

spiritual ✕



disciplines



spiritual disciplines and their practice



If you are weary of some sleepy form of devotion, probably God is as weary of it as you are. – Frank LaBauch

It is probably a mistake to assume that one 'spiritual routine' is adequate to cover us for the rest of our lives. – John Ortberg

Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. – 1 Timothy 4:7-8

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. – 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intellectual people, but for deep people. – Richard Foster

Perhaps somewhere in the subterranean chambers of your life you have heard the call to deeper, fuller living. You have become weary of frothy experiences and shallow teaching. Every now and then you have caught glimpses, hints of something more than you have known. Inwardly you long to launch out into the deep. – Richard Foster

Spiritual disciplines are practices that help you focus on the life, power, strength, intimacy, encouragement, and admonishment within your relationship with Jesus.

As a small group leader, you are invited to use 10-15 minutes of your group time for the next few months to introduce these basic spiritual disciplines to your people. Encourage them to try several of them in their personal lives to discover a new level of richness in their relationship with Jesus and in understanding themselves. Ask them to give feedback as to what they discovered. Have fun with it and invite the Holy Spirit into it. It might just be what the doctor ordered for this season!

This is list of common practices; it is not intended to be the complete list.



meditation

Seeking to hear from God in His Word as you take the time to ponder a passage of Scripture and its practical meaning for your life.

Joshua 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success.

Psalms 1:2-3 ...whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on this law, day and night.

1. **What it looks like:** When you read or study a passage from the Bible, don't just read or study it and then leave it. Ponder it. Run the words over and over again in your heart and mind. Do you sense that God is speaking to any part of your life? Is there a connection here with something in your life? Are you experiencing what any of the characters in the story are living out? Is there a promise to trust, a command to obey, or an example to follow or avoid? Is there a deeper insight into God or your experience with God? What action are you going to take in response to what God is saying to you?

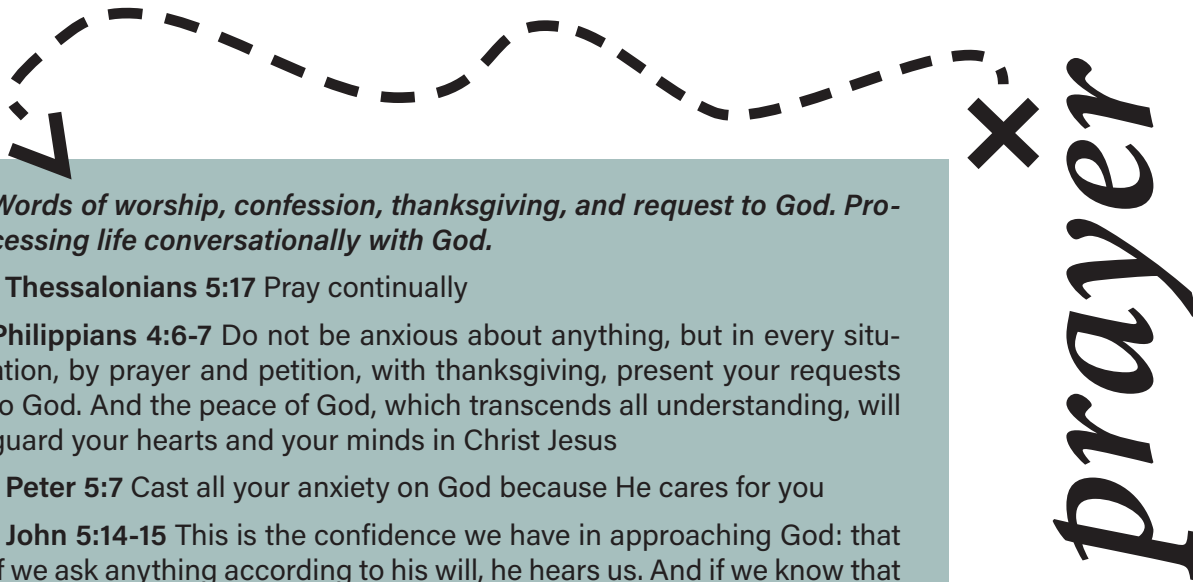
What will it look like for you?

2. **What it should do in your life:** Meditation should help you drill the Word of God deeper into your life, from your mind into your heart and your actions. You should experience your life being slowly conformed into the image of Christ as you let the Word of God transform you.

Make sure you take some concrete action in response to your meditation. This "action" could be as simple as a whispered prayer of praise to God for who He is as you have encountered Him in the passage, or as complicated as giving up a habit that you see is harmful.

What do you want to accomplish through meditation?

3. **What will you do with it?**



Words of worship, confession, thanksgiving, and request to God. Processing life conversationally with God.

I Thessalonians 5:17 Pray continually

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

I Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on God because He cares for you

I John 5:14-15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.

1. **What it looks like:** Prayer is basically just talking to God: sharing our joys, sorrows, feelings, and needs with Him; needs for ourselves and others; our situations, etc. Prayer should contain words of *worship* as you praise God; *confession* when you honestly share your sins, failures, and fears with Him; *thanksgiving* to thank God for what He has done and prayers He has answered; and “*petition*,” bringing our specific needs, concerns, and requests to God. You don’t need to have all of these in every prayer, but in the course of your regular prayer life they should all be evident.

Prayer is also a part of a dialog in which you process your thoughts with God, sharing your feelings, concerns, and needs with God, and then seeking to hear from Him in His Word.

- The paragraphs above are the basic definition and picture of prayer. There are lots of variations of this as you grow in your Christian life: listening prayer; centering prayer; “breath prayers”; prayer ministry; prayers of lament (which are not asking for anything specific, but are just crying out in agony to God); and more. Talk to your pastor, spiritual director, or mentor for more information on these.
- Praying together in a small group, with each member contributing a short verbal prayer, can also be a very powerful experience.

What will it look like for you?

2. **What it should do in your life:** Prayer connects you to the heart of God. As you develop a regular prayer life you will come to know God more intimately as both the majestic Lord of the universe, and also as your Father and friend who loves you, hears you, and cares for you. As you bring your petitions to God over time, you will sense His answers: many times, “Yes;” sometimes, “Wait;” and sometimes, “No, but I have something even better for you in the long run, though you don’t see it now.” You will grow to love and trust God.

What do you want to accomplish through developing a regular prayer life?

3. **What will you do with it?**

fasting

Spiritual fasting entails setting aside activities, as well as reducing the intake of food, and replacing these activities with the exercise of prayer and preoccupation with spiritual concerns.

Joel 2:12 "Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning."

Matthew 6:16-18 When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Acts 13:2-3 And while they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart now for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them away.


1. **What it looks like:** Setting aside something that you regularly do that has a degree of value to you and taking the time it would have taken to accomplish that activity to instead seek God in an anticipatory manner. It's not just giving up something, but also demonstrating to God that you are willing to forego something to seek Him and His will for your life.

What will it look like for you?

2. **What it should do in your life:** Fasting should have a freeing effect from the forsaken activity, break idols, bring discipline into your life and allow you to focus unhindered on God and the good work that He has set before you.
 - Fasting must be done within the context of the joyful thanksgiving of the new life in Christ.
 - The context of fasting is prayer. It should conform to the same conditions as prayer: unostentatious quietness before God, arising out of gratitude, expressing thanksgiving, grounded in faith, as a means of spiritual growth.

What do you want to accomplish through fasting?

3. **What will you do with it?**



The covenant between Christians that allows the life that God intended us to know and grow in. Christianity is done in the midst of others of like persuasion.

Hebrews 10:25 ...not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Philippians 2:1-4 Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, complete my joy, so that you are in agreement, having the same love, united in spirit, having one purpose. Do nothing according to selfish ambition or according to empty conceit, but in humility considering one another better than yourselves, each of you not looking out for your own interests, but also each of you for the interests of others.

fellowship

1. **What it looks like:** Two can do much more than one can accomplish by themselves. We can't encourage ourselves like someone else can, nor can we challenge a blind spot in ourselves. We need friendship, the ability to be known and to know others. We need to know that others believe like we do and to learn from the mature in Christ. All of these are functions of fellowship. We must choose to have people in our lives. There is a strong element of living life for the sake of others in Christian fellowship.

What will it look like for you?

2. **What it should do in your life:** It should encourage you in the faith and how you live it out daily. It should cause you to grow and to care about the growth of others. It should birth friendships and deepen the ones you have.

What do you want to accomplish in fellowship?

3. **What will you do with it?**

stewardship

The process of being responsible with someone else's property [God's] while it is entrusted to you. Today, stewardship is generally understood in a holistic or all-inclusive sense. The human managerial responsibility extends to all areas of life, both individual and communal, and includes both attitude and action.

2 Corinthians 8:7 But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

1 Peter 4:10-11 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.


- 1. What it looks like:** Stewardship is being aware of all that you are entrusted with, understanding it is from God, and using it to live your life in a pleasing manner to God and those around you. Being a good steward is the willingness to see the needs of others and participate in meeting them. It is also to see opportunities for what is good and to engage in it for the benefit of many. Stewardship also carries the responsibility of presenting our first fruits (the initial benefit of something) to God as a way of declaring that all things are His and that we trust our lives and needs to Him.

What will it look like for you?

- 2. What it should do in your life:** It should free you from idols and laziness. As we open our eyes to people and participate in meeting their needs, we realize that God does open His storehouse (Malachi 3:10-12) to those who put their trust and availability of their resources in God (time, talent and treasure).

What do you want to accomplish in your stewardship?

- 3. What will you do with it?**



Sharing the Good News (the Gospel) with another person with the intent that they understand the love of God and the magnitude of their sin to the point of repentance and confession of Jesus as Savior, and then as Lord.

Matthew 28:18b-20 All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Luke 10:2 The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

x evangelism

1. **What it looks like:** It begins with the awareness that you are saved by God's grace, not deserving what He has graciously done for you. This is the motivation that should spurn us on to tell others what God has done for us. Evangelism is being a witness to your own story of what God has done and is doing in your own life. We get stuck because we think we have to be perfect in our understanding of the theological context of it, but we don't. We should be as prepared and knowledgeable as we can be, but it's really just telling your own story. It should briefly contain why you needed a Savior and what opened your eyes to Jesus. Then, the main point is what God did for you. Finally, give a glimpse into what your life is like now with Jesus.

What will it look like for you?

2. **What it should do in your life:** Sharing your faith should cause a great sense of thanksgiving in your own heart as you recount God's love for you to others and to yourself. It should also give you a sense of boldness that God's story is true for and in you! If someone opens up their heart and listens, it is the most wonderful experience of watching a new life be birthed and another's sin literally forgiven and washed away.

What do you want to accomplish in your witness (evangelism)?

3. **What will you do with it?**

self-examination

Taking time to see and understand what the Holy Spirit wants to show you, call you to, and encourage you to do. Scrutiny of one's inner self to determine one's spiritual status, motive, and attitudes.

2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?

1 Timothy 4:16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

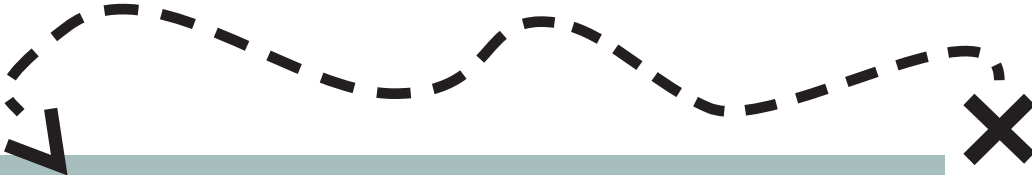
1. **What it looks like:** Inviting the Holy Spirit to help you take inventory of your heart and soul. It may be in a time of prayer, getting away from the busyness and allowing Him to speak into your conscience, showing you your true self, attitudes, and desires. King David prayed that God would create in him a pure heart and a steadfast spirit when he understood that he had sinned against God. (Psalm 51:10-12). So, it's not just examination, but asking God to do something about it, to restore that which has been trampled or destroyed.

What will it look like for you?

2. **What it should do in your life:** It should free you of present sin or encourage you that 'it is well with your soul.' Self-examination should be a stimulus to your faith and holy living. It should not be a morbid introspection, but rather a joyful expectation that forgiveness is near and joy will be experienced as you enter His gates with thanksgiving and praise for His grace, mercy and love for you.

What do you want to accomplish in your self-examination?

3. **What will you do with it?**



Bearing what is sin before God to God or to another that you trust in the faith.

Psalm 51:3-4 (1-19) Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

Proverbs 28:13 Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

Psalm 100:2-3 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

confession

1. **What it looks like:** On the one hand, confession means to declare publicly a personal relationship with and allegiance to God. It is an act of open, joyful commitment made to God in the presence of the world, by which a congregation or individuals bind themselves in loyalty to God or Jesus Christ. It is an avowal of faith which can have eternal eschatological consequences.

On the other hand, confession means to acknowledge sin and guilt in the light of God's revelation, and it is thus generally an outward sign of repentance and faith. When sin is confessed, it is done so in the safety of the covenantal promise that you are in Christ and therefore you will be received, forgiven, and restored. While God hates sin, His remedy for it is not to hate the sinner but to forgive upon confession and repentance. He invites us to get rid of that which destroys and desires to bring us into His light so that we can flourish as His children.

What will it look like for you?

2. **What it should do in your life:** Confession is good for the soul because it unbinds the sin and frees us into the freedom that God intends for us, which Jesus purchased and the Holy Spirit empowers us to live in. Whether it is confession of His worthiness or of our sin, the focus is on God, and that is worship. When we place God in a right position, we are then positioned to receive His blessings. If we seek the blessings without exalting God, we are simply using Him to get what we want instead of trusting Him to do the right thing for us, His children.

What do you want to accomplish in your confession?

3. **What will you do with it?**

solitude/rest

Scheduling time to step away physically and emotionally from the busyness of life and enjoy the presence of God; to spend time with the presence of God; to enjoy His creation.

Genesis 2:2 By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work.

Exodus 34:21 Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and the harvest you must rest.

Matthew 28:11 Come to me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

- 1. What it looks like:** It's amazing how hard it is to obey this command of God, especially in hard-driving, always-busy America. But the command to rest is one of the Ten Commandments! It is serious. To obey it, simply do what it actually says to do: take a designated time each week, a full day if possible, but at least half a day, to literally *rest*. Turn the TV off, shut off the phone and put it out of reach, take a nap, sit in a chair with a warm drink, or take a leisurely walk in nature. Most importantly, spend some extra time with God, praying or reading His Word, or just sitting or walking in His presence. Clear your mind from the pressures and problems of the world and of your life for a few hours, once a week, and just bask in the presence of God, and if possible, the beauty of nature.


This is harder, of course, if you have little children, but if you are creative you may be able to pull it off. Enlist your spouse to watch the kids for a few hours and then trade off so they can have their "sabbath" at another time. Pass your kids off to neighbors, friends, or relatives for a few hours a week (and pay them back somehow). Take advantage of "play dates" or any excuse to get a few hours alone.

What will it look like for you?

- 2. What it should do in your life:** God Himself, the Lord of the universe, eternal, almighty, Lord of Hosts, rested! Isn't that amazing? If God "needed" rest, how much more do we? God knew that we needed one day in seven to rest. He knew that we needed to recharge our physical batteries. And He knew that we also needed it emotionally and spiritually. We need time to throttle down emotionally. We need time to be with God and enjoy His presence, time to worship, time to remember God's blessings and His salvation. Sabbath resting refreshes us in every way, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

What do you want to accomplish through developing a regular time to rest?

- 3. What will you do with it?**



Quieting your mind and thoughts to be in the presence of God to worship and/or hear the nudging of the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 62:1 Only for God my soul waits in silence. From him is my salvation. [Lexham English Bible]

x silence

- 1. What it looks like:** We should be aware of the impact of the ‘noise’ in our life and what it is replacing. The practice of silence is what makes us aware of that noise. It is often in these times that we hear the ‘still small voice’ of God’s Spirit speak to our soul. Therefore, you have to decide what and who you should be listening to. Find enough time for you ‘settle’ into a place of peaceful thought and take captive the other thoughts that want to rush in – they can wait. Focus your heart and thoughts by doing something (like reading Scripture, listening to worship music, finding a place of beauty, or just shutting yourself away in your imagination) and invite the Holy Spirit to sit and talk with you.

What will it look like for you?

- 2. What it should do in your life:** Silence should let you breath, in a physical sense as well as a spiritual sense. It should slow you down to hear what is important. It should serve as an entrance to a settling in your inner person where communion with God can occur.

What do you want to accomplish in your silence?

- 3. What will you do with it?**

celebration/worship

Expressing adoration and reverence for God to Him. It covers such activities as adoration, thanksgiving, prayers of all kinds, the offering of sacrifice and the making of vows.

Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."


1. **What it looks like:** We all have things that we enjoy, value or cherish. Typically, we hold them worthy because of what *they* do for *us*. Worship is not about us, it is about the worthiness of God to be honored or paid homage too. It is directing your heart's affection, your activity, and your thoughts towards God or Jesus. It is the reminder that we are not God, He is. It can be an individual or corporate time or activity. Praying a common prayer or singing songs together are times of declaring something to and about the person and goodness of God. Songs that are about us are thanksgiving, not worship, and they serve to remind us of God's goodness. Worship must exalt God, lifting Him up in praise.

What will it look like for you?

2. **What it should do in your life:** Worship should help put things in perspective for us in terms of who is in authority. It should remind us of the vastness and majesty of God. It should have a humbling effect on us. It should speak of the good works and rich character of God.

What do you want to accomplish in your celebration and worship?

3. **What will you do with it?**



Not doing something worldly in exchange for doing something Godly; taking the time to repent, confess, and honor God so that you are ready to receive what he wants to do in and through you.

Joshua 3:5 Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you."

Consecration of self

1. **What it looks like:** Making choices about the things that influence you is part of growing in maturity in Christ. The Bible calls us to 'set ourselves apart' from worldly things and give ourselves to Godly things. This could be for a specific length of time or in your life choices in general.

What will it look like for you?

2. **What it should do in your life:** Consider the example of the sailboat. If the sailboat isn't in line with the wind, it doesn't move. However, if it is sailed in such a way to catch the wind in its sails, it moves effortlessly through the waves. Taking the time to take inventory and make choices about how you live and what you think and do, in light of who God is and who you are in Christ, should prepare you to be used by God.

What do you want to accomplish in your consecration of self?

3. **What will you do with it?**

gratitude

Taking time to practice thanksgiving to God and others for the good and growth in your life.

Psalm 100:3 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

Luke 17:11-19 [Jesus heals ten lepers, but only one of them comes back to thank Him. "Where are the nine?" is Jesus' haunting question in verse 17.]

- 1. What it looks like:** God loves you. Jesus died for you. His Spirit fills you. God gives you salvation, love, joy, peace, and the sure hope of eternal life as free gifts of His grace. He gives you innumerable blessings, even with the hard things in life. Are you thankful? Gratitude is, first of all, an attitude, a way of seeing the world realistically with all of its problems and dark sides. But it is also having a heart that is aware of God's presence in your life, that trusts Him to be in control, and that is genuinely thankful for His presence and His blessings minute by minute. It also means having that "attitude of gratitude" towards others, being genuinely thankful for good things that they do or say. Finally, gratitude means to take time, even designated time each day and week, to just sit with God in His presence and thank Him for His salvation and His love, for all of the good and growth in your life, and the people through whom He is working.


Giving thanks in community, in a small group, or an assembly of believers is also a powerful experience. Try it in your small group. Just go around and each tell God out loud what you are thankful for.

What will it look like for you?

- 2. What it should do in your life:** It is medically proven that nursing anger, grudges, vindictiveness, and unforgiveness can make you physically sick. Gratitude, on the other hand, is good for your soul. It lifts you to God and brings you into His presence with songs of joy. That will affect your body, mind, and spirit. And saying a kind word of thanks to another person will lift their spirit as well as yours.

What do you want to accomplish through gratitude?

- 3. What will you do with it?**



Taking time not only to read, but to observe and interpret a book or piece of literature, particularly Scripture. Study not only increases your knowledge but effects your life more deeply.

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in Your law.

II Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

study

1. **What it looks like:** “Study” means to “read the Bible with a pen or pencil in hand” (or nowadays, “Zoom annotate tools”). It means more than a cursory reading, or “reading to get a blessing.” To study means to dig deep, to find observations such as who, what, when, where, and how, or words that contrast or repeat; to develop interpretations by asking and answering good questions about what the text means; to try to state the main point, the core message; and then to apply the main point to your life.

It is best to learn to study the Bible on your own, without helps. However, some people find study guides helpful to use at the beginning of their journey of studying the Bible. There are many good study guides available; ask your pastor, mentor, or small group leader for suggestions. But make sure it is an actual “study guide” that asks you questions about the text, not just a “devotional” with only an inspiring story to read.

Studying on your own is life-changing, but studying the Bible in a community that is committed to discover and apply the truth of a text together can be awesome.

What will it look like for you?

2. **What it should do in your life:** In our broken world of pandemics, riots, racism, political turmoil, economic uncertainty, and a movement away from truth, we need to build our lives on the Word of God. It is our rock, our anchor of hope. One of the best ways to do that is to study the Bible and apply it, individually and in groups. Establishing a regular hour or two during the week when you put a little extra time into studying passages from the Scripture instead of just reading them, using the method described above or perhaps using a study guide, will not only help you learn the content and truths of the Scripture, but will help you meet God in His Word and learn to obey Him. That will truly transform your life.

What do you want to accomplish through regular, deep study of the Bible?

3. **What will you do with it?**