

Spiritual Trainer Series

*Spiritual  
Habits*

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Lake Forest, CA 92630  
Edition 1.0

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# *Spiritual Habits*

**Session One: Pages 1-10**

**Session Two: Pages 11-22**

*Do not waste time arguing over godless ideas  
and old wives' tales. Spend your time and energy  
in training yourself for spiritual fitness.*

*Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual  
exercise is much more important,  
for it promises a reward in both this life and the next.*

(1 Timothy 4:7-8 NLT)

How long does it take to become a Christian? A moment and a lifetime! At the moment of your conversion, you were instantly *made brand new* in God's eyes. The Bible says that you are to spend the rest of your life on a journey toward Christlikeness. It is not God's desire to let your spiritual growth begin and end with your act of asking Jesus Christ to be your personal Savior. Keep going. Your moment of salvation must be followed by practicing daily spiritual habits that will lead to a lifetime of maturing in your faith.

- ❖ What spiritual area did you initially grow most quickly in when you became a Christian? How well did that go?

## **Important Concept**

"A Christian is never in a state of completion but  
always in the process of becoming."

- Martin Luther

- ❖ Imagine that you have mailed in your registration form to run in the New York Marathon eight months from now. (What were you thinking!?) What would it take for you to get ready to run that marathon? You would have to go into serious training, wouldn't you?

📖 The Bible compares the Christian life to a marathon. In order for you to run the race of life well, you will have to get serious about your spiritual training. (Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.)

## Serious Training Includes Habitual Practice

The famous pianist, Paderewski, emphasized the need for the **habit of daily training** when he said that if he missed a day practicing on the piano, he would notice a difference in his playing. If he missed several days, his critics would notice the difference. And, if he missed a week, the public would notice the difference.

This idea of consistent practice must be applied to your spiritual life. **You can not be sporadic in your spiritual walk if you want to become more and more like Jesus Christ and be an attractive testimony for Him.** Donald Whitney, author of *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, said it best:

“Without practicing the Spiritual Disciplines we will not be Godly, but neither will we be Godly without perseverance in practicing the Disciplines. Even a slow, plodding perseverance in the Spiritual Disciplines is better than a sometimes spectacular but generally inconsistent practice.”

## **What Types of Spiritual Habits Will Help Me Become More Christlike?**

Prayer, Fasting, Scripture Memorization, Simplicity and Contentment, Waiting and Hoping, Worship, Meaningful Time with God, Extended Times of Solitude, Confession and Repentance, Tithing, Bible Study, Meditation, Surrender, and Journaling.

- ❖ Looking at the spiritual habits listed in the box above, take a quick survey to see how you are you doing. How would you rate yourself on each of these habits?
- I'm doing fairly well on it.
- It shows up on my radar occasionally.
- I must have missed the sermon on that one!


If you are not consistently practicing some of these habits, don't be critical of yourself. This Spiritual Trainer Series will be a great "starter kit" or refresher course for you.

## **Spiritual Anatomy**

To get excellent results from physical training, it is beneficial to understand some basics about anatomy, about your body's structure. Likewise, to train well spiritually, it is important to understand some details about your spiritual anatomy or eternal soul. Knowing more about your spiritual framework and about what happened to your soul when you became a believer in Jesus Christ will help you train more effectively and consistently.

1. **You were taken from spiritual death and given eternal life.** At the moment of your salvation, you were made spiritually alive. You were saved forever, ensuring that your eternal destiny is secure.

*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions....*  
(Ephesians 2:4-5)

-  To get a full picture of what happened to you at your conversion, read Ephesians 1:3-14. You won't want to miss this incredible passage. You may even decide to meditate on it.

2. **The penalty for your sin was paid and the power of sin was broken.** Sin had you chained in spiritual bondage, but Christ died in your place to pay the price for your freedom and take your punishment for you. He liberated you from the power that sin previously had over you. You will still struggle with sin in this sinful world (from Romans 7:18-24), but you are not a slave to sin any longer. You are free.

*Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you have obeyed with all your heart the new teaching God has given you. Now you are free from sin, your old master, and you have become slaves to your new master, righteousness.*  
(Romans 6:17-18 NLT)

- ❖ What is the best birthday or Christmas gift you ever received? How does that compare to Christ's gift of freedom from the penalty and power of sin?

- 3. At your conversion, the Holy Spirit came to live in you forever.** You may not have felt anything, but at the moment you became a Christian, God put His Holy Spirit in you. He has promised that His Spirit will never leave you and that His Spirit will guide, teach, convict, and comfort you.

*But you are not controlled by your sinful nature.  
You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the  
Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those  
who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them  
are not Christians at all.)  
(Romans 8:9 NLT)*

- 4. By the power of the Spirit, you can change your old, bad habits!** Off with the old and on with the new spiritual maturity. You can cooperate with the Holy Spirit by the practice of spiritual disciplines.

*... throw off your old evil nature and your former  
way of life, which is rotten through and through,  
full of lust and deception. Instead, there must be a  
spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes.  
You must display a new nature because you are a  
new person, created in God's likeness—righteous,  
holy, and true.  
(Ephesians 4:22-24 NLT)*

- ❖ What specific, recent way have you seen an improvement in your spiritual walk?
- 5. You have everything you need to live the Christian life.** The good news is that God has given you His Son and every other resource you need to live the life He intended.

*As we know Jesus better, his divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life. He has called us to receive his own glory and goodness!*  
(2 Peter 1:3)

- ❖ As you think about your own spiritual training, what are some of the resources God has made available to help you become mature in Christ?

## The Goal of Training

### Something to Think About:

“If your picture of a disciplined Christian is one of a grim, tight-lipped, joyless half-robot, then you’ve missed the point. Jesus was the most disciplined Man who ever lived and yet the most joyful and passionately alive.”

- Donald Whitney

Physical fitness training is simply a means to a desired end or goal. One person may want to build bigger biceps; another may want to lose 20 pounds. One may want to win a medal at a swim meet; another may want to take pressure off his heart. Likewise, God’s goal for your life determines the type of spiritual fitness training you are to do. His goal directs your spiritual workout! It might be helpful to look, first, at what God’s goal is not.

## What the Goal of Spiritual Training is Not

1. **The goal is not to generate more activity in your life.** It is easy to fall into the deceptive thinking that being spiritual is primarily about church attendance, ministry, meetings, or Bible studies because it is easy to count and measure those things. But without the cultivation of a healthy inner life,



those outward actions can lead to exhaustion, legalism, joylessness, hypocrisy, and a shriveled soul.

**2. The goal is not to help you gain knowledge for knowledge sake.** Information alone does not cause spiritual transformation. In fact, it could trap you into becoming arrogant, self-righteous, or cold-hearted.

**3. The goal is not to create a list of all the things you refrain from doing.** In some Christian circles, what makes people *spiritual* is what they don't participate in. For example, not smoking, not drinking, or not cursing become markers of spirituality. However, Jesus would never have equated the absence of some vices as synonymous with godliness. Remember his dislike for the Pharisees who were careful with *appearances* but were filled on the inside with all sorts of impurity.

❖ Think of a Christian you know. How would he or she complete the following sentence? The goal of “spirituality” is....

### **So... What Is the Goal of Spiritual Training?**

The goal is to become Christlike.

*For God knew his people in advance,  
and he chose them to become like his Son,  
so that his Son would be the firstborn,  
with many brothers and sisters.*

(Romans 8:29 NLT)

**LIST:** Make a short list of traits or characteristics of a person who is Christlike. (See Galatians 5:22-25 for how to live like Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.)

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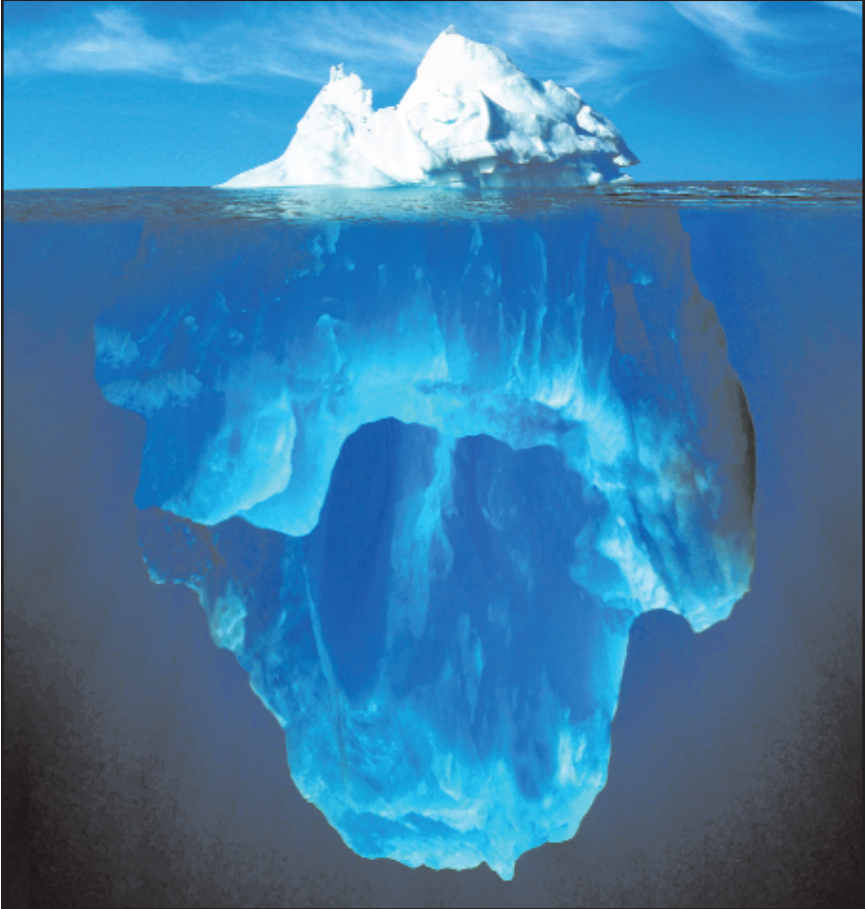
❖ Which of these qualities do you sense that God is trying to develop in you? What action step could you take to see that these *fruits of the Spirit* grow in your life?

**Christlikeness is an *inside job*, meaning it is critical that you pay close attention to your “inner” life.**

*A good person produces good deeds from a good heart,  
and an evil person produces evil deeds from an evil heart.*  
(Luke 6:45 NLT)

Sow a thought, reap an act.  
Sow an action, reap a habit.  
Sow a habit, reap a character.  
Sow a character, reap a destiny.

Your life is much like an iceberg! Your external actions and behaviors are only a small part of your life. Beneath the surface, unseen by people, lies a part of your life that is huge. It holds things like attitudes, desires, values, and character. The reality is that your care for your soul (that which is unseen) will determine the direction of your actions (that which is seen).



**Draw** an iceberg that represents the amount of attention you give to the external (above the waterline) and the amount of attention you give to the internal (below the waterline).



### **The Truth about Goals**

If you have decided that a certain goal is worth pursuing, and you have firmly set the vision of that goal in your mind and heart, you will not give up when the training gets difficult. You will be more willing to do “whatever it takes.”

**You may choose to stop here and continue  
the second half of the book in another session.**

# Life Training: Spiritual Habits

## Session Two: Pages 11-22

### The Motivation for Training

Physical training that is internally motivated by a personal life choice will outlast training that is externally motivated by guilt or a desire for approval. This is certainly also true when it comes to your motivation for developing spiritual habits. The apostle Paul was internally motivated in all he did by the “priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus.”

*Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ....*

(Philippians 3:8 NLT)

The clarity and godliness of Paul’s motivation is a very important idea to grasp. It is not healthy to engage in spiritual habits to win God’s favor or to get Him to love you, but only to know Him better and become more like Him.

- ❖ Take a few moments for reflection. What are some improper motives that people can have for practicing spiritual disciplines?
- A pastor told me I should!
- All my friends are doing it.
- I need to do something to earn God’s love.
- It makes my family think I’m spiritual.
- Other

## Remember This About Motivation:

The heart of the matter is a matter of the heart.

God is not interested in religious acts of worship. He is interested in a heart that passionately seeks Him. Spiritual habits (practiced with the right heart) help develop an intimate, white-hot relationship with your heavenly Father. The habits are an invitation to enjoy God and the Christian life. However, time spent in prayer, studying Scripture, and even fasting can be done mechanically and routinely – without *heart*. Don't settle for reducing the Christian life to simply going through religious motions.

*Above all else, guard your heart,  
for it affects everything you do.*  
(Proverbs 4:23 NLT)

- ❖ John Piper made an interesting comment: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” How can the practice of spiritual habits help you become *satisfied* in God?

## The Workout

1. **Trying vs. Training.** You know that when you try too hard to be spiritual, you become emotionally and mentally exhausted. It is better to train wisely by incrementally, purposefully, and joyfully practicing spiritual habits.

“Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder,  
but training wisely.”

- John Ortberg

- ❖ Have you ever started a training program (i.e., fitness, sports, computers, a foreign language, college entrance exams) in which you deliberately arranged your life around certain disciplined practices because you were not able to reach your goal by simply **trying harder**? If so, explain.

2. **Consistency.** Everybody knows that there is a big difference between bicycling with the kids on a Sunday afternoon around the neighborhood and training for a mountain biking adventure. The first is recreational; the latter is hard work. Unlike recreation, serious training involves creating a plan and consistently disciplining yourself to follow the plan.

“Pistol Pete” Maravich, a basketball legend who died of a heart attack at age forty, made this comment about consistent devotion to his faith,

“The key to my [basketball] ability was repetition.

I practiced and practiced and practiced again.

I gave the sport my total commitment.

I tried everything I could in every way

I could to perfect my skills. It was like  
an obsession. It paid off for me as a player.

I’m not so sure in life. If I had given  
that same devotion then to my faith,  
which is what I do now, I’d have  
been a better person in the long run.”

- *USA Today*, January 18, 1988

3. **Personalized Plan.** If you were to hire a fitness trainer to get into shape, the trainer would start the process by asking you questions about your health, prior exercise routine, and current goals – in order to customize a plan for your unique needs. Similarly, you should feel great freedom and creativity in designing your own spiritual training plan. How you cultivate your relationship with God should be personalized to you. Remember that the goal is not to follow some prescribed plan but to know and become like Christ.

## Training Partners and Role Models

*Two are better than one, because they have  
a good return for their work:  
If one falls down, his friend can help him up.  
But pity the man who falls and  
has no one to help him up!  
(Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)*

**Training Partners.** Whether you are training for a physical or spiritual race, it is good to have friends who can challenge, encourage, and cheer for you, as well as discuss things with you and hold you accountable. God made you to need others. Though your relationship with God is personal, it was never meant to be private. You need others in your life to help you train.

- ❖ What people in your life have been sources of strength, encouragement, and guidance? How could they help challenge you in your spiritual development?

**Role Models.** Often, when people are training, they watch video clips of others who are more experienced to observe their technique, style, training methods, and performances. Similarly, there is much to be learned from those who are further down the *road of faith* than you are. Don't be afraid to ask for their help. Be inquisitive. Find out what has helped them stay close to God.

- ❖ Of all the people you know personally, who seems to be the most like Christ? Consider setting up a lunch appointment with that person to explore his or her relationship to Christ and spiritual growth steps. (And, don't forget the possibility of reading about historical role models!)



## Training Tips

1. **Make it a priority in your schedule.** Do you tend to prioritize your existing schedule or schedule your top priorities? As you begin to practice spiritual disciplines on a regular basis, you may want to block out time for them in your Palm Pilot or Day Timer. It is important to consider the practice of spiritual habits just like any other appointment that you would never consider canceling.
2. **Slow Down.** Jean Fleming has so aptly said, “I find myself thinking, ‘When life settles down, I’ll....’ but I should have learned by now that life never settles down. Whatever I want to accomplish I must do with life unsettled.” There will be no *perfect* time!

“Our chaos of the soul and busyness of the spirit robs us of our created destiny to find fulfillment in a relationship with God. A voice deep within our souls tells us something is wrong, but we are too afraid to slow down and find out how life could be different.”

- Pascal

- ❖ In what way(s) could you slow your life down to make time for spiritual training?
3. **Start with small steps.** When people go into training, they start with small, achievable action steps. For those who want to get in shape, for example, walking around the block might be a good way to start their training program. Trying to run three miles would leave them feeling defeated and frustrated. This same truth applies to the spiritual realm. If you are not used to spending much time in God’s Word, your starting point might be to read the Bible for a few minutes a day or to read a few pages at a time.

- 4. Focus on the goal, not just the training.** The purpose of spiritual training is to lead you to be more like Christ. Don't measure your spirituality by how many times you did your Quiet Time this week, but rather measure it by how much more you are becoming like Christ in your attitudes and actions.

### Active Love of God

“When we look closely and continually at Jesus, we do not lose sight of this one fundamental, crucial point—the activities constituting the disciplines have no value in themselves. The aim and substance of spiritual life is not fasting, prayer, hymn singing, frugal living, and so forth. Rather, it is the **effective and full enjoyment of the active love of God and human-kind in all the daily rounds of human existence** where we are placed.”

- Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*

## How Do I Train Others About Spiritual Habits?

In ancient times, a disciple (literally, a *learner* or *follower*) was one who was learning a new body of knowledge, a skill, or a pattern of behavior, but there was no precise formula then for training someone. Today, there is still no formula – but here are a few guidelines that will help you be a better discipler:

- 1. Share your life with those you are training.** Love those entrusted to your care; be a good friend; develop strong relationships with them. Be transparent and authentic. Share examples from your own life experiences to help convey important points.

*We loved you so much that we gave you not only  
God's Good News but our own lives, too.*  
(1 Thessalonians 2:8)

**2. Care about their needs, hurts, and interests.** One of the best ways to ignite life change is to show trainees how learning about spiritual habits is relevant to their lives. In light of that, there are three questions you will want to ask yourself as you seek to apply biblical truths to their lives:

- What are their *needs*?
- What are their *hurts*?
- What are their *interests*?

*All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.*

(2 Timothy 3:16-17 NLT)

You **don't** have to make the Bible relevant. It already is!

You **do** have to show its relevance by applying it to people's lives.

- ❖ How does it make you feel when someone you trust asks you about one of your needs, hurts, or interests?

**3. Teach them with conviction as a representative of Jesus Christ.** As a trainer of today's disciples of Christ, speak with godly conviction.

*You have heard me teach many things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Teach these great truths to trustworthy people who are able to pass them on to others.*

(2 Timothy 2:2)

- 4. Request God's help and leave the results to the Holy Spirit.** Pray privately – well in advance of your meetings, asking God to work through you to bless those you are training. Also, pray for and with your trainees, that they will become *fully-developed* disciples. There is not a single tool you can use that is greater than prayer.

*Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere.*  
(Ephesians 6:18 NLT)

- 5. Encourage them.** Be positive and compassionate. Don't criticize. Just share the message of the Bible. Bottom line: When you are abrasive, you are *not* persuasive!

*The wise in heart are called discerning, and pleasant words promote instruction.*  
(Proverbs 16:21)

**In fact, tell it “like it can be”!**

One key to helping people change is not to tell it “like it is” with all the discouraging realities, but to tell it like it can be! Paint the picture for them of how God sees their potential.

**“As You Go” Principle of Discipling**

Some of your discipleship sessions will require that you focus on subject matter – like when you are initially reading the information in any of the Spiritual Trainer Series booklets. Other times, you may want to invite your trainee into your everyday life *as you go* about your normal routine of running errands, making dinner, cleaning the garage, making a hospital visit, going to the gym, or taking a class. Think of it as Relationship-Discipleship! Some of the best learning happens in those types of situations, and it will keep you from adding another appointment to your schedule.

**Do Life Together!**

# **Call to Action**

## **Action Steps Bathed in Prayer**

**Prayer:** Ask God to direct your steps regarding your own spiritual habits' training. Pray that He will remove all fear and excuses as He develops you and leads you to disciple others about spiritual habits.

1. Becoming like Jesus is a life's work. Are you willing to make it a top priority by developing daily habits? If yes, which habit in the list below would you like to concentrate on first?

## **Spiritual Habit Booklets Now Available**

**Time with God**  
**Life of Prayer**  
**Lifestyle of Worship**  
**Names of God**  
**Simply Content**  
**Confess & Repent**  
**Memorizing Scripture**

2. Visit the weekend Resource Tent to pick up a booklet or contact the Saddleback Church Maturity Team. (See the contact information at end of the booklet.)
3. Read the "Spiritual Trainer Challenge" on page 21 of this booklet.

## Great Resource

*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney  
(Colorado Springs: NavPress) 1997.

The concept of spiritual disciplines can be so intimidating that it seems as if it is a topic reserved only for the super-spiritual. Nothing could be further from the truth. Whitney accurately states, "The road to Godliness runs through the practice of Spiritual Disciplines." In this book, Whitney gives plenty of practical suggestions to show how each of the habits can help you grow.

"Have you ever considered the force of a habit in your life?  
Nothing is more powerful than the patterning or  
programming of your life and thoughts by habit.  
It draws you to the same seat when you enter church."

- Harold Sala

## Spiritual Trainer Challenge

Is the Holy Spirit encouraging you to be a Spiritual Trainer to another Christian in the area of spiritual disciplines? Is someone in your family, small group, or ministry ready to take the next step in his or her spiritual walk? Would you like to share this booklet with a parent, child, sibling, friend, neighbor, or co-worker? If so, here are simple steps you can take:

### Things You Can Do to Prayerfully Prepare for a Spiritual Training Appointment

1. Ask someone if he/she (same-sex as yourself, unless it is a family member or your fiancé) would like you to disciple him/her using this booklet, *Life Training: Spiritual Habits*. Pick up a copy for that person. Set a date and time for your first one-hour meeting—with a reminder to bring a Bible. Since this booklet has two discipleship sessions, you can set the date and time for Session Two later.
2. Re-read this booklet, *Life Training: Spiritual Habits*, paying special attention to how it is organized and what sections helped you the most.
3. Pick up a copy for yourself and read through some of the other short booklets in this Spiritual Trainer's Series on spiritual habit topics, like **time alone with God, confession and repentance, prayer, Scripture memorization, worship, contentment, praying the names of God, etc.** (You should carefully read each booklet yourself and practice the suggested discipline for a while, before you try to train someone else in it, unless you are simply interested in having a peer learning experience with a Spiritual Discipline partner!)

## Things to Do During the Appointment

**Important Note: This particular booklet has two discipleship sessions. Please allow 50-60 minutes for each session, including fellowship and prayer requests.**

1. Open with a brief prayer and a few minutes of fellowship.
2. Read through the booklet with your trainee, taking turns to share the reading, and asking your trainee the questions. Take your time; don't rush.
3. For the "Call to Action" section, slow the pace as you pray, answer any questions, and discuss the action steps.



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Thank you for using the Saddleback Church Spiritual Trainer Series materials entitled *Life Training: Spiritual Habits*. We hope that this has been a beneficial experience and has provided you with an opportunity to draw closer to God.

If you are interested in exploring more of the Saddleback Spiritual Trainer Series tools, please call the Maturity Team at Saddleback Church, (949) 609-8201.  
[www.saddleback.com/maturity](http://www.saddleback.com/maturity)