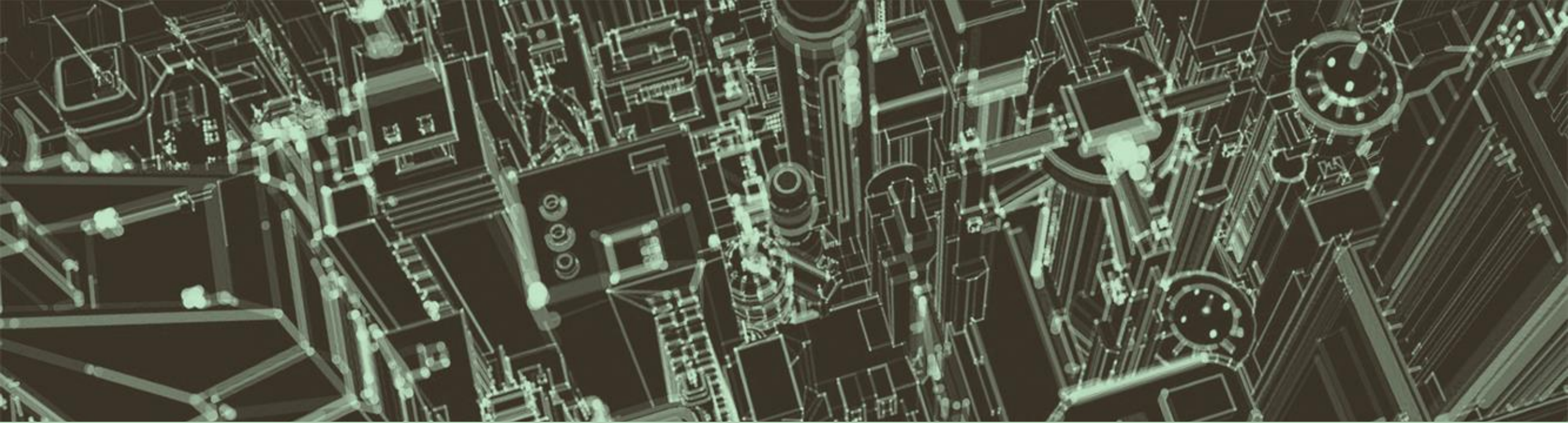




DISCIPLINES OF FASTING AND JOURNALING

CITY SESSIONS: SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR LIFE





FASTING



WHAT IS FASTING?

- Although fasting is one of the least understood of the disciplines, it is mentioned two more times than even baptism (77 vs. 75) in Scripture.
- “Christians in a gluttonous, denial-less, self indulgent society may struggle to accept and begin the practice of fasting. Few disciplines go so radically against the flesh and the mainstream of culture as this one.” – Whitney

WHAT IS FASTING?

- Christian fasting is a believer's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.
- Must it be from food?
 - “To make the matter complete we would add that fasting, if we conceive of it truly, must not only be confined to the question of food and drink; fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose. There are many bodily functions which are right and normal and perfectly legitimate, but which for special peculiar reasons in certain circumstances should be controlled. That is fasting.” – Martin Lloyd-Jones

WHAT IS FASTING?

- Types of Fasting:
 - Normal Fast: abstaining from all food but not water (Matt. 4:2; Luke 4:2)
 - Partial Fast: limitation of the diet but not abstention from all food (Daniel 1:12; Matt. 3:4)
 - Absolute Fast: avoidance of all food and liquid, even water (Ezra 10:6; Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9)
 - Supernatural Fast: extended times with no food or drink – required God’s supernatural intervention and only done by God’s specific calling (only 2 - Deut. 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8)

WHAT IS FASTING?

- Private Fast: fast practiced alone (Matt. 6:16-18)
- Congregational Fast: church fasts together (Joel 2:15-16; Acts 13:2)
- National Fast: entire nation called to fast together (2 Chron. 20:3; Nehemiah 9:1; Esther 4:16; Jonah 3:5-8)
- Regular Fast: only one established by God on the Day of Atonement every year (Lev. 16:29-31)
- Occasional Fast: occur on special occasions as the need arises (Matt. 9:15; Esther)

WHAT IS FASTING?

- Most commonly among Christians today would be normal fasts that are either private and/or occasional.
- Jesus expected that his followers would fast.
 - “*Whenever* you fast...but *when* you fast...” (Matt. 6:16-17)
 - “Then John’s disciples came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and *then they will fast.*” (Matt. 9:14-15)

WHAT IS FASTING?

- In Matt. 6:16-18, we see a negative command, a positive command, and a promise.
 - There is no command for how long to fast. That is up to you and the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- “Christian fasting at its root is the hunger of a homesickness for God.” – John Piper

FASTING WITH A PURPOSE

- There's more to biblical fasting than just abstaining from food. Without a spiritual purpose, you are just on a weight-loss fast.
- Having a biblical purpose is the most important thing to take away.
 - Without it, fasting can be a miserable, self-centered experience about willpower and endurance.
 - Without it, fasting becomes an end in itself.

FASTING WITH A PURPOSE

- None of the purposes of fasting is to earn God's favor. It is useless to fast as a way to impress God or earn his acceptance.
- “This is the essence of Christian fasting: We ache and yearn – and fast – to know more and more of all that God is for us in Jesus. But only because he has already laid hold of us and is drawing us ever forward and upward into ‘all the fullness of God.’” – John Piper
- Let's look at some of the biblical purposes for fasting...

FASTING WITH A PURPOSE

- To Strengthen Prayer
 - Of all purposes in Scripture, this is the most emphasized.
 - “Fasting does not change God’s hearing so much as it changes our praying.” – Whitney
 - Ezra 8:23; Neh. 1:4; Dan. 9:3; Acts 13:3
- To Seek God’s Guidance
 - “Fasting does not ensure the certainty of receiving...clear guidance from God...Rightly practiced, however, it does make us more receptive to the One who loves to guide us.” – Whitney
 - Judges 20:26,28; Acts 14:23

FASTING WITH A PURPOSE

- To Express Grief
 - 3 of the first 4 references to fasting connect it with expressing grief.
 - Fasting can be used to express grief for our sins and for the sins of others as well.
 - Judges 20:26; 2 Sam. 1:11-12; 1 Sam. 20:34

FASTING WITH A PURPOSE

- To Seek Deliverance or Protection
 - One of the most common reasons to fast in biblical times was to seek salvation from enemies or circumstances.
 - “Typically we’re tempted to strike back with anger, verbal abuse, counteraccusations, or even legal action. But instead of political maneuvering, gossiping, and imitating the worldly tactics of our enemies, we should appeal to God with fasting for protection and deliverance.” – Whitney
 - 2 Chron. 20:3-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:16

FASTING WITH A PURPOSE

- To Express Repentance and the Return to God
 - “...as repentance is a change of mind resulting in a change of action, fasting can represent more than just grief over sin. It also can signal a commitment to obedience and a new direction.” – Whitney
 - 1 Sam. 7:6; Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-8

FASTING WITH A PURPOSE

- To Humble Oneself Before God
 - Fasting itself is not humility, but an *expression* of humility.
 - 1 Kings 21:27-29; Luke 18:12 (bad example)
- To Express Concern for the Work of God
 - Neh. 1:3-4; Dan. 9:3
- To Overcome Temptation and Dedicate Yourself to God
 - Matt. 4:1-11

FASTING WITH A PURPOSE

- To Minister to the Needs of Others
 - The kind of fasting that pleases God is the one that results in concern for others and not just for ourselves.
 - E.g., skip a meal and minister to someone during that fast
 - Isaiah 58:3-4,6-7

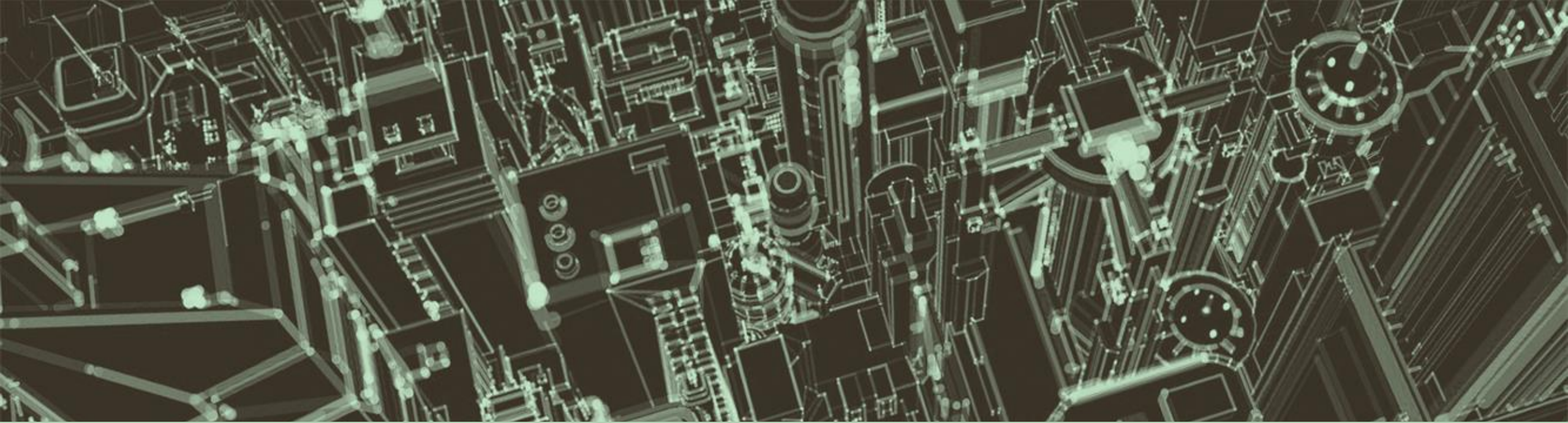
FASTING WITH A PURPOSE

- To Express Love and Worship to God
 - Luke 2:37
 - It's a way of demonstrating to yourself that you love God more than food, that seeking Him is more important to you than eating, that Jesus – the Bread of Heaven – is more satisfying to you than earthly bread.” – Whitney
 - E.g., fast in preparation for the Lord's Supper, spend a mealtime in praise and worship

FASTING WITH A PURPOSE

- Fasting is “a divine invitation to experience His grace in a special way.”
- When we feel our hunger or headache, this must prompt our thoughts of God and remind of us our purpose for fasting.
- When our fasts are rightly motivated with a God-centered focus, God will bless it, even it is not in a way that we expect.
- Don't wait for the perfect day/time to fast; it will never come.
- Start somewhere and don't search for loopholes!

“Like all the spiritual disciplines, fasting hoists the sails of the soul in hopes of experiencing the gracious wind of God’s Spirit. But fasting also adds a unique dimension to your spiritual life and helps you grow in Christlikeness in ways that are unavailable through any other means. If this were not so, and if the blessings of fasting could be experienced by other means, Jesus would not have taught and modeled fasting.” – Whitney



JOURNALING



JOURNALING

- “A journal is a place where a person records information important to him or her personally for preservation or consideration”
- Do you have to journal to grow in Christlikeness? No.
 - Even though there is no Scriptural obligation to journal, we do see examples of it in places like the Psalms.
- Let’s look at some of the values of journaling...

JOURNALING

- Help in Self-Understanding and Evaluation
 - You may find unknown patterns in your life and see your attitudes, thoughts, and actions more clearly.
- Help in Meditation
 - This may be the most valuable reason to journal.
- Help in Expressing Thoughts and Feelings to the Lord
 - “Pour out your hearts before him.” Psalm 62:8

JOURNALING

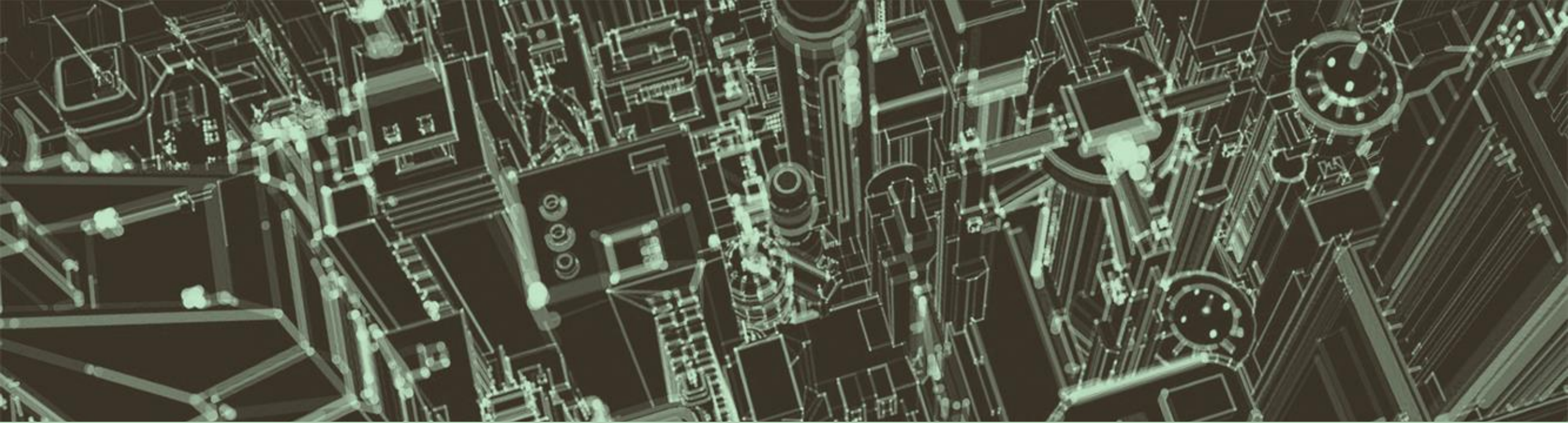
- Help in Remembering the Lord's Works
 - “If a man write little, he had need have a great memory.” – Francis Bacon
 - “I will remember the Lord's works; yes, I will remember your ancient wonders. I will reflect on all you have done and meditate on your actions.” Psalm 77:11-12
- Help in Creating and Preserving a Spiritual Heritage
 - “This will be written for a later generation, and a people who have not yet been created will praise the Lord” Psalm 102:18

JOURNALING

- Help in Clarifying and Articulating Insights
 - “While reading makes a full man, and dialogue makes a ready man, according to Francis Bacon, *writing* makes an *exact* man.”
– Whitney
- Help in Monitoring Goals and Priorities
 - You can see where you have come and how far you have to go.
- Help in Maintaining the Other Spiritual Disciplines

JOURNALING

- “...the method you find most edifying and useful in your pursuit of godliness is the way you should keep a journal. This goes for content, format, length, and frequency.” – Whitney
- To start, try listing one verse or idea from your Bible reading or prayer time that impressed you most. Then, after meditating on this verse or idea for a moment, write your thoughts, insights, feelings, brief prayers, etc. concerning them.



QUESTIONS?

