

Reflections on Great Achievements

We are too often amazed at great achievers without looking at the simple (not easy, but straightforward), underlying factors determining achievement and the level of success. The same principles work for athletes, students and scholars, employees, teachers, parents . . . in any endeavor, the two key factors controlling success are **aptitude** and **discipline**. In this age of “you can do anything . . .” (aptitude doesn’t matter) and entitlement (we are entitled without any effort or responsibility) these truths have been gutted by many and thus more people are unfulfilled and dissatisfied wallowing in the morass of mediocrity rather than eagerly seeking their equilibrium of excellence!

Aptitude (in Christian understanding, that for which God designed us individually to be and do) is what drives us to enjoy devoting the time and effort necessary to learn and improve in an endeavor. Without aptitude a person may have a certain level of achievement, but it will be at a much greater perceived cost than the person equally talented, but with an “infused” aptitude – aptitude delights in what those without aptitude consider drudgery and a burden.

Signs of aptitude versus sheer effort and will?

Asking: “**How much more can I do . . .**” versus “**How much do I have to do?**”

Seeking more and better disciplines rather than **trying to minimize them**.

Enjoying the process of learning and improving
rather than solely being **concerned with the associated “perks” and accolades**.

Let’s Make a Deal!




When it comes to spiritual matters, we can typically learn much from the physical – in the case of the factors determining achievement there is virtually a direct parallel between the physical and spiritual – aptitude and discipline being the deciding factors of achievement and success. And whether physical or spiritual, there are not an unlimited number of available doors to us, in fact there are only 4 options.

We daily Make a Deal with life and death; which have you chosen – which defines your present state? Fortunately, through the grace of repentance, we can change our choice! Every day (and sometimes several times in a day) we are faced with challenges and opportunities to choose again how we define our life and worth.


Door 1, 2, 3 or 4?




1	Humility	Aptitude	Disciple
2	Pride	Not Born Again	Disciplined
3	Disappointment	Born Again	Not Disciplined
4	Lawlessness	Not Born Again	Not Disciplined

1  **Humility** **Aptitude** **Disciple** – you have been given the aptitude (in Biblical terms, been born again) and are exercising the disciplines of a disciple. Door 1 is labeled Humility because we only have its benefits as we remain in a state of humility – the most difficult position because it is the most “unnatural.” Humility is the recognition that we are totally helpless – we cannot take credit for anything, our success has and will rest with Someone else;


we recognize, and are VERY thankful, we have been given a new and better life (until born again, the *Bible* says we are dead, blind, slaves unable to see, hear or do anything acceptable to God).


The challenge however, even for those born again, is that we live in a natural body and in a natural world, both encouraging (or should we say  driving) us to the safety and security of the natural world – what everyone else is doing and thinking; it is the bird in the hand philosophy, especially when (like 21st Century America) the “bird” is pretty good – certainly as opposed to having to sacrifice everything for the **hope** of something better!

Unless we have been graced the aptitude (ears to hear) and discipline, we can and will not hear or do that which is required to grow in this grace! Still, yet, even with the given aptitude it is a daily challenge to keep Door 1 open.

2  **Pride** **Not Born Again** **Disciplined** This is maybe the most dangerous door to choose because it can look so much like Door 1 (often even better), thus it is the most misleading and destructive – thinking everything is right, when, in fact, everything is so wrong! This is discipline (while not a disciple of Jesus Christ) without an aptitude – ground won by sheer will and effort and consequently the person rightly is prideful of what they have accomplished. This, in religious circles, is the thought that “God helps those who help themselves” as opposed to the truth (of Door 1) that God helps those who cannot help themselves – the totally helpless, hopeless yet given the faith (aptitude) that God can and will give the humility.

In Jesus’ time, these were the Pharisees, the very religious and self-righteous. In “Christian” circles, these are mostly commonly the conservatives prideful of how good they are, that they have “chosen” Jesus Christ (as opposed to His having chosen them) and disdainful of others that are not at their level spiritually! It is so easy to trade Door 1 for Door 2 and when we find ourselves at Door 2 we have to repent again and humbly return to Door 1; Door 2 is God’s least favorite choice for us!

3  **Disappointment** **Born Again** **Not Disciplined** For those observing what is going on, those at Door 3 typically appear far less successful than those at Door 2 – they show little interest and less discipline. However, unlike Door 2, in which a person may rest comfortably and self-righteously all their remaining earthly life, the person at Door 3 will be disappointed (first with God because He does not bow down to them and their wishes – then to themselves as they realize the problem is with them). Door 3 will sooner or later be revealed as a mirage because it is uncomfortable (even, if for a while, not consciously); aptitude may be lazy and undisciplined for a period, but eventually (unless the person dies first) it will tire of “retirement” and reassert its “made for” nature. A real doctor may enjoy the “good life” (cocktail parties, golf . . .) for a period, but after a while he had rather be at the hospital or in the operating room – he is, after all, a doctor, not a dilettante. This person can only let grace wane so far and long before they are reawakened to the death of earthly life and their only satisfaction in their given aptitude and related disciplines!

4  **Lawlessness** **Not Born Again** **Not Disciplined** Oh, don’t think these are simply the atheists and irreligious, these are often the most religious of all – but unlike those prideful in their disciplines, these are those that foolishly claim no discipline is necessary; they don’t have a sliver of aptitude in the truth so they can’t imagine discipline is of any worth. And

in one sense they are right; without aptitude discipline is simply deceiving. But this does not mean discipline is of no value. Without belaboring this door too much, today we see the leaders of the current Episcopal church standing at Door 4, with a big smile on their faces, welcoming the naive and gullible in and through this door of death!

Hope and Help at the Corner of Aptitude Way and Discipline Boulevard

Jesus graciously points us in the right direction, to the right door, warning:

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” Mt 7:13 - 14

“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’

“But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’” Lk 13:24 - 25

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Aptitude (in Christian understanding, what God designed us individually to be and do) is what drives us to enjoy devoting the time and effort necessary to learn and improve in an endeavor. Without aptitude a person may have a certain level of achievement, but it will be at a much greater cost than the person equally talented, but with an “infused” aptitude – aptitude delights in what those without aptitude consider drudgery.

The really Great News and Hope:

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. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus**, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” 1Co 1:26 – 31



It may not be a fancy door, but it is the right and easy one – look for and at your aptitude and for the associated disciplines so that you find the God-graced Door 1 designed especially for you! Only there can we hope to find the freedom and satisfaction of the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Gal 5:22 – 23

Jesus Offers and Promised:

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” Rev 3:19 – 20

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Lk 11:9 – 10

Every day (and sometimes several times in a day) we are faced with challenges and opportunities to choose again how we define our life and worth.

Choose Door 1! The Truth of Humility!

