



2007 ← Happy Old Year? → 2008

Fording the “Rivers” of Life

More important and valid than singing and planning to have a “Happy New Year!” is asking did we have a Happy Old Year? If so, how can we extend and enhance it into the future? If not, what do we need to change to make 2008 a Happy New Year? A person may have gotten married in 2007, had a baby, graduated, bought a new home . . . any one of a number of things that would make 2007 memorable. But what happens when we don’t have monumental events to make a year – when we are just living the mundane, day-by-day, life that is more common for everyone? Are we event dependent in our happiness or can and are we doing what it takes to have a happy new year come what may?

To have a happy new day, month or year, at some point we have to realize happy is not an event, luck, an accident or even genes – it is a discipline that can be developed and honed; the best gauge of a happy new year is a happy old year, but an old year does not necessarily dictate the new year.

The three pictures above can probably provide a better aid in understanding life, and its possibilities, than many, many words. If using rivers as the analogy of what everyone faces (using a river as a picture of a day, month, a year, a life or simply the barrier between where we are and where we would like to go and be) there are really only three options:



Some challenges are so small and easy that we can, with minimal effort, ford the trial, reaching the other side to accomplishment and success. Challenges differ from person to person as do the abilities to face them – what may be a snap for one person may be difficult to impossible to another person due to age or other factors. Even small challenges, however, require some effort, but many can be crossed successfully with minimal consistent effort.



Larger challenges, on the other hand, can be daunting and overwhelming – the difference in success for “big” challenges is finding a bridge to help us across – a river a mile wide, with a bridge, will look smaller than one, without a bridge, 100 feet wide – a dependable bridge is the key. We can stand on one bank and look across longingly thinking “if only . . .” Some people spend their entire adult life:

- In a fog, unable to see the other side, to see or hope for anything better – a slave to following the crowd and popular opinion or the press of immediate urges and drives.
- Resigned to the fact they will always live on “this” side – unable to make any meaningful changes and improvements.
- Making excuses, blaming and making others miserable, about why they cannot ford the challenge.
- Always preparing to learn how, developing the resources and skills, to ford the river themselves – never really with any hope – the challenge is just too difficult for them (made even more frustrating by seeing others, with greater abilities, do what they cannot do).

The Bridge? Persevering Disciplines

Disciplines are the sole bridge leading from where we are to successfully reaching where we want to be – nothing very meaningful will be accomplished without an appropriate discipline. Many days, months, years and lives are lost to nothingness due to a lack of disciplines. The primary responsibility as parents is teaching their children correct disciplines at appropriate times so that when they are grown they will have a foundation of meaningful disciplines and an attitude of the importance of discipline development throughout life; there is not time in life when learning new disciplines, adding them to the “old” ones, is not important and necessary – assuming a person has not given up on life! Unquestionably, the challenges of life increase as we age; ever-increasing disciplines are the only effective way to “ford” these opportunities and challenges.

We should look for the disciplines that most effectively and efficiently accomplish the desired objective (after first evaluating if the objective is worth the expected effort and what, in committing to and developing the discipline, must be given up). A common example is raising children: should the wife work outside the home? This is certainly a major discipline added to the required cooking, cleaning, shopping, taking care of the children (including the husband – often, in effect, one more child to try to raise); yes, working outside the home, for mothers, is a major discipline! For fathers, on the other hand, working is far less a discipline – not working (meeting the family challenges) is often the greater discipline men. Making money or devoting more time to children? When we face multiple challenges we have to THINK and evaluate the conflicting objectives, determining which is more important and which must take a back seat (at least for now). A family needs money to survive – children need proper care – these challenges should be carefully evaluated with objectives determined and disciplines established. Deciding not to have the mother work outside the home, for some period of time, will certainly require greater financial discipline, but it is probably worth it!

The need for some disciplines are “no-brainers” – brush your teeth, clean your clothes, change the oil in your car, make your bed . . .! Others (like the example above of a wife not working outside the home when the children are small) require evaluation of often (at least apparently) conflicting goals and objectives; in the final analysis we may find a clear answer, without any conflicts, but initially we often think there are variances in goals and objectives that we later find are, in fact, not divergent. A clear and important example is “finding” the time to exercise – which is critical as we

age. At first it may seem impossible to find time to exercise (by the time someone is 50 or so, about 1 hour a day 6 days a week). But this is seldom really the case or problem – the kids are either out of the home or largely grown. Work should not be consuming the “heart” of life . . . then we find – take it from TV time! Yes, the TV gremlins will cry out for attention, but as the exercise discipline is being developed we find, not only was there no real conflict between need rest and relaxation and exercise but, that exercise actually improves rest, both when awake and sleeping. Exercise is an example of a discipline that typically returns multiple “dividends” far surpassing the time and effort required.

Perseverance is the key, and normally the breakdown, on the road to a possible discipline. A discipline will start out “loose” and somewhat ineffective, with the perseverance of time the discipline will be improved/tightened to increasing effectiveness.

Perseverance + Time —————> Discipline —————> Goal

Caveats

That said (recognizing disciplines as the key to facing and crossing the challenges of life) there are significant warnings related to disciplines:

- Good disciplines are not goal dependent as measures of success, in other words the benefit and blessing of a good discipline will be in the process, not the conclusion. For example, many people are disciplined (you may say religiously) in purchasing their weekly lottery tickets. The common view is to think a “mega” winner was very smart to be disciplined – not to miss the week when they won. Assuming (and this is a big assumption) that they will use the money for good, rather than it being a negative, it shows poor thinking to attribute their actions as anything other than the foolishness of the many millions who lose billions buying lottery tickets – good disciplines are not goal dependent as a measure of their success.
- Disciplines are synergistic – when focused too narrowly on a single discipline the effect is usually a cannibalization of other, maybe even more important, disciplines. There must be a consistency of disciplines so they do not “pull” from other disciplines. A person very disciplined in exercise is not wise if they fail to eat right, properly rest, etc. – disciplines equally, or maybe even more, important to achieve the exercise discipline objectives.
- Disciplines that are helpful are those that are disciplines of substance, not merely cosmetic. Cosmetics should not be ignored and disregarded as unimportant; a car should be washed periodically even though it won’t have any meaningful impact on how the car drives or rides. It is not unreasonable for a female to uses cosmetic. But when cosmetics become a mask to hide underlying conditions and problems (to replace disciplines that would likely resolve the core issues), they become detrimental. As a common example, many people are “serial” dieters worried about their weight – concerned little about the real issues involved with excess fat (in place of muscle mass), but how (cosmetically and superficially) they look, so they diet.

Besides being ineffective, dieting is a poor decision and discipline for several reasons including the fact that it very seldom work, even if it accomplishes its objective of losing weight, it typically does so at the expense of necessary nutrients lost eating too little or focusing simply on calories to the exclusion of considering what the body needs to operate effectively. In the interest of the short-term goal of looking better, long term damage is done; this is a common example of poor and misplaced disciplines based and focused on cosmetics. And even more, this is a case in which the difficulty and cost of the cosmetic discipline is greater than that of the “core” discipline of exercise – developing and maintaining an exercise discipline is easier than dieting, it provides the real benefits of improving health and it will result in greater cosmetic changes than that provided by dieting.

Finding Grace for Disciplines

For Christians this is, without question or qualification, the really major issue – Where is God? (for only when and where I find God can I hope to find His grace). The effective prayer is:

your will be done ^{Mt 6:10}

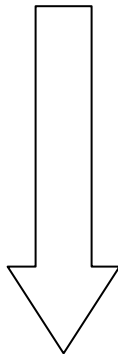
while remembering the warning:

“Those who cling to worthless idols
forfeit the grace that could be theirs. ^{Jnh 2:8}

Disciplines can usually accomplish a great deal – those combined with grace do the otherwise impossible (at least for the person doing them – which is really all that is important)! It doesn't matter that Joe can do X, without grace, while I have to have grace to do it – it is simply vital that I seek grace, through grace disciplines, to do what God wills for me to do! It is very rewarding to see the rewards of disciplines – it is even more gratifying to be blessed with the gifts of grace! As Jesus promised:

“But whoever lives by the [discipline of] truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done [by grace] has been done through God.” ^{John 3:21}

Happy New Year? Happy Old Year? Why seek anything less the Excellence when appropriate disciplines make it possible?



2008 – Year for Continuing to Seek

Physical ^{Body}	Spiritual	Financial	Physical ^{Possessions}	Relational ^{Personal}	Relational ^{Work}	Mental
Proper Rest	Proper Rest	Live within means - start paying down debt	Dispose of clutter	Be Thankful!	Proper Rest	Be Thankful!
Dedicate Time	Dedicate Time		Clean/maintain what you keep	Dedicate Time	Be Thankful!	Proper Rest
Exercise	Seek 1st ^{Mt 6:25-33}	Be Thankful!		Be Thankful!	Take Sunday off!	Take Sunday off!
Be Thankful! ^{Key for good attitude}	Be Thankful!	Clean/maintain physical possessions		Every day have a "devotional" time	Every day have a "devotional" time	Exercise
	Take Sunday off!				Start/increase giving ^{rather than seeking "entitlements"}	Start/increase giving ^{rather than seeking "entitlements"}
Floss your Teeth!	Every day have a "devotional" time	Exercise ^{Even if there is no immediate impact, in the long run this is the best financial investment a person can make}				
Take Sunday off!	Start/increase giving ^{rather than seeking "entitlements"}					Be THE person, in the office, that has the best attitude ^{Encourage others}
Every day have a "devotional" time						
					Challenge yourself with new tasks	Every day have a "devotional" time
		Take Sunday off!				Challenge yourself with new tasks
		Start/increase giving ^{rather than seeking "entitlements"}				