

The Bad Thing About Good Times

It Doesn't Have to Be Like That!

There are several books whose theme is to tell us our odds in life – the probability of common tragedies like divorce, diabetes, a heart attack, alcoholism, bankruptcy . . . as well as the relatively rare chance of being struck by lightning, winning the lottery, etc. While reading these books is probably a little morbid, it might not be the easiest thing to do, but it is beneficial, to look at the question:

What is (are) the most likely disaster(s) I face?

For, otherwise, how can we hope to be:

A prudent man [that] sees danger and takes refuge,
but the simple keep going and suffer for it. Pr 22:3

Why contemplate this question? Because a prudent person sees danger (these dangers can be significantly different from person to person) and can then normally take refuge in shelters of discipline. The purpose and benefits of disciplines is to minimize (and often eliminate) bad things from happening.

- Financial discipline normally significantly reduces the common financial problems many people have when faced with job loss, illness or even small troubles like car repairs – one of the best ways to reduce the odds of divorce is the discipline of financial responsibility!
- A physical discipline on the whole considerably minimizes many common ailments or, when illnesses occur, reduces the severity and recovery time – a person who is out-of-shape has a far higher likelihood of having diabetes, high blood pressure and many other illnesses, and these chances increase dramatically as they age without physical disciplines; a picture of the result of a lack of exercise is that of a person who does not brush his teeth – a child can go a few years without this discipline, but they will be looking at serious dental problems before too long. Our insides, without exercise (while the impact is further out) parallel teeth not cared for – they will become yellow and diseased with inescapable physical disorders. It is true, not all people will experience the same manifestations, but all will suffer serious consequences!
- A discipline of rest has an impact on many aspects of life including when, for whatever reason, sleep is interrupted, the effects are reduced and the “recovery” time is lessen – people who neglect sleep suffer the effects, in many ways, throughout life – we see this even more clearly in later life when insomnia increases drastically for those who, earlier in life, did not exercise this discipline.

Predictably, lack of appropriate disciplines catch-up with people later in life:

- Most people can live for a while being financially irresponsible – then bam!
- Spouses can take each other for granted, exercising little Spouse Discipline – then (usually the husband is shocked at) “out of the blue . . .” – it wasn't all of a sudden, it was the final result of a little by little neglect of his wife!
- “I am in shock, the Doctor just told me I have [name it] and will have to [the other half of name it]” – any medical disorder is bad, self-inflicted or not. Some have no known cause,

cure or way to avoid. But clearly, greater than two-thirds of diseases and illnesses can be prevented with appropriate disciplines.

A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge,
but the simple keep going and suffer for it. ^{Pr 22:3}

Medical costs in America are sky-rocketing out-of-control (will equal or greater non-financial negative impacts of diseases) not because of external environmental influences, but from the decline in physical condition of the average American. Pills, procedures, medical “advances” and doctors, on the whole, have been a curse not a blessing as people use them as an excuse for shirking personal discipline and responsibility! It is true pills, procedures, medical advances and doctors have alleviated many problems, but it is even truer that the lack of exercise and condition does eventually find us out! Pills, procedures, medical advances and doctors typically mask some symptoms while, all the while, there is a festering still brewing with other consequences right around the bend. The general thought about medicine is similar to that about education – in spite of evidence otherwise, if we just had more money . . . All the while, even with greatly increasing resources (for both) we are not getting healthier or smarter because no amount of money can mitigate the greater lack of personal responsibility and disciplines! It is the same with spouses – no amount of money can replace Spouse Discipline.

It is a great blessing to have a specific medicine that can mitigate an illness (like diabetes in young people) where there is no known cure; it is a great blessing to have money and not have to worry about the basics of life. But on the whole, we would be better off with less money and without (to use a single medical example) any diabetes medicine because the vast majority of people taking it use it as a crutch not to do what they should to mitigate the real underlying problem – watching what they eat and exercising! The same is true for high-blood pressure, heart disease, insomnia . . .

A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge,
but the simple keep going and suffer for it. ^{Pr 22:3}

Disciplines build reserves that keep us from, or help us through, potential bad “patches” or, worse yet, disasters; they are investments for a better future.

Good times are the best times to build reserves:

- Not borrowing is more easily achieved when finances are in order.
- Exercise is easier when we feel good.
- Sleep is easier when we are not “dog” tired.

This said, paradoxically, most disciplines are built in difficult time either by necessity or because they now become a critical focus when, for example:

- The lender says: “No more! In fact, I want what you owe now!”
- The doctor says: “If you don’t have this major operation (stop smoking, eat better . . .) you are going to die!”

- Your spouse says: “I have had enough of your neglect – I don’t love you anymore – I am not sure I ever loved you!”

But it doesn’t have to be like that! Concentrated disciplines, in these cases, are critical in getting us through the difficulty, unless it is now too late even for disciplines. How much better if we had invested when we had the time, energy, emotions to do them and by doing them had been delivered FROM the difficulty altogether? We can develop disciplines the hard way (in the midst of a problem) – and then let them slide when the immediate problem passes. Why not take the easy approach – seek E^2 in the critical areas of life to minimize the problems many people encounter?

- Think and work hard the **Spouse Discipline** – while there is a deep love, not after love has faded. The alternatives are:
 - “No fault” divorce so people can go out, find someone else they can be passionate about for a while . . .
 - Settling for a marriage that is less and less rewarding for either spouse.
With a little thought a Spouse Discipline can be easily implemented when, in the initial phase of marriage, either partner would do anything for the other! But, it is never too late . . .
- Slowly work to pay down debt – not increase it in an expectation that everything will be better tomorrow.
- Exercise – the alternative being by-pass operations, other medical procedures, pills, costs . . . to mask our lack of health caused primarily by a lack of activity and exercise! **It is never too late . . .**

It is a real tragedy when, due to neglect, we get to a point of throwing up our hands, throwing in the towel, because we do not perceive the benefits of disciplines are worth the cost . . . we see no hope because the situation has gotten so bad. Instead we declare bankruptcy in our finances, marriages and health. It doesn’t have to be like that with a **little** thought and discipline!

This thought is especially important when living in times and a country when and where most everything is **so** good – at no time in history (including in the U.S.) have so many had so much with so little investment and thought for tomorrow – thoughts about the **inevitable** personal or national downturns.

The principle?
Build (through disciplines) in times of ease and peace
so you can better withstand the inescapable attacks of life.

Disciplines have to be guarded most when the attacks appear to be the least. What is true on a national basis in America is true individually (unless we do something about it) – America is weakening now, not because things are disastrous, but because things are so good disciplines are eroding.

Remembering is a discipline – the alternative is taking for granted where we only receive 10% of the benefits (often not enough to sustain a marriage and certainly not enough to make us happy). If we are not focused, coming back **again, again and again** to what is important (sound like a discipline!) we will get enmeshed in and swallowed up by what is less important – this is the quagmire of the morass mediocrity (M^2). E^2 (seeking an Equilibrium of Excellence) is a search for

a proper focus and order to life so that appropriate attention is given to all aspects of life – the more important things given priority. “Quality time” is the excuse and cop-out (and downfall) of M² – E² strives to make all time “quality” time!

A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge,
but the simple keep going and suffer for it. ^{Pr 22:3}

The cultural approach – “Don’t worry! Be Happy!”

The counter-cultural (wise and intelligent) approach – Think! ***Fight*** for the essential disciplines that guard and protect what is important:

- Your soul for eternity,
- Key earthly relationships (spouse, children, parents, friends, co-workers, etc.),
- Keeping ***things*** is the proper perspective as temporal servants, not eternal masters, maintaining, to the extent possible, physical order to life (rest, exercise, repair and maintenance . . .) so ***things*** do NOT disrupt the higher goals of eternal soul security and key relationship!

Most people only consider and attempt disciplines in difficult time either by necessity or disaster – **it doesn’t have to be this way!** The ***best*** purpose and benefits of disciplines is to minimize (and often eliminate) bad things from happening. Seeking an Equilibrium of Excellence (E²) views disciplines as friends and investments to minimize the problems many people encounter. Disasters and challenges come to all people, but to those seeking E² they typically occur ***far*** less often!