

2

INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL LIVING

INTENTIONALITY DEFINED

What does it mean to be intentional about your spiritual life? It means getting some sense of clarity concerning what God is highlighting in your spiritual life for growth and then creating a simple plan for how you're going to pursue that weekly. This directs what you read and meditate on from the Bible during your personal times, but it also directs books you read, what you pray about, and what you do with parts of your calling.

The basic idea is to form your weekly times with God around what He specifically wants to do in your heart in any given season of life. I call it breakthrough discipleship because it's focused on equipping people to hear the Holy Spirit's direction for spiritual growth, encounter God as a lifestyle, and receive supernatural breakthroughs in heart issues. Breakthrough discipleship focuses on getting victory over lies and sin patterns by intentionally feeding on biblical truths through study and meditation.

WHY INTENTIONALITY?

Why is having direction and a plan in your spiritual life critical to growing closer to God? God has specific things He wants to say and do in this season to bring you into the deeper things of His heart. He's wise, strategic, and pastoral—and He knows what truths you need right now that will act as building blocks for future truths.

Also, spiritual breakthrough requires focused investment over time in order to bear fruit. If you're unfocused in what you're doing in your prayer and Bible times, you'll end up not going as deep as if you had stayed on one topic or in one direction for weeks or months. It takes significant time in one truth to come into true revelation and transformation.

I'm guessing that many Christians read the *One-Year Bible*, a morning devotional, or read random verses for their times with God and are not feeling deeply connected to Him. Drawing near to God in these ways can be edifying, but they probably lack the kind of spiritual depth that intentionality offers. If this describes your past approach to spiritual living, take courage, there is a greater place of intimacy with God to experience through a more focused pursuit of God's truths.

SPIRITUAL MOMENTUM

Having direction and a plan will help you feel spiritual momentum. Momentum will help you stay consistent in your daily time with God. When you feel purpose in what you're reading and meditating on, and if you're hungry for the Bible verses you're studying, supernatural desire for more time with God will grow in your heart.

Staying with a passage of scripture long enough will get you deep into its storyline. This will hook you with a holy curiosity and a desire for greater understanding. Being hooked by the Bible means an intense interest grows in you for greater insight into the things you're reading. When you're hooked, questions about the things you're reading start flowing from your heart. Once that happens, your hunger will grow to search out questions. This will continue to grow until you're thinking about Bible verses throughout the day, passionately talking to others about them, and adjusting your schedule to get even more time with God.

Being hooked on the Bible and feeling spiritual momentum could be compared to what you feel when watching a really good television series or reading a good book. If you're really into the storyline, you want to know what's going to happen next, and you end up wanting to watch the next episode or read the next chapter. Some people even binge-finish the book or series in one sitting. If a book or a television series can capture your heart, how much more can the Word of God when it's anointed by the Spirit? You can get hooked on the Word of God in this way if you go deep enough in the biblical storyline.

I know my heart is hooked on a section of the Bible when I randomly have fifteen minutes to myself, and my automatic response is to study my Bible verses and read commentaries. Another sign is that I stay awake longer at night to read the Bible, or I wake up early with anticipation for what I'll discover during my time with the Lord. I think about the verses throughout the day, talk about them with friends, buy books about their subject, and wrestle with the truths until I understand and experience them. In a positive way, being hooked is disruptive to normal life because it demands satisfaction and moves you to reorient your life around discovering the truth.

STEP ONE – GET DIRECTION

Discerning direction from God and designing a plan should be a simple process. Start by asking yourself and God the questions listed below. As you answer these, you will feel purpose in what you're doing and feel like you're stewarding what God wants to do in you. These questions help determine your direction for Bible study, meditation, and prayer.

If you're not familiar with hearing God's voice, don't be intimidated. Get a notepad and your Bible and think about each question. As you do, write down your own thoughts, and then picture Jesus in front of you and ask Him the same question. You may have thoughts, a picture comes to your mind, or just experience deeper conviction about what He may be saying to you about direction. Many times, your own desires—or awareness of what you need spiritually—will be comparable to what you sense God is saying to you. So your own thoughts are totally valid. You can even ask one of your spiritual leaders who knows you well enough to give you a perspective on each one of these questions.

BIBLE READING DIRECTION

What are one or two Bible truths that you want to pursue right now, and why do they interest you?

What do you think you need to receive from these truths?

These could include Bible topics, specific Biblical passages, or specific books of the Bible. Then pray and ask God to bring to mind a truth or an

area of the Bible to focus on in order to grow in these truths. These are the two most important questions you can ask yourself and God in discerning direction for your spiritual life because what you study and meditate on in the Bible will be the thing that makes the greatest long-term impact on your heart.

AREA OF TRANSFORMATION

What lie or character issue do you want freedom from and what biblical truth could help set you free in that area?

Ask yourself these questions and then picture Jesus in front of you and ask Him to bring to mind a lie or sin pattern from which He wants to free you during this season. Choose one Bible verse that has the truth that will oppose the lie or sin issue to meditate on. Meditation on this truth will become the doorway to transformation.

Experiencing freedom is foundational to being a follower of Jesus, so why not target the primary issues in your life that hinder you from experiencing God and walking in fullness? What if you were intentional about pursuing freedom from one area of sin or from the biggest lie that daily holds you back? What if you got supernatural freedom from fears, anxieties, depression, anger, unforgiveness, insecurities, addictions, various lusts, and lies about God and yourself by attacking them with truth during each season? Most people are aware of their issues but don't consistently attack them with the truth. You, however, can attack them by forming some or all your spiritual life around truths that will set you free.

AREA OF GIFTING/CALLING

What spiritual gift or part of your calling do you want to pursue in this season?

This could include gifts of the Spirit, ministry gifts that you see in your life, or aspects of your calling that you've identified. For me, this has included topics such as prophecy, healing, deliverance, preaching, and being a husband and a father. I give time to studying the Bible and other books in order to grow in those areas of my calling because I know this is one way to partner with God in these areas.

STEP TWO – MAKE A PLAN

After getting some sense of direction, the next critical step is to make a simple plan to fulfill your spiritual desires. Plans put feet to your desires. The process of thinking a plan through will excite you and give you faith because you will feel empowered to walk out real desires.

These plans will help you to be focused on what God wants to do in you. My suggestion is to stay focused on what you're reading and meditating on for at least one to two months, but you could easily stay on them for a few months in order to go deeper into the truths. Below are the main areas for planning in your spiritual life.

PICK A BOOK OF THE BIBLE

Choose a book of the Bible, a section (New Testament, certain Psalms, Gospels, etc.), or several verses that have the truth you're wanting to pursue. Make that

your Bible reading focus for one or two months. My overall value with Bible study is to go deep into a small section of scripture as opposed to reading through the entire Bible in a year.

MEDITATE ON ONE VERSE

Meditate on a single verse for one or two months or until your heart is burning with its truth. I suggest scheduling meditation times every other day of the week. The truth of the verse will act as a spiritual hammer progressively knocking down the walls in your heart.

MAKE A SIMPLE PRAYER LIST

Write down five to ten things you want to pray for in your life. As a part of your prayer list, put the truth/lie or character issue toward the top of the list until you see a breakthrough.

READ A BIBLE-BASED BOOK

Purchase Bible-based books or listen to a teaching series that will help you understand what you're studying in the Bible—or one that will help you grow in a part of your calling.

JOIN A CORPORATE PRAYER TIME

Schedule an extra prayer time or one of your personal prayer times at your church. This corporate time could have worship, meditation, or intercession as the focus.

STEP THREE – MAKE A SCHEDULE

FIGHT FOR DAILY PRAYER

Prayer schedules are crucial to actually growing in prayer. I'm convinced that the greatest spiritual warfare from Satan is over our daily time with God. Our daily time with God is where we plug into the divine outlet and receive power for the day. If Satan can get you unplugged from the divine power source, he can quickly get you off course with spiritual dullness, sinful desires, and deception. Spiritual warfare begins by resisting the flesh and the Devil and by fighting for daily time with God. Fighting for daily prayer will be very hard at first, but you will connect to God more, and you'll develop spiritual momentum.

Scheduling times with God is an expression of loving and prioritizing Him. It's very easy to let needs, distractions, the flesh, and other people's priorities define our schedules, but we must take the initiative with our schedules. Your prayer schedule shows where God is on your priority list in the same way that your budget tells you what your financial priorities are.

PRAYER SCHEDULE

Think through each day of the week and pick the best times to spend focused on God. I suggest picking times where you can focus on prayer and your Bible without distraction. You can always pray while exercising or working, but these scheduled prayer times are meant to be set apart from other activities.

Write down the exact times you want to spend with the Lord and what your plan is for each day based on your answers to the guided questions in step one. I have my sacred times with God written out in my personal journal, and I have

certain things I focus on for each day. I reference my schedule most days to remind myself about what I've already planned to do.

Focus on one or two things each day (study, meditation, prayer list, etc.) so that you don't feel rushed in your prayer time. For me, some days are more focused on Bible meditation and others are more focused on Bible *study* and praying through my prayer list. Give yourself plenty of time to go deep into something and don't feel the pressure to do everything every day. Try a prayer plan and then adjust it every week as you learn what helps you. Be flexible to adjusting your weekly schedule to better fit your prayer schedule.

It takes time to dial down our hearts and receive a true encounter with God. Because of this, I suggest scheduling one or two hours a day with the Lord as a starting length of time, then to grow from there. If you already have a strong rhythm of time with God and are hungry, try scheduling two hours or more a day with the Lord. Also, look at your days off and see if you can get a longer prayer day once a week. If you already fast or are ready to fast on a weekly basis, plan your fasting days and prioritize more time with God on those days.

MORNING PRAYER

Consider scheduling your prayer times for early morning before school, work, or family responsibilities. I see three practical benefits to early morning prayer. The first benefit is that your mind is fresh and uncluttered. Second, if you pray first, you'll do it for sure. If prayer is saved for later, things could come up that get in the way of your prayer time, or you just might not feel like doing it. Third, if you connect with God during the first part of your day, you will be more likely to overflow with His life for the rest of the day. In the same way that eating food in the morning gives you energy, morning prayer will fuel you for the day.

Waking up early can be challenging for a lot of people, but don't dismiss the option. Much of the challenge is because people don't give it a fair chance and don't set up a full life rhythm that allows them to wake up early while feeling fully rested. From my experience, it takes around two weeks of going to bed at the same time to be able to set my body clock to comfortably wake up early the next morning.

SCHEDULE SUGGESTION

A simple schedule might be to alternate between Bible reading and meditation every day. Then pick which day—or days—you want to pray through your prayer list, pray in tongues, or simply worship. At the end of this chapter there is an example of a simple prayer schedule that alternates between Bible reading and meditation, has an hour and a half of scheduled prayer each day, a fasting day, one long morning of prayer, and a weekly corporate prayer time.

EXAMPLE PRAYER SCHEDULE

Monday (5:30 am-7:00 am)

Pray in Tongues (5:30 am-6:00 am)

Bible Reading – Ephesians Chapters 1-3 (6:00 am-7:00 am)

Tuesday/Fasting Day (5:30 am-7:00 am, 12:00 pm-12:30 pm, 8:00 pm-8:30 pm)

Pray in Tongues (5:30 am-6:00 am)

Bible Meditation - Psalm 149:4 (6:00 am-7:00 am and 8:00 pm-8:30 pm)

Prayer List (12:00 pm-12:30 pm)

Wednesday (5:30 am-7:00 am, 12:00 pm-12:30 pm)

Church Prayer Meeting for my city (5:30 am-7:00 am)

Bible Reading – Ephesians Chapters 1-3 (12:00 pm-12:30 pm)

Thursday (5:30 am-7:00 am)

Pray in Tongues (5:30 am-6:00 am)

Bible Meditation – Psalm 149:4 (6:00 am-7:00 am)

Friday (5:30 am-7:00 am)

Pray in Tongues (5:30 am-6:00 am)

Bible Reading – Ephesians Chapters 1-3 (6:00 am-7:00 am)

Saturday/Longer Prayer Day (5:30 am-8:30 am and 8:30 pm-9:00 pm)

Pray in Tongues (5:30 am-6:00 am)

Bible Meditation – Psalm 149:4 (6:00 am-7:30 am)

Bible Reading – Reading through New Testament (7:30 am-8:30 am)

Spiritual Book – Parenting Book (8:30 pm-9:00 pm)

Sunday (5:30 am-7:30 am)

Pray in Tongues (5:30 am-6:00 am)

Prayer List (6:00 am-6:30 am)

Bible Reading – Reading through New Testament (6:30 am-7:30 am)

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

This week, your assignment is to follow the three steps outlined in this chapter to make a rough draft prayer schedule. This includes answering each question on the *Spiritual Pursuits Document* and creating a daily prayer schedule. After meeting with your Discipleship Mentor, you will have another two weeks to finalize the *Spiritual Pursuits Document*. This prayer schedule will become your reference point throughout the 40 weeks. Be intentional with it but know you will probably change it in small ways each month as you grow and learn. Also, write down your three main practical questions from this chapter to discuss in your discipleship meeting.

DISCIPLESHIP MEETING GUIDE

MODULE 1: SPIRITUAL PLANNING – CHAPTER 2

MEETING FOCUS:

The purpose of this week's meeting is to discuss the value of scheduling times with God and to talk through the rough draft of your *Spiritual Pursuits Document*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. ***Chapter Questions:***
 - a. What are your three main questions from this chapter?
 - b. Do you understand the value of being intentional? What excites and challenges you about having an intentional approach to your times with God? Are there parts of this chapter you initially disagree with and want to discuss?
2. ***Spiritual Pursuits Document:***
 - a. Talk through what you've written down on your *Spiritual Pursuits Document*. Ask any directional or practical questions you need that would help you better answer the document questions over the next two weeks. Do you feel clear on what you want to pursue in the Bible, heart issues, gifting, and how to pursue them?
 - b. Are there other times in the day you can get more prayer time? Are there any days you can get more than one or two hours of prayer? What lifestyle changes do you need to make to prioritize your prayer times?
 - c. Starting tomorrow, try to follow your rough draft prayer schedule.
3. ***Heart Issue:*** If you have time, start or continue the discussion about what you want to pursue freedom from. With heart issue discuss, process, confess, encourage, and pray together for God to release transformation.
4. Briefly review next week's homework together.

