



the fruitful been life

WEEK 5

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Day 29

Spiritual Workouts • Prayer

My first internship was done in a little town in Kansas, called Lamont. It had less than fifty people in the town and had two towns of less than five hundred on both sides of it. The church ran about a hundred and fifty, and by the end of the summer I had about sixty kids coming on Wednesday nights. Football was huge in this community, like it is in most Kansas towns, and a lot of my guys were on the football team.

Their team had won the state championship that year and they were ready for another season. I asked the youth group if they wanted to have an effective spiritual life, like that of the football season they had just won. They looked at me as if I was from another planet. I explained to them that just like working your muscle out to stay competitive in sports, we have to work at our spiritual disciplines to stay sharp in life.

Prayer is an amazing thing. Just think, the creator of the universe is waiting to hear from you, and in return wants to talk back. The person who created all existence is waiting to speak to you. This is bigger than meeting your favorite singer or sports hero. It is bigger than talking to the president or a king. God wants to listen and speak with you, and we treat it as if having teeth pulled.

James 5:16

We neglect prayer so much in our lives, yet we get frustrated when nothing is going our way, or when we don't get what we want. I find that often we don't know what we want. This was portrayed in an amazing way in the movie Bruce Almighty. Human beings have no idea what they want, and if they got what they wanted, the world would be a mess. That is why prayer is also about listening.

If we communicated with our friends the way we talk to God, we would probably be very lonely. You don't just talk to your friends and then walk away, or just ask them for things and ignore their response. When you ask for something you wait for the answer. So many times we feel like we are talking to the wall, but I wonder what God feels like when He is trying to talk to us. We are always talking and never listening. We pray with the wrong motives and don't get our prayers answered because we don't listen to what God has to say. If we would give Him a chance, maybe He would let us know what He would say yes to.

Instead of always asking for selfish things we would start asking about what is important. "Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done." Instead we ask for our will and our kingdom. This is why we feel like we are talking to a wall. We don't let God speak, and that is why we don't see fruit in our prayers.

So I challenge you to work your spiritual muscles like my youth group in Lamont. But remember there is a right and wrong way to work out, just as there is a right and wrong way to pray. -J.W.

Day 30

Fasting (X-Box Fast)

“Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason; and others have utterly disregarded it.”

John Wesley

Definition of Fasting: Abstaining from food for spiritual purposes.

Story: I had a student in my ministry tell me, “Nate, I can’t give up eating. I love food too much.” I said to this young man, “Listen, dude, you don’t have to give food up for the whole day, but take one meal and pray to God during that time.” I then talked to him about giving up X-Box for the day and taking those X-Box hours to focus in on God. I told him he could also help someone in need and spend that time focusing on God instead of playing video games.

Plain and simple, God wants us to focus on Him. At times it’s okay to sacrifice something of meaning to show our love for God. I hardly ever eat breakfast. I wouldn’t say it’s a planned fasting time, but often I use that time to focus in and pray to God.

Study project: Look at the people below. Study these people of faith and look at how they fasted and sought after God. Each one made fasting a part of their life. If they made it a part of their lives, shouldn’t we make it a part of ours? -N.K.

Moses	David, the king	
Elijah, the prophet	Esther, the queen	
Daniel, the seer	Paul, the apostle	Jesus

Practical Piece: Give up a meal or something of value to God. Take that time to focus on God instead of eating or playing video games. Check out the challenges below:

1. Try to think of one meal in this next week that you'll fast and devote that time to God. When will you fast this week? _____
2. Try to think of one whole day that you can give up something of importance to you to focus on God. What will this be? _____ When? _____

Day 31

Confession (I'm sorry, God.)

Scripture: Matthew 23:27-28

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Study Project: Look at the scripture above. Why do you think the religious people are afraid to confess what is going on inside them? Why do you think they act righteous on the outside? Have you ever met people that look like beautiful whitewashed tombs on the outside, but on the inside are dead bones? Don’t you think that our outside should match our inside? To me, true confession is being real with what is going on in the inside and the willingness to open up about what those sins are. Are you open about what your struggles are?

Story: Not long ago I spoke at a youth camp about being real and confessing our sins. I talked about how many people are not real about the struggles in their lives or the sin that they are dealing with on a daily basis. One thing I love about non-Christians is how real they truly are. They will be very open about the struggles they are facing. Christians are more secretive about their struggles. At this camp I challenged Christian students to be real and confess their sins to one another. God worked in amazing ways and students confessed their sins to God and decided to become real about their relationship with Christ. At that camp I realized that confession is not just repenting of our sins, but making a decision to be real and open about the struggles and sins we face on a regular basis.

Scripture: 1 John 1:9

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sin and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

The above scripture is one of my favorites. If we confess and are real about what we are confessing He can cleanse us and purify us from all sin. Wow, is that cool!

Practical Piece on Confession:

1. Take a 3x5 card and write down what your sin is on the piece of paper. When you are done, pray over that card and then rip it up into small pieces of paper and toss it into the garbage. Think about this activity. Think about how this represents Jesus tossing the sins we confess. -N.K.

Day 32

Meditation (What is it?)

Scriptures: Psalms 1:1-2

“Blessed is the man ...his delight is the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.”

Definition of Meditation: The ability to hear God’s voice and obey His word.

Illustration: I remember a class at Indiana Wesleyan University called “Spiritual Disciplines.” We were told in the last 30 minutes of that class to practice the spiritual discipline of meditation. Meditation was then explained to us. I remember returning to my room and trying my best to focus on meditating on God and on scriptures. But before I knew it, I was sound asleep. I totally failed in the spiritual discipline of meditation.

I realized later that my approach was wrong. And here is why I was wrong:

1. I went back to my room to meditate. This was a very bad idea because sleeping was the only purpose I used my dorm room for.
2. I didn't want to focus on God that day. My heart was not ready to meditate and learn from God. My purpose was not to meditate because God desires it, but because it was an assignment. I wasn't willing to hear from God and to allow Him to speak to me.
3. I also realized I didn't have a plan or a certain passage that I wanted to focus on. It was a matter of my heart and if I truly wanted to learn from God.

Activity on Meditation: Meditation is a time for thinking about God and allowing Him to speak. It sounds weird, but when we meditate on Him – we can feel Him. I want you to take a look at the scripture below. Read the scripture five times, slower and slower each time. Now think about the scripture. Think about how it relates to your life and think about what God is teaching you.

Romans 12:1-2 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Practical Piece:

1. What did you learn from the scripture above?
2. How can you apply the scripture above to your life?
3. What time works best for you each day to meditate on God's word?

Once I realized that if I desired to grow in Christ and learn from His word I needed to meditate on scripture and allow God to speak to me, that's when I truly understood meditation. -N.K.

Day 33

Secret Service
(Mission Possible)

Scripture: John 13:13-17

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

This scripture is awesome! Think about Jesus washing your feet and serving you in this way. Think about the fact that Jesus died for your sins and took all that pain so we could have Him in our hearts. He gave us the example that we should put other people before ourselves and serve others with a grateful heart.

Story: When I was in middle school I will never forget helping an organization called J.A.R.S. that delivered food to other countries. Our mission trip responsibility was to landscape and clean out a certain area near the J.A.R.S. property. I remember ripping out poison ivy, thorns and weeds. You name it; I tore it out of the ground. I was afraid of hurting myself and angry because of how hard I worked in the hot sun. I remember raking the field, taking all the weeds and tossing them into trash bags. We spent two whole days outside for eight hours cleaning. You may think I had a great servant-type attitude, right? My attitude was anything but Godly.

I remember thinking that no one said thank you for all the work I did. No one brought me water during the time I worked in that hot sun. No one seemed to landscape as well as I did. No one smiled as much as I did. No one in the organization saw what I did and the way I was serving. You see, I didn’t have an attitude of a servant. Instead, my attitude focused on me and my desires, not the needs and desires of others. I had an angry attitude and it bothered me that I wasn’t rewarded for my service to this organization.

Teaching Tip: Now that I am a little older and a pastor, I realize that organizations like J.A.R.S. hardly ever get encouragement for delivering food to other countries. Many of the missionaries serving in organizations like that one hardly ever get paid what they deserve. I thought about the amount of money pilots receive and then wondered how much the pilots for this organization receive. They fly across the seas, not for money, but to serve people and to help the hungry. Their reward is not money, but the gift of serving those in need. When you allow yourself to think about this you realize they serve with the right attitude. It's not about who knows what we do, but about serving Christ and others.

Final Challenge: Jesus was the greatest and He got on His knees and washed the disciple's feet. If our Master and King can do that, then I can clean a field and I can serve my church and community. Let's serve together, not for recognition, but for God. -N.K.

Day 34

Coaching

Scripture: Romans 15:14

Scripture: Romans 15:14

“I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.”

Story: I'll never forget walking into my professor's office in my junior year. I went there to withdraw from a class and I needed his signature. I had had this professor in a few classes and enjoyed a fairly good professor-student friendship with him. He told me that I needed to start taking my classes more seriously instead of socializing and being involved in the campus activities. He told me that I needed to become more organized or I would struggle throughout my ministry. He said, “Nathan, you're great at relating to people, but there is a lot more then just relating to people in ministry, it's called organization.” Needless to say that was hard to hear, but it was also one of the best teaching moments in my life. From that moment on, I started changing the way I studied. I started caring about and listening to what my professors had to say. When I did this, I watched my college grades improve. My professor instructed me in the way I should go and I listened to him.

Teaching Tip: My professor coached me and helped me with a weakness that existed in my life, but I also willingly received his coaching. Many times I see students, adults, and even children refusing to receive coaching. I needed this professor's boldness to speak truth to my life. I needed him to call out the flaws in my life so I could become a better leader.

My coaches in life:

My Dad: Dad taught me how to have a real passion for Christ and how to love people unconditionally. He taught me how to reach out to lost people. He coached me everyday in these areas.

My Mom: My mom taught me to be a servant. She also taught me how important it is not to need recognition and that it is okay to work behind the scenes. She showed me what it means to have a humble heart and serve like Christ.

Pastor Dennis and Pastor Pete: They taught me the importance of leadership and how leadership is what builds successful ministries.

Professor Jim Lo: He taught me the importance of encouragement, and he helped spark in me a passion for lost people. He also mentored me during my college years.

This list could go on and on. Plain and simple, these people coached me and I received it. Allow yourself to receive coaching and you will become a better person for it. God desires us to be teachable and open to correction and instruction. -N.K.

Practical Piece:

1. Who is a person you are receiving coaching from right now?
2. Are you open to instructions from other people?
3. Do you think if someone helped you, you might become a better Christian?

Day 35

Jesus Was All About Relationships

The coolest thing about Jesus is that He was about building friendships with people. He was about the community of Christians and also about the lost. There are five types of friendships that He built.

1. Jesus built a friendship with the Masses. He spoke to the masses of people. He walked around the communities healing the sick and loving people. One of my favorite stories is Jesus talking to and healing the man with Leprosy. He ministered to the masses through speaking and teaching, but He healed plus showed compassion and love to individual people as well.

2. Jesus built a friendship with the crowds: We've all heard the story about Jesus ascending into heaven. But do you remember when the followers of Christ were in the upper room? These were some of Jesus' closest friends that He lived with and built community with. These were people that He knew and loved.

3. Jesus built a solid friendship with the disciples: I love hearing about Jesus' disciples and all they experienced together. I love hearing stories of His disciples being stretched by Jesus' teachings and personal mentoring. The coolest thing about the disciples was that they continued His ministry after Christ left the earth. Now we are continuing what Jesus commanded us to do. Jesus had a deep friendship with the disciples. This impacted the world and many people received Christ because Jesus invested in twelve men. Billions and billions were reached from this friendship.

4. Jesus built a close friendship with His key leaders: Peter, James and John. Everyone has good friends, but only a few can you call brothers. Peter, James and John were Jesus' brothers. These were the people that Jesus formed the closest relationships with and ones that I imagine He invested in the most. Jesus loved them.

5. Jesus passed his ministry on to one: Peter. Jesus was about the masses, crowds, disciples, leaders and about one man too! Jesus saw something special in Peter and believed that Peter could have one of the biggest impacts for the Gospel. Jesus built His church on Peter. -N.K.

Practical piece:

1. Study about the masses and how Jesus reached out to those that didn't know Him.
2. Study the crowds (the upper room). Search and investigate who you think was with Him.
3. Study the twelve disciples and His three leaders and how that friendship was different.
4. Study Jesus' friendship with Peter and find out why the church was built with Peter in mind.