

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

The Importance of Disciplines

Even though spiritual disciplines have been around for thousands of years, today they seem to be understood by only a minority of Christians and diligently exercised by a far smaller portion. Yet it is essential for the disciplines to be practiced daily in order to live a strong Christian Spiritual Life and spiritually mature. There is absolutely no other way for a believer to consistently live close to God, be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, overcome the influence of the world we live in and daily live the holy life that God requires each person to live. We follow spiritual disciplines that help us turn from self and the world and as we diligently do this the acts will become habits and so the habits will eventually become the normal way of life for us. It is important for all Christians to always keep in mind the danger of not clinging to God and daily loving and pursuing Him with all our heart for the pull of our flesh and the world will remain strong as long as we live upon this earth.

We need physical exercises to ensure that our physical body is fit and can stay healthy and in a similar way we need to exercise spiritually to ensure that our spiritual life is continually strengthened and is always healthy. Paul says that when we exercise towards godliness it is profitable for all things.

1Timothy4vs7 ... exercise yourself toward godliness. 8 For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

We all know how challenging it is to keep up regular exercise to keep our bodies fit and very often when we fail to keep up an exercise regime usually the only one we let down is ourselves. For many this is not significant enough to overcome the inclination towards laziness and the temptation of tasty food that we know is not healthy. With the spiritual practices and exercise, unless we are able to diligently follow them, our spiritual life suffers and there will be little or no spiritual growth. We not only let ourselves down but also are unable to reach up towards obtaining all that God has for our life.

Growing as a Christian requires our time and effort so that we can co-operate with God to transform our life. We must always keep in mind the fact that our life requires a dramatic turn around of our mind, will and emotions. We cannot expect this to be easy and it is not, but for those of us who commit to the daily spiritual disciplines, the reward on this earth is to walk closely with God, be freed from worldly pressures, live the life that God wants us to live, spiritual growth and preparation for leaving this body and going to be with God. There are also eternal rewards which will be given to each believer by Jesus when we stand before His judgment seat.

The spiritual disciplines enable us to overcome our old life and take up the new spiritual life. Our body, soul and spirit are all needed and the spiritual disciplines help ensure that these elements are brought together in a way that enables us to live a life that is pleasing to God. We can start by taking small steps that will, if we persist, set us on course to meet our goal of knowing God's will, living our life according to God's will, and growing spiritually. As Christians, if we do not, our life will not be

transformed and not get past the point of being the spiritual babies that Paul talked about. Jesus said that there is no choice for people who want to live the Christian Spiritual Life and follow Him. We must deny ourselves, lose the life that we live for ourselves and live our life purely by God's will and purpose.

God requires all believers to be on a journey of sanctification and spiritual maturity. This spiritual journey must birth a strong desire to turn our life around and live for God rather than ourselves. The disciplines enable us to shift ourselves from being people who are controlled by our physical senses and deeply entrenched ways of acting, thinking, feeling and speaking, to people who are controlled by our spirit under the direction of God's Holy Spirit. The disciplines enable us to redirect our life to God so that we can be open to the work of the Holy Spirit, daily being transformed to become more godly. The renewal of our inner person is significantly restricted unless we are able to bring our body under the control of our new spiritual life. Even Paul recognized the great need to place his unrenewed physical body under subjection.

1Corinthians9vs27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

The disciplines will ensure that we build up areas of our life that have been neglected while weakening the influence of those things that will distract us and draw each of us away from God. The more we know about God's will, the more we will find that we must leave further parts of our old life behind which we might have thought could stay. On this path of spiritual transformation, we come to know God in a deeper and deeper way.

It is through these disciplines that we become spiritually empowered to do God's will each day of our life. It is during the times that we exercise the spiritual disciplines that the Holy Spirit within us is most likely to be able to get our attention to assist us to live the life that is needed. As we follow the spiritual disciplines, we often may find it difficult and there may be little visible progress. However, there are significant changes being made to our heart and soul and this will eventually be apparent through the way we think, speak, feel and act. We must stay faithful in following the disciplines for they provide the means for each of us to successfully live for God.

As Christians we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to answer for the daily life we live on earth (2Corinthians5vs10). At that judgment, although all true believers in Christ Jesus will receive eternal life, we shall also each receive eternal rewards based on how we have obeyed God's will during our life on earth. From this perspective it is easy to see why daily spiritual disciplines, as a means to ensure our spiritual growth, are so essential for every believer.

Essential Spiritual Disciplines

Bible Reading

God told Joshua that the Scripture was essential for Him when he took over the responsibility from Moses to lead God's people into the Promised Land. He had to keep himself and the people of Israel close to God and living in God's will.

Joshua1vs8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

When Jesus lived on earth He read from the Jewish Scripture which was very close to our Old Testament. He accepted it and did not ever dispute it. In fact He quoted it as the word of God. The Old Testament reveals the character of God and God does not change. As we have seen, the law and sacrificial rituals of the Old Covenant speak of things that are a reflection of what is in the New Testament or New Covenant.

Without Bible reading it is difficult for a Christian to develop an understanding of God, His will and draw near to God. Having committed to living a spiritual life, we must now learn about God and the life He wants us to live through our study and meditation of the Bible. When we read in the verse quoted previously from Joshua that meditation on the word and obedience to it makes our way prosperous, it means prosperity from God's perspective, which means spiritual maturity and growth. According to God's will for each of us, in some cases, it also means material prosperity.

God told Joshua how important the Scripture had to be to him and the Bible is equally important for every one of us today. We need to come to know God, His will and His ways and it is the Bible that is the key instrument that God uses to accomplish this. Although the lives of people come and go as time passes, the word of God lasts forever. It will never lose its ability to transform lives by the power and instruction of the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah40vs6 The voice said, " Cry out! " and he said, " What shall I cry? " " All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever. "

The Bible is the word of God and it must be accepted and believed in its entirety. Certain verses of the Bible cannot be taken and believed while others are ignored because they make us uncomfortable or following them is difficult, inconvenient or unpopular. Where we do not understand particular verses, we must persistently seek the Holy Spirit's instruction and help. All that we learn from the Bible instructs us in the life God wants for us, spiritually strengthening us and enabling us to live a life full of the good works that God desires us to do.

2Timothy3vs16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

God always acts in accordance with His word, His promises and His character. We can place our complete trust in Him with full assurance that He will be faithful to all that He has said (*Lamentations3vs23*). Jesus also spoke of our ability to rely and trust every word that He spoke, many of which are recorded in the gospels. The words that Jesus spoke were the words of God and they possess eternal relevance and value.

Mark13vs31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

God has spoken to generations of people through the Bible and the Bible provides His truth to us. Although, the books of the Bible have been written by different writers, each writer was always under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is God who is the Author of the Bible and if a person is not able to believe this, they will not be able to have a strong belief that any section of it is true. Strong and unwavering belief in the words and promises of the Bible is essential for every Christian for without it we are unable to come to know God, understand God's will and receive spiritual revelation. A faith in God must be built on an unshakable belief that the Bible is the inspired word of God. Without faith in God and His word we cannot please God.

The Bible contains layers of mysteries that are hidden within its words and verses which remain elusive unless the Holy Spirit is within us to reveal the truths that God desires. As we allow the Holy Spirit to teach us we will find that as we read and re-read the words and the chapters, layers of God's truth and will are revealed and taught to us by the Holy Spirit within us. One particular section is likely to mean nothing to you at one point in your life but when you are re-reading the Bible, perhaps for the tenth time, many years from now, that same section could provide a great revelation for your life. God selects what you need to know and when, as long as, you diligently seek Him and His revelation with a heart of obedience. The form, content and progression of teaching are uniquely tailored by God for each individual and can only be discovered by daily living a spirit-led life for Him. Each of us must be willing to wait patiently for God's timing to teach us particular things and the meaning of particular Biblical passages.

If you talk to any person who has genuinely approached the Bible seeking to understand God's will in this way, they will tell you that they can live a lifetime and still not discover all that there is to learn from the living words contained in the Bible. Even the 80 year old man who has lived all his life as a faithful Christian may be re-reading the Bible for the 120th time and I can guarantee you that God will have new things to teach him through the words of the Bible specific for that point of time and his specific need in his life.

Each of us must spend quiet time each day slowly reading, absorbing and meditating on the words of the Bible, allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us through our intuition. This must be a priority for it is likely to be the most important way that God inspires and speaks to each of us, enabling us to grow spiritually. Also, as we do this, God's word will be placed onto our mind and written onto our hearts, becoming spiritual life and strength to us.

The writer of Hebrews talks about the word of God being living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit.

Hebrews4vs 11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of

the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

The writer of Hebrews talks about the power of the word of God to divide the spiritual inner man, which is made up of the spirit and the soul. As believers our spirit has been renewed by the presence of the Holy Spirit but our souls are in the process of being renewed. Therefore the word of God has the effect of enabling us to clearly know God's will and His spiritual direction for our life. This is very different to the worldly direction that is in our unrenewed soul. As we read and think about the word of God, we understand the sharp differences between the worldly life that is inherent in our soul and God's life that is in our spirit. Thoughts and intentions that we previously had are revealed for what they are and we recognize the need for them to be controlled and transformed. We increasingly recognize those parts of our life that must go and at the same time increasingly understand the new life we must live. In the verses above, the writer asks believers to be diligent so that we do not fall from our spiritual position through disobedience.

God's word, revealed through the Bible, provides us with instruction on building our spiritual life by enabling us to discern between God's way and the way of the world around us. Joints and marrow cannot be easily separated apart and neither can the soul and spirit. In fact even though the soul can be separated from the body at death, it will never be separated from the spirit. The bond of these two is so deep that only the word of God enables us to discern between the two and so understand how God wants us to be transformed.

The word of God also helps us to discern between thoughts that are in our mind that are our own, those thoughts that are sourced from evil spirits and those thoughts that are revealed in our mind from the Holy Spirit. As we read the words of the Bible and meditate on them, the Holy Spirit gives us an understanding of God and His thoughts. Once we recognize them we can quickly identify all other thoughts that are inconsistent with our knowledge of God and His will.

Any hardness in our heart is broken away by the word of God being continually applied to it. God's purpose is for the hardened heart of any believer or non-believer to be broken up into pieces so that His light can shine in and He can reform it into a new heart. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of the word of God being like a hammer that breaks up the rock and also like a fire. As fire is used to purify metals, so God's word also continually applied to a person's heart will refine it and purify it.

Jeremiah23vs29 " Is not My word like a fire? " says the Lord, " And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"

All that is revealed spiritually to us by the Holy Spirit through our intuition will always be consistent with what is in the Bible. The Bible is the completed revelation for people and all spiritual revelation must be checked back to God's word to ensure consistency with it. The Holy Spirit will not reveal any new doctrine to a believer for the work is finished, nothing is to be added and nothing is to be taken away from the Bible.

The word of God can only be truly and fully revealed by the Holy Spirit. When the

Spirit teaches us through the word of God, the teaching starts in the depths of our spirit and then works its way out to be accepted by the mind (the Spirit transforms the soul of a person rather than the mind trying to change our will and emotions). In this way the written word becomes the living word of God and is spiritual life.

John6vs63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

As God commanded the nation of Israel under the Old Covenant, the commands of the New Covenant, such as our love for God, love for people and living daily under the direction of the Holy Spirit, must be followed. We are told that God writes them onto our hearts and so they are implanted into our souls.

Transformation through the word of God requires us to adopt the daily discipline of reading a few chapters of the Bible each day. For those of us who are parents, it is our responsibility to read and teach the word of God daily to our children.

Deuteronomy11vs18 " Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 19 You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

It is important for Bible reading to be always done slowly so that we are able to think and meditate about the verses and individual words we read. Little will be gained through rapid reading. As we eagerly seek to know God through His word and look to the words of the Bible to reveal God and His will to us, we daily become increasingly enlightened by the words we read. No one will ever be able to read through the Bible for the first time and understand it immediately. In fact many areas will be very confusing but this is why the Bible needs to be read again and again repeatedly throughout our life. God knows what each of us needs to learn and when we need to learn it and He will determine how revelation is received.

The actual person who wrote Psalm 119 is not known but some believe that it could have been Daniel. The writer loved God's word so much that he used to rise early eagerly seeking it and stayed up late to diligently meditate upon it.

Psalm119vs147 I rise before the dawning of the morning, and cry for help; I hope in Your word. 148 My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word.

The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit knows the mind of God and being part of the God-head we would expect this to be so. Therefore as He teaches us we can be assured that the truth behind the Bible's words will be revealed in a deep and meaningful way, be written onto our heart and change our thinking, emotions and actions. This approach to reading the Bible feeds us spiritually and develops a spiritual hunger for the words of the Bible through the Holy Spirit drawing us each day to the Bible to teach, guide and help us. Reading the Bible in this way takes the revelation from it straight to our heart, which is far greater than just understanding it with the mind.

The Bible provides the compass for staying with God's truth through the revelation that the Holy Spirit provides. It will always be the primary source of understanding God's will, coming to know God and being led by Him. The Bible is a book like no other and anyone who approaches it with the Holy Spirit within them and a right heart is guaranteed to find that it is the living word of God providing us daily with instruction and guidance on how to live our life.

Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Eternal life is not found in the Bible when it is only read as a book but it is found in coming to know God who is revealed through its words and promises. It is always important to keep in mind the purpose for which we study and meditate on the Bible. The purpose is not to pride ourselves on our knowledge of it but it is to draw near to the Author behind it, God, receive spiritual life and daily live by it.

John 5:39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

Our purpose must always be to know, love and obey God through the understanding we gain from the Bible. Mere knowledge is useless in the spiritual life. Only knowledge held in our heart and applied to our daily life provides spiritual strength and growth. Knowing that we should love God and people is of no spiritual worth until our daily life reflects this knowledge. We must delight in daily meditating on the word of God and must be diligent in applying its instruction to our daily life. As we do, our spiritual life will prosper.

Psalms 1:1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

Prayer

Prayer, like Bible reading, is essential for all Christians for it is the means for the Christian to communicate with God. Prayer is spiritual conversation with God and God always wants to hear the words that are spoken from the heart of His children. We speak spiritually to God and this means that effective prayer is not words that are just expressed through our mouth or from our mind but must be words that are sourced from our heart. Our emotion and will must support the words that are prayed to God. Because it is a conversation, prayer also requires that we have a quiet time where we focus on God, think about Him and wait to hear His intuitive revelation that arises from deep within our spirit.

It is important to understand that not all prayer is heard by God. He has not promised to respond or answer a prayer of any person who is not in a right relationship with Him, apart from the prayer of such a person for forgiveness of sins through the blood

of Jesus Christ. For this prayer, God looks at a person's heart to see if there is true repentance from sin and a true belief in Jesus Christ.

Proverbs15vs29 The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.

Isaiah59vs1 Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. 2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.

1Peter3vs12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

We are also warned in the Bible that God does not hear the prayer of even a Christian in particular situations. If Christians have unrepentant sin in their hearts, He will not hear.

Psalms66vs18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.

2Chronicles7vs14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

John9vs31 Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.

When we refuse to hear the cry of the poor around us and refuse to help, God will not hear our prayer.

Proverbs21vs13 Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard.

The prayers of husbands are hindered when we do not honor our wife.

1Peter3vs7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

Prayer must be directed to God the Father and it is He who answers prayer according to His will. Believers have the right to go before the Father with our petition based on the finished work of redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ. This is why we pray "in Jesus' name". The believer lives a life "in Jesus Christ" and therefore prayer will only be heard by God from our position in Jesus Christ (justified by our faith in Jesus Christ). Being "in Jesus Christ" must mean that our prayers must be as Christ would pray. Asking in Jesus' name is asking not only based on His authority but also asking in a way that He would ask. General prayers of self-indulgence are unlikely to be answered for these prayers are sourced from our old selfish life. We must look at our prayers from God's eternal perspective, know His will and understand that He will answer them in a way that always looks after our long-term spiritual interest and growth.

James4vs2 Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Jesus always asked the Father for things that were according to the Father's will and those things which were in line with achieving God's plan and purpose for people on earth. Therefore all His prayers were answered by the Father. Jesus said that when we approach the Father like He did, in His name, our prayers will also be answered.

John14vs13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

Jesus only prayed for the will of the Father to be accomplished, even if it meant He had to suffer and die on the cross and be hated by men. This is the reason that much of our prayer is not answered. When we pray we ask from a position that is inconsistent with the heart of Jesus and not according to God's will. Occasionally we ask without knowing God's will or in other situations we ask to satisfy our own desires which we may clearly know to be inconsistent with God's will. Therefore essential elements of achieving a successful prayer life are to live in a right relationship with God, be led and taught by the Holy Spirit and to increase our understanding of God's will.

Jesus knew that His life had to be lived according to the will of the Father. Prayer was an extremely important part of Jesus' life and He often went away by Himself to pray. In this way His relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit within Him was such that He always knew the Father's will. Therefore as He moved around people, He already knew who the Father wanted to touch. In this way His prayer over people was to enable the Holy Spirit to move through Him to touch their lives. He knew that God wanted to open the blind eyes of a particular person, spoke it out in prayer and the Holy Spirit opened the blind eyes. Like Jesus we also must know the will of God and ensure that our prayer is in accordance with it. God will not grant a prayer that is outside His will for a person.

1John5vs14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

The disciples could see that prayer was very important to Jesus and realized that it was His source of power, leading and strength. Jesus' disciples saw how much Jesus prayed and saw the impact that His life of prayer had on His relationship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. They saw how He was built up spiritually as a person, how He was continually in touch with God, how He knew what people were thinking in their heart and how the power of the Holy Spirit flowed in and through His body and soul. They saw the impact that prayer had on the way He felt for people and His ability to teach, heal and deliver people. The disciples therefore one day asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Jesus had this to say to them.

Matthew 6vs5 " And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who

is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 " Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. 9 In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

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

In His teaching on prayer, Jesus makes a number of important points for us to learn. He opens His instruction by saying what prayer is not. It is not words spoken in God's direction with a heart that is not lifted up to God. It is not words that are spoken not so much out of faith in God but rather so that other people near us can hear us or words spoken simply from a sense of duty. In saying these words Jesus knew human nature very well and knew that it is very difficult for human beings to do anything without seeking glory for themselves. Prayer is a time when all glory must be given to God and all attention must be directed to God.

For this reason Jesus said that prayer should ideally be done in solitude where nobody else can see or hear. In this way it is just you and God. In this one to one situation, you can forget about people's expectations and your desire to live up to them and impress them, you can be focused on God and Jesus says that the Father will meet you and listen to you.

Jesus adds that prayer is not meaningless repetition of what has been written down or memorized. This form of prayer is not from the heart, it may be expressing what others felt a Christian should feel and say but it is very often not an honest prayer to God. It is not prayer filled with words that have been formed by our own heart. It is often not a prayer that is sent to God in love and faith. As parents we long to hear the simple words of love that come from our child's heart. If they were to use a repetitive phrase from a book they had read as an expression of love to us it is highly likely that we would know immediately that the child did not really mean what was recited and our heart would not be touched by this form of expression of love. In the same way, God's heart is not touched by prayers that are repeatedly read to him or memorized and repeatedly said to Him without them being truly sourced from our heart.

Jesus also said that a lot of words in a prayer don't impress God. Rather a few words expressed from our heart are sufficient. In many cases a heart that overflows towards God results in an inability to express ourselves with words and in these situations God knows our heart and understands even when no words are spoken.

Jesus said that the Father knows all about us and our needs. Very often what we think are our needs and wants at a particular time in our life may not be seen by God to be

something that is good for us to have from His perspective. As a father will never give his children something that he knows is bad for them, God also protects His children in the same way looking after their eternal good. He knows what we need to best live our life and will help us obtain our need as we come to Him in prayer. In many cases the things we ask for in pray are not for our good and may even hinder us spiritually. What we should always seek first in prayer is His kingdom (His rule/His will) for He says that as we do this the other things we desire will also be added. If we do not seek His kingdom more than all else, the other selfish wants are not likely to be given to us by Him.

In these verses from the Bible, Jesus also gives His listeners a model prayer which He directs to God the Father. We are able to go to God and call Him Father and this is truly amazing. Jesus confirms that as believers we are sons and daughters of God and can approach Him in prayer in this way. This is the way we should view Him and He looks upon us in the same way. He is in heaven but through the spiritual realm is also very near to us and He must be honored, glorified and exalted. When we pray we should understand who He is, Creator of all things, Giver of life, the One whose word holds the world in place, the One who gave His only Son to save us. His name must be worshiped and honored and so we say "hallowed be thy name".

God's kingdom (His rule) only exists upon this earth in the life of believers for all else is under the spiritual rule of Satan. We are therefore first asked to pray for His kingdom to come on earth. Even though Jesus received total spiritual authority when He rose from the dead, Satan is allowed by God to retain spiritual control of this world and people, unless we are under God's protection through our belief in Jesus and being spiritually placed "in Him". There will be a day when Jesus returns and establishes His rule over all the earth and we pray for that day to come. However until it does, as God's children we can pray for God to rule our lives and rule situations and places where we are. Wherever God's kingdom is, His will is done and we are told to pray for the Father's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. We are His instruments and ambassadors upon the earth to ensure that His kingdom touches earth today and that it will one day come in all its fullness to earth. To do His will, believers must come to know His will with the intention and commitment in their heart to do it as it is progressively revealed to us. God's perfect understanding, wisdom and knowledge can be applied to living our life as we receive and understand His will and do it.

In the second part of His model prayer, Jesus then goes on to show how we should live our life daily for God trusting Him to provide our daily material and spiritual needs. Our physical body needs to be sustained and made strong by daily food and we rely on God to supply us with the food and drink we need to keep our bodies strong. However, Jesus also taught about spiritual food that is required to sustain and build our spiritual side. We also rely on God to daily teach, lead and guide us. Without this daily spiritual sustenance from God, our spiritual life will weaken.

Jesus also asks His disciples to pray for the forgiveness of their sins. However, Jesus said we must forgive anyone that we may have ill feelings against. This is essential because if we do not forgive, the Father will not forgive the sins that we have and therefore we cannot be sure that He will hear our prayer. God has clearly told us that we can only receive forgiveness for our sins when we forgive others who have wronged us.

In a parable given by Jesus, He describes a servant who owed his master a very large debt. Eventually after the servant's pleading, the debt is forgiven. However, the same servant is owed a small debt by another person and when that person begs for forgiveness no forgiveness is received. The master hears about this and calls back the servant and demands that he be tortured until the large debt is fully paid (*Matthew 18 vs 26-34*). Jesus closes his parable by saying:

Matthew 18 vs 35 " So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses. "

Through God's mercy and love, our debt was repaid with the high price paid by Jesus Christ. When we then go on to live our life in a way where we do not forgive from our hearts those who wrong us, this parable states that we will find that our relationship with God will suffer. Without God's mercy, our debt to Him could never be repaid and this means that when we do not forgive others and fail to be merciful to others, we will find that God will not forgive the sins that we commit.

Our life must always be lived in a way that ensures that our spiritual life is not adversely impacted by unconfessed sin and by us not forgiving people. When we sin it is in our nature to hide from God and not be able to come near to Him or seek His face in prayer. Therefore it is essential to allow the Holy Spirit to bring to mind any areas of sin in our life so that we can bring to account our unconfessed sins, seeking God's forgiveness for them.

Jesus closes His model prayer by asking the Father to keep us away from temptation and for deliverance from the influences and plans of Satan. In the final words of the prayer, He gives glory and honour to the Father recognising His eternal rule.

For those who are not used to daily prayer, it is initially difficult to pray. However it is essential for us to do it every day to build and maintain our spiritual life with God and to change our heart. We must adopt the practice of spending at least 20 minutes each day alone with God in prayer and in reading God's word. As we daily do this, the time we spend in prayer and Bible reading can gradually be extended. A spiritual Christian life needs to be lived with daily prayer and reading/meditation on the Scriptures.

We need to remember that God wants to eventually get us to a point where a formal prayer time, although essential, will only be a daily supplement to our communion with Him throughout the day. He is with us always so we must never think that our prayer should be restricted to our daily scheduled prayer times. Wherever we are and whatever we are doing we should always remember that God is within us and we can pray at any time. We do not have to have a particular posture, be alone or say a prayer for a pre-determined length of time.

Paul says that we should pray without ceasing. In a mature relationship with God there is a realization that God is always with us, we always have His attention and He listens to every word that comes out of our mouth. Our thoughts, feelings and actions are also known by Him and therefore need to be acceptable to Him. When we are able

to recognize and accept that God is in control of our entire life, then in whatever situation we find ourselves, we will know that God has put us there and we will seek His guidance and help to do the right and good thing in the various situations during each day of our life.

No matter how insignificant or worthless we or others may see areas of our life, it is important to accept and always remember that we are important in God's sight and He has a plan and purpose that we must fulfill. As we live for Him and are open to His leading, His plan will unfold for us. Brother Lawrence used to dedicate even his most menial daily tasks to God recognizing that it was God's will at that time for him and he ensured he did the job to the best of his ability with a thankful heart. This is so important for many of us who become dismayed that so much of our time is taken in activity that is important or unavoidable but appears to provide very little spiritual benefit. A life lived each moment before God in this way is a life that has been truly given to God. It is a life of prayer without ceasing. Each moment of our lives is lived for God to fulfill His will and His purpose for His glory and honor, no matter what that may be.

The Holy Spirit was sent to help us to pray according to God's will. As individuals are led and instructed by the Holy Spirit, we come to know the will of God and we can then pray effectively for His will to be done on earth, in our life and in the lives of others. The Holy Spirit knows our mind and our heart and therefore intercedes for each of us according to the will of God.

Romans 8vs26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

It is important to know that God relies on people to pray for situations and other people in this world. When people who are in a right relationship with God pray, God listens and will act according to His will. In the Old Testament, the prayers of Abraham for the mercy of God were granted (*Genesis 18vs26-33*).

God looks across the earth to find people who will pray according to His will and thus enable His will to be performed on earth. People who will stand in the gap to pray, the gap between the situation as it is without God's intervention and the situation as it will be if God intervenes as a result of prayer (*Ezekiel 22vs30*). God looks for godly people who will pray to Him to enable Him to act upon situations and people's lives.

Prayer requires persistence and patience. In the eighteenth chapter of Luke, Jesus tells a parable to teach people that we must be persistent in our prayer and not give up easily. In many cases our prayer is not immediately answered and the answer is delayed perhaps due to the request not being in God's will, a test of our faith, what we ask not being the best thing for us, or the timing to answer the prayer not being appropriate. If we believe that what we ask is within God's will, we must repeatedly pray believing that God will answer our prayer. At the end of His parable about the persistent widow and the heartless judge who refuses to initially pay attention to her

cry, Jesus says that God will respond to His children who cry out in a faith filled prayer to Him.

Luke 18 vs 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.

Prayer is time spent communicating with God and a person will grow spiritually as more and more time is spent in prayer. The more time a person spends in communication with God the more likely it is that the person will take on God's character. Once we have peace with God, He takes hold of our life and when we pray we have His promise that He will listen to us.

Jeremiah 29 vs 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.

Fasting

In *Matthew 6 vs 16-17* the statement made by Jesus shows that He assumes that people will fast for He says "*when you fast ...*". By fasting we may abstain from food and water for a couple of days, abstain from all food only for a period of time or simply abstain from particular types of food for a period of time. Care must always be taken in fasting to ensure that you are physically able to endure it and you should talk to a doctor to get advice before going on a fast. We can also fast by abstaining from particular activities or things for a period of time.

Fasts combined with prayer enables us to take control of our flesh with its physical appetites and focus on the spiritual. Fasting is a form of self-denial through which we can show our devotion to God and seek His face for an answer to a particular need that is on our heart. Fasting is therefore done for a particular spiritual purpose whether it is to show God that we are repentant for a wrong, to ask God for help and guidance or simply as a form of adoration. Any fast that is thrust upon us by someone else against our will or one that is done simply to please or impress other people or done for some self-serving purpose, is likely to be of little spiritual worth.

Fasting should be done, where possible, in secret. Also in *Matthew 6*, Jesus explained how hypocrites made it clear to others that they were fasting and this action impacted the spiritual effectiveness of the fast because they ended up doing it to glorify themselves rather than God. Jesus said that we should fast in secret and then the Father seeing our fast would reward us openly.

There are many examples in the Bible where people were able to affect the outcome of particular events through prayer and fasting. The combination of prayer and fasting has a powerful impact in the spiritual realm. Like so many other spiritual disciplines, the effectiveness of the fast depends on the person being in a good relationship with God and having a clear conscience before God and people. Unconfessed sin and unforgiveness of those who have wronged us will impact the effectiveness of a fast.

Meditation

Christian meditation must be clearly distinguished from Eastern meditation. With the

latter, people must clear their minds of all thought and focus deep within themselves, relaxing their body. In doing this there is a loss of the person's identity as they go deep inside themselves to connect with a spiritual force and become lost in it.

With Christian meditation we actively use the mind to think deeply about and dwell upon God, His attributes, His word from the Bible, what He has done or promises to do or perhaps the magnificence of His creation.

Even in situations where there may be silence, the mind is actively engaged thinking about God, praying to God or perhaps inquiring of God for revelation of His will. The mind is alert trying to pick up any intuitive revelation that may be placed into it by the Holy Spirit through our spirit. While there is a clearing of the mind in the sense of putting off the thoughts of everyday life, this is done with the sole purpose of redirecting the mind to think and focus only on God instead.

Psalm 46 vs 10 Be still, and know that I am God;

Therefore rather than looking within ourselves to go to our own inner core, instead we meditate on God who is independent of each of us yet who comes to live within us. While there is absolutely no loss of the believer's identity, yet through the spiritual relationship with God, He is in us and we are also in Him. There are no multiple lives or reincarnations. We will always retain our personal identity in spirit form, when our physical body dies.

Whereas reading and studying the Bible provides us with spiritual instruction, even greater revelation is received when we meditate on the verses and chapters of the Bible. In Bible meditation we pick a verse or two, on some days possibly a chapter or two, and set our mind on the words it contains. Understanding and accepting that the words were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we read the words in a way where we look inwards to gain revelation from the Holy Spirit. We can memorize particular verses as we are able to and reflect on them so that we can search out how God wants them to apply to our life.

When we make a commitment to live the Christian Spiritual Life, we must take time each day to meditate on God and His word. A few times a day is necessary, early in the morning, lunchtime (if possible) and in the evening when there is some relaxation time before going to bed.

When practiced regularly, Christian meditation will enable each of us to draw closer to God, build our faith, enable us to come to know God in a personal way, come to understand God's will and receive Biblical revelation. Other benefits flowing from the activity will be clearer direction and purpose for our life, joy and peace, inner and outer transformation, and a life enabled and empowered for service.

Christian meditation is simple in what it tries to achieve but for many of us the challenge is to be able to stop the busy thoughts that occupy our minds and focus on God. We should never become discouraged, for with daily patience and perseverance, this discipline will increasingly enable us to shut out the worldly thoughts. It is a slow process that will take years of persistence and for most of us there is no easy route to take. We must always remember that we have the Holy Spirit within us who helps us

daily with this. Total supernatural peace will come as we focus our mind on God as often as we can each day.

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.

A few suggestions for developing a life of daily meditation are included below:

1. Start with reading the Bible commencing from the start and daily reading a few chapters, dwelling on verses that are of particular interest or perhaps confusing. While reading, seek the teaching of the Holy Spirit for verses that catch your attention, pause, and then turn them over and over in your mind. Reading the Bible forces our mind to switch off from the rest of our life and focus on what is being read. The reading of Christian books is also recommended for this same reason. Regular prayer and the listening or singing of worship songs with deep reflection on the words of worship also will focus our mind on God so that we can still our mind and meditate more effectively.

2. As we find that we are able to still our mind and think about God with less effort, we can add in some quiet time where we just reflect on God, His attributes, His creation, His blessings, what He has done and what we want Him to do, leaving some time where we still our mind, still thinking about God, listening to our intuition to see if any words, pictures or general impressions arise from the Holy Spirit within us.

3. As we progress down the path of steps (1) and (2) we will find that we spend more and more of each day thinking about God and when our mind is not actively engaged with our work or particular activity, we will find that our thoughts automatically draw back to God (this could take some time to do without our mind wandering but we must always be patient and persevere with the spiritual disciplines).

Without the discipline of Christian meditation, it is difficult for the Holy Spirit to speak into our mind due to it being busy and preoccupied. It is important to remember that even "good" things we do occupy our heart and mind and very often can exclude our ability to hear from God and draw near to Him. We should try to do these "good" works after giving priority to Bible reading, prayer and meditation to gain the strength and wisdom to live our daily life.

Psalms 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

Book reading

The Holy Spirit has taught and guided many people over the years and continues to do so today. We are privileged to have the great revelation and experience of people's lives recorded in the many Christian books that are available today. We will see in the next chapter that one of the attributes Peter tells Christians to have is knowledge. One source of Godly knowledge is the revelation that comes to each believer through reading Christian books.

Knowledge of God and His will is essential because it serves to renew our mind

which knows nothing or very little of the spiritual due to the worldly lives we have lived and the huge amount of worldly knowledge that floods our mind each day. The Godly knowledge that we receive also assists us in discerning true Christian teaching from any that may not be consistent with the Bible.

Silence and Solitude

Jesus often went away on His own to pray and spend time in prayer with the Father. Through these times of silence and solitude He strengthened Himself spiritually so that He could always be close to the Father and fully in step with the Father's will.

In a world that prides itself with busyness and where there is much noise, we must on a daily basis set aside quiet time wholly dedicated to God alone. While God is always with a believer, it is easiest to commune with Him in solitude and silence. His voice is soft and quiet and there are only a few that hear it, the few that truly hunger to hear it. Elijah looked for the voice of God expecting it to be loud and thunderous but found that it was a still small voice. It appears that God speaks softly so that only those, who seek to hear Him with all their heart by going into a place of silence and solitude, will hear Him.

1 Kings 19 vs 11 Then He said, " Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord. " And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

The discipline of silence and solitude enables us to focus on God to seek His will, worship Him and simply to spiritually grow and strengthen our walk with God. Although the periods of silence and solitude can vary significantly from a few minutes to hours, to days and maybe even weeks, every Christian should seek to have some time each day.

The time we must daily set aside is a time when we are able to be in silence and quiet our mind. It is also a time where there will be no distractions. This will be the time each day when we are able to meditate on God's word, pray in a deep and meaningful way and take time to focus on God to enable the Holy Spirit to speak to us through our spirit. For those of us with young children, these solitary and quiet times will be early in the morning or late at night when they are in bed. Once we are able to find an appropriate time and place we will find that our mind will wander and be distracted. However, as we are able to take control of our thoughts and spend more and more time with God in this way, these distractions will be easier to turn off.

The amount of time that each of us decides to spend in silence and solitude is obviously up to each individual but it is wise to build up the time gradually. Our spiritual growth depends on our ability to direct our mind to the "voice" of our spirit. The more we do this the greater and quicker is our spiritual growth.

Over the past years of our life, we have built up patterns of thought that need to be altered through the relatively small periods of dedicated time we spend listening to the spirit and allowing the Holy Spirit to teach, help and guide us. The times of silence

and solitude will strengthen us so that we can live out our physical life in tune with God's will and supported by His presence within us. God never forces His way into our life and therefore it is up to us to daily pursue Him and seek His presence. This is most effectively done by having regular quiet times of being alone with God.

Personal Spiritual Diary

Every Christian should have a personal spiritual diary to record the things that we learn daily through our reading and meditation of the Bible, our prayers or any other daily spiritual experience. For any person living a spirit-led life, each day is exciting for the Holy Spirit implants some new teaching or thought onto our heart and opens doors for us to touch the lives of other people. Writing down our daily spiritual experiences enables us to not only go back and read them but also further writes them onto our heart and mind.

During periods of prayer and meditation, having the spiritual diary near enables us to write down any words and thoughts that come into our mind as we focus on God. As we earnestly seek God each day He will instruct and help us. Keeping the diary records our spiritual steps and growth.

If there are no new truths revealed through our Bible reading, prayer or meditation for a particular day, then the journal can just be used to record our own thoughts, struggles, questions or victories.

Worship

Worship is defined by the Oxford dictionary as *reverence and respect paid to God*.¹⁷ Therefore our worship is focused on God and must be purely directed to Him. We are told in the verse below from John's gospel that we must worship God "*in spirit and in truth*".

John 4vs 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

As we lift up our heart in worship we are worshipping with far more than just empty words and this worship from deep within ourselves is the worship in spirit that God requires. The Holy Spirit is also the one who is able to teach us God's truth and as we come to know it we can express our worship to God from a perspective where our life is based on that truth. We know God for who He really is and we worship Him with this true understanding received through the Holy Spirit.

Worship is a purely spiritual practice which can only be accomplished by people who are spiritually alive to God for it results from the Holy Spirit inside us. He teaches us God's truth and He guides us into loving and knowing God as we should thus leading us to being awestruck and developing a deep reverence and fear for Him. This positions us for the true worship of God. It comes from a right heart brought about by a right spiritual relationship with God.

People were created to live in a close relationship with God. Worship is something that would have flowed naturally from this relationship. However, with our spiritual separation from God we lost the relationship and the knowledge of God. It is only after restoring the spiritual relationship between ourselves and God that we can come

to love, fear and know Him. Therefore the restoration of the spiritual relationship enables us to enter into the worship of God that we were originally created to experience. Our love for God and reverence for Him should make worship easy and it should flow effortlessly as we live daily for Him. As we come to know God for who He is, worship will flow naturally from our heart to Him.

Before we worship we should reflect on our life and repent of any unconfessed sins. We should also forgive anyone who needs our forgiveness. As our conscience is cleared before God, we can then go boldly into God's presence to worship Him. As mentioned, sin in our life makes us hide from God and makes us unable to come before Him with a true heart of worship.

It is important to understand that worship is not just the singing of worship songs. It is a state of the heart and mind and occurs every time we turn to God to express our love, fear, awe and reverence for Him. We must never forget who God is, His power, His greatness, His might, for as we do, we will humbly come before Him to worship Him with the great respect that He is worthy to receive. Our expression of worship can be through our words, songs, thoughts or actions. As long as they are directed to God in honor of Him they are forms of worship. In this way our giving of time and our money to God are ways in which we worship Him. Worship can be expressed sometimes through doing our daily work and lifting what we do up to Him, the various forms of service we may perform for Him and other people. Some of the deepest worship is without words and in our silent meditation in thankfulness and love for Him.

Our greatest acts of worship can very often be our greatest acts of sacrifice to God, such as, the total surrender of our life to God and giving our time and money to build His kingdom here on earth or to help the poor. It can also take place through our commitment to fast and pray or through particular forms of abstinence from worldly goods or experiences. The Christian is most effective in worship when we live our life surrendered to God.

Praise differs from worship because it is specifically an expression of our thanks to Him. Both praise and worship open up our minds, hearts and lives to God so that He can spiritually minister to us. Our hearts should be filled with thanksgiving by focusing our mind on our blessings rather than on our needs and wants. There is so much for us to be thankful for and we can start with such things as perhaps our general health, family and our friends. Praise is used to enter into God's presence.

Reading the Bible and meditating on its words puts us in a frame of mind for worship. Music with words of worship directed to God is a powerful tool for worship and assists the mind to stay focused on God. Songs and their words linger in our minds and if the songs we hear are worship songs we naturally find that when the melodies and words ring in our minds, we can effectively direct them to God in worship. Also, as we repeat the words of a beautiful worship song, the words go deep into our heart and get implanted there.

Ephesians 5vs18 but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

The right worship music is essential and I believe that the best is the music where the words speak to God in the first Person. The words should have statements like "I love only You my Lord" rather than "I love Him for He is my Lord". In these songs we directly express our love and desires to God rather than treating God as if He were distant. He is not, He is inside believers and all worship must be directed to Him. This is the worship in spirit for as we do this, our spirit is lifted up to magnify God. Worship through songs is a powerful tool for building our spiritual life.

The worship we do privately, in our family or in a home group flows through to our worship in our local church and the wider fellowship of believers. In worship we forget about ourselves, other people and the issues of life so that we can give God our complete attention. We come before God to honor and express our devotion and adoration to Him. In a corporate setting, we should be careful that our worship does not merely become entertainment by the singers and musicians. Worship must always be directed straight to God and focused on Him. When worship is directed in this way to God, it glorifies Him and provides a sweet smelling sacrifice to Him.

As we progress in our spiritual life, our love and reverence for God increases for we come to know Him more. As this happens our worship also becomes deeper and more meaningful. True worship causes us to live a pure and holy life for true worship draws us close to the heart of God and as we draw near to Him we see our wickedness and sin far more clearly and see Him for who He really is.

Worship provides a way for the worshiper to express, in an imperfect way, all we feel towards God. Like Bible reading, prayer and meditation, we must ensure that we have opportunities each day to spend time worshipping God. Worship takes us deep into His presence where we shall also find His power.

We were made to praise and worship Him, not only in heaven but also through our lives on earth. Worshipping God in our earthly life was what we were created to do. As we worship we build up our faith and our spiritual life. It purifies and renews our soul and replaces the self-focus with a God-focus. It most importantly gives glory to God and enables us to enter more fully into His glorious and holy presence.

Psalms 29 vs 2 Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Time Management

This life is our preparation for eternity and each of us will be accountable to God for how we have spent our life (Romans 14 vs 12). Our time is our life and if we are not disciplined with it to ensure that an appropriate daily amount of it is spent to develop our spiritual life, we will not develop and mature spiritually. If Christians are not careful how we spend each day of our life, we can easily drift back into living our old worldly life.

Our eternal salvation and our eternal rewards depend on the state of our spiritual life on this earth and the state of our spiritual life on earth is determined by how we spend each day of our life. Jonathan Edwards suggested that we should spend each day of our life living it as though we had to at the end of that day give an account of how we had spent the time to God. It is easy to let our laziness, cares of life, busyness, fatigue and pursuit of riches draw us away from building our spiritual life. It is easy to let our own passions and desires draw us away from the life that God wants us to live.

In one instance a man came to Jesus who obviously believed in God and kept the commandments but wanted Jesus to give Him the assurance that he was on track to obtain eternal life. Jesus saw that although the man lived his life in obedience to the commandments, in his heart he did not put God's kingdom first. The man was wealthy and put his trust in the wealth that he had. The man had perhaps worked hard for his wealth and loved it more than he loved God. The man desired to build his wealth rather than build God's kingdom. Because of the state of his heart, even though he superficially appeared to live a good life for God, Jesus recognized that the man had to be ready to cast aside his wealth if given a choice to love and pursue it or love and pursue God. When challenged in this way by Jesus, the state of his heart made him walk away rather than make Jesus the Lord of his life and the full focus of his life. In walking away he demonstrated what his first love was and chose not to do the thing Jesus told him to do to receive eternal life.

Mark 10 vs 21 Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, " One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me. " 22 But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Riches in themselves do not mean that a person cannot receive eternal life but what it does mean in this world is that people who have it seem to very often put their trust in it rather than God. Their time and energy is devoted to becoming rich and maintaining their wealth rather than doing the will of God and developing their spiritual life. For this reason the rich must trust and rely on God, setting aside their wants, passions and desires and putting God first in their life. However, riches is just one example, other passions, distractions, desires and even laziness can push God aside.

For those who make a deliberate decision to put God's kingdom first, their life, which translates to the time that they have, must be managed in a way that reflects this priority. Each of our days is so occupied with the things of this world that if we do not deliberately make time each day for our spiritual development it will not occur. Spending time with the world makes us worldly and spending time with God makes us more spiritual and Christ-like. We must be daily aware of this and manage our time accordingly.

Today there are many demands that compete for our time but we must ensure that our spiritual development is the highest priority. Jesus said that we should put the kingdom of God first and this is certainly true when we each look at how we should spend each day. A few days away from our loved ones causes us to hunger for their presence and it should not be different for God. When we miss a day of prayer, Bible reading, meditation and worship we should feel a deep loss and a hunger to get back

to it so that we can spend time with God. This is what God expects and this is what we must ensure we do.

The truly effective life is a balanced one where appropriate daily amounts of time are given to sleep/rest/food/exercise, work, family/friends, and spiritual disciplines. When all of these aspects of our life are in balance we are most effective, spiritually and physically.

17. Oxford Dictionary ed. Soanes and Stevenson. 2004, Concise Oxford Dictionary, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

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