

# Individual Spiritual Disciplines - Overview

Spiritual disciplines are more than just “going through the motions.” When one begins to look at the deep, spiritual roots of the Disciplines, we realize that they are about “breathing in Jesus,” then taking that breath and breathing it out in our everyday lives.

There are two types of Spiritual disciplines: community oriented and individual oriented. This module will focus on the individual disciplines and how they apply to the way we engage our community. We will look at how they reflect the teachings of Scripture, and how they draw us in closer to the Spirit of God by breathing in his presence, and breathing out his grace

Lesson one, **Intro to Spiritual Disciplines**, will try to do just that. The hope is that it will give students an introduction to spiritual disciplines and help them see how significant they are. If your students are already familiar with the disciplines, it will help them gain a deeper understanding, and explore and discuss some new disciplines.

The remainder of the lessons are focussed on specific disciplines. In all, we will look at **Prayer** (lesson two), **Silence and Solitude** (lesson three), **Fasting** (lesson four), and **Simplicity** (lesson five). Each lesson will leave the student with practical ideas on how they can make these disciplines a part of their everyday routine.

Your students may not resonate with every one of these disciplines, but it will give them some fresh ideas. During the weeks that you are going through this material, it is important to encourage your students to continue exploring and breathing in God’s presence.

# Breathe

## Module: INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

### Lesson 1: INTRO TO SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

#### Objectives:

- Students will discuss their current knowledge of Spiritual Disciplines/be introduced to the idea of disciplines.
- Students will consider how spiritual disciplines build and strengthen your faith.
- Students will discover new spiritual disciplines and ways to incorporate them into their life.

#### Materials Needed

- Bibles
- Pens, Markers, Pencil Crayons, Crayons
- White board and dry erase marker (optional)

## Minds On

Start your youth group night off with a game. It doesn't really matter which game, although basketball or dodge ball are good options. If your church doesn't have a gym, something like a push-up contest (can be really funny) or some kind of relay race outside would work.

After the game, **ask:**

What did you need to do to play well?

What habits do you always need to do to play (whatever game was played)?

What does a proper stance (e.g. in basketball, there is the ready position) look like?

How do we know if what we're doing is correct?

## Action

**Prompt:** We're going to start talking about Spiritual Disciplines. What are some things that come to mind when you think of discipline?

**Leader's Note:** While you'll get some positive answers, it is very possible that most, if not all, will be negative answers.

**Prompt:** Often times we think of discipline as a negative word, but today's Bible passages are going to show us how discipline can play a very important and positive role in our spiritual life.

Read aloud: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and 1 Timothy 4:8.

**Ask:** What does a successful athlete look like?

If you have students who are athletes, ask what they do to succeed. The concept of discipline is also very relevant in music, so if your students play musical instruments, ask what kind of activities help them improve as musicians.

**Prompt:** A good athlete or musician has really strong discipline because they practice and work hard to improve, because they value what they are doing and want to learn more and develop their skills further. Paul tells Timothy that spiritual training exceeds physical training.

Have your students brainstorm some key differences and similarities between sports/music training and spiritual training. Similarities could include:

- practice (the more you pray out loud, the more comfortable you get with it)
- consistency
- accountability
- coaching
- structure

Differences could include: Intense physical exertion.

Next, brainstorm a list of spiritual disciplines that students are familiar with. If the list is short, help your students out and explain what each practice involves. A basic list of spiritual disciplines would include: prayer, reading scripture, silence and solitude, confession, worship, fasting etc.

**Ask:** What do you think of spiritual disciplines?

Why do you think it's important for us to talk about spiritual disciplines?

**Think/Pair/Share:** Give them a moment to think on their own. Then have them get in pairs and invite them to share their thoughts. Use the follow questions:

What do you think of spiritual disciplines?

Do you think they would have a positive impact on your relationship with God if you practiced them consistently?

Have the pairs join into groups of 4-6 to discuss the following questions. It may be helpful to have the questions written on a piece of chart paper or printed out for each group.

What, if any, spiritual disciplines have you tried before?

What are some of the challenges that get in the way of these disciplines?

Are any of these common with the people in your group?

If you are comfortable, share about some personal experiences that affect how you approach God

**Leader's Note:** Pay close attention to these answers! You may need to address them individually with each youth and a later time to help them grow in their walk with God.

Have the groups come back together and use the white board to write down answers from groups and brainstorm any further activities for spiritual disciplines.

**Ask:** So, what are the benefits of spiritual disciplines?

Some answers might include:

Spiritual disciplines are how we incorporate God into our daily life.

It's a very personal thing that helps you be more deeply connected with God.

It's pushing everything in the world aside, to say this is where I am spiritually.

To be a great Christian athlete, you have to practice day in and day out .

**Prompt:** The goal of spiritual disciplines, whether it is prayer, meditation, fasting, silence, or reading the Bible, is to give you a time to put aside things that distract you and focus on spending time with God. Let those things be, and pay attention to what God is saying to you in that moment.

Leader's Note: This is different from community orientated disciplines, so you may want to explain that point further to your students.

## **Consolidate**

End in prayer; mention how they are separated from God specifically and personally, and ask that God speak to each one as you explore the spiritual disciplines.

**Breathe in:** Read and memorize 2 Timothy 3:16-17 over the next week.

**Breathe out:** Over the next week, ask each student try to spend between 5-10 minutes in silence and see what happens! (It doesn't even need to be "prayer," but just keeping silent. If students are worried about getting distracted, setting a timer can help prevent constantly checking the clock, and focusing on a simple phrase or Scripture passage can also help.)

# Breathe

## Module: INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

### Lesson 2: PRAYER

#### Objectives:

- Students will discuss the role of prayer in their life.
- Students will consider how prayer impacts our faith.
- Students will discover new ways to think about prayer.

#### Materials Needed

- Bibles
- Pens, Markers, Pencil Crayons, Crayons
- White board and dry erase marker (optional)
- Cards for charades (pieces of paper with a word or phrase on them)

## **Minds On**

Start with a game of Charades. Have a number of words or phrases on small pieces of paper. Divide the group into two. Give a word or phrase to a student and have them act it out without words. If their team can figure it out within a time limit (3 minutes is probably good, but you can set the time to whatever works for you), they get 3 points. If they don't, the other team can steal for one point.

**Leader's Note:** Thinking so much about prayer may be something that seems irrelevant to your youth, so it's important that we begin to bridge that gap before getting into the lesson.

**Ask:** What is your experience with prayer? Why Pray? What do you like about it? What do you find difficult?

**Prompt:** In the game we just played, you had to communicate a word or phrase without words. In life most of our communication is non-verbal. This means that it is not a big stretch to know that God communicates to us through non-verbal means as well. Prayer is our way of communicating with God; it is our direct line to him. God communicates with us verbally through his Word (the Bible), as well as non-verbally, through our circumstances and events in our lives.

## **Action**

**Prompt:** Jesus' life was focused around prayer, and it is through his example that we will begin to take a close look at prayer in our lives. We want to start looking at the question of how we make prayer central in our lives.

**Ask:** Why do you think prayer was so central to Jesus' life?

Are there other people you know whose life is centred on prayer?

Have a student read Mark 1:29 – 39. (You can also choose to break the passage into 2-3 segments and have multiple volunteers.)

**Prompt:** Jesus' life was centred on prayer. After Jesus worked, performed miracles and preached, we learn that he withdrew to spend time in prayer. This prayer not only gave him rest, but prepared him for future ministry as well.

Have another student read from Matthew 6:7-13. This is the passage where Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray (commonly known as the Lord's Prayer). Divide your students into the number of phrase segments. (Leader's note: Many translations write the passage with 10 lines. You can group them per line i.e. 10 groups, by pairing each one i.e. 5 groups or dividing in half i.e. 2 groups.) Assign each group a segment of the Lord's Prayer and have them discuss:

How does this phrase fit into the whole prayer?

What is Jesus trying to teach us through including it in the prayer?

Come back as a group and have each group report their ideas through one representative.

**Prompt:** Jesus taught his disciples this prayer to teach them that prayer can be simple and to the point. It doesn't need flashy language. The point is it should come from the heart, and we should take time to think about what we are actually saying, rather than how it might sound to others or how long we can pray for.

Divide your youth into pairs. In pairs, each person is going to pray a prayer of thanksgiving and praise. Before they go to pray, ask students to brainstorm some of the things that would be incorporated in this type of prayer (write responses on a white board).

As the students go to pray, tell them that at no time in the prayer are you allowed to use the word “Praise,” or “Thanks.” This is harder than it sounds, and some of your students may not get it at first. You must think of different words and phrases to praise God, like “God you are awesome and powerful” or “the stars in the heavens give you glory” or “the mountains you created are beautiful.” You also need to think of some other words to express gratitude, like “We are so happy for the ways in which you provide for us” or “The love and mercy you show us is incredible.”

Have the students come back and ask them how it felt. For some it may not have been a challenge at all, and for others it may have been very awkward. It’s important to stress that saying “praise” and “thanks” in a prayer **is not** a bad thing. This exercise is just meant to emphasize the importance of thinking about the words you put into your prayers.

**Leader’s Note:** It is very possible that you have youth who regularly attend your group, but don’t know God. Maybe they’re there for the first time, or maybe they are new Christians. It may be helpful to have a leader join those pairs. If everything falls apart, the leader can facilitate a discussion about God, such as things we can praise and thank him for, and then he/she can lead the pair in prayer.

## **Consolidate/Debrief**

Close your evening in prayer, being sure to ask your group if anyone has anything that needs prayer. If you can, try to do the same exercise for this prayer, trying not to use the words “praise” or “thanks.” If you really want to have fun, don’t tell the youth you are going to do it, and see who notices.

**Breathe in:** Have students read Psalm 136 and reflect for two minutes on the passage.

**Breathe out:** Students can write their own Psalm of thanksgiving, and use it as a daily prayer each night throughout the week.

# Breathe

## Module: INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

### Lesson 3: SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

#### Objectives:

- Students will define silence and solitude.
- Students will identify the obstacles we face in silence and solitude.
- Students will discover how we can overcome these obstacles.

#### Materials Needed

- Bibles
- Pens, Markers, Pencil Crayons, Crayons
- White board and dry erase marker (optional)
- A timer (kitchen timer, cell phone, stop watch)

## **Minds On**

When students are seated, tell them you have set the timer for 3 minutes and you want silence for all three minutes. If there is noise, you will re-set the timer and start again. It may take a few tries, but hopefully you can get silence for three minutes.

**Leader's Note:** Use your discretion when to end the activity after a series of unsuccessful attempts. Even if you have some students who intentionally disrupt the silence, they will become teachable moments later in the lesson.

## **Action**

**Ask:** How did that silence feel? Was it awkward? Was it Difficult? Or was it not really that big of a deal?

Give them a few minutes to express how they felt.

**Ask:** Do you enjoy silence? Let them answer. If some responses are a quick “yes or no”, take a poll (i.e. have them vote with their left hand for “yes”, right hand for “no” or they can “vote with their feet” i.e. all the “yes” go to the right side of the room, all the “no” to the left side.)

Have a student read Mark 6:30-32

**Prompt:** Jesus had silence and solitude as an integral part of his ministry, and trained his disciples to make it a priority in their ministry as well. Silence and Solitude is about carving out time for you to spend with God, meditating on his word. What does it mean to you to carve out time for God? What do you think it means to meditate on God's Word?

Let students give a few answers, then **ask:** What are some of the benefits of silence? Give students some time to shout out answers. You can write these on a white board or newsprint to make it visual.

There are often many things that make Silence and Solitude difficult for us. Have the youth form groups of 4 (there may be a couple of groups of 3) and talk for 5 min. about some of the issues that would hinder them from spending time in silence and solitude. These may include: distractions, thinking about other things, stress and worry over your day, boredom, loneliness, etc. Remind that each person needs to know their group's answers.

In each group, give each person a letter (i.e. A, B, C, etc.). Have them group together based in their given letter and brainstorm for 5 min. different ways to overcome these obstacles. Afterwards, gather the large group and have a representative share each group's answers.

**Leader's Note:** Some suggestions could include:

- For youth who struggle with loneliness, it means having the confidence to know that solitude isn't being alone, but having faith that God is present in your life.
- For youth who have trouble focusing, meditating on a breath prayer (a one line prayer that is repeated over and over, i.e. the Jesus Prayer) may help clear the mind and help you ignore distractions. You can Google more breath prayers for other ideas.

## **Consolidate/Debrief**

End the evening in prayer. Let the group know that in this prayer they will spend three minutes in silence. If they can't focus, tell them to look up a Psalm of praise, and use it as

a breath prayer to help them focus. Then, close by praying aloud, being sure to take any prayer requests from your youth.

**Breathe in:** Throughout this coming week, challenge students to increase the minutes of silence they experience. e.g. On day 1, spend 1 min. in silence. On day 2, spend 2 min. in silence (and so on). See who can report back at next week's meeting if they reached seven minutes of silence.

**Breathe out:** Students can journal about their thoughts and prayers during this time of silence.

# Breathe

## Module: INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

### Lesson 4: FASTING

#### Objectives:

- Students will discuss what it means to fast.
- Students will consider the importance of relying on God for our needs.
- Students will discover new ways to create space for God in our lives.

#### Materials Needed

- Bibles
- Pens, Markers, Pencil Crayons, Crayons
- White board and dry erase marker (optional)
- 2 or 3 toonies (\$2 coins)
- 2 or 3 \$5 bills (or \$10 if you want to be REALLY generous!)

## **Minds On**

Before the lesson, get two or three toonies, and two or three \$5 (or \$10) bills. Don't tell your students about the money; just announce that you need two or three (depending on how much money you have) volunteers. If they ask what for, tell them you can't say. Give each volunteer \$2. Assure and emphasize to your students that this toonie is theirs to keep. You are giving it to them. It is no longer yours, but theirs to use for whatever they wish. They never have to pay you back, and you will not ask for any kind of favour in return, it is simply theirs.

After giving the toonie, ask your volunteers, what is the tangible value of that toonie? You will probably get answers of a coffee, or candy bar, or lots of candy at the bulk store, etc. Hopefully they will talk for a while, and put genuine value on it. Let the volunteers rejoin the group.

## **Action**

Read Matthew 4:1- 11

**Ask:** What do you know about Fasting?

The most common answer will be giving up of food, but there are many others like giving up sugar, coffee, and even non-food things like, TV, or even talking. Encourage students to give reasons for fasting. Some won't know any, while other common answers will be: to spend time on God, build discipline, etc.

At this point, tell your volunteers with the \$2, that they have the opportunity to give up the toonie. Assure them that you will have no hard feelings if they choose to keep it, and

you gave it to them with no expectations of getting it back. If they would like to buy coffee or candy with it, it is theirs.

**Prompt:** In our story, Jesus is fasting in the desert. Much like those who just gave up the toonie, Jesus has intentionally decided to give up something of value to him. Immediately following this passage, Jesus began his ministry. Fasting is a way that we spend time with God in preparation for what he has called us to in our lives. Whether that means being a leader in our church or even a leader in our local community, fasting is one way we can prepare for this. There is another interesting point in this passage though. Jesus has not eaten for forty days, and one of the ways the Devil tempts him is to tell him to make bread from stones. Jesus says no, quoting the Old Testament that says “man does not live on bread alone.” So, what’s wrong with bread then that Jesus had to give it up?

Students may give reasons, some far-fetched, but some that may actually sound reasonable. However, the answer is nothing.

**Prompt:** In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with bread. Jesus is not condemning bread as bad. What Jesus is saying here is that bread is not what sustains us; God sustains us.

Have some students read Matthew 6:16-18.

**Prompt:** Let’s go back to the volunteers who gave up the toonie. Now, as a youth leader, I don’t sustain you, God does, but in the sense of this illustration, what is giving up the toonie really saying? (That it isn’t an essential thing for me to have). Jesus is teaching about fasting in Matthew 6:16-18, and he is emphasizing the importance of not making a spectacle of fasting. Fasting is not for our own glory, or to build into our own reputation of how spiritual we are. Instead, fasting is about giving something up as an expression that God is what sustains us. In Matthew 6, Jesus says that if we are fasting to build our reputation, that is all we will get, a reputation. But if God is at the centre of our fasting, then Jesus tells us that God will reward us.

Have the students discuss the follow question in pairs or groups of 3: What are some of the rewards from fasting?

Then come back together to share their answers (discipline, time with God, etc).

## **Consolidate/Debrief**

Tell your volunteers to think back to the beginning about giving up the toonie.

**Ask:** How did you feel giving up the toonie?

(Some will say sad, disappointed. Some will probably say indifferent)

**Prompt:** We gave the toonie value, but fasting is showing that God is beyond all value. For those that kept the toonie, you still have two dollars, and there is nothing wrong with that, just like how there is nothing wrong with bread in itself. But fasting is about God being of more value, (stand up and take out enough \$5 bills for the students who gave up the toonie and give them one each), and God's reward is far more valuable that anything we could ever give up. Jesus promises us in Matthew 6 that when God is the centre of our fasting, he will give us a greater reward than the world ever could.

End in prayer, making sure to take prayer requests from the group. Specifically pray about the ways that God shows value to us, and how we can carve out space for him in our lives.

**Breathe In:** Ask students to reflect whether there is an area of their life where they can carve out more time for God by giving something up. This could mean turning off their cell phone while they do devotions, or it could mean reading Matthew 6 before they check Facebook or after a sports practice.

**Breathe Out:** Encourage students to read through Matthew 6 this week (once a day would be ideal). Ask them to pay attention to what verses stand out to them as they read the passage over the week and to share that with a leader or friend (or even as a Facebook status).

# Breathe

## Module: INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

### Lesson 5: SIMPLICITY

#### Objectives:

- Students will discuss the things they need to be happy.
- Students will evaluate how we prioritize and value things.
- Students will discover how we can still make God a priority even though these things make us happy.

#### Materials Needed

- Bibles
- Pens, Markers, Pencil Crayons, Crayons
- Pieces of paper
- White board and dry erase marker (optional)
- Jar of honey

## **Minds On**

Get youth to start thinking about the things they value and desire.

**Ask:** If you found \$50, and there was no way to find out whose it was or return it to its previous owner, what would you do? What would you do with a free \$50 for you to spend on whatever you like?

Allow some time for students to give you their answers. Help students see if their answers trend towards consumption, such as things to eat or wear, or things to do. After enough answers have been given, discuss these questions:

Would the choices change if the amount changed?

What do you think takes first priority in your life or has a high value?

Do those things come with a price tag or \$ sign?

## **Action**

Take a jar of honey and hand it around your group. Let each student taste a little bit of the honey, perhaps by using a squeezable container and giving out saltine crackers. Then have a student read Proverbs 25:16 and allow your students to discuss what they think of it. Ask them what they think the point of the verse is.

**Ask:** What do you need to be happy?

Make a list on a white board or chart paper. Be sure to try and build a consensus.

Answers can vary wildly and that's ok. They could be things like food, water, shelter, or even girl/boyfriends, books; anything your students decide are needs they have in order to be happy.

Next have a student read Philippians 4:11-13.

**Ask:** What kind of things did Jesus need to be happy? Or Paul?

**Prompt:** Paul has gone back and forth from having plenty, to having very little, to having plenty again, and back to having very little. What does Paul see wrong with having plenty? (Answer: Nothing...). In this proverb then, what is wrong with having honey? (Again... nothing). If you look at the list that we made together, we have actually created a list of needs. Nothing in and of itself is wrong with anything on this list, but just like having too much honey is bad for you, too much of anything can distract us from God. Paul learned to be happy in any situation because he relied on God to make him happy. This is a spiritual discipline called ‘simplicity’ and it’s when we begin to prioritize God over all these things in our lives.

**Think/Pair/Share:** Have students pair off and discuss: “What obstacles do we face in living a simple life?” Typical answers include: Media pressure, peer pressure, comparing ourselves to others, trying to find happiness and satisfaction and identity.

After a short while have them come back as a group and share some of their thoughts.

## **Consolidate/Debrief**

Ask the group to identify common obstacles to living a simple life. If it doesn’t come up, ask your students if they think sometimes wanting a simpler life is the biggest obstacle.

**Prompt:** It can be hard to imagine how our lives will change before we really put the change into place, and simplicity can be even harder to imagine because we have so few examples of it in our culture.

Ask your students whether they see any appeal in the spiritual discipline of simplicity.

**Prompt:** Simplicity can be a helpful discipline for many reasons: saving time, money, and stress, but why do you think it is considered a spiritual discipline? (Allow youth to share their thoughts.) There is a saying that the more stuff you own, the more your stuff

owns you, what do you think of that? Tell a partner. (Again, allow a few moments for conversations.) Simplicity is a spiritual discipline because it protects us from becoming so wrapped up in acquiring or upgrading our belongings that we run out of room in our lives for God.

**Breathe In:** Matthew 6:20 (which your students will be very familiar with if they took last lesson's challenge of reading this chapter daily!) – says **store up** for yourselves treasures in heaven, but so often we become consumed by collecting treasures on earth that can be broken, worn out, or stolen. Have students reflect, “What do I really treasure?” Encourage them to journal these thoughts.

**Breathe Out:** Challenge your students to simplify their lives this week by choosing one item per day to donate, recycle, or throw away. The purpose is not to have youth waste their possessions and then need parents to replace them, but to identify belongings that simply fill space in their lives without being useful or loved. Depending on your group, it might be more appropriate to have them choose one item per day to be put away in a box for a week (or a month!)