

# SERMON GUIDE

## Cultivating Spiritual Disciplines

### 1 Corinthians 9:24-27



#### SERMON NOTES

There's something beautiful about new beginnings or fresh starts.

- Every 24 hours we get another opportunity to have a new day. Yesterday could have been horrible and you may have failed miserably but a new day gives you another opportunity.
- Every 7 days we have a new week. Last week may have been filled with laziness and lack of productivity. But Monday is coming again. Another opportunity.
- Every 12 months we have a new year.... And what do we all do? We make New Year's Resolutions, we set new goals, we evaluate things we did well or didn't do well over the year and make plans to make certain changes in our lives over the upcoming year.

I truly believe that 24 hour days, and 7 day weeks, and 12 month years are blessings from the Lord. We need resets, we need opportunities to slow down and evaluate. A huge part of the Christian life is being a person of discipline. We don't allow the flesh to dictate what we do because we live by the Spirit of God.

First of all... what are spiritual disciplines? Spiritual disciplines are practices for Christians to grow in Christlikeness. This is what we are to do between our justification and our glorification. It's being conformed to the image of Christ. It's the role we play in our sanctification. You see salvation is monergistic, meaning it is solely the act of God. We are saved by God's work alone. However, sanctification is synergistic, meaning we have a part to play in our maturing in the faith.

It's also important that we keep the purpose of spiritual disciplines in mind. We see this in 1 Timothy 4:7, "*train yourself for godliness*" or as another translation puts it, "*discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.*" So Godliness is the goal. To be more like Christ. So my hope today is that we would all self-examine our spiritual life and particularly how we are living out certain spiritual disciplines in order to grow in godliness.

If you've met Jesus, you'll want to be like Jesus. And if you want to be like Jesus, you'll discipline yourself in order to be conformed to His image.

## **Exposition**

As I walk through the text today, I'm going to give you some theological points that I want you to see throughout the text and then at the end I'm going to give you some more practical applications.

### **1. God expects that we give Him our best in all things.**

***V24 – Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.***

Paul here gives us an analogy about runners. This would have really hit home with the Corinthian audience because Corinth at this time, was home to the second largest sporting event in the world, only behind the ancient olympic games. He says only one receives the prize in a race, therefore, run in such a way that we may obtain the prize. Now, in the race of the Christian life, everyone who endures to the end will receive the prize of eternal life. But the point is clear, we are to run the race of faith with everything we have. God does not want us to just start the race. He wants us to flourish. He wants us to succeed. He wants us to represent His image in the best way possible during our time on earth.

Now unfortunately in our culture today, laziness has become the norm. We live in an age where we want to fast-track everything.

- An age of Amazon packages showing up at our front door just hours after we order it.
- An age where we don't have to cook food or even go out to buy food, we can just get UberEats directly to our house.
- An age where everyone wants "Get Rich Quick" how they can.

The culture we live in loves to cut corners and do the least amount possible in order to be successful and get what they want. Now, I'm not saying these things are necessarily bad, they aren't, but what they've done is they have created a laziness and lack of hard work and discipline in many people's lives.

**Illustration:** Many of you know that I own a CrossFit gym here in town... discipline is something that I preach both in the church and the gym almost every single day. It's something I try to exemplify in my life and live by. And one thing about working out is you can't expedite health and muscle growth. It takes years and years of consistency to get where you want to be. And it never really stops, it's

something you must maintain by continuing to show up day after day, year after year.

And the Christian life is the same: You cannot microwave Spiritual Growth. Spiritual growth takes time, energy, and effort. You don't randomly wake up one day and become spiritually mature. It takes years and years of running in such a way that you may obtain the prize. God expects that we give Him our best in everything we do. Whether that be:

- Spiritual disciplines
- Completing a project at work
- Raising kids at home
- Discipling others
- Creating beautiful art

Christians are called to excellence.

## **2. God commands that we are disciplined and self-controlled.**

***V25 – Every athlete exercises self-control in all things.***

As athletes exercise self-control in order to best prepare themselves to compete, Christians are to exercise self-control in our daily lives as well. You see athletes, in order to be at their best, must sometimes refuse things that in themselves are not necessarily bad. Things that may hinder them reaching their goals. Things like unhealthy foods, or alcohol, or staying up all night.

In the same way, we as Christians, must sometimes sacrifice certain things in our lives in order to pursue holiness and to be best used by God. You see Spiritual Disciplines are a stewardship issue not simply a duty. Having discipline and self-control in the small things, grows your ability to have discipline and self-control in much larger things.

- If you can't show up to your job on time, what makes you think you're going to carve out intentional time with the Lord each day?
- If you can't stop yourself from eating unhealthy foods, when you know you should, what makes you think you can fight off other temptation?

Being a person of discipline and self-control is vital in the Christian life. How are you stewarding your body, your gifts, your time, and your passions that God has given you?

I want to talk about stewarding our bodies for a second. This is something that rarely gets talked about in the church. There's a beautiful connection between physical health and spiritual health.

In 1 Timothy 4 that I mentioned earlier where it says, *“train yourself for godliness”* If you go on to the next verse it says this... *“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.”*

So Paul makes it clear. Spiritual training is the most important thing we should be worried about. But notice that He says physical training is also of SOME value. You see, Scripture tells us that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and we are called to steward our body well. Our bodies are the means in which God uses us to bring about His glory on earth.

Think about it practically for a moment. If you want to be best used by God over the course of your life, you're going to be able to do that much more effectively and with better longevity if you are physically healthy. So yes, physical health does matter. How you treat your temple is important. God commands that we are disciplined and self-controlled, stewarding well all that HE has given us.

### **3. Investing in your spiritual growth has eternal implications.**

Just like 1 Timothy 4 said, spiritual training has much greater implications. Why? Because it pertains to both this life and the life to come. Athletes compete for worldly crowns, but Christians seek a heavenly crown. A crown that can never be taken away. Now, if you know me, you know that I love sports and I am an extremely competitive person. I love to win. Unfortunately, I'm a Titans and a Vols fan.... So I may never see a champion again.

But you know what is much greater than any championship here on earth? Standing before the Lord and hearing *“well done good and faithful servant”* and receiving the crown of Glory for all those in Christ. It does not even compare. This is what we seek, this is what we strive towards. Friends, there is nothing better with your time you can do, than to invest in your own spiritual health and the spiritual health of others. If there's anything in your life that is causing you to sin, you need to purge it. If there's anything in your life that has become an idol and keeps you from communion with the Lord, you need to make changes. Seek the heavenly crown.

#### **4. We must seek holiness and maturity with intentionality.**

***V26 – So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.***

Like I said earlier, you cannot microwave spiritual growth. It happens with intentionality over the course of your life. It never happens by accident. So we need a plan... we need to be intentional on what steps we are going to take in order to grow. And this is where particular spiritual disciplines come in.

- When and where do you read God's Word?
- How often do you pray?
- What do your prayers consist of?
- Do you fast?
- Are you committed to the local church?
- Are you living on mission?

We must have a plan and intentionality as we seek to grow more like Christ. Now, I'm going to get into some more specifics on these towards the end of the message.

#### **5. There are consequences to being a person who lacks discipline.**

***V27 – But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.***

Paul here shows us that if we lack discipline, if we can't control our own bodies... if we're walking by the flesh and not by the Spirit... There are consequences. Now, it's important to point out here that Paul is not referring to one losing their salvation.. But likely, he's referring to someone losing their rewards. Each one of us will be judged for what we do on this earth and will be rewarded accordingly in heaven. But not only do we run the risk of missing out on heavenly rewards... but we run the risk of missing opportunities to be used here on earth for God's glory. God has chosen that His Children, as heralds and preachers of the gospel, will be the means in which others are brought into the Kingdom. When we waste time. When we misrepresent Christ. When we constantly fall into sin.... We're missing opportunities to be used for God's glory and to be vessels that point others to Jesus.

How much do you care about the salvation of those around you? Every single Christian, not just pastors, are called to this work. We are called to be Great Commission Christians. To baptize and to teach others how to be reconciled to God. So we must discipline our body, we must be self-controlled.... Spiritual disciplines are one of the key ways in which we best prepare ourselves to not only grow in holiness ourselves but to also help others grow closer to Christ as well.

## **Application**

### **1. Give God the first fruits of your day.**

Now this is not a specific command from the Lord you find in Scripture, however, I do believe this is a wise principle to live by. Just like in our giving we give the Lord our first and best. It's wise that we spend time with the Lord each day when we wake up. Over the last 10 years of following Jesus, one thing I've learned is, if I want to spend quality time in communion with God, it typically needs to happen when I wake up. The moment we put it off... the likelihood it happens that day goes way down. OR it may still happen, it just becomes much more rushed or distracted.

So here's my recommendation: Start a morning routine and commit to it. What's the first thing you reach for in the morning? Is it your phone or is it God's Word? Grabbing our phone first thing in the morning immediately sets our minds on things of the world, rather than the things of God. Discipline yourself to get up when your alarm goes off. Discipline yourself to go to bed on time the night before. Erik's good friend Dean Insera likes to say, "Sunday morning church is a Saturday night decision." I love this quote because it's very true. And if that is true, well "Mornings with the Lord, is a night before decision as well." What should this routine look like? There are many different things I could mention, but I want to talk about the two I believe to be most important.

## **Prayer**

What's the number one thing most Christians say they struggle with or need to get better at? Prayer. Once again, this goes back to the fast-paced world we live in. We're easily distracted, we can't slow down, we can't focus when we do try to pray. We have to be extremely intentional in our prayer life.

### **Here's a few recommendations on prayer:**

- The goal of prayer is to get God, not to get the things He gives.
  - We go to the Lord in order to know Him more, in order to align our hearts with His will.
  - You see God isn't learning anything when we pray, He knows what we need before we

ask, but He desires that we do ask.

- Prayer changes us and leads us to further dependence on the Lord.
- Pray through Scripture
  - If you struggle with knowing what to pray or your prayers just sound the same every single day. One of the best things you can do is pray through The Bible.
- Get in a posture of dependence
  - I am someone who's easily distracted. One of the best things I've ever done to help my prayer life is get on my knees and pray.
  - It puts us in a posture of dependence and we know why we're there when we do so.

## **Studying God's Word**

I would argue that this is the most beneficial and important spiritual discipline that you can do. We need God's Word, we need our daily bread every single day to shape our hearts and transform our minds.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

This passage and others like it tells us about the transformative power of God's Word. The Bible isn't just words on a page... it's not just words about God.. It's not just words from Godly people... the scriptures are the very words of God Himself written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through the prophets and apostles. You want to be conformed to the image of Christ? You want to grow in holiness? Get in God's Word and let His Word get into you. The first thing I did when I came to Christ at age 21, was I read through the entire New Testament and it absolutely changed my life. I could no longer deny the truthfulness of the Scriptures. The countless prophecies that were fulfilled in Christ were astonishing. I promise you if you make it a daily habit to read God's Word, it will absolutely change your life. Now, just like Paul said "*do not box as one beating the air.*" We need a plan. Don't just open your Bible and read whatever. I would suggest finding a Bible reading plan online and picking the one that works best for you. If you need help with this come and talk to me or one of our pastors. We must give God our first fruits through prayer and the studying of His Word every single day.

## **2. Prioritize the local church.**

One of my favorite passages is Hebrews 10:24-25: “let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

If you want to grow spiritually in 2025 and you want to be obedient to the commands of the Lord, the local church will be your priority. Here’s the reality: there are certain “one another” commands found in Scripture that you cannot possibly be obedient to without “one another.” Without being a part of the local church. Sitting under the preaching of God’s Word, being Shepherded by elders, church discipline, bearing one another’s burdens, partaking in the sacraments of the Lord’s Supper and baptism with the saints. We need the local church.

**So here’s the challenge:** Get more involved in the church in 2025.

- If you’re not in a life group, join one.
- If you aren’t serving anywhere, sign up to serve.
- Attend a MDWK class.
- Join a new ministry like Re:Generation, jail ministry, the Fount, Re:Engage, men's or women's ministry.

I promise you one thing, there is not a lack of opportunities here at the Journey Church to get involved. And here’s what it will do, when you dive into something new. It will stretch you, it will challenge you, you will grow, and you will find like-minded believers to sharpen you in a way you never have been before.

## **3. Invest in God’s Kingdom in order to win souls.**

In 1 Corinthians 9 right before the passage we read today, Paul is talking about becoming all things to all people (Jew to Jews, those outside the law, weak) and his reason is this “In order to save some.” Why do Spiritual Disciplines matter? Why do we run in such a way in order to receive the prize? Well we’ve already established that the goal of spiritual disciples is godliness. But there’s also another reason... In order to win souls for Christ.

How are you investing in the kingdom of God? How are you investing in the lives of others, that they



may have the hope of eternal life as you do? Here's a good discipline for you to pick up in the new year.... Start caring about the lost around you.

- Go get coffee with someone and study the Bible together.
- Check in with an old friend and see how they're doing spiritually.
- Invite a co-worker to church who you know needs the gospel.
- Or maybe you know the Lord is calling you to the mission field but you keep putting it off.

Whatever it may be... God has called all Christians to be a part of building His Kingdom here on earth. So friends, don't waste more time in 2025 on meaningless endeavors. If you've been lazy, repent and get to work. If you lack discipline, find accountability and bring your body under control. Purge your life of anything causing you to sin and seek holiness in a deeper way than you ever have this upcoming year.



- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



- **REVIEW**
  - Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different translation.
  - Additional Scripture
    - Mark 8:36
    - 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
    - Philippians 2:13
    - Colossians 3:23
    - 1 Timothy 4:7
  - What big takeaways did you have from the sermon?
    - What did this teach you about God?
    - What did this teach you about man?

- What did this teach you about salvation?

- **DISCUSS**

- What are spiritual disciplines and why are they vital to the Christian life?
- What is significant about giving the Lord the first fruits of your life?
- How does physical health relate to spiritual health?
- What does it mean to run the race of faith with everything we have?
- How can we address laziness and lack of discipline in our lives?
- What are some practical examples of spiritual disciplines?
- What is a practical step you can take as a result of this sermon?

- **MEMORIZE**

- **2 Timothy 2:15** – *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*



- **BUILD UP:** How will you grow in your love and knowledge of the Lord this week? We have several discipleship opportunities for you to participate in.
  - **Life Groups** are a time and place to connect and learn to better follow Jesus together while abiding in Him. Life Groups are the primary means of disciple-making at TJC. Our groups focus on connecting, learning, following, and abiding. Groups meet weekly on various days/times across Wilson County. Contact Morgan Cates ([morgan@tjclive.com](mailto:morgan@tjclive.com)) for more information.
  - **MDWK** is a time of education and growth in order to build up the Journey Church body. We offer a handful of intentionally chosen classes that cover a broad range of topics and are taught by quality teachers from within our congregation. Classes are at 6:30p every Wednesday. Contact Morgan Cates ([morgan@tjclive.com](mailto:morgan@tjclive.com)) for more information.
  - **TJC Women** seeks to equip women to be rooted in the Word of God and bold in their faith. Our events and small groups focus on letting the gospel shape all spheres of our lives. Gather is the first Saturday of every month. Contact Laura DiLeonardi ([laura@tjclive.com](mailto:laura@tjclive.com)) for more information.
  - **TJC Men** exists to equip men to show Jesus as incomparably glorious in every sphere of their lives. The men's ministry meets on the 2nd Saturday of every month at 8:00a in the student center. Contact Morgan Cates ([morgan@tjclive.com](mailto:morgan@tjclive.com)) for more information.
  - **TJC Students** is passionate to see every parent equipped, every leader developed, and every student disciplined into baptized, self-feeding, disciple making followers of Jesus who are letting the gospel shape every sphere of their lives. Our student ministry meets on Wednesday nights from 6:00p-7:30p for MDWK worship and Sunday mornings at 8:30a and 10:00a for small group. Contact Larry Davis ([larry@tjclive.com](mailto:larry@tjclive.com)) for more information.
  - **TJC Kids** believes that the Gospel saves, sanctifies, gathers and sends. It is our desire to see our kids understand that the Gospel truly does change everything and we will do this

primarily by teaching our kids to love Jesus, showing them they can have fun in the process, and making sure they stay safe. Contact Nick Judd (nick@tjclive.com) for more information.

- **TJC Young Adults** exists to equip young adults ages 18 to 29 in becoming passionate followers of Jesus who enter their life in Christ. We do this through intentional relationships, fellowship, and worship centered around the gospel. The Fount meets Tuesdays at 7:00p. Contact Hunter Christian (hunter@tjclive.com) for more information.
- **SEND OUT:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story, your story, or the gospel? We have several opportunities for local and international missions.
  - **For the City:** Acts 1:8 calls us to be engaged where we live and among the nations. The people of TJC seek to bring truth, grace, and hope to Lebanon and the surrounding area by mobilizing the church to be salt and light, not only for the city, but for your city. Take part in faithfully and obediently using your gifts to declare God's glory among those who are hopeless living among you today. Contact Jeff Long (jeff@tjclive.com) for more information.
  - **For the Nations:** At TJC we exist to show Jesus as incomparably glorious to Lebanon and beyond. We are ambitious and passionate about strategically taking an active role in finishing the Great Commission as we actively pursue the unreached peoples of the world by mobilizing the entire church to pray, send, go and welcome international friends among us. Contact Shawn Casto (shawn@tjclive.com) for more information.
- **PRAYER**
  - **Pray over any request from your group members.**
  - **Pray for our staff:** Houston Wood (Middle School Director)
  - **Pray for our replanters:** Christ's Fellowship (Gallatin)
  - **Pray for our short-term teams:**
    - Central Asia Team departing on March 7, 2025
    - Southeast Asia Team departing on March 7, 2025
    - Europe Team departing on March 21, 2025
    - Southeast Asia Team #2 departing on April 25, 2025
  - **Pray for our long-term units on the field:**
    - The Wilsons
    - The Grays
    - The Starks
  - **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>