

The Disciplined Life

REMEMBER our theme text for this series: “Exercise thyself . . . unto godliness (1 Timothy 4:7–8). The Christian life is serious, challenging, and demanding. It’s not a picnic or a parade; it’s a battle. Believers are to approach their lives with a sense of commitment, eagerness, and passion for the cause of Christ. Yet many believers lead very undisciplined lives. They are highly disorganized, always late for appointments, irresponsible, unreliable, unstable, and more of a hindrance to the work of the Lord than an asset. Their basic character flaw is a lack of self-discipline.

We live in an undisciplined age and culture. Modern people put themselves first, and anything that hinders their pursuit of “happiness” must go. Such people often evidence little or no commitment, restraint, or loyalty. Self-indulgence, rather than self-discipline is the order of the day. Unfortunately, such an attitude often surfaces in the church.

The purpose of this lesson is to show the student how important self-discipline is, and to develop within him or her a desire to become more disciplined in his or her daily life.¹

What is Discipline?

Discipline is self-control.

It’s the commitment to force yourself to do the right thing, the best thing, and the proper thing. It’s not taking the easy road when the hard road is the better way. It’s a refusal to do less than your best. It’s dedication to duty, and the result of a desire to live an honorable and meaningful life.



¹ Much of the material in this lesson is based on Richard S. Taylor’s work *The Disciplined Life*.

Discipline is commitment

From a Christian perspective, discipline is the result of a commitment to honor and glorify God in everything you do. Discipline is the ability to regulate your behavior and attitudes by the principles of Scripture rather than by feelings, impulses, pressure, or tradition.

Discipline may be either external or internal.

As kids are growing up, much of the discipline they experience is external, from their parents. As they mature, children are given more responsibility and privilege, and must begin to discipline themselves. As one moves on to adulthood, most of the discipline in his or her life is self-imposed.

Why is a Disciplined Life Desirable?

A. Practically speaking, almost anything worth doing takes discipline to master. Any professional career requires training, study, commitment, and work. To play a sport on a high level takes hours of practice and self-denial. Those who excel in the arts (music, painting, sculpture, etc.) must spend years in preparation. In any field of endeavor, those who wish to succeed must exercise self-discipline, restraint, practice, and commitment to the goal.

“Prod yourself! kick yourself! it s the only way.

Winston Churchill

B. The Bible often encourages believers to live disciplined lives. Note some texts.

Proverbs 24:10 If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.

Matthew 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.



1 Cor 9:25 Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Titus 2:12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

Hebrews 5:14 Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

2 Peter 1:5 7 Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

List the words from the above verses that talk about discipline. Strength, deny your self, strive for the mastery, temperate, run, fight, keep under my body, denying lusts, soberly, exercise, temperance

“Discipline is the mark of maturity. Without discipline the character will remain weak and infantile.
Richard Taylor

What aspects of life must the believer discipline?

Appetites and urges

The believer must not be flabby, either physically or morally. One must control his urges to eat, lest his additional weight prohibit him from serving as well as he could. He must also control his sexual desires, lest he disqualify himself for ministry.

Emotions

Feelings must be subordinate to the intellect. Those who allow themselves to follow their emotions will



likely not find themselves useful in the service of God. The giddy impulsiveness of a child will not take one where he needs to go. Depression saps one's strength and resolve. Romance and infatuation are powerful emotions, but the Christian must bring them under control. A mind submitted to God, not one's fickle emotional moods, must rule.

Speech

James tells us (3:2) that if a man can control his tongue, he can control his whole body.

Proverbs 17:27-28 He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.

Priorities

The essence of discipline is the ability to subordinate the lesser to the greater. Many things cry out for our attention. It takes discipline to do those things that are necessary and important. Make sure those things that assume first place in your life are worthy of that position. Put first things first, and do what needs to be done. Good intentions are worthless.

How to become a disciplined person

Accept discipline as the route to success.

There are no substitutes or shortcuts to the goal. Undisciplined people are forever seeking quick and easy ways to find success. They carefully avoid the grind of hard work, study, and commitment. But those who achieve great things do so by discipline and willingness to work.

Start with the little things.

Keep your schedule. Arrive early for appointments. Make punctuality a high priority. Keep your things neat and clean. Put things away after you use them.



Organize yourself and your things. Don't live in a pigsty. Make sure you look presentable.

Exercise foresight, carefulness, and thoughtfulness.

Plan your work, and then work your plan. Try to be well organized in everything you do. Don't approach things haphazardly. Instead, plan for the future. Avoid the "fly by the seat of your pants" approach.

Control your body.

Avoid constant movement—shuffling, rocking, popping your knuckles, shifting, etc. Try to maintain a good posture. Look people in the eye when you talk to them. Use a firm handshake. Exercise and eat right. Lose excess weight. Get enough sleep. Make your body into a strong and effective tool in the Lord's service.

"During his term as President of the U.S., Lyndon Johnson was somewhat overweight. One day his wife challenged him with this blunt assertion: "You can't run the country if you can't run yourself. Respecting Mrs. Johnson's wise observation, the President lost 23 pounds.

E. Get your priorities right. Do the hard things first. Don't procrastinate. Seek to complete one job before moving on to the next. Don't waste time needed to do important work. Get right at it, complete it, and rest when you're done.

"You have no right to be mediocre if you are capable of something better. Richard Taylor



Accept the goal of Christlikeness rather than happiness.

If personal happiness is one's main pursuit in life, then fun and entertainment become high priorities. But such should not be the case for Christians. Although rest, refreshment, and recreation do have a proper place in a believer's life, they should not be top priorities. Christians must never become preoccupied with the frantic quest for pleasure for its own sake. When hobbies and vacations become central, one's effectiveness suffers.

Conclusion

One might think that living a disciplined life would take all the joy and spontaneity out of living. One might complain that self-discipline and duty don't sound like much fun. Remember that fun (self-gratification, amusement, "happiness") is not the primary goal for a Christian; effective, honorable service to the Lord is. Oddly enough, a disciplined life is a joyful life. In fact, it is those who seek to live a disciplined life who are most free to serve God and enjoy His blessings.

For Further Discussion:

1. What are some excuses for lack of discipline?

Too hard, no fun, I just can't live that way, it's unrealistic

2. List some everyday ways that believers can discipline themselves.

Keep your room neat and clean, keep your stuff organized, hang up your clothes, finish things you start, do your daily devotions, arrive on time (or even a little early) for appointments, exercise, eat right.

3. Why is a disciplined life better than an undisciplined life?

Almost any meaningful aspect of life takes discipline and work to accomplish. If you want a joyful life, you have to exercise a little self-discipline. Those who re-



Those who refuse discipline often end up in ruin, pain, and unhappiness.

4. What is the ultimate goal of discipline?

Christlikeness; to live an honorable and meaningful and fruitful life in the Lord's service. Discipline is necessary to fulfill one's duties as a believer.

5. What is true of those who refuse to discipline themselves?

It's highly unlikely that they'll ever amount to much, either personally or as a worker for the Lord.

"The world belongs to the disciplined.

Richard Taylor

