



Do you want to become the kind of man who walks with God and influences our world for Christ? You'll need a regimen of spiritual exercises. Morley highlights twelve habits that will strengthen your walk with Christ. Each discipline is presented with a concise overview, relatable stories, and application ideas.

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Imagine you're a baby chick inside an egg about to hatch. It's a dark little world, and the only reality you've ever known.

But instinctively you peck, peck, peck away at the shell. Suddenly, a pinhole of light appears. Your adrenaline kicks in. You feel excitement and curiosity, but also trepidation and fear. You feel compelled to find out what's on the other side. You keep pecking away until the shell cracks open and falls away.

You squint until your eyes adjust to the light. You look to your left. You look to your right. Filled with awe, you blurt out, "I had no idea! Where has all this been?" That bigger world was always there of course. You just couldn't see it.

In many ways, the same is true for us spiritually.

I've never met a man who doesn't want spiritual insight. Yet, we often miss the spiritual connections that are present in the common details of everyday life.

Every day, we are walking around in this shell of what we can tangibly see and touch. But there's a whole other spiritual dimension that we can also experience—if we know how to crack through the thick shell of this world's darkness.

The spiritual disciplines are here to help you crack your way completely out of the shell. Before we dive in, let's make sure we agree on a few things.

WHAT THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES ARE AND ARE NOT

A man said, half-jokingly, "Do me a favor. Tell me how to be good. I already know how bad I am." That sentiment captures the purpose of the twelve spiritual disciplines.

The spiritual disciplines are very specific tools, resources, and practices that will equip you to reflect honestly, pursue God wholeheartedly, and live vibrantly.

As important and valuable as they are, spiritual disciplines do nothing to improve your record with God. They are not necessary to make God happy (or avoid His wrath). Through Christ, you already have all the merit you need. We place our trust in God—not in the disciplines. The disciplines are not ends in themselves—they are means to an end.

The disciplines are 100 percent about God—both knowing Him and knowing about Him. Knowing Him is communion. Knowing about Him is discipleship. Both are essential.

Anyone who has ever excelled at anything understands the benefits of discipline—every parent, athlete, scientist, soldier, business owner, and so on.

Most of us also understand what happens when we don't have discipline. Consider two twenty-five-year-old men. One works out at the gym and the other doesn't, but you don't see any visible difference. By the age of forty, however, it's obvious who exercises his body. And when they turn sixty-five, which one is more likely to be washing down a dozen different prescriptions every day?

What's the difference? Self-discipline. As my mentor Jim Gillean taught, "You can choose your way but not the result."

The problem is that the benefits of discipline (in any arena) are not usually immediate. We often find self-discipline hard, don't see quick results, and are tempted to give up without allowing enough time for discipline to work.

That's why sometimes you have to substitute discipline for a lack of natural motivation. But if you will do what you don't naturally want to do, you will get what you truly need.

That's what the disciplines can do for you. Make them into habits, and they will always be at your fingertips to help you:

- Know Him better.
- Know more about Him.
- Discover His Will.
- Be transformed into His likeness.
- Receive power to abide in Him.
- Learn how to love Him with your whole heart.
- Desire to sacrificially serve others for the greater good.
- And so much more.

Sound attractive? You can get there from here.

FOUR WAYS THAT GOD COMMUNICATES

Hearing God is simple but not easy. The Bible tells us God has, on occasion, spoken to men from burning bushes or pillars of fire. But even in ancient days, those experiences weren't common. Fast-forward to today, and probably none of us know anyone who has heard God speak in that way. So how does God speak to men now? God reveals Himself every day in four ways:

- Through His works
- Through His Word
- Through the "whisper" of the Holy Spirit
- Through the witness of believers

Here is a preview of the disciplines we will study, organized around the four ways that God communicates with us.

First, *God communicates through His works*. The psalmist explained, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1). Theologians call this *general revelation*, noting that it is available to all people all over the world. This will be the subject of chapter 2, “A Man and Creation.”

Second, *God communicates through His Word*. Psalm 19:7 says, “The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul.” Theologians call this *special revelation*. This will be the subject of chapter 3, “A Man and Scripture.”

Third, *God communicates through the “whisper” of the Holy Spirit*. Picture a cube of space in front of you, twelve inches on all sides. Within that one-foot cube are all of today’s news, radio programming, cellphone conversations, podcasts, and much more. But to hear any of it, you have to be on the right frequency. In the same way, the Spirit’s voice is right in front of us, but we won’t hear Him unless we tune in to His frequency. In addition to the Bible (all inspired by the Holy Spirit), in chapters 4–10 we will drill down on several other ways you can tune in to what the Holy Spirit has to say on:

- A man and worship
- A man and prayer
- A man and the Sabbath
- A man and a small group
- A man and counsel
- A man and fasting
- A man and spiritual warfare

Fourth, *God communicates through the witness of believers*. The first nine disciplines are mainly for us. In the next three chapters (part 4), we will explore disciplines that will help you express neighbor-love to others:

- A man and stewardship
- A man and service
- A man and witnessing

There are many other disciplines too. All are helpful, but the twelve we're going to explore are core disciplines for the man who wants to experience what's on the other side of the shell.

THE NEED TO REFLECT

A study was conducted at the University of Virginia. Researchers asked a group of volunteers to sit in a room for ten to twenty minutes and not say or do anything. No devices or activities of any kind were permitted in the room, and they had two rules: they couldn't get out of their chairs or fall asleep.

But first, they showed them a button that they could press in order to receive an electric shock. Each volunteer was asked to press the button once before starting. They all reported that it felt terrible—so bad that most of them were willing to pay money to not be shocked again!

Finally, they put them in the room. After twelve minutes, 25 percent of the women and 70 percent of the men couldn't sit there before they shocked themselves again.¹

French philosopher Blaise Pascal said, "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone."² If Pascal's observation—albeit somewhat hyperbolic—rang true in the 1600s, how much more does it ring true for us today with smartphones and social media at our fingertips?

So find a quiet place and let's begin our journey with a look at how you can hear and see God through His creation.

PART 1

*Discipline
Related to the
Works of God*

2

A MAN AND CREATION

PREVIEW

In this chapter we will examine what God says about His creation. We'll:

- See how nature reveals God's character.
- Learn why it's important to cultivate an attitude of enjoying God's creation.
- Consider positive ways to begin incorporating this discipline into daily life.

Let's begin this chapter with a brief pop quiz to test your creation IQ.

1. Circle the answer that best reflects how you regard creation.

Creation is:

Good

Evil

Neutral

2. Which of the following best describes the relationship between creation (nature, the universe) and God?
 - a) Nature hints of God.
 - b) Nature reveals God.
 - c) Nature conceals God.
 - d) Nature tarnishes God.

Let's explore how the Bible answers these two questions.

THE BIBLE ON NATURE

Regarding his days as an atheist, C. S. Lewis explained an epiphany that started him on a path to believe in God. He wrote,

Look at the universe we live in. By far the greatest part of it consists of empty space, completely dark and unimaginably cold. It is improbable that any planet except the Earth sustains life. And Earth herself existed without life for millions of years and may exist without life for millions more when life has left her. And what is it like while it lasts? It is so arranged that all the forms of it can live only by preying upon one another. In the most complex of all the creatures, Man, yet another quality appears, which we call reason. It enables men by a hundred ingenious contrivances to inflict a great deal more pain than they otherwise could have done on one another and on the irrational creatures.

This power they have exploited to the full. Their history is largely a record of crime, war, disease, and terror, with just sufficient happiness interposed to give them, while it lasts, an agonized

apprehension of losing it, and, when it is lost, the poignant misery of remembering. . . .

There was one question which I never dreamed of raising. If the universe is so bad, or even half so bad, how on earth did human beings ever come to attribute it to the activity of a wise and good Creator? Men are fools, perhaps; but hardly so foolish as that.¹

C. S. Lewis's insight brings up an important question: Is creation good, evil, or neutral? Author Leonard Sweet helps us uncover the answer in his book *Soul Tsunami*. His mother was a traveling evangelist, and their church was quite legalistic. The Sweet family bought their first TV when sets first became available. One night they heard a knock on the door. The pastor dropped by to visit, and the TV happened to be on.

The pastor peered in and said, "So it's true. You have bought the devil's blinking box." Leonard's mother argued that matter is not evil—it's what people do with matter that makes it evil. Still, the Sweet family was put out of the church for having the "devil's blinking box."

Mrs. Sweet was right. *Nothing* in God's creation is inherently evil—not thunder, lightning, storms, movies, or television signals. And yet, because of what happened to the world when Adam and Eve sinned, thunder can scare your children, lightning can hit your home and start a fire, storm winds can split a tree that crashes into your living room, movies can debase human beings, and television and the internet can send vulgarity to your ears and lust to your eyes.

Nevertheless, the Bible says, "The whole earth is *full* of his *glory*" (Isaiah 6:3, emphasis added). This used to bother me, because "the whole earth" is also full of *evil*. And we also see a third force at work in the world: *futility*, or that which simply doesn't matter. I wondered, *How could the earth be full of God's glory when there is so much evil and futility?*

Then one day, I was struck with an analogy that might seem unusual when you first read it. I'm sort of a health nut. Because glucose is a primary source of energy, I decided to research how it works in the human body. As I studied, I discovered that glucose is a three-part compound: $C_6H_{12}O_6$ —six parts carbon, twelve parts hydrogen, six parts oxygen. So

glucose is full of oxygen, but not only oxygen; it is also full of carbon and hydrogen. In the same way, the earth really is full of God's glory, despite also being full of evil and futility. They coexist.

The Bible also says, "For everything God created is good" (1 Timothy 4:4). Colossians 1:16 goes even further: "For by [Jesus] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him."

Here's the bottom line: 1) God made everything. 2) Everything God made is good. Therefore, 3) everything is intrinsically good. That doesn't mean nature is incorruptible, but it does imply that nature has meaning and value. The Bible tells us that *apart from sin*, nature is good.

According to his wife, Edith, theologian and philosopher Francis Schaeffer would often say, "There is a lot of leftover beauty in nature."² Or as Sam said to Frodo at a point of despair in the movie adaptation of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Two Towers*, "There's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for."³

For our belief system to hold together, we must explain evil, but that's not very hard. Evil wasn't part of the original plan. The sin of Adam and Eve introduced every bad thing that exists in creation. You'll find that event recorded in Genesis 3, where Adam and Eve were tempted and sinned. Humanity has been sinning ever since.

Now back to question #1: Is creation good, evil, or neutral? Do you need to change *your* answer?

TO SEE GOD IN CREATION

Now to the second question in our pop quiz: Does nature *hint of, reveal, conceal, or tarnish* God? Theologians describe two ways God reveals Himself to men and women. They call the Bible God's *special revelation*, and they call creation (or nature) God's *general revelation*. This is the idea that nature "reveals" a "general" knowledge to everyone about God's essence and characteristics. As John Calvin is quoted, "The painter reveals something of himself in his painting."⁴

When we watch a blood-red sunset disappear over the horizon, lilies sway in a field, or baby ducks paddle for all they're worth to keep up with mama duck, we also get a glimpse of God.

The first half of Psalm 19 describes how God speaks through His works. It begins like this: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day, they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard." The psalmist describes a God whose voice can erupt in peals of thunder, or be heard in a quiet gust of wind that rustles a glorious display of autumn leaves.

Everyone has seen God's hands at work in His creation. In fact, the apostle Paul noted, "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

You can experience creation through your senses—you can see it, smell it, hear it, touch it, taste it. Nature will not necessarily lead you to salvation, but it will reveal God's grandeur and give you tangible evidence of His invisible qualities. As a spiritual habit, I don't know a better way to experience awe than to observe God as the Creator of the heavens and earth.

So back to question #2: Does nature hint of God, reveal God, conceal God, or tarnish God? Nature *reveals* God. Knowledge of the invisible God is revealed by contemplating His visible creation.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PURSUING GOD IN CREATION

What's the best way to observe God in creation? Is it to gaze upon its beauty? To look with amazement at man himself, created in God's image? Or stand in awe of human accomplishments? After all, people have created airplanes, spaceships, the internet, smartphones, and computers. They've explored land and sea, the expanses of space and the microbiome of the human body. They've found miracle medical cures. The list can go

on and on. So which more clearly reveals God—raw nature, humanity, or the works of humanity?

Okay, this is a trick question, because the answer is . . . we can see God in all three places. This is a powerful truth, freeing us from the tendency to segment our lives into “Christian” and “secular” categories. We don’t have to live in a world where Bible study is *Christian* (“good”), and work is *secular* (“bad”). Everything God made is good: 1) God reveals Himself in creation. 2) He reveals Himself through His reflection in mankind. 3) He reveals Himself through our accomplishments as well.

Pursue God’s Creation by Marveling at Nature

You may put this book down and walk outside to enjoy the beauty of your yard. You might go to the mountains or to the beach for a weekend break. Perhaps you live in a city, but you can still do what I love to do—look up at the nighttime sky and drink in the stars.

I love to sit in my backyard before dawn, gazing up into the sky. In that quiet moment, when a tangible hush rests on my neighborhood, before kitchen lights announce the day’s beginning, and the engines rev and car doors slam, I think about Psalm 8: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?” (verses 3–4).

You can pick up a book about any topic, and you will find that it communicates something about its author. Similarly, creation offers its own message of beauty and grandeur, and it also communicates something about its Creator. It gives perspective. Nature reveals God’s invisible qualities, His eternal and infinite power, His divine nature. When I sit in my backyard and stare at the stars and the planets and the moon, I am humbled by God’s greatness. Yet I also am encouraged by His willingness to stoop into my world and pursue me.

Astronomers tell us the observable universe is 46.5 billion light-years wide. That means our galaxy, the Milky Way, is like a speck of dust in the known universe. And our solar system is like a speck of dust on a speck of dust. The earth, in turn, is like a speck of dust on a speck of dust on

a speck of dust. And for all we know, our entire universe could be like a marble that God holds in His hand. He could also have many other universes. That God would care about us is beyond amazing. Yet “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans . . . in accordance with the will of God” (Romans 8:26–27).

So what are we that God cares for us? Psalm 8 continues with the answer: “You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor” (verse 5). We are small, but very special.

Pursue God’s Creation by Marveling at Human Creativity

Raw nature has the power to turn our thoughts to God, but so do man-made things. Consider, for instance, the intricacy of a smartwatch, the grandeur of a skyscraper, the glorious sound of a symphony, the hum of a finely tuned engine. I love driving through beautiful neighborhoods and admiring the homes, manicured lawns, and flower gardens. I love the smell of freshly mown grass and the restful simplicity of a well-designed golf course. This list is almost endless: parks, sculpture, art, music, cathedrals, computers, the muscular curves of a Porsche.

Who doesn’t marvel at the upgraded power of a new laptop computer? Or what about a smartphone—small enough to fit in your pocket, yet NASA tells us it has more computing power than the computers used to launch early space missions.⁵ Humans who create such great works—whether in technology, art, science, or medicine—in some sense are reflecting God’s own creative nature.

Pursue God’s Creation by Standing in Awe of Human Beings

Beyond raw nature and man’s work lies the wonder of how God has handcrafted people. We love to recognize and reward human achievement. In the creative arts, we have Emmys, Oscars, Tonys, and People’s Choice Awards. We can’t wait to celebrate the athletic exploits of MVPs and GOATs.

Whether you sing in the shower or perform in stadiums, whether you play in a summer softball league or win the World Series, you are so

much more talented than any other creature under heaven. Every human being—however beautiful or talented or athletic—is *part* of God's creation. So appreciating the intricacy of how people are put together can turn our thoughts to God's greatness.

Whether you focus on natural beauty, man-made beauty, or mankind's beauty, let the result be the same—let it propel your mind to meditate on the greatness and goodness of the holy God. In *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolph Otto described what he called the *mysterium tremendum*, the presence of a “mysterious” God. While we will never be able to fully explain God's character or His actions in this life, Otto reminds us that we can certainly learn to appreciate Him:

The feeling of it at times may come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its “profane,” nonreligious mood of everyday experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of—whom or what? In the presence of that which is a *mystery* inexpressible and above all creatures.⁶

That's what we're looking for in contemplating nature—the experience of God's holiness. When you find it in creation, how should you respond? Do not fall into the trap described in Romans 1:21: “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him.” Instead, glorify God, and thank Him.

A SUGGESTED SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

1. Sit quietly in a quiet room at a quiet time of day.
2. Become aware of everything in the room—the noises, the silence, the creaks, the wind outside or lack of it, a draft, the humidity, the temperature, your body, the furniture, the light, each chair, fabric, texture, color, and how these things make you feel.
3. Consider what else is in the room that you cannot see—radio waves, TV waves, microwaves, cellphone conversations, internet transmissions.
4. Next, become aware of God's Spirit in the room—in the same sense that He was always there even when you were not focused on Him.
5. Pray, "Jesus, I know You are right here with me. Help me to sense Your presence."

OTHER IDEAS—CONSIDER WHAT YOU CAN LEARN ABOUT GOD, OR HOW YOU CAN EXPERIENCE HIM MORE DEEPLY BY:

- Sitting quietly in the predawn hour gazing into the sky.
- Watching a vermilion sky yield to a new day, or to darkness.
- Sitting still beside a stream. Listen to the rippling water and the sounds beyond it . . . the birds, the rustling leaves.
- Watching an anthill.
- Staring back at a heron.
- Looking at a mountain and thinking how long it would take one person to cart it away, or make one, or climb it.
- Considering a mother duck and her little chicks.

The only way to understand what's really going on is to give God time to show you.

A PRAYER FOR YOU

Heavenly Father, we do worship You, we do glorify You, we do give You thanks, and we do see You in creation. We see You everywhere around us. We see You in people. We see You in things made well by people. We see You in nature, and it is good, and we acknowledge that You have revealed Yourself to us. Lord, give us the habit or the discipline to come often to this place, to this attitude, to this mindset so that we might be with You, that we might have communion with You and that our relationship with You might deepen. We ask this in the name and the power of the invisible God made visible in creation. Amen.

A REVIEW OF THE BIG IDEAS

- Knowledge of the invisible God is revealed by contemplating His visible creation. When we watch a sunset disappear over the horizon, lilies sway in a field, or baby ducks paddle for all they're worth to keep up with mama duck, we also get a glimpse of God.
- The spiritual habit of observing nature leads to a deeper understanding of God.
- You can pick up a book about any topic, and you will find that it communicates something about its author. Similarly, creation offers its own message of beauty and grandeur, and it also communicates something about its Creator.
- Whether you focus on natural beauty, man-made beauty, or mankind's beauty, let the result be the same—let it propel

your mind to meditate on the greatness and goodness of the holy God.

- The only way to understand what's really going on is to give God time to show you.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Consider exploring these Reflection and Discussion questions with a new or existing small group. Over several decades of working with men, I've seen that most meaningful change takes place in small groups. The "Discussion Leader's Guide" in the back of the book has everything you need to get started. Who are the men with whom you would most like to grow together with in faith as you read this book?

1. Describe your last experience or interaction with God's creation. What did that experience teach you about God?
2. Read the creation story in Genesis 1—especially look at verses 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31. What do you see in each of those verses? What does that tell you about God's creation?
3. Look up Psalm 139—especially look at verses 13–16. What does that tell you about yourself?
4. We've described ways to experience God through nature, through people, and through human accomplishments. Which of those ways most clearly gives you a sense of God's majesty and presence? Explain why.

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