

## DAILY SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

### Introduction

1. Bodily exercise is profitable for fitness and health (1 Timothy 4:8), and many people have a daily exercise routine. But our greatest concern ought to be our spiritual health.
2. Just as bodily exercise requires time, effort, and discipline, so spiritual exercises require the same. Those who fail to put forth these requirements simply prove they have no real desire or motivation. The onus is on each person to discover their desire and motivation.
3. I would like to suggest five, daily spiritual exercises to maintain and develop our spiritual growth:



- ☞ Devotion to prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- ☞ Devotion to reading the scriptures (2 Peter 2:1-3; Psalms 119:16, 82).
- ☞ Devotion to singing (James 5:13; Psalms 66:2).
- ☞ Devotion to fellowship (Acts 2:46; Hebrews 3:12-13).
- ☞ Devotion to good works (Titus 2:14; 3:8, 14; cp. Hebrews 10:24).

“For physical training is of some value, BUT godliness (spiritual training) is useful and of value in everything and in every way, for it holds promise for the present life and also for the life which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

### 1. DEVOTION TO PRAYER

Your devotion to prayer is an essential component of maintaining and strengthening your relationship with God.

- a. Every relationship begins with a conversation and is maintained by conversation. We speak to God through prayer and, thereby, maintain our relationship with Him through prayer. No wonder the scriptures emphasize constant prayer: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17<sup>NKJV</sup>), “Be unceasing in prayer [*praying perseveringly*]” (1 Thessalonians 5:17<sup>AMP</sup>). The call to prayer:
  - “Pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).
  - “And when you pray...” (Matthew 6:5).
  - “This, then, is how you should pray...” (Matthew 6:9).
  - “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (Romans 12:12).
  - “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Ephesians 6:18).
  - “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6).
  - “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (Colossians 4:2).
  - “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone...” (1 Timothy 2:1).

**Jesus Regularly Prayed**  
 “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16).

It is as we spend time in God’s presence through devotion to prayer that the thoughts and intents of one’s heart are shaped and guided.

- b. The power of prayer:

- 1) It is through prayer that we obtain the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:7-10).

“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins [through prayer], He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:7-10).

- 2) It is through prayer that we free ourselves of anxiety and receive peace of mind (**Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Peter 5:6-7**).

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (**Philippians 4:6-7**).

- 3) It is through prayer that we gain strength (**Isaiah 40:31; Ephesians 3:14-16, 20**).

“In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul” (**Psalms 138:3**).

“But those who wait on Yahweh shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

To “wait upon the Lord” is not suggesting a period of inactivity, but a time of seeking the Lord through prayer.

- 4) It is through prayer that we look for the Lord to give us opportunities to preach the gospel (**Colossians 4:3; Ephesians 6:18-20**).

- 5) It is through prayer that we obtain boldness to speak God’s word (**Ephesians 6:19-20; e.g., Acts 4:29-31**).

- 6) It is through prayer that we can obtain wisdom from God (**James 1:5-8**).

- 7) It is through prayer that we obtain healing from God (**James 5:14-16**).

A person devoted to prayer recognizes their weakness and is seeking God’s strength to accomplish His will. A sincere Christian does not view prayer as a substitute for action, but as that which undergirds action with God’s strength.

- 8) It is through prayer that we gain tranquility from God (1 **Timothy 2:1-4**).

c. Praying fervently:

- 1) We are to pray “fervently”; this is from the Greek word *agōnizomai* (G75): “to *struggle*, literally (to compete for a prize), figuratively (to contend with an adversary), or generally (to endeavor to accomplish something): - fight, labor fervently, strive” (Strong’s). This is the word used of Epaphras regarding his prayers:

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring *fervently* for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (**Colossians 4:12**).

- 2) As you pray for wisdom, forgiveness, strength, opportunity, boldness, peace, healing, and tranquility, be sure to include thanksgiving: “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving” (**Colossians 4:2**).

- 3) Consistent, fervent prayer will strengthen your relationship with God.



## 2. DEVOTION TO READING THE SCRIPTURES

God has provided all that we need to grow spiritually in His inspired word.

- a. What is the Bible? We often refer to the Bible as “the scriptures”. Jesus referred to the Old Testament as “The Scriptures” (**Matthew 2:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56; cp. Luke 24:27**), and Peter refers to Paul’s epistles as scripture (**2 Peter 3:15-16**).

- 1) Paul says that “all scripture is given by *inspiration* of God” (**2 Timothy 3:16**), and Peter says “that no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (**2 Peter 1:20-21**).

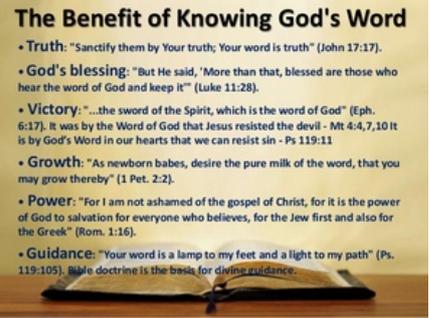
“Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk [i.e., the word of God] so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation” (1 Peter 2:2).

- 2) The inspired word of God that we possess today is the complete revelation of God to mankind. Jude exhorted Christians to “contend earnestly for *the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*” (**Jude 1:3**).

- 3) We have the complete inspired word of God, but does it contain *all* that we need? Paul wrote, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

b. Here are a few of the benefits of studying the scriptures:

- 1) It will assure you of your salvation. “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).
- 2) It will teach you. “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- 3) It will guide you. “For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life” (Proverbs 6:23). “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalms 119:105).
- 4) It will counsel you. “Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever mine” (Psalms 119:98). “Your testimonies also are my delight; they are my counselors” (Psalms 119:24).
- 5) It will restore you. “The law of Yahweh is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of Yahweh is sure, making wise the simple” (Psalms 19:7).
- 6) It will warn you. “Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward” (Psalms 19:11).
- 7) It will nourish you. “Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (1 Peter 2:2).
- 8) It will judge you. “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).
- 9) It will sanctify you. “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17).
- 10) It will free you. “So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32).
- 11) It will enrich you. “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16).
- 12) It will protect you. “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against you” (Psalms 119:11).
- 13) It will strengthen you. “My soul weeps because of grief; strengthen me according to Your word” (Psalms 119:28).
- 14) It will embolden you. “Even though princes sit and talk against me, Your servant meditates on Your statutes” (Psalms 119:23).
- 15) It will stabilize you. “He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers” (Psalms 1:3).



“The law of Yahweh is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of Yahweh is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of Yahweh are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of Yahweh is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of Yahweh is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of Yahweh are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Psalms 19:7-10).

c. Reading and studying the word:

- 1) Develop the habit of reading and studying the word daily.
- 2) Pray for wisdom, understanding, and insight before each session.
- 3) Learn to meditate on the scriptures.

**3. DEVOTION TO SINGING**

Singing praises is foundational to our spiritual well-being; it enriches our souls and fortifies our relationship with God.

a. Paul refers to three categories of songs: “Speaking to one another in **psalms** and **hymns** and **spiritual songs**, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).



1) Three categories of songs: (i) **Psalms** (psalmos) were the Hebrew worship songs. Most of the ancient psalms were recorded in scripture, but some were written later. (ii) **Hymns** (humnos) were the songs of the church, written after Pentecost, in which the orthodox beliefs of the church were set to rhyme, meter, and music. (iii) **Spiritual songs** (pneumatikos ᾠδῆ) were songs that people wrote in a local style, a local “spirit.” It should not be hard to imagine that different parts of the Roman Empire were given to different styles of music. As the gospel spread, and as creative people became taken by the love of God expressed in the gospel message, they wrote songs in the style unique to their culture in order to express their love for God<sup>1</sup>.

2) Whenever the subject of singing arises, so does the question regarding the use of musical instruments.

a) Is it scriptural or unscriptural to use musical instruments when singing (whether in the congregation or at home)? If you think that simply quoting Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 will settle the matter, then you’re mistaken. The problem isn’t an ignorance of these verses, the problem relates to two things: the definition of the word *psalmos*, and one’s hermeneutics. One first has to agree on these two points before looking at those verses.

“How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Yahweh of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of Yahweh; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalms 84:1-2).

b) Rather than branching off into a discussion about these things, let me just state what I believe we all agree upon: the scriptures only authorize vocal music (*sing*), not instrumental (*play*). This is true whether singing takes place in the assembly (**Ephesians 5:19**<sup>2</sup>) or outside the home (**James 5:13**; cp. **Acts 16:25**).

“When our soul longs and faints for the opportunity to worship God, then our heart and flesh can truly sing to our Creator in joy” (Landon Rowell).

3) James says, “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms [psallō]” (**James 5:13**). This is not an instruction for the congregation, but for individuals and even the whole family. “Praise is appropriate to such a state of mind. The heart naturally gives utterance to its emotions in songs of thanksgiving” (Barnes). What is implied in this statement is that the absence of singing reveals a heart devoid of any thought of God’s praise and thanksgiving.

b. The role of singing:

- 1) One purpose of singing is to praise God (**Acts 16:25**).
- 2) It is a type of spiritual sacrifice that we offer to God (**Hebrews 13:15**).
- 3) It is a way to be filled with grace and melody in our hearts (**Colossians 3:16**; **Ephesians 5:19**).
- 4) It is a way of responding to the goodness of God (**James 5:13**).

<sup>1</sup> All these definitions come from an article titled “What Are Psalms, Hymns, And Spiritual Song?” by Pastor Robby Rikard - [www.fbcwiggins.org/what-are-psalms-hymns-and-spiritual-songs/](http://www.fbcwiggins.org/what-are-psalms-hymns-and-spiritual-songs/)

<sup>2</sup> The words “speaking to one another” point to a congregational setting.

c. Seven biblical reasons why singing matters<sup>3</sup>:

- 1) When we sing, we are obeying a command: “Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).
- 2) When we sing, we dig deep roots in the word. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16). Singing is one of the two chief ways in which God’s word dwells in us richly. As we sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs together, we are promised that the word of Christ will dwell in us richly, which is what we should crave as believers.
- 3) When we sing, we build up others. Paul says, “... addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...” (Ephesians 5:19), and “... teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Colossians 3:16).
- 4) When we sing, we make war on sin. In Colossians 3, Paul is challenging the Colossians to literally put sin to death in their lives, to kill sin. In Ephesians 5, the command to address one another in song comes right on the heels of “make the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16). It’s very hard to lie, be greedy or to look at something inappropriate when, you’re “singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart” (Ephesians 5:19). Simply, a heart that’s doing that will not easily give in to temptation. A singing heart is a heart at war with the work of the evil one and the power of sin.
- 5) When we sing, we are spiritually strengthened for trial. Often times, we think only of singing when we’re happy and times are good, but singing is also a source of strength in a time of trial: Paul and Silas are unjustly imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel, and what do they do while they’re in prison? Sing! (Acts 16:25).
- 6) When we sing, we walk a God-designed pathway to joy: “Let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you” (Psalms 5:11), “For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy” (Psalms 63:7). “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise” (James 5:13). As you study Scripture on this point, you’ll notice that sometimes singing gives birth to joy and sometimes joy gives birth to singing. But persistently in Scripture, joy and singing are bound together. If you struggle for joy... sing! If you are joyful... sing! In God’s perfect design and understanding of the human condition, He has bound joy and singing together for His people.
- 7) When we sing, we glorify God. True obedience, deep roots in the word, building up others, making war against Satan and sin, persevering, finding joy in God: all these things bring glory to God, which is each person’s chief goal and purpose. We sing “to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16) because He is the object of our praise.

“Singing has such a unique way of bringing your heart, soul, mind, and strength together to focus entirely and completely on God. In an age of distraction, singing grabs the attention of all our senses and focuses us on God” (Tom Olson).

#### 4. DEVOTION TO FELLOWSHIP

The term “fellowship” refers to spiritual activities. Fellowship with other Christians strengthens one’s faith in God and Christ.

##### a. <sup>4</sup>Explaining what we mean by the term “fellowship”.

- 1) Many brethren understand the term “fellowship” to consist of both spiritual activities and social and recreational activities.
- 2) However, the term “fellowship” in the New Testament is used to mean “share together, or participate together.” It is never used to refer to social activities, dinners, or entertainment. In the New Testament the word *fellowship* is always used to mean sharing together in *spiritual* activities.

<sup>3</sup> This is a modified list from an article by Tom Olson.

<sup>4</sup> The comments under point “a.” are taken and adapted from an article I found on the Timberland Drive Church Of Christ website. The author is not named. [www.timberlandchurch.org/articles/fellowship-a-social-activity/](http://www.timberlandchurch.org/articles/fellowship-a-social-activity/)

- 3) “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). This passage is very instructive because it shows how fellowship cannot mean social activity. Fellowship is a spiritual activity, participating together in spiritual actions with spiritual goals and spiritual ends in mind.
- 4) We challenge anyone to produce a single verse of scripture where a meal or social activity is referred to in scripture as “fellowship.” A careful search of the New Testament will find that the only “meal” labeled fellowship is the Lord’s Supper (“is not the cup of blessing which we bless a *sharing* in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a *sharing* in the body of Christ?). When brethren tried to make the Lord’s Supper into a social occasion they were sternly rebuked and told to take their parties home (see 1 Corinthians 11:34).

b. The importance of fellowship:

- 1) The church is the body of Christ which is built up when each part does its share (Ephesians 4:15-16).
- 2) Our assembling is designed to stir one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25).
- 3) Our fellowship is a source of comfort and edification (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- 4) Our fellowship is a way to avoid becoming hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:12-14).

c. Experiencing Fellowship:

- 1) Attend worship every Sunday and any other weekly meeting the church provides.
- 2) Meet regularly with other Christians outside the assemblies for Bible studies, prayer meetings, etc.

Frequent fellowship is crucial to remaining faithful and steadfast.

**5. DEVOTION TO GOOD WORKS**

A Christian has been created in Christ Jesus for good works. Indeed, we ought to be a people zealous for good works. The absence of good works reveals a dead faith.

a. What is the proof of faith, love, and hope?

- 1) The proof of faith is works (James 2:14-26).
- 2) The proof of love is works (1 John 3:17-18).
- 3) The proof of hope is works (1 John 3:2-3; 2 Corinthians 7:1).



b. The role of good works:

- 1) We are not saved by good works (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-5).
- 2) But we are created in Christ for good works to glorify God. The works in which we walk are those “which God prepared beforehand”<sup>5</sup> (Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14; Matthew 5:16). Thus we are to be fruitful in *every* good work (Colossians 1:10).
- 3) We must be careful to maintain goods works (Titus 3:8, 14) and not to grow weary in doing good (1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:9-10).

“But someone will say, You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:18).  
The point made by James about faith is also true regarding love and hope.

- c. Doing good works: Peter said that “Jesus went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). When threatened by His enemies with stoning, Jesus said, “For which of these good works do you stone Me?”<sup>6</sup> (John 10:32). What good works did Jesus mean? He fed the hungry (Matthew 15:32-39) and He healed the sick (Matthew 8:16-17). We cannot do either in the same way He did, but nevertheless we can provide food for the hungry (Matthew 25:35-40; James 1:27; 2:14-17; 1 John 3:17-18).

<sup>5</sup> “... God prearranged a sphere of moral action for us to walk in. Not only are works the necessary outcome of faith, but the character and direction of the works are made ready by God (Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament).

<sup>6</sup> Note the sarcasm!

- 1) Feeding the Hungry. Destitute widows in the Church at Jerusalem were fed by the generosity of the congregation (Acts 6:1-7).
- 2) Clothing the Poor. A woman named Dorcas was “full of good works and charitable deeds”. The good work for which she has been remembered is clothing the poor widows: “And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them” (Acts 9:36-42).
- 3) Prison Ministries. The author of Hebrews writes, “Remember the prisoners as if chained with them - those who are mistreated - since you yourselves are in the body also” (Hebrews 13:3). “I was in prison and you came to Me” (Matthew 25:36).
- 4) Hospitality. Taking people into your home is a good work that demands patience and kindness and a willingness to put up with inconvenience. Elders are to be hospitable (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8), but all Christians who are able should practice this good work (1 Peter 4:9; 3 John 1:5-8).
- 5) Sharing. The author of Hebrews writes, “Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:16). Sharing takes in an enormous spectrum of good deeds! A person with a Christlike heart is ready for new and creative good deeds.

Maintaining good works builds spiritual endurance.

## Conclusion

1. In this lesson we have suggested five, daily spiritual exercises:

- ☞ Devotion to prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- ☞ Devotion to reading the scriptures (2 Peter 2:1-3; Psalms 119:16, 82).
- ☞ Devotion to singing (James 5:13; Psalms 66:2).
- ☞ Devotion to fellowship (Acts 2:46; Hebrews 3:12-13).
- ☞ Devotion to good works (Titus 2:14; 3:8, 14; cp. Hebrews 10:24).

The head of the household that leads the family in daily spiritual exercises – prayer, Bible study, singing, fellowship, good works - is creating an environment conducive to spiritual development. An environment of carnality exists where these are lacking.

2. Engaged in daily, these will help to develop strong Christians. These are only basic exercises and it is not suggested that this is everything a Christian needs to be doing. They will, though, establish a good foundation of spiritual fitness. It will certainly be helpful as you seek to carry out the admonition given by Paul to the young man Timothy: “... exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:7-8).
3. A devotion to prayer, reading, singing, fellowship, and good works requires a great deal of time and effort. What will motivate us to be diligent in these things? That’s a question that would require another lesson! However, here are just a few things (not in any particular order): (i) A desire to please God, (ii) A desire to grow spiritually, (iii) A desire to reap the rewards these exercises afford, (iv) A desire to maintain one’s relationship with God, (v) A desire to lead your family in the right spiritual direction, etc.

A devotion to prayer and Bible study stand at the head of our obligations as Christians. Every relationship begins with a conversation and is maintained by conversation, and we maintain our relationship with God through conversation: we speak to God through our devotion to prayer and He speaks to us through His word as we devote ourselves to study.

All that we do as Christians – whether corporately or individually – is an outflowing of our relationship with God. Further, it is our relationship with God that gives meaning to all that we do. If we have no relationship with God, then all that we do, regardless of our zeal, will afford us no spiritual benefits.

We cannot have the kind of close relationships with one another (Acts 4:32) that we ought unless we first have an intimate relationship with God – every relationship begins with conversation and is maintained by conversation; we speak to God by our devotion to prayer (Colossians 4:2) and He speaks to us as we devote ourselves to studying His word (1 Peter 2:1-3; Galatians 5:25 - this, of course, involves walking in obedience to His word – James 1:22). Some people think they can neglect their relationship with God (i.e., prayer, study, obedience) and still have close relationships with their brethren, but that is only what they think. True fellowship between brethren is only possible when both have fellowship with God (1 John 1:3).