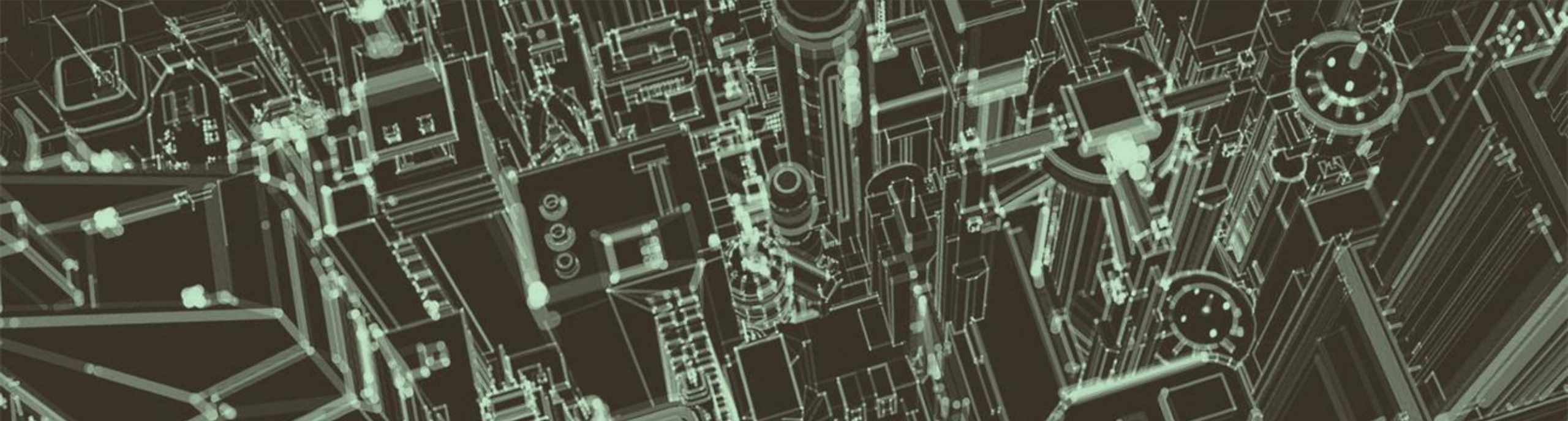


SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR LIFE: INTRODUCTION

CITY SESSIONS





WHY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?



WHY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

- “Discipline without direction is drudgery.” – Donald S. Whitney
- To avoid the drudgery of discipline, we must understand what we shall become.
- “For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...” Romans 8:29
- “Dear friends, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is.” 1 John 3:2

WHY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

- If we will be like Christ when he appears, why practice disciplines?
 - God intends for us to grow toward holiness, not to wait for it but to pursue it.
 - “Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness—without it no one will see the Lord.” Hebrews 12:14
- “It’s crucial to understand that it’s not our pursuit of holiness that qualifies us to see the Lord. Rather, we are qualified to see the Lord *by the Lord*, not by good things we do.” – Donald S. Whitney

WHY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

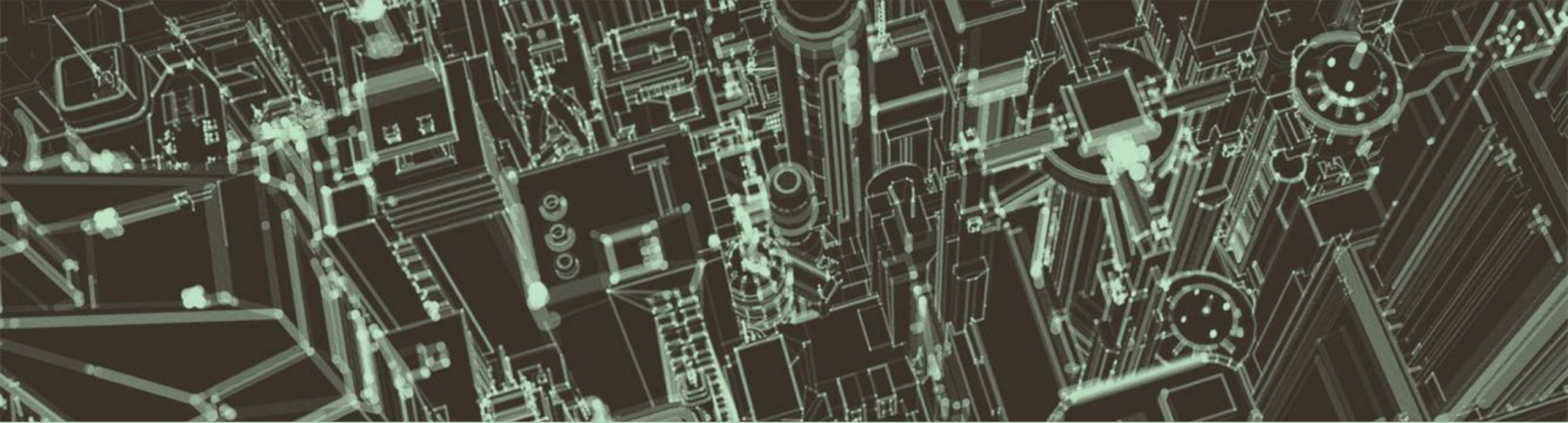
- So, again, if disciplines don't qualify us in any way, why practice them?
- “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”
Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)
- Does this sound like the kind of life you long for?

WHY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

- “The longing for something more, no matter how weak or crackling with heat, is evidence that God is already at work in your life. You wouldn’t want more of God if the Holy Spirit wasn’t first seeking you.” – Adele Ahlberg Calhoun
- “When the Holy Spirit indwells someone, that person begins to prize and pursue holiness. Thus, as we have seen in Hebrews 12:14, anyone who is not striving for holiness will not see the Lord.” – Donald S. Whitney

WHY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

- So, if those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit desire and strive after holiness, how do we do so?
- “Train yourself in godliness. For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance. For this reason we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.” 1 Timothy 4:7-10



WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?



WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

- Whitney defines spiritual disciplines as “those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.”
- Calhoun describes them as “intentional practices, relationships, and experiences that [give] people space in their lives to ‘keep company’ with Jesus.”

WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

- 1. The Bible describes both personal and interpersonal spiritual disciplines.
 - We are to practice them both individually and corporately.
 - Jesus practiced both. Luke 4:16,42
- 2. Spiritual disciplines are activities, not attitudes.
 - “Discipline, of course, is not about *doing* as much as it is about *being*, that is, *being* like Jesus. But the biblical way to grow in *being* more like Jesus is through the rightly motivated *doing* of the spiritual disciplines.” – Whitney

WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

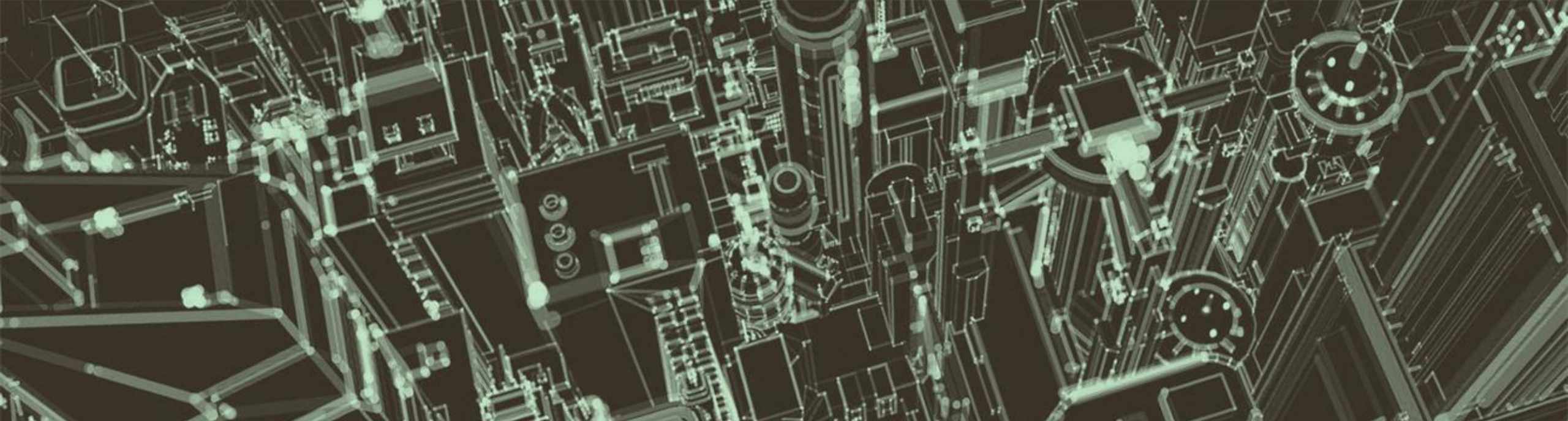
- 3. Spiritual disciplines are *biblical*, practices modeled or taught in the Bible.
 - This helps us refrain from (1) making just anything into a *spiritual* discipline and (2) avoiding disciplines that are difficult for us or that we do not necessarily enjoy.
 - Each discipline we cover will be rooted in Scripture.
- 4. The disciplines found in Scripture are sufficient for knowing/experiencing God and growing in Christlikeness.
 - “All Scripture is inspired by God[a] and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

- 5. Spiritual disciplines are *derived from the gospel*, not *divorced from the gospel*.
 - They are designed to take us deeper into the gospel of Jesus, not to lead us on from the gospel into a more advanced Christianity.
 - All disciplines should be done while trusting in the finished work of Christ and in reliance of the Holy Spirit promised by Christ.
 - Calhoun says, “The simple truth is that *wanting* to keep company with Jesus has a staying power that “shoulds” and “oughts” seldom have.”

WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?

- 6. Spiritual disciplines are *means*, not *ends*.
 - The end is godliness and Christlikeness. While we cannot reach that end without the disciplines, we certainly can practice the disciplines without godliness and Christlikeness when we see them as ends in themselves.
 - So, we must ask ourselves, again, what is the *end* to which the spiritual disciplines are the *means*?
 - In other words, what are their purpose?



PURPOSE: THE MEANS TO GODLINESS



PURPOSE: THE MEANS TO GODLINESS

- We must never forget the purpose of the disciplines stated in 1 Timothy 4:7, “for the purpose of godliness.”
- God uses 3 primary catalysts for changing us:
 - “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another” Proverbs 27:17 – God often uses other people to change us.
 - “We know that all things work together[i] for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28 – God also uses circumstances to move us toward holiness.
 - But there is only one catalyst which is under our control – spiritual disciplines.

PURPOSE: THE MEANS TO GODLINESS

- On the one hand, we must recognize that even the best self-discipline by itself will not make us more godly.
 - “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will do it.” 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24
- On the other hand, that doesn't mean that we do nothing, just sitting around waiting for God to make us like him.
 - Practicing the disciplines are the God-given means of receiving God's grace and growing in Christlikeness

PURPOSE: THE MEANS TO GODLINESS

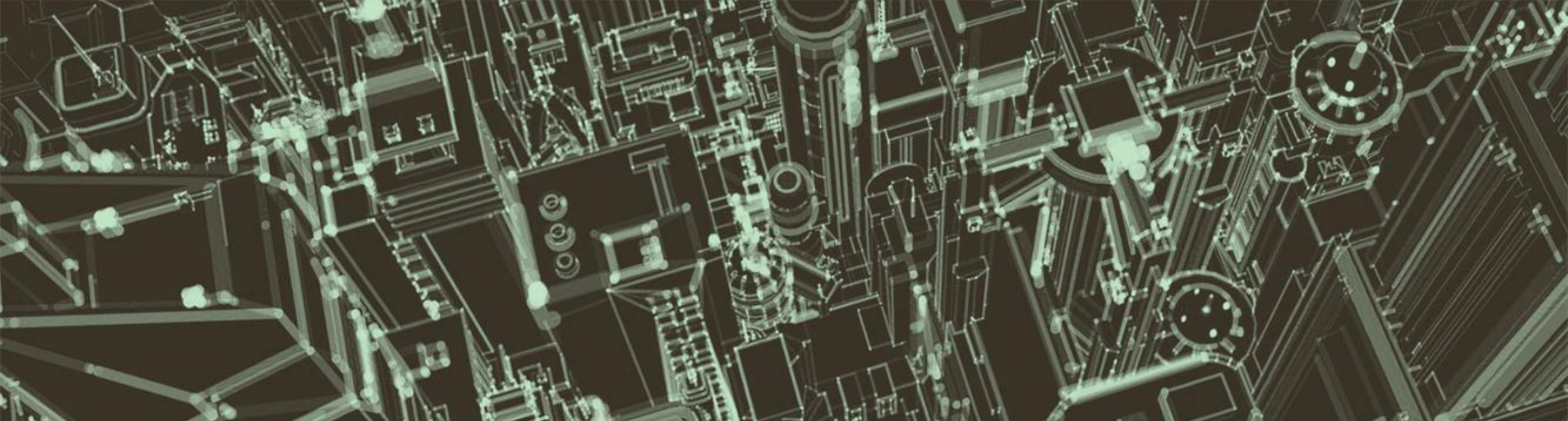
- We see that the desire and power for the disciplines are given by the grace of God. But we must practice them ourselves, by our choice.
- The Greek word we translate as “discipline” in the New Testament is *gumnasia* (where *gymnasium* is derived from) and means “to exercise or discipline.”
- So, one way to see spiritual disciplines is as spiritual exercise which leads to spiritual strength and endurance just as bodily exercise leads to bodily strength and endurance.

PURPOSE: THE MEANS TO GODLINESS

- Another way to see the spiritual disciplines as ways that we can spiritually put ourselves in the path of God's grace and seek him.
 - Think of Zacchaeus!
 - Calhoun reminds us that "it is not spiritual disciplines that transform us into the likeness of Christ. Without the work of God's Spirit within, practices guarantee nothing."
 - Instead, she says, "They simply put us in a place where we can begin to notice God and respond to his word to us." She goes on: "Our part is to offer ourselves lovingly and obediently to God. God then works within us doing what he alone can do."

PURPOSE: THE MEANS TO GODLINESS

- “We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18
- Whitney reiterates, “by means of these Bible-based practices, we consciously place ourselves before God in anticipation of enjoying his presence and receiving his transforming grace.”



GOD'S WILL FOR CHRISTIANS

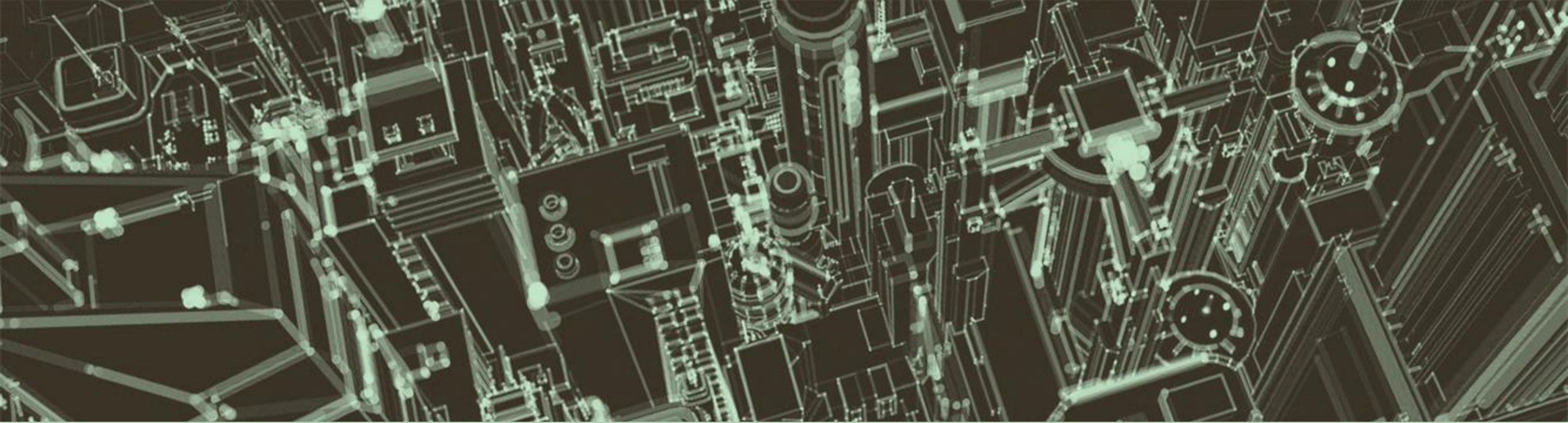


GOD'S WILL FOR CHRISTIANS

- The language in 1 Timothy 4:7 “train yourselves...” make it clear that this is not optional for the Christian. It is a command!
- Recall the call of Jesus to walk alongside, work with, and learn from him in Matthew 11:28-30. Alongside this call is the call to “deny [yourself] and take up [your] cross daily and follow him.” Luke 9:23
- To learn from and follow Jesus is the call to discipline, and one does not follow by accident.

GOD'S WILL FOR CHRISTIANS

- Jesus not only calls us to practice the disciplines, he is the model of discipline for the purpose of godliness.
- Do not think that the disciplines will be easy and not take much effort. Again, Jesus reminds us that it will mean taking up our cross.
- But Calhoun encourages us, saying, “Take heart; transformation happens as you keep company with Jesus.”



FINAL THOUGHTS



FINAL THOUGHTS

- There is danger in neglecting the spiritual disciplines.
- On one hand, Whitney says, “some who fail to practice the disciplines disregard them because they simply have no appetite for them, and they have no appetite for them because they have no hunger for God. They do not know God, so the God-given means of personally experiencing and enjoying God have little appeal.”

FINAL THOUGHTS

- There is danger in neglecting the spiritual disciplines.
- On the other hand, Whitney says, for the Christian “spiritual gifts must be developed by discipline in order to bear spiritual fruit. Thus, the danger of neglecting the spiritual disciplines is the danger of bearing little spiritual fruit – your life counting little for the sake of the kingdom.

FINAL THOUGHTS

- There is freedom in embracing the spiritual disciplines.
 - Elisabeth Elliot once said, “freedom and discipline have come to be regarded as mutually exclusive, when in fact freedom is not at all the opposite, but the final *reward*, of discipline.”
 - Whitney says, “The freedom of godliness is the freedom to do what God calls us through Scripture to do and the freedom to express the character qualities of Christ through our own personality.”

FINAL THOUGHTS

“His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. By these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

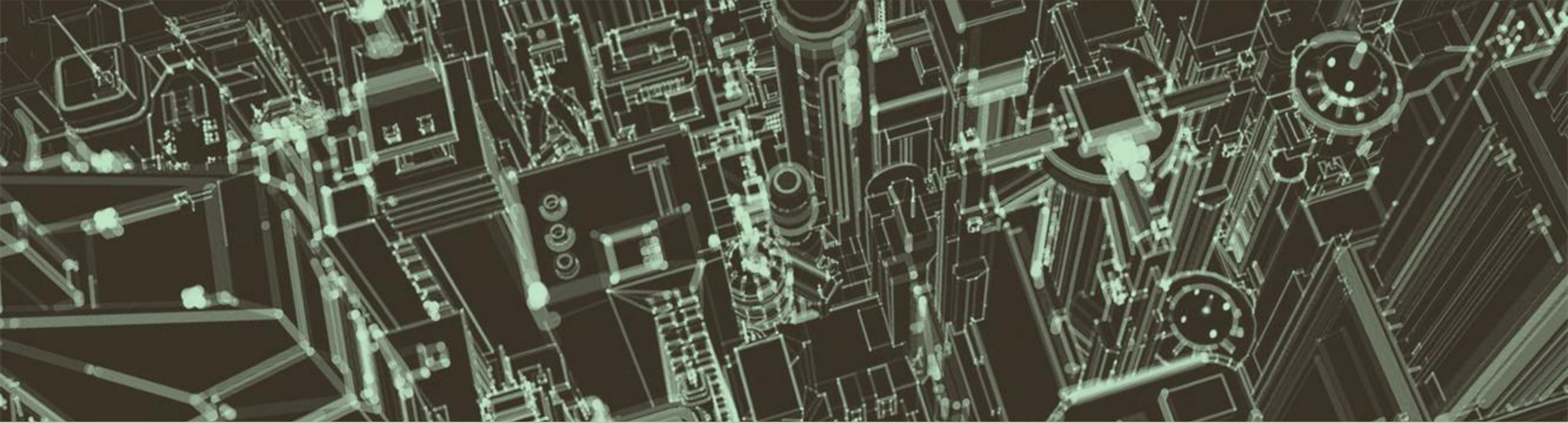
2 Peter 1:3-8

FINAL THOUGHTS

- There is an invitation to all Christians to enjoy God and the things of God through the spiritual disciplines.
 - The disciplines are never drudgery if we keep in mind the goals of godliness and Christlikeness.
 - Remember the Jesus was the most disciplined man to ever live and was also the most joyful and truly alive.
 - As we learn how to practice these disciplines, we must remember to focus on the person and work of Jesus, learning to gaze upon and enjoy who Jesus is and what he has done.

FINAL THOUGHTS

- In the coming weeks, we will learn how to:
 - Hear God's Word
 - Pray
 - Worship
 - Open Ourselves to God
 - Share Our Lives with Others
 - Act Like Christ



QUESTIONS?

