

Institutes of Theology—Session 14
Spiritual Disciplines and Q&A
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1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 6. Paul writes his young son in the faith, Timothy, and he's left in Ephesus to pastor the church there. And he tells him about ministry. In fact, he tells us that he wrote this letter so that in case he was delayed—this is chapter 3 verse 15—Timothy would know how things ought to be conducted in the household of God. So here is how church ought to be done. He's telling this pastor what it should be. Look at verse 6 of 1 Timothy 4. “In pointing out these things to the brethren [this is his teaching ministry now] you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, and you will be constantly nourished on the words of the faith and the sound doctrine which you've been following.” You notice what he says here? He says, you're going to benefit others from your teaching ministry, but if you do it right, Timothy, your own soul is going to be fed. You're going to be nourished in the process of doing it. And let me just say, guys, I tell people almost every week when they say something positive about a message I've preached or whatever, I say, look, I have the greater privilege because I get to be in this and live in this text and in this passage we're studying for hours, and you get 45 minutes. So mine is the blessing and my own soul is nourished. And that's what Paul says to Timothy.

But now watch what he says in verse 7. “But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself.” The Greek word for discipline there, as you probably know, gives us the English word gymnasium. Basically saying, train yourself, discipline yourself in the same way that an athlete does in the pursuit of their whatever particular sport they're involved in. But in your case, discipline yourself, put yourself in the gym, as it were, for the purpose of godliness. That's what I'm going to challenge you to do tonight. Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. What does that look like? Well, I want you to turn to a couple of other texts, because I want you to get sort of the larger field.

Turn back to John chapter 17. This is the high priestly prayer of our Lord on the night before His crucifixion. In verse 1, John 17, “Jesus spoke these things, and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, Father, the hour's come. Glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom you have given Him, He may give eternal life.” Now, look at verse 3. Jesus defines eternal life. “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” So, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness, but it's not just for discipline. The goal is to know your God. The goal is to be a man of God, in the true sense of expression. To know God as Father through a personal relationship with his Son. That's the goal.

People often claim that, you know, you'll hear people say, you know, I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I don't want to be cheeky, but my response to that often is, yes, you and everybody else. Everybody has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every person on this planet, He's their Creator, He's their Sustainer, He's their Lawgiver, and if they don't repent, He's their Judge, and if they have repented, He's their Savior. Everybody has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The real question—and this is where I want to go tonight—is what is the nature of a true spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ? The goal is to know God and to know His Son.

So what does that look like? Go back a couple of pages to John 13. Jesus tells us exactly what our relationship, a true spiritual relationship with Jesus should look like. John 13 verse 12. “So when He had washed their feet and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I've done to you?’” You know the story. I won't go through the entire narrative. But notice what He says to them next. Verse 13. “You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. Teacher. You call Me *didaskalos*, Teacher, and you call Me *kurios*, Lord, and so I am. You see, men, here's the bottom line. Christians are students, and Jesus is our Teacher. And Christians are slaves, and Jesus is our Master. That is a true spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ. That's what it really looks like. So, being a disciple isn't about praying a prayer or professing momentary faith in the facts about Jesus. Being a disciple is following a person, Jesus Christ, as your Master and your Teacher.

Let me just start with that question tonight. Can you honestly say in your heart of hearts that Jesus Christ, Jesus the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, God's only Son, is your *didaskalos*? He is your Teacher, and you are His student, and He is your Master, and you are His slave? Can you say that? That's the nature of a true relationship with Jesus Christ. But how does someone initially become a disciple, one who will follow Jesus as Master and Teacher?

One of the texts I want you to turn to is in Acts chapter 14. Here's how you become a student, a disciple of Jesus. Acts 14 verse 21. Paul comes to Derbe, and after they had preached the gospel in that city, verse 21, Acts 14:21, “and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Tyconium and Antioch.” Do you see what happens here? They preached the gospel, and that made many disciples. The point is this, Paul made disciples by preaching the gospel, by proclaiming the word, and then that's how we become disciples. You hear the gospel, you become a follower of Jesus Christ. You become a disciple of Jesus Christ. The Father works through the message that you hear to call you to Himself, and to call you to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. So, the term disciple simply means a true Christian. To be a disciple is to be a Christian.

Now, I say that because not everyone understands that. I don't know if you know this or not, but we live in DFW. And in DFW, there is a theological position that ultimately came out of Dallas Theological Seminary that says that these are two different things. There are two levels of

Christianity, they would say. Level one, you believe in Jesus as Savior. That's level one. That's how you get in. And someday, maybe, maybe years in the future, you believe in Jesus as Lord. And then you kind of grow to a different level. But you can go along pretty much flat line for a long time just believing in Jesus as Savior and living your life, doing what you want. This is not what the Scriptures teach. What you've already seen is to believe in Jesus is to become a disciple. To believe the Gospel is to become a disciple if you've really believed in Him. You see, when Jesus called people to believe in Him for salvation, He called them to discipleship, right? Anyone who would be My disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me. It was a call to discipleship. That's, if you're a Christian, that's what Jesus called you to, to be his disciple, to be his student.

Acts 11:26 says the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Do you hear that? There's an equal sign between disciples and Christians. The disciples of Christ were first called Christians in Antioch. To be a disciple is to be a Christian. To be a Christian is to be a disciple. Look at Ephesians chapter 4. In Ephesians chapter 4, Paul is talking about, in verse 17 and following, the pagans we used to be. He says, don't walk like the Gentiles walked. Don't live like you used to live when you were an unbeliever, because, verse 20, you didn't learn Christ like this. You didn't learn Christ to live like that. Now, what Paul does here is make an interesting play on words. In verse 20, he says, you did not learn Christ in this way. And he uses the verb form of a disciple, of the noun disciple. You didn't learn to be a disciple of Christ in this way. It's really what he says. Used, usually, of becoming his disciple initially at salvation. And then he goes on in verse 21, "if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him." The word taught is the verb form of *didaskalos*, teacher. Used of learning as a disciple after becoming a Christian. In other words, what he's saying is, listen, you became a Christian by learning from Christ and becoming his disciple. And you grow as a Christian by continuing to follow Him as his disciple. That's what he's saying. So if you're a Christian, you're a disciple.

But here's the question. What does it mean to be a disciple? Let's talk about that briefly. Let's go through a little definition here. We're going to look at a Greek word. It's from Kittel's. What I'm going to lay out here is from Kittel's Theological Dictionary in the New Testament, a massive 10 or 12 volume set that fills a whole shelf on my bookshelf. And in that volume, there's some very important lessons about what it means to be a disciple. First of all, the Greek word is *mathētēs*. Literally, it's one who directs his mind to something. It came to mean out of that, a pupil or a student. It identifies a person who is engaged in learning. There is no *mathētēs* without a *didaskalos*. The process involves a personal relationship.

It's also, by the way, a normal word that's used for an apprentice. Some of you have apprentices that work for you. Maybe you are an apprentice. And so you know what that is, that you have someone you're training, bringing along. This word was used in many settings in the first century. For an apprentice, to be a disciple of Jesus is to be an apprentice. It's used, for example, in the papyri, which is the secular writings. When I was in seminary, particularly working on

some doctoral work, I had six months, a Greek coursework for six months, we translated papyri. These are ancient secular documents that ended up in the trash heap, and because of the climate and that part of the world, they survived, and this enables us to see Biblical words in a secular context. And in the papyri, this word is used of a weaver. It's used of a person learning to play a flute. It's used of a doctor, an apprentice, someone learning a skill from someone else who knows that skill well. So understand this, a person is a *mathētēs*, a disciple, if he's a student and has a teacher.

That's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. So let's look at it in the New Testament. *Mathētēs* occurs only in the Gospels and in Acts, but it occurs about 250 times. And it always implies a relationship, a personal attachment, which shapes the whole life. In other words, it's not like our school. You know, when we went to school, most of us in our culture, we go to school, and the teacher's up there, and they share some information. You may never know anything about that person. Their life shapes you in no way. You get the information, maybe, and you leave, and you're done. That's not this word. This describes those who have attached themselves to a teacher. Just to show you some examples, it's used of the disciples of John the Baptist, those who attached themselves to John, who wanted to learn from him, who wanted to study under him. It's used of the disciples of the Pharisees, disciples of John and of Jesus in Mark 2, 18. It's used of those who were disciples of Paul, who wanted to learn from Paul, to be with him, to hear him teach, to ask him questions, to be taught by him. It's used of disciples of Jesus in John 8:31.

But here's a really important one. In John 9:28, the same word is used for those who are disciples of Moses. Now, why is that important? Because that shows you can be a disciple, a *mathētēs* of someone even when they're dead, through what they've written or what they've spoken that's been recorded. In secular Greek, for example, Socrates is called a *mathētēs* of Homer, who wrote long before Socrates lived. So it's to be a student or a learner of someone.

Now, let me show you two texts that frame this up for us in a way that I hope will help you. Turn with me first of all to Matthew chapter 10. Matthew chapter 10 and look at verse 24. Jesus says, "A disciple [a student] is not above his teacher." His *didaskalos*. So, a *mathētēs* is not above his *didaskalos*, nor a *doulos*, a slave, above his *kurios*, his master. "It is enough," now watch verse 25. "It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher and the slave like his master." Now, one other text, and I think it will be clear. Turn to Luke chapter 6, verse 40. Luke chapter 6, verse 40. A pupil, a disciple, A *mathētēs* is not above his teacher, his *didaskalos*. But everyone in this relationship, everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be what? Have a lot of information in his head? Know a lot about the subject? No, what's the goal of being a *mathētēs*? It's to be like the teacher. It's to be like the master. It's training like that. These two passages make it clear that the goal of a *mathētēs* is not like the students in our educational system who just gather information. The disciple's goal is to become like his teacher. So a true disciple not only learns the truth from his teacher, he copies his teacher. He practices it. John 8.31, "If you

continue in My Word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.” It's not enough to hear it and go, yeah, that's great. I know that now.

Obedience to Jesus' Word is the basis of all true discipleship. And ultimately, the goal is what? To become like Him. So when we think about discipleship, your goal as a disciple of Jesus is to be like Him. Now how does this all connect? Well, you remember where I started. Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness, of a god-driven, god-based, god-focused life. Discipline yourself to that end. So let me ask you, who is the teacher on that subject? Of course, it's our Lord, the Lord Jesus. And so what we need to do tonight is ask ourselves, what were the spiritual disciplines of our teacher? What were the disciplines that drove His life, that shaped His life, that framed His life, that at a human level made Him who He was and is? What should our priorities as His disciples be? The answer is His priorities, right? To be like our Teacher.

When you examine the biblical data, what you discover is that there are two primary daily disciplines of Jesus Christ. Two primary daily disciplines of Jesus Christ that made Him at a human level the spiritual man that he was and that we as his disciples, his *mathētēs*, have to copy. Fail to copy these two, and you're not going to be like your teacher, because this was where he lived every day. So let's look at them together. The two primary daily disciplines of Jesus Christ, and therefore of his students, of those who want to learn from Him and be like Him.

Number one. Spending time daily in God's word. Nothing more defines a disciple than this. How can you be a disciple? A student, listen to this now, think about it with me. How can you be a disciple of Jesus, a student of Jesus, if you never listen to Him teach? It's a no-brainer, right? When you think about it like that. How can you become like your teacher when you never hear Him teach, because you're never in his word, you're never doing what He did? I'm talking about a daily time in God's word. Now, I'm going to give you a brief biblical defense. I'm just going to put a buzz through these, because I covered these, most of these, maybe all of these, when we were talking about Bible study for every Christian. So, we already covered this earlier this semester. So, I'm just going to give them to you briefly.

Seeking to understand and apply the Scripture is a daily duty of parents and children. Deuteronomy 6. Be in the Word. Be teaching your children the Word. Daily. Reading, understanding, and applying the Scripture was a requirement for Israel's leaders. You remember Deuteronomy 17? They had to make a copy of the law. The leaders of the nation, the kings, had to make a copy of God's law for themselves, and they had to read it every day. A preoccupation with Scripture has always been the practice of God's people. Whether you're talking about Joshua, Job, who delighted in God's Word more than is necessary food. The Psalms begin with, blessed is the man who delights in God's Word and meditates in it day and night. Number four, feeding on Scripture is the God-given desire and God-given demand of every true Christian.

Desire the sincere milk of the Word, Peter says. Long for it. Like that newborn child, if you're a parent, you understand exactly what this image is. Like a newborn child longs for its mother's

milk, you long for the Bible like that. Christ rebuked people for not knowing the Scripture. Can I say, gentlemen, if Christ were here, if He were in your home, if He was interacting with you about the Scripture, would He say, have you not read? That's what He asked on a number of occasions. Really? You don't understand this? You should understand this. Paul commanded Timothy to immerse himself in the Scripture in order to grow in holiness, or in godliness. We saw it just a moment ago. You know, where he says, look, you're going to nourish your soul with the Scripture, even as a pastor.

Number seven, the daily discipline of prayer and exposure to the Word results in spiritual progress. It does. It will protect your soul from sin. Psalm 37:31, "The law of God is in his heart, his steps do not slip." Psalm 119:11, "Your word, I have treasured in my heart." Doesn't mean just memorized it, although certainly that's included. It means treasured. I've thought about it. It's really important to me. "I've treasured it in my heart that I may not sin against you." Psalm 119:38, "Establish your Word to your servant as that which produces reverence for you." Did you hear that? "Establish your Word as that which produces the fear of you." Spurgeon said, and this is, sounds a little old, this quote, but you'll get the point. Spurgeon said it this way, "Backsliders begin with dusty Bibles and end with filthy garments." It's a great quote. It will protect you from sin.

Secondly, it enables growth in personal holiness. John 17:17, Jesus prays, and you know what He prays for us? He says, "Father, sanctify them, set them apart in holiness by your truth. Your Word is truth." You realize you're not growing. You will not grow in likeness to Jesus Christ apart from his Word. Not gonna happen. 1 John 2:14, "I have written to you young men because you are strong." How do you become a spiritual young man instead of a spiritual baby? How do you become strong? He says, "because the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one." It will prepare you for service. 2 Timothy 3:17, you know, all scripture, you know, the verse is inspired by God, breathed out by God. To what end? Not only to our salvation, the verse before, but to equip us for every good work. That book there sitting in front of you, that's its promise. God promises through it to prepare you for every good work. Couple of other arguments, and we'll move on.

Number 8, Paul directed his New Testament letters not only at the leadership of the church, but also at its members. Think about that. There are three pastoral epistles. That is three letters in the New Testament, 1st and 2nd Timothy, Titus, written to pastors. The rest of the New Testament was written to you. And all of those commands, God expects you to read it, to know it, to digest it, to live it. It's to God's people.

And number 9, New Testament believers were commended by God for being diligent students of the scriptures. In Acts 2, you see them, they were devoted to the teaching of the apostles. That's an interesting word, devoted to. It means sold out to, given over to, preoccupied with. And then, of course, you have Acts 17:11, where Luke, I'm sure, under the direction of Paul, commends the

Bereans because they were more noble than those in Thessalonica because they examined the scriptures, what? Daily to see if these things were so.

Guys, what I want you to see is that if you read the Gospels, and we saw a little of that this last week, even as we saw Jesus absolutely driven to preach God's word, He was in the scriptures. He was in the scriptures daily. He is our teacher. We're his pupils. So what ought to shape our lives? The same priority that He had. So that's the first daily discipline of a disciple of Jesus Christ. We're going to be like Him. We got to be in the Word like He was.

Secondly, the second daily discipline is spend daily time in prayer. Spend time daily in prayer. Let me give you again just a brief reminder of the importance of prayer. First of all, you'll find that it was a crucial part of our Lord's life. I'm not going to go through all these texts. The importance of prayer starts with: this was crucial in our Lord's life. You read through the Gospels, and how many times do you find Jesus praying? Let me give you one powerful example. Look at Mark chapter 1. I touched on this passage this last Sunday, and it just jumps out at me. But look at Mark chapter 1 and notice what happens here. Verse 14, our parallel in Matthew, after John was taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel, and He calls the first disciples to Himself, which we'll get to shortly in our study of Matthew. He goes into verse 21. He goes into Capernaum, and on the Sabbath, He entered the synagogue, began to teach. Many were amazed at his teaching. He was teaching them as one having authority and not as the scribes.

He heals someone, and then out of that, He heals Peter's mother-in-law, crowds gather after the evening. If you go down to verse 32, when evening came after the sunset, this is on the Sabbath. Once the sunset, of course, the Sabbath was over, so everybody gathers from everywhere. They began bringing to Him all who were ill, those who were demon possessed, the whole city gathered at the door. He healed many. And then next morning, verse 35, this always strikes me. So think about Jesus. He had a long day of ministry on the Sabbath. He taught. He healed Peter's mother-in-law. He healed a demon possessed man. After the Sabbath was over, huge crowds gathered at sunset, and they stayed till the wee hours of the morning, and He heals them and proves his power among them all.

And then verse 35, in the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place and was praying there. I am just always convicted by that. You say, well, I just don't have time for these things. Not if you're a *mathētēs* of this teacher. He made time. These were his priorities. Crucial part of our Lord's life. He told his disciples to pray. Oh, I'll just mention this in passing. This isn't so much an argument for prayer as it is just a reminder that there's no one posture in prayer. Jesus prayed standing. He prayed kneeling. He prayed when He was falling on his face. So every posture is appropriate. Sitting is appropriate. There's no posture in prayer that's not, that's as long as there's a respectful heart that's disrespectful to be in. On your bed, David does that often, right? So just point that out.

But Jesus also told his disciples to pray. And I'm going to come back to that, so I'll just touch on that one. The rest of the New Testament models and commands the same commitment to prayer. Be devoted to prayer, Paul says. That's to every disciple. That's not, that's not me. That's not the elders of the church. He says that to the members of the church in Colossae. Be devoted to prayer. And you see that in Acts Chapter 2 of the Church in Jerusalem. You see it in other texts as well.

In scripture, there is often a pattern of time set aside for daily prayer. Think about this. Prayer that isn't planned often doesn't happen. It's just the reality. If you don't have a plan, then you're going to go through your day, and all of a sudden, you're going to be putting your head on your pillow, going to sleep, and going, I didn't pray today, or at least not very much. There's a pattern. David, he says in Psalm 55:11, at morning, and at noon, and in evening, I will lift up my voice to you. In Daniel, three times a day, we learn that Daniel would go to his home, and there on his balcony, he would lift up his eyes toward heaven and pray. The apostles, they prayed, we know, at the ninth hour, at three o'clock in the afternoon, the time of the afternoon sacrifice when they were there in Jerusalem. And at the sixth hour, Peter was in a house in Joppa, on the coast of Israel, and he went up on the sixth hour before the noon meal to pray. There were these times structured into their lives. Now, what that time looks like for you, we'll talk about it in a moment. What that time looks like for you may be different than these times, but guys, let me just be honest with you. If you don't have a plan, then you're not going to grow in prayer.

So, that brings me to the next logical step. If these are the two, and I can, I just touched on the New Testament, guys. I've just touched on the Gospels. But I promise you, if I didn't feel you were convinced, I could take you to countless texts in the Gospels where these were the daily disciplines of Jesus Christ, our *didaskalos*, our teacher. These things marked Him. In the busiest of days, He was still committed to these realities. So, if we're going to be like Him, we need to have these as our daily priorities. The question is, what does that actually look like? I know a lot of guys, I certainly, at a stage in my own life, was at a place where it's like, okay, yeah, I know I need to do that. What does that even look like? I don't have any idea where to start. And so, that's what I want to do in the rest of our time, is just very practically share my own heart with you, share my own life with you.

You know, through the years, I have sort of shaped and molded my own approach to daily time with the Lord. And I'm just gonna share that with you. Not because it's inspired, but because it includes some of the key elements that I know were included in our Lord's life and therefore should be included in ours. So, let's talk about then, a practical plan for carrying out these daily disciplines. How can you do this?

First of all, you need to land on the best time and place. I would encourage you to consider, seriously consider—I know, I get it, some people are really morning people, and others say, no, I'm a night person; I understand that—but I want you to be honest with yourself. When are you

most likely to be faithful in spending some time in the Word and prayer? For most guys, it's before the day begins. Those who say, I'm going to do it at the end of the day, that's just a harder sell. You get home, you're tired, there are a lot of distractions. You know, things happen in the day that carry your mind away. You got something you need to do about work because something didn't get finished that day. It's very hard. So I'm not saying this is inspired. Clearly, there are different times in the scripture. I'm just saying seriously consider making it part of your first morning activities. Choose a time that's available and workable most days.

For most people, again, mornings are better. You say, what time? Again, depends on your schedule. For me, I'm not really functioning very well before 5 a.m. So, you know, that's like the middle of the night. There's a reason God made it dark. It's supposed to be for sleep. That's me. Some guys aren't like that. Some guys, you know, Chas Morris, who was an elder in this church for years. I mean, he and his wife got up and ran at like 3.30. It's like 3.30. That's like a disease, isn't it? I mean, maybe that's you. Go for it. But for most of us mere mortals, it's going to be closer to 6, 5:30, 6, somewhere in there. You say, boy, I have a hard time getting up in the morning. Let me give you a little clue. Just start getting up every morning, and guess what's going to happen? You're going to go to bed earlier. It's going to happen naturally. And suddenly you'll find you can get up at 5:30 or 6. I'm just telling you, you know, most of that evening time, guys, most of it's wasted. It just is. It is for me.

Now, I do some reading before bed, but a lot of those evening hours, so the longer you extend that evening, the more you're just wasting time. So say, I'm going to get up, whatever time works for you, 5:30, 6, whatever it is. Say, this is what I'm going to do it and start doing it. And you'll get tired enough, if you keep doing it, you'll get tired enough before you go to bed earlier, and you'll start getting the sleep you need and still getting up when you need to get up. That's just a reality. As far as places, I would encourage you to select a place that's quiet and light. You don't want to do dark, because then it's going to put you to sleep, especially if it's early in the morning. A place that's quiet and light, but not too comfortable. Don't slack back in your lounge chair. That is not going to go well at 5:30 or 6 a.m. So, you want a place that is conducive for what you're trying to do. I'll tell you, for me, for about half of the year, when it's cold, it's my living room, where I've got a window on one side, where I can look out, because I love looking out and praying as I'm seeing what God's made, and then a fireplace on the other side. You know, that's a really conducive spot for me for the portion of the year it's cold. And then when it starts warming up, we have a back porch with some rocking chairs, and I'm out there. You know, that's where Sheila and I spend our time together, and in our personal time as well as interacting with one another. So, whatever works for you, be flexible.

Set a target time to begin and end. In other words, don't be unreasonable, guys, okay? Don't say, okay, I've never done this before, Tom, so I think tomorrow I'm going to shoot for three hours, the Lord. That's just dumb, okay? Set a reasonable time. Set a reasonable begin time and a reasonable end time that fits your life, that fits your schedule. And then be flexible. If one day

your schedule doesn't permit the scheduled amount of time, then remember, guys, some time in God's Word and Prayer is better than no time. It's just like food, right? There are times when work is so busy that you don't have time to grab much lunch. But a bite of lunch is better than none. Same thing is true for your souls.

Now, let me just tell you why this works. Because God has given you, men, He's given me an amazing gift. And that gift is called habit. Now, habits can work against us because we're sinners, we can create sinful habits, and we do, all of us have, and have to overcome those in the process of sanctification. But habit is an incredible gift of God. Imagine if you had to think about tying your shoes the same amount of energy you had to invest the first time you tied them. Or the first time you got behind the wheel of a car. You know, I learned to drive with a stick shift. And, you know, the first time you're trying to work out the clutch thing and getting it in gear and you're grinding some things, and, you know, and trying to keep all that in your mind and not driving into the bushes, you know, on your way out the driveway.

But habit allows you now to, like, drive and eat your breakfast and look at your text messages and, yeah, I hear you. You're those guys. I've seen you on the road. You know what I'm saying? That's a gift. Habit is a gift. And so it works for you spiritually, too. Here's how it works. In six weeks, if you will have enough discipline to do what we're talking about for six weeks, it will become a habit. That's what the scientists tell us. Do it for six weeks and it will become a habit. If you do it for six months, it will become such an ingrained habit that you will feel uncomfortable not doing it. We're not talking about this is going to be like pulling teeth the rest of my life. No, it's going to be hard. For six weeks, it's going to be hard because it requires the discipline to do it, even when you don't feel like it, when your body's getting used to a new schedule and everything else. Yeah, it's going to be hard, but everything worthwhile is hard. So six weeks, it's a habit. Six months, it's an ingrained habit. I can tell you personally that for me, I just can't even imagine a morning without that, because that's how the Lord wired us. That's how He built us. So establish a practical plan.

Now, as part of that plan, let me just give you the essential elements. What do you want to include in your daily time? If you're going to carry out these two disciplines, time in God's Word, time in prayer, what does it look like? Well, let's first of all start with the elements. What should be included? Obviously, prayer, both prayers of the moment, as well as scheduled times each day to pour out your heart to God. Bible reading, exposure to the entire content of the Scripture.

Bible study, going deeper in a passage. Discipline, regular, in-depth study, like we talked about in Bible study for every Christian. Music, because read the Psalms. Read the life of Jesus. We have several records. Well, first of all, we know He was in the Synagogue every Sabbath, and they sang in the Synagogue. We also know that on several occasions at the Feast, it's recorded that He sang hymns with His disciples. And we're encouraged in both Ephesians and Colossians to sing. Spirit-filled praise with our hearts and voices.

And then meditation. We talked about this, the choice to think deeply about our Lord, His works, and His Word, in order to better understand and to plan what we need to do. Those guys are the elements that you want to think about including in your time with the Lord each day.

Now, with that in mind, let me show you a little show and tell here. I just, this morning, after I finished my own personal time, I just grabbed the resources that I use every morning and brought them with me. Let me just walk you through them.

First of all, obviously, there's my Bible. Okay? I prefer the New American Standard. I would encourage you to consider using that for your study, for your study especially, because it is closest to the original of the versions we have. I think it's a little better than the ESV in terms of the closeness to the original. Honestly, the ESV reads a little better, but I'd rather have something as close to the original as I can get, and that's what I think you probably want, too. so have a copy of that.

I have, I also have with me, because I'm often in the Gospels, I have a Harmony of the Gospels, which you can get in our bookstore. It's essentially the Gospels put in chronological order, and if one Gospel comments on that story, there's one column. If two Gospels comment on that story, there are two columns. Three are three columns, four are four columns. So you can compare the text as you're working your way through the life of Jesus. Very helpful if you're working through the Gospels, particularly because you want to get a full picture of what's going on. I use that. I have a copy here at the church, and I have a copy at home. I use that almost every day.

I have my Greek testament. Maybe you know Greek, maybe you don't, but I enjoy that every day. It's a reader's Greek testament.

But here are a couple of others I would recommend to you. As far as prayer, we have our Countryside Missionary little booklet so that at least one or two days a week, you can pray for our missionaries.

Now, I don't think I'm going to mention this later, so let me just mention this now. Guys, you can't pray for everything every day. Okay, that just isn't going to happen. So the best thing to do is to come up with a plan. Okay, on Mondays, I'm going to pray for my family. I'm going to pray for my wife, my immediate family. I'm going to pray for my wife, pray for my kids, pray for me to be the right kind of father, pray for their spiritual growth. Tuesday, I'm going to pray for my extended family. You know, I have family members that aren't in Christ, and I want to pray for them. I have many family members that are. I want to pray that the Lord continues to grow them. And so think about that. Think about a plan, even in terms of praying, so that you're not covering the same ground every day and praying for, you know, Aunt Suzie's bum elbow or whatever. Be praying for things that matter. Not that that doesn't matter. It does. But you want to pray for more than that. That's what I mean. Okay, so, you know, have some plan of who you're going to pray for.

A prayer journal. I don't personally keep a prayer journal. Many people do. But regardless, have a plan for who you're going to pray for and who you're going to remember. I would say this to you, and I really have tried religiously to do this. If you promise you're going to pray for somebody, do. Even if it's when you're walking away from that conversation, lift them up to the Lord. Pray for them. Don't ever essentially lie. Yeah, I'll pray for you, and then you never do.

As far as prayer as well, this is a really helpful resource. Now, you won't be able to get one leather like this. I'm sorry. But it's called the Valley of Vision. The Valley of Vision. It is a collection of Puritan prayers. Now, I don't just read these and like, that's my prayer. What it does is it challenges me to think differently as I'm praying. And so it gives it gives me a new direction. For example, this is the prayer for yesterday. This is the Spirit as teacher. So just listen, I'll just read a few lines, and you'll get the idea. It just challenges me to think differently in my praying. And I take those words and I sort of reframe them as my own, as opposed to just rotely reading the prayer to God, as it were. So for example, here we go.

“Oh God, the Holy Spirit.” And by the way, the other thing I do is I change the pronouns to contemporary pronouns. I hate “thees” and “thous” because that's not how it is in Greek. It's not how it is in Hebrew. So, oh God, the Holy Spirit, “that which I know not, teach me. Keep me a humble disciple in the school of Christ. Learning daily there what I am in myself, a fallen sinful creature, justly deserving eternal destruction. Let me never lose sight of my need of the Savior, or forget that apart from Him, I am nothing and can do nothing. Open my eyes to know the scripture. Reveal to my soul the councils and works of the Trinity. Instill into my dark mind the saving knowledge of Jesus.”

I mean, that's half of the prayer. And it's just so rich because my mind starts taking off in that channel, right? It's like, that's true. I embrace that. Lord, I really am nothing. I mean, all I bring to you is sin. And everything good I have, I got from you. And it just takes me and inspires my prayers, rather than my trying to generate it out of my own heart entirely and out of my soul. Now, I do that sometimes as well, but I'm suggesting that that is a helpful resource to help you do that.

Another helpful resource that isn't—you can buy it in print, but it's free online digitally. It's Matthew Henry's (Many of you are familiar with Matthew Henry, the Puritan commentator) his book called Method of Prayer. Really all it is, is he's categorized the prayers of scripture. So, for example, the initial address to God. He's got all the initial addresses to God and all the prayers in Scripture cataloged for you there. So it just gets your mind, again, going in a certain direction. You can get that, by the way. You can get it for free.

You can get it in the NAS. You can get it in the ESV. You can get it in a corporate, if you're praying for people beyond yourself, or you can get it in an individual, where all the pronouns are I, me, and my, or corporate for us and we and so forth.

You get the point. So that's a really helpful resource. One of the things I'm using right now is I'm almost always going through a psalm. I'll talk about that in a minute. And there are a couple of resources I'll recommend. This one is an interesting one for me." It's Psalms by the Day, a new devotional translation" by Alec Motyer. Looks like mot-yer, but it's pronounced "mo-teer." Really interesting. I'm enjoying it. So just a resource to prompt me as I go through the Psalms.

All right. So those are the resources that I have with me every morning, when whether it's on my couch in the living room or it's out on the patio.

Now, let's talk then about a possible order. What does this look like? Again, I'm trying to get to nuts and bolts practical here. Let me just say again, this isn't inspired, okay? This isn't, thus saith the Lord. I'm just trying to be practical and say, guys, here's something to consider and what this might look like.

First of all, I would encourage you to begin with a brief time of prayer. Don't make this your 15, 20-minute prayer if you pray that long. Make this just an introductory prayer. Use the Valley of Vision like I just suggested, or a portion of a prayer from the Valley of Vision. Use your own heart just overflowing to the Lord. That's something that's on your heart. Maybe a passage you studied the day before that is still in your mind and heart. But begin with a brief time of prayer. And I think that should always include a prayer of dependence. I think it always should say what taught you before. Lord, I am ignorant and in need of a teacher. Help me to understand. Teach me. It's amazing how often Psalm 119 says, teach me, instruct me. That's what we need. And so, that's where you begin.

Next, I would suggest that you reflect briefly on a psalm. Now, when I say a psalm, that doesn't mean you have to go through an entire psalm every day. Maybe it's a couple of verses in the psalm but just work your way through. In the last three days, as I've started again through the psalms, using this, today I finished psalm four. So in about, I don't know, four days, three or four days, I've done the first four psalms, which are fairly brief, but there's so much there to think about and meditate on. So reflect on a psalm. How do you do that? Well, read the psalm, then refer to a study resource to make sure you understand it. This doesn't have to be a full-fledged commentary. It could be a study Bible, like the MacArthur Study Bible, or even the ESV Study Bible, something that gives you a little bit of help to understand what you're reading.

Another resource I love for the psalms is Derek Kidner. He's published two brief little commentaries on the psalms in the Tyndale commentary series. Derek Kidner, K-I-D-N-E-R, he is so brilliantly concise. A couple of things to be aware of. One, he's an old earth guy, which I would disagree with. I think biblically can be argued against. There are a couple other minor things. Anything you read outside the Bible, you always read carefully and with discernment. But it's really helpful. It's very insightful. I use it often. I have it through Logos. You have Logos, you can get Kidner electronically. And I use that, again, just to make sure those two or three

verses I'm thinking about, I'm not taking them out of their context. I'm understanding them in their larger context.

Pray and meditate through the psalm. So, again, when I say the psalm, it might be an entire psalm. If it's a few verses, might be a few verses that day. And you pick up the next day where you left off. And you're thinking about, you're meditating, praying the psalm. That's a great thing. Pray the psalm back to God. Just put it in your own words as you think you now understand it. And just ask God to do those things in your own heart.

I'll give you an example. Turn to Psalm 4. This is where I was this morning. Psalm 4, it's a remarkable psalm. It goes with Psalm 3. Psalm 3 is a morning prayer of David. You'll notice Psalm 4 is an evening prayer of trust in God. Guess what the circumstances were for these two psalms? Look at the opening to Psalm 3, "A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son." So think about this, guys. You thought you had a rough day. David is the king of Israel. His son rebels against him, leads a conspiracy, brings an army to Jerusalem. David has to flee Jerusalem for his life with a handful of people. He has nothing to eat. Someone has to bring him food by stealth. He's staying in caves out in the Judean wilderness, doesn't know if he'll ever have his kingdom again. And, by the way, he has been banished, as it were, from the temple. He can't go there and worship his God. His life may be on the line. He's lost all of his reputation. But notice what he says. Verse 1 of Psalm 4. He's going to bed in that circumstance. "Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness. You have relieved me and my distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer."

And then he talks about those who've conspired against him. "O sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach? How long will you love what is worthless and aim at deception?" And then here's how he comforts himself in his circumstance. "Know that Yahweh has set apart the godly man for himself." In other words, I'm his possession. Doesn't matter what happens to me. Doesn't matter if I'm killed. Doesn't matter if I don't have my kingship anymore. It's—here's what helps me. The Lord has set me apart from Himself. I'm his. I'm his possession. "The Lord hears when I call to Him. Tremble and do not sin. Meditate in your heart upon your bed and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness and trust in the Lord."

Now, here's where I wanted to come. Look at verse 6. "Many are saying, 'Who will show us any good?'" Well, yeah, you think. I mean, if you were in that circumstance, you think people would go on. "I don't know, David, It looks pretty hopeless." And he says, "Lift up the light of your countenance upon us, O Lord." That's the priestly prayer from Numbers. "Lord, let the light of your face shine on us." And then he says something that's shocking. In that circumstance, he's going to bed as a pursued man, maybe dead before morning. He says, "You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and new wine abound." In other words, you've given me joy like the best human joys.

And then verse 8 is my favorite. If you were being chased by an army, how would you feel about sleeping? Here's David. In peace, "I will both lie down and sleep. For you alone, O Yahweh, make me to dwell in safety." That's powerful, guys. This is where we live.

This is where the people in our lives live. And just a simple understanding of the psalm shapes our knowledge of God in such profound ways. That's why I think this is what you should do. And I would encourage you to let your study and what you've learned about God drive your praise and confession. When you learn this about God, turn it into praise. "Lord, it's true. You do hear me when I call. You have set me apart for yourself. And even if my circumstances are as bad as David's, you're not going to abandon me. You're going to give me gladness even in the midst of that. And even when I'm at risk of dying, I don't have to be afraid. I can lie down and sleep. For you alone, oh Yahweh, make me to dwell in safety." And you just turn it back into praise to God.

So, begin with a brief time of prayer. Briefly reflect on a psalm. I showed you an entire psalm. You may not do a whole psalm. You may do a few verses. Then read a significant portion of scripture. Now, you may include this in your private time. Other guys will listen to the Bible on their way to work or whatever, but you want to be getting exposed to all of scripture. You want to have a plan like you have here, like Lance was talking about earlier, where you have a plan to read through the Scriptures, where you're exposed to all of it. If all of it is God breathed, you want to expose yourself to all of it.

And so, establish a plan to read through the Bible in one or two years. Use different translations to keep your reading fresh. In other words, you know, don't just stick with one. Circulate and keep moving. Avoid using a study Bible, especially if you get distracted by the notes. If you're one of those guys, you know, you're like me, you're kind of the engineer type, and you're like, "Okay, I gotta know what that means." "Oh, I kinda know what that means." Then don't read in a study Bible. Force yourself to read quickly, to grasp content and major themes. By the way, one thing that's helpful in reading through, the only thing I would suggest you do is read the introduction to the book before you read it in a study Bible. That way, you at least know the big picture. You know what's going on there. You have a sense of the flow of it.

If you use a schedule for reading, a lot of apps and things have schedules, just make sure, guys, that either it's not tied to specific dates, or if it is, that the dates can be easily changed. Why is that? Because let's say you have a week when you let it slip. You don't use the discipline you intended. You get behind, you get a week behind or a couple of weeks behind, you go, I just give up. No, you have to have a way to go, okay, I dropped the ball the last week. Now, let's start again today. So make sure that you choose a plan that does that.

Study a paragraph of Scripture. This is what we talked about in Bible Study for Every Christian. In other words, you want to go deep somewhere. Maybe it's the Psalm. Maybe that's where you do your study for a while. But maybe you do, I do a Psalm and another passage. I started Zechariah this morning, and I want to work my way through Zechariah. I want to understand

better. You know, Zechariah ends chapters 9 to 14 with the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ. Pretty amazing, the detail that's there. But I want to work my way through and see, understand that amazing Old Testament book better. So I would encourage you to consider doing the same.

Be working your way through. Again, it doesn't have to be a chapter. It can be a couple of verses. Just do something. Have a plan. And then you pray.

Follow with an extended time prayer. I would encourage you to follow the pattern that the Lord gave us in the Lord's prayer. Now, I'm not going to spend a lot of time here because I don't have time, but also because we're going to cover the Sermon on the Mount very soon in Matthew. We're going to get to it. But let me just give you an outline. First of all, Luke tells us in Luke 11:1, that prayer is a skill you can learn. Remember, Jesus' disciples came to Him and said, teach us how to pray. It's a skill that you can learn. The most thorough explanation of how to pray is the Disciples' Prayer, or as it's often called, the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer technically is John 17. What we normally call the Lord's Prayer is really the disciples' prayer. It's your prayer. It's my prayer.

Two versions of the disciples' prayer have been preserved for us through divine inspiration. One of those in Matthew 6, probably taught in the summer of 29 AD, and Luke 11, probably taught in the fall of 29 AD, that same year. And, you know, in Matthew 6:9, Jesus says, pray therefore in this way. Let this serve as a pattern for your prayer.

So, again, let me just give you an overview. The Lord's Prayer, first of all, it begins with the preface. Our Father, who is in heaven. That preface teaches us three attitudes that ought to permeate our prayers. First of all, we should pray as a member of a family. Our Father. Secondly, we should pray, or let me say in filling that out, that we should pray for others. Our and us occur throughout this prayer, and we should pray with others, as you see often in the New Testament. So, there is an attitude that you come to prayer with. You're not just thinking about yourself. You're thinking beyond yourself. Secondly, we should pray as the child of a father. Our Father. Our Father. In other words, we come in prayer aware of our adoption. Guys, this isn't like make believe. If you're a Christian, God has adopted you as his son. It's how He thinks of you. That's who you are to Him. So come to Him like that and be confident in his response. Because again and again, Jesus says, look, if you earthly fathers, if your children comes and has a legitimate need and asks something of you, what do you do? You don't go, "Get lost, kid." Not if you're any kind of a loving father. You want them to have what they need. You have a Father that's a far better father than I am or you are. And so, pray as a child of a father.

Thirdly, pray in a spirit of submission. You know, if you're coming as a child to a father, there's a humbleness that comes with that. But the third attitude that's here in the preface is we should pray as the subject of a king. Our Father, who is in heaven. See, we have a Father, but it's not just any father. We should pray as a subject of a king. Who is in heaven? In other words, with an

apprehension of the majesty of God. That's the idea. He's our Father, but he's not just any ordinary father. He's the King of the universe. And with a deep sense of our own unworthiness. Our Father's in heaven. He's exalted far beyond us. And so, we come, that preface drives the attitudes we come with. Then, that brings us to the petitions.

The six petitions in the Lord's Prayer provide six categories of prayer. And again, I'm just going to touch on these because we're going to be there soon. First of all, pray for the glory of God. "Hallowed be your name." Secondly, pray for the kingdom of God. "Your kingdom come." Pray for the will of God. "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Pray for the needs of this life. "Give us this day our daily bread." Pray for confession of sin "and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." And pray for the pursuit of holiness. "And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil." Guys, that's what you ought to be praying for.

Now, I want you to notice the proportion of these requests. Half of them are about God. Half of them are about us and our needs. Sadly, most of our prayers are about what? Us. Notice the balance in these requests. Jesus divides the requests we should be making in prayer into six categories. But let's be honest, most of our prayers fall into two of these categories. The needs of this life and confession of sin. So it's obvious that our prayers are significantly out of balance. But I also want you to notice the order of these requests. The order is obviously by design. And it tells us volumes about the focus of our prayers.

Guys, the first three of these are all about God. We don't get to our needs until the second half of this model prayer. You see, our prayers must begin with, be preoccupied with God, with His glory, with His work, with His will. That's why praise and thanksgiving is such a huge part of biblical prayer. That's why the Psalms are filled with praise and thanksgiving. Because that's what Jesus taught us. Only then are we really ready to ask for the things we need.

And then briefly, there's the conclusion of the prayer. Now, I'll talk about this when we go through it. I'm not going to deal with it now. There's some doubt as to whether this, it almost certainly wasn't attached to the original prayer that Jesus taught the disciples. However, this is from the scripture, so it's still true and legitimate. And it's put there to remind us that it's okay to include arguments to support our prayers.

Four, here's why I'm asking these things, God, "because yours is the kingdom." Listen, you rule over all of this. Yours is the power. You can do this. You can do whatever you want. "And yours is the glory." I want you to fulfill these requests only in keeping with your glory. "Forever and ever. Amen." And then tune in, in a few weeks, when we get to the Sermon on the Mount, because this will be filled out when we get to chapter 6. Well, it will be longer than a few weeks, probably, before we get to chapter 6. Just in full disclosure. So, let me finish this way, and then we're going to take a break and have some questions. But the two primary disciplines of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

You're a student. If you're a Christian, you're a disciple, you're a *mathētēs*, you're a learner of Jesus, and the goal is to be like Him. So, what were the two spiritual priorities that marked his life on a daily basis? It's these two. It's being in the Word and prayer. And so, guys, you want to be like Him? You want to be a true follower? You've got to make these a priority. Now, this practical part at the end, you can play with that all you want. You can say, I don't like that. I want to change it.

It's just to help you think about it. But what you can't do is say, yeah, well, I don't think so. Because you're not a disciple of Jesus if you're not trying to imitate Him and learn from Him. And to learn from Him is to become like Him. Read the Gospels, and you'll find that these were the huge priorities and the daily disciplines of Jesus Christ, our Lord. The goal, goals, to be a true disciple, true follower, true student, to be like Him, and ultimately to know Him and the Father, John 17:3. Let's pray, and then we'll transition.

Father, thank you for what we have studied so far this evening. Lord, I pray for each of these men, that they would make the commitment even tonight, before they leave this room, to pursue these daily disciplines. And Lord, don't let them get discouraged if they lapse for a day or a week.

Father, help them to remain committed to the long term, realizing that to be a disciple of Jesus is to embrace his teaching and his priorities as our own. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Q&A

Lance Borroughs (LB). Alrighty, men. Hopefully, you've refilled your coffee. You've grabbed some more water, some snacks. We're gonna get started here on the Q&A. Let me say thank you for the many of you guys that submitted questions, and I'm grateful for your participation in that. Also know that you know it's almost 830, and we're shutting it down here in 30 minutes, unless you guys can keep Tom here till midnight, but I think we're gonna let him go.

Tom Pennington (TP). I don't want anybody falling out of the window that I got a raise from the dead.

LB. There we go.

TP. Because I don't have that power. I'm a cessationist.

LB. That's true. That is true.

So we'll put a lot of these questions in the queue, and we'll see if we have some extra time available over the next few semesters here in Institutes, and we can cover some of these things. So, yeah, let's jump right in, Tom.

We've got really three sort of categories of questions. First category would be related to Bible study. The second would be related to systematic theology, and then we sort of have a miscellaneous category.

But so you talked about your Bible reading plan and what you have been doing in the mornings throughout your life and ministry. What does that look like when your schedule gets busy and you're traveling for this or that? You're on vacation with your family and those things. What do you do to either keep that routine or do you sort of switch it up a little bit during those times?

TP. Yeah, I think you have to. I mean, if you're traveling, and for example, I'll give you a recent example. I was speaking at a conference just a few weeks ago. I was gone, you know that. And literally, there was like, there was no time. I mean, very little sleep time. The conference went late into the evening, or up early the next morning. And so what you have to do at that point, you just have to recognize, Lord, you know my heart, and we're gonna grab a couple of minutes here together, and I'm gonna express my dependence on you. I'm gonna read a passage, get my heart in it, ask for your help and strength for the day, and that's what you just have to do on that day.

Now, that can't become the routine. If it becomes the routine, then there's something wrong with how you're scheduling your life. But there will be times like that. I mean, you're gonna face days when you're not in control. You get a call early in the morning that disrupts everything, and you've got to react to it. So you're always thinking of, first of all, expressing your dependence on the Lord. That is a non-negotiable. Every day, it has to be, Lord, I need your wisdom. I need your insight. I need your strength today. Help me. So if I'm doing nothing else, I'm expressing that to the Lord. But I'm always trying to fit in, either bringing back to mind something I was studying the day before, or the week before, when I was able to carve out that regular time. I'm spoiled, okay, because of what I do, and because I live so close to the church. I'm just 10 minutes away. So, for me, I'm able to have a large chunk of time I've carved that out through the years.

So, typically, I get up—when I'm not studying, study days are a little different, but on the normal days of the week—I get up around 6, sometimes a little before, 5:45, and I'm pretty quickly in one of those settings. And I'm there. Sheila joins me eventually, and I'm there until I need to get a shower around 8. So, I get to carve out a couple of hours every morning, most every morning. That hasn't always been true. You know, when kids were younger, there are challenges you face with that. So, you just have to ebb and flow with life. The main thing is, guys, make it a priority. You know, make it a priority every day. And if there is a day, and it happens, if there's a day when you just don't see how in the world you're going to squeeze out a moment, at least take time to pour out your heart to God.

Do it on the way. Do it as you're moving toward the day, and say, Lord, you know, my heart is to spend that time with you, and I'm forced to do this this morning instead. You know, let me have a desire to return tomorrow and seek you. Maybe that evening. Sometimes for me, you get to, like when I'm doing a conference or something, and literally, I'm in a conference from early in the

morning till late in the evening. I've got to relax anyway in the evening. Far better for me to relax, thinking about the Lord and His Word, than, you know, I don't know, watching something or even reading a book I enjoy. Turn to His Word. So just carve out what you can. That's the bottom line. Have the discipline to schedule it regularly and make it a regular part of your life, and let those times be the exceptions.

LB. Tom, earlier in your marriage, when your kids were young, what were some things that you did, practically speaking, just to create a culture of Bible reading and a culture of prayer and meditation in your family?

TP. You know, I think the number one thing, guys, that I would say in answer to that is, it starts by you're doing it. We don't do what we do to be seen. Don't, you know, like be a Pharisee and pick the most visible place in your house so everybody can see how spiritual you are. At the same time, I do want my kids to know that the Bible matters to me. I want them to know that every morning, I'm spending time in the Word and in prayer. I want them to hear the fruit of that as I share something I learned that struck me from my own time in the Word, separate from something I may do structured with my kids. So I want them to see and know.

I'll give you an example from my own life. My dad, I'm the youngest of ten kids, as you heard me say on Sunday, and we had five boys, five girls. We lived on two acres, which was a nice size plot of land, but we had two very small houses. Our main house was 900 square feet. And then my dad built this little outbuilding, cinder block outbuilding that was part garage and part, call it boys' room. It's like, think camp dormitory. That's what it was like. And every morning, we only had two bathrooms in those two places.

So every morning, we had to eat breakfast early. So every morning at 5:30, my dad would knock on the boys' room door, and he was our alarm clock, and say, okay, boys, time for breakfast. And we'd roll out, you know, bleary-eyed, pull on a t-shirt and a pair of pants, and go in the house for breakfast. Full breakfast, by the way. But before we did anything else, we'd all gather around the table, and my dad, who was not a teacher, ever, he was a music director, but every morning without exception, he would read a few verses from the Scripture and then pray as we began breakfast. Didn't comment on them. He just read them. But that established in my heart the reality that the Bible mattered to my dad. I knew that, and I saw him reading individually and privately as well, but it just built into my life the fact that my dad loves the Bible, and he is going to insist that it be a part of our lives.

And so that example, I think, is the biggest thing you can do, both personally to be in the Word and for your kids to know you're in the Word, and then to make it part of your family life. You don't have to teach them. A lot of my kids, my kids' friends, when they were growing up, thought, you know, I wore a suit every day, and I set my family down and preached to them for an hour every day. I never did that. You know, we would take ten minutes. You know, kids have a very short attention span, but it was regular. It was faithful. They knew that it mattered to me,

that it mattered to their mom, and it built into their lives the importance of the Word of God. It framed everything that we did. And so, that was true in the home I grew up in, and we wanted that to be true, and it wasn't the home Sheila grew up in. We wanted that to be true in the home that we established. So I would say, that's chief.

Beyond that, just establishing a culture of reading that directs them back to the Word, even fun reading. In the evening, when our kids were young, we would read through, you know, children-level biographies of famous Christians, so they could hear stories that people who loved God and loved His Word and stood for something that mattered, did something in life, just challenging them, but in ways that were winsome, that they enjoyed. I know not everybody's a big fan, and I may hear some feedback on this, but we read through the Chronicles of Narnia series with our kids. I don't agree with all of CS. Lewis' theology. I'm not even sure what went on in his own soul, but I appreciated the resource, and I would read through it, we'd make comments. So just everything you can do in a winsome way to expose them to the Scripture directly, and then in other ways to the Scripture indirectly, as it's bringing that to bear in their lives.

LB. Tom, you've mentioned through the years that you have a stack of books on your nightstand, and I'm sure that's ever evolving as you're finishing one and beginning another. So it seems that you've carved out sometimes in the evening to do some reading. So tell me, what are some of the similarities and differences between your morning time reading in the Word and then your stack of books that you're working through in the evening.?

TP. Yeah, the morning time for me is time with the Lord. I mean, it's time in His Word. Again, if He's going to be my teacher, He's got to teach me. And He doesn't teach you by whispering in your ear. He teaches you through His Word that He's given us through His apostles and prophets. And so, for me, that's crucial, that time in the Word and the process we just talked about, time in prayer. He talks to me through the Word. I talk to Him in prayer. That's the communion that we have with our Lord. And so, that's the morning for me.

The evening is more just reading books. And that varies. I'm in very, as you know, I'm very eclectic in my reading taste. I like history, so I often have something historical going. I like church history, so I often have something I'm working through on that. I like non-fiction history, like, you know, I just recommended to one of the guys a book by Eric Larson, who's a secular author, but he writes real history as though it were fiction. You know, in other words, it's like a page turner, but it's not a word of fiction in it. It's all firsthand accounts. If you want to start, you want to try one of his, by the way. I, not too long ago, a couple of his latest, I read *The Splendid and the Vile* about Churchill and Hitler, *The Splendid and the Vile*, and then another one, *The Demon of Unrest* was about what happened with Fort Sumter, the beginning of the Civil War. So I'll be reading some of that sometimes.

I'll also read some Puritan works. I enjoy just their, the way they take the Scripture apart and apply it. So I'll often have on my nightstand a couple of Puritan works that I'm working my way

through. And I give and take, you know, tonight, maybe I'll read this one, maybe the next two or three weeks, I'll read this one, and then say, you know, I'm okay, I've gotten enough history right now, I want to go back over here and I want to feed my soul a little differently.

One other thing I would say about reading, guys, I said readers, leaders are readers. The other thing I would say about reading is make the author prove himself to you. I'm not going to finish a bad book just because I want to say I finished a bad book. You know, if I get into the book, a hundred pages, and it's like, yeah, this really isn't feeding my soul, or I don't like this writing as a historical writer, then life's too short to read books that are bad. So move on. Find one you like.

LB. Now, I know on Sunday mornings, you typically mark up your sermon notes, but do you mark up your books as you read them? So your commentaries or even in the mornings when you're going through a Derek Kidner Psalms, do you typically, how do you annotate? Or do you?

TP. Yeah, I do. Mostly though, I annotate either reference works or commentaries. I do with certain books that I read, but not every book I read. It just varies, to be honest with you. If it's something that jumps out at me, that it's like someday I'm going to want to find this, so I'm going to highlight it, then I'll do that. If it's commentary, then it's different. I'm noting a lot and underlining a lot and highlighting a lot that stands out to me, that helps me grasp the flow of the text. So I think a lot of it depends on the book. Some books aren't worth marking. They're just like the one I just mentioned, historical fiction or historical nonfiction written like fiction. There's nothing to mark unless it's a quote that I want to capture that quote. Then marking it isn't necessarily going to help me find it, so I'm going to put it somewhere on my iPad or on the computer.

LB. So you just talked about, Tom, using the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 as a method of praying, using that as a template, as a guide. But you also use the method, and you do this on Sunday mornings in corporate worship, and I'm sure in your own private time as well. But you read the scripture, and then you prayed the scripture. So could you talk about that particular method and why you find that to be helpful?

TP. Yeah, and let me just mention, that's a great point, Lance. Let me just mention that I don't pray through the Lord's Prayer in those categories every day, but I do it regularly. And I almost always do it on Sundays. At some point before I come up to the church on Sundays, I'll work through the Lord's Prayer as I have come to understand it through study and hopefully as you will as we work our way through it. Most of the time, my prayers are framed up by what I'm reading and seeing in the scriptures or just by the overflow of my own heart, something that's on my heart, something that's just happened that I want to pour out before the Lord. But I would say the majority of the time for me, it's shaped in some way by the scripture.

Now, the only caution I would have about praying the scripture, only caution, is just do your best to make sure you're not praying it completely out of context. Don't be praying it as though it

meant one thing when actually God intended to mean something else. And the only way, the only thing you need to do with that is like I said, just look at a good study Bible, look at a resource so that you have a decent idea that you're capturing the ideas of that passage in its context. And then just turn it into prayer. And again, he's right. This is how I pray. It's how I think God's people have always prayed, is taking God's Word and turning it back into prayers to him. And so, I would say, imitate me as I'm trying to imitate the Lord, imitating Paul, as you hear me do that on Sunday morning, that's what you need to do. Read the scripture. And I know there's a resource that Lance put together. I would never have put my prayers in a book, but Lance has captured, and at the encouragement of others, the Scripture readings, some Scripture readings from Sunday morning, and then the prayers that I prayed sort of in response to the scripture. Sometimes Sunday morning prayers, I will write out from my own heart as a reflection of the scripture. Sometimes I will have an outline in my mind of where I want to go. Other times, it's just purely extemporaneous as I've dealt with that text and reading it. But let the Scripture just become an example of your prayers. Like I just showed you with Psalm 4, right? If you find yourself in a hard and difficult place, pray that back to the Lord. Lord, you will hear me. You're the God of my righteousness. You're going to do what's right, and you're going to work this out. I don't always understand what you're doing, but I can trust you like David trusted you. So you just turn it back to Him.

LB. And that probably helps, Tom, with, you know, maybe repeating and saying the same expressions, and, you know, you're not expanding your prayers in terms of vocabulary and subject matter and those things. For example, you talk about just praying the Psalms, just working through a different psalm a day or whatnot to be helpful.

Switching gears here to systematic theology. Tom, you're in the commentary world and the exegetical world and the reference material world, but you're also a theologian, so just tell me a little bit about the benefit of systematic theology in your own life. And one of the primary reasons systematics is important in general for the Christian life.

TP. Yeah, the bottom line is the only way to understand the Scripture is to understand the entirety of what it says about a subject. So that's systematic theology. You want to understand how this passage you're studying relates to another passage in another book about the same topic and to another passage in another book about the same topic. Systematics is simply that. It's the systematizing of what Scripture teaches about any specific issue. So, for example, there are the categories of systematic theology, and we're going through right now those categories. This semester, we've looked at just the reality, the introduction to the importance of the scripture. You're going to be looking at the next semester in more detail at specifically the doctrine of Scripture as it lays out. And the categories, like the canon. Why these 66 books? Why do we embrace them as God's word? What about the apocrypha? Why don't we embrace that? You know, those kinds of questions are what systematics are. Those kinds of questions are the questions that systematics is answering.

So, it's important to know that, because without knowing that, then you don't understand why, you know, in this passage, it talks about election. In Romans chapter 9, it talks about election. In Romans chapter 10, it talks about individual responsibility. If you don't understand how those two connect and relate, you're going to be terribly confused. And so, that's systematics. It's understanding how the teaching of Scripture about a topic syncs together.

And so, I would say it's crucial. It's what we try to do in the study, in all the context here in the church. It's what you should be doing. But it's a gift to be able to look at the entirety of what Scripture teaches about the Scripture, what Scripture teaches about God, what Scripture teaches about man and sin, what Scripture teaches about Christ, the Church, salvation, eschatology, and times. It's a gift to be able to look at that. And that's why you men are here, because that's what you want. You understand that, and I can't underscore enough how important it is, because if you don't have a good foundation in systematics, then what you're going to do is you're going to end up pulling a text out of context, and you're in your own way going to be doing what the cults do, unwittingly, accidentally. And so getting your arms around all that Scripture teaches are the main issues that Scripture teaches about a particular topic is really crucial.

LB. What are some of the systematic theologies, Tom, that have influenced you throughout the years that you find to be beneficial? And what of those systematic theologies, which ones would you recommend if you are looking to begin to build your library, and you're starting from the ground up, and you don't know where to turn? What are some of the go-to ones that you would recommend?

TP. Yeah, no, you know, it's honestly, it's been a bit hard for until recent years, because most of the best systematic theologies were written by guys that there are sections of those systematics I don't agree with. You know, guys, Presbyterian in their theology, we're reformed in our soteriology, that is, we believe in the sovereignty of God in all things, but certainly in salvation. But there are elements of Presbyterian theology that we wouldn't embrace. Their doctrine of the church. Their doctrine of end times. I don't believe that that's what the scriptures teach.

So finding a good systematic theology was tough. So what you did as a guy like me is you found those systematic theologies that were good in certain categories, and then you found some that were helpful in others. So I loved Berkhoff's systematic theology, but obviously I wouldn't agree with some sections of that. Grudem's for a time was good, but he's so charismatic in his views that it just permeates a number of chapters. And so, you know, it was hard to find the right fit. Robert Raymond, I like his systematic theology because it's so biblically based. But again, he's Presbyterian. I love what he does with the doctrine of salvation. I got to his doctrine of the last things. It's like, what are you smoking? I mean, it's like a totally different, it's a totally different hermeneutic. How do you do that?

But the good news is, in the last few years, John MacArthur, in conjunction with the Master Seminary, has come out with the systematic theology that I would highly recommend to you as a

starting place. Now, there are two versions of it. If you're into reading, you're a heavy sledding kind of guy, you can get the big thick volume called Biblical Doctrines. Probably ought to get it anyway, but if that's—

LB. Yeah, if you're doing Institutes, you're going to get the big one.

TP. Okay, there we go. And then for your kids, for others, there's one called—it's a shortened version—called the Essential Doctrines of the Christian Faith. Same basic content, just culled down into a more succinct, concise form. But that would be my go-to systematic theology. Now, again, I have a bunch. In fact, I was just re-ordering my shelves in my office, and I have about five shelves of systematics. You know, long, big shelves of systematics. And so, I enjoy and benefit from—Now, don't get me wrong, there's an entire shelf of overview systematics that cover all topics. And then I have, beyond that, here's a section of books on the doctrine of Scripture. And here's another section of books on the doctrine of God. And here's another section of book on the doctrine of Christ and so forth. But it's something like five long shelves of systematics, because it's crucial. It's vital. But I would say, start with Biblical Doctrines, and then expand from there. And you're going to get exposed even through these years to other resources on these specific topics that will help you. Like, what about the canon? We're going to— we'll expose you to some resources that will help you if you want to delve into that more.

LB. So, all of us are here tonight, and Lord willing, we'll be here the next three years working through systematic theology, each and every category of systematics. But Tom, there's some danger potentially with systematic theology in terms of that overtaking or overriding your own personal Bible study or even gaining intellectual knowledge and that being detached from holiness. So, can you sort of steer us in the right direction on how we should use systematics and what role that plays in our own Bible reading and even in our own personal holiness?

TP. Yeah, that's a great question. And I would say, guys, there are two patent dangers that come with systematics. The first is accumulating knowledge that is detached from the Bible. You know, a lot of guys, they enjoy systematics and they enjoy it more than they enjoy the Bible. They'd rather read John Calvin than read the Bible itself. Now, John Calvin is filled with the Bible, but that's not a replacement for being in the scripture. And so, don't think of systematics as a replacement for the daily disciplines we just talked about. That'd be number one.

The other is at becoming a detached disciple. You're a disciple like students in our culture. You're just getting information. You're just learning stuff, and it's not changing your heart. I will tell you, when I was in college, I went in early seminary. I went every Saturday night to preach at a prison. That's how I learned how to preach. You know, the good news about preaching in a prison is they'll let you know if they're bored. I mean, they just lie out on the back row and go to sleep. And so it was a great place to learn, you know, how to preach. But I ran into, in one of the prisons I was in, it was one of the higher security, medium, I think, security and up prison. And I

ran into a man there who knew more Bible than I knew and knew more theology than I knew. And he was in prison for murdering his mother-in-law.

And so, guys, here's the bottom line. You cannot—let me say it differently. Let me say it this way. You can grow in your knowledge without growing in your holiness. Just beware of that. You can grow in your knowledge without growing in your holiness, in your likeness to the teacher. You can just accumulate information. However, beware of that. But also understand that you will not grow in your likeness to Jesus Christ without growing in knowledge. So knowledge is essential, but it's not the goal. It's just the means to the goal, to know God, to be like Jesus Christ. If you ever lose sight of that, then your systematics will be worthless to you.

LB. Tom, in recent months, there's been a lot of talk about AI. And using AI in sermon prep. And maybe you could speak to just AI in general and the Christian life. Using AI in Bible study and sermon prep and things of that nature. And how we should respond to that technology and how we should use it appropriately.

TP. Yeah, I don't think AI is of the devil. I think it's a tool. It can be a very helpful tool. I use it often. Not so much for sermon prep, but I'll tell you a couple of ways I think it can help in that way. But it's a tool. It's a resource, just like all the other tools. I think the problem, big picture problem with AI, there was a great article. I don't remember now where it was. Maybe it was in the BBC. There's a great article about, recently, about the danger of it, and the fact that it runs the risk of stealing creativity. You know, God made us in his image. God Himself is creative. And if you rely on other factors than the own creative ability God gave you, you lose that skill over time. You lose that ability. And I would add, you also become lazy. You begin to rely on the work of others.

You know, I told our seminary guys, you know, I just was playing around. I said, okay, let's see what AI can do. I used a couple of different models. And I said, okay, I want you to create an evangelical Protestant sermon, expositional sermon on this passage. And I want you to make it more on the academic, educational side. And I wanted to see what it could do. And what it generated was okay. It wasn't something I would ever preach. But it was okay. And I said to the guys, because I talked to a couple of guys who were in this field, I said to them, just understand what AI is. AI is not really creating anything. It's simply digesting what's out there and putting it together in a reasonably coherent way. So really, if you let AI create your sermon, you're not stealing John MacArthur's sermon. You're stealing the sermons of 20 guys, 30 guys, however many sources they're using to put that together. Just a different number of guys. It's the same thing.

And so I would take you back to what Paul says to Timothy. Paul says, be diligent. Just show yourself a workman, approved to God, rightly dividing, cutting straight the Word of God. AI doesn't mesh with that. You're not a diligent workman if you're letting somebody else do your

work, whether it's John MacArthur or, like I said, however many sources they're using to piece that together. And so you have a responsibility before God. I have that responsibility.

Now, uses of AI, I think, you know, for me, the things that sometimes hardest for me is cutting out the noise. So if I want to say, okay, I want an illustration. I didn't use it this last Sunday for that, my opening illustration about the heart. I pulled that elsewhere. But let's say I want an illustration about the heart and details about the heart. Well, I can go to Google and I can, I can search Google and try to find the right source. Or I can go to AI and say, give me source, give me information about the heart from reputable sources and tell me your sources. And boom, it's there. That saves me time. That's not stealing from anybody. That's borrowing information and getting there quicker than I could get there if I googled it. So you see what I'm saying? There are legitimate uses for it. Just don't let it be a substitute. And don't let it steal. I would say this. Don't let it erode the image of God in you. Don't let it steal your creativity that God gave you. And don't let it make you lazy, where you just are just relying on somebody else's work instead of your own.

LB. Tom, we've got just a couple of minutes left here. If you could just finish our time tonight, finish this semester just by encouraging us, one, to be diligent students, diligent disciples in the Word, and then with that, to also be diligent, to be connected to the local church, right? It's foundational. You've mentioned that off and on throughout your ministry here. But the importance of your own personal Bible reading, but also being connected to the local church when doing that.

TP. Yeah, you know, it really is like we were talking about even the Lord's Prayer, right? Our Father. Even when you're coming to the Word of God, you're not thinking as, you know, it's not like God adopted one son, right? All of these people are God's children. The people in our church are God's children. We're part of a family. And so whether you're studying or thinking about serving or you're praying, you're always thinking beyond yourself, just like I hope you do with your own family. This is your family. So I think you have to keep that in mind as you're doing all of these things. We don't live in a bubble. That's why I said take the missionary prayer list with you. Think about your family, but think about people you know in the church. Make one of those days of the week people needs that are in the church that you can remember and bring before the Lord.

I think the main thing I would say, guys, is when we don't see a direct connection between these disciplines and growth, it's easy to lose heart, okay? It's like going to the gym. If you go to the gym, you say, Oh boy, it's New Year. I'm going to go to the gym this year. I'm going to do this. And you go for three days and you go, You know, I don't see any real improvement. Most New Year's resolutions die in mid-January, right? Well, that isn't enough time to do anything. It's not time to build a habit. It's not time to really see progress. But it affects you. The lack of exercise,

the lack of eating well, the lack of proper sleep is going to affect your physical health. Not overnight, but given enough time, it's going to affect you. The same thing is true with your soul.

You know, you can say, well, you know, I haven't been in the Word in the last week or two, but I don't really see any difference. Well, maybe not. You know, you can eat potato chips for a week or two and be okay. But if you do that in an ongoing way, it's going to affect your health. The same thing is true spiritually. Your spiritual health will diminish and suffer if you're not carrying out these daily disciplines.

And part of that daily discipline is being on the Lord's Day with God's people in His church. So it's that whole package. You know, they used to talk about the means of grace. How does God administer grace into your life? That's what we're really talking about. He doesn't just zap you while you're sleeping. He uses means, and the chief means are the Word of God, prayer, and the fellowship of God's people. So don't neglect those things.

LB. We're going to have to do one more question. You got my mind thinking here. Just talk to us a little bit about the Lord's Day. How crucial is Sunday for the believer?

TP. You know, the older I get in Christ, the more I understand the importance of the Lord's Day. I've always, I hope, always understood something of it. But the longer I've been in Christ, the more I see that, just the wisdom of God. Because, guys, we spend six days being distracted by things that in many cases aren't eternal. But on the Lord's Day, we're re-centered. We're brought back to what really matters. We were made for God. We were made to bring Him glory, to enjoy Him forever. And the Lord's Day reminds us of that. And so just his wisdom in that, I need the Lord's Day. I need the fellowship with you. I need to sing with you. I need to be studying the Word of God with you.

I'm my own soul. We saw it in 1 Timothy 4, right? I'm nourished on those words, even as I teach. Sometimes as I'm teaching, it has more effect on me than it does you. I need that. And guys, so do you. And that's why God and his wisdom gave us the Lord's Day. Think about this. Why are there seven-day weeks? Have you ever thought about this? Why are there seven-day weeks? It doesn't make sense mathematically. The reason is because God created it that way. He created the world in six days and set apart the seventh for rest. He structured human life on the cycle of a seven-day week. And in the Old Testament, they worshiped on the Sabbath. In the New Testament, we worship God on the day He raised Jesus from the dead. But God built our lives, our world, around seven-day weeks. It was that important to Him that our lives reflect that pattern.

And so I would just say, I think you already see it, or you wouldn't be a part of our church. I would just tell you this. The longer you're faithful in the Scriptures and in prayer, the more you grow like Christ, the more you just mature, the more you're going to understand how important it is that you and your family have to be there. And nothing else matters as much.

LB. That's great, Tom. Thank you, sir. Would you pray for us?

TP. I will. Thank you, guys.

Father, we're so grateful for your amazing wisdom. Thank you that you have given us that wisdom in your **Word**. I pray that you would use tonight to encourage these men. Lord, I pray that they wouldn't leave feeling guilty. They would leave feeling hungry. They would leave desiring what we talked about. Lord, I ask that for each man here, that you would take them from where they are and enable them to make progress, to make a new and fresh commitment.

Lord, for those who already, for many of these things are a part of their lives, Lord, encourage them, build them up, and help them to encourage the others they interact with. Lord, for those who are in the throes of forming these habits and patterns, Lord, give them the courage, the patience, the determination not to give up. And Father, for those for whom these are new challenges, and they've just never really been faithful in this way, Lord, give them an insatiable appetite to know you through spending time with you in your Word and in prayer. And then, Lord, satisfy that appetite with yourself. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.