

# Self-Discipline and Worship

(Study notes compiled by Paul R. Blake)

## Introduction:

- A. Self-discipline in worship is the ability to purposefully keep one's entire being centered on the matter of glorifying God, growing in the faith, and building up one another in fellowship while assembled in worship
  - 1. Understanding how to worship and how we benefit from worship is incomplete until and unless we train our hearts and minds to wholly engage and remain in awe of God and in harmony with each other
  - 2. A study of self-discipline in worship naturally flows from an general understanding of self-discipline for all facets of our lives
- B. 1Tim. 4:7 - "Exercise yourself toward godliness" (NKJV)
  - 1. Compare translations
    - a. "Train yourself for godliness" (ESV, NET)
    - b. "Train yourself to be godly" (NIV, NLT)
    - c. "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness: (NASB)
  - 2. Consider commentators
    - a. "Cultivate piety, and seek to become more holy" (Barnes Notes)
    - b. "As an athlete trains his body, so the Christian must train his soul" (Barclay)
    - c. "Such exercise involves reading and studying the Bible, prayer, meditation" (Burkitt)

## I. WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE?

- A. Discipline: "Any training intended to develop moral character, or produce a pattern of behavior" (Wikipedia)
  - 1. "Training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character" (Merriam-Webster)
- B. Spiritual discipline: "A spiritual discipline is, when practiced faithfully and regularly, a habit or regular pattern in your life that repeatedly brings you back to God..." (<http://www.spirithome.com/spirdisc.html>)
  - 1. "Spiritual disciplines can be described as behaviors that facilitate spiritual growth" ([www.wcg.org/lit/spiritual/group/discip1.htm](http://www.wcg.org/lit/spiritual/group/discip1.htm))
  - 2. Spiritual disciplines are spiritual exercises one engages in habitually which bring him or her closer to God, resulting in becoming more godly in knowledge, understanding, character, and behavior
- C. Forms of spiritual discipline
  - 1. Prayer, in which one spends time talking to God - Dan. 6:10; Col. 4:2
    - a. How can one increase the regularity, duration, and quality of his personal prayers?
    - b. How can habitual, quality prayer increase self-discipline and character?
  - 2. Meditation, in which one contemplates God's Word or other worthy considerations - Psalm 1:1-2; Phil. 4:8

- a. How can one increase the regularity, duration, and quality of his meditation?
  - b. How can habitual, quality meditation increase self-discipline and character?
3. Fasting, usually accompanied with prayer, in which one abstains from food for a predetermined period of time - Neh. 1:4; Acts 13:2-3, 14:23
  - a. How can one increase the regularity, duration, and quality of his fasting?
  - b. How can habitual, quality fasting increase self-discipline and character?
4. Singing, through which one can praise God and be personally edified and refreshed - Psalm 71:23; Acts 16:25
  - a. How can one increase the regularity, duration, and quality of his singing when alone?
  - b. How can habitual, quality singing in with the spirit and understanding increase self-discipline and character?
5. Giving, by which we please God and are blessed (It is when we help others, regardless of personal cost, that we find our greater sense of accomplishment and fulfillment; contrast with helping ourselves) - Heb. 13:16; Acts 20:35
  - a. How can one increase the regularity and generous quality of his gifts?
  - b. How can habitual, generous giving increase self-discipline and character?
6. Assembling, where we can exhort one another and be exhorted (Is exhortation unidirectional?) - Psalm 122:1; Heb. 10:24-25
  - a. How can one increase the regularity, duration, and quality of his assembling for exhortation?
  - b. How can habitual, quality exhortation increase self-discipline and character?
7. Hospitality, showing kindness to strangers, without concern for a reciprocal blessing - Heb. 13:2
  - a. How can one increase the regularity, duration, and quality of his love and care for strangers?
  - b. How can habitual, quality hospitality increase self-discipline and character?
8. Teaching, benefiting the teacher, as well as the student - Heb. 5:12-14
  - a. How can one increase the regularity, duration, and quality of his teaching?
  - b. How can habitual, quality teaching increase self-discipline and character?
9. Confession, to ourselves, God, and if public to others - James 5:16
  - a. How can one increase the regularity and quality of his confession?
  - b. How can habitual, quality confession increase self-discipline and character?

10. Celebration, the discipline of rejoicing. It is especially needed by those who take life too seriously. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Reverent joy empowers and keeps one sweet, sane, and strong - Phil. 4:4
  - a. How can one increase in it?
  - b. How can it make one grow?
11. Blessing, the discipline of openly loving others - Rom. 12:14
  - a. Observe an individual person, visually or as a mental image.
  - b. Appreciate them as they are, rather than as you wish them to be.
  - c. Bless them with an open expression and action of good-will.
  - d. How can one increase in it?
  - e. How can it make one grow?
12. Solitude, taking time to be alone is a prerequisite for most of the other disciplines and is essential to spiritual health - John 8:1
  - d. How can one increase in it?
  - e. How can it make one grow?
13. Study, the discipline of intentional learning - 2Tim. 2:15
  - a. Repetition - return to the same subject again and again
  - b. Concentration - focus attention
  - c. Comprehension - grasp the truth in what is studied
  - d. Reflection - look for the significance in what is studied
  - e. How can one increase in it?
  - f. How can it make one grow?
14. Simplicity, freedom from anxiety about things and fear of others' opinions - Matt. 6:33; Phil. 4:6-7
  - a. How can one increase in it?
  - b. How can it make one grow?
15. Service, the self-discipline of doing things for someone other than self Mark 10:45
  - a. How can one increase in it?
  - b. How can it make one grow?
16. Submission, the discipline of freeing the self from the obsession of getting its own way - Eph. 5:21
  - a. How can one increase in it?
  - b. How can it make one grow?

## **II. THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE**

### **A. An undisciplined life leads to:**

1. A lack of restraint that produces indulgence in fleshly, carnal desires
2. A lack of respect for authority that produces departure from God's will
3. Overt defensiveness about sinful choices and lifestyles
4. Decline in spiritual and possibly physical health
5. Harm to financial future; rising debt
6. Poor performance at work, failure to advance, or job loss
7. Develop slothful habits and possibly unkempt appearance
8. Reckless manner of speech, declining social skills, loss of relationships
9. Habitual tardiness, procrastination, and undependability

- 10. Wastes time and resources, blames others or circumstances
- 11. Loss of influence and credibility
- 12. Complete inability to a faithful and effective Christian. An undisciplined life compromises a believer's testimony for Christ - 1Cor. 9:27

### **III. WHAT IS REQUIRED FOR SPIRITUAL SELF-DISCIPLINE?**

- A. Have a definite purpose. Goals clarify what disciplines are necessary.
- B. Detach from things that distract from goals.
- C. Pursue objectives with diligence. Reflecting on the worthiness of goals will increase focus on the course.
- D. Be consistent. The full benefits of a self-controlled life can be found only through regular practice.
- E. Practice self-control. Stumbling happens; get up and return to work on self-discipline.
- F. Say "no" both in the heart and with the mouth with conviction to all temptation to ease up or take a break.
- G. Remember accountability; not just accountability to God, but the impact an influence on others and to the self. Write it down and read it often.

### **IV. WHAT ARE THE REWARDS OF SPIRITUAL SELF-DISCIPLINE?**

- A. A more orderly and consequently less stressful life. Self-discipline can increase peace, joy, and confidence.
- B. Improved confidence and self-esteem. Setting and achieving goals will confer a sense of accomplishment.
- C. Increased productivity. A well-planned day is generally more fruitful.
- D. Better health. By eating right, exercising, avoiding drug and alcohol abuse, and getting proper rest, many illnesses can be avoided that hinder attendance, good works, and personal development.
- E. A sound, healthy impact and influence on others. A disciplined lives, often inspire others to do the same. It can lead to interest and questions about other, deeper spiritual matters.
- F. Eternal reward. The most significant benefit of discipline will come from God.

### **V. HOW CAN SELF-DISCIPLINE BE APPLIED IN WORSHIP?**

A. It should be fairly obvious at this point that if the principles of self-discipline above are adopted and applied by the Christian, he or she will use them in worship as well as in all aspects of life. The things that enhance our focus when alone or in a secular setting will work equally well when assembled for worship. In fact, fellowship with others should facilitate self-control and awareness when gathered together in the presence of the Lord.

#### **B. Questions**

- 1. Discuss any differences in the settings of solitude vs. assembly.
- 2. How can the assembly enhance self-discipline?
- 3. How does one overcome distractions unique to assembly?

Sources: Disciplines for Disciples by Mark Copeland. Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth, by Richard J. Foster (Harper & Row, 1988).

Self-Discipline: A Pillar of Christian Character  
By John McArthur (A helpful article for extra study - prb)

Self-discipline is important in any endeavor of life. It is best defined as the ability to regulate one's conduct by principle and sound judgment, rather than by impulse, desire, or social custom. Biblically, self-discipline may be summarized in one word: obedience. To exercise self-discipline is to avoid evil by staying within the bounds of God's law.

I'm grateful for my parents, coaches, professors, and the others who helped me develop self-discipline in my own life. People who have the ability to concentrate, focus on their goals, and consistently stay within their priorities tend to succeed. Whether in academics, the arts, or athletics, success generally comes to the self-disciplined.

Since self-discipline is so important, how do you develop it? How can parents help their children develop it? Practical tips:

Start with small things. Clean your room at home or your desk at work. Train yourself to put things where they belong when they are out of place. Make the old adage "A place for everything and everything in its place" your motto. After you've cleaned your room or desk, extend that discipline of neatness to the rest of your house and workplace. This will help you get to the point where orderliness matters. Learn how to keep your environment clean and clear so you can function without distractions. This will further develop self-discipline by forcing you to make decisions about what is important and what is not.

Learning self-discipline in the little things of life prepares the way for self-discipline in important matters. On the other hand, those who are undisciplined in small matters will tend to be undisciplined in more important issues. In the words of Solomon, it is the little foxes that ruin the vineyards (Song 2:15). And when it comes to a person's integrity and credibility, there are no small issues.

A famous rhyme, based on the defeat of King Richard III of England at the battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, illustrates the importance of concentrating on small details:

For want of a nail, a shoe was lost,  
For want of a shoe, a horse was lost,  
For want of a horse, a battle was lost,  
For want of a battle, a kingdom was lost,  
And all for want of a horseshoe nail.

Get yourself organized. Make a schedule, however detailed or general you are comfortable with, and stick to it. Have a to-do list of things you need to accomplish. Using a daily planning book or a personal information manager program on your computer would be helpful. But get organized, even if all you do is jot down appointments and to-do items on a piece of scrap paper. The simple reality is that if you don't control your time, everything (and everyone) else will.

Don't constantly seek to be entertained. When you have free time, do things that are productive instead of merely entertaining. Read a good book, listen to classical music, take a walk, or have a conversation with someone. In other words, learn to entertain yourself with things that are challenging, stimulating, and creative. Things that are of no value except to entertain you make a very small contribution to your well-being.

Be on time. If you're supposed to be somewhere at a specific time, be there on time. The apostle Paul listed proper use of time as a mark of true spiritual wisdom: "Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16). Being punctual marks a life that is organized. It reveals a person whose desires, activities, and responsibilities are under control. Being on time also acknowledges the importance of other people and the value of their time.

Keep your word. "Undertake not what you cannot perform," a young George Washington exhorted himself, "but be careful to keep your promise." If you say you're going to do something, do it — when you said you would do it and how you said you would do it. When you make commitments, see them through. That calls for the discipline to properly evaluate whether you have the time and capability to do something. And once you've made the commitment, self-discipline will enable you to keep it.

Do the most difficult tasks first. Most people do just the opposite, spending their time doing the easier, low priority tasks. But when they run out of time (and energy), the difficult, high-priority tasks are left undone.

Finish what you start. Some people's lives are a sad litany of unfinished projects. In the words of poet John Greenleaf Whittier,

For of all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these: "It might have been!"

If you start something, finish it. Therein lies an important key to developing self-discipline.

Accept correction. Correction helps you develop self-discipline by showing you what you need to avoid. Thus, it should not be rejected, but accepted gladly. Solomon wrote "Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days" (Prov. 19:20); and "He whose ear listens to the life giving reproof will dwell among the wise. He who neglects discipline despises himself, but he who listens to reproof acquires understanding" (Prov. 15:31-32).

Practice self-denial. Learn to say no to your feelings and impulses. Occasionally deny yourself pleasures that are perfectly legitimate for you to enjoy. Skip dessert after a meal. Drink a glass of iced tea instead of having that banana split that you love. Don't eat that doughnut that caught your eye. Refraining from those things will remind your body who is in charge.

Welcome responsibility. Volunteer to do things that need to be done. That will force you to have your life organized enough to have the time for such projects.

These practical suggestions may not seem to involve any deep spiritual principles. Yet you cannot split your life into the secular and the spiritual. Instead you must live every aspect of your life to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). And self-discipline cultivated in the seemingly mundane things of life will spill over into the spiritual realm. (Adapted from *The Pillars of Christian Character* by John MacArthur. © 1998 by John F MacArthur, Jr.)