

Discipline: What Are You DOING?

I get angry with Jordan at least once a month over the same thing. Want to know what it is? You know how they serve pint-sized ice cream at the store? Right. Men, what are you supposed to do with a pint-sized ice cream? Correct. You eat it. The whole thing. At one sitting. In biblical hermeneutics, we call that a necessary inference, because no one in their right mind would stretch a pint-size ice cream over 3 weeks. That would be an unreasonable assumption, and assumption, as you know, is also sin. So, when she engages in this ungodly act, it frustrates me because I (1) feel judged by her self-control (2) get incredibly angry while she enjoys another evening of ice cream as I sit empty-handed. I didn't know about this before we were married, so as a side note to our singles, don't rush marriage. Make sure you know what you're getting into before you put a ring on it.

Titus 1:7-8 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

Whether you serve as an elder or not, the character of such men is what we all strive for because it's rooted in Christ. We know how He behaved in this world from the gospel accounts. Today, as I read this passage and consider different aspects of holiness, my eyes are drawn to "self-controlled" and "disciplined." What's the difference between the two? Most of us blend them, understandably, but they aren't the same. Being able to differentiate will guide us in our walk with the Lord and those we love. For example, this week as I considered how to apply this in my life, it made me reflect on my role as a father. So, what's the difference? Think of it this way: self-control is more about your ability to govern your desires, emotions, and actions in the moment. It chooses what's right over what you feel. Discipline is intentional practice or training that strengthens self-control over time. It's been put like this: *Self-control is the fruit. Discipline is one of the ways the fruit grows.*

Examples help:

- **Self-control:** You're offered a piece of your favorite pie, but you're watching your sugar intake so you politely turn down the offer.
- **Discipline:** You're watching your sugar intake, so you create a routine by adding more vegetables to your meals. You might prepare a large amount of food on one day and divide it into daily containers. This makes eating easier and reduces the chance of making choices outside your routine because nothing else is available. And if you have ice cream, you limit how much you have so you can enjoy it more often.

What happens when you lean on self-control without discipline? Your reaction to temptation may heavily lean on your current mood. If you're not practicing discipline, there's a high possibility you'll give in when tempted. Self-control is more consistent when it results from discipline. Consider Paul's exhortation to those in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one

beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

But we're not giving guidance on how to be elite athletes, and we know that. As Paul wrote Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:6-10 If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

Holy living example: Anger

- **Self-control:** Someone says something passive-aggressive and you hold your tongue.
- **Discipline:** You pray to God every day for help because you struggle with anger. You study passages reminding you how unrighteous anger is seated in pride. You purposely seek the good in others so their value shines brighter than their faults. You consistently remind yourself that we all struggle in our own way. This isn't passive. It's active.

We're asking: What are you doing?

We can't afford to wing it, brethren. I know that some issues resolve over time - you've got to let things work out on their own, but how we react to day-to-day situations, our mindset, emotions, etc, need our constant attention. If we don't train ourselves and let things "work out," we're going to naively establish bad habits. Whatever you practice will show up in the moment. This isn't just about "not doing the bad thing", but replacing it with something good consistently. No athlete wins by accident. No soldier survives by accident. No Christian grows by accident. Consider Paul's instruction to brethren in Philippi:

Philippians 4:4-9 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Think of it this way. He's encouraging self-control and discipline:

- **Self-Control:** Rejoice. Be reasonable to everyone. Don't be anxious about anything.
- **Discipline:** Pray with thanksgiving and let God know what's on your heart. Think and practice what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, and excellent.

If you sit around just hoping you'll exercise joy in a bad moment, act reasonably when someone acts a fool, and not make mountains out of every molehill, then you'll need to practice excellence. It's a choice you make.

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Think about this in terms of parenting. Are you helping your child when your approach to "training" is simply getting on to them when they fail? Have you counseled them? What tools have you given them to succeed? What goals have you set before them? What are they supposed to replace their bad habits with? Do they know? Do you know?

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Finally, I'd like to bring this lesson to a conclusion by reminding us of two fundamental truths:

- **You are to BUILD a house on the rock.** Just because it's built on the rock doesn't mean you don't build ([Matthew 7:24-27](#)). Yes, God gives the increase, but you're still expected to plant and water ([1 Corinthians 3:8](#)). You don't work, you don't eat ([2 Thessalonians 3:10](#)). You don't consider what it takes to complete a project; it will fail ([Luke 14:29](#)). On and on it goes.
- **Discipline expresses obedience, and obedience is not anti-grace.** It's been said that "grace is opposed to earning, not effort." Some could hear this and think, "that sounds like legalism." Not so. Legalism says, "work so God will love you." God says, "I have loved you; now get to work." Consider [John 3:36](#), "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." Here's one more: [Titus 2:11-14](#) For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

I understand you may be going through a difficult time. It may be something beyond your control. This message isn't meant to beat anyone down. We also want to remember that even the greatest amount of self-control and discipline has never resulted in perfection, save our Lord Jesus. As it's stated in [Ecclesiastes 7:20](#), "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." Having said that, we don't need to coddle a lack of self-control and discipline to the degree that it results in no long-term change. We're soldiers in training, and training was never promised to be easy. There's no magic pill. It would defeat the purpose. God wants us to engage. Don't allow someone to guilt-trip you because you're encouraging discipline. We all struggle with certain sins, and they may not be the same, but if we've never seen improvement or long-term change, we need to accept accountability. Stop blaming everyone else. Accountability begins where excuses end. Stop telling yourself you're the exception. If you're a grown adult, stop blaming your parents for what they did or didn't do when you were a child. Seek God's counsel and put into practice what He's given you. Will it be difficult? It will, and remember God is gracious, but start building the house based on His blueprints. Brick by brick. Prayer by prayer. Decision by decision. Habit by habit. This morning, I haven't asked you what you believe. I haven't asked you what you intend. I haven't even asked you what you hope will change. I've asked one question all morning: **What are you doing?**