

Spiritual Disciplines: Assessment Pack



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Leader's Guide

How to use "Spiritual Disciplines: Assessment Pack" by SMALLGROUPS.COM in your regularly scheduled meetings

Welcome to SMALLGROUPS.COM. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you train and direct the leaders of your small-groups ministry. The material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders, and has been selected by the editors of LEADERSHIP Resources at Christianity Today International.

An "Assessment Pack" is a collection of tools that can be used individually or with a leadership team. Each tool has been designed to help measure some dimension of small-group ministry. This specific pack is designed to help individual leaders and group members evaluate their spiritual health by looking at the practice of several spiritual disciplines.

For example, to get a general overview of your spiritual health, see "Your Walk with God," by Kevin A. Miller (p. 3) or "Conducting a Spiritual Audit," by Fred Smith (p. 9). To evaluate your current need for a spiritual break, use "Balancing the Demands," by Kirk Byron Jones (p. 6). And use Bill Hybels' "Are You Emotionally Depleted?" (p. 8) to assess your current emotional reserves.

We hope you and your group members benefit from this resource as you take a step back and evaluate your overall spiritual health.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at SmallGroups.com.

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Your Walk with God

Ten key questions for assessing our devotional life

Matthew 22:35–37; Hebrews 10:19–25

For each statement, mark how true it is of you:

	<i>Not True of Me</i>			<i>True of Me</i>	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I thank God for something almost every day.					
2. I give God credit for everything I am and possess.					
3. It's part of my life to confess my sins to God.					
4. I try to listen to God in prayer.					
5. Every day, or almost, I read the Bible.					
6. I don't let guilt or failure keep me from returning to devotions.					
7. I apply the truth of the Bible to my life.					
8. I long to and work to be pure in body, mind, and spirit.					
9. My thoughts often turn to God during the day.					
10. When someone asks me to pray for him or her, I do.					

—KEVIN A. MILLER; copyright © 2006 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss

1. Individually, what are my areas of greatest strength? What needs more attention?
2. As a group, how would we answer these questions?
3. What might God be asking us to do so he can work more powerfully among us? What steps can we take today and in the coming weeks to improve in our areas of weakness?

Pray

As Peter called the people to do in Acts 3, invite God to bring times of refreshing to you and your church.



Excusing Our Time with God

Evaluating the four factors that determine all we do.

Jonah 1–2

Why do people avoid devotions? Social psychologists say there are four major factors undergirding any behavior. People weigh these factors when embracing or resisting an activity.

I use this excuse:
Often Sometimes Never

Will it work for me? For years Susan had kept her daily appointment with God. Then her 10-year-old son was hit by a car. After hanging on for two weeks, he died. Susan now says, “What’s the use of praying? I prayed harder in those two weeks than in my whole life, but Timmy still died!” Susan no longer has confidence that prayer makes a difference. She needs guidance to see if what she expects prayer to accomplish is realistic and biblical. She has taken one aspect of prayer, petition, and isolated it from others, such as submission, intimacy, and comfort (as in Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane).

Can I do it? Frank was enthusiastic about his faith, but when his pastor urged him to read the Bible each day, he thought, *I’ve never liked to read. I don’t even read the paper.* Frank’s struggle is with having confidence that he could successfully accomplish a task. Like the smoker who knows giving up cigarettes will improve his health but doesn’t think he has the willpower to quit, Frank believes reading the Bible would help him grow spiritually, but that his nonliterary mindset leaves him powerless to read it regularly. Several approaches can help Frank. One is to link him with people of similar abilities and backgrounds who regularly read Scripture. A second is to provide him with small experiences of success, to build his skills and morale. A third is verbal encouragement.

What’s it worth to me? Joanie thinks to herself, *I’ve enjoyed my life so far. How could spending time every day praying and reading the Bible make my life better?* Joanie is questioning the value of personal devotions. She expects that devotions will make her a better Christian, and she feels confident she could do them if she wanted to. But, she asks, “Why become a better Christian?” Of the four behavioral factors, this is the one most often overlooked. We assume that Christians will value the outcome of the spiritual disciplines, but outcomes are not valued unless they are defined, and that is not always easy to do.

What will it cost me? “What will I give up if I study this weekend?” asks Jeff. If it means missing a day at the beach with his girlfriend, the cost will be high. Jeff knows he can study effectively, believes studying will result in good grades, and realizes that good grades are important to his future—but he’d still rather go to the beach. For personal devotions, cost is often expressed as “I don’t have enough time.” Sleep, recreation, family, and work schedules all compete for the heart and the mind. The best way to help people count the cost is to strengthen the first three factors (expectations, skills, and values), which would make people more willing to pay the cost. Another approach is to lower the cost. For example, the novice, rather than being urged to practice a sweet hour of prayer each day, might be encouraged to spend five minutes a day in prayer and Bible reading.

—RICHARD P. HANSEN with DAVID WALL; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP Journal, © 1994 by Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. Which of these four factors most often undermines my devotional life?
2. How has our church communicated that a rich devotional life is worth the effort? How can we better communicate that message, both in our church and our group?
3. What can we do to help people overcome these barriers to having a vital devotional life?



Five Reasons We Hesitate to Pray

What keeps us from coming closer to God?

Psalm 5:3; Psalm 46:10

Several questions or concerns may bother you when you decide to move from mere attraction to serious practice of prayer. Consider how much you have asked each of the following:

	<i>Often Wonder</i>	<i>Sometimes Wonder</i>	<i>Never Wonder</i>
<p>1. Is God really approachable? Like Dorothy and her ragamuffin band on their way to Oz, we may need to find courage to come near God. I am amazed at how many people say they do not feel good enough to pray. They suspect God won't like them, let alone love them. We need to know if God will greet us when we come.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>2. Does God listen carefully? For prayer to seem real, we want to know that God will pay attention.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>3. What do I say when I pray? Are there certain words or phrases we need to use in prayer to get it right? Prayer sometimes seems like a complicated enterprise reserved for mystics.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>4. I used to feel closer to God; can I get that feeling back? If you were raised in a practicing religious household, the problem may not be lack of words or belief so much as a loss of spiritual energy. As hurried and harried as your schedule is, you realize that nothing less than heartfelt faith will keep you going in the practice of prayer.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>5. Will God respond to my prayers? We have all sincerely, desperately pleaded for some release from a prison of pain or illness, some hoped-for promotion or reprieve, only to experience disappointment with God's response. What if God turns a deaf ear?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Our not knowing exactly how prayer works need not keep us from its delights. That we fumble for words does not disqualify us. Prayer is for nonexperts. It is possible—and important—for the person with the slightest stirring of spiritual interest to pray. We can use simple words from the heart. "In the morning, O Lord," penned a psalm writer centuries ago, "you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation" (Ps 5:3).

—From *The Art of Prayer: A Simple Guide* by Timothy Jones, copyright ©1997 by Timothy Jones. Used by permission of Ballantine Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

Discuss

1. Which of these questions has been most common in my spiritual journey? What has helped me wrestle with that question? How can I help others do the same?
2. What Scripture passages speak to each of these questions?
3. What steps can we take as a group to increase our practice and understanding of prayer? What steps can I take individually?



Balancing the Demands

Do you need to find time for quiet solitude?

Psalm 23:2; 46:10

	<i>Often true of me</i>	<i>Occasionally true of me</i>	<i>Never true of me</i>
<p>1. I mentally put limits on the time I can spend with my family and close friends. When we don't take time for quiet meditation, our priorities can become skewed. Those closest to us may suffer most.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>2. I feel some resentment toward others about all I have to do. We need to realize God doesn't expect us to be all things to all people. If Jesus regularly found time to rest and renew his energies, why shouldn't we?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>3. Others ask, "Why do you look so down?" As church leaders, we may forget that God loves us for who we are, not for what we do. Reflecting on that truth can bring profound joy.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>4. I rush my listening and speaking in conversations. Jesus moved at what I refer to as a savoring pace—a speed of ministry characterized by peace, patience, and attentiveness.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>5. I am inflexible about my schedule. We need to learn to practice sanctified negligence. By taking time to be still in the presence of God, we may have to push some responsibilities aside, but the rest will justify itself in our readiness to follow through on our commitments.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>6. I get annoyed by surprises. Prepare yourself for the unexpected by intentionally setting aside a few moments of prayer each morning to welcome the day and its opportunities to offer and receive blessings.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>7. My spouse says I don't communicate with him/her. By communicating with God in restful seclusion, we filter our minds and are therefore able to communicate more positively with those closest to us.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>8. I say "yes" to more obligations, even when I'm screaming "no" inside. The next time you're asked, go away and pray about it before answering.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>9. Family time seems like a luxury in light of more pressing church obligations. I have determined to schedule my times of rest and renewal with my family with the same purposefulness that I schedule church responsibilities.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

—KIRK BYRON JONES; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP Journal, © 2001 by Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. What did you learn from these questions?
2. What deters you from spending quiet time with the Lord?
3. How do you try to balance family and church life?



Family Priorities

Here's how to rightly value your family.

Ephesians 4:1–16

I've lost track of the number of times people have told me of a decision they have made on the basis of the following priorities: (1) God, (2) family, (3) job. "Those are the Big Three," they smile and say. "Keep those straight and you'll keep your life straight before God."

A Place for the Church

I can't argue with number one, but I do have questions about numbers two and three. My most urgent question is, "Where does the church fit into this scheme?" The New Testament has much to say about the church and little to say about the family. The current focus on the family continually misses a crucial point: the family needs the church.

How do you view church involvement? (circle one)

- | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I view church involvement as a vital part of our family life: | <i>Definitely</i> | <i>Somewhat</i> | <i>Not at all</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When I am asked to get involved in church activities, I: | <i>Worry that it will interfere in family life</i> | | <i>Consider it a privilege</i> |

A Place for the World

Another question I have is, "Where does the world fit into this order of priorities?" More than once the command to go into all the world and make disciples has put a strain on family life. So has the call to be hospitable to strangers, visit the sick, feed the hungry, and clothe the naked. But today, Christians can avoid those problematic areas of discipleship in the name of sustaining the family life. The truth of the matter is that the family has become a convenient excuse for turning our backs on other people.

What's your attitude toward family time?

- | | | | |
|--|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I use family time as an excuse to avoid serving others: | <i>Often</i> | <i>Sometimes</i> | <i>Never</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Serving others is a high priority for my family: | <i>Definitely</i> | <i>Somewhat</i> | <i>Not at all</i> |

A Place for Singles

I also have a question about where single people fit into all of this. Forty-four percent of our population is single. If churches reflect this demographic in the least, a substantial number of Christians will find themselves outside the most acceptable arena for discipleship. The avenues for the pursuit of holiness must be broadened in the minds of evangelicals to include the single. After all, God's supreme will for us all is holiness, not matrimony. Marriage was made for people, not people for marriage.

What is your church's approach toward singles?

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single people have abundant opportunities to get involved in our church: | <i>Definitely</i> | <i>Somewhat</i> | <i>Not at all</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Our church offers guidance on how to lead a holy single life: | <i>Definitely</i> | <i>Somewhat</i> | <i>Not at all</i> |

A Place for Family

My last question is, "How does the family itself fit in with all of this?" How is it doing in the number two spot, just below God? Can it bear the weight of responsibility and expectation placed upon it? It is true that the family remains the best way the world has yet seen to produce civilized human beings. But it can't do it well without the extended family of the household of God.

What do I do in a family crisis?

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> When our family is facing problems, we seek help from the church: | <i>Always</i> | <i>Sometimes</i> | <i>Never</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I view fellow church members as an extended family whom I can support and be supported by: | <i>Definitely</i> | <i>Somewhat</i> | <i>Not at all</i> |

—BEN PATTERSON; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP Journal, © 1981 by Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. What value system do I use to make decisions?
2. How does our church minister to those not in a traditional family? Our small group?
3. How can our church be an extended support system for families? Our small group?



Are You Emotionally Depleted?

Determine if you need to recharge your emotional reserves.

Psalm 23

Sometimes problems in ministry can stem from emotional burnout. To determine if you need a break for some emotional renewal, assess yourself according to the following statements:

	<i>True of me</i>	<i>Somewhat true of me</i>	<i>Not true of me</i>
I feel morally vulnerable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am getting short and testy with people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel a desire to get out of God's work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have driven away from a leadership activity recently and said, "It would be fine if I never did that again."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When I drive home from work, I consciously hope my spouse isn't having a problem and my children don't want anything from me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When I study the Bible and pray, I am on autopilot.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am out of gas emotionally.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can't stand the thought of relating to people right now.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel the urge to take a long walk with no destination in mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel the need to go home, put on music, and let the Lord recharge my batteries.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

When you take an accurate, honest reading of your emotional gauge and find that it's reading low, you need to take time to recharge. Some people recharge by running, others by taking a bath, others by reading, and others by listening to music. Usually it means doing something totally unrelated to ministry—golfing, motorcycling, woodcarving. The important thing is to build a leadership and ministry schedule that allows adequate time for emotional recharging.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the use of your major spiritual gifts breathes life back into you. When you have identified your spiritual gifts and use them under the direction of Jesus Christ, you make a difference. You feel the affirmation of God. Many times you feel more energized *after* service than before.

—BILL HYBELS; originally printed in *Deepening Your Ministry Through Prayer and Personal Growth*, copyright © 1996 by Christianity Today International.

Discuss

1. What can I do to renew my energy and enthusiasm for my leadership role? For my spiritual life?
2. Is my attitude toward my family an indicator of my emotional state? What are some ways I can maintain the energy and resources I need to minister to my family?
3. Which phrase from Psalm 23 most speaks to me right now?



Conducting a Spiritual Audit

Twelve questions to keep your personal accounts in order.

2 Corinthians 13:5; Psalm 26:2

The CEO of a major firm once confessed to me, “I have a banker to keep me solvent, a lawyer to keep me legal, and a doctor to keep me healthy, but I have no one to help assess my spiritual condition.” I had never thought about such a thing: a “spiritual audit.” Since that time, I have accumulated twelve questions that I regularly ask myself.

	<i>True of me</i>	<i>Somewhat true of me</i>	<i>Not true of me</i>	<i>I could use help</i>
1. Am I content with who I am becoming? Every day I get one day closer to who I will ultimately be. Am I satisfied with who I will be?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Am I becoming less religious and more spiritual? The Pharisees were religious; Christ is spiritual. After years of involvement in organized religion, I often feel the shallowness of the experience, the restriction of the rules, and hunger for something truly spiritual in my relation with Christ.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Does my family recognize the authenticity of my spirituality? They see me whole. I must believe that if I am growing spiritually, my family will recognize it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Do I have a flow-through philosophy? Scripture says, “He that believeth in me, out of his innermost parts will flow rivers of living water.” The freshness is in the flow. If I have been blessed with leadership, that blessing should flow out of my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Do I have a quiet center to my life? Every Christian should have a quiet center that nothing can disturb. François Fenelon said, “Peace is what God wants for you no matter what is happening.”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Have I defined my unique ministry? Do I know what I can do effectively? The need is always bigger than any person can satisfy, and so my call is simply to handle the part of the need that is mine to do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Is my prayer life improving? I cannot evaluate when I am a man of prayer, but I can perceive progress if I am making it. One test is: Do my decisions have prayer as an integral part?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Have I maintained genuine awe of God? Awe overwhelms; it inspires worship.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Is my humility genuine? Nothing is so arrogant as false humility. Two definitions of humility I like: “Humility is accepting your strength with gratitude,” and “Humility is not denying the power that you have but admitting the power comes through you, not from you.”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Is my spiritual feeding the right diet for me? I’ve stopped calling my reading time “a devotion.” I call it “a feeding time” for my soul.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Is obedience in small matters built into my reflexes? Do I try to bargain with God or rationalize with him? Obedience largely determines my relation with Christ following new birth.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Do I have joy? Joy is promised to me. If the relation to Christ is right, I will have it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

—FRED SMITH; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP Journal, © 1998 by Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

RESOURCES



Additional Resources

Books, downloads, and websites to help your growth through the spiritual disciplines.

BuildingChurchLeaders.com. Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International.

- “How to Prevent Ministry Burnout” Survival Guide
- “Knowing God” Training Theme
- “Soul Care” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Spiritual Disciplines for Busy Church Leaders” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Finding Focus Through Spiritual Disciplines” Practical Ministry Skills

LeadershipJournal.net. A website offering practical articles and advice for church leaders.

Metamorpha.com. This is an online community for Christian spiritual formation.

Celebration of Discipline by *Richard Foster*. Foster’s masterpiece has served for over 25 years as a handbook on the central practices of the Christian faith (HarperSanFrancisco, 1988; ISBN 978-0060628390).

Invitation to Silence and Solitude by *Ruth Haley Barton*. This book is a great primer for the disciplines of silence and solitude (InterVarsity Press, 2004; ISBN 978-0830823864).

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life by *Donald S. Whitney*. This book is an invitation to the pursuit of holiness through a lifelong delight in the spiritual disciplines (NavPress, 1997; ISBN 978-1576830277).

The Rest of God by *Mark Buchanan*. This is an in-depth exploration of why the Sabbath is essential to the Christian faith (Thomas Nelson, 2006; ISBN 978-0849918483).

The Spirit of the Disciplines by *Dallas Willard*. A great book that can help us understand how God transforms our lives (HarperSanFrancisco, 1990; ISBN 978-0060694425).