

Spiritual Disciplines for Personal Focus and Growth in 2017

Adapted from "Developing Healthy Spiritual Growth" by Joel R. Beeke

Growing through Private Disciplines

Read the Scriptures: Read the Bible daily. Follow a plan to read through the entire Bible in a reasonable cycle of time. Constantly expose your mind to the voice of your Shepherd. The Bible echoes with the voice of He who laid down His life for you. The Holy Scriptures are to be read:

- With a high and reverent esteem of them (Ps. 19:10; Neh. 8:3-10; Exod. 24:7; 2 Chron. 34:27; Isa. 66:2).
- With the firm persuasion that they are the very words of God (1 Peter 1:19-21), and only He can enable us to understand them (Luke 24:45; 2 Cor. 3:13-16).
- With a desire to know, believe and obey the will of God revealed in them (Deut. 17:19-20).
- With diligence (Acts 17:11) and attention to the matter and scope of them (Acts 8:30-34; Luke 10:26-28).
- With meditation (Ps. 1:2; 119:97), application (2 Chron. 34:21), self-denial (Prov. 3:5; Deut. 33:3), and prayer (Prov. 2:1-6; Ps. 119:18; Neh. 8:6-8).

Don't neglect to sing the Scriptures. Psalm 59:16-17 says, "But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength; yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning, for You have been my stronghold and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my strength, I will sing praises to You; for God is my stronghold, the God who shows me lovingkindness."

Meditate on the Bible: Psalm 1 describes the blessed man's way: "His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:2). Colossians 3:1-2 says, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

The Puritans often spoke of meditating on God's Word. Meditation is the intentional setting of the mind upon various truths to press them deeply into the heart. Here are some suggestions from the Puritans on how to meditate: (1) Pray for the power to focus your mind on the Word. (2) Read the Bible and select a verse or two. (3) Repeat those verses to yourself in order to memorize them, saying them ten times while looking at the page, then ten times while looking away. Repeat them once a day for retention. (4) Think about what these verses say and imply, probing the book of Scripture (other verses on the same topic), the book of conscience (how you have believed or disbelieved, obeyed or disobeyed), and the book of nature (how this truth appears in experience and in the world). (5) Stir your affections unto love, desire, grief, hope, zeal and joy, as appropriate. (6) Arouse your soul to the specific duty that the text requires, making holy resolutions for the glory of God. (7) Conclude with prayers for divine assistance, thanksgiving for graces given, and singing psalms of praise to God.

Growing through Family Disciplines

Release the Power of Regular Family Worship and Catechizing: Ephesians 6:4 says the head of the household has the responsibility to teach Christianity to his children: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Family worship should not be a burden but a delight. Arrange your schedules so that you can have a brief devotion in the morning, then a longer time in the evening. Have a plan for what you do. (1) Read some Scripture. (2) Memorize a catechism question and answer. (3) Pray briefly together. (4) Ask questions. (5) Sing praises. Do you want Christ to fill your home and your family relationships? Welcome Him into your house in regular family worship.

Growing through Corporate Disciplines

Make Diligent Use of the Sacraments: We may not separate the sacraments from the Word any more than we may separate the Word from the Spirit. In the light of the Word, the sacraments are signs that point us to Christ, and to the central moments of His work as the Mediator, His holy conception and birth; His redemptive suffering; His trials, crucifixion and death; His resurrection and ascension into heaven; and His coming again for His Church and to judge the world. Scripture commands us to prepare beforehand, by examining ourselves as to our repentance from sin, our faith in Christ, and the reality of our Christian discipleship; and by considering the end for which the sacraments were instituted. Every Christian should know how to improve his baptism, and what is required before, during, and after the time of administration.

Growing through Neighborly Disciplines

Have Compassion on People but Flee Worldliness: Christ 'was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.' Our hearts should break at the plight of sinners in this world. They are not safe in the fold of the Shepherd but are exposed to the ravenous wolves of the devil. They need Christ or they will be lost forever! May God give us a heart for the lost!

But in our compassion we must remember that they are a people with no king (1 Kings 22:17). Everyone does what is right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). Therefore we must love unbelievers but separate ourselves from their wicked ways. We must avoid the temptation to believe we must become like the world to win the world. In reality, we must love sinners but we must be different from them. Beware of living a divided life as if you could give part of it to God and part to the world. If salt loses its saltiness, its distinctive flavor is gone and it becomes worthless.