



SEVEN
HABITS
OF A
HIGHLY
EFFECTIVE
CHRISTIAN

INTRODUCTION TO SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Be proactive

Begin with the end in mind

Put first things first

Think win-win

Seek first to understand, then to be understood

Synergize

Sharpen the saw

If you are into self-help or personal improvement books, chances are the above list rings your bell. They are taken from the book *'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.'* The book has sold more than 25 million copies in 40 languages worldwide, and remains one of the best selling nonfiction business books in history. In August 2011, *Time* listed the book as one of "The 25 Most Influential Business Management Books".

In the book, the author, Steven R. Covey, wrote this: *"Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny."* The origin of this quote is uncertain. A quick browse through the internet would show that it has been attributed to the like of an English novelist and dramatist Charles Reade (1814-1884), an American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), an American educator Frances Willard (1839-1898), or even to an old Chinese proverb. Regardless of the uncertainty of the origin, our intuition can confirm that the quote does describe our life experience. A habit, which is formed through repetitive actions and born through a meditation of a particular truth, in time does shape our character, which in turn determines where we are going in life.

The Bible also bears witness to various practices that God's people do in order to grow in their spiritual walk and to maintain their relationship with the Almighty God. Daniel, for example, persisted in his regular prayer despite Darius' edict (Daniel 6). Moses sought and spoke with God regularly at the tent of meeting (Exodus 33:7-11). David wrote about the delight of meditating God's Words (Psalm 119). The people of God declared a season of fasting in a number of occasions when they sought God's favour (e.g., Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:12-17). The believers in the

early church made it their habit to meet together in the temple and at homes (Acts 2:42-47). Those are just a few. They take time and effort to put into practice. However, they allow God's people to experience God's divine power working in and through them.

Having been born into the family of God, every Christian must make effort to grow in their characters to be more like Jesus Christ. As much as this process of sanctification requires our efforts, we must also realise that without the power and grace of God working in our life, our labour will be in vain. Therefore, Christians must build into their lives certain practices or disciplines where we allow God to work in us by the power of His Spirit. In Richard Foster's words:

*'God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us... By themselves, the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done. They are God's means of grace.'*¹

This teaching series will look at some spiritual disciplines that every Christian must practice in their life in order to keep him or her from being 'ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ' (cf. 2 Peter 1:5-8).

There are differing views with regards to how many spiritual disciplines are there in the Bible. David Foster, in his book 'Celebration of Discipline', outlines twelve disciplines divided into three categories.² R. C. Sproul suggests five spiritual "nutrients" crucial to spiritual maturity: Bible study, prayer, worship, service and stewardship.³ Using the term 'means of grace,' David Mathis focuses on just three of them: hearing God's voice through Bible-reading, having God's ear through prayer, and belonging to his body through fellowship, while mentioning another three that are 'closely related to the means of grace': evangelism, stewardship of time, and stewardship of money.⁴ Andy Stanley proposes a list of five 'faith catalysts' for growth: practical teaching, providential relationships, private disciplines, personal ministry, and pivotal circumstances.⁵

¹ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (London: Hodder, 1989), 7-8.

² The inward disciplines of prayer, fasting, meditation, and study in the Christian life; the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service; and the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration (Richard Forster, *Celebration of Discipline* (London: Hodder, 1989)).

³ R. C. Sproul, *5 Things Every Christian Needs to Grow* (Thomas Nelson, 2002).

⁴ David Mathis, *Habits of Grace* (Illinois: Crossway, 2016).

⁵ Andy Stanley, *Five Things God Uses to Grow Your Faith* (Zondervan, DVD, 2009).

Stanley's list does go beyond spiritual disciplines. However, the intention is still the same. Christians would do well putting effort into a number of spiritual practices that will help them grow in grace and godliness.

In our series, we have decided to study seven of them, hence the title, hence the reference to Covey's book, and they are by no means exhaustive. Three of them are corporate disciplines: (1) regular attendance to church services, (2) meeting together in life groups and discipleship, and (3) using your spiritual gifts to serve in a ministry, while four of them are personal disciplines: (4) Bible reading, (5) living a simple life, (6) fasting, and (7) praying.

We will study the Bible to look at what each discipline means, why is the discipline necessary, how it has been practiced by various people in the Bible, and how we can put it into practice in our life today. It is our hope that this series will not just impart biblical knowledge about spiritual disciplines, but that it will inspire us to instil good practices that will help us grow in Christ, both personally and corporately.

For your own personal reading, the followings are some helpful books on spiritual disciplines:

- *Celebration of Discipline* by David Foster
- *5 Things Every Christian Needs to Grow* by R. C. Sproul
- *Five Things God Uses to Grow Your Faith* by Andy Stanley
- *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney
- *Habits of Grace* by David Mathis

THE WHAT AND WHY OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Context

1. Share with the group one habit that you find very useful for your daily life *OR* one habit that you do regularly to achieve a specific goal in your life.

Observation

David Mathis in his book *Habits of Grace* uses the term 'means of grace' to refer to spiritual disciplines. He defines it this way:

"The means of grace are God's promised channels of continuing grace, received by faith. Infinite grace is behind us, and infinite grace lies ahead, and through his appointed means of grace, God is pleased to supply ongoing life and energy and health and strength to our souls. The means of grace fill our tank for the pursuit of joy, for the good of others, and for the glory of God. They are spiritual blessings, not the gravely mistimed material blessings promised prematurely in the so-called "prosperity gospel." And they are blessings—not mere disciplines, but channels through which God gives us spiritual food for our survival, growth, and flourishing in the mission."

2. What are some habits that can be considered Spiritual Disciplines and explain why you consider them 'Spiritual Disciplines'?

Meaning

3. 'Your salvation does not depend on your spiritual disciplines.' What do you think about that statement? Discuss this in light of 2 Peter 1:3-11 and 1 Tim 4:7-8.

4. Why should Christians practice spiritual disciplines? (You can refer to Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18; Phil 1:3-11; Phil. 2:12-13; Phil. 3:8-11; 1 Peter 5:6-11)

Application

5. What spiritual discipline(s) do you think you can start working on in your life?

6. Together with your group, think about some tangible ways you can help keep each other accountable in the area of spiritual discipline?