

# What are Spiritual Disciplines?

Do you remember the WWJD bracelets? The idea for them came from a book about a church whose members decided to start asking themselves “what would Jesus do” in all situations. Unfortunately, the book was fiction because I imagine, the author couldn’t find a real church to write about.

A guy named Dallas Willard writes about this striking situation. He likens the church to a young boy who idolizes a famous athlete (let’s say Michael Jordan). The boy dreams of playing like Jordan, slam dunking from the free thrown line, tongue out, high above his opponents. Not only could he slam, he was an amazing team player who could pass, rebound and shoot 3 pointers as well as anyone else. So this young boy shows up to his basketball games every Saturday with his Air Jordan shoes and Chicago Bulls team jersey. When the game starts the boy lets his tongue stick out of his mouth as he heads toward the basket. He tries to jump exactly like Mike, tries to be a team player like Mike, he tries to shoot like Mike.

I hope this imagery makes you smile as you picture the boy completely missing shots and his jumps not coming anywhere near the basketball rim. As you might be picking up on, the boy isn’t going to play like Jordan unless he spends time practicing on his own and with his team. Jordan was a great athlete because he spent hours each day running drills and strengthening his body. In the same way, simply asking WWJD won’t cut it if we are trying to be like Jesus. If we desire to be more like Jesus, we can’t simply try to act like him at any given situation. Instead we must learn from the ways of Jesus and have his life shape ours: mind, body, and spirit. In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard brings to light many of the spiritual habits Jesus is known for. Willard says that Jesus is able to respond well in tough situations because He spent so much time preparing his heart, mind and body. Now the word “discipline” may not be a word you want to hear, but let’s look at what is really meant. A disciple is one who follows a person, ideology or theory. Related to that, “discipline” thus is “training that corrects, molds, or perfects” a follower (Merriam Webster Dictionary). So, in the same way that Jordan disciplined himself to be a better basketball player, so we too follow some specific disciplines as we desire to be more like Jesus.

In his book, Willard makes note of some disciplines Jesus followed while on earth: Solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, sacrifice, study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession.

*Some of these may be more familiar while others may seem strange or even undesirable. Take some time to look at Jesus’ life in one of the gospels. Make note of when and where Jesus practices these disciplines.*

