

Broadcast 19 – Spiritual Disciplines

BEN:

Hello! Pastor Fin, thank you for being with us again today, and for making our church available for translators to work and fellowship together.

PASTOR FIN:

When I see the progress of Bible translation into our language, I am filled with thanksgiving and awe at God's work among us.

BEN:

Yes, I feel the excitement when translators learn and practice the MAST process, translating Scripture for all to read and understand. As we saw more people becoming involved in translation, I noticed some of the translators are new Christians. They recently converted through Bible reading, or the witness of family members. We want to encourage them to grow and mature in their faith.

PASTOR FIN:

I witnessed the same thing. Young Christians need to establish discipline in their walk of faith, as they are on a long journey. There are many temptations along the way that can easily cause us to stumble and fall. Especially since we are engaging in translating God's Word. The enemy does not want us to succeed.

BEN:

I am glad we see the same need for spiritual disciplines among the translators. We desire all to become strong in faith. We heard about spiritual disciplines, but not all of us know what that means. Why are they important for Christians? How do we put them into practice? Would you be willing to teach us?

PASTOR FIN:

I would be happy to provide an overview of spiritual disciplines. I think of these disciplines like training a runner for a race. It must be done patiently, consistently, and effectively to win. Sometimes the athletes may encounter pain and injuries, but they know they cannot give up. The runners cannot miss even one day of training without noticing their performance and progress being hindered.

BEN:

I like your analogy of training for a race. When we were translating 1 Corinthians in the New Testament, I remember in chapter 9 verse 24 it says, *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run the race, but that only one receives the prize? So, run to win the prize."* With this picture in mind, we can better understand why spiritual discipline is important if we want to win the race and bring glory to God.

PASTOR FIN:

Yes, and that is one of my favorite Bible verses. Let's start by talking about the different disciplines that bring us close to God. We can begin with five disciplines that are commonly adopted by Christians throughout the world and throughout history. These are good practices to

develop in our spiritual lives. They are meditation on God's Word, prayer, fasting, worship, and service.

BEN:

These five activities seem easy to remember, and they come from our commitment to the Lord. They will prepare and strengthen our service for His kingdom.

PASTOR FIN:

Meditating on God's Word probably becomes natural for translators, because this is what Step One in the MAST process hinges on. To CONSUME, we need to read and ponder the passage to understand the message God is giving to us.

BEN:

I heard meditation is like slowly chewing food, this to savor the flavor and thoroughly enjoy it. This is like the CONSUME step.

PASTOR FIN:

Then during step two—VERBALIZE--we can put it into our language. The other steps also solidify the passage in our minds. We can practice the steps in our own time reading the Bible and store God's Word in our heart. Remember the first two verses of the Book of Psalms say: *"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the advice of the wicked, or stand in the pathway with sinners, or sit in the assembly of mockers. But his delight is in the law of Yahweh, and on His law he meditates day and night."*

BEN:

One of the challenges of meditation and Bible study is finding a quiet time to listen to God. Our lives are full of distractions and demands so it is difficult to focus our hearts and minds on His word. What should we do to overcome this obstacle?

PASTOR FIN:

This is a very real problem, and everyone has experienced it at one time or another. I confess there are times when my mind has been preoccupied and I cannot concentrate on His message. I believe we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us to keep wandering thoughts away. For this reason, the second discipline, "prayer," goes hand in hand with "meditation" on God's Word. We should pray for understanding and a teachable spirit before opening Scripture.

Although God is mighty and holy, we can approach Him and pour out our hearts to Him. The book of Psalms recorded different people crying out to God, asking for protection and guidance, seeking wisdom and His presence. Paul exhorted us in Philippians 4:6-7 *"in everything by prayer and earnest appeal with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."*

BEN:

Let's talk about the third topic, fasting. I admit I have the least understanding of this discipline. What does it mean? And how do we put it into practice?

PASTOR FIN:

Fasting often goes with prayer. At times when our hearts are burdened or faced with trials and tribulations, we free ourselves of food to focus completely on God. It can be a powerful spiritual experience. The Bible does not set specific guidelines for fasting, but both the Old Testament and New Testament mention fasting. For those who are new to this discipline, I suggest they begin with skipping one meal first. Then perhaps go to one day a week as it becomes a spiritual habit.

We should remember fasting is a powerful discipline, but it does not make us more spiritual because we practice it. Jesus warned us in Matthew 6:16-18 not to make it a show, but to do it in secret, which God will see and reward us.

BEN:

Thank you, Pastor. Now I have a better understanding of fasting and I will start practicing it. I suspect it is not easy, especially in the beginning, when our body is not used to going without food. How do we overcome the desire of the flesh?

PASTOR FIN:

Fasting takes time to learn before it becomes a natural process for us. It is a discipline of body, mind, and spirit. Concentrating on close fellowship with God will strengthen us to face temptations.

BEN:

As for the fourth discipline, worship, I believe the translators are familiar with it and already putting it into practice.

PASTOR FIN:

Worship is not only coming to church on Sunday. Although gathering with other believers weekly to thank God, listen to His word, and serve Him in different ministries is important. We acknowledge that everything comes from Him and we honor Him by our praise. As we remember God's attributes, we give Him all the glory. He is worthy of our adoration and appreciation. We worship more than just on Sundays. It is an attitude we carry into our daily living.

Let's finish our discussion with the last discipline which is service. All of you are serving God and men by making the Scripture accessible to your community. It takes dedication and perseverance from start to finish, until the Bible in our language is delivered to our people. Service always includes some form of sacrifice, whether it is time or resources.

BEN:

Besides translating the Scripture, there are other types of services we can engage in and God rewards our effort. Depending on our willingness and resources, it can be as simple as giving a cup of water to a child or taking a meal to a hungry family. Other examples are helping an injured neighbor to harvest his crops, transporting sick people to nearby clinics, and extending hospitality to strangers.

PASTOR FIN:

Jesus said He did not come to be served, but to serve as found in Matthew 20:28. He showed us the example of taking the form of a servant and washing the disciples' feet in John 13:1-17. He also enables us to serve by giving us spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 there is a list of gifts, and they are given by the Holy Spirit as He chooses. We are told the purpose is to build up the body of Christ in Ephesians 4: 13.

BEN:

Thank you, Pastor Fin, the discussion of spiritual disciplines is helpful to us translators. Before we end our talk, are there other challenges we should pay attention to?

PASTOR FIN:

Being too busy is one of the biggest excuses for neglecting spiritual disciplines. We all live busy lives, working long hours with many demands and responsibilities that require our time and attention. We hardly have any free moments and are usually quite tired by the end of the day. Putting aside time to pray or serve our neighbors becomes difficult.

Everyone faces this challenge of not being consistent in our spiritual walk. I will share a few of my experiences how to overcome it. First, develop a habit of spiritual disciplines. Once a habit is formed, doing it regardless of limitations is much easier. Second, if you missed, get right back on track. Don't let discouragement take root and get you farther away from the habit. Third, ask the Holy Spirit to help you make this a priority. He will strengthen your will even when your body is weak.

BEN:

Thank you for pointing this out and sharing your insights. It can be a blind spot we may not be aware of while concentrating on Scripture translation. Our goal is for God's Word to shine through the darkness that surrounds us.

PASTOR FIN:

I am privileged to be a part of this important work.

BEN:

Thank you, Pastor Fin, for being with us and sharing new insights to help us grow in our relationship with the Lord. May the Lord help each of us to put into practice what we learned. Until next time, may God bless all of you. *If you have questions about your current project or want to start a project in your own mother-tongue language, please call or text (local country partner info) or send an email to reachingalldialects@gmail.com or radio@wycliffeassociates.org.*