

DISCIPLINE

What is discipline?

Bill Hybels has coined a great two-word explanation of this character trait that zeroes in on what it really is at its core. Simply put: discipline is *delayed gratification*. And Hybels points out that “the key to practicing discipline can be described in three words – *advance decision making*. You are making an advance decision to delay gratification as long as necessary to achieve the results you most desire. That’s discipline.”

We live in a culture that demands easy answers and instant results. Bookstore shelves are full of quick-fix books on every subject. “*Self-Discipline in Ten Days – How to Go From Thinking to Doing*” by Theodore Bryant was actually the number three book on Amazon’s January 2013 Top Ten List of useful self-discipline books.

But you will never develop the character trait of discipline by following any of modern culture’s quick-fix road maps. Whatever your pursuit, true discipline will be developed only by deciding in advance what results you wish to achieve (whether related to your body, your bank account, your friendships, or your relationship with God), and then putting your shoulder to the wheel... and staying the course.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In which of these areas have you’ve pursued a quick-fix approach in recent times to achieving a desired result, only to be disappointed?

___ Dieting

___ Education/Degree/Certification

___ Finances

___ Job or Career

___ Friendships

___ Prayer

___ Sports

___ Other _____

- What was the source/reason for your disappointment or failure in each instance?

- How much were you influenced in your quick-fix pursuit by false expectations?

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Read Galatians 5:16-26

¹⁶ So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ¹⁷ For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Holy Bible - New International Version

1. How many of the qualities listed in verses 19-21 can be practiced with instant gratification?
2. Why do the qualities in verses 22-23 require a commitment to delayed gratification?
3. What does verse 25 mean when it says to “live by the Spirit”? [Examine Romans 8:3-11 and Galatians 3:1-6 for additional understanding on this.]

4. Verse 25 says we live by God's Spirit. In what sense does living by the Spirit depend on our cooperation through self-discipline?

5. What is attractive about the character trait of discipline?

6. As you compare the list in verses 19-21 with that in verses 22-23, where do you find the greatest need for discipline in your own life?

APPLICATION

- Consider one area of your life that can benefit from greater discipline. What would it mean for you to trust God by allowing His Holy Spirit to work in that area?

- Pray that God will help you be a person of discipline in that area, and share your commitment to pursue that goal with a trusted friend... someone who will encourage you along the way in this regard.