INTRODUCTION

Spiritual Disciplines:

Discuss the following quote.

“Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”

Richard Foster (Celebration of Discipline, p.1)

What do you think he means when he says “Superficiality is the curse of our age”?

In what ways, spiritually speaking, do we tend to expect instant satisfaction?

What does Foster mean when he says our desperate need for today is to have more “deep” people?

How does one become “deep”?

What is your gut reaction to the words “spiritual disciplines”? What are spiritual disciplines?

Spiritual disciplines are activities we come to value as essential for spiritual life. They are the key to deeper intimacy with God. Without them we will die spiritually. The goal is to learn to see their value and embrace them in such a way that we structure our lives around them and pursue them wholeheartedly.

Example: EATING

Eating is an activity that we make a natural part of our daily routine. We understand the importance of it, we schedule our day around it and we actually enjoy doing it. In fact, we raise it to the level of a “special occasion” when we go out to eat. It is a physical discipline. If we did not embrace it we would die. But eating itself is not something we view as onerous, a hassle, or even a burden (cooking might be, but not eating). We understand its value; we enjoy it; we see it as essential to living. Eating has become a natural part of our day that we do not even think of it as a discipline.
Our desire is to not just “teach” about spiritual disciplines but to embed them into our lives so they become as natural a part of our daily routine as eating.

There are many different spiritual disciplines but the ones we will focus on in this series are:

a) **Studying the Bible** – learning to let God speak to you through his word.

b) **Prayer** – learning how to pray, learning to pray with others and learning how to be victorious through prayer.

c) **Giving** – learning how to surrender everything to God.

**Getting Spiritual Control**

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NIV)

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. 25 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. 26 Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. 27 No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

What motivates a serious athlete to change their daily routine, change their diet, train rigorously and spend money on equipment and training?
A strong desire to reach a goal – the first place prize.

What is the goal that we are to be striving for in Christ?
The goal for every believer is to live the Christ-life to its fullest extent, to live out the righteousness God has given us in Christ and to be holy and blameless before him. Living the Christ-life requires self control and discipline so we are not swept away by our own evil desires or by influences of the world we live in.

The analogy here is that we are to pursue the Christ-life as though we were runners in a race. Paul used this analogy to stress the importance of disciplining our lives to be holy. Paul is concerned that he never stop trying to live out the righteousness he has in Christ Jesus.

Do athletes view these disciplines as obligations or expectations they have to meet?
No. They are a means to a goal – not a goal in and of themselves and not a list of rules. If we approach disciplines as a goal then we miss the point – they are meaningless in and of themselves. Disciplines are simply a means to get us to where we want to go. If we don’t want to go anywhere, then disciplines are of no value. However, if we want to progress towards a goal then disciplines are necessary to get us there.
What does Paul mean when he says he “beats” his body and makes it a “slave”?

His body and mind are tainted by a history of a sinful approach to life. If Paul lets his body/mind rule, then he will always default back to a sinful approach to life and his relationship with God. He chooses not to let his “natural” preferences set the agenda or make the decisions for his life. He chooses to do that which will bring him closer to God and make him more effective in representing Christ to others. He tells his body what he is going to do – not the other way around.

In what ways might we “beat” our body and make it our “slave”?

Some examples:

- **Our Bodies** might feel tired and not want to get up to go to church, Growth Group or to read the Bible in the morning – WE DO IT ANYWAY.

- **Our Minds** might naturally wander during prayer times or throughout the day to things that are not beneficial – TAKE EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE TO CHRIST.

It might involve setting the alarm clock earlier to spend time with God.

It might involve not giving in to a bad habit that is not glorifying to God or your body.

It might mean stepping out in faith to do something that terrifies you.

It might mean going without something that is not beneficial: TV, certain foods, work overtime, excess sleep, certain friends, etc.

What will it take for us to bring this type of spiritual determination and discipline into our lives? Discuss what each passage below reveals about developing spiritual disciplines.

**Philippians 3:7-11 (NIV)**

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

1. **A DEEP DESIRE TO KNOW CHRIST**

Why did Paul view all his former accomplishments as rubbish?
In what way did all his previous efforts fail him in his pursuit of life?
Paul wanted to measure up to God’s standard. He strove beyond everyone else to live righteously according to the law. Ironically, the very disciplines he thought would give him the life and righteousness he longed for were the very things that created a barrier between him and God.

In what way was Christ the answer to all he was longing for?
Christ gave Paul the gift of righteousness. Where Paul could never measure up Christ measured up for him, and for us. Paul did not have to strive after life anymore; he only needed to stay focused on Jesus Christ and experience Jesus’ presence and power in his life.

Paul was always a much-disciplined man. The problem was he had the wrong focus for his disciplines. His disciplines were rooted in making him a more righteous person.

As you think about the disciplines in your life, are they taking you in the right direction?
What are some examples of disciplines that may be good, but will not ultimately bring one the life they are hoping for?
Examples:
- Work hours
- Studying for school
- Exercise
- Diet

What are some ways we can strive to better know Christ?

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NIV)
Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: 10 If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!

2. ACCOUNTABILITY

Why do we so often hate the idea of accountability?

Why is accountability so important?
Spiritual disciplines appear difficult at first simply because they are something new we are trying to introduce into our lives. We have already established an old pattern of behaviour and it will take some time, perseverance and encouragement to put into place new spiritual habits that will bring about life transformation. Going deep takes determination.

We’re here to help. We understand spiritual disciplines are essential for disciples of Jesus Christ. Although they take some concerted effort at first, like a musician first learning to play an instrument, once they are practised over time they become effortless – just like eating.

Accountability is a mark of maturity. We were NOT created to be independent, but inter-dependent, relying on each other to grow into maturity. Accountability simply says we will keep asking you how the journey is going and will pray for your ongoing spiritual growth and encourage you in any way we can. You also are an accountability partner to others within the group, helping them grow in their disciplines. Without the support of God’s family you will continue to stumble and will eventually fade away like a burning ember cast from the blaze of the fire.

How good are you at being spiritually inter-dependent?

Why do we strive so much for independence?

How will a decision to become inter-dependent help everyone grow?

What are some steps we could take to become more inter-dependent as a group?

Bible Reading and Prayer Time
We are recommending that you book an appointment with God at least five times each week. Many of you are already spending daily time with God and we want to encourage you to continue to do that. These times don’t need to be long but for now try to set aside half an hour so your time with God doesn’t feel rushed. You will need to determine the time and place that works best for you. We do recommend that you try to find a consistent time each day so that it will more quickly become a habit, a regular part of your routine.

BOOK MEMORIZATION
I think it would be embarrassing for us to claim this is the Book of Life given to us by God, upon which we base our hope and eternal future, and we don’t even know the basic structure of it. We hope to help you understand not just where the books are but how they are categorized.
Old Testament (39 books)

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<th>Poetry (5)</th>
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<td>The Law (5)</td>
<td>Genesis</td>
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<td>Pentateuch</td>
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<th>Other Historical books (12)</th>
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<td>Song of Songs</td>
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<td>Malachi</td>
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This week we want to encourage you to memorize the first 5 books of the Bible. Below is a brief explanation of the nature of each of these books.

Some bibles also include an additional 14 books called the apocrypha. These are books that never met the criteria to be considered the inspired Word of God but held some cultural and historical insights into that era.

**GENESIS, EXODUS, LEVITICUS, NUMBERS, DEUTERONOMY**

The first section of the Bible consists of 17 books of History. They tell the story of how God is at work to create for himself a people of faith. The first 5 books were written by Moses and are therefore often called the Books of Moses. They have some other names too:

1) **The Law**
2) **Pentateuch** (pent = 5, teuch = Law; the 5 books of the law),
3) **Torah** (Hebrew word for Law – this can refer to just the first 5 books, or may refer to the whole Old Testament)

**Genesis:** Genesis means “In the beginning”. It deals with Creation, the Fall and the People of God.

**Exodus:** Exodus deals with the “exit” of God’s people out of slavery in Egypt. It ultimately answers Pharaoh’s and Israel’s question, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?”

**Leviticus:** Leviticus details what it means for the Israelites to be a “holy” priesthood.
Numbers: Numbers relates the consequences of disobedience. The Israelites’ failure to enter the land resulted in their wandering through the desert until that generation passed away. There are consequences for sin.

Deuteronomy: Deuteronomy means “Second Law”. It is the recommitment to the Covenant before the Israelites enter the Promised Land.

DEVOTIONAL READING:
The Letter to the Philippians

To understand Paul’s relationship to the church in Philippi read Acts 16:11-40.

Paul is in prison (the precise location is up for debate) for proclaiming Jesus Christ. While there, he is visited by Epaphroditus, a delegate sent from the church in Philippi to encourage Paul and bring him a financial gift to help support him during his imprisonment.

As Epaphroditus visits with Paul he starts to share about church life back in Philippi and all the issues they are facing. The church is being pulled in various directions by different people and different perspectives. There are concerns of Judaizers (people who claim you must still keep all the Old Testament ceremonial law) who are having influence. There are people who are claiming to be Christ followers yet are living immoral lives. And then there are good old Euodia and Syntyche, women in the church who are having a quarrel with each other in a manner that is affecting the entire church. On top of all this, there is the constant challenge to represent Christ in a society that is opposed to the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

Paul is deeply concerned that the church maintains unity in Christ and that it not forget why it is there. If the church continues on in this manner it will become ineffective in its mission to transform lives and its community. As he writes this letter to the Philippian church, Paul wants to thank the Philippians for their generous gift but he also has a deep spiritual burden he wants to share with them. He knows he needs to be positive and encouraging, yet forceful enough to break them free from their present perspective and to encourage them to start living life with a greater sense of purpose.

This is a powerful letter speaking of our ultimate purpose on earth and the peace that comes from trusting Jesus Christ. When we stop focusing on our Relationship with Christ and we become more concerned about our own agendas versus Representing Christ in this world, we start to experience anxiety, stress, and tension with others around us. If we, as a church, stay focused on Jesus Christ and his mission, if we allow the Holy Spirit to direct each of us in the unity of his Spirit, then joy as a community and effectiveness for the kingdom will always accompany us.

This is an extremely practical letter for us as a church. It is easy for small issues to start to divide us and render us ineffective. It is easy for us to start focussing more on our own preferences than the eternal needs of others. It is easy for us to lose sight of why God keeps us on this earth after we are brought into his kingdom. It is easy to value comfort more than mission. This letter sets us free!
**Spiritual Disciplines**

**Session 1: Disciplining Your Life**

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* James 1:22 (NIV)

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<th>Thoughts to Consider</th>
<th>Apply 1 Point Today</th>
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| **Day 1**
Read the book of Philippians in ONE SITTING (relax, it is a small book) | What is the overall tone of this letter? |
| | How many times do the words joy/rejoice occur in this letter? (Perhaps underline them in your bible.) |
| | How is this striking in lieu of Paul’s immediate circumstances? |
| | Why does he feel he needs to emphasize this point with the Philippians? |
| | How is this relevant to you and your circumstances? |
| | What people does Paul provide as examples of the self-sacrificing, purpose-driven life? |
| | Could Paul use you as an example of someone who joyfully serves God whatever your circumstances? |
| | How does our own agenda sometimes create conflict with those around us? |
| | What are some perspective shifts that may need to occur in your life? |

In the space below, write out the first 5 books of the Bible.

G ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
E ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
L ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
N ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
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In what literary section of the Bible are these books found? ____________________________
**PASSAGE**

**Philippians 1:1-2 (NLT)**

This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. I am writing to all of God’s holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the elders and deacons. 2 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

**THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER**

Normally, my guess is, you would just quickly read over these verses without paying too much attention to them. Let’s slow down and remember “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

God has something to say to you in this greeting.

Why do you think Paul calls himself a slave of Christ Jesus?

When you’re a slave you are compelled to obey the one in authority over you. Do you feel compelled to obey Jesus Christ?

If you want to read more on this topic read Romans 6 which sets up the contrast of being a slave to sin vs. being a slave to righteousness. You are one or the other.

Paul writes to “all of God’s holy people (saints)” who are in Philippi. If you were in Philippi, would that include you? Are you one of God’s holy people? If you are in Christ – you are. You are declared holy by God.

The question is, “Are you living that holiness out or are there ways where you are denying it in your life?” What should you do about that?

Where does grace and peace come from?

**APPLY 1 POINT TODAY**

In what way can this passage change my life if I apply what it says? What is one thing I can do differently today as a result of this passage?

How might some concepts in this passage tackle the issue of tensions among people in a church setting?

**GRACE:** Blessing that is not earned or deserved in any way.

**PEACE:** A sense that everything is under control and you can rest at ease.

Are you experiencing God’s gift of peace or are you trying to maintain peace in your life through your own control and manipulation? What can you do about that?
In the space below, write out the first 5 books of the Bible.

G __________________________
E __________________________
L __________________________
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In what literary section of the Bible are these books found? _________________
Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22 (NIV)

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<tr>
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<th>PASSAGE</th>
<th>THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER</th>
<th>APPLY 1 POINT TODAY</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philippians 1:3-11 (NLT)</td>
<td>How are you partnering in spreading the Good News?</td>
<td>In what way can this passage change my life if I apply what it says? What is one thing I can do differently today as a result of this passage?</td>
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<td><em>Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. 4 Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy,</em> for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. <em>And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.</em></td>
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Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22 (NIV)

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<th>APPLY 1 POINT TODAY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Philippians 1:12-19 (NLT)</td>
<td>And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. 13 For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. 14 And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God’s message without fear. 15 It’s true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. 16 They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. 17 Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. 18 But that doesn’t matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice. 19 For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance.</td>
<td>Instead of grumbling, what is Paul’s perspective about his negative circumstances?</td>
<td>In what way can this passage change my life if I apply what it says? What is one thing I can do differently today as a result of this passage?</td>
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<td>Even though he is in chains, Paul is experiencing joy because he is accomplishing his goal. What is his goal in life?</td>
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<td>Have you ever felt jealous about someone else’s effectiveness in ministry?</td>
<td>How might some concepts in this passage tackle the issue of tensions among people in a church setting?</td>
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<td>Even when others are preaching Christ out of impure motives, does Paul criticize their ministry? Why not?</td>
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<td>How is it that he is able to rejoice through such times?</td>
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In the space below, write out the first 5 books of the Bible.
### PASSAGE

**Philippians 1:20-26 (NLT)**

For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don’t know which is better. I’m torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith. And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me.

Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing side by side, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. Don’t be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.

### THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER

What is Paul’s perspective about his life? What is the goal he has whether he lives or dies in prison?

In verse 21 the actual words in the Greek are “to live is Christ” What do you think that means?

If you had the choice of staying here on earth or going to be with Jesus in heaven right now, what would you choose? Why?

What is the only thing worth sticking around for from Paul’s perspective?

What are you living your life for on this earth?

What does it mean to live as a citizen of heaven?

In what ways are you contributing to the fight for the faith in your community?

What types of things intimidate you in the fight for the faith and proclaiming the good news?

Why is it a privilege to suffer for Christ? Have you ever been persecuted for sharing your faith with others?

Have you partnered with Paul and Jesus in this way?

### APPLY 1 POINT TODAY

In what way can this passage change my life if I apply what it says? What is one thing I can do differently today as a result of this passage?

How might some concepts in this passage tackle the issue of tensions among people in a church setting?
In the space below, write out the first 5 books of the Bible.

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In what literary section of the Bible are these books found? ______________________