

Disciplines for Spiritual Growth
1 Tim 4:7-8

Intro: What does it take to grow spiritually? Discipline; what is discipline? Richard Foster wrote a book called CLASSIC CELEBRATION OF DISCIPLINE. Sounds a little strange as a title, as a child I certainly would have never celebrated discipline – who celebrates spankings?

To understand Foster's idea title we need consider an alternate idea of discipline: **the word “Christian” originally meant disciple of Christ. “Discipline” comes from the word “disciple.”** Disciplines are the activities that the disciple engages in, that the disciple does, to follow her Master. The Christian Disciplines, then, are the things that we do to aid us in following after Christ. Prayer, study of the Word, meditation, fasting, these are the inward spiritual disciplines; the ones that allow the work of the Spirit to take deep root in the soul and change the believer.

Many have struggled spiritually under the delusion that since there is nothing that we can do to be justified before God, there is nothing we can do to be sanctified, or made righteous. This simply isn't true. Salvation is a completely unmerited gift of God given to us through faith, but that does not mean that we have no role in our becoming sanctified. God doesn't wave a magic wand and make us completely sanctified at the point of salvation. Instead, God calls us to pursue Him, and promises to transform us as we do. That is what Spiritual Disciplines are, they are our pursuit of God, so that He can change us. As Richard Foster says, “[*The Spiritual*] Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.” We don't make ourselves righteous by reading the Bible or fasting or meditation. Instead, as we commit to seeking God in these disciplines, we park ourselves in God's garage so He works on us.

The deepness of our faith, the deepness of God, awaits those who develop these **Spiritual Disciplines**. Our text today speaks of **Spiritual Discipline**. As we begin our journey this year toward **Transforming for Heaven** lets look at this idea of **Spiritual Discipline**.

[Stand\read 1 Tim 4:7-8 \pray\dismiss jr church]

What we are really taking about today is self-discipline. Self-discipline is the ability to get yourself to take action regardless of your emotional state.

Imagine what you could accomplish if you could simply get yourself to follow through on your best intentions no matter what. Picture yourself saying to your body, “You're overweight. Lose 20 pounds.” Without self-discipline that intention won't materialize. But with sufficient self-discipline, it's a done deal. The height of self-discipline is when you reach the point that when you make a conscious decision; it's virtually guaranteed you'll follow through on it.

The Christian world is woefully in need of some real Self-disciplined followers of Christ; men and women who are strong enough to make the conscious decision to decide to develop sound **Spiritual Disciplines** in their lives that will result in real life transformation.

Discipline is something every Christians needs and we need to be about the work of developing Spiritual Disciplines. Let's look at this idea of Spiritual growth and Discipline.

1. Spiritual Growth Takes Discipline

A. Spiritual Disciplines are those personal disciplines that promote Spiritual growth

- 1) They are the habits of devotion Christian behavior that have been practiced by the people of God down through history as they become more Godly.
- 2) The ultimate purpose of Spiritual Growth is Godliness or Christ-likeness
 - (a) 1 Tim 4:8 **“For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.**
 - (b) Rom 8:29 says that God predestined us, **“...to be conformed to the image of his Son...”**
- 3) 1 Tim 4:7 tells us that we are to **“Exercise ourselves unto godliness”** or we are to **discipline ourselves for the purpose of Godliness**

4) These Spiritual Disciplines are the God-given means we are to use in the spirit-filled pursuit of Godliness

- (a) Godly people are disciplined people
- (b) Consider the heroes of Church History:
 - (1) Martin Luther
 - (2) John Bunyan
 - (3) The Wesley's – John, George and their mother Susanna
 - (4) George Whitfield
 - (5) Jonathan Edwards
 - (6) C. H. Spurgeon
 - (7) This list goes on

5) In my own Christian life those who have had the biggest impact on my Spiritual Growth were Spiritually Disciplined.

B. God uses 3 things to change us and conform us into the image of His Son :

- 1) God uses people to change us – Pr 27:17 ***“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend”***
- 2) God uses circumstances to change us – Rom 8:28 ***“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”***
- 3) God uses Spiritual Discipline to change us.
 - (a) This one is different
 - (1) Unlike the other two this one works from the inside out
 - (2) When he uses people or circumstances to change us they work from the outside
 - (3) It is also different because this is the only one that God gives us a certain amount of choice in; He lets us decide just how involved we are going to be in our own spiritual growth.
 - (b) We have little choice in which people or circumstances he is going to use but we can chose to develop Spiritual disciplines that can cause us to Grow to Christ-likeness or godliness.
- 4) We recognize that self-discipline alone will not make us more holy because growth in holiness is ultimately a gift from God:
 - (a) In Jn 17:17 Jesus prayed, ***“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”***
 - (b) In 1 Thess 5:23 Paul prayed ***“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”***
- 5) But we can take certain actions or develop certain **Disciplines** to help the process of our own **Spiritual Growth**
- 6) God has given us these Disciplines as a means of receiving His grace and to grow in Godliness
- 7) It is through these disciplines we place ourselves before God so he can work on us conforming us into the image of His Son (Rom 8:29).
- 8) These disciplines include but are not limited such things as: **Bible Study, Prayer, true Worship, Evangelism, Serving, Stewardship, Fasting, Silence and Solitude (Quite time with the Lord), growing in knowledge.**

C. As parents we understand that discipline is essential for our children to grow up to be productive members of society; Spiritual Discipline must be developed if we are going to grow up to be productive members of the Christian life as well.

2. The Lord Expects us to be Disciplined

- A. In 1 Tim 4:7 when it says, ***“...exercise thyself rather unto godliness”*** it is in the imperative voice which means it is a command
 - 1) In other words being Holy or disciplining ourselves to become more holy is not an option; its not a suggestion
 - 2) If we claim to be a child of the Holy God, then Peter tells us, ***“...be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”*** (1 Pet 1:15-16)
 - 3) Therefore, developing Spiritual Disciplines is not an option.
- B. Jesus implied that we should develop Spiritual Disciplines...
 - 1) When He said, in Matt 11:29, ***“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”***

2) When He said, in Luke 9:23, “**...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me**”

3) These verses are telling us that Jesus expected His followers to develop Spiritual disciplines just as He was spiritually disciplined.

4) Those who learn accidentally and follow incidentally are not true disciples.

C. The Lord not only expects us to develop Spiritual Disciplines He modeled them for us.

D. Even Gal 5:22-23 tells us that discipline is at the heart of spiritual gifts since **Temperance (self-control)** is part of the fruit of the spirit.

3. There is a danger in neglecting spiritual disciplines

A. William Barclay, a well known Bible commentator, illustrates the danger of neglecting spiritual disciplines.

Commenting on the difference between the disciplined and the undisciplined way of life, he wrote:

1) Nothing was ever achieved without discipline; and many an athlete and many a man has been ruined because he abandoned discipline and let himself grow slack. Coleridge is the supreme tragedy of indisciplinability. Never did so great a mind produce so little. He left Cambridge University to join the army; but he left the army because, in spite of all his education, he could not rub down a horse; he returned to Oxford and left without a degree. He began a paper called *The Watchman* which lived for ten numbers and then died. It has been said of him: “He lost himself in visions of work to be done, that always remained to be done. Coleridge had every poetic gift but one – the gift of sustained and concentrated effort.” In his head and in his mind he had all kinds of books, as he said himself, “completed save for transcription.” “I am on the eve,” he says, “of sending to the press two octavo volumes.” But the books were never composed outside Coleridge’s mind; because he would not face the discipline of sitting down to write them out. No one ever reached any eminence, and no one having reached it ever maintained it, without discipline.

2) This man never accomplished a thing in his life, in spite of great potential, because he refused to develop the disciplines necessary to excel.

3) How many Christians are there that are Coleridge Christians...full of potential but failing to rise to that level of Christian maturity necessary to achieve great things for God because they failed to develop the Spiritual Disciplines necessary to rise to that next level in their walk.

B. When we neglect our spiritual Growth we will bear little fruit; the presence of Spiritual gifts does not guarantee abundant fruitfulness any more than Coleridge’s mental gifts assured the production of poetry.

1) “**...But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal**” (1 Cor. 12:4-7).

2) Just as with natural gifts, spiritual gifts must be developed by discipline in order to bear spiritual fruit.

C. Finally, if we neglect these Spiritual Disciplines we run the risk of being deceived into following all manner of flawed doctrine.

1) “**...beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ...**” (2 Pet 3:17-18).

2) There are some Christians in our world today who have been caught up in such error and crazy doctrine and all because they neglected the development of sound Spiritual Disciplines.

3) Paul warns us that until we are perfected and, “**...the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive...**” (Eph 4:13-14).

Conclusion: There is a certain freedom that comes with discipline. The more disciplined we are at something the freer we are to try something more. I love to drive a car and I would really love to drive a race car. But I have not disciplined myself to drive a race car so there for I am not free to get behind the wheel of a NASCAR and try to race at Daytona. If I had spent the number of years developing the disciplines needed to drive in NASCAR then I would be free to try driving at Daytona.

Developing Spiritual Disciplines frees us to step out in faith and try something new and challenging for God that we otherwise would not feel free to do. The reason few Christians are involved in many ministries of the Church is because they don’t feel they are qualified to do so and that stems from a lack of Spiritual Discipline.