

# Following Jesus – Part 5: “Disciplines Of Grace”

## Greetings and Recap

A very good evening to all of you. Thank you for taking time this Saturday evening to join us in our Christian education program. I think you must be quite excited that finally we are going to emerge from circuit breaker, although progressively, but it's a good step. And I hope that during this circuit breaker, CEP, or this Christian education program has been a blessing to you. That's our goal in Gospel Light that we want to feed God's people God's word that we might be able to drink in the Gospel, so that we might live out the Gospel and give out the gospel. Now, this is our fifth session together, we have two more to go. But in the first four sessions, I really touched on very important theological foundations, we talked about what it means to follow Jesus. And that is you have to die to self. We explain what faith really is all about. I shared with you that it's important to realize not just that Jesus died for me, but that we died with Jesus, that union with Christ is something we have to reckon, consider to be true, so that we realize we are no more slaves to sin, but we can live in freedom, in life and in obedience to God. Then last week, we looked at a very important subject of what it means to be filled with the Spirit. Now all those are very important theological foundations.

## Disciplines of Grace

Today, we come to something a bit more practical, not that the first four were not practical, but this is very practical, in that it is directly things that you can do about your Christian life. So, we are covering this subject called the disciplines of grace. What are disciplines of grace sounds scary, sounds like someone is caning us. Note that what disciplines are simply things you do, and these are things that you can do in order for God's grace to flow into your life. So, I like to define first for you what this really means. The Disciplines of grace are things that Christians do to create space for the Holy Spirit to grow us in our hearts. Let me say this again, what are spiritual disciplines, there are things that you and I can do so that we can create space for the Holy Spirit to grow us to be more like Christ in our hearts. Now this is circuit breaker and a lot of us have to be at home and so I watched a bit more of TV programs. I caught this show about food, I'm interested in food, I love food. And it talks about how soya sauce is produced in some parts of Japan, not everywhere, but the traditional ones. And they speak about how this soya sauce is actually produced from these wooden barrels, these huge wooden barrels as you can see very old, very traditional. And if you go up and see these wooden barrels, you will see that they actually contain this mixture of soya bean and some liquid and so on. And the soya sauce producer, he says they wait for the microorganisms in the air to ferment the mixture. So, soya sauce is actually made from fermented soybeans. And that fermenting agent is those microorganisms. They are in the air. The microorganisms also live inside these barrels and on the surface sounds scary to me already. But that's how it is. And they will then gather these soya sauce. I'm not sure how but this is one way to do it. They use a little dish they collected it, made it apparently tastes amazing. Not like those industrial soy sauce we are used to. So, the soy sauce maker, he remarked. And I find it very helpful for us. “I don't make the soy sauce. The microorganisms, they make it.” Then what's your role? “I just create an environment where they can thrive.”

Why do I talk about soya sauce? Because I think in a way that describes spiritual change in our lives. Our hearts are like that soybean if you like, and the Holy Spirit is like that microorganism. It is only the Holy Spirit who can change hearts to produce soya sauce, to produce Christ's likeness, that produces joy and peace and righteousness. We can't produce that the Holy Spirit alone can. But we are to create the environment for the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts. So we are like the barrel makers, if I may say. So, disciplines of grace are things that Christians do to create space for the Holy Spirit to grow us in our hearts. We are like creating many, many barrels so that it can have maximum exposure of the soybeans, to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, what are the disciplines of grace, we'll cover today. For number one, we're going to look at the Bible. Number two, we're going to look at prayer. Number three, we're going to look at Christian community of fellowship. And number four, we're going to look at fasting. These are things that you can do, to create space for the Holy Spirit, to grow you in your heart. So, these are the barrels we create, so that the Holy Spirit like that microorganism can produce beauty and taste and aroma from our lives and from our hearts. So, I'd like you to focus on number one, the hearts. This is important. Christianity is not about behavior modification alone; you do not come to church so that you change the way you behave and speak and neglect what is in the heart. Christianity springs from the heart, guard your heart, for out of it, are the issues of life. Real change begins in the heart, and you cannot touch your heart, only the Holy Spirit can. But we can create space, in Word, in prayer and fellowship and fasting, so that God the Spirit can change us from the inside out. I think that's exciting; don't you think? Number two, I'd like you to think that this is the work of the Holy Spirit. As I've mentioned, I can't change my life, I can't change you. But as we read God's Word, as we pray, as we get in Christian community and as we fast, well, that allows the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. So that's really all I want to say, in general, about disciplines. I'm going to drill down a little into each of the four things we can do to encourage you to be abounding in reading the Bible, studying the Bible, in praying, in getting into Christian community and in fasting so that God can work and change your hearts.

### The Bible

Number one let's look at the Bible. The Bible tells us "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Spirit, who is the Lord." (2 Corinthians 3:18) Now I know there's a lot to chew here. But I want you to see, number one, Paul is describing someone beholding the glory of the Lord, from the Bible. Now you know that when you read the rest of the chapter, it's about Moses, it's about people looking at the Old Testament, the word of God. So, the idea here is we can be changed when we are looking at the glory of God in the Bible. So, if you want to be changed, you got to see God, that's who you want to be changed into, or changed to be like, but you can't do that if you're not beholding his glory in the Word. So, it's very important that we are reading the Bible, studying the Bible, seeing God in the Bible, so that we might be changed. This change is not instantaneous, or immediate or total, it is from one degree of glory to another. So please, don't expect yourself to become Apostle Paul overnight when you read the Bible. But it's like eating, you eat a bit, you grow a bit, you eat a bit, you grow a bit, no one grows from being a child, to being Arnold Schwarzenegger the next day, it takes time. And then we see that this is from the Lord who is the spirit, this change this transformation, actually, the word is

the *metamorphoo* (greek for) that change, total change from the inside out, is accomplished by the Lord, who is the spirit. Now, I've always liked this illustration. This is a picture of a man suntanning. Now he's out there. Why? Because he wants to be tanned. Who or what can make him tanned? Can he make himself tanned? In a sense, no, he can't. I can't say be tanned, be tanned, be tanned. I'm someone who can't get tanned easily anyway, but I can't get myself tanned but I know some things who can, which can and that is the sun. The sun is the only agent that can tan my skin. But my job is to get out into the sun. So, the idea here is, I can change myself, it's the Holy Spirit who can. So, all I do is that I expose myself to the sun, expose myself to the Holy Spirit by reading and studying the Bible. The more I get out into the sun, the more tanned I get, the more I study and understand the Bible, the more like Jesus the spirit will make me to be. So, this is a great verse, isn't it? I want to encourage you today, to be a student of God's word, study His word, not just so that you can, quote verses and spew sentences from the Bible, but that you see that as you are suntanned, looking at the sun of the Bible, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will change you into His likeness. Now there is no pride here, because it's the Holy Spirit who changes me. But there is no allowance for passivity here saying, Oh, God will change me anyway. No, you got to get into the sun. You got to read the Bible. So this is a very important first spiritual discipline, read, study the Word of God. That's what you're doing here. And we are praying that the Holy Spirit will change you to be more like Jesus.

## Prayer

Number two, prayer. Prayer is important. Now, prayer is important for many reasons. We pray for many things. We pray for health; we pray for protection. We pray that we will do God's work. Those are wonderful things but another thing you should pray for is for change. You should pray that you will be more like Jesus, I think that is the number one thing, we should pray for ourselves that we will be more like Christ, isn't it? And so, in Ephesians, chapter three, one of my favorite passages about prayer, it says here that Paul prays before the Father, I bow my knees is a picture of prayer. Why? He prays for them for many things, please look at verse 16, 17, verse 18, verse 19, he prays, ultimately, that they will be filled with all the fullness of God. Now, this compared with Ephesians, chapter four and verses 11 to 13, you will understand that this is a reference to being mature. So Paul's prayer is that the Holy Spirit would strengthen them in the inner man, that they might be ultimately mature. So, you see, we don't grow apart from praying that the Holy Spirit will change us and strengthen us and grow us. It's important to read the Bible. It's also very important to pray, because spiritual change is not just in a hit. It's in a heart, all right, and only the Holy Spirit will bring something that is merely academic, and intellectual to being life changing, life giving, life transforming.

So, what a blessing that God has given us His word that we might be thoroughly furnished unto all good works. God has given us the avenue of prayer that we might seek him and asked him to do what we cannot do for ourselves. And God has also given us His Church, His people. And the third means of grace is that of Christian community, Hebrews says, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another." (Hebrews 10:24-25) So I want to encourage you as well, that as we gather in Christian community, God uses that to change your life. Maybe it's an encouragement, a sharing, a prayer, an example, a provoking, a warning from someone in this community that we need, that God would use to change our lives. I want to say Christian community today is very misunderstood. People think that

going for a game of soccer, having tea eating, that is Christian community. Now that can be but I think there is more than that. It is that focus on spiritual life that is so important in Christian community. You can play soccer with friends who are not Christians, you can drink tea with friends who are not Christians. But when we gather as Christians, we should not neglect that spiritual input and ministry that we should have in one another's life. We should provoke one another to love and good works. pray for one another, point people to the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, if you're a Christian, and all you have is Sunday worship service, listening into Bible study, I'm afraid that's not quite enough. You need to be in community that people may speak directly into your life, and that you can also serve them. And you might be the agent that the Holy Spirit would use to change others. So apply yourself to spiritual disciplines.

### Fasting

The fourth and last one we will talk about is fasting. There are many misconceptions with regards to fasting. I want to say fasting is not to earn favor before God. God does not love those who fast more, and love people less who do not fast. It's not a means to gain favor. Fasting is also not a means to instant spirituality, almost thinking that if I fast today, I am so spiritual. No, it's not. It's just things you do to create space for the Holy Spirit to work in your hearts. That's all. It's not a guarantee for instant spirituality. And may I say this is not hunger strike, all right? Don't say to God, God, if you do not answer my prayer, I'm not going to eat. That's not the right way to approach God. But fasting is useful in that it helps us to express and it also increases our hunger for God. Matthew 9:15 says, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." So this fasting is a longing for the return of Jesus, for the presence, for the intimacy of Jesus. So fasting is not to earn favor. It's not a hunger strike, it's not a means to instant spirituality, but it is to express and increase our hunger for God. So that's it. These are the disciplines, things you do, that allows grace to flow into your life, for the Holy Spirit to work in your hearts. And I pray that you will now have a right perspective to studying the Bible praying, and so on and so forth. Many people do it for the wrong reasons. But do it for the right reasons today. You are saying, Lord, as I read as I pray as I get in community as I fast, I'm saying, Lord, please work in my heart, like those microorganisms that are needed to change the soybean into something beautiful. Let your Holy Spirit work in my heart, that Christ may be seen. I set up many, many barrels so that there is maximum space for you to work in my life. So be diligent about this. Dallas Willard, he says, "God is not against effort, but against earning." So be very diligent in reading the Bible studying the Word. Be very diligent in prayer. Be diligent in Christian community. Be conscientious in your fasting, so that in all these things, God will change you into Christlikeness.

### Conclusion and Prayer

I hope this is helpful for you. And I'll look forward to catching up with you at our zoom meeting right after this. Let's pray. Father, thank You for this time I pray that these teachings would be properly understood, and then applied in our lives, so that the Holy Spirit will change us into Christ's likeness. We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless.