

Better Late Than Never!

Around age 50 I *began to* understand the concept of discipline, discipline as a friend, not an enemy. I have a very good excuse for being so slow:

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. ^{1Co 1:26 - 29}

Until then I thought discipline meant the same thing as punishment – to be avoided at all cost (typically, as hopefully kids discover and correct later in life, at a greater pain and cost than the discipline could ever be). Even after 50 I am receiving only a portion of the possible benefits of disciplines because I have yet to fully understand them; but better late than never, better to keep seeking than to give up and into the inevitable decay that comes from a lack of discipline. There is a great need for increasing disciplines as we age – as the natural decaying process increases (physical, mental, attitudinal and spiritual!), as we get older, the need to mitigate these forces, to the greatest possible extent, multiplies. We have a choice – look around, spend time and money seeking the magic and silly ways that NEVER work or seek the grace of good disciplines.

Time, money, spouse, children . . . (you name it – all good things) without increasing disciplines will ultimately turn into a curse, not a blessing! Initial passions end in *ho hum* or, worse yet, a burden – a responsibility without the satisfaction that only the associated disciplines provide.

Good marriages become fair marriages; often, then, leading to divorce. But why should this surprise anyone when the husband moves the wife further and further down his list of priorities and the wife respects her husband less and less? We should not “buy a farm” we are not able or willing to work a long, long time. All important things in life require on-going and ever-increasing disciplines if we expect them to bless and satisfy us!



People foolishly think, using a common example, “If I had a lot of money” . . . yet money without financial discipline will end in greater obligations, decaying “stuff,” more fear about “What if . . .?”, lost time (more precious than money!) worrying about, caring for, replacing, cleaning, protecting . . . inanimate things – money if it is to serve us, rather than the other way around, involves responsibilities and disciplines.

One crucial discipline Jesus identifies (yes, He is a great financial Teacher!) that few follow:

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?” ^{Lk 14:28}

People seldom realistically fully count the financial cost of major purchases like homes and cars, much less the non-financial costs – the toll on their nerves (and ultimately their health) from worry or having to work more, the necessity of shortchanging other (often more vital) responsibilities and opportunities, arguing with their spouse about their spending, not having money for many of the simple pleasures of life . . .

Key Principles of Good Disciplines

- **The normal “currency”**  **of disciplines is time**  – people that succeed in developing disciplines set priorities, dedicate the necessary time to a new discipline (simultaneously giving up the time formerly spent on something else – maybe even something “good”) while those, conversely, who fail with disciplines are the ones who make the excuse that they would develop a discipline **if** they had the time and did not have to give up anything else, but . . . the first step in “buying” any discipline is dedicating the time to it.

There is the paradox of disciplines, however, that we discover sometime down the road (often a good while later): disciplines take – but they typically also later give (along with a greater quality of whatever they are oriented towards). Exercise takes time, but, in the end, it gives all the time back, and more, while, at the same time, conferring a much better quality of living. Financial disciplines initially take money, but in the long-run provide much more.

- **Disciplines are always active** – doing something – not, not doing something. Many people pay a high price for passivity/neglect rather than mitigating the inevitable decline and benefiting from disciplines:

- ⊗ Quitting smoking is not a discipline, it is breaking a bad habit.
- ⊗ Dieting is not a discipline; it is the passive, negative, and harder approach to weight control than exercise and more thoughtful eating! Everyone **knows** diets don’t work, yet the majority of people still try them! The old adage, “No pain – no gain” is not true (unless you consider it pain having to give up an hour or so of TV every day to “spend” on exercise)!
- ⊗ Not doing wrong (most people’s concept of religion) is not a discipline; true religion is not even the discipline of DOING right. True religion (as a uniquely Christian teaching) is in BECOMING – which requires both grace and discipline! In fact, in the *Webster’s New World Dictionary* (1,692 pages of small print – that is a lot of words!) there are only 3 words between *disciple* and *discipline* – this would indicate a very close connection between the two!

In a nutshell, disciplines are “handles” for passions – allowing us to hold onto them rather than seeing them slip away (like the greased pig) through familiarity and neglect.

- **Disciplines involve a “tension” to build us up in some way so that we can later do more with less effort** – physical exercise is tension on the muscles required to build them up. The same is true for flossing your teeth (at first the gums bleed until they are toughened); spiritual disciplines are similar, at first, a few minutes seems like hours – later we find it is easier to devote an hour than it used to be to spend 10 or 15 minutes – as our spiritual “muscles” are developed.
- **Disciplines are flexible for necessary short term changes, but not always looking for excuses not to follow through and complete them.** It takes a while with every discipline, but you know you have “made it” when it is easier to do the discipline than not to do it – this is a great day!
- **Disciplines are the source of balance** – implementing a discipline, without balance, can lead to obsession, the opposite of neglect (and typically more damaging). Uncontrolled disciplines (an oxymoron since one vital facet of all disciplines, by definition, is control) will end in obsessions:
 - ⊗ Eating disorders (more difficult than the excellent disciplines of exercise and better eating) are perverted self-control “disciplines.”
 - ⊗ Body-building, of the grotesque kind, is an obvious distorted “discipline.”
 - ⊗ Workaholicism involves extreme self-control, but it is not a discipline since it is unbalanced, not well thought-out and destructive; it leads to:
 - Neglected children.

- Broken marriages.
- Health problems.
- Mental disorders . . .

So a short-term (1, 5, 10 . . . year) obsession ultimately, when weighted in the balance, is destructive rather than beneficial. The only thing worse than no discipline is uncontrolled discipline allowed to become an obsession.

Discipline is necessary to ward off sloth, while even more vital to heading off obsessions.

- **Disciplines are synergistic** – the paradox is that it is easier to “work” on many disciplines than to focus on a single one. While it is counter-intuitive, it is less difficult to focus on the “art” of disciplines than the specific disciplines – when we learn HOW discipline works we are able, fairly easily, to apply them to other areas of our life where they are needed. And as noted above, focusing on multiple disciplines reduces the possibly of obsessing on a single one caused by undue and undivided single-mindedness on one discipline.
- **Disciplines remove punishment** – natural or that imposed by others. Don’t learn the discipline of flossing your teeth – the results are commonly the serious side effects of multiple oral, heart or other ailments – natural consequences (punishment) for not developing this simple discipline.
- I don’t know where else to put it, but **it is important to remember thankfulness (THE source of happiness) is a discipline.**

Fundamental Disciplines – Give a Little and Collect a Lot

| Day - 24 Hours | | | | | | |
|--|---|--------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Sleep | Exercise | Family | Spiritual | Work/School | Mental Development | Other |
| 8/9 hours. Well, this takes care of about 1/3 of life! | Foundational - especially as we age - 1 minute a day times your age 6 days week | Spouse1st Children | To be effective, like any discipline, it must be planned and fought for against all the "screaming in our ears" of the other issues of life. 2 Key Spiritual disciplines: Repentance Thankfulness | Seasons change, but the need to develop a good work discipline (while not become obsessed) is vital throughout life. | Too often people leave this discipline behind, at the school house door, becoming more and more outdated! | Everyone has other, special and specific, disciplines they need to focus on to have a whole and balanced life. |
| To do all we need to every day requires a lot of discipline! | | | | | | |
| <p>A special note about the discipline that takes more of our time than any other - sleep. Sleep is foundational, not glamorous, and as a result too often taken for granted and neglected - BIG mistake!</p> <p>My good buddy Wayne is an excellent example: He worked very hard, often only stopping when he was tired or exhausted and then tried to sleep – he did not have a reasonable pattern for sleeping - he depended on circumstances and adrenaline to dictate when he slept.</p> <p>Well (to quote Gomer Pyle), "Surprise! Surprise!" he started having very significant sleeping problems; as I told him: "You don't respect sleep, why should it respect you?"</p> <p>Waiting to go to sleep when we are tired is like brushing your teeth when you see they are yellow - not a mature approach! The proper way to judge when we should go to bed is to think about at what time the NEXT day we need to get up.</p> <p>Sleep should not be used at the end of exhaustion, but as the critical support for what is ahead!</p> | | | | | | |
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| Week | | | | | | |
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| M - F | For most people, weekdays are pretty well programmed just trying to effectively complete the important, daily, disciplines! | | | | | |
| Saturday | Catch-Up and fun (if time allows) - Yes, to be effective with this "free" time (not frittering it away with passivity) requires separate Saturday disciplines - Get up! Get going! | | | | | |
| Sunday | Rest & refresh | A 7th day of rest will make anyone more effective, the 6 other days, than the person who is equally, or more, busy on Sunday! This is both well understood "naturally" and spiritually! | | | | |
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| Year | | | | | | |
| Try to do SOMETHING memorable (especially when children are small) several times a year! several times a year And when the children are out of the house, something special and memorable with your spouse! In either case, the years are short! These are disciplines - good disciplines! | | | | | | |
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| Life | | | | | | |
| A life is built one day, week and year at a time through disciplines - several times a year likewise, it is destroyed one day, week or year by a lack of disciplines! | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Eternity | | | | | | |
| Eternity, if we are to believe the <i>Bible</i> is won or lost before it begins - it is foolish to wait until we are on its doorstep (many people are surprised when it comes) to plan for and consider this VERY long period of non-time - it is scary to think (again, assuming the <i>Bible</i> is right) of the consequences that WILL occur by ignoring this most important reality. | | | | | | |

Making New Year Resolutions?

So as we end 2006 and begin 2007, many people will soon be thinking about *New Year Resolutions*; an excellent resolution would be to think about the disciplines that would help mitigate the inevitable decline that will otherwise occur without them – those that can be easily executed, within the year, that make 2007 and the rest our lives (and eternity?) easier and better!

We may have a very good excuse for being so slow on the uptake, but at some point excuses must be replaced by maturity **IF** we hope to make a difference in our lives – mitigate, fully or partially, the inevitable and painful decline that occurs through neglect and passivity.

Good disciplines ARE friends, not enemies.



Seeking



Yes, it will be shorter! I think