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**DO YOU
HAVE AN
UNUSUAL
HABIT?**

The **POINT** ➤

**Growth in Christ occurs when we
practice spiritual disciplines.**

➤ 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-10

¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ²through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

⁶If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.

⁷Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to

come. ⁹The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. ¹⁰For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.



FOR LEADERS (15 minutes)

THE POINT // GROWTH IN CHRIST OCCURS WHEN WE PRACTICE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES.

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // GOD

God communicates to us through His Word and hears and answers when we pray, and our spiritual maturity depends on our practicing these spiritual disciplines.

Message to Leaders

We grow in Christlike maturity when we practice spiritual disciplines. It is true that only God causes us to grow; however, we put ourselves in the position that God would work in us when we carry out the things to which He's called us. Studying Scripture and spending time in prayer are absolutely essential to our relationship with God. It is just as important that we steward well the resources God has entrusted to us, spend time in community, serve the church, share the gospel, and live our lives as an expression of worship to God. We are called to grow in spiritual maturity, and our growing to be like Jesus depends on our living disciplined lives.

> Engage Option 1

Ask students to get into groups of three. Give each group a list of spiritual disciplines, and have students write down practical ways they can live those out. Say, **"Spiritual growth takes time and hard work, but practicing spiritual disciplines can help us in our daily walk with Christ."**

> Engage Option 2

Decorate the room with workout equipment. Say, **"If we want to get in better shape, we discipline our bodies by working out. If we want to grow in our relationship with God, we practice spiritual disciplines."**

> Engage Option 3

Search the Internet for "How Great Athletes Teach Us about Spiritual Discipline." Play the video as you begin the session. Say, **"Athletes are able to perform the ways they do because of tedious practice and discipline. If we want to grow in our obedience to Christ, we must practice spiritual disciplines on a daily basis."**

NOTE: Always make sure you preview any video clip you show students and ensure it is appropriate for your church and ministry.

LEADER PACK ELEMENTS

If you have the optional Leader Pack, consider the following:

ITEM 8: Introduce students to the main idea by displaying the **Habits Poster**.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

THE POINT // GROWTH IN CHRIST OCCURS WHEN WE PRACTICE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES.



THE SETTING

Paul wrote the First Letter to Timothy around AD 63 after his (Paul's) first imprisonment in Rome. Timothy was leading the church in Ephesus. In the letter, Paul gave Timothy instructions concerning order and structure in the church. In chapter 4, Paul addressed the issue of false teachers and encouraged Timothy to be a faithful minister for Christ.

FACT:

Approximately half the time we're awake is spent carrying out automatic behaviors or habits.¹ We'd better make sure we cultivate good habits!

We have good habits, maybe a few bad habits, and perhaps a couple of unusual habits. For example, some people:

- sleep with a stuffed animal, even as teens, because it helps with being afraid of the dark.
- eat their least favorite food on their plate first to save the best for last.

The writer Voltaire drank 40-50 cups of coffee—every day! That may sound like a bad habit, but Voltaire also lived to the age of 83. The artist Michelangelo slept in the same clothes for days on end and avoided baths. Again, this doesn't sound healthy, but Michelangelo lived to be 89, and he's regarded as one of the most versatile and influential artists in history.

We might debate whether certain habits are good or bad, but there are some things we can do that are definitely good for us. Anything we do that helps us grow in our walk with Christ is definitely good, and we would benefit from learning to do these regularly and faithfully.



IMPART (30 minutes)

THE POINT // GROWTH IN CHRIST OCCURS WHEN WE PRACTICE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES.

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-3

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-3

God has provided many good things for us, but the world often refuses to use them as God intended. Paul said this would happen, and he referred specifically to “later times.” This, as well as the term “the last days” refers specifically to the time between Jesus’ ascension and His return. As the end gets closer the world will be busy “paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons.”

As in Paul’s day, we see people who leave the faith. Many claim to follow Jesus, but words alone do not prove they have a new life or a relationship with Christ. Those who depart from the faith do not lose their salvation—true salvation is never lost. Instead, these people demonstrate that they were never saved to begin with.

Many are led astray by people who offer a counterfeit spirituality. These false teachers are hypocrites who willfully deceive by distorting the things of God. Paul gave two examples.

- **Marriage:** Paul wrote that these deceivers “forbid marriage.” As the apostle wrote this letter to Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus, the church was under attack from legalistic false teachers who prohibited people from getting married. The covenant of marriage is God’s good gift, and His people should celebrate it. Jesus Himself endorsed marriage: the joining together of one man and one woman in a lifelong relationship (Matt. 19:4-8).
- **Food:** The deceivers also will demand that people abstain from eating certain foods—foods that God created for them to eat. In the garden of Eden, God allowed Adam and Eve to eat fruit from any tree except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17). While the Old Testament law restricted the children of Israel from eating some animals (Deut. 14:3-21), God later clarified that Peter was free to eat anything God had made clean (Acts 10:15).

The hypocrites and deceivers Paul described were not promoting moderation, balance, or making healthy choices. They were deceitfully teaching the people to refuse good gifts from God. Marriage and food are wonderful gifts God created for us, which we should receive with gratitude. To accept the distorted teachings of deceivers is to reject God as Provider. It is to view Him as a tempter who created humanity with needs and desires but without a way to satisfy them. Instead of appreciating His gifts, we would become bitter and ungrateful. Such self-denying practices distort our understanding of God, our gratitude toward Him, and our walk with Him.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 64)

- 1 What are some examples of good things that have been distorted by our culture?
- 2 What steps can we take to be able to identify false teaching when we hear it?



1 TIMOTHY 4:4-7a

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. 1 TIMOTHY 4:4-7a

God's creation is good. On the sixth day, when God saw all that he had made, He declared that "it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Now in his letter to Timothy, Paul stressed that everything created by God is good—therefore, we can receive it all with thanksgiving. Instead of rejecting the good things God has given to us, we are to receive God's good gifts with wholehearted gratitude. After all, every good thing comes from His hand.

The gift reflects the giver. This means that the gifts we receive from God are holy. They are to be received prayerfully and used in ways that bring honor to Him. When we use the good things God has given us in ways they weren't meant to be used, instead of thanks, this is an abuse of God's kindness.

- **Marriage:** Many people seek to enjoy the benefits of marriage—specifically relational and physical intimacy intended to be experienced between a husband and wife—outside the context of a marriage covenant. In our mainstream culture, many argue that premarital sex, homosexuality, and divorce are just fine. However, this is very clearly against Scripture.
- **Food:** We are encouraged to continually indulge ourselves with the best foods, and too much of them. In the US today, over 70% of adults are overweight, and 40% are considered obese (extremely overweight).²

When we abuse our sexuality, or when we abuse food, we bring harm to ourselves in very real ways. Paul urged Timothy to help those he served to understand these things. He was to correct the deceivers' false teachings by focusing the believers' attention on God's truth. Our conduct must always be in line with the unchanging teachings of God's Word, not on the standards of our society.

Many of our culture's perspectives aren't in line with the Bible's teachings. If we are to recognize truth from error, we must know what God has communicated in Scripture. Paul was certainly referring to the teachings of abstinence from food or marriage, but the principle expands beyond those two teachings. Just like with a twenty-dollar bill, the best way to know when a teaching is counterfeit is to thoroughly know the real thing. Therefore, we must know the hallmarks of truth, and truth is found in God's Word.

If we are to recognize truth from error, we must know what God has communicated in Scripture.
#BSFLSpiritualDisciplines



DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 65)

- 3** What things or ideas does our culture value that go against God's truth?
- 4** How has knowing the truth helped you avoid silly or misleading teaching in the past?
- 5** What are some examples of the "good" gifts Paul mentioned in verse 4?



1 TIMOTHY 4:7b-10

Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. **1 TIMOTHY 4:7b-10**

We ended the previous section on Paul's emphasis and command to avoid pointless and silly myths (v. 7). The apostle immediately followed that with a second command: "train yourself in godliness." The first command is incomplete without the second. It's never enough just to avoid doing wrong—we must commit to doing what is right!

Training is hard work. Athletes endure hours of training, so they can perform their best when the big game comes. Actors rehearse their lines repeatedly so they "hit their mark" and the scene comes alive. In the same way, as followers of Christ, we must discipline ourselves so we can live out God's plan for our lives. There are no shortcuts to achieving our best. However, many people would like to have all the benefits of training, but with very little effort. Everyone wants to have all the success of a star professional athlete, but very few are willing to do all it takes to get there. The same principle applies to our spiritual life.

Physical exercise is good for us, but spiritual discipline is even more important—the blessings apply not only to right now, but for eternity. This is why believers must be willing to train. To "labor and strive" doesn't refer to casual, easy activities. In fact, spiritual disciplines are often quite rigorous. Paul did not encourage Timothy (or us) to take the easy path. Instead, we are to take the best path—the one that leads to godliness. This is always worth the effort!

When we practice spiritual disciplines, we open ourselves up to God's working in us so He can produce godliness in us. Believers, just like athletes, are to be strategic in practicing spiritual disciplines.

- **Bible Study:** helps us avoid silly myths and falling prey to false gospels.
- **Prayer and Meditation:** help increase intimacy with and dependence upon God.
- **Confession of Sin:** helps us remain humble and fosters our relationship with God.
- **Fellowship and Corporate Worship:** form connections with other believers, build up the church, and bring honor to God.
- **Service:** demonstrates love and meets needs in real ways.
- **Evangelism:** through sharing the gospel we fulfill our mission to reflect God's character to the world.

As important as the spiritual disciplines are, our confidence is not in the spiritual disciplines. Our confidence and hope are in God, who is working through our obedience to conform us into Christ's image. While we cannot manufacture godliness on our own, God will use our disciplined training to produce godliness in our lives.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 65)

- 6** What are the challenges and benefits of training ourselves in godliness?
- 7** What strategies have helped you stay committed to spiritual disciplines?
- 8** What are some specific spiritual disciplines you will commit to?



LIVE IT OUT (10 minutes)

THE POINT // GROWTH IN CHRIST OCCURS WHEN WE PRACTICE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES.



GOD

JESUS

HOLY SPIRIT

BIBLE

SALVATION

CREATION

CHURCH

PEOPLE

FAMILY

COMMUNITY
& WORLD

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING // GOD

God communicates to us through His Word and hears and answers when we pray, and our spiritual maturity depends on our practicing these spiritual disciplines.

We grow in Christlike maturity when we practice spiritual disciplines. It is true that only God causes us to grow; however, we put ourselves in the position that God would work in us when we carry out the things to which He's called us. Studying Scripture and spending time in prayer are absolutely essential to our relationship with God. It is just as important that we steward well the resources God has entrusted to us, spend time in community, serve the church, share the gospel, and live our lives as an expression of worship to God. We are called to grow in spiritual maturity, and our growing to be like Jesus depends on our living disciplined lives.

>CHRIST

9 Godliness refers to living like Jesus. What five words would you use to describe the ways Jesus lived?

10 Choose two of these ideas where you have room to grow. How will you commit to growing in these areas this week?



LIVE IT OUT

THE POINT // GROWTH IN CHRIST OCCURS WHEN WE PRACTICE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES.

> COMMUNITY

We are called to devote ourselves to disciplines like studying Scripture, prayer, and stewardship. We are also called to disciplines that involve others, such as hospitality, serving others, and community.

11 On a scale from 1 to 10, how well are you doing with disciplines that involve others? Which one stands out as an area that needs improvement in your life?

12 How will you grow in practicing disciplines in order to bless others or to grow in your relationship with others?



> CULTURE

Most Christians are familiar with Jesus' call for us to share the gospel. However, far fewer understand that evangelism is a discipline we're called to regularly practice.

13 How often do you share the gospel with lost friends?

14 How many times per week do you think would be healthy for you? Commit to practicing evangelism in a disciplined way. If you need help knowing how to share the gospel, ask a leader or trusted friend.