



# Lessons from a Roll of Dental Floss

Dental floss, seat belts and other mundane items can be great teachers. For example, a simple roll of dental floss can educate us about the mathematics of disciplines.

The value of any discipline can be measured as the ratio of the benefits as compared to its costs.

Dental floss provides a great and easy evidence of this

From more than one reliable source, I have heard that those who floss their teeth regularly have between a 2 and 3-year greater life expectancy (the reason being that, as we get older, some deadly bacteria enter the body through poor gum hygiene, affecting the heart and other vital organs).

So if we take 2.5 years as the median we can calculate the value of a flossing discipline.

## Benefit/Cost

Benefit: 2.5 years \* 365 days \* 24 hours = 21,900 hours gained

Cost: 2 minutes a day \* 365 days \* 50 years / 60 minutes per hour = 608 hours

Result: 36 times "payback" – 36 times greater time benefit than time cost

Every time we floss we have a 72-minute payback!

(And this does not even consider the other benefits that result from regular flossing)

Establishing the discipline of regularly flossing your teeth is a no-brainer!

Seat belts are another easy to evaluate discipline – the daily cost is seconds and, like fire insurance, if you ever need it the benefits are almost incalculable!

Most disciplines, however, require a more subjective "costing the count" to make sure the benefits are worth the costs. And since there are usually options, we must evaluate which alternatives are more effective and efficient for accomplishing the desired objectives.

An example looked at earlier is the comparison of the disciplines of dieting to exercise – dieting is seldom effective because the on-going costs (24 hours a day hunger!) are higher than the single "looks" benefit while exercise (done properly – as an easy, common-sense strategy, not like physical therapy!) is effective because the multiple benefits (including inevitable weight reduction) easily exceed the costs.

Dieting involves a 24-hour a day cost with sporadic benefits when people compliment you about the weight you have lost (which they forget shortly after you have lost the weight). Exercise, on the other hand, provides 24 hour a day benefits (feeling better in multiple ways based on improved health) with a single 30 to 40 minutes a day cost.

We haven't here (using our formula) proven exercise is a "good" (beneficial) discipline, but it is obvious that it is FAR superior to dieting!

Another mark of most successful disciplines is that the perceived cost must decrease over time as the discipline becomes a habit – another reason why dieting does not work – dieting is hunger forever while exercise, when it becomes routine, is something that actually becomes enjoyable!

Now, to the important use of our discipline cost/benefit ratio – in establishing the discipline of reading the Bible EVERY day. After asking many professing Christians if they read their Bible every day (do they have a discipline) I have finally come to the following conclusions:

- ⊕ Most claim to believe the Bible is the Word of God.
- ⊕ Yet, few have a Bible reading discipline.
- ⊕ Not many have ever read the Bible through.
- ⊕ Because they really do not see the benefits.

Like dieting, it APPEARS to be easier to focus on the symptoms instead of the source of the problem, yet it is simply a mirage. Over-weight is ALWAYS (if not the source of) accompanied by declining health – it may take years to manifest itself seriously, but waning health is occurring when someone is overweight!

Spiritual development is the same – people find it more appealing to focus on the "fruit" (not "smoking, chewing" or doing other "bad" things) of improved spirituality rather than the true source (changes in our desires, passions, the way we think with RESULTING "acting" modifications). They think they can "cut through" and resolve their spiritual problems by cleaning the outside while largely ignoring the inside "issues." "I'm not perfect," they will admit, "but isn't pretty good, good enough?" Not if we judge ourselves by what the Bible (which means God Himself, Jesus Christ, Paul, Peter, etc.) says. They take this discipline more seriously than we do!

When asked do they read the Bible, most professing Christians will give one of two common responses:

- ⊕ Resignation – "I know I should be reading the Bible every day, but . . ."
- ⊕ Defensive – "Just because you read the Bible every day doesn't mean you are super-Spiritual!"

Neither of which answers the question – Why are you not doing what you say is important?

Reading the Bible is like looking at a hologram – what you see depends on where you are. As times change, what we receive from and understand in reading it will vary.

While we can benefit to some degree by having read the Bible yesterday, the real benefits come by reading it today – God designed it this way!

Unless we are not truly a Christian (in which case the devil will not bother us) we are literally bombarded ALL day EVERY day by the ideas, conventions, pressures, pleasures, thoughts and assumptions of the world – as Hebrews and Genesis say:

“sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it . . .”

“let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles . . . let us fix our eyes on Jesus . . .”

And to successfully do this we must “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” – of which reading the Bible (not “studying” – which like the physical therapy approach to exercising does not work if done day after day). Simply read the Bible to find out what God says (and if you need grace ask for it)!

Being a Christians does not mean a person faces less trials and temptations – usually it means exactly the opposite, they face more! What being a Christian means is that we have help (and the Bible is one of God’s greatest “graces” to and for us) in facing them. But if not used it is of no use!

There are MANY benefits of establishing a simple DAILY Bible reading discipline – using a “life as a trip” analogy here are just a few:



– The Bible provides a map outlining both guidance as to where we should go and the pitfalls along the way.

⊕ – it is a light for our path.

⊕ – a thermometer – when we get spiritually cold it will alert us so we can take cover and when too hot (for our own britches) bring us down a notch or two.

⊕ – a barometer so that when the pressure gets too high we know to seek help and relief and when too low, to pick up the pace a little.

⊕ – it is a filter through which we can “strain” all the advice of the world, accepting that which is good and rejecting the bad.

Life is the most serious trip any one of us will ever take – while we all start out oblivious and dumb it is stupid to continue to “fly by the seat of our pants” when help is available and offered!

Reading the Bible every day is as simple or as difficult as establishing a discipline – the bottom-line truth is that we fail to establish disciplines NOT because we don’t have the time (only new parents are short of time – and then only for a few months). We do not establish this discipline because we don’t see the benefits as greater than the associated “costs.”

Like flossing and using seat belts, a Bible-reading discipline (if you REALLY think about it) is a no-brainer! Really think about and NIKE (Just Do) It! And, again, when you find you can't, ask for God's grace!