



Spiritual disciplines are tools that help to ignite our relationship with God. These practices are crucial in the lifelong process of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. As the apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:8, “Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is much more important, for it promises a reward in both this life and the next.” Some disciplines are corporate in nature (such as Sunday morning ministry and small group community), while others are more personal. This brochure highlights a few basic tips regarding two key personal spiritual disciplines: *Bible study* and *prayer*.

## Bible Study

### Why?

If you opened up your mailbox and found a letter from a dear loved one, what would you do? Most likely you would quickly tear it open and carefully read it—probably several times! After all, you would want to know what that special person had to say to you. Well, God has written a letter to each one of us. The Bible is his personal message about who he is and what he has done, and about who we are to be as his people. The only way that we can discover this is by regularly reading and intentionally studying God’s Word.

### How?

How does a person get started in studying Scripture? What are some important first steps? Here are a few suggestions:

- Pray and ask God to meet with you through his Word.
- Start with perhaps 15 minutes a day, and choose the time of day when you are at your best.
- Find a quiet place to read the Bible so that you will not be interrupted or distracted.
- Have a specific plan. Know in advance what you are going to do. For example:
  - ⇒ Read through the Bible in a year.
  - ⇒ Read through the book of Proverbs in a month.
  - ⇒ Read through one of the gospels.
  - ⇒ Read a psalm each day.
  - ⇒ Study a specific topic, passage, or book of the Bible.

- Read the biblical passage—a few times, if necessary. If you find it to be beneficial, read the section of Scripture aloud.
- Write down what you believe the author is saying and how this applies to your life.

In addition to these introductory suggestions, here is a popular method of studying God’s Word. Don’t be afraid to give it a try. The more you do it, the easier it becomes.

### *Step 1: Observation*—what does the passage *say*?

- Investigate the 5 Ws: who, what, when, where, why. Ask lots of questions of the passage.
- Imagine how you would have reacted had you been there. Enter into the world of the passage.
- Identify any key words or phrases. Use a concordance to cross-reference with other related passages.
- Record your observations.

### *Step 2: Interpretation*—what does the passage *mean*?

- Try to figure out the “big idea” or theme of the passage. If you had to summarize what is being said in one sentence or less, what would it be?
- Make a note of any difficulties or hard-to-understand portions of the text.

### *Step 3: Application*—what does the passage mean for *my life now*?

- D. L. Moody said, “The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives.” The intentional application of the Scripture to our lives is the ultimate goal of study. Anything less is not enough.
- Check for SPICE:
  - Sins to avoid or confess.
  - Promises to claim.
  - Insights to understand.
  - Commands to obey.
  - Examples to follow.

### Tools

#### INTERNET WEBSITES

- [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)
- [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org)
- [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org)
- [www.youversion.com](http://www.youversion.com)

## OBC LIBRARY

- *Transforming Bible Study* by Bob Grahmann
- *Living by the Book* by Howard & William Hendricks
- *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* and *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* by Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart

# Prayer

## Why?

Prayer does not exist so that God can find out what we need, because as Jesus says in Matthew 6:8, “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

So why pray? Because . . .

- Prayer expresses our trust in God and is a means whereby our trust in him can increase.
- Prayer brings us into deeper relationship with God, and he loves us and delights in our connection with Him.
- Prayer allows us to be involved in a significant way in the work of God’s kingdom.

## How?

There are many different ways to pray, but here are some of the most common elements. It is important to remember that any approach can soon become rote and devoid of meaning. Therefore, it is essential that we strive to deeply engage ourselves with God in order to truly encounter him.

- *Adoration.* This involves worshipping and loving God for who he is. As we read the Bible or reflect on God, we should remind ourselves of different aspects of his character and his nature. The Psalms, in particular, provide incredible examples of adoration.
- *Confession.* This involves admitting our failures, receiving God’s forgiveness, and committing to live differently. This is so important because unconfessed sin builds barriers between us and God.
- *Thanksgiving.* This involves expressing our gratitude to God for what he has done. Before we make requests of God, we should pause to express our gratitude for the ways that he has already shown up in our lives.
- *Supplication.* This involves making requests—concerns, needs, desires—to our Heavenly Father for our own lives and the lives of others. God loves to give good gifts to his children.
- *Silence.* This involves being still and listening to what God has to say to us. Remember, prayer is not a monologue. It is a way for our heart to be changed and our relationship with him to grow.

## What?

Sometimes we wonder what requests we should bring before God. What exactly should we pray for? The following list is not exhaustive, but it is a great starting point. Feel free to add items as the Holy Spirit leads you:

- Daily needs (Matthew 6:11).
- Forgiveness for sin (Matthew 6:12).
- Help in temptation (Matthew 6:13; 2 Peter 2:9).
- Enemies (Matthew 5:44).
- Salvation of the lost (2 Peter 3:9).
- God’s will to be done (Matthew 6:10).
- God to be praised and worshipped (Matthew 6:9).
- Spiritual leaders (2 Thessalonians 3:1).
- Earthly rulers (1 Timothy 2:1-2).
- Wisdom (James 1:5).
- The sick (James 5:14).
- God to protect his name and honour (Daniel 9:19).
- Strength in difficulties (Hebrews 4:16).
- Spiritual maturity (Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-14).
- Fellow believers (Ephesians 6:18).
- Boldness in sharing the gospel (Ephesians 6:19-20).
- Family members (Ephesians 5:22-6:4)

## Tools

### INTERNET WEBSITES

- [www.allaboutprayer.org](http://www.allaboutprayer.org)
- [www.navpress.com/magazines/pray](http://www.navpress.com/magazines/pray)
- [www.24-7prayer.com](http://www.24-7prayer.com)

### OBC LIBRARY

- *Too Busy Not to Pray* by Bill Hybels
- *Prayer 101* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Prayer* by Richard Foster