

Godly Discipline is God's way for growth and greatness! (from Kent Hughes: Disciplines of a Godly Man)

We wonder at the anatomical perfection of a da Vinci painting. But we forget that Leonardo da Vinci on one occasion drew a thousand hands. In the last century Matisse explained his own mastery, remarking that the difficulty with many who wanted to be artists is that they spend their time chasing models rather than painting them. Again the discipline factor

Thomas Edison came up with the incandescent light after a thousand failures.

Jascha Heifitz, the greatest violinist of this century, began playing the violin at the age of three and early began to practice four hours a day until his death at age seventy-five when he had long been the greatest in the world some 102,000 hours of practice. We will never get anywhere in life without discipline, be it in the arts, business, athletics, or academics.

This is doubly so in spiritual matters. In other areas we may be able to claim some innate advantage. An athlete may be born with a strong body, a musician with perfect pitch, or an artist with an eye for perspective. But none of us can claim an innate spiritual advantage. In reality, we are all equally disadvantaged. None of us naturally seeks after God, none is inherently righteous, none instinctively does good (cf. Romans 3:9-18). Therefore, as children of grace, our spiritual discipline is everything, everything! I repeat . . . discipline is everything!

PAUL ON DISCIPLINE

This being so, the statement from Paul to Timothy regarding spiritual discipline in 1 Timothy 4:7 — “train yourself to be godly” — takes on not only transcending importance, but personal urgency. The word “train” comes from the word *gymnos*, which means “naked” and is the word from which we derive our English word *gymnasium*. In traditional Greek athletic contests, the participants competed without clothing, so as not to be encumbered. Therefore, the word “train” originally carried the literal meaning, “to exercise naked.”⁸ By New Testament times it referred to exercise and training in general. But even then it was, and is, a word with the smell of the gym in it — the sweat of a good workout. “Gymnasticize (exercise, work out, train) yourself for the purpose of godliness” conveys the feel of what Paul is saying.

The call to train ourselves for godliness also suggests directing all of our energy toward godliness. Paul pictures this elsewhere: “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. . . . Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave” (1 Corinthians 9:25-27). Intense, energetic sweat!

When one seriously trains, he willingly undergoes hours of discipline and even pain so as to win the prize running 10,000 miles to run 100 yards at one's best. The successful Christian life is a sweaty affair! No manliness no maturity! No discipline no discipleship! No sweat no sainthood!

The difference is one of motivation : legalism is self-centered; discipline is God-centered. The legalistic heart says, "I will do this thing to gain merit with God." The disciplined heart says, "I will do this thing because I love God and want to please Him." There is an infinite difference between the motivation of legalism and discipline!

The typical church service has 60 percent females versus 40 percent male attenders.

The Church in America needs real men, and we are the men!

COSMIC CALL

We cannot overemphasize the importance of this call to spiritual discipline. Listen to Paul again from 1 Timothy 4:7, 8: "Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

Whether or not we have disciplined ourselves will make a huge difference in this life. We are all members of one another, and we are each either elevated or depressed by the inner lives of one another. Some of us affect others like a joyous tide, lifting them upward, but some of us are like undertows to the Body of Christ. If you are married, the presence or lack of spiritual discipline can serve to sanctify or damn your children and grandchildren. Spiritual discipline, therefore, holds huge promise for this present life.

As for "the life to come," spiritual discipline builds the enduring architecture of one's soul on the foundation of Christ gold, silver, and precious stones which will survive the fires of judgment and remain a monument to Christ for eternity (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15). Some may minimize the importance of spiritual discipline now, but no one will then! The disciplined Christian gives and gets the best of both worlds the world now and the world to come.

- What is spiritual discipline, and why is it so important?
- What usually gets in our way (see Romans 3:9-18)?
- What can a lack of spiritual discipline do to your life?

- Reflect on 1 Timothy 4:7, 8 (“train yourself to be godly”). What is the literal meaning of “train” here? Practically, step by step, what does this mean you should do?
- What does Hebrews 12:1 say about this? What things are holding you back in your walk with God? Why are you hanging on to them? Are you prepared to pay the price? Why or why not?
- “No manliness no maturity! No discipline no discipleship! No sweat no sainthood!” True or not true? How do you feel, deep inside, about this challenge? How does spiritual discipline differ from legalism? Which do you most often practice? Is a change needed? If so, how can you bring this about?