

DISCIPLINES
of a
GODLY
WOMAN



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Disciplines of a Godly Woman

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DISCIPLINE FOR GODLINESS



Train yourself to be godly.

1 TIMOTHY 4:7

I had been married barely two years when I came across my husband's prayer list. As I dusted his ever-tidy desk, my own name caught my attention—right at the top of his list. Next to my name were the letters *D* and *O*. I was instantly curious. What did the letters stand for? Delightful and openhearted? Darling and optimistic? Distinguished and outstanding?

I had no idea what he was thinking—and what he was praying for me. After several days, I drummed up the courage to ask him. Without hesitation, he replied, “Disciplined and organized, of course!”

My mouth fell open, my face reddened, and I cried out involuntarily. My husband was puzzled at my astonished response. He was thinking, *Doesn't she know she needs help in these areas? Doesn't she want help to be disciplined and organized?*

The truth? At the time I wasn't aware that these were difficult areas for me. More truth? After thirty-seven years—even though I've made a lot of progress—Kent is still praying for *D* and *O* for his wife!

Discipline for me and discipline for Kent are not exactly the same thing, we've discovered. Our personalities are different, for starters. My husband is a morning person, and I wake up with the evening news. He finds sanity in structure—a well-ordered calendar with no unexpected

interruptions. I welcome interruptions and love the surprise of a drop-in visitor.

But I've found that while a spontaneous personality may cause me to adopt a more flexible schedule, spontaneity isn't an excuse for me to ignore the importance of discipline. And discipline *is* important for my spiritual life. In fact, it is the path by which the good news of Christ gives meaningful shape to all the days of my life.

Maybe *discipline* seems like a hard word to you now—one full of challenge and perhaps of duty. But be prepared to discover that discipline is your lifeline, something that you learn to embrace and thank God for as you grow in him.

THE GODLINESS WORKOUT

Years ago when I was in my early thirties and the busy, flabby mother of four, a friend and I made up our minds to get in shape and exercise a little physical discipline. We donned ratty old tennis shoes and weather-beaten T-shirts and shorts and set out to run around the block. To our dismay, we made it only as far as the first corner, nearly fainting with that much exertion. But we didn't give up. Every morning we tried again. The day we made it to the half-mile marker, we were so happy we celebrated with donuts! That morning workout eventually lengthened to three miles, then to five—always ending with the prize, a donut! We got fit, but we didn't take it too seriously. We understood that some disciplines are more important than others.

The apostle Paul links this idea of necessary training or discipline with the spiritual life. First Timothy 4:7 says, "Train yourself to be godly." That word *train* is derived from the very ancient Greek word from which we get the English word *gymnasium*. By New Testament times it referred to exercise and training in general. In a sense, Paul is saying, "Gymnasticize yourself for the purpose of godliness." He's calling for a spiritual workout.

It's this spiritual workout that Paul deems so much more important than a morning jog around town. He goes on to say, "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

I'm nearly sixty now—a soft grandmother of sixteen youngsters. I don't jog anymore, though I regularly make the most of my occasional

bursts of energy by using the few pieces of high-tech exercise equipment stashed in our basement. The older I get, the more I understand Paul's exercise priorities: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Like the Greek athletes who lay aside even their clothing to avoid encumbrances, we Christian women need to get rid of every association, habit, and tendency that impedes godliness. The writer of Hebrews talks about this shedding of hindrances: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1).

There have been habits and pastimes I've had to shed over the years. For example, I used to be unable to begin my day before I read the morning news. I finally noticed that I consistently headed for the front porch for the newspaper before I reached for God's Word. It seems like a simple thing, a newspaper, but I found I had to cancel my subscription in order to pursue a better habit. I have also had wrong ideas that have had to be altered or replaced by truth based in God's Word and in His character. I've had to dump lots of dead weight.

What is weighing you down today? Those things will have to go. Once you've removed obstacles and hindrances, your call to training also demands that you direct your energy toward godliness. "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified," writes Paul (1 Corinthians 9:27 NKJV). Remember Paul's instruction to "train" for godliness? Just a few sentences later he comments on this command, saying, "for this we labor and strive" (1 Timothy 4:9). In the Greek *labor* means "strenuous toil," and *strive* is the word that gives us "agonize" in English.

In other words, Paul isn't promising us a cushy, low-impact workout. Spiritual disciplines call for serious commitment and "no-pain, no-gain" effort. Athletes in serious training willingly undergo hours of discipline and pain—in order to meet the goal, to win the prize. Many women will understand this easily in physical terms, having already made a commitment to train their bodies, spending long hours at the gym for the outward prize of a trim figure. But even those women may be neglecting to bring that same discipline to a flabby soul.

DO WE HAVE TO?

Why should we Christian women turn our attention to the disciplines that will train us for godliness? First of all, because in today's world and in today's church, disciplined Christian lives are the exception, not the rule. Some people might like to find an excuse by saying, "Oh, but that's always been true." Actually it hasn't. Many periods of church history have been characterized by the amazing discipline of believers. We can come up with plenty of reasons why Christians today avoid the disciplines that lead to godliness. Maybe teaching has been poor. Maybe it's the laziness of individual believers. But one reason that stands out in our current culture is fear of legalism.

Let's face it: Many of us think of spiritual discipline in terms of "living the letter of the Law" or as a series of draconian rules that no one could possibly live up to. Such legalism seems to us a path to frustration and spiritual death.

But true discipline is a far cry from legalism—thank God! The difference lies in motivation: Legalism is self-centered; discipline is God-centered. The legalistic heart says, "I will do this thing to gain merit with God." The disciplined heart says, "I will do this because I love God and want to please Him." The true heart of discipline is relationship—a relationship with God. John Wesley's words express this relationship beautifully:

O God, fill my soul with so entire a love of Thee that I may love nothing but for Thy sake and in subordination to Thy love. Give me grace to study Thy knowledge daily that the more I know Thee, the more I may love Thee. Create in me a zealous obedience to all Thy commands, a cheerful patience under all Thy chastisements, and a thankful resignation to all Thy disposals. Let it be the one business of my life to glorify Thee by every word of my tongue, by every work of my hand, by professing Thy truth, and by engaging all men, so far as in me lies, to glorify and love Thee.¹

Paul knew the difference between the motivations of legalism and discipline, and he fought the legalists all the way across Asia Minor, never giving an inch. Now he shouts to us, "Train yourselves to be godly!"

What's another reason why Christian women need to turn their attention to the disciplines discussed in this book? Because we need to

embrace a concept that is key to living a godly life authentically—a concept we stumble over and stumble hard. A Christian’s life is about bringing the will under submission to God’s will, and submission is an idea that has fallen on hard times. Confusion abounds about rights and boundaries, roles and authority. This confusion muddies our thinking about God and creates roadblocks to our spiritual growth. The only cure is a proper theology about God in order to bring every area of our lives under submission to His will. So each topic we touch on in this book is framed in terms of this surrender.

With the Word of God taking my measure, God has sometimes gently and sometimes brutally chiseled away at my life to make it one of substance. God is still at work on me. With each day that passes I am more aware that the time is short, and there remains so much to be done in me. I open my heart and thoughts to you with the hope that they will help you choose to train arduously in your pursuit of God and godliness and that you will submit to His plan for your life.

RENEW YOUR MIND

What is spiritual discipline, and why is it so important? What usually prevents you from exercising spiritual discipline (see Romans 3:9-18)? What can a lack of spiritual discipline do to your life?

Reflect on 1 Timothy 4:7-8 (“Train yourself to be godly”). What is the literal meaning of *train*? What does this definition tell you about the way to approach spiritual discipline?

What does Hebrews 12:1 say about running the Christian race? What things are holding you back in your walk with God? What makes you hang on to them?

Is there a cost to spiritual discipline? Check out 1 Corinthians 9:25-27. What could greater discipline cost you? Are you prepared to pay the price?

How does the motivation in legalism differ from the motivation in discipline?

SOUL



DISCIPLINE OF THE GOSPEL

The Source of Godliness



*By this gospel you are saved. . . . Christ died
for our sins according to the Scriptures.*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:2-3

I'm an evangelist at heart. I love interacting with people who haven't a clue about the Bible's message. It's incredible to watch the light dawn in the eyes of an unbeliever who suddenly begins to grasp the truth, and I'm disappointed if the person closes the door to discussion or debate. Why do I get so excited about the Gospel? Because it reveals God's loving plan for this world and for humanity—men, women, and children. It's good news—the best news anyone can ever receive. When a person understands God's love in Christ Jesus, life finally makes sense.

Do you remember the moment when you first understood the Gospel? Every day the good news of the Gospel is being revealed to someone around you. Seven years ago God was making His good news known to the young woman who regularly served Kent and me coffee at Starbucks. My husband and I enjoyed walking into the shop—not only because of the grande skim cappuccino, but because Stacey was behind the counter. She's a red-headed, perky Meg Ryan type who made buying a cup of coffee an experience. Even before the caffeine, you felt better because Stacey took your order.

Because she always appeared so cheerful, we would never have guessed that she was involved in a devastating divorce and child-custody battle. But someone knew—a former neighbor, a Christian, who now lived in a distant city. Concerned for Stacey, she encouraged her to visit our church.

A few weeks later Stacey, alone and uncertain, came to College Church for the first time. When the pastoral staff walked onto the platform at the start of the service, Stacey did a double take. What was that “nice man” who comes into Starbucks with his wife doing on the platform? When that “nice man” stood to pray and preach, she listened as she had never listened before.

The following morning, Stacey greeted us with even greater energy than usual. She told us about her surprise at discovering that my husband is a pastor. She asked if I could meet with her because she had questions about the Bible. We were overjoyed.

Stacey’s former neighbor called to tell us that she would be praying for us. Long before we met Stacey, God had been at work in her life preparing her. She was ready to hear the good news of the Gospel and receive Christ as her Savior. And she did.

With her conversion, Stacey began a new way of life. Her belief in the Gospel’s good news has become the center of her life. She is a devoted student of God’s Word. Her skill in parenting reflects her desire to help her children grow in godliness. After her commitment to her family, Stacey prizes most her ministry to junior high students. In the Gospel she found life itself!

But not every person who professes to be a Christian treasures the Gospel with this same enthusiasm and tenacity. For some Christianity is just one part of their busy lives. They’ve got work, their Tuesday morning self-help group at the YMCA, their workout schedule—oh, and their spiritual life, too. Others see their Christian experience as something to look back on—“the day I said ‘the’ prayer” or “walked the aisle” or “joined the church.”

For many Christianity is a ticket to heaven. They want the assurance that everything will be okay when they die, but they don’t want to get too serious about it today.

Many families fit Christianity in as part of their lifestyle package. They enjoy the wholesome atmosphere the church provides, good moral teaching for the kids, potluck suppers, and women’s meetings.

Not one of these last few views of the Gospel is the real deal; none of them sees the Gospel as the Bible reveals it. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is unrelenting in seeking to convert every area of our hearts and lives. The Gospel is all-encompassing. It is in fact the only source of godliness. Search anywhere else, and you have nothing more than self-reform at best and idolatry at its worst.

Do you want to be a godly woman? Since we intend to discuss the many, many areas of a woman's life that are shaped and informed by the Gospel, we must know what this Gospel is and believe it! Then, like our friend Stacey, we must be prepared to make it the center of our lives.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Recently, a diverse group of women from our church (young and old, married and single, widowed and divorced) came together to study how faith in the Gospel impacts the way we live. At the first session, I asked each to write down a clear answer to the question, "What is the Gospel?"

Easy, right? The answer should fall from our lips like the ABCs. Wrong! All these born-again, godly women found it difficult to compose a clearly stated, succinct definition of the Gospel. We were humbled! Some women wrote pages describing how to become a Christian. Others laid out witnessing techniques. Some listed the Gospel's benefits. The Gospel itself got lost in that fog of words.

When asked how they know they are Christians, people often answer with "Because I accepted" or "I prayed" or "I went forward." Notice the "I"? All of these answers give prominence to what the person has done. This is the root of the general confusion about the Gospel. The Gospel is about what *God* has done!

Christianity is the only religion in which salvation cannot be earned. Christians know our salvation has been accomplished by what God alone has done, not by what we have done. This is the truth that Jesus shouted from the cross: "It is finished!" (John 19:30).

God's Gospel

The Gospel belongs to God. It is His Gospel.¹ From cover to cover the Bible is about God's Gospel. It was His idea and His plan: "The Scripture

foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced *the gospel in advance* to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you’” (Galatians 3:8).

The Bible, beginning in Genesis, reveals God’s plan to restore us to what we were created to be—people made in His image, joyfully living under His loving rule and blessing. But while it saves us, “the Gospel is not primarily about man and his needs, although these are not unimportant nor are they unrelated.”² As good as it may sound, a man-centered gospel is not God’s Gospel. A gospel that primarily focuses on man’s needs or guilt or feelings or wants or ambitions is not God’s Gospel. God’s Gospel is amazing news about what His son Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross. It is about what God has done.

Christ Crucified . . . According to the Scriptures

Jesus Christ is the central figure of God’s Gospel. Our study group concluded that Paul’s explanation of the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 is the foundational text: “I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*” (emphasis mine).

Paul keeps it simple: Jesus Christ died for our sins and was resurrected from the dead. Then he adds—twice!—an all-important but often overlooked phrase: “according to the Scriptures.” In other words, the Old Testament is the source and validation of this Gospel and this Christ.

By pointing us to the Old Testament Scriptures, Paul is telling us that Jesus Christ didn’t come in a vacuum—an event unrelated to past or future. He came as the culmination and fulfillment of God’s great plan in history as revealed in the Old Testament. That is why Paul declared, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:20). Jesus Christ is the prophetic “yes” to every gospel promise in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation! The first hint of this truth was revealed in the Garden of Eden where God promised that a descendant of the woman would crush Satan’s head (Genesis 3:15).

Christ Himself also referred to the Old Testament Scriptures in order to explain the Gospel to the dejected disciples along the Emmaus road following His resurrection. He chided them with the words: “How slow of heart [you are] to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:24-27).

What a “Bible study” that must have been! Christ systematically walked them through the entire Old Testament, explaining His death and resurrection as fulfillment of its prophetic promises.

Peter makes the same significant point about Christ’s place at the center of scriptural truth: “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves *but you*, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things” (1 Peter 1:10-12, emphasis mine). Did you see it? The Old Testament prophets were serving us. You and me!

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, David, and all of the rest of the prophets wrote their books in order that we who live on this side of the cross might recognize Jesus as the Christ, the one true Messiah who alone holds the words of life—the Gospel. They wrote for our benefit! So hear this: “For everything that was written in the past was written *to teach us*, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4, emphasis mine).

Why so much emphasis on this? Because as Paul said, if we believe any other Gospel, *we have believed in vain*. In a day when everything (including theology) is decided by popular opinion, how easy it is to believe another gospel. How easy it is to shape our god according to what we think he should be like and not allow the whole of Scripture to explain Him.

Some men came to Jesus and asked Him this question: “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: *to believe* in the one he has sent” (John 6:28-29, emphasis mine).

Our part is to believe. But we must believe in *this* Jesus—the Christ God has revealed in the holy Scriptures and not one of our own imagination. Here I must ask: In what gospel do you believe? Is your Jesus a messiah defined by your own imaginings or the promised Messiah defined by the Scriptures? The Jesus of the Bible is utterly wonderful! And His Gospel is the only path to godliness.

That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” (Romans 10:9-11)

It is possible that you may not have fully understood the Gospel. To make sure that you do, I have included “Two Ways to Live” at the end of this chapter. It is the clearest explanation of the Gospel available today. If you’re not certain of your spiritual status, read and work through it now—before you go on.

GOOD NEWS

William Tyndale, the martyr who gave us the English Bible, wrote that *gospel* comes from a word that “signifieth good, merry, glad and joyful tidings, that maketh a man’s heart glad, and maketh him sing, dance and leap for joy.”³

A young woman in our singles’ group at church discovered the joy that comes from seeing Christ in light of the Old Testament. Michelle grew up attending church. She knew “the Sunday school answers.” She’d been taught that Jesus died for her sins, but she felt she was a pretty good person who only sinned once in a while. As an adult, Michelle became more and more aware of her sinfulness. She wasn’t the good person she thought she was.

One Sunday evening, as the pastor traced the history of Israel, he told how God made a covenant with Israel, gave them His Law, and established animal sacrifice to atone for sin when the people disobeyed. The pastor posed the question: “How is a holy God to dwell with a sinful people?”

Michelle recalls, “I began to realize that because of my sin I could not approach a holy God on my own.” At that point the pastor explained that

Jesus Christ came to fulfill the Law and the prophets and quoted 2 Corinthians 5:21: “God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

That night Michelle understood for the first time that “I was not a passive onlooker at the death of Jesus. I was an active participant in His death. My sins were the nails pounded through His hands and feet and the thorns pressed into His brow. Only in Jesus can I be made righteous. That Sunday I wanted to climb up to the rooftop and shout, ‘I’m forgiven!’”

“According to the Scriptures,” Michelle understood the Gospel as she never had before—and now it could hold a central place in her heart, her relationships, and her choices.

THE GOSPEL IS EVERYTHING

So you see, the Gospel is not just one more thing you schedule into your day planner or kitchen calendar. The Gospel shapes everything about you. The discipline of the Gospel is coming to God on His terms. That is what this book is all about. As women who understand and embrace the Gospel, we find God’s Word so dynamic that it at once defines us, satisfies us, and motivates us.

The Gospel Defines Us

When we are born again, life starts to make sense. Within the pages of Scripture, we find the blessed answer to the age-old question, “Who am I?” Beginning in the opening pages of the Bible, we learn that we are *made in the image of God*. We learn also that as women, we are made distinctly female as opposed to male. Most importantly, we discover that we are of great value to God, as demonstrated by Christ’s death on the cross. The Gospel, therefore, not only brings dignity and value to our humanity, but it brings purpose and meaning to gender distinctions.

We learn further that we are sinners. Genesis 3 records the decision of Adam and Eve together to rebel against God’s good plan, bringing sin and death to mankind (Genesis 3; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:23). We find that we can be saved from God’s wrath against all ungodliness (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:3-9). We see that we can become children of God and members of His family, the church (John 1:12; 3:5-8; Mark 3:31-35). Finally,

we are partners with all the saints for the sake of the Gospel (Philippians 1:1-6; 2:14-15). The disciplines that we will address in this book are informed by these realities.

Apart from the angels, who were not created in God's image, we are the only beings in the universe who can hear God's Word and respond to it. Genesis reveals that the first thing God did after creating Adam and Eve was to speak to them. You and I can hear the Word of God! Because we were created in His image, our souls have a moral sense that can respond to His Word in obedience, by God's grace. Women, you bear the image of God and are complex spiritual beings who can hear God speak and, through His grace, respond!

Sisters in Christ, think of it! In the Gospel we need have no identity crisis. We know who we are!

The Gospel Motivates Us

The Gospel is motivating; it gives us purpose in life: "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17).

The Scriptures show us where we fit into God's plan for the world and detail what we are to do with our lives. The Bible is the "how-to" manual for bringing our lives under the discipline of the Gospel. As we go on, we'll look at the work we have been given in spreading the good news, in being part of the family of God, in responsibilities to nurture others and to serve the poor and helpless. The Gospel informs every aspect of our lives as single or married women. The Gospel gives meaning to whatever we do, because as gospel women, we are doing it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. If you don't remember anything else about this book, remember that the Gospel is the foundation for every single thing you *are* and *do*.

The Gospel Satisfies Us

Marie Antoinette is famous for her heartless statement to the starving people of France who had no bread: "Let them eat cake." This same queen, surrounded by lavish furnishings, extravagant clothing, abundant and exotic food, and servants to provide for her every wish, also despairingly said, "Nothing tastes." It is not surprising that she could find no sat-

isfaction in material possessions, but it is tragic indeed for those who claim faith in the Gospel to search anywhere else for satisfaction. As a pastor's wife, I have often had Christian women express to me their longing for something they do not possess. In their search to find what is lacking, they casually diminish and even dismiss what they have taken for granted—the knowledge of God and His gracious provisions for us discovered in the pages of Scripture.

Here's the gospel truth: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness *through our knowledge of him* who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3, emphasis mine). God's provision for His children is astonishing! We have everything we need! Do you believe this?

Do not doubt that the simple Gospel has everything you need and more. Jesus told the woman at the well, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst" (John 4:13). And again on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, He declared that He is the source of all satisfaction: "On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him'" (John 7:37-38).

THE BEST NEWS

Though we all bear the noble image of God, we find that we constantly fall to self-centeredness, envy, greed, rebellion, lust, or exploitation of others, and worse. But that's exactly why the Gospel is such good news. Right now, today, each of us can hear God's Word and respond through His grace. We can think the thoughts of God as He has revealed them. We can do the works of God. We can be pleasing to Him—and pleased with Him. We can be satisfied, in the same way Christ was, by living in obedience to God's Word and will.

I will never forget the day fifteen years ago when a young woman named Carol who had received Christ as Savior only a few weeks earlier came to Bible study for the second time. She sat, with her borrowed Bible in her hand, in a circle of women who were well-versed in the Scriptures. Carol quietly listened as the study questions were answered.

When there was a lull in the conversation, Carol said with great enthusiasm, “I found the most wonderful verse last night!” All those Christian women turned their attention to this baby believer. Slowly and reverently she began to read: “For God . . . so loved . . . the world . . . that He . . . gave . . . His one . . . and only . . . Son . . . that whoever . . . believes . . . in him . . . shall not perish . . . but have eternal life.”

The quiet in the room was palpable. She was reading John 3:16—a verse many believers memorize from childhood and can prattle off in seconds—as it should be read, as if each word were a holy treasure. Around the circle eyes began to glisten as Carol’s awe of the Gospel laid bare the shame of those of us whose senses had been dulled to its wonder.

Never lose the wonder of the Gospel! Never imagine that you have outgrown it. John 3:16 is not only the beautiful summary of what God has done, but it is the basis for a way of life. It ought to be the true center of our living—defining, motivating, and satisfying us. The Gospel is a woman’s first and most important discipline, for it is the source of godliness.

RENEW YOUR MIND

When did you first understand and accept the Gospel of Christ? What immediate effects did it have on your life and choices?

Why must the Gospel take center stage in your life? Has the Gospel slipped from the top of your list of priorities? How will you make it foremost in your thinking again?

How is the Christian defined by the Gospel (see Genesis 1-3; Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; John 1:12; Ephesians 4-5)?

How is the Christian motivated by the Gospel (Colossians 3:17)?

What is the wonderful, satisfying gospel truth found in 2 Peter 1:3? What do you currently think you “need” for “life and godliness”? How can you claim this promise for yourself?

TWO WAYS TO LIVE: A BRIEF LOOK AT THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTIANITY⁴

What is Christianity about? What does it mean to be a Christian? Most people have their own ideas about these questions, but in the end, God’s ideas are the important ones. What does He say Christianity is really about?

That's what we'll be looking at in this short study: God's definition of Christianity as He spells it out in the Bible. There are six basic points.

1. God—the Loving Ruler and Creator

God is the loving ruler of the world. He made it, and He made us to rule and care for the world—under His authority.

Find Revelation 4:11 in a Bible (Revelation is right near the back). Read it and then try to write answers to the following questions from what you've read.

a. Why should we honor and praise God?

b. Is there anything in creation that does not depend on God's will? Explain.

c. What attitude should we have toward a God like this?

2. Humanity in Rebellion

When we look at the world, however, we can see that things are not the way they should be. This is because we reject God as our ruler by trying to run our lives without Him. Have we done a good job of running ourselves, our society, and our world? Support your answer with examples.

Now Read Romans 3:10-13 from the Bible.

a. According to this passage, how many righteous people are there?

b. How many people really seek God?

c. How many people have turned away from God's loving rule?

Note this carefully: Some people rebel quietly by just ignoring God. Others rebel more visibly by doing things that everyone recognizes as

sinful. But either way, it's rebellion against God. The real question is: What will God do about it? Let's find out.

3. *God Won't Let People Keep on Rebelling Forever.*

God cares enough about us to take our rebellion seriously and to call us to account.

Read Hebrews 9:27.

a. What does the future hold for everyone?

b. What must everyone face after death?

God's punishment for rebellion is death and judgment. This might sound hard, and many people don't like to believe that God could feel so strongly about our rebellion. But justice isn't justice unless it brings sin to account. It's simply wrong to turn a blind eye.

The bad news is very bad, but the good news is wonderful. God has provided a remedy for the disastrous position in which we find ourselves.

4. *Jesus—the Man Who Dies for Rebels*

God loved the world so much that He sent His Son into the world—Jesus Christ. Jesus obeyed God completely. He was the one person who deserved no punishment. He lived a wonderful life of selfless giving, truth, and integrity, but He was executed as a common criminal. By dying on the cross, He, the perfect Man, took our punishment and brought us free forgiveness.

Read 1 Peter 3:18.

a. Why did Christ die?

b. Who is the righteous person mentioned here? Who are the unrighteous?

c. Which of the two terms describes you?

d. What can Christ's death do for you?

The death of Jesus is not the end of the story. Before He died, Jesus said He would come back from the grave after three days. At the time nobody believed Him. But then . . .

5. Jesus—the Risen Ruler

God accepted Jesus' death as payment in full for our sins and raised Him from the dead. The risen Jesus is now what humanity was always meant to be: God's ruler of the world. Jesus has conquered death and now gives new life to us. One day He will return to judge the world.

Read Philippians 2:9-11.

- a. What place has God given to Jesus?

- b. What attitude should we have toward Jesus?

- c. Whether by choice or otherwise, who will eventually bow down to the authority of Jesus?

By rising from the dead, Jesus proved once and for all that He did indeed have all the power and authority He claimed to have as the Son of God. That leaves us with only two options . . .

6. The Two Ways to Live

Our Way

Reject God as ruler

Try to run our own lives our own way

- Result**
- Condemned by God
 - Facing death and judgment

God's New Way

Submit to Jesus as Lord
Rely on Jesus' death and resurrection

Result

- Forgiven by God
- Given eternal life

Read John 3:36.

- What two types of people are described here?
- What must you do to have eternal life?
- Why would God's anger (wrath) remain on certain people?
- Which of these two options is the way you want to live?

What Should I Do Next?

You may want to think more about the truths covered in this brief study. You can get to know Jesus better by reading Mark's Gospel.

If, however, you know that you're ready to give your life to God by submitting to Jesus' rule, you should pray a simple prayer in your own words. Ask God to forgive you for ignoring Him and rebelling. Ask Him to help you let Jesus run your life and to rely on His death for forgiveness and eternal life.

From that point on, it's a matter of living out your new way of life day by day—but you won't be on your own. God will be with you all the way. He'll keep speaking to you (as you read the Bible); He'll keep listening to you and helping you (as you pray to Him); He'll help you to change and live His way (by His Spirit who lives within you); and He'll provide brothers and sisters to encourage you along the way (as you meet with other Christians).

NOTES

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- 1 John Wesley, quoted in *Garden of Prayer* (Santa Ana, Calif.: Vision House, 1976), p. 45.

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- 3 William Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treatises* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1849), p. 8.
- 4 “Two Ways to Live: A Brief Look at the Message of Christianity,” a pamphlet published by St. Matthias Press, P.O. Box 665, London, England, SW20 8RU. Reprinted by permission.

DISCIPLINE OF SUBMISSION

- 1 Betty Friedan, as quoted by Mary A. Kassian in *The Feminist Gospel* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1992), p. 15.
- 2 Kirsten Birkett, *The Essence of Feminism* (Sydney, Australia: Matthias Media, 2000), p. 121.
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- 4 Peter Jensen, *At the Heart of the Universe* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1997), p. 87.
- 5 John Wesley, quoted in *Garden of Prayer* (Santa Ana, Calif.: Vision House, 1976), p. 51.
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- 7 Robert Coles, “Discipline” in *Family Weekly*, March 27, 1983, pp. 4-5.

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- 1 E. Stanley Jones, *A Song of Ascents* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), p. 383.
- 2 Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Bantam, 1978), p. 35.
- 3 J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973).