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JOHN ZICK

FOREWORD BY DOUG CLAY

CHAPTER ONE

BUILD DISCIPLINES

In high school, I read a devotional about praying without ceasing.¹ *Well, that seems impractical*, I thought. *How can I pray all the time?* With sports, school, friends, and everything else important to a sixteen-year-old, I didn't know how I could do all of those things while also praying nonstop. Can you imagine? "Sorry I missed the catch, Coach. My eyes were closed because I was praying!"

As time passed, I couldn't stop thinking about it. I had to figure out what it actually meant. I finally went to my youth pastor and asked how it was possible to pray constantly with everything I had going on. He explained it like this: Praying without ceasing is an *attitude*. It's a practice of making Jesus a part of our daily lives, not just sitting with our heads bowed and eyes closed all day long. And we're urged to pray without ceasing because God wants to have a relationship with us! No prayer is too big or too small for God; He simply wants to be involved in our lives. We invite Him to be involved when we talk to Him.

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We see this idea play out in the Parable of the Persistent Widow, an illustration Jesus used to encourage His disciples to never stop praying.² Simply put, a widow continually visited an unjust judge, asking him to give her justice against her enemy. Her request was so persistent that the judge helped her because he couldn't take her visits any longer. The point is, if an unjust judge hears our request, how much more is our loving Heavenly Father ready to hear us and act on our behalf when we call out to Him?

I'm not going to tell you that building this spiritual discipline was easy because it wasn't. Even after choosing to make Jesus a part of my daily life, many times I would be getting ready for bed and realize it was the first time I was praying that day – sometimes it was the first time I was even *thinking* about Jesus! But I would excuse it and tell myself, *No big deal. I'll do better tomorrow.* The cycle continued day after day, week after week. **No matter how hard I tried to build this discipline, I couldn't seem to get into a pattern of praying without ceasing.**

Then one night it hit me: *I can ask Jesus to help me make Him a part of my everyday life, right?* It might sound kind of sad, having to ask for help to make the Savior of the world a part of my day. But in reality, there is no shame in asking for help when you're having a hard time, or you know you can't do something on your own. After that prayer, I got the idea to put reminders in my phone so that every hour it would buzz with a prompt to pray.

It was a process. There's this idea that it takes 21 days to build a habit. But according to a 2009 study, building a new habit can take anywhere from 18 to 254 days – the average being 66 days.³ Looking back, I recognize that it took several months of my phone buzzing, stopping everything I was doing, and saying a quick, simple prayer before I noticed a change.

At some point, I realized I was actually *beating* the reminder buzz. I was including this mindset, this attitude of praying without ceasing into my daily life – and it was becoming a habit! I was growing and the spiritual disciplines I was asking God for were becoming real.

Obviously, building this discipline was not easy. **Even if you are determined to build a specific discipline in your life like I was, it doesn't mean that it will come naturally or without some sort of effort on your part.** It takes intentionality, it takes diligence, and it takes time. But, the investment you make when establishing disciplines always pays off and the results are totally worth it!

One of the most famous men in the Bible, Paul was a leader and teacher in the Early Church. In the thirteen New Testament books he wrote, Paul covered various topics including spiritual disciplines. He spoke from experience, because he had one of the most miraculous transformations in all of Scripture.⁴ His conversion on the road to Damascus was a call to advance the gospel, which meant he had to shift from persecuting Christians to recruiting Christians.



Apostle Paul

He had to break *years* of bad habits and replace them with new ones – habits that glorified Christ and brought hope to the people around him.

One of his books, 1 Corinthians, is a letter to the church of Corinth addressing some of the serious problems in the church and providing godly counsel

and guidance. At one point, Paul specifically focused on the intentional training that must take place to successfully discipline ourselves spiritually: “So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.”⁵

“Run with purpose.” What does that mean? In Scripture we are told that we – all people – were created *on*

In Scripture we are told that we—all people—were created *on purpose for a purpose.*

purpose for a purpose. Beginning in Genesis 1, we read that we are made in God’s image,⁶ which means every person has tremendous value in God’s eyes. He knows everything about us –

our passions, thoughts, struggles, triumphs – even before we are formed in our mother’s womb because He planned for you and me!⁷ To honor God and His purposeful creation,

like Paul, we should run with purpose. It's the least we can do for the Creator of the world, the One who knit each of us together and gives our lives meaning.⁸ Again, it will take time and effort on our part, but sacrifices are worth making to build habits and disciplines that will move you forward into your calling.

In his autobiography *Just As I Am*, the great evangelist Billy Graham shared many moments in his own ministry journey when he had to choose to run with purpose. These stories tell how he would practice his preaching any time he could, regardless of the occasion.

During his college years, he was invited to preach over the summer – which for most students is a sacred time to do absolutely nothing. But, Graham seized those opportunities because he saw beyond what was right in front of him. One particular summer, he had an opportunity to participate in a two-week evangelistic series. Graham said, “I was developing the basics of my own preaching style and my approach to giving the invitation to come to Christ.”⁹

How did he do this? While staying with Reverend Cecil Underwood, Graham said he would walk the streets around Underwood's house practicing his sermons and praying. This



Rev. Billy Graham

is the reason millions came to know Christ under Graham’s ministry – he ran with purpose! Even though he had to sacrifice things like his summer vacation, Graham saw the importance of developing his gifts and establishing habits because God had called him to something bigger. And the intentional investment in building these disciplines sustained him for over sixty years of healthy ministry.

The spiritual disciplines we need to sustain us in life don’t come naturally. Think about sports. While natural talent or ability contributes to success, that’s only part of the equation; discipline is a basic part of athletics. What can make or break an athlete is the determination to work hard and dedication to their training.

We know the average person can’t pick up a tennis racket and serve an ace to Venus or Serena Williams or lace up their spikes and beat Usain Bolt in a sprint. It takes a lot of time and effort – hours, months, and even years of practice – to build endurance or perfect form and technique.



Venus and Serena Williams

This idea isn’t just limited to sports. Maybe you want to create music like Ludwig van Beethoven or paint masterpieces like Leonardo da Vinci. Maybe you are passionate about science like Marie Curie or innovative technology like Steve Jobs. These “greats” didn’t become great

BUILD DISCIPLINES

without commitment and hard work. Regardless of what interest you are pursuing or goal you are hoping to achieve, the idea is the same: “Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment.”¹⁰

It’s safe to say that the disciplines you create will last a lifetime. So, what behaviors, actions, and practices are you repeating? Whether they lead to good or bad, life-giving or draining, effective or ineffective habits, all depend on what you do on a day-to-day basis. It may not be fun. It may feel tedious. It may be hard to see the long-term effects. But every decision you make and action you take affects what you do in the future.

For example, choosing not to cheat on a test can help train your brain not to steal. Or learning how to navigate a fight with a friend instead of giving up can teach you how to address conflict in your marriage. The list can go on and on. The point is, the choices we make may seem small, but they have lasting effects.

This is why we, as believers, have to be deliberate and purposeful about the habits we create. Habits, routines, and disciplines don’t come naturally – they are built over time, which means we get a say in what we build.

"Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishments."

I had no idea how hourly reminders on my phone would affect many other situations over the course of my life. In that situation I knew my end goal – the habit I wanted to build – was to pray without ceasing. And that

little buzz set the tone (no pun intended) for how I was choosing to discipline my body to do what it should.

Success for believers is fulfilling our God-given destiny.

God calls people to professions, communities, and even seasons; but it still takes intentionality and discipline on our part to achieve success in those areas.

If you are reading this right now, it's likely because you feel God calling you to ministry. (Cue inspirational music.) That is what God created you for – it's the purpose He had in mind for you even before you were alive! You are a part

Fires die when they're not being fed, so what will you do to keep your fire going?

of His ultimate plan to **cover the earth** with His love. Here's the thing: Your calling is bigger than you are. That statement might sound scary, but the Bible promises that we are not in it alone. The

Bible says, "If God is for us, who can ever be against us?"¹¹

So, hear this as all of the possibilities and opportunities you will have while pursuing your calling. Hear it as an assurance that God will lift you up as you trust in Him and His ability.¹² Hear it as a prompt to ask God to help you "accomplish . . . good things."¹³ Hear it as a guarantee that with God, nothing is impossible.¹⁴

Pursuing your calling is a lifelong process. At times, you won't feel very excited or inspired to push through – that's normal. Fires die when they're not being fed, so what will you do to keep your fire going?

MAKE IT PLAIN

There are three areas in your life where you can (and should!) start building healthy spiritual disciplines now. You don't have to wait until you graduate high school, get a degree, have a family, or get that dream job. Prayerfully consider how you can start now with what you already have.

Spiritual Health Your Closeness with God

Your spiritual health should be the top priority in your life. Jesus demonstrated the importance of an intimate relationship with the Father, and what better example to follow than the Son of God?

During His time on earth, Jesus made it a priority to be alone with God; He regularly withdrew from the crowds, His disciples, and the general demands of ministry to spend time with God.¹⁵ There were a number of times when Jesus went away to pray – from choosing His disciples to preparing for His death on the cross.¹⁶ But the reason was the same: Jesus desired to connect with His Father in heaven, to talk to Him and hear from Him, to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, to gain the wisdom and power that only comes when we spend time alone with God.

Learning to trust and obey God – establishing a relationship with Him through the discipline of prayer –

helps us build a solid foundation. And when our foundation is built on Jesus Christ, the Solid Rock, there is no storm that we won't be able to withstand.

“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.”¹⁷

Sadly, people sometimes take shortcuts in building their foundation. Maybe they take the easy route, compromising on things that are important to them or settling for how things have always been done. Taking shortcuts is appealing because it can be faster, easier, and seem better; but when the storm hits, it exposes all the ways a person has cut corners.

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This happens to people who are called to ministry. There are too many stories about peo-

ple in ministry who fail because they weren't disciplined when it came to building their foundation. Even if it was unintentional, they formed bad habits – sacrificing quality

for efficiency. It's incredibly important to heed the advice in Matthew 7 by investing time and effort into building a strong foundation the right way. There is a difference between knowing the right thing and training yourself to do the right thing – that is where disciplines come in!

Mental Health

Your Awareness of Yourself

Having the knowledge of who God created you to be is not only powerful information to know, but also crucial. Your true identity in Christ is not about anything external – grades, jobs, finances, or appearance. **It's about who you are and whose you are.** You need to know, understand, and accept that you were created in the image of God.¹⁸ He has a divine plan and purpose for your life so you can impact others through the ministry He has called you to.

Yet, we have an enemy who has come “to steal and kill and destroy.”¹⁹ The devil is not the little cartoon figure on your shoulder debating with the angel on your other shoulder. He is a deceiver, a schemer, and a liar at his core.²⁰ The last thing he wants is for you to walk in the fullness of who God created you to be.²¹ Instead the devil is doing everything in his power to make you believe the lies that you are ill-equipped, unqualified, and incompetent to fulfill your calling.

He may tempt you with comparing yourself to the people around you; he may try to convince you that you



Darby Zick

didn't really hear God's voice; he may guilt you with past mistakes all in an effort to distract you from becoming a healthy person and leader. This is why we need to be aware of who he is and guard against his schemes.

Growing up, my mom said the same thing to my siblings and me *every single day* as

we left for school: **"Remember who you are."** It's a simple statement, but those four words have stuck with me and challenged me more times than I can count. Who am I? Who are you? According to Ephesians 1, we are loved and chosen by God; we are adopted into His family; we are redeemed and forgiven; we have the hope of being with God for eternity.²²

These truths are just that – truths. That means our identity in Christ cannot and will never change based on

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anything we do. For me, understanding these truths provided a greater sense of my spiritual identity as a child of God and helped me to accept it for myself. You need to live life out of the identity God has designed you. You were created on purpose for a

purpose by the ultimate Creator. The One who spoke the earth into existence breathed His breath into your lungs.²³

You are not a mistake; the gifts, talents, and passions you possess were intentionally given to you so you can fulfill the call God has on your life. No one else can do what you do like you. **As a part of the body of Christ, you are essential to God's plan for the world.** Living confidently in that knowledge frees you to do what He has specifically created you for.

Relational Health

Your Closeness with Others

When speaking to His disciples, Jesus made a rather bold statement about loving one another: “So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”²⁴

The Bible tells us that healthy relationships are the most important things in life, the most important being our relationship with God. But here, we're going to focus on our relationships with the people around us.

Take a minute to really hear this: If we can't have healthy relationships with others, the world – those we have been put here to reach – will not be able to tell the difference between a nonbeliever and a believer. That's not okay. We are called to be set apart, not to conform to the behaviors

If we can't have healthy relationships with others, the world—those we have been put here to reach will not be able to tell the difference between a nonbeliever and a believer.

or practices of the world.²⁵

Our ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships will naturally set us apart from the culture.

The apostle Paul told us that believers are to show compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love to those around us;²⁶ yet too often there is hurt, misunderstanding, and pride in people's hearts that can cause or contribute to broken relationships. It can be challenging to kill those negative emotions and treat others better than they treat us. It's not our human nature to give people the benefit of the doubt. When we are hurt or taken advantage of, we can feel angry, disappointed, or bitter.

However, we are called to reflect Christ's love to those around us and ***cover the earth*** with it. The qualities listed above are all reflected in Jesus Christ – He was kind, compassionate, patient, loving, and forgiving. As we model these qualities in our relationships, we are actually becoming more like Jesus. And the more we look like Him, the easier it becomes to see people as He sees them – as sons and daughters of God who were created in His image – and treat them like He would.

First Corinthians 13, also known as the “love chapter,” gives us more specifics about what Christ's love looks like:

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.²⁷

This is how Jesus loves us! **We don't get to pick and choose when to apply this information.** If more people would approach every relationship with this verse as their guiding principle, there would not be as many issues in establishing and preserving healthy relationships.

How can you start building health in these three areas now?

Read the Bible. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. It has the power to change us from the inside out, so we need to spend time reading it if we want to grow and establish health in these areas. The Bible gives advice, helps us to make good decisions, encourages us to overcome old habits, and teaches us to have self-control. Most importantly, it helps us learn the truth about Jesus and ourselves. We gain a deeper understanding of God's heart toward us. I like to say it's the ultimate cheat code for life. We can trust what it says, but before we can trust it, we have to know it.

Journal. Write out your thoughts. Journaling offers general health benefits: it can manage stress, boost your mood, and help process thoughts and emotions. It's a great discipline to have! Journaling allows you to write down what God is speaking to you, how He's working in your life, and what you're learning as you walk with Him. One of the best parts about journaling is that you have a written account if you ever need to be reminded of God's promises when circumstances are telling you a different story.

Pray.²⁸ It can be a hard discipline to learn especially in our fast-paced culture, but simply sitting and spending time with God is essential. No time is ever wasted when it's spent in His presence; the One who intentionally created you wants to be in relationship with you. God has a specific will and design for your life. Spending time in His presence helps you know what that plan is. It's crucial that you invest in your relationship with Him: express your thankfulness, tell Him how much you love Him, and set aside time to sit and listen to Him speaking to you.

Creating and establishing disciplines doesn't happen overnight – it's a process that will take time, effort, determination, and intentionality. Even learning how to build disciplines can take time, so don't hurry through this content. Prayerfully consider the call God has placed on your life and ask Him to help you determine what disciplines to invest in and develop now.

**Take some time to answer the following questions
and share them with someone you trust.**

1

From this chapter, what stuck out to you the most? Why did it stand out?

2

Out of the three areas—spiritual, mental, or relational health—which one do you feel the most disciplined in?

3

Out of the three areas, which one do you feel like God is challenging you to get better in?

4

What are some lies that you have believed about yourself and what truths will you replace them with?

Check out more resources regarding disciplines at:
called.ag.org

Notes

- 1 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (KJV).
2 Luke 18:1–8.
3 Philippa Lally, “How Are Habits Formed: Modelling Habit Formation in the Real World,” July 16, 2009, accessed January 28, 2021, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/ejsp.674> (accessed January 28, 2021).
4 Acts 9.
5 1 Corinthians 9:26–27.
6 Genesis 1:27.
7 Psalm 139:16; Jeremiah 1:5.
8 Psalm 139:13–14.
9 Billy Graham, *Just As I Am* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2007), 58.
10 Jim Rohm as quoted in Justin Bryant, “Discipline Is the Bridge Between Goals and Accomplishment” *SelfMade Success*, May 27, 2016, accessed January 28, 2021, <https://selfmadesuccess.com/discipline-is-the-bridge-between-goals-and-accomplishment>.
11 Romans 8:31.
12 James 4:10.
13 2 Thessalonians 1:11.
14 Luke 1:37 (ESV).
15 Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:12–13, 35; 6:46; 14:32; Luke 5:16; 6:12.
16 Luke 6:12–13; 22:39–44.
17 Matthew 7:24–27.
18 Genesis 1:27.
19 John 10:10.
20 John 8:44.
21 Ephesians 3:19.
22 Ephesians 1:3–14.
23 Genesis 2:7.
24 John 13:34–35.
25 Romans 12:2.
26 Colossians 3:12–14 (NIV).
27 1 Corinthians 13:4–7.
28 In Matthew 6:5–13, Jesus gave us a clear outline on how to pray.

CALLED

**Cover the earth.
You have been called for such a time as this!**

The ultimate Creator created. He fashioned you with a specific destiny in mind. You are chosen. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. It's a mandate given that no man can retract. It's a specific piece to the puzzle, a call to ministry.

Regardless of your journey, the mistakes you've made, the regrets you have, you have a purpose. You can run from it, but you can't give it away. It's yours! It's precious! It's sacred!

YOU. ARE. CALLED.

Called to **cover the earth** with the love of Jesus!

In this book, you'll learn about steps you can take to start your journey into the ministry, even while you're still a student. Don't wait—start answering His call right now!



JOHN ZICK has been in full-time youth ministry for over a decade. John's passion is to make Jesus famous throughout the globe. His mission is to see believers walking in their God-given design and working together as the body of Christ to cover the earth with the gospel. John is an ordained minister through the Assemblies of God. He and his wife, Alicia, currently have two sons and reside in Springfield, Missouri.

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