

Introduction

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[0:00] Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 42. We're going to read the entire Psalm. Psalm 42, verse 1. As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, where is your God?

These things I remember as I pour out my soul, how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

Why are you so? Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God.

My soul is downcast within me. Therefore, I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls.

[1:09] All your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day, the Lord directs His love. At night, His song is with me.

A prayer to the God of my life. I say to God, my rock, why have you forsaken me, forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?

My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, where is your God? Why are you downcast, O my soul?

Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God. Don't you love the Psalms?

They meet you in the rough and tumble of life, and they give you the words you were longing for. They grab your heart and give you what you need to deal, to have dealings with God.

[2:16] This afternoon, my aim is not to give an exposition of Psalm 42. I want to introduce you to what we're going to be looking at, Lord willing, over the coming year on these luncheon afternoons, at least when I'm preaching.

I want to introduce you this afternoon to a new series on the spiritual disciplines. And when I say spiritual disciplines, I mean things like Bible reading and prayer and fasting and service.

But I don't want you to think of these things as primarily disciplines. Instead, I want you to think of them as aspects of spirituality. And you say, oh boy, what?

That kind of sounds new agey. I don't know if I like where that's going. I don't mean anything like that. I'm hardly new age. What I mean is that these are the ways that we drink in God.

And that's why I brought you to Psalm 42. The psalmist says in the first verse, as the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you. Oh God, my soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

[3:34] When can I go and meet with God? At the heart of true biblical religion is a drinking in of God.

And that is true spirituality. Men do all sorts of things to be religious. They sit in church and they sing songs and they cry and they dance and they wail and they preach and they hear.

And that might be true religion and it might not be. It all depends if when the person's doing it, if he's dealing with God or not.

Biblical religion is about drinking God. It's about meeting with God, talking with God and that's true spirituality. And now that's where these spiritual disciplines that I'm talking about come in.

Prayer, Bible reading, meditation, fasting are God-given ways that we, that He has given to us to drink in God. These are the places that we go to meet with Him, as Psalm 42 says.

[4:40] And so the disciplines are about meeting God. If you want more of God in your life, then this series should be interesting to you because this is where we go. So these aren't just repetitious activities that we do day after day.

That's why I like calling this series Aspects of Spirituality. Well, before I go any further, I need to tell you some of the sources of inspiration for this sermon series.

And I want to give credit to where credit's due and I want people to think appropriately of me and everyone else. The first source is a sermon series that Stuart Olliot preached in 1996.

And if you've heard him, then you know how very helpful he is. And he was very helpful for me. He preached a series on these things and he entitled it Aspects of Spirituality.

And so I like the title and I'm taking it, but it was his idea. The second source is Donald Whitney's book entitled Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life. I meant to bring a copy.

[5:45] I think many of you are aware of that book. Many of you have read it. I've read it so many times. I'm not bragging. I've read it so many times that its message, its word has just become a part of me.

And so when I think of spiritual disciplines, Donald Whitney is going to come out. And so when I'm speaking, sometimes I'm going to be saying things that he said and I don't even realize it.

Well, I'm not going to follow Donald Whitney or Stuart Olliot slavishly, but their thoughts are going to come out and so I want you to know that. If something is really smart, really good, or really funny, or really striking, it's them.

It's not me. Now, with all that said, I have four things I want to say about the spiritual disciplines in general. Four things just in dealing with them in general and then we'll be done.

The first thing is that spiritual disciplines are not magic. They're not magic. It's not saying hocus pocus and something automatically happens.

[6:56] They are a machine where you press the button and it comes out. Now, children, or maybe adults actually, do you remember the Jetsons cartoon?

When the Jetsons wanted food, they had a machine and they just pressed the button and bam, voila, the food. Anytime they wanted it, pressed the button, voila, there it is.

That is not what the spiritual disciplines are like at all. So let me put this into a real life picture because you're thinking, yeah, obviously, that's not, they're not like a machine.

Let me put this into a real life picture. It's January 1st and you say, I want 2010 to be a better year for me spiritually.

I want to really walk with God and I want to start, or I want to stop yelling at my kids and saying mean things to my wife. So what do you do?

[7:56] That's your goal. So what do you do? Well, you say, I'm going to read my Bible all the way through. I'm going to read it every day. I'm going to memorize more scripture and I'm going to pray more.

And so you start off strong. You know how it is. January 2nd, you're up first thing. And you read three chapters of scripture. You memorize a verse.

You pray for 15 minutes. Now a week goes by. So we're on January 9th. And you're still losing it with the kids.

You're still yelling at your wife. You're still, you don't feel closer to God. Actually, you're starting to feel a little further away from God. And you're feeling not energized, but tired.

Your plans, your goals, they're already starting to fall apart. You're feeling tired and you feel defeated. And so you know what, you know what, you know what you say. You say, I got to work harder at this.

[8:58] I have to press the button harder. So what do I do? I get up a half an hour earlier and I read five chapters of scripture and I memorize two verses and instead of praying 15 minutes, I pray 25 minutes.

And if I do that, that should do the trick. Well, two weeks go by. You're on January 16th now. And you're still losing it with the kids.

You're still saying mean things to your wife and God has apparently abandoned you. You're exhausted because you're not sleeping as much and you're defeated.

And you say, what's the point? The pastor tells me to read and to pray and that's how I become godly and that's what I do, but it doesn't work.

It doesn't work. I'm sleeping in tomorrow. Well, have you ever been there? Have you ever been there? Well, what's the problem? Is the problem with the disciplines?

[9:57] No. It's the way they were pursued. You can't tell by looking on the outside. We kind of saw that in Sunday school. You can't tell just by looking on the outside.

So, we need to get our x-ray glasses on and we look into the heart and what do we see? Well, you see something surprising, something ugly.

your faith was not in God. Instead, you were trusting in the disciplines themselves and your own human effort to do them.

And you were trusting in your ability to do these things and if you did them well, what should the result be? The result should be I become godly. I get the blessing. And in reality, you're treating the disciplines as a machine, as magic.

So, you press the button and you didn't get what you wanted and so you threw it away, you become frustrated and that's it. Well, the disciplines are not automatic.

[10:59] They're not like that. Nobody can guarantee you that just because you read and pray and fast that you will enjoy fellowship with God.

And you might say, well, wait a second. Let me tell you what I mean. I can't guarantee you that you'll take those things and use them properly. You might take these things that I'm going to be talking about over the coming year and use them as a Pharisee.

You might use them as a Pharisee. You might do these things and think by doing them that you will earn God's favor, that you will somehow be able to control God's grace, that He will have to bless you.

And the bottom line is this. You can't control God. The wind blows wherever it pleases. He's not automatically attached to any of these things.

And to prove that, you can look at the Pharisees. The Pharisees knew more of the Bible than you and I ever will.

[12:09] And when they made a disciple, they made Him twice a son of hell as they themselves were, and they were of their father, the devil. The disciplines, just because you do them, it doesn't necessarily make you godly.

Well, that's the first thing I want to say. The spiritual disciplines, they're not magic. They're not a machine. They don't work like that. And now the second thing is, they do work like this.

They work like this. Let's go back to January 1st again. And we're on 2010, and we want this year to be a better year for me spiritually. I want to stop yelling at my wife, and I want to stop losing it with my kids.

And those are your goals. But instead of jumping right into the disciplines, you realize that what I need is not more human effort.

What I need is not more Jason trying harder and doing these things. I need God. I need God. I need divine power in my life.

[13:17] So do you remember 2 Peter chapter 1, verse 3? We memorized it this week. His divine power has given us everything that we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his glory and goodness.

There's that power that we need for change. There's that power that we need to have if we're going to live with God and drink God in and enjoy him.

And so, how do I get that power? How do I get that power? Peter says it's through our knowledge of him. Through our knowledge of him. And you know that Peter isn't talking about head knowledge.

He's talking about intimacy with God. And so, as we meet God and we drink God, he communicates to us everything that we need for life and godliness.

And so, it's that kind of knowledge. Adam knew Eve and they conceived Cain. and we know God and power for godliness flows into our life.

[14:28] And that's where the spiritual disciplines come in. They don't come in first, they come in after this part, after we meet with God, as we meet with God. So, Bible reading, prayer, fasting, they come in there.

This is where they fit in. So, they aren't machines to manipulate God, to get him to do what we want. They're ways that we meet with him. that we get close to him.

They're roads that we travel to meet God. They aren't God themselves. There's no power in a road. They're where we need to be if we're going to meet him.

And that's why these disciplines are aspects of spirituality. They're ways that we are able to come close to God. And they bring to us the life changing water that we need.

So, instead of doing the disciplines directing automatic change, now we do the disciplines, but we look to God to meet us and change us. And so now we dive into the disciplines.

[15 : 31] Okay? So, it's going to look the same as before. We're going to get up earlier, we're going to read, we're going to pray, we're going to fast, we're going to meditate. And when we're doing that and we're looking and saying, God, I want you in these things, that is when our life becomes vibrant.

That's when our spiritual life comes alive, so to speak. And we stop yelling at our wife. And we stop losing it with our kids. Why?

Because we're doing the disciplines? No. Because God's power is working in us to change us. So, the disciplines aren't ends in and of themselves.

They're not the end. And the problem is that when we start to treat prayer and fasting and reading and service or whatever as an end, we do them just because they're the right things to do.

And that's all that we do them for. And then we grow frustrated and then we throw them away because they aren't satisfying our thirst. We want water and we're not finding the water there.

[16 : 41] They aren't giving us what we want. And when the real problem is that we've been trusting in something else other than God. We've been trusting in our performance of these things instead of God.

And so, instead of saying, God is free. He is free to give me whatever I need. He is free and I cannot manipulate him.

I cannot control him. I cannot force him to come and help me. But, oh God, I need your help. I need your help.

So, please come and meet me in these things. Let me drink from you. So, picture a drinking fountain. And there you have, we're saying the spiritual disciplines are like a drinking fountain.

So, you have the tank there. The tank's memorization, we'll say. And the button that you press to get the water, that's prayer. And the pipes that are running up inside the tank, that's reading God's word.

[17 : 43] But, God himself is the water, is the water that we need. And so, you don't go to a drinking fountain, a water fountain, to taste the pipes.

You don't go to a drinking fountain to lick the tank. You better not. But, so often, that's how we treat the spiritual disciplines.

We try to satisfy our desire for God just in those spiritual disciplines, and not trying to get God, not trying to drink God through them.

I hope that's clear. So, they aren't magic. They're only the drinking fountain that can bring us the water. And that leads me to the third thing that I want to say about spiritual disciplines.

That, yeah, they're not automatic, and God is free in them, but there is no other way. There is no other way, there is no other path to Christian maturity and Christian growth than through the use of spiritual disciplines.

[18 : 55] So, the wrong way to look at it is to say, okay, I follow what you're saying, and to say, you know what, I'm not going to use them then. Because the only place to get the water is from the water fountain.

And the only place that we can grow in godliness is through these disciplines. 1 Timothy 4.7, you don't have to turn there. Paul writes to Timothy, train yourself to be godly.

Train yourself to be godly. The word train can be translated discipline or exercise. The word is *gymnasia*, and you hear the word *gymnasium* in there.

The only way to godliness is through this training, is through the rigorous, vigorous, everyday use of spiritual disciplines.

There is no other way. There is no other way to godliness. You've all heard of Jonathan Edwards. He was a brilliant thinker.

[19 : 56] He wrote absolutely mind-blowing treatises on theology and philosophy. philosophy. And you know what? At the same time, he was a very emotional person.

His children would often hear him crying and singing in his study. And he would be so convicted of sin and so in awe of God that he couldn't help but to cry for joy or for sorrow.

And he wanted, he loved holiness. He sighed after it. He made it his goal.

And I'm not joking and I'm not exaggerating. I want you to think about this. He made this his goal that he wanted to be the finest Christian on the face of the earth in his lifetime.

If there was one, he said he wanted to be that one. Now, can you imagine writing that down on a piece of paper and actually meaning it and writing it down and saying this is what I want to be.

[21:09] Well, he was godly. I don't know if he became the finest Christian in his day or not, but he was godly. Well, how did he become so godly? It wasn't through his intellect.

He was smarter than any of us, but it wasn't that. And it wasn't through his emotionalism. He was an emotional person, but it wasn't through that. It was through discipline. It really was through discipline.

He was the first one up in the morning in his very large household. And family worship came before dawn for him and his family.

And by that time, before dawn, he had already met with God by himself. And he made it his resolution to study the scriptures so frequently and so thoroughly and so often that it would become plain that he was growing in his knowledge of scripture.

And so he wasn't half hearted. He gave himself completely to this. And so he wanted anyone to see that this week I know more of the Bible than I did last week.

[22:16] Well, he disciplined himself to be alone. You might say, well, what's the big deal with that? He had ten children and he said, I'm going to be alone.

And there were a thousand pressures on him. And he denied himself food. And he denied himself sleep. Why? Because he wanted God. He wanted to know God.

And the only way to grow in godliness is through the disciplines. There's no other way. Husbands, wives, you know that.

If you want a healthy, strong, good relationship, it's going to take work. And so you're going to have to set priorities. You're going to have to say no to certain things. You're going to have to carve out time.

It takes self-denial. It means putting aside a lot of other things so the marriage can grow. And our relationship with God is no different. It requires self-discipline.

[23:16] And it's through this rigorous, strenuous, frequent use of the spiritual disciplines that we grow in godliness, that our relationship with God gets better.

Well, that is hard work. That's hard work. That's what you should be hearing. That is hard work. But I want you to look around the church at large. Just look around and think about the kind of people that are out there.

What do you see? Well, there's disciplined, holy people, and there are lazy, half-hearted people, but there are no lazy, holy people out there.

Laziness and holiness never ever go together. They can't go together. And so Paul tells Timothy, train yourself to be godly.

Timothy, you have to hit the gym. You have to go into training, exercise yourself, discipline, yourself. The Olympic athlete, he disciplines himself. He gets up every morning before dawn and he runs and he swims and he does whatever he needs to do.

[24:29] He devotes his life, his time, his energy to training in order to win a wreath that falls apart and dies. But we do it for an eternal way of glory, a crown that can never be taken away from us, that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

And so the athlete must train to win the prize and the Christian, you, must train in order to win godliness.

The Christian woman must discipline herself if she's going to have a vibrant love life with God. And the Christian man has to hit the gym spiritually if he's going to have a vibrant relationship with God. God. And so there is no alternative. There is no easy way. There's no easy road. So do you want the power that Peter talked about in 2 Peter 1.3, the divine power working in us?

Do you want the godliness that Paul talks about? Then rigorously use the spiritual disciplines. That brings me to the fourth thing I want to say.

[25:40] And that is this. The disciplines are not the gospel. They're not the gospel. If you do these things, if you pray and you fast and you meditate and you serve and you evangelize and so on, if you do those things, they cannot and will not save you.

If you do these things, they do not, if you're a Christian or if you're non-Christian, change God's mind about you.

They cannot make up for your sins and they cannot justify you. So trusting in them, trusting in them to make God happy with you, to say, you know what, you're right.

You are right with me. You are worthy. coming to heaven. Trusting in them like that will end you, land you straight into hell.

And you will have a prayer in your mouth and you will have a Bible in your hands and Jesus will say, depart from me. I never knew you. We don't do these things to be saved.

[27 : 03] Christian, we do these things because God has saved us and that God is already completely satisfied with you. So on our bad days, on your worst day, you know what your worst day is like?

You wake up and you don't feel like reading God's word and so you don't. And you don't feel like praying and so you don't. And so the day gets off bad and you say lots of horrible things to your wife and your kids and you feel lazy and you don't do anything at work and you come home and you boss your kids around and you watch TV and then you watch something really bad on TV and then you go to bed and you don't pray at all.

That doesn't ever change God's heart towards you. He is your Father. And that horrible bad day does not change His heart towards you.

Why? Because Jesus Christ, is all of your righteousness. And He lived the life that we could never live and He died the death that we could not die so that God's wrath would be turned away so that our sins would be washed away and He took all of our miserable failures.

He took all of our horrible bad days on Himself and He was punished for them so there is no wrath left on your worst day. God does not turn His fatherly heart from you.

[28 : 40] And so now Jesus Christ stands at the throne of God and He strongly pleads for us. And God looks at Jesus and He pardons us.

And that is our salvation. It's another's life and it's another's death. And so brothers and sisters, you stand free. You don't have to do anything.

You stand free. God smiles on you. And God loves you with this intense, infinitely intense desire and affection. And it's not because of you, it's because of Jesus Christ.

And He wants to have fellowship with you. He wants to meet with you. He wants to give Himself to you and He wants you to give yourself to Him. And so how do you do that?

through these disciplines. You don't do these things in order to save yourself. You do them to enjoy God, to make much of God.

[29 : 42] So my unsaved friend, if you're listening, don't be deceived. Go to Christ. Don't be deceived. Go to Christ.

Don't screw up your strength and tighten your belt and try to read and pray your way into God's favor because it won't work. Fall down on your face.

You call on Jesus and now He stands with His arms open wide. So run into His arms and He will fall on your neck and He will kiss you and He will bring you into the feast.

And then that's where the disciplines fit into your life. So don't stop until you have Him. He will be all of your righteousness.

He will set you free. And He's everything that you need. Heavenly Father, I pray that the gospel would strike us again with fresh intensity.

[30 : 45] Open our eyes. We are so tempted. We so stray into our own self-righteousness and we take good things, very good things that you have given to us and then we change them into something that they're not.

Change them into works of righteousness that are somehow pleasing to you without Jesus.

righteousness. So Father, I pray that you would open our eyes so that we could see Jesus standing at the throne pleading for us and that He is our spotless righteousness.

And so there is no need for us to go and try to work on our own righteousness to present to you, but that you freely pardon us for all of our sins.

And Father, it is that kind of grace that makes it so tempting to ask, well, why should we do anything then? So Father, I pray that you would show us that it is not out of our need of righteousness that we do these things, but it is because you have loved us.

And you have given yourself to us and that you want to have communion and fellowship with us and that you have made us rich in Jesus Christ.

[32 : 24] Father, I pray for my brothers and sisters that you would help them to enjoy you this week, that they would really meet you and drink you in, that you would change them.

And for those who need to know the Lord Jesus, who are digging their own cisterns, carrying their own pictures around looking for water, Jesus, come and meet them and show them the living water that springs up to everlasting life.

Forgive us for our sins, bless our fellowship, bless the rest of our week, and help us to please you in all that we do. For Jesus' sake, amen. We are dismissed.
Please pass your song sheets to the middle. Thank you.