

A 12-WEEK BIBLE STUDY

THE EXERCISE OF

THE SPIRITUAL

DISCIPLINES

Key Verse

*“I am teaching you the way of wisdom; I am guiding you on straight paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hindered; when you run, you will not stumble. Hold on to instruction, don’t let go. Guard it, for it is your life.”—
Proverbs 4:11-13 (HCSB)*

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The *ScienceDaily* (October 2, 2008) reported the results of a research study claiming that the use of music can significantly increase a person’s physical endurance and make the experience of exercise more positive. The article adds, “...the effects of music on mood and emotions open up the possibility that it can be used to improve compliance in exercise and therefore help people achieve their long-term health and fitness goals.”

While moving to the beat of music may help with the exercising of our physical bodies, even more important is moving to the rhythm of the Spirit in the exercise of the Spiritual Disciplines. Paul says in I Timothy 4:8, “Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.” The Spiritual Disciplines are exercises in various important facets of the Christian life and experience. Our goal this year is to stay “On the Move” with our spiritual growth by walking on the straight paths and in the way of wisdom, as Proverbs 4 describes it. Exercising along these paths is what will keep us from stumbling! In his book, *The Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster says, “The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths...They urge us to be the answer to a hollow world.”

In keeping with the idea that “moving to a beat” helps with physical exercise, each month’s study will correlate to the definition of a musical term that will help to illustrate the spiritual exercise of that particular discipline. My prayer is that God will deepen your walk with Him this year, so that you may run with joy and your steps will “not be hindered.”

All Scriptures are quoted from The New Living Translation

All musical definitions are taken from:

Glossary of Musical Terms

(www.classicalworks.com/html/glossary.html)

Other sources used:

The Glorious Pursuit by Gary Thomas

The Prodigal God by Timothy Keller



This study is formatted in 12 lessons that can be experienced in various ways such as a 12-week Bible Study, a monthly study/devotional, or a Sunday School class. You may copy and distribute for use in your local church. For a leader’s guide to go along with this study, go to www.alliancewomen.org/leadershiplink.

LESSON I

THE DISCIPLINE OF WORSHIP

Hymn: "A song of praise and glorification, most often to honor God."

Scripture Reading: *"Happy are those who hear the joyful call to worship, for they will walk in the light of Your presence, Lord. They rejoice all day long in Your wonderful reputation. They exalt in Your righteousness. You are their glorious strength. It pleases You to make us strong."*

—Psalm 89: 15–17, NLT

The call to worship is a call of joy! Like the definition of the musical term "hymn," anything we say or do that brings praise and glorification to God is an act of worship. Worship can take place in our hearts anywhere and anytime. And this verse tells us that wherever we are, worship keeps us walking in the light of His presence. The words of the psalmist bring to mind the image of a singer in a staged production who is followed by the spotlight no matter where she goes on the stage. She is enveloped in light...until she stops singing and moves offstage. Remaining "onstage" and in the spotlight of His presence occurs as we remain "on mission" with Him while keeping a continual attitude of worship.

How do we worship in response to that joyful call? We worship God by rejoicing in His wonderful reputation, or as the King James Version puts it, "[I] rejoice daily in His Name"; that Name above all names, at which every knee in heaven and on earth shall bow. His Name is our security code"—knowing His Name personally means that we are granted access to the Holy of Holies; that we are protected from the evil one; that we are loved. His Name is cause for rejoicing!

If we heed the joyful call to worship, walk in the light of His presence, and rejoice in His Name, the result is that we are filled and empowered by His strength. And it's not just an ordinary strength, but a "glorious strength"! When walking in a lifestyle of worship, it becomes His pleasure to make us strong; and in turn, it becomes our pleasure and privilege to know the empowerment of the Spirit and to display the truth of Paul's words that "...our great power is from God, not from ourselves" (2 Cor. 4:7).

This is the first step! We cannot adequately engage in any other practice of spiritual discipline without the priority of learning how to truly worship our great God.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Have you ever thought about the concept of your whole life being a "hymn of praise and glorification" to God? Approximately what percentage of your life would you say fits that description at the present time? _____% Discuss some ways in which you could increase that percentage.
2. Read Matthew 22:37–38. J. Oswald Sanders said, "Worship flows from love. Where love is meager, worship will be scant. Where love is deep, worship will overflow." How can you grow deeper in your love for Jesus?
3. An anonymous person once said, "Christians don't tell lies; they sing them." Unfortunately this is too often true. Many times as we gather in our worship services, God could say of us, "They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me." List some things that you can do to keep your heart in the right place as you worship God.
4. Psalm 89:16 says to "rejoice daily in His Name" (KJV). How much of your private devotional time do you spend just worshipping and praising His name? What are some ways in which you can incorporate that practice into your daily life?

LESSON 2

THE DISCIPLINE OF MEDITATION

Fermata: “A rest or note to be held for a duration that is at the discretion of the performer or conductor.”

Scripture Reading: *“Oh the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.”*

—Psalm 1:1–3

The musical term “fermata” perfectly describes the discipline of meditation. This discipline is the practice of drinking in the Word of God by resting in His presence and thinking deeply about what He says to us, for a duration of time that is at His discretion. You cannot rush through a time of meditation. If we want to become women who walk with God, we must become women of the Word. In II Chronicles 7:14 God urges, “seek My face.” The phrase “seeking the face of God” conveys the idea of a pursuit, a pressing in. It is not a passive activity, but involves actively listening for Him to speak to us through His Word. Take a short passage of Scripture—perhaps just one verse—and read it several times. Ask God to speak to you through it and then expectantly watch for the words or phrases that He particularly draws to your attention.

When we think about seeking God and listening for His voice, we need to remember that He has already revealed Himself through the Scriptures, and so it is through the Scriptures that He will most often speak to us. Treasure His Word. Ask God to GIVE you a love for His Word. Spending more and more time in His Word will result in experiencing His presence...which then brings inexpressible delight to what was previously seen as a duty. John Newton, the famed former slave trader who wrote “Amazing Grace,” also penned these words: “Our pleasure and our duty, though opposite before; Since we have seen His beauty, are joined to part no more.”

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Two of the definitions of the word meditate are “to ponder” or “to contemplate” (American Heritage Dictionary). Prior to this study, what images came to your mind when you thought of meditation?
2. In what ways might the practice of meditation bring about spiritual growth in your life?
3. Psalm 1:1–3 associates the words “joy” and “delight” with the practice of meditation. What makes the difference between meditation being a “discipline” or a “delight”?
4. This verse uses the imagery of trees bearing fruit and having leaves that never wither. What might this look like in the reality of your own life?
5. In order to meditate, you must stop, rest, and be still. How can we engage in meditation and still be “On the Move”?

LESSON 3

THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

Duet: “A piece of music written for two vocalists or instrumentalists.”

Scripture Reading: *“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”*

—*Philippians 4:6–7*

We see a wonderful example of the progress of the spiritual life of prayer in the story of Hezekiah, found in II Chronicles 29–32.

When Hezekiah became king, the first thing he did was to restore the practice of worship in the land of Israel (29:3,11)—confirming what we have already learned about worship being the starting point of all other spiritual disciplines. No sooner had Hezekiah gotten the people back on track with worship than he was attacked by the nation of Assyria. Hezekiah’s immediate response was to strengthen his position, check his fortifications, and double his guard (32:1–8)! This corresponds to our second discipline of meditation: We fortify and encourage ourselves through His Word and place ourselves in a position of being ready to hear from the Lord. Next, we see that after Hezekiah was obedient in doing his part—he prayed to God (32:20) and God miraculously answered by rescuing the nation.

Hezekiah’s obedient and loving relationship with God enabled him to have confidence in approaching God with his needs. Prayer is nothing more than a conversation with God. Our key verse, Philippians 4:6–7, says we are to pray about everything. Strive to develop the habit of interacting with the Lord throughout the day, cultivating a constant awareness of His presence that births an ongoing conversation with Him. In addition to these times of personal prayer, it is also very important to take time to intercede for the needs of others. We are commanded to pray for one another, and somehow in the mysterious plan of God, our intercessory prayers make a tremendous impact in this world.

When two musicians are engaging in a duet, they are constantly listening to and following one another. There is a type of intimate connection that occurs, and the result is beautiful music. Similarly, when we are engaged in prayer, there is an intimate connection with our Father, the Creator of the music of the universe.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Read Psalm 27:8 aloud. How do these words affect your understanding of prayer?
2. Chapters 18–20 of the book of II Kings tell the same story of Hezekiah and the threat of the Assyrian army. Read II Kings 19:14–19. How can you practically apply the example of Hezekiah’s response?
3. Part of our key Scripture this month says, “Don’t worry about *anything*; instead pray about *everything*” (emphasis mine). Easy to say, but hard to do! Discuss what has been helpful to you as you strive to apply this verse to your own life.
4. Read II Thessalonians 1:11. What might have been some of the specific requests Paul prayed for his fellow believers? What types of actions or attitudes do you think characterize a “life worthy of his call”?
5. Share about a time when your prayers, or the prayers of someone else, made a significant difference in your life.

LESSON 4

THE DISCIPLINE OF JOURNALING

Opus: "A convenient method of numbering a composer's works."

Scripture Reading: *"Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write a careful account for you...so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught."*
—Luke 1:3–4

Journaling is a way of recording the events of your life, the thoughts and prayers of your heart, and the intervention of God. It is giving testament to what happens in the present so that in the future you can look back and "be certain of the truth" (Luke 1:4). This discipline can be clearly seen in the life of David. In Psalm 40:5 he wrote, "Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to You; were I to speak and tell them, they would be too many to declare." David had a long history with God, and in his psalms he frequently recounted the Lord's goodness and His miraculous care. This formed the basis of David's praise and enabled him to move through new trials with a confidence in God and an unshakable joy. We need to choose to remember what God has done for us in the past. We need to record God's activities in our lives in ways that will help us to remember them when times are bad. Over and over again, we can see a pattern in David's psalms: First, he wrote, "This is how I feel," and second, "This is what I believe." In doing this, he modeled an important format of any type of journaling. After pouring out our feelings, we then build our faith by consciously remembering and writing down what we believe about God. Our faith is increased when we have a recorded history on which we can look back, allowing us to concretely trace the hand of God over the years.

Journaling can be a controversial discipline because not everyone is a writer. However, it can and should be a very personal way of recording your history with God. For some, it may be writing daily about thoughts and events. For others, it may be a form of prayer—writing down personal responses and requests after meditating on Scripture. Still others may journal only weekly or monthly. One of David's methods of journaling was song-writing; another contemporary alternative could be photo-journaling.

There is great freedom in how you choose to develop this discipline in your life, but in some form or other, begin journaling your history with God. Just like an Opus, "number the Composer's works," and you will find your faith beginning to grow!

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Discuss various creative or alternative ways of journaling. If you already engage in the discipline, share your experience of journaling.
2. Read Psalm 13. How is this psalm of David an example of "this is how I feel/this is what I believe" journaling?
3. Review again Luke 1:3–4. Obviously Luke's account is not exclusively his personal experience, but in what ways can you compare it to journaling?
4. Read Psalm 40:5. From what you know of David's life, what are some of the "wonders" he could have declared? List some of the wonders God has done in your life.

LESSON 5

THE DISCIPLINE OF FASTING

Tuning: “The raising and lowering of a pitch of an instrument to produce the correct tone of a note.”

Scripture Reading: *“Turn to me now, while there is still time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don’t tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead. Return to the Lord your God, for he is merciful and compassionate.”*
—Joel 2:12–13

We have progressed in our study through the disciplines of worship, meditation, prayer, and journaling; now we turn our attention to yet a deeper level of seeking God. In Joel 2, the prophet calls the nation of Israel to a fast of repentance. Throughout Scripture, repentance is often a hallmark of fasting; however, repentance is not the sole reason for fasting. It could be a desperate situation that leads us to fast, with the aim of seeking the face of God with a greater intensity. Or it could be that we regularly practice fasting as a means of growing deeper in our walk with God. Whatever the purpose, fasting is a very valuable tool when used in our prayer lives. It is important to mention that, wherever it is mentioned in Scripture, the discipline of fasting is always accompanied by prayer. Joyce Baldwin says, “The whole point of fasting was to render the prayer experience more effective and prepare oneself for communion with God.” It is not used as a means of twisting God’s arm, but rather as a means of cleansing our hearts and minds, helping us to be more aware of Him and committing ourselves completely to Him. Jesus assumed that fasting would be a part of our Christian experience. In Matthew 6:16, He says, “And *when* you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do...” (emphasis mine). Notice that He does not say “if you fast”! It is helpful to practice this discipline as a reminder that our physical desires are subject to God; whenever the hunger pangs strike, they become a means of directing our thoughts toward God. Fasting is a process of “tuning” our hearts, adjusting the tone of our lives to match His purpose.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. As a review, list some of the possible purposes for fasting.
2. Read Mark 6:16–18. What is to be our attitude while fasting?
3. Read Job 23:12. How can you apply this verse to the discipline of fasting?
4. For some people, there may be factors (such as medical conditions) that do not allow them to fast from food. What are some other ways in which the discipline of fasting could be practiced?
5. Someone once said, “What happens during the fasting is key to the feasting!” What do you think that statement is saying in terms of seeking God?

LESSON 6

THE DISCIPLINE OF SERVICE

Cavatina: "A short and simple melody performed by a soloist that is part of a larger piece."

Scripture Reading: *"No, this is the kind of fasting I want: free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help."*

—Isaiah 58:6–9

Thus far in our studies we have focused on various means of developing personal growth and communion between self and God. But the Christian soul cannot remain isolated. We are called not only to be in community with other believers, but also to offer up our lives in service to God, for the glory of His Name. I Corinthians 6:19–20 says in part, "You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price." God may call a particular person to fill a specific ministry role, but we are all called to do something... and we are not left to wonder what we should do. God is very specific in Isaiah 58:6–9. We are to care for the prisoners, the poor, the sick, and the oppressed. He makes it clear that even if we have mastered the discipline of fasting, it is worthless if the inward love we have cultivated towards God is not displayed outwardly to our fellow man. Throughout the Gospels it is clear that the heart of Jesus was drawn to the poor and the oppressed, and we are called to follow His example. God desires for us to be passionately concerned about the welfare of others, and we are often called to go outside of our comfort zones. Yet we also must be careful to tend to our own basic physical and spiritual needs. We are not serving in the Spirit when we overextend ourselves to the point of frustrated weariness. Exhaustion and burnout lead only to bitterness and a martyr complex. We will be called to make sacrifices, but we must realize that we cannot minister to someone else if our own resources are not being replenished through rest and personal time with God.

Like the musical term "cavatina," we are each given an important solo line to play...but we must always remember that it is part of a larger musical piece. It takes all of us, serving together for the glory of God, to fulfill His purposes here on earth.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Read Matthew 20:26–31. How does Jesus relate leadership to service?
2. Read Psalm 41:1–3. Discuss some specific ways in which we can be "kind to the poor" (NLT) or show "regard for the weak" (NIV).
3. Separate out and list each type of service named in Isaiah 58:6–9. What specific opportunities are available in your church to meet one or more of these needs? Pray about how you can get involved, or how you might need to change your involvement.
4. Discuss Colossians 1:29. What differences might you see between laboring with "His energy" versus laboring with "my energy"?

LESSON 7

THE DISCIPLINE OF SIMPLICITY

Pastoral: "A composition whose style is simple and idyllic."

Scripture Reading: "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."

—Matthew 6:33

Living a life of simplicity requires two main components: focus and contentment. Our key verse for this lesson tells us, "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else." That requires intentional focus and a sense of purpose. Most of us have busy lives that are filled with stress and uncertainty. It is crucial that we prioritize our activities and determine the focus that God wants us to have. Evaluate your activities in the light of eternity and ask yourself: Am I spending time on things that really matter? Simplify your life as much as you can by deciding what's really important to you and taking time to discern what God has called you to do. An exercise that might help in this process is to ask yourself the question, "What are the things that no one else can do but me?" Focus your energies and evaluate your priorities by these things. It doesn't necessarily mean that these are the *only* things you can do; however, you can now evaluate requests for new commitments by these priorities. When you begin to feel overwhelmed and out of balance, often it's because you have lost sight of your focus. Focus brings God's peace and joy because you are centered on HIS calling, HIS will, and not your own agenda.

The other key to the discipline of simplicity is cultivating a spirit of contentment. Colossians 3:1–3 talks about setting our hearts and minds on things above. This calls us to live with an attitude of detachment toward the material possessions of this world because our lives are hidden in Christ and our focus is on the things that are eternal. God's Word says that "true godliness with contentment is great wealth...so if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content" (1 Timothy 6:6,8). Is the "stuff" you possess getting in the way by taking up too much of your time, energy, and resources?

In a world of fashion and consumerism, let us be known as a people whose "style is simple" and whose focus is on the kingdom of God, both in this world and the next.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Read Philippians 3:3–9. What were some of the "things" that Paul considered worthless? What "things" in our lives today might be comparable?
2. Think about the question, "What are the things that no one else can do but me?" Make a list of your answers.
3. Read Philippians 4:11–13. In striving to live with the mindset Paul describes, what are some of the obstacles we face in North America?
4. In order to practice this discipline of simplicity, do you need to address the area of commitments, the area of possessions, or both?
5. If you could be more focused in one area of your life, what would it be? What are some practical ways in which you could begin to simplify your life? Discuss different ideas as a group.

LESSON 8

THE DISCIPLINE OF SUBMISSION

Clef: "A symbol at the beginning of the staff defining the pitch of the notes found in that particular staff."

Scripture Reading: *"You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave, and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross."*

—*Philippians 2:5–8*

Having the same attitude as Christ Jesus... that's a pretty sobering thought! Most of us have miles to go in this discipline that is all about the relinquishment of self. Submission is often considered a very negative word, especially among women, but another word we could use to describe it would be humility. Often we think of submission the way the world thinks of submission: putting yourself down, or thinking poorly of yourself. But the biblical view of submission, or humility, is not defined by thinking less OF yourself—it's thinking less ABOUT yourself. It's removing self-focus and placing the focus on God; it's seeing yourself in the light of His majesty and holiness. Look at Moses—he was one of the most powerful leaders in history! Yet Scripture tells us, "Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). How was that possible? It was because he regularly met with God (Exodus 33:11) and continually saw himself in the light of God's glory. As Pascal said, "Knowing God without knowing our own wretchedness makes for pride. Knowing our own wretchedness without knowing God makes for despair."

When Christ came to earth, "he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave." Living out the discipline of submission means living in such a way that we give ourselves over completely to the Lord, renouncing any claim on our own lives. It is acknowledging that He is in control and we are not... and then living like we believe it!

Living a truly submitted life means living with peace and assurance, regardless of the circumstances. Like the role of the "clef" in music, we allow God to define the pitch and the notes of our lives.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What are the mental thoughts and images that come to your mind when you hear the word "submission"?
2. Gary Thomas said, "The surest road to humility is a constant remembrance of God...we don't **become** humble so much as we learn to **practice** humility." In what ways can you begin to practice humility, or submission?
3. How does this biblical concept of submission compare or contrast with the contemporary emphasis on self-esteem?
4. Hudson Taylor once wrote, "I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realize He is able to carry out His will, and His will is mine." How can this realization help us to live a life of submission?
5. Read Romans 13:1–2, Ephesians 5:21, and Colossians 3:18. In obedience to God, what other types of submission are we called to exhibit?

LESSON 9

THE DISCIPLINE OF SOLITUDE

Tacet: "Silent; do not play."

Scripture Reading: *"I wait quietly before God, for my victory comes from him... Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in Him."*

—*Psalm 62:1,5*

When we look at the life of David in the Old Testament, we see a man who experienced shepherding, soldiering, assassination attempts, kingship, wealth, talent, and tragedy. Yet in the midst of it all, David knew the importance of waiting before God in silence. In our modern society we are constantly surrounded by noise, so much so that we often don't even recognize it. There is music in the stores, in our cars, and on the phone when we are put on hold. Most of us have multiple televisions and computers that are constantly turned on. We all want to live lives that are obedient to God, but how can we be obedient if we aren't listening to what He is saying to us? In fact, the very word "obedient" comes from the Latin word "*audire*" which means "listening." Henri Nouwen says, "A spiritual discipline, therefore, is the concentrated effort to create some inner and outer space in our lives where this obedience can be practiced... Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life."

People say they want peace and quiet, but many times what they really mean is that they want time to pursue their own pleasure and entertainment. Often people have great difficulty in facing real solitude. Just as it is easier to hear the voice of God in the quiet, so it is easier to hear all those other voices in the quiet: the voices of fear, or worry, or unwanted memories. We frequently distract ourselves with outer activity in order to mask the inner chaos. It takes time and practice to learn to shut out those other voices and focus on the voice of God. Madame Guyon, a Christian writer from the 15th century, said this: "Be assured that as your soul becomes more accustomed to withdrawing to inward things, this process will become easier. There are two reasons that you will find it easier each time to bring your mind under the subjection of the Lord. One is that the mind, after much practice, will form a new habit of turning deep within. The second is that you have a gracious Lord!"

A common admonition heard today is "you need to face the music!" Instead, perhaps we need to turn the music off and learn the meaning of "tacet": be silent, do not play.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Henri Nouwen writes that through solitude we "prevent the world from filling our lives to such an extent that there is no place left to listen." What things are currently filling your life and preventing you from listening?
2. Read Habakkuk 2:20. What does the silence signify? Why is it the appropriate response in this situation?
3. Where do you go to find solitude? How can you carve out regular opportunities for silence in your daily or weekly schedule?
4. Read Matthew 14:23. How does Jesus' need for solitude speak to you about your own need for solitude?

LESSON 10

THE DISCIPLINE OF STEWARDSHIP

Time Signature: “A numeric symbol in sheet music determining the number of beats to a measure.”

Scripture Reading: “Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will be.”
—Matthew 6:21

Stewardship is the disciplined use of time, money, and resources. A “steward” is defined as someone who manages the affairs of another. A good steward always has the owner in mind, keeping her focus on the owner’s pleasure and will as she takes care of the property that does not belong to her. In Matthew 6:21, Jesus instructs us in this central concept of stewardship by spelling out the bottom line: wherever our hearts are, wherever our focus lies—that is what we truly treasure. Cultivating the spiritual discipline of stewardship means learning to live with an eternal perspective and keeping our hearts set on Christ, while we hold our material possessions with open hands. “In a truly biblical worldview, ‘things’ are good and are declared so by God Himself, Who is the Master Creator. Sin enters our hearts not when we begin desiring things, but when we desire them out of proportion to their true worth” (Peter Kreeft, quoted in *The Glorious Pursuit*).

We may not all possess great wealth in terms of material possessions, but we all have resources—abilities, families, or ministries—that have been entrusted to us. God calls us to be ready to freely offer up our resources to Him, recognizing that He is the Giver of all gifts and we are merely the stewards of them. It is He Who determines how and when those gifts are to be used. He uses not only material resources, but also resources of skill and talent. When God is building something, He provides all that is needed!

The giving of money and possessions is the first thing that comes to mind when the subject of stewardship arises. Yet, like a time signature in music, the amount of money you give is merely a number. The question is, what does that number reveal about the state of your heart?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What are some of the gifts, material and otherwise, that God has given you to use in His service?
2. Read Exodus 35:25–26. Besides their skill, what important quality is evident in these women?
3. Give examples of some “treasures” that can distract your heart.
4. Discuss the principle of “tithing” (the giving of a 10% portion). How does it fit in with the discipline of stewardship? In what ways is stewardship broader than the principle of tithing?
5. The word “ready” means “prepared and available for action or use.” Spend some time, either individually or as a group, praying about whether you are ready to give of the resources that have been entrusted to you.

LESSON II

THE DISCIPLINE OF SABBATH

Adagio: "A tempo having slow movement; restful, at ease."

Scripture Reading: *"So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. For all who have entered into God's rest have rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world. So let us do our best to enter that rest. But if we disobey God, as the people of Israel did, we will fall."*

—Hebrews 4:9–11

What a wonderful day it must have been when, after decades of wandering, the Israelites finally crossed into the Promised Land and had a place to call "home"! Joshua 21:44 says, "And the Lord gave them rest on every side..."

While the Israelites experienced an earthly place of rest, Hebrews 4:9–11 makes it clear that we who are believers have entered into a place of spiritual rest and peace. When we believe by faith on the Son of God for salvation, the Sabbath-rest of God becomes our new "home," our permanent dwelling place. However, it's sometimes easy for us to subconsciously fall back into the "works" mode of life—doing, doing, doing in order to try to please God. But in the Sabbath-rest of God, works are worthless as a means of purchasing salvation, and faith is the currency. God in His mercy gives this place of rest. The Israelites did not earn the land they entered, but received it as a gift from the hand of God. In the same way, we just need to take possession of the land God has already given us and live fully in it, appropriating His promises.

Why then does Hebrews 4:11 say, "So let us do our best to enter that rest..."? The end of the verse makes it plain. While abiding in God's Sabbath-rest, the only effort we must make is to live in obedience, listening for His voice and doing what He says. A Sabbath-rest lifestyle becomes a life of joy-filled adventure and opportunity, watching to see where God leads next and following in His footsteps of grace. It is an "adagio" lifestyle, marked by an inner sense of restfulness and ease. If you are a believer, you are already living in a Sabbath-rest reality. Begin cultivating a Sabbath-rest mentality!

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. The reality of a Sabbath-rest takes place when you become a believer. What might this look like in the practicality of your everyday life?
2. Read Mark 4:31. How important is it to also take a regular "Sabbath-rest" for our physical bodies?
3. Read Titus 3:5. Discuss the difference between a "works" mentality and a "grace" mentality.
4. Read Hebrews 4:11. How do you explain the effort described there in light of a Sabbath-rest mentality?

LESSON 12

THE DISCIPLINE OF CELEBRATION

Allegro: "A direction to play lively and fast."

Scripture Reading: *"So the people went away to eat and drink at a festive meal, to share gifts of food, and to celebrate with great joy because they had heard God's words and understood them."*

—Nehemiah 8:12

The context of this wonderful verse is that the people of Israel had heard and understood the Word of God after they had returned to Jerusalem following their captivity. They had forgotten many things during their exile in Babylon and had long neglected the instruction of the Lord. Their immediate and instinctual reaction upon hearing the Scripture was to weep tears of penitence (v. 9), but Nehemiah encouraged them with these words: "The joy of the Lord is your strength!" Gary Thomas says, "Surprisingly, penitence is the spiritual prelude to true celebration. People caught in the world are deadened by sin and frequently numb to what is happening within them. Penitence sets us free to experience true contrition, but this is the gateway also to experience true joy."

When Jesus came to earth, the Living Word became flesh among us. As we hear and understand this Word, and come to Him with tears of repentance, He promises us His joy. Hebrews 1:9 says that "God anointed Jesus with the oil of joy." In John 17:13 Jesus says, "I have told them many things while I was with them so they would be filled with my joy." This is surely cause for celebration! God is the source of all joy, and as His children, we have access to that joy. These Scriptures teach us that our joy is not just a subjective feeling but is based on our relationship with Christ.

As believers, we are called to live out the discipline of celebration, not only individually but corporately. While we are to live in such a way that our joy is evident to others, the fulfillment of celebration can only happen in community. Timothy Keller says, "Jesus came to bring festival joy. He is the real, the true 'Master of the Banquet,' the Lord of the Feast." When we come together as the Body of Christ to celebrate His death and resurrection, we are mirroring the joy of the Father... and getting just a glimpse of the great and ultimate feast of celebration in the new Kingdom!

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Read Isaiah 25:6–8. What type of celebration does this scene describe?
2. Read John 15:9–11. How does this verse relate to living a life of celebration?
3. Would you characterize the weekly gathering of your local church as a "celebration"? Why or why not?
4. List some ways in which you can increase your practice of the discipline of celebration:

Individually--

Corporately--