of calming oneself to reflect. It may be an exhortation of God for His people to pause and meditate on this fact: He will be exalted among all of the nations.

This shows us a great benefit of meditating. It allows us to calm our minds and hearts and ignore the distracting thoughts which would argue against God’s truth. If we, daily, focus our minds on a central truth-- something that is of God-- we will have an emotional base from which to operate throughout the rest of our day. Meditation, in other words, is not only beneficial to our mental state in the moment but during the entire day.

## **How to Meditate**

Many people claim their minds are too busy to meditate well. ‘There are too many thoughts in my head,’ they say. This is actually evidence that one is in great need of meditation. Technically, you “practice” meditation when you form this habit. That is to say, you will improve at it with time. It will likely be difficult to keep your mind focused

# Meditation

for very long at all in the beginning but your ability will increase as you practice. You may want to begin with a short time period of about 5 minutes and work your way to more as you are able. Here are some practical tips for meditation:

Focus on your breathing in order to gain a rhythm in your thinking. Then, once the mind and body are calmed, begin contemplating the thought which will be your focal point.

Focus on a single thought. As an example, consider Psalm 145:5: "On the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wonderful works, I will meditate." The focal point of your meditation could be the splendor of God and His wonderful works.

Try to silence your mind of all other thoughts. When your mind drifts, bring it back. Practicing meditation will, over time, enable you to remain focused for longer and longer periods of time. Do not become discouraged if the first few attempts are difficult and your mind wanders more than you would like. Just call it back to focus as soon as you realize what has happened and continue.

## **Making Time**

Does it seem like meditation would be impossible to work into your schedule? Keep this in mind; It is not so much about escaping from life as it is about preparing yourself for the day or centering your thoughts again after the day has ended. Spending just a few minutes on conscious, focused, thinking can do far more good than you may now realize. This is certainly a habit that can increase godliness if you allow it to become a part of your life.



Lesson 4

# Meditation

What early Christian speaks about meditation? Summarize his explanation.

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What is the purpose of meditation?

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Give some simple tips to help begin the practice of meditating.

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What are the greatest obstacles to your daily meditation? How can you work around those obstacles?

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# Self-Improvement to Go

## IN PREPARATION...

### Ephesians 5:11-17

What should we do with the deeds of darkness?


What should the "sleeper" do?


How should we walk?


Why should we make the most of our time?


We are a people on the go. Is it not ironic that we now have the technology to travel such great distances so quickly and yet we now spend more time traveling than ever before? Many people drive more than an hour each way to work every day! Then, to make up for all of this time we spend sitting, many people invest a great deal of time to exercise to keep their bodies capable of moving well.

And what happens to all of this time? It is gone and never to be regained. Of course, it is not a waste of time to drive to work nor to spend time staying fit. Thankfully, we are also blessed with the technology to make good use of the time we spend 'on the go.' In this lesson we will be discussing habits that we can build into our schedule to make great use out of the time we spend traveling to increase our spiritual strength and wisdom.

### Using Smart Phones Smartly

Within most of our pockets is a computer with access to the entirety of human knowledge. It's almost like Star Trek has come to life. These devices can be a great asset to the Christian's efforts to make good use of their time.

*"The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb." (Psalm 19:9-10)*

We are to love the word to God as His children. It should be more desirable to us than gold. Our smart-phones give us unprecedented access to it if we so desire. Here are a few ways we can use our phones to access spiritual material:

# Self-Improvement to Go

Sermon Videos- Many churches, including ours, put sermons online. Mauriceville.org will give you access to the past several years of lessons that have been recorded here including those from gospel meetings and special series.

Audio Bibles- You no longer need to buy CDs in order to hear Scripture read aloud. Some websites will stream readings for free and sites such as Amazon sell audio versions of the Bible that can download right to your phone.

Podcasts- Podcasts are talk shows you can subscribe to for free. Anyone can make a podcast so there are shows related to virtually every subject matter. You can find spiritually minded talk shows for encouragement as well as discussions on world religions, science, and any other topic you would like to become more familiar with.

## **Time Redeemed**

We are a busy people and yet so much of our time is wasted by purposely distracting ourselves. A good example of this is found during driving. While there may be nothing wrong with listening music on the radio (with some of it, anyways) perhaps we could sometimes reinvest that time in self-improvement. The same thing is true during exercise. I formerly would listen to music every time I went for a run. Then I discovered podcasts. Now, it is as though my body and mind are both getting a workout at the same time. Once we start reclaiming our "on the go" time and making it more productive we will realize how much growth we have been missing out on.

*"Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil." (Ephesians 5:15-16)*

While this principle may be applied in modern times with new technology, we see that spiritually minded people have often sought to maximize the time spent traveling. The Ethiopian was studying his bible and even heard the gospel preached all while traveling down the road. (Acts 8:27-28) Instead of wasting an hour on worldly music or political talk shows, why not plug in your phone and listen to spiritual and self-improving thoughts? The same can be true for your time spend jogging, walking, or biking.

# Self-Improvement to Go

## **Apps, Tips, and Tricks**

For those that may not know, here are a few instructions for getting started on using your smart phone to access these types of materials.

To listen to podcasts you will need to download the Podcasts app. Once that app is on your phone you can open it and search for any topics. Simply read the show descriptions and subscribe to those you are interested in.

One way to listen to audio books and bibles is to download the Kindle app onto your phone. Once you have that app you can order Kindle books off of Amazon.com and it will appear on your phone within minutes. Then simply open the app and push play.

To listen to sermons online simply open your phones web-browser and navigate to the church's website, [mauriceville.org](http://mauriceville.org). Once there, select on the sermon you'd like to hear and push play.

You can use an auxiliary cable to connect your phone to your car's vehicle if the car is a recent year model or if you have a newer aftermarket radio installed. This is the safest way to travel and listen. You will hear whatever is playing through your car's speaker system.

Building the habit of seeking self-improvement during times of travel or exercise will make you feel more productive and help maintain spiritual focus while also likely teaching something you've never known. It won't be long before getting into the car and turning on the radio just seems like a waste of time!



Lesson 5

# Self-Improvement to Go

What should be a Christian's great desire more-so than gold?

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What are a few options available to us through smartphones to learn on the go?

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Who is one example of a spiritually minded man studying Scripture while traveling?

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What are some websites, books, or podcasts that you would be interested in listening to while driving or exercising?

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# A Song in Your Heart

## IN PREPARATION...

### Deuteronomy

31:16-22

What did God say would happen?


What was the purpose of the song?


When would the song be forgotten?


Who wrote the song and taught it to the people?


Sometimes children are able to teach adults great lessons and habits. My children taught me to value a habit that I did not consider as much before they were born; the benefit of having a song in your heart. And not just any song, but a spiritual song. Many times their small voices have filled the house with songs of praise to God that have caused spiritual thoughts to linger for some time afterward.

Humans are musical creatures. We do not all have wonderful voices or perfect pitch and timing, but we all love to have a song in our hearts. What if we the song we were humming was spiritual and encouraging? So many of the songs the world offers up to us teach ungodly lesson. But who says we have to allow them to dictate what song we sing? This lesson will consider the godly habit of listening to spiritual songs and receiving from them the encouragement to godliness they offer.

### A Nation of Singers

Christians have been a singing people from the beginning. Our spiritual lineage shows us the value of singing. On the night He was betrayed and immediately after the last supper we read, "After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." (Matthew 26:30) Our Master Himself shows us the value of song.

The early church was singing from the very beginning as well, receiving instruction to do so from the apostles. (Colossians 3:16) Praise in song does not end on earth, either. The heavenly throne scene of Revelation 5:9 records the angelic host singing "a new song" as John observes.

Whether armies marching to battle or sailors on the waves,



# A Song in Your Heart

humans are singers. Good voice or not, when we blend voices in melody we find joy and motivation to press on. And Christians are chiefs among singers and always have been.

## **The Benefits of Spiritual Songs**

Songs are memorable. It is incredible how well we can remember song lyrics and how long they remain with us. That being the case, we can use songs to help spiritual principles to remain in our minds. The Lord used Moses' song in this way. God instructs him,

*"Now therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, so that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel.... Then it shall come about, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify before them as a witness (for it shall not be forgotten from the lips of their descendants); for I know their intent which they are developing today, before I have brought them into the land which I swore."* (Deuteronomy 31:19-22)

The Lord knows the power of songs in our minds. We ought to know it as well in order to protect our minds from the influence of depraved music and to be wise enough to fill it with godly words.

Spiritual songs are also encouraging to the struggling soul. A man who knew great struggle is the apostle Paul. During one such difficulty he found himself imprisoned with Silas over another ludicrous charge. What is one to do? "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;" (Acts 16:25) Their spirits were lifted through prayer and song and they even lifted the spirits of the people around them! What great examples for us all!

Song is an outlet for the heart and any emotion. James says, "Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises." (James 5:13) It doesn't have to just be in the assembly. In fact, we can do another good by singing outside of the assembly of the saints; we teach our children to love worship. When we assemble to praise God as brethren it should not be separate from the rest of the week but an outgrowth of our lives during the week. If we show our children our faith every day then worship will make much more sense to

# A Song in Your Heart

them. If we sing spiritual hymns during our normal lives then our singing during the assembly will seem natural to them. Our faith should be a joyous one. Let the song on your lips show the people around the joy in your heart.

## **Incorporating Spiritual Songs**

But how can we incorporate spiritual songs into our lives? Some envision that this means that any other music they enjoy is lost to the bins of history. The point is not that we should incorporate spiritual hymns to the exclusion of any other but only that we should incorporate these songs habitually into our normal lives due to the benefit that singing in this way can bring to us. Here are a couple of ideas on how to do that.

Have you ever been on your way to a stressful day to the point that you were almost dreading what was ahead of you? What an excellent opportunity to sing songs of praise and glory as a reminder of who you are and who God is. What stresses in this mortal life are worthy to be compared to the hope we have in Christ?

Are you worried about the influences your children are going to be around when you drop them off at school? Perhaps spending the travel time on the way by talking about spiritual things and singing hymns that can help them to start their day off with a godly mindset. I am sure you can imagine many more opportunities to uplift yourself and others with godly hymns. Why not make it a habit?

## **Listening Options and Opportunities**

There are many options available to Christians for spiritual songs. We make CDs of our annual singings and several vendors offer college and professional singings. Another option is to stream songs from our website ([mauriceville.org](http://mauriceville.org)) or other sites such as the Kleinwood congregation ([kleinwood.com](http://kleinwood.com)). If you are using your phone you can play the singings through your car stereo!

Put a song in your heart of praise and encouragement. You may find that this habit becomes a wonderful addition to your life.

# A Song in Your Heart

How long have Christians been singing? Give Scripture with your answer.

What are some of the benefits of spiritual songs in our lives?

What benefit can children in particular benefit from our regular singing of spiritual songs?

What are some ways you can incorporate spiritual hymns into your daily life? What benefits do you think would come from it?

# Spiritual Speech

**IN PREPARATION...**

**Colossians 4:2-6**

What should they devote themselves to?


What does Paul request prayers for?


Who are "outsiders" what how should we act toward them?


Describe the Christian's speech.


What comes out of our lips is an indication of what is in our hearts. Sometimes, though, spiritually minded people hide themselves away from the world and fail to allow the tongue to utter the spiritual thoughts within. This lesson is about changing that habit. We can become people who speak spiritual truth to the world around us and do so in a way that may help our fellow man turn their thoughts to God and perhaps come to the truth.

**Speaking Spiritually**

What exactly do we mean by "spiritual speech"? Basically, the idea is that we can form into a habit the action of making spiritual observations a normal part of our speech. When you think of great Christians of the past and present, do you picture people who speak openly and confidently about their faith or those who walk around being overly careful not to say spiritual things lest they be misunderstood or mocked? It seems that Christians are often times afraid to speak about the truth of God lest someone be offended. But why? It doesn't take much observation to recognize the destruction and sorrow brought about by sin. Why should we be ashamed to speak The Way when most are on a path that leads to suffering?

Our mindset should be closer to that of the apostles. Paul says of them, "For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God." (2 Corinthians 2:17) We are not peddlers doing something to be ashamed of. We are just trying to lovingly aid the people around us with truth. If we make spiritual speech a habit we may be surprised at how many people could be positively affected.

# Spiritual Speech

## **Influencing Others**

We often underestimate the amount of influence we have on others as well as the amount of influence we could have if God's word was on our lips. If we speak spiritual words on a regular basis we will increase the amount of spiritual influence we have in others lives. This a great thing both for those we speak with and for the Kingdom. People with godly convictions and who wear them proudly are likely to become spiritual leaders to the people who have regular contact with them.

Evangelism is certainly benefitted by those who speak spiritually by habit. The greatest at this ability is Jesus Himself. He often was able to take casual conversation and turn it to a spiritual one. One example is seen in His conversation with the woman at the well:

*"There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give Me a drink.' ... Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?' ... Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.'" (John 4:7-10)*

For Jesus, nearly everything had a spiritual lesson waiting to be revealed.

Making spiritual speech an action of habit has another benefit in that it turns the table on sin. It seems that our society is always more accepting of ungodliness being in the open while requiring Christians to keep quiet. Why should we allow them to keep us from lovingly making spiritual observations? The word of God is given "so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:17) Why should we not speak of it often?

## **Opportunities for Spiritual Speech**

We are confronted with many opportunities for speaking truth but we may be conditioned to pass them up. Have you ever heard a person lamenting their bad day? That is an opportunity to speak words of grace about thankfulness, the God of comforts, and perseverance. Have you heard someone speaking about their spouse in an unflattering way? That is an opportunity to teach on the principles of love and

# Spiritual Speech

family responsibilities. Have you heard someone speaking of their great desire for something like nicer cars or houses? That is an opportunity to speak about contentment and the vanity of physical things.

Each of these are opportunities to allow God's wisdom to supplant the wisdom of men. If we choose our words wisely we will not seem like critics of others but like encouraging students of Christ. Then, when something more serious arises, to whom will that person likely go to talk? You will have already shown yourself to be spiritually minded.

## **Building the Habit**

This is a difficult habit to build because it cannot simply be put into the schedule and checked off. Rather, it is about changing our entire attitude about speaking spiritual things. Here are a few pieces of advise that can aid anyone who wants this to be a habit.

First of all, pray for boldness. The apostles new this to be beneficial in their speaking: *"praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak."* (Colossians 4:3-4)

We would be wise to speak to our heavenly Father first for the strength and wisdom to do this.

Next, put God's word in your heart through diligent study. Jeremiah, a great prophet of God, found that he was not emotionally able to contain the word of God within him even when he wanted to!

*"But if I say, 'I will not remember Him Or speak anymore in His name,' then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it."* (Jeremiah 20:9)

Lastly, strive to say what you are thinking in a loving way. We should always be those who are "speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." (Ephesians 4:15)

Are you proud to be a Christian? If so, be proud to speak about the spiritual truth of God and build a habit of doing so!



Lesson 7

# Spiritual Speech

What is the “spiritual speech” referred to in this lesson?

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What things are likely to come about if we make spiritual speech a habit?

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What are some opportunities for spiritual speech that you have seen with people in the community?

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What are some methods we could use to build spiritual speech into a habit?

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# 15 Minutes with Your Spouse

## IN PREPARATION...

**1 Corinthians**

**13:1-8**

If I don't have love, what?


What is it to act unbecomingly?


Love "bears all things." Explain.


Explain how love "hopes all things."


15 minutes flies by before we know it. I have often hit the snooze button on my alarm for longer than 15 minutes. Yet, 15 minutes per day devoted to conversation with our spouse can be a marriage-changing habit despite how easy it sounds. Dustin Reichmann has written a book called 15 Minute Marriage Makeover which is available from any book store. After listening to an interview with this man on a podcast, I realized the value of this primary point of investing 15 minutes into distraction-free conversation with my spouse every day. After spending some time on this idea in my own home I am now more convinced than ever of its validity.

This lesson will consider starting a daily habit of spending 15 minutes in conversation with our spouse, the benefits of this habit, and how to successfully implement this habit in order to gauge its impact in your own home.

### **Time Devoted to Conversation**

The odds are that you and your spouse spent a great deal of time just talking when you were first spending time together. I can recall sitting on the phone for hours with the woman who is now my wife. Granted, we were getting to know one another and finding out things that we did not already know, but the truth is that much of what was said could be called 'sweet little nothings.' As one passage says, "How beautiful you are, my darling, how beautiful you are! Your eyes are like doves." (Song of Songs 1:15) There was a time when we communicated just because we wanted to be communicating. We can get some of that back.



# 15 Minutes with Your Spouse

We are discussing the idea of having 15 minutes set aside to simply talk every day. There is a word of caution that needs to be given, though. This time is meant to spend talking, not arguing. Sometimes we get into such communication ruts that we do not feel like we can talk without arguing. For this 15 minute habit, especially starting out, some passages should be remembered to encourage us to keep it upbeat. Solomon says, "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute." (Proverbs 15:18) And again we read, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions." (Proverbs 10:12) This 15 minute habit is meant to open the doors of communication in order to build anew the relationship. It is important that it not become an outlet time for wrath.

Someone who is stuck in the cycle of anger may wonder how to have a conversation that is not fierce in nature. One idea is for both parties to take this time to tell their story- of their day, week, etc. In other words, the conversation during this time can be about anything and it is a good time for you and your spouse to just get to understand one another's day.

## **A Little Time with a Big Impact**

Did you know that "communication problems" is cited as one of the biggest complaints in marriages? And it is easy to understand why. When we are feeling negative toward each other communication tends to be negative. Add on to that the fact that we have known each other so long that we may feel like there is nothing new to know and it is a recipe for silence.

Men are encouraged, "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth." (Proverbs 5:18) While there are undertones of this passage which refer to the physical relationship in marriage, the primary thought of this verse is for men to find joy in the woman that they married when they were young and not to grow bored or discontent with her. Can 15 minutes a day help men, or women, to find more joy in their spouse? You may be surprised at the answer! Since communication problems are the greatest complaint in marriages, then improving communication in this small way will likely yield tremendous results in your home.

# 15 Minutes with Your Spouse

## **Investing a Little**

Does it seem daunting to fulfill an obligation to communicate for 15 minutes? Do not feel as though a script is needed. If you need help getting the habit started it can be helpful just to talk about each other's days (as was mentioned earlier), plans that you may have in mind for upcoming days, hopes for the future, or anything at all!

the thing is, while small things will sometimes be the sole conversation, these small thoughts will often time lead to big thoughts. Many important and family evolving conversations have begun in simple exchanges. In my own home we have found this to be true.

## **Making it Happen**

There are a few basic tips for incorporating this 15 minute talk into your marriage. First of all, agree on a time to have this conversation. The evenings may be preferable especially if you have young children in the home. We wait until the kids are asleep so that there will be fewer distractions. Turn off the television for the same reason.

Our goal is to build stronger marriages. God has joined us to our mate. If we can increase one another's joy through dedicating a mere 1% of our time to this habit then it is certainly something worth trying out!

# 15 Minutes with Your Spouse

How does Song of Songs remind us of the interest couples initially share in one another?

What should the 15 minutes of this habit NOT be spent doing? How can it be avoided?

What is one of the most oft cited marriage complaints? How can this 15 minutes change that?

Will you encourage the couples you know to try dedicating this 15 minutes to one another? When might this best fit into your schedule?

# Habitually Helping Others

## IN PREPARATION...

**Luke 14:12-24**

Why does Jesus not to invite those closest to them?


Why would they be blessed for inviting the others?


What happened to those invited to the feast?


Who would not taste of the dinner?


We all respect the person who is willing to go out of their way to help others, especially those who do it as a matter of habit. Helping others does not just make you a good neighbor but it also is an essential part of being a Christian. Throughout His work on earth Jesus showed an example of servitude to those around Him and taught His disciples to imitate it. He says,

*“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14:12-14)*

This lesson will be dedicated to forming the habit of helping others. There is no shortage of Scripture to teach us all that this is a noble pursuit with many benefits for everyone involved.

### **You Can Help**

It is not hard to feel insignificant if we consider all of the problems and suffering in the world. Flying over a city and looking down can make one feel like nothing more than another ant going about their work for the colony. If we live selfish lives then perhaps we may be about as useful as an ant to other people. However, Christians have been a people known for doing good to others since the very beginning of the church.

I have been blessed to know many brethren who are always willing to stop and help someone change a tire on the side

# Habitually Helping Others

of the road, taking nothing in return. Many are quick to take a meal to someone who is sick or in mourning. Others are considerate and visit those who are lonely. Some are like a modern day Barnabas who go out of their way to encourage those who are troubled. These are all activities that we can and should be involved in toward our fellow man.

There is a story told of a boy who walked along the beach throwing starfish into the ocean after a storm had washed multitudes of them onto the beach. A man told the boy that his efforts wouldn't matter with so many dying. The boy picked one up, threw it into the water, and said, "It matters to that one." So it is with the good deeds we do. Do not become overwhelmed with so much to be done. We just need to build the habit to help those we can.

## **You Should Help**

Christians are supposed to help others. These passages and many more make the point plainly:

*"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." (Philippians 2:3-4)*

*"Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith." (Galatians 6:9-10)*

*"Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." (James 1:27)*

Can there be any doubt that God expects us to be busy helping other people? In this way "they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

## **Helping Others Helps Us**

It may be surprising to some to learn that helping others has been repeatedly shown to be the best way for us to lead happy lives. One expert observes,

# Habitually Helping Others

*"As has been known for millennia, the key to a sense of personal satisfaction... is hard work and a solid platform of good values – the centerpiece of which is high regard for others. Note that the primary beneficiary in that equation is one's fellow traveler, not oneself. In short, the key to the good life is putting others first." (John Rosemond, Family Counselor)*

Selfishness is not satisfying in the long term. We may think that by putting our schedule and our desires first we will find joy but we are wrong.

If that is not enough, there is also an eternal reward for God's people who serve others. As we read at the beginning, Jesus says, "you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (Luke 14:14) Since all men have been created in the image of God, God takes joy in our service to others.

## **Becoming a Person Who Helps**

It can be a difficult transition for a person to become one who helps others habitually if they have been living selfishly in the past. So, what can be done to help build this habit?

As has been said in previous lessons, pray to God for help building this habit. Since this habit is about godliness it makes sense that our God will help us build it.

Sometimes we get caught up in self debate about whether or not we should help. Max Dawson has often counseled young preachers in situations like that, "If you are in doubt, go." More harm can typically be done by not acting than acting with love.

It will help to make your good deeds a family affair if possible. Everyone will be benefitted by helping another person and it sets a great example.

It is also essential to building this habit that we value relationships and people over worldly things. Is the stranger worth more than the time I would lose by helping out?

Lastly, consider the Father who sees us rather than other people. Jesus says, *"But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."* (Matthew 6:2-4)

We are striving to please God, not men. Helping others is a habit that will bring our God great joy!

# Habitually Helping Others

Why should we not be overwhelmed by the amount of need in the world? What should motivate us?

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Give three bible passages that teach Christians that they must do for others.

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What is one of the important keys to happiness? How is it opposed to what some think the key to happiness is?

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What are some ideas for helping to build the habit of helping others into our lives?

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# Worship as a Habit

## IN PREPARATION...

### Hebrews 10:11-25

How many offerings did it take God to perfect us?


Why do we no longer need animal offerings?


How should we "draw near"?


How does the writer say to "encourage" one another?


Worshiping God is not something Christians should just do on occasion; it is a habit that should only be interfered when absolutely necessary. This habit must be cultivated in the life of every believer. Worship is an outgrowth of the thankfulness within the heart of the Christian and, as such, failing to build this godly habit suggests that one is ungrateful for all that has been done for him/her by God. Worship with the church is special, important, and should be done as God has purposed.

### Worship is Special

The worship we are referring to is that of assembling with the local church in order to praise God in the specific ways He has revealed, and especially on the first day of the week. There can be little doubt as one reads the New Testament that the assembling of the church for worship is a special action in the life of the believer. Some, however, suggest that the church's assembly is irrelevant and suggest, rather, that "all of life is worship."

So, is all of life worship? There is a sense in which it is true that all of life is worship. We ought to be bringing God praise through our actions every day as we seek to do His will and encourage those around us-- as has been discussed in past lessons. Yet, it is a misnomer to then claim that there is no particular importance to the worship of the church together on the first day of the week.

The church is special. It is pictured as the bride of Christ in numerous passages. (Ephesians 5:25-27) The assembling of the church is special in the pages of Scripture. So much so, in fact, that the Christians are commanded to "not forsake" the assembling. (Hebrews 10:24-25) The actions of the



# Worship as a Habit

church when assembled are special. One such action is that of partaking of the Lord's Supper. Paul says, "So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment." (1 Corinthians 11:33-34) The partaking of the Lord's Supper is such an important act of worship that treating it disrespectfully or as a common meal is said to bring judgment.

Worship among Christians is a special thing to the Lord and so it ought to be to His people. Let us treat it with reverence and come together with joy for all that has been done for us.

## **The Importance of Worship**

God does not depend upon our worship for His survival. The Maker does not need anything from us. Rather, our worship accomplishes other important goals which warrant it being a habit in our lives.

Our worship proclaims the Lord's death to all, according to the apostles. Paul speaks of communion when he writes, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26) According to this argument our worship is a testimony of faith to everyone around us that Jesus was crucified for our sins. It is also a confession of faith that the Lord will return. The importance goes even farther when we realize that our lack of participation would mean we are not proclaiming His death.

Worship serves the purpose of uplifting one another. Another passage says, "*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;*" (Ephesians 5:18-19)

Our singing is a way to speak to one another and build one another up. We are making melody with our hearts, together. My worship should not be selfishly motivated. I must consider the good of those around me.

We are also bringing praise to God when we assemble and worship. Jesus tells the woman at the well,

# Worship as a Habit

*"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:23-24)*

God is seeking for true worshipers. Should we not be those who have a habit of worship, then?

## **Worship as God Intends**

The will of the Lord cannot be discounted so that we can worship as we desire. We serve the same God as Nadab and Abihu, priests under the Law of Moses. We learn from their example that when God delivers a pattern to be followed, we must follow it. Those two priests,

*"offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them... Then Moses said to Aaron, 'It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored.'"* (Leviticus 10:1-3)

God accuses these men of not regarding Him as holy because of their disregard for the pattern He gave them to follow. On the other hand, when people follow the pattern given them for worship we see that God is pleased. Abel was one such man. We read, "Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering..." (Genesis 4:4-5) As Christians, let us look to the covenant through Christ, identify the pattern of worship, and worship in such a way that God has regard for it.

## **Forming a Habit of Worship**

Some have difficulty forming a habit of worship. Here are some tactics to help: Be accountable for your own worship. If others fail to worship (friends, family, etc.) you are still accountable for yourself. Get involved in the church. If people are depending upon you to be there you will consider that you are letting others down when tempted to skip. Make worship a priority. And more-so than sports, recreation, yard-work, or sleeping in. The Lord made us a priority by giving His life. Are a few hours a week too much to ask? Focus on others and the benefit they gain from your worship and involvement. If you value your brethren, show them by attending habitually and encouraging them.

# Worship as a Habit

What are some reasons that the worship of the church is special to God?

Explain some of the things that worship accomplishes.

Does it matter what we do as "worship" to the Lord? Give Scripture to support your answer.

Is worship a habit in your life? Why or why not? What can you do to help others that are struggling to make worship a habit?

# The Practice of Fasting

## IN PREPARATION...

**Ezra 8:21-22**

Where did Ezra proclaim a fast?


Why did Ezra proclaim a fast?


Why did Ezra not ask for protection from the king?


How did God respond to the fasting of His people?


Fasting may be the least esteemed of all the ancient Christian practices in our culture today, and that is a shame. The ancient writings reveal that fasting for spiritual purposes is almost as old as humanity itself. This lesson will consider the reasons that fasting is a practice that would be beneficial to make into a habit in your life for the purpose of godliness.

### Understanding Fasts

Fasting itself is not something that is always done in the same way or even with the same things. A person could conceivably fast from anything they customarily participate in ranging from eating to playing video games. For the sake of this study we are primarily considering fasting from food for a set period of time (which is the most typical usage of the word) but that is not to negate the benefits of fasting from technology or anything that can be distracting to whatever spiritual purpose that the participant has in mind. What are the spiritual reasons that a person may decide to fast? The Scriptures show a number of potential reasons including, but not limited to:

Sorrow of heart. 2 Samuel 1:12 shows David and the nation of Israel mourning due to the passing of Saul and Jonathan. It can be used as an outward sign of inward sorrow.

Sincere repentance. Saul was a persecutor of Christians when confronted with the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus. After being struck with blindness and led into the city we read, "he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank." (Acts 9:9) Saul had been wrong and his fasting was meant to show God that he knew it.

Devotion to God. Both the Pharisees and the disciples of John fasted often in order to show (and increase) devotion

# The Practice of Fasting

to God. (Matthew 9:14) It was a commonly accepted view at the time that those who fast are righteous and those who want to be righteous, fast.

For important issues. Fasting is often times seen when some issue of great importance comes. When David was told that his son would die his reaction is to begin fasting.

*“David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him in order to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not eat food with them.” (2 Samuel 12:16-17)*

While his fasting did not change the situation, it is revealing that the ancients often connected important issues with fasting.

## **A Worthwhile Practice**

Fasting is not a habit that should have been left behind by God’s people. There are great spiritual benefits to fasting. We teach ourselves self-control by denying the body. There is a war between soul and body and fasting helps place our body into submission. Fasting also boosts the believer’s confidence since we accomplish something which seemed difficult. If I can do that, I am capable of other things also! Fasting helps Christians to build a stronger faith. Jesus Himself proclaimed this truth to the apostles. They failed to cast the demons from a particular person. Jesus explains, “this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” (Matthew 17:21) His point to them is that they must increase faith and this was how! Besides all of these things, fasting makes us more grateful for what we have. We are blessed to live in a land where most people never miss a meal. We cannot help but to take food for granted. A fast will, at least temporarily, help one to be more thankful.

## **Objections Answered**

Nevertheless, there are some who object to building the habit of fasting. Consider a few common objections and a response to them.

*“I would be miserable if fasting.”* If the thought of missing a few meals makes you think that you would become a miserable person, perhaps a fast is just what you need to conquer that view of a ‘weak-self.’ You do not have to be miserable when fasting.

# The Practice of Fasting

You will not likely have terrible hunger pains for the duration of your fast. If a person misses one meal due to being busy, of course they feel hungry. However, if you are planning on missing the meal it helps a great deal since much of the pain is mental. Also, the hunger pains do not typically last longer than a couple of hours past the first meal or two that is missed. Trust me, your pain will not be nearly as great as you think. Most of our eating is not based on need, but on food lust. Simply decide to not be miserable during your fast and stay busy with prayer and other activities and you will not suffer.

fast and stay busy with prayer and other activities and you will not suffer.

*"Fasting is bad for your health."* This statement is simply untrue. Many studies have verified the physical benefits of occasional fasting. Your digestion system is allowed to rest, your insulin levels balance, and your hormone levels balance. While this article is not intended to convince a person to fast for physical reasons, the charge that this habit is unhealthy is simply wrong. However, for those with special dietary needs due to a medical issue, it would be wise to consult with your doctor before fasting. There are surely special circumstances in which it could be unhealthy to attempt to fast.

*"That's an old testament thing."* Others have simply denied that fasting is a Christian practice. They, too, are mistaken. The Christians at Antioch are described thusly: "they were ministering to the Lord and fasting..." (Acts 13:2) Christians have had the habit of fasting from the beginning. Why don't we?

## **Fasting and You**

It can seem daunting to plan your first fast. However, with these few tips you can make the experience more meaningful and less intimidating.

First, couple your fasting with prayer. The two are intended to go hand in hand.

Second, don't fast alone. It is easier knowing that someone is doing the same thing you are. Third, start out small. Jesus fasted for 40 days (Luke 4:2), but it takes years of bodily training to attain that ability. A goal of a 12-24 hour fast is a great place to start.

Finally, fast privately. Jesus warns against doing righteous acts for the sake of praise.

(Matthew 5:17)

Revive the ancient practice of fasting in your spiritual life and see the godly fruits! Page 45

# The Practice of Fasting

What are some of the spiritual reasons people fast in the Bible?

What results make fasting a worthwhile practice for Christians?

Will fasting make a person feel miserable? If a person thinks so, why is that an argument that they need try fasting?

What are some tips for helping a person to fast for the first time?

# Budgeting for Godliness

## IN PREPARATION...

### 2 Corinthians

#### 8:1-15

What did Paul praise about the Macedonians?


What should the Corinthians abound in?


It is acceptable according to what?


"Your abundance" is what?


Budgeting is a habit that can make a big difference in a person's life. You may be wondering, though, why a lesson on budgeting is included in a study of godly habits. The Bible has a great deal to say on the issue of how God's people should spend and allocate what they earn. Understanding these Biblical teachings will not only improve a person's lifestyle but also increase a person's ability to be godly. Are you still skeptical? Keep an open Bible and an open mind as we consider the reasons that budgeting is a godly habit.

### The Necessity of Budgeting

Budgeting refers to the practice of taking a consideration of all a household's expenses and goals and setting them up to fit into the available funds for the household. Many today live without a consideration for their budget and spend until their money is gone and must look to others in order to make until the next paycheck. Others live with a mindset that say, 'if I can afford the note, I can afford it.' Both of these financial mindsets lead to spiritual struggles. Stress from being overextended is a distraction from the important things in life such as love and relationships. Fighting often arises due to competition over the limited financial resources of the home. Greed can take hold of many hearts as the few crumbs left available are clung to. Covetousness often becomes an issue as others are considered and the thought is in mind that, 'life would be great if I had what they had.'

On the other hand, budgeting with a mind toward godliness can help to bring purpose into financial decision making. All members of a household can find comfort in a financial plan



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where before they were competing. Generosity is encouraged when household funds are budgeted in a way that looks for opportunities to help. And spiritual priorities can be maintained if our minds are not focused on trinkets.

## **Budgeting Biblically**

The Bible is filled with financial teaching and especially the book of Proverbs.

Wise and godly people are instructed to manage money carefully. We read,

*“Know well the condition of your flocks, and pay attention to your herds... and there will be goats’ milk enough for your food, for the food of your household, and sustenance for your maidens.” (Proverbs 27:23-27)*

It is wise for a person to seek to manage their assets. The implication of the proverb is that if a person considers and manages what they have then they will have enough. However, if they do not manage it then they will lack although they started out with the same amount.

It is a general truth that we should avoid debt. It says, “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender’s slave.” (Proverbs 22:7) One should not just consider whether they can afford a note or not when considering taking on debt.

What if an unexpected expense arises? Every note still must be paid and it does not take long for a person to be in serious financial trouble because of debt. Admittedly, most people must go into debt in our society for some purchases. However, taking on as little debt as possible, paying that debt down quickly, and leaving wiggle room in the budget as to not be ‘hemmed in’ by debt payments is wisest.

Some fail to consider that a godly budget should seek to give to the Lord first. Paul speaks to the Christians about their offering when he says, “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7) A financial offering to the Lord’s work is not meant to send a person into poverty but neither should it be the ‘left-overs’ after everything else is done. We ought to “purpose in our hearts” to give a worthy sum when considering our prospering and to do so cheerfully. A godly budget will plan on giving to God first.

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The Bible also teaches the importance of saving. "There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man swallows it up." (Proverbs 21:20)

Something should be budgeted for savings every month because there will be some months when unexpected expenses arise that would otherwise wreck a person's financial house of cards. Pulling out of each paycheck and setting a certain amount into a separate account location is essential for dealing with the inevitable troubles that come our way. Instead of those moments breaking us with stress, we can be comforted in knowing that we had a 'rainy day fund' set aside just for these things. Other things such as retirement and preparing to leave an inheritance to children is also a wise when considering how much to save.

## **Starting a Budget**

Setting up a budget for the first time is best done by writing out all of the set expenses of the home. There may be recurring expenses that are unnecessary or can be lowered. Looking at them all on paper will give an overview of the home's current financial situation.

If there are excess funds after the expenses are considered it must be determined where those funds are going. Many are surprised to see how much they are spending on gourmet coffees or eating out. Having a budget will help to rein in that waste.

Next, money should be allotted to each category as needed. The offering to the Lord, groceries, savings, etc. are all separate categories that need funding. If the expenses are set up in this way there should be an ending balance of zero dollars. Every dollar is accounted for before it is even brought home.

Lastly, only spend what you make. Anything spending on credit cards or other options beyond income is unsustainable. While the temporary joy of some purchase seems worth it, living a lifestyle in this type of manner is reckless and will lead to suffering in various forms. Building a budget and sticking to it is a wise and godly habit that can help you and your family to have the spiritual mindset and purpose to build all of the godly habits we have discussed into your life! May God bless your efforts to build habits that will bring glory to Him!

# Budgeting for Godliness

Why is budgeting a necessity for those who seek godliness?

Explain the lesson of Proverbs 27:23-27.

Why should Christians consider their financial offering to the Lord when building a budget?

How can a person go about setting up a budget?