

Discipline: Spirit

Matthew 26:36-46; Romans 5:12-19; Luke 9:23-25; Galatians 2:20

If you are like me, you have probably been getting your toes stepped on through this series. Before we talk about Spiritual Discipline, I want to remind us all that nobody is perfect. In fact, some of your favorite people from scripture were not perfect people.

David, by all accounts, was an amazing man of God. He was strong, brave, defeated giants, wrote poetry and music, and loved God with all of his heart. David's mental and spiritual disciplines had amazing resolve, but in one lapse of judgement when it comes to physical discipline he finds a way to dishonor God in all three disciplines.

The prophet Jonah, I am sure, was very strong in body and in mind, but when it came to spiritual discipline he had a few issues. He was often running from the messages that God asked for him to deliver and that lapse in spiritual discipline eventually led to a downward turn in his physical and mental disciplines.

Think about Sampson who obviously had discipline of the body and spirit, but sometimes didn't always have the greatest mental discipline. He thought a bit much of his own strength which led to a breakdown of his physical and spiritual discipline.

So none of us are perfect when it comes to all aspects of discipline in our lives. If anything we have said up to this point has left you feeling bad or discouraged about yourself, I am here to let you know that you are not alone. Nobody is perfect, not even your favorite person from the Bible, and there is hope for you to improve. One mistake we make is getting an idea in our head that we can be really strong in one area of discipline in our lives, and that is enough. Let Sampson's story be a cautionary tale of what happens when you think that you are enough to do it on your own. You can be as physically strong as you want to be, but if it isn't paired with your mind and with your spirit, you will fall. They are interconnected, just like the roots we have been talking about. As you grow your roots, let them *all* grow deep!

Question 1:

I want to focus on one scripture today that I think will give us some resolution to this series, but first, it raises some questions we need to address. Read Matthew 26:36-46. *Why ask them to "keep watch" and "pray" if Jesus knows He will be arrested anyway?*

Jesus is not asking the disciples to prevent His arrest, change the outcome, or even to pray that the soldiers don't find them. He already knows the Father's will and has submitted to it in verse 39. The point of keeping watch was never control but participation.

Jesus is fully human here. Matthew tells us He is "overwhelmed with grief" (v. 37), even to the point of death" (v. 38). He asks them to stay awake because suffering is heavier when done alone. Their presence mattered to Jesus, even if it could not change the outcome. The tragedy is not that they couldn't stop the cross, but that they couldn't stay present with Him in the moment of trial, even though they knew it was the end.

Gethsemane is the disciples' testing just as much as it is Jesus'. He is telling them to prepare for this testing that is coming soon (v. 41). In a very short amount of time, Judas betrays Jesus, Peter denies knowing Jesus, and all of them flee. Jesus was asking them to watch because alertness and prayer is how they would have been strengthened for the coming crisis. The arrest was inevitable; their collapse was not.

Jesus was trying to teach them what obedience looks like under pressure: honest prayer, submission to God's will, and staying spiritually awake. They fail here—but this failure becomes part of their formation. Later, after the resurrection and Pentecost, they will remember this moment and understand what they lacked which gives them the resolve to spread the gospel even in the face of certain death.

Peter, James and John were not invited along to keep watch physically for what was coming, but to practice spiritual discipline so that when the time came they wouldn't fail.

Question 2:

What does Jesus mean when he tells Peter, James, and John, "Watch and pray so that you do not fall into the time of testing"? What time of testing?

In Scripture, "testing" often means pressure that exposes what is really shaping you and moments where fear, fatigue, or self-preservation can override faith. Jesus is warning them: This night will test who you truly trust.

Prayer is not about escape—it is about endurance and faithfulness. (Too often our prayers become this wishlist of items that we want from God instead of a prayer of endurance.) Jesus tells the disciples, "The spirit is eager, but the body is weak". This is not an insult. It is a diagnosis of the human condition. Time and time again as humanity, we have proven that we are in fact weak.

The disciples here genuinely loved Jesus. Peter especially means it when he says he will never abandon Him (Matt. 26:33). Their intentions are sincere. However, physical exhaustion, fear, emotional overload—all of these diminish spiritual resilience. Sleep here represents more than tiredness; it reveals unpreparedness for the test.

When Jesus says "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak", He means that good intentions are not enough in moments of testing. Without prayer and spiritual discipline, even sincere devotion collapses under pressure.

This explains why:

- Peter sleeps → then he denies Jesus 3 times
- The disciples sleep → then they scatter in fear

They were willing in spirit but unprepared for what was happening in that moment.

Notice the parallels in this scripture.

- Jesus prays with urgency while the disciples sleep repeatedly
- Jesus submits to the Father while the disciples follow natural instincts
- Jesus stays even when afraid while the disciples run when afraid

Gethsemane shows that spiritual strength is cultivated before the crisis, not in the middle of it.

Application for Us:

Jesus' words still apply. Watching equals spiritual attentiveness. Praying equals dependence on God rather than willpower. We often assume we'll be faithful when the moment comes. However, Jesus says faithfulness is shaped in advance, through prayerful attentiveness to God.

The warning is loving, not harsh. If you rely only on your good intentions, the pressure will be too much. Jesus is not saying, "Try harder." He is saying, "Stay awake to God." Watching and praying means:

- Paying attention to what is shaping you
- Anchoring yourself in God before crisis hits
- Recognizing that faithfulness is cultivated, not improvised

Contrasts of Gardens:

The Bible opens and closes key moments of human destiny in gardens, and Paul writes about it in Romans.

Read Romans 5:12-19. Adam is placed in a garden of abundance. He is well-rested, well-fed, and not under threat. God gives a clear command. When tested, Adam chooses his own will over God's. The result is that sin, exile, and death enter the world. Adam fails in a garden where obedience should have been easiest.

Jesus is in a garden of agony. He is exhausted, distressed, and facing suffering. He prays honestly: "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me." Yet he submits: "Not as I will, but as you will." The result is obedience that leads to redemption for all. Jesus obeys in a garden where obedience is hardest.

- Adam sought his own will while Jesus sought God's will
- Adam ate forbidden fruit while Jesus accepts the cup
- Adam brought death to humanity while Jesus brought life
- Adam hid from God while Jesus prayed to and sought God

The Point:

What's the point of all of this? Well... the choice is yours. You can choose to stay asleep. You can choose to become spiritually disciplined, so when the trials and hardships come your way, you are prepared to face them with grace and dignity just like Christ.

Every morning you wake up in a garden and get to choose between the trees. One is easier, but leads to death, root rot, and no fruit. The other is hard but leads to life. Remember that you are not alone, and you also have an example in Christ who can lead and guide you to a new place.

Remember earlier when I said that the scripture from Matthew was the perfect resolution to this series? It was because of this one line.... "*The spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak*". That is it. Our Minds and Bodies have to be in agreement with not *our* spirit... But *HIS*! It's not a

matter of learning how to become spiritually disciplined. It's about adopting His spirit and His nature as our own.

Read Luke 9:23-25 and Galatians 2:20. So how do we adopt God's spirit? We enter into a relationship with Him. We get to know Him through the word, reading scripture, and prayer. You will know when your spirit matches His when you start producing good fruit.

Reflection Questions:

- What does it mean to watch and pray? What would it look like for you to watch and pray?
- Consider the accounts of David, Jonah, and Samson.
 - How important is it to have a balanced discipline of the mind, body, and soul?
 - Is the discipline of your mind, body, and soul balanced in your life?
 - If not, where are your strengths and weaknesses? How can you build discipline in your weak areas?