

Choose A Self-Discipline Life

Lesson #20

Scripture: Hebrews 12:11 *"All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."*

Introduction:

When I was a little boy I was a perfect child. I never...ever got in trouble. When I walked into a room people said of me...that is the greatest little boy that ever lived. I guess by now you recognize that I am putting you on.

My mother and father must have loved me greatly as they followed God's example of disciplining those that He loved (Heb 12:6).

As mom was home while dad worked during the day most of this fell to her. I remember some of her frustration trying to teach us different life lessons. One problem that came along was that I figured out that a spanking only lasted a minute or so tops, so I would grit my teeth and be on my way.

However, mom was pretty smart and figured out somehow that I absolutely with ever fiber of my being...hated standing in the corner. That was bad news for me because once she had figured that out I had not choice but to become a little angle.

When we are small discipline is something that is for all practical purposes thrust upon us by our parents, but as we grow we must take on the task of self discipline in our lives.

Transitional Statement:

As Christians self discipline and self control is essential for our walk with God. Discipline should be a daily lifestyle that we as Christians embrace, not a once in a while experience brought on by the trials of life.

Lesson:

I. First of all, the discipline of giving

A. I haven't always been a good giver.

1. A couple of friends of mine helped me

- a. Joe Brewer....made a point to tell about how God blesses giving
- b. Doug Hamilton helped me look for opportunities.

B. In the Old testament specific instructions defined God's expectation for giving

1. As a base standard, 10% was what God expected.
 - a. And then other gifts and offerings were made in addition to that 10%
2. But, Jesus moves the Old Testament instruction to a higher level in Matthew 5
 - a. By repeatedly saying *“you’ve heard it said, but I tell you”*
 - 1) By saying this He calls us to the fullness of spirituality that happens only through Him.

C. The New Testament points, the discussion on giving, to the spirit and purpose

1. 2 Corinthians 9:7 *“Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*
2. Giving is to be **understood as:**
 - a. An elevation of God’s will over ours...Romans 12:1-2
 - 1) Just imagine how different this world could be if we were all earnestly trying to promote God’s will.
 - b. A full surrender of self
 - 1) Denying our self desires....Matthew 16:24

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”
 - c. A rejection of Greed.
 - d. A measure of trust and understanding of God’s sovereignty...Isa 40
 - e. A sacrificing of self
 - 1) Romans 12:1

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”
 - 2) Exemplified to the greatest degree by Jesus as He gives His life on the cruel cross of Calvary.
 - a) It represents a complete giving of all that we have.
 - f. And a demonstration of God’s love to a world in need of salvation.

D. When our giving measures up with God's expectations

1. Flood gates of possibilities are opened in our lives.
2. Our trust in God grows
3. The love of Jesus is shared with the world around us
4. And we acknowledge that everything we have belongs to God anyway.

E. Our giving effects the people around us.

1. When I was little my dad sometimes was unemployed because he worked for a government contractor (McDonald Douglas). One time we got down to nothing but Mayonnaise and peanut butter...a real bad combination. So the church brought us tons of food...literally. My heart was really touched and I still remember that great giving that the church did that day.

F. Interestingly enough the world and sometimes the church fails to get hold of this wonderful spiritual discipline...The national average for giving sets at a mere 2%

II. Then there is the discipline of fasting

A. Fasting throughout the bible represents a natural response of a soul in anguish, and in need of concentration and self discipline.

1. In the Old Testament fasting was part of the day of atonement and done collectively by Israel as a group.
 - a. Lev 16:29-31 & 23:27-29 Mentions "humbling" on that day and Isa 58:3 connects this humbling to fasting.
 - b. i.e. God through this fast helps His people know that anguish must accompany the failure of sin.
2. The last time I checked the New Testament says that there is only one who is perfect and that all have sinned Romans 3:23 and that and that none of us live above sin1 John 1:10
 - a. Maybe that is why Jesus just says "*when you fast*"
 - b. He doesn't say "*if*" you fast
3. Have you ever heard someone say...or said yourself that you just can't seem to stop doing some particular sin?
 - a. What if you embraced this wonderful God given discipline in your life by taking up fasting after you sin to more closely connect with the anguish of sin...

b. I suspect that we might learn to sin less often.

B. Mostly fasting is a private matter...Matthew 6:16 not to be shown

1. It is a very deep time of focus,reflection ,....and connection with God.

a. Jesus in Gethsemane

b. Jesus' forty days in the wilderness

2. Public or group fasting comes with some danger.

Isaiah 58:5

*5 "Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself?
Is it for bowing one's head like a reed
And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed?
Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD?"*

a. Israel was vainly fasting without letting God and His will and way penetrate their hearts.

1) And God found that unacceptable.

2) And put them on ice seventy years in Babylon to think about it.

C. Interestingly enough God explains through Isaiah that His kind of fasting is one that moves a person to action and even takes on different forms than simply abstaining from food.

Isa 58:6-8

*6 "Is this not the fast which I choose,
To loosen the bonds of wickedness,
To undo the bands of the yoke,
And to let the oppressed go free
And break every yoke?
7 "Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry
And bring the homeless poor into the house;
When you see the naked, to cover him;
And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
8 "Then your light will break out like the dawn,
And your recovery will speedily spring forth;
And your righteousness will go before you;
The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard."*

D. Fasting is also connected with a deep longing to be in the presence of God.

1. In Matthew 9:14,15 Jesus explains that fasting comes when the bride and groom are separated for a while.

E. Fasting helps us:

1. Clear our minds and focus more clearly on God.
2. It sharpens our discernments
3. It slows us down
4. And helps us remain humble
5. It can be a part of building commitment.
6. It can help us through grief.
7. It can be used to help in our search for truth and wisdom
8. **But more than anything it represent a plea for God to have His way in our lives.**

F. With fasting we should expect God's intervention

1. Angels came to Daniel, Elijah, to Jesus and Cornelius in their fasting
2. In Psalms 91, God's love is promised for His children and verse 11 says that *"He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all of your ways."*
3. Through the story of Job we know that God is ever present ...especially in our times of anguish.

III. And finally there is the discipline of meditation

A. What is meditation?

1. I knew an old Choctaw Indian who described his way of meditation by sitting under a tree and starting at the top and looking between each branch for truths of life until he reached the bottom....In all his years he said he never made it to the bottom branch.
2. Simply put meditation means to ponder
 - a. And ponder means:
 - 1) To deeply explore meaning
 - 2) To consider all the possibilities
 - 3) To gain overall perspective.
 - 4) And most importantly to figure out what part we will have in all of it.

b. Fertile ground for meditation is a quite place like Gethsemane was for Jesus.

- 1) We protect our wet lands
- 2) Our coast lines
- 3) And even our hunting refuges.
- 4) But on many occasions don't make time for quite reflection with God.

3. Meditation is and active process of thinking that fills the mind with thoughts of God

B. Examples of meditation

1. Psalms 1:2-3

*2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.*

2. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 (implicit)

6 " These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 " You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 " You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 " You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

3. Psalms 63:6 *"When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches,"*

4. Psalms 119:15 *"I will meditate on Your precepts And regard Your ways.*

5. Psalms 119:23 *"Even though princes sit and talk against me, Your servant meditates on Your statutes."*

6. Psalms 119:48 *"And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, Which I love; And I will meditate on Your statutes."*

C. Meditation is the process of coming to the well of God and drinking deeply of that living water mentioned in (John chapter 4) and so deeply that the same living water will well up and flow out of us to others John 7:38

Conclusion:

Meditation is really the fertile soil of the mind by which God brings about change in our lives.