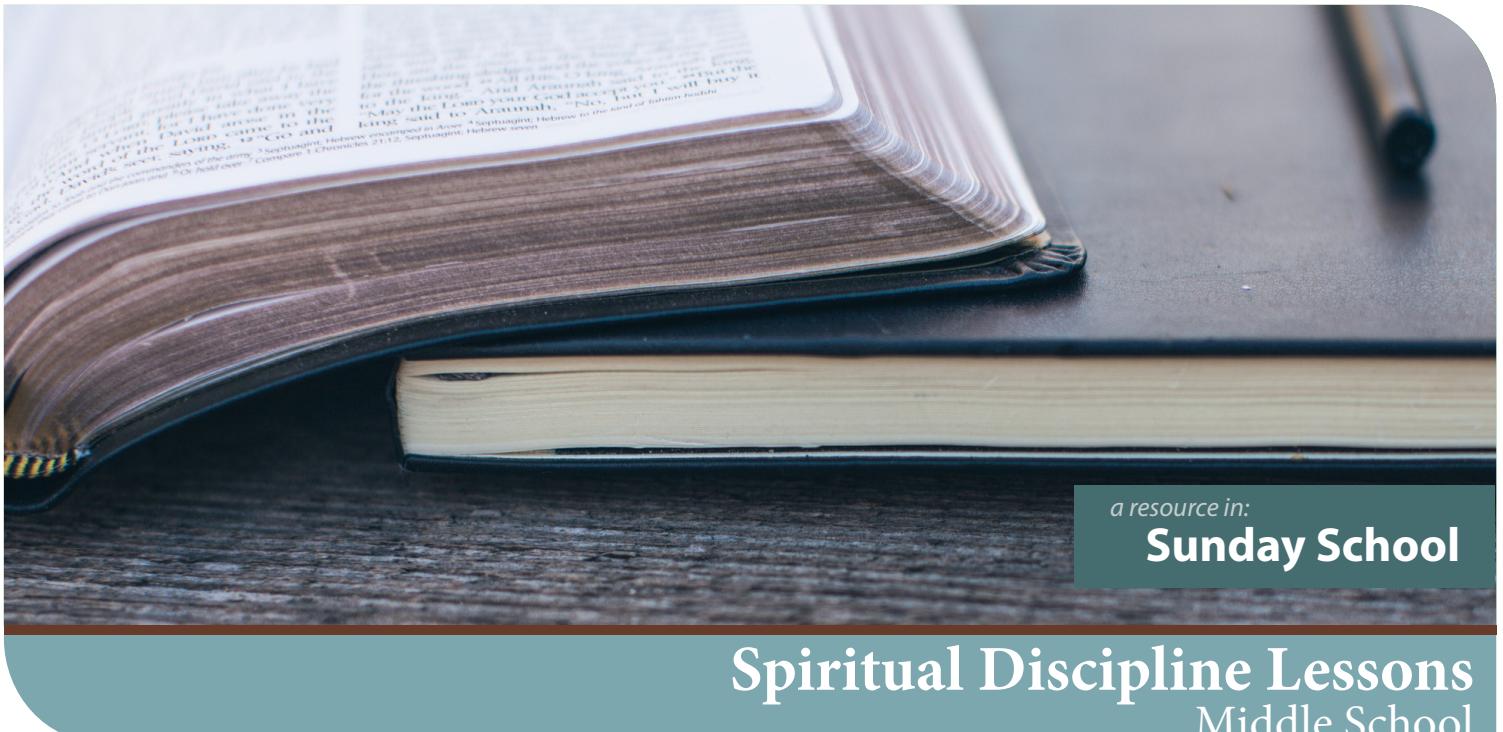


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Spiritual Disciplines

Lesson 1: Reading God's Word

Recommended Age/Class: Middle School (6th-8th grade)

Objectives:

- The student will understand spiritual disciplines are practices that help us become more Christ-like and serve God better.
- The student will understand the Bible has a story throughout of God wanting to be in a close relationship with the people he created, beginning in Genesis and leading to Jesus.
- The student will understand we read the Bible to know God better and become more like Him.
- The student will understand the Holy Spirit helps us understand the meaning of the Bible as we actively think about what we read.

Scripture:

Psalm 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

Psalm 19:7-8, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."

1 Corinthians 2:11-12, "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."

Lesson Content:

- Everything we try has skills that require practice (e.g., tying rope climbing knots in rock climbing). These skills are often called disciplines.
- Being a Christian includes disciplines that help us become more like Christ and serve God better.
- The Bible has an overall story from Genesis to Jesus of God wanting to be in a close relationship with the people he created. Because of people's rebellion against following God's commandments, God sent Jesus to redeem us from our sin.
- If we read the Bible as a "to-do" item to check off of a list or to please our parents, we will not gain much from our reading.
- The purpose for reading the Bible is to know God better and become more like Him. Knowing God better encourages us to want to live our lives for Him.
- In reading the Bible, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us understand what it means and how we can put God's teachings into practice in our lives.
- As we read the Bible, we need to actively think about what it means through strategies such as stopping and looking up words we don't understand, finding other parts of the Bible that talk about the same topic, and slowing down to think about what we are reading.

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Discussion Questions:

1. What hobbies or sports do you enjoy learning how to do? What skills (or disciplines) do you need to learn to do those hobbies or sports?
2. How do spiritual disciplines compare to these earthly skills?
3. What overall story is found in the Bible? How will remembering this overall story help you understand the Bible better?
4. Why do you read the Bible?
5. What is the difference between studying the Bible and reading it as an item to check off our list or please our parents?
6. How will knowing God better change you?
7. How can we rely on the Holy Spirit to help us interpret the Bible? How might we hinder the Holy Spirit from helping us interpret the Bible?
8. What are helpful ways you can use active thinking as you read the Bible?
9. What strategies have you tried for actively thinking as you read the Bible? How have they helped you?
10. What are some strategies for actively thinking as you read the Bible that you want to apply in the future?

Activities:

1. **Activity 1:** Finding Jesus throughout the Bible
 - a. Discuss how the entire Bible was written to help us know God better and drawing us into a relationship with him through Jesus. Reference *John 20:31*, “*But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*”
 - b. Read the following passages from throughout the Bible and talk about how they all point us to Jesus and how He is the way to having a relationship with God.
 - i. *Genesis 3:15*
 - ii. *Exodus 12:1-14*
 - iii. *Isaiah 9:6-7*
 - iv. *John 1:1-14*
 - v. *1 Corinthians 15:1-19*
 - c. Encourage students to keep a journal as they read the Bible with an entry of all the verses they find that point us to Christ’s coming, explain why He was on this Earth, and how He brought us salvation that we can have a hope of being in heaven.

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2. **Activity 2:** Priorities and Soil of our Hearts (materials: paper, pencils)
 - a. Give each student a piece of paper and have them write a list of what is important to them in order of greatest to least (or by priority).
 - b. Read together *Mark 4:1-20*.
 - c. Discuss the different responses to applying God's Word in one's life:
 - i. Not understanding God's Word and missing its importance (verse 15).
 - ii. Believing when life is easy, but not when it is hard (verses 16-17).
 - iii. Pursuing worldly riches and pleasures (verses 18-19).
 - iv. Receiving the message and producing fruit (verse 20).
 - d. Connect what they wrote on their paper to the types of soils in the parable. If they have something written ahead of God on the list, their heart may be like the rocky ground. If we allow other things as priorities in our lives, such as friends, following after fashion, or honoring sports heroes/famous people, our faith is choked out by these worldly things. Removing those rocks and putting God as priority in their lives will allow their soil to be good ground where seeds of God's Word can grow and thrive.
3. **Object Lesson 1:** Soaked Up with the Word of God (materials needed: sponge, squirt bottle with water, bucket with water)
 - a. Ask students why they read the Bible and how much they think they need to read the Bible to be able to know God and serve Him.
 - b. Have a student spray one squirt on the sponge and see how much water they can squeeze out in the bucket. Compare the lack of water that came out to how only reading the Bible a little bit or not thinking about the Bible as we read it will not allow us to be able to use it in our lives.
 - c. Have a student dip the sponge in the bucket with water and see how much water can be squeezed back out into the bucket. Compare this stream of water that came out to someone who has immersed themselves in the Bible daily and is able to apply it in their lives.
 - d. Ask students to consider which sponge they would rather be – the one that is slightly sprayed or the one that was dipped. Discuss how the Bible can only be a lamp to our feet and a guide to our path if we read it often.
4. **Object Lesson 2:** Focusing in on God's Word (materials needed: binoculars)
 - a. Show the binoculars and ask students to say what is and what we use them for. Give an example of what it is used for and how it is an important tool (e.g., birdwatching to see the type of bird, its shape, coloring, etc.). It allows you to see things up close even though you are far away.
 - b. Compare the binoculars to how we need to read the Bible. Instead of just reading it quickly, we need to stop and focus in on what it means and why God wrote that message for us. The stories of people within the Bible are there to help us better understand God and how to obey Him in all situations in our lives. Talk about what more could be learned if we spent more time studying what the Bible says as we read it. Taking a closer look as we read the Bible allows God to speak to us with what we need to hear or remember in our lives at that moment.

Spiritual Disciplines

Lesson 2: Prayer

Recommended Age/Class: Middle School (6th-8th grade)

Objectives:

- The student will understand prayer is how we communicate with an almighty God who cares for us.
- The student will understand the purpose of prayer is to help remind us of who God is, to draw us closer to God, and to change life circumstances.
- The student will understand the Lord's Prayer provides a model for our prayers.
- The student will understand how to apply practical strategies for prayer.

Scripture:

Hebrews 4:16, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

1 John 3:22, "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."

Psalm 145:18, "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth."

Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Lesson Content:

- Sin separates us from directly communicating with God. Prayer is our way to communicate with God.
- We pray by purposefully speaking or thinking words or feelings to God.
- Prayer could be questions, statements, personal requests, or praise.
- The God who is the Creator of the universe and holds all power cares for us and wants to listen to our prayers.
- Prayer reminds us of the wonder, mercy, and awesomeness of our God.
- Prayer refocuses our hearts on God's character rather than our circumstances.
- Prayer helps us develop a closer relationship with God as we tell Him our needs, hopes, questions, and joys.
- Prayer changes circumstances, but not always in the way we want or with visible proof.
- The Lord's Prayer provides a model of how we should pray including honoring God, wanting His will to be done, and asking Him to fill our needs.
- To actively pray with our hearts and minds, we can use the following strategies:
 - Pray scripture.
 - Pray for a different group of people each day of the week. (e.g., Monday: family, Tuesday: friends, Wednesday: church leadership, Thursday: missionaries, Friday: teachers).
 - Share specific prayer requests weekly with someone.
 - Write out your prayer.
 - Pray out loud.
 - Find a good time of the day to pray (e.g., set aside a specific 15 minutes in your daily schedule to pray).

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Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe prayer?
2. How is prayer different from thinking?
3. How is prayer similar or different from communicating with your friends?
4. How often does God want us to pray?
5. Why does God want us to pray?
6. How can prayer help us move beyond focusing only our circumstances?
7. Are you able to be open with God in your prayers? Why or why not?
8. How can you both be honest and open in your prayer with God, but yet yield to His will for you?
9. What does the Lord's Prayer show us about praying to God?
10. What are some topics/groups of people you would like to include in your prayers? (e.g., political leaders, friends, teachers, honoring God)
11. Which of the practical ideas for prayer have you tried? How did it help you?
12. Which of the practical ideas for active prayer would you like to try this week?

Activities:

1. **Activity 1:** A Prayer Model (materials needed: copy for each student of *Matthew 6:9-13* double-spaced with room for annotating like that provided below)
 - a. Read together *Matthew 6:9-13* and have students share what they learned about prayer from Jesus's model of prayer.
 - b. Closely break down the Lord's Prayer phrase by phrase:
 - i. Our Father which art in Heaven – who we are speaking to as we pray, God wants us to call Him our father.
 - ii. Hallowed be thy name – God is holy and He wants us to respect and honor Him.
 - iii. Thy kingdom come – Praying for God to live in the hearts of men on earth.
 - iv. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven – praying for following God's will in our lives each day, for peace and unity of people here on earth like it is in heaven.
 - v. Give us this day our daily bread – asking God to provide for our daily needs.
 - vi. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors – asking God to forgive us of our wrongs and for help forgiving others who have hurt us, recognizing that forgiveness from God also means we must forgive others.
 - vii. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil – asking for God to show us the right thing to do and for His protection to keep us away from evil.

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- viii. For thine is the kingdom – Recognizing God has all authority over man and that His kingdom will be fulfilled on earth.
- ix. And the power – All power comes from God.
- x. And the glory – All glory goes to God for good works.
- xi. Forever – God is, was, and always will be; His kingdom, power and glory will last forever.
- xii. Amen – “so be it,” acknowledging we accept what we prayed.
2. **Activity 2:** P.R.A.Y. (materials needed: prayer phrases like those provided below the lesson)
- Discuss the types of prayers or purposes we may include in prayers with the following acronym:
 - P=Praise
 - R=Repent
 - A=Ask
 - Y=Yield (wait and listen to God)
 - Provide students with different phrases we can pray about and ask them to categorize them by the types of prayers. Example prayers are provided below for this activity.
 - Have students write a few things for each of the letters in the P.R.A.Y. acronym that they would like to pray for this week.
3. **Object Lesson 1:** Prayer Draws Us to God (materials needed: matches, clear drinking glass, balloon)
- Blow up the balloon ahead of time.
 - Tell students the balloon represents God, the glass represents us, and the matches represents our prayers to God.
 - Light the match and put it in the glass.
 - Wait until the match starts to fizz out and place the balloon top of the glass.
 - The balloon will be drawn inside the glass. Talk about how this represents as our prayers go up to God, we are drawn closer to Him.
4. **Object Lesson 2:** Turning to the Right Source for Help (materials needed: $\frac{1}{2}$ sheets of 8.5x11 paper, scissors)
- Before the lesson watch this video for an example of how to do [this lesson](#).
 - Prepare the example paper with the cutting and folding as demonstrated in the video.
 - Show students the example paper and give them each a paper and scissors to make it look like the example. Give the students time to try and mimic how it looks, but do not tell them how to do it or give them hints.
 - Next tell students they can ask anyone in the class for help. Give students another minute or two to work on figuring it out.
 - Remind students they could have asked anyone in the class for help and ask who they should have asked (you who knows how to do it). Ask students to set their attempts aside while you show them how to do it. If there is enough time, give students a new half sheet of paper to make one.
 - Compare this lesson to prayer and turning to the right source for help – praying to our heavenly Father to find the answers we need. We can find lots of answers from our friends and the internet, but God is the one who is the only true source of wisdom.

Spiritual Disciplines

Lesson 3: Worship

Recommended Age/Class: Middle School (6th-8th grade)

Objectives:

- The student will understand worship means to put someone or something first in our time and what we do in our lives.
- The student will understand we are to put God first in our lives of who we worship.
- The student will understand worshipping God helps us become more like Him.
- The student will understand we must set aside times to worship God individually and with others in a group.

Scripture:

Revelation 4:11, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

Deuteronomy 6:4-5, "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

Matthew 6:20-21, "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Lesson Content:

- When we worship someone or something we put it first in our lives and it becomes who or what we truly desire.
- The first commandment (*Exodus 20:3*) teaches us to put God first in our lives.
- What or who we choose to focus on in our time and resources will become who or what we worship.
- We should only worship God by obeying Him and seeking His will for our lives.
- Only God is worthy of our worship because of who He is.
- Worshipping God makes us become more like Him as we begin to see the world as He does, care about the things He cares about, and interact with others as He would.
- We need to purposefully set aside times to worship God in our heart by ourselves and externally with others.
- We can worship God personally by studying the Bible, praising Him during prayer, thinking about who He is, and through singing, listening, or playing music.
- We can worship God in a group with others through activities such as church services, singing in a group, group Bible study, praying with others, spiritual conversations, and service projects.

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Discussion Questions:

1. What is worship?
2. How does worship affect our hearts, minds, and body?
3. What is the difference between enjoying something and worshipping something?
4. What are some people, things, or desires that can become idols in your life?
5. What makes God worthy of our worship?
6. Why is it wrong to worship anything or anyone other than God?
7. How does worshipping God lead to making us become more like Him?
8. What do you enjoy and what is difficult for you in worshipping God by yourself?
9. What do you enjoy and what is difficult for you in worshipping God in a group with others?
10. What is one way you can choose to worship God this week?

Activities:

1. **Activity 1: Why Should We Praise God?**
 - a. Read *Psalm 100* with students asking them to think about what this Psalm says about why we should worship and praise God.
 - b. Read it over again verse by verse, discussing the various reasons for why we should worship God:
 - i. Verse 1: *Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.*
 1. This verse reminds us that God has power over all the earth.
 2. Shouting or loudly praising God with joy is an expression of praise and worship.
 - ii. Verse 2: *Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.*
 1. This verse shows us worshipping the Lord is one way to serve Him.
 2. We should enjoy worshipping the Lord.
 3. Singing with joy is one way of worshipping God.
 - iii. Verse 3: *Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*
 1. This verse reminds us that God is in control of all things.
 2. He is our Creator.
 3. We belong to Him.
 - iv. Verse 4: *Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.*
 1. This verse shows us how to come before God's presence with thankfulness and praise.
 2. We are to bless His name in our praise.

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- v. Verse 5: *For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.*
 - 1. This verse reminds us of God's goodness.
 - 2. God's mercy and faithfulness to us lasts forever and will never fail.
 - c. Have students summarize what they know about God from this psalm that shows us why He is the one we should worship. Possible examples:
 - i. God created everything and everyone.
 - ii. God never leaves us.
 - iii. God loves us forever.
 - iv. God is all-powerful and even stronger than Satan.
 - v. God sees and knows everything.
2. **Activity 2:** Character Traits of God (materials needed: paper, pencil/marker, optional: index cards with Bible verses from directions below)
- a. Create a web with students that has God in a center circle or box, lines extending out from the center with character traits they associate with God.
 - b. Read some of the following Bible verses with students (could also put on index cards ahead of the lesson). Discuss what character trait is mentioned in each verse and find it on the class web. Add character traits of God to the web as needed.
 - i. *Revelation 4:8* – holy
 - ii. *1 John 4:16* – love
 - iii. *Isaiah 55:9* – wise
 - iv. *1 Thessalonians 5:24/1 John 1:9* – faithful
 - v. *Psalm 147:5* – all knowing
 - vi. *Isaiah 30:18* – just, gracious
 - vii. *Deuteronomy 33:27* – everlasting/eternal
 - viii. *Psalm 136:1* – good, merciful
 - ix. *Luke 1:37* – all powerful
 - x. *Colossians 1:15* – invisible
 - xi. *James 1:17* – unchanging
 - xii. *2 Corinthians 1:18* – true
 - xiii. *2 Peter 3:9* – patient
 - xiv. *Psalm 119:137* – righteous
 - c. Review the character traits of God and how this shows why He is the one that we worship, rather than things or people who cannot demonstrate all these traits to the full extent that God can.
3. **Object Lesson 1:** No Room for God (materials needed: pitcher or bucket, tray water, cup for each student, rock for each student, permanent marker for each student)
- a. Give each student a rock and a marker. Have them think of what takes a lot of their time and write these things on their rocks (e.g., video games, sports, hanging out with friends, etc.).
 - b. Give each student a cup of water. Show them the pitcher and tell them how the pitcher represents an empty heart and we need to fill it with God. Have each student pour their cup of water into the pitcher saying, “God deserves first place in my heart because...”).

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- c. Now talk about how this heart is full of God, but sometimes other things may try to crowd into our hearts to take God's place. Have students read one or two things on their rocks that tries to take their time and attention away from focusing on God. Set the pitcher on the tray. Have them put the rocks in the pitcher. Notice together how the pitcher begins to overflow. Talk about ways you can try to keep God first in your life and not let other things crowd Him out.
- 4. **Object Lesson 2:** Giving God our Very Best (materials needed: a plate of food with servings that are half eaten (e.g., twinkies, apple, candy bar, etc.). and a paper heart also on the plate)
 - a. Show children the plate of food and tell them you have brought some rewards for people who have been great listeners today. Take another bite of some of the food and comment on how good it is.
 - b. Offer to give the various food to students for their reward. Ask them what is the matter and why they did not want it.
 - c. Talk about how if we planned a meal for someone we highly respected, such as our teacher or even the president of the United States, we would take great care to prepare the very best food for them and would not serve them our leftovers from the refrigerator.
 - d. Compare this to how we worship God – do we give him our leftover time and attention or do we place Him as a priority in our life to give Him our whole heart? Read *Psalm 111:1* and encourage students to worship and praise God with their whole heart this coming week.

Spiritual Disciplines

The Lord's Prayer

⁹ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

¹⁰ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Prayer Phrases for P.R.A.Y. Activity

I wait on thy direction and guidance.	Bless the food before us.
How great thou art O God! Thy faithfulness is day in and day out.	Help me to forgive my friend who hurt me today.
I am sorry for not listening and going ahead of thy will.	I submit my own thoughts and ask that the Holy Spirit speaks to me.
Help me to do well on the test in school tomorrow.	Thou hast made the heavens and the earth. Nothing is too hard for you!
I am seeking wisdom about _____ .	Forgive me for not using kind words and actions to others today.
Thou art King of Kings and Lord of Lords.	I am thankful for thy salvation through Jesus.
Please be with my grandmother and heal her sickness.	I am sorry I sinned and ask for thy forgiveness.
How excellent is thy name in all the earth!	Be with us to travel safely on our vacation.