

Christian Growth Course Developing Self-Discipline

Introduction: CAN YOU:

- Save money for anticipated expenses?
- Maintain a daily quiet time with God?
- Keep from gossiping when you have heard something?
- Get to church early?
- Talk to someone about Christ when it is hard to do?
- Give God a regular portion of the first-fruits of your income?
- Keep your checkbook balanced?
- Do your homework or work on a term paper when you had rather watch TV?
- Go and apologize to a person you have wronged?
- Control eating, drinking and entertainment?
- Keep romance from disorganizing your whole life?
- Pay for necessities and pay bills before spending on non-essentials?
- Keep from putting things off?
- Make yourself lay down work for needed relaxation or family time?
- Turn your mind away from wrong fantasies?
- Keep dating behavior within bounds?
- Speak and act gently and carefully when your patience is tried?
- Go to bed and get up when you should?
- Turn off the TV or change channels when content is unfit for viewing?
- Observe the speed limit?

Many gifted people accomplish little and suffer great unhappiness because they cannot control and discipline themselves. It is God's will that we be in control of our lives. God himself is perfectly ordered and in perfect control of himself - 1 Corinthians 14:33; James 1:13. The more we grow like him, the more disciplined and self-controlled our lives will be - Galatians 5:22, 23. It is possible to develop self-discipline. Indiscipline is a habit, and habits can be unlearned and replaced with better habits. If we can learn to rule ourselves, we will have discovered one of the main keys to an abundant, happy life.

1. Lack of self-discipline costs us a lot.

- A. We fail in important things because we cannot make ourselves do what we don't want to, or stop doing what we want to keep doing.

- B. We can't find time or money for the most important things because we waste time or money on side attractions that we can't turn down - Proverbs 23:21; 6:10; 21:25.
- C. We grow tired and frustrated because of the disorder in our undisciplined lifestyle.
- D. Our relationships with others suffer because of our uncontrolled outbursts.
- E. We may fall into sin for lack of self-control - 2 Peter 2:14a; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 2 Samuel 11.
- F. We lose valuable things because we cannot refuse the things that conflict with them - Genesis 25:29-34; Hebrews 12:16, 17; Numbers 20:2-12.

2. Self-discipline brings valuable rewards.

- A. Self-discipline and self-esteem are closely connected. A disciplined person feels much better about life, much more secure.
- B. Self-control in one part of your life may spill over into other parts as you develop a spirit of discipline.
- C. A disciplined person is much more productive in anything he or she does materially or spiritually.
- D. When you rule yourself, you then have a right to teach and help others.
- E. Self-discipline enables you to walk away from evil so that you are not trapped or damaged by it.
- F. Through the cultivation of discipline, you can keep doing the right thing not only in the good times, but when you are tired, tempted, tried or under pressure. You become a dependable soldier.

3. Some causes of indiscipline:

- A. Parents did not discipline consistently or make requirements during childhood, so that the child did not learn to discipline himself/herself. (A new pattern can still be learned).
- B. Drifting into a habit of indiscipline during easy times.
- C. A spirit of independence or rebellion.
- D. Inherited personality traits (these can be deliberately adjusted and compensated for).
- E. Some illnesses.

4. It is God's will for us to be self-disciplined.

- A. Self-control is part of the gospel preached by Paul - Acts 24:24, 25.

- B. Elders, who are examples to other Christians, are to be self-controlled and disciplined (orderly) - 1 Timothy 3:1-3; Titus 1:6-8.
- C. We are taught to use our time and opportunities as efficiently as possible - Ephesians 5:15.
- D. We are to add self-control to our lives as one of the Christian virtues that keep us from falling - 2 Peter 1:5, 6.
- E. We are to do our very best at our work or whatever we do. That requires discipline - Proverbs 10:5; Colossians 3:23.
- F. God's word says it is better to rule our own spirit than to conquer a city - Proverbs 16:32.
- G. God gives us his Spirit to help us discipline our lives if we will cooperate - Galatians 5:22, 23; 2 Timothy 1:7.

5. Self-discipline has always been part of the lives of strong servants of God:

Joseph - Genesis 39:6-12

Daniel - Daniel 1:8; 2:26-30; 6:10

David - 1 Samuel 24

Moses - Exodus 34:28

Ezekiel - Ezekiel 24:15-18

Paul - 1 Corinthians 9:12-27

Jesus - Matthew 4:1,2; Mark 1:35; John 17:19; Luke 9:44,57; Mark 10:32-34; John 12:27,28; Mark 14:36; 1 Peter 2:23

6. Some important areas requiring self-discipline:

- A. Thought-life
- B. Emotions
- C. Devotional life
- D. Productivity
- E. Relationships
- F. Appetites
- G. Finances

7. Some steps toward a disciplined life:

- A. Honestly look at what indiscipline is costing you, others, and the Lord. (Don't allow yourself to blame something or someone else for problems really caused by your own lack of discipline). Picture the difference that discipline could bring into your life. These things will motivate you, and motivation is a basic key toward a more disciplined life.
- B. Study various life situations that produce discipline and see how they do it. (Why does a G.I. shape up at boot camp? Why does a student study for an exam? Why does a guy in love plan carefully for his date?). Discipline is more a matter of motivation than of technique.
- C. Let God's discipline of your life produce self-discipline. Ask him for his discipline, and for his help in developing your own. Learn to deal with yourself before God has to - Hebrews 12:5-11; 5:8; Romans 5:3,4; James 1:2,3; 1 Corinthians 11:31.
- D. Graph and analyze your life (time-use, successes and failures, frustrations, etc.) for 1 to 3 weeks. Discover non-productive and damaging behavior so that you can deal with it.
- E. Learn the principles of good time management and financial management.
- F. Learn the classical disciplines that produce spiritual growth (In his book Celebration of Discipline, Richard J. Foster lists meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration).
- G. Discover the snares that pull you off-track, and devise a plan (even a radical one) to deal with them - Matthew 18:8, 9.
- H. Carefully choose one or a few areas of your life that most need discipline, and make it/them a pilot project. As you exercise yourself in discipline, you will grow spiritual "muscles" that will help in other areas. The more you discipline yourself, the more you will be able to do so - Mark 4:25. Some sample programs:
- 1) Put God first in your finances. Prayerfully decide on a regular proportion of your income to contribute. Take it off the top of each paycheck you receive, and put it aside where it won't be spent on something else. Contribute it at the first opportunity.
 - 2) Decide on a time for daily prayer and Bible study. Choose the time that is least likely to be interrupted. Make this a priority even if you have to eliminate some other activity to make room. Put up a notice on your bathroom mirror or some other likely place to remind you of the priority of this commitment. If you miss the set time, don't let yourself go to sleep at night until you have had your devotional time.
 - 3) Think of a personal relationship between yourself and someone else that is not as it should be. Think prayerfully about the problem that separates you. Decide from the scriptures and from the spirit of love what God would want you to do - Matthew 18:15; 5:23, 24; Galatians 6:1, 2. Then, though it is hard for you, make concrete plans to contact the person and work on the relationship, and carry through.
 - 4) If you have a long-term project such as a term paper or report due, say, December 10, calculate the lead-time necessary to complete the project without a pressure-crunch. Set specific work-periods during October and November for

successive stages of the project, and stay on schedule even if you have to cancel less important activities.

- I. Make deliberate commitments to meet certain deadlines, to put yourself under measured pressure to produce.
- J. Develop the habit of starting every project far enough ahead to complete it, and budget work-time on your calendar for intermediate steps. Name the steps to be completed by each date.
- K. If you tend to put things off, compensate by making a complete reversal: make a rule to tackle any necessary task at the first available opening. Set aside specific times in future to do certain things.
- L. Take away the "safety nets" so that you will reap the consequences if you fail to discipline yourself. For example, don't ask anyone to wake you up if you fail to heed your alarm.
- M. Reward yourself for significant victories in self-discipline, but not in a way that competes with your goals.
- N. Rearrange your daily schedule and your lifestyle to make it more productive. For example, go to bed early enough to be at your best the next day. Get up early enough to really get a good start each day.
- O. Study the lives of people with disciplined lives. Associate with such people.
- P. Learn to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials.
- Q. Practice doing the things you dread, and dread will diminish.
- R. Don't abandon the search for discipline because you fail at times. Old habits are not easily broken, but new habits can be established. All of us will need to work on self-discipline all of our lives.
- S. Above all, grow closer to Jesus. Love for him will motivate you to discipline as nothing else will.

Conclusion: Self-discipline makes you a dependable soldier who will not give way easily under trial. Today's discipline prepares you for tomorrow's engagements. Discipline is a matter of survival.

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