

## Active and Growing...Discipline!

Hebrews 12:1-13  
January 27, 2019

I want to warn you that I am about to say a word from the pulpit that might offend many of you. It is not a four letter word that my sermon monitor would chastise me on saying. It is a word that seems, more and more, to be lacking in people's lives. Or if it is in their lives they often despise it.

The word...DISCIPLINE!

As we venture through our 2019 goal of being active and growing in our relationship with Jesus and others we have so far looked at basic faith, character, wisdom and now that dreaded aspect of life...DISCIPLINE!

I am amazed at some of the stories I hear about the lack of discipline these days.

I was talking to folks at the food pantry last week when I came across a dad with his two daughters who seemed to be of elementary age. I asked the older daughter if she went to school today. I wanted to find out what she learned. She shook her head no. I then looked at her younger sister and asked her the same question. She too shook her head no.

So I asked them was it "National Skip School Day?" Again the sisters smiled and shook their heads no.

At this point dad smiled and told me the reason the girls didn't go to school that day. He said his daughters told him it was too cold out to go to school!!! Now before all of us "old school" school goers start telling the stories of walking to school uphill in the snow both ways...the Florida version is we walked to school through sand spur patches barefooted...hear me out. I was as shocked as many of you are. I thought to myself, "Who is the parent here?"

I shared with the two fair-weathered school going girls, and so dad could hear, what the rule was my wife and I had in our home raising our four kids. The rule was you went to school unless... you were running a fever or you were throwing up! I went on to share how one morning our daughter woke up and said she wasn't feeling well. She wanted to stay home from school. We reminded her of the school attending rules, which she knew by heart. You don't have a fever and you are not throwing up...go get ready for school. As she was walking out the garage she threw up and looked at us and said, "Now do you believe me!" She stayed home from school. Which also meant no going out and playing later when her friends got home from school. You were in your room all day. School attending discipline!

As the two girls left with their dad and their load of groceries I simply said to them, "Fever or throwing up!" We all smiled.

Discipline is not a flashy concept of life or something many are attracted to. It may surprise you that most children and even teenagers and adults desire some discipline, boundaries or routine in our lives. Why I even read an article the other day about a local dog trainer, who will be judging at the big dog show in London, that dogs love training or discipline. Notice the article wasn't about cats! Had to throw that one in there for you Garfield fans.

Why do dogs love training? According to the article the professional dog trainer gave the following reasons: Dogs love to please their owners. Dogs enjoy the affirmation they receive from their owners when they do what is expected or asked of them to do. Dogs also look forward to the reward or treat they will receive when they respond well to their training expectations.

As God's sense of humor would have it...while I was writing this part of the message a little dog came running into the office around my desk and wagging his tail and wanting some affection. This was not a well trained dog but an escapee dog! I loved on the dog and took her back home to her owner.

We need to be like a dog when it comes to our discipline or training in life and not the escapee breed! Unless it is us running to our Heavenly Father with such joy and enthusiasm.

Self-discipline or self-control is important to us. The importance of discipline confronts us in two ways: The bible expects it of us. Secondly, we live in a culture where more and more it seems as though discipline is becoming outdated, undesirable, neglected or fair-weathered...not just in raising our children, but in all aspects of our lives.

Self-discipline or training focuses not on who we are now, but rather on who we desire to be. This is a growing process that we are to activate in our daily living. Active and growing discipline is our focus.

When I go to the gym to ride the bike to nowhere I have noticed a couple of folks who have a personal escort with them. Their escort sets the weight machines or the tread mills for them. They talk with them while they are exercising. The proper name for this escort service is a personal trainer. This is someone who motivates, congratulates, challenges and holds the person accountable for showing up to the gym and pushing them to be active and growing in their personal fitness goals.

Here is the good news for you and me as we look to be more active and growing in our self-discipline and training. We have a personal trainer! His name is Holy Spirit.

We have been given the spirit of Jesus to motivate, challenge, encourage, congratulate and hold us accountable in our spiritual discipline and training. We have been given a spirit of power, love and self-discipline. (II Timothy 1:17)

Self-discipline is submitting ourselves to God's discipline. God is our Heavenly Father who disciplines, trains those who He loves. We are to desire His training out of love for Him. We should want to do as He instructs. We should desire His affirmation and we should stay focused on the reward that is waiting for us. (Proverbs 3:11-12)

Self-control is submitting ourselves to Christ's control. (II Corinthians 5:14)

A person who lacks self-discipline or self control, God's discipline or training in their lives, is a person who is out of control. Uncontrollable in their personal wants and desires. Some of us can relate to the Apostle Paul when he talked about being uncontrolled himself at times. He shared how the things he knew he should do he didn't always do, and the things he shouldn't do he would do! (Romans 7:18-19) That is why he never stopped training!

Can any of us relate?

So what can we do to become more active and growing in our spiritual discipline and training?

We were given the answer in our scripture reading. In fact, Jesus himself provided the example of what it takes to be disciplined in our faith relationship with him.

The simple phrase to remember is this:

"KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE PRIZE!"

Why do you think athletes train so hard day in and day out? I doubt the common answer is that they just enjoy the pain and struggles of workouts. Most of them go through the discipline of the weight room and practices because they desire the prize...the championship...the #1 status...the ring! They don't focus on the struggles of the daily grind...they keep their eye on the prize.

Jesus did that. Our bible reading reminded us that as he went through all the struggles, the ridicules, beatings, mocking and crucifixion on the cross, by keeping his focus on the joy that was set before him...the joy of doing His father's will. The joy of being obedient. The joy of being reunited with His father in Heaven in all glory.

The Apostle Paul, reminded the Christians in Corinth to do the same:

***"All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally. I don't know about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself." (I Corinthians 9:24-26)***

What prize in life has your attention the most?  
Is it a prize that can fade, rust, break or be stolen?  
Or is the prize of your focus the same as Jesus?

You can do all things through the power and spirit of Jesus who is in you! (Philippians 4:13)

Now like a good athlete who goes through the training, we to need to go through the spiritual disciplines or training routines. Step not into Gold's Gym but to God's Gym!

Let me show you the regular routines or disciplines you are to work out on if you want to be active and growing in your relationship with Jesus.

1. Prayer
2. Bible reading
3. Worship
4. Being still
5. Celebrating creation
6. Sacrificial giving of time, abilities and money!
7. Fasting
8. Witnessing

Begin where you are.

You may only pray before meals or before bedtime. Learn to pray along the way in your day to day.

You may not read the bible. Start with a psalm and one chapter of the gospel of John each day.

Worship...be here each week, others depend on your being here. Develop also a quiet worship space at home. Fever or throwing up!!! :)

Being still. Make time each day to just be still and listen...don't pray...just ask God to be with you and hear His still small voice...presence.

Look around you in creation, see the beauty of a flower, the birds, the clouds...

Sacrificial giving...takes your time...your skill set and money to give to God to keep His presence known in this community.

Fasting a meal a week or a craving for a week. Let it remind you of all you have been blessed with from God.

Share with others what Jesus has done for you...however you feel good about doing!

Start where you are...work up to more time on the spiritual discipline routines.

Work hard...push forward...keep your eye on the prize of a relationship with Jesus.

For that joy come rushing into his presence daily!

My son, T.J., made a Christmas gift for his wife Lindsay. Our daughter-in-law runs in different races and mud runs. No matter what the race her goal is always the same:

"Finished Vertical!"

The gift TJ made for Lindsay is a wooden hanger for her race medals with her personal goal painted on it:

"Finished Vertical!"

Lindsay trains hard during the months in between races. Why? She wants to finish vertical! She also keeps the prize before her... good health, the finish line and the medal!

Maybe that could be our motto as we seek to be active and growing in our spiritual discipline in life...to finish vertical and eternal! We train hard now as we keep our eye on the prize... good spiritual health, the finish line and Jesus giving us that medal that will last forever, "Welcome home! You finished eternal! Well done my faithful servant!"

How discipline are you in your relationship with Jesus?  
Are you enjoying the training of your Heavenly Father? Do you desire more than anything to please Him?  
Are you running towards him with such joy or trying to escape him to do as you desire?  
How are your spiritual workouts coming along? Are you paying attention to your spiritual trainer...the Holy Spirit?

Spiritual discipline...not a fair-weather option.  
Spiritual discipline a daily desire to do the will of our Heavenly Father.

Keep your eye on the prize in Christ Jesus!