Have you ever felt controlled rather than controlling, either by others or by circumstances? This study is for anyone who has struggled with discipline in an undisciplined age, for self-control in an age of self-indulgence.

How does one obtain self-control?

- Do they enroll in a six-week program?
  - Take a pill?
  - Attend a seminar?

Actually none of these methods will enable one to gain self-control. Self-control is a process. No pill or seminar will produce it overnight. Self-control is not an overnight "mushroom-growth" sensation. It takes time!

The following study is a Biblical documentation of this process of being self-control and provides practical applications for working it out in daily Christian living.
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- Self-Control, the last characteristic mentioned of the Fruit of the Spirit - but it is no lemon!
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Who Is In Control of Your Life?

Lesson One

Self-Control

Anyone who have been around church for very long has heard messages on the important of allowing the Holy Spirit to develop within us the characteristic of “love.” This, of course, is an essential quality in the development of Christian maturity. It is one of the characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit. However, while love should be stressed, careful study of Scripture teaches reveals that it does not teach about the Fruits of the Spirit (plural) – but, the Fruit of the Spirit (singular). What is the difference? The difference is that there are not nine Fruits of the Spirit, but rather, there is a nine-fold Fruit of the Spirit. This nine-fold Fruit of the Spirit is a portrayal of genuine Christ-likeness, and it is a mistake to emphasize one dimension of it apart from the others.

Isn’t it interesting that we hear so much about the first feature of the nine-fold characteristic of the Fruit of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life, that is, “love,” while the last feature, “self-control,” (or, “temperance”) being so ignored?

The danger is that there is a tendency for “love” to degenerate into sentimentality rather than a demonstration of the kind of love that is portrayed in Scripture and characterized by the life of Christ.

In addition to the nine characteristics of the “Fruit of the Spirit,” given in Galatians 5:22-23, Scripture also reveals nine “Gifts of the Spirit,” given in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, that are available to every believer. However, without the spiritual grace of self-control, these Gifts will be ineffective, misused, or unused. We have heard frequently about the characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit – particularly the first eight – love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, and meekness – but when have we heard a message concerning the final characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit, self-control? This certainly illustrates a need to learn as much as we can and cultivate this neglected grace.

We need to ask ourselves, “Am I manifesting the spiritual grace of self-discipline?” We need to ask ourselves such a question because it could be quite possible that we are a part of the problem. As one writer states, “The body of Christ seems to be afflicted with a form of St. Vitus dance, its members engaging in uncoordinated, uncontrolled, spasmodic twitching.” Just look at the weekly activities listed in the bulletin of the average church meetings every night and one can see that we are busy believers. The question is, “Are we so busy in the Lord’s work that we get little or nothing done for the Lord? Have we equated ‘busy-ness’ with effective service?” There’s so much movement but little momentum, so much activity but little action, so many programs but little progress. As one pastor said, “I seem to be busy all the time, but I don’t seem to be doing anything! I seem to be accomplishing nothing and getting nowhere!”

Only when our “self” is Spirit-controlled can we effectively use our spiritual gifts and be used by God. – for genuine self-control is to be Spirit-controlled! My prayer is that we will let God make the necessary adjustments for a miracle recovery of control.
Paul said in Philippians 1:9, “And this I pray, that your love may abound [grow stronger] still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment [personal knowledge and perception], so that you may approve the things that are excellent [distinguish good from evil] – or – learn to prize what is of value, in order to be sincere and blameless [pure and give no occasion of stumbling] until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” [Phrases within parentheses are from “26 Translations”] – In other words, love that is not accompanied by self-control will be apart from “real knowledge and spiritual discernment.” It will find itself approving things that are not excellent and being blamable at the day of Christ.

Scripture does not teach that we are to “control our self” by sheer will power – but rather, it teaches we are to “die to self” so the Holy Spirit can control our “self life!”

A true story tells of passengers and crew aboard TWA Flight 841 they had just finished eating and were settled back for the last leg of their flight from New York to Minneapolis, with the Boeing 727 on autopilot, everything seemed routine, smooth, perfectly under control, when all of a sudden, at 39,000 feet, the plane began to shake, veering sharply to the right and nosing downward into a barrel roll. Cabin fixtures shattered; objects flew through the air; people screamed. As the huge plane plummeted 24,000 feet in less than a minute, the pilot struggled to regain control. In a desperate effort he lowered the landing gear, causing the plane to level off – about two seconds before crushing! Following a hard but safe landing of the damaged plane at the Detroit Metropolitan Airport, officials called the plane’s recovery from a 36-degree roll “a miracle.”

How many, designed by God for His ultimate purpose, are like that sophisticated machine speeding out of control, nearly causing a major disaster, running out of control? It will take nothing short of a miracle for them to recover. Think of the hundreds of thousands of lives that are running blindly out of control toward certain disaster. We need to ask our self the question “Is our life one of those?” “Are we out of control?” “Under whose control are we?”

Our Reaction Reveals Who Is In Control

The best measure of who is in control is not our actions, but rather, our spontaneous reactions. Let’s say that we were walking down a street and someone comes along and bumps you, I mean really bumps you brutally, pushing you into the gutter. How would you react? You probably would react by allowing your temper to flare up and you, (providing he wasn’t too large of a person), would angrily push him off the sidewalk as well – maybe adding an abusive word or two. Most of us – in the flesh – would do to him what he had done to us – and more, if possible.

--When we react the way others act toward us – they control us!

Have you ever been in a situation when someone spoke harshly and bitterly, and then someone else responded in the same way? - (It may even be in a church business
Harsh, bitter words beget harsh, bitter words! Actions are controlling reactions. Or, let’s say that someone falsely accuses us, and the “natural” thing to do is to respond in a similar manner. The point is that, when we do so, we are allowing ourselves to be controlled by that person. Proverbs 26:4 warns – “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.”

How do we react when some driver is tailgating us for miles, then passes and cuts sharply in front of us, nearly causing a collision? Do we honk the horn, shake our fist, and mutter (maybe not out and out cuss words, but explicit mutterings)? If we reacted in this manner then this stranger’s reckless driving controlled us – that is, because we reacted to his actions, he determined our behavior.

Who -- or what -- controls our life?

Who controls your life in the home? Do the attitudes, moods, or actions of our spouse control our reactions? If we allow the aloofness, coolness, or inconsiderateness of our spouse to make us discourteous and inconsiderate, then they control us. Some parents’ reactions are determined by their offspring’s actions. Because, if a parent responds to a child’s angry words and raised voice with angry words and raised voice, then that parent is being controlled by the child.

The Greek philosopher Epictetus said, “No man is free who is not master of himself.” It is almost impossible for us, in the natural, to control our self. It is human nature to react in the manner in which others around us acts. The Bible teaches that for the believer to be in control of his “self” life, he must allow the Holy Spirit to produce within him the characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit – “Self-Control.” No person is master of himself if he allows the actions of others to dictate his own reactions.

Regardless of how others act toward us, we have the power – because of the Holy Spirit – to act and react in a spiritual manner. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:12, speaking of “Scripturally permissible acts,” – “Everything is permissible for me – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me – but I will not be mastered by anything”

Master of self and mastered by nothing – that is the ideal! But what is spiritual self-discipline, and how is it to be achieved in an age of little discipline and so much self-indulgence? We hear the expression “Control yourself,” or, “Get hold of yourself.” But how is self-control, self-restraint, to be achieved? To give such a command is somewhat like telling a young person to “go get educated.”

Self-control is not fashionable

Our culture is certainly an uncontrolled, undisciplined age – an age of self-indulgence. “If it feels good, do it.” “If it works, do it again and again and again” – these seem to be the prevailing mottoes of our day. It appears that the seven deadly sins of Scripture have become an accepted lifestyle.
We cannot argue with the evaluation one columnist describing our culture as “undisciplined pursuit of individual pleasure.” Unrestrained spending and abuse of credit, on both the national and individual levels have led us to the edge of financial chaos.

The church has not escaped the blight of undisciplined living either. Habitual stuffing themselves like gluttons has produced flabby saints. The mass media – especially television – has influenced many a believer, resulting in wasted time, dulled thinking, and perverted values. Emotions have been exploited and distorted, until their way of behaving has run the gamut unchecked.

Just look at the daily newspaper and you can see evidence of foundations of restraint crumbling – in individual, in families, in schools, in society at large. The Psalmist asked, “When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3).

The question we must all ask our self is, “What can I do in the midst of an undisciplined age?”

Standing like bookends, encasing the qualities of the Fruit of the Spirit, first, is “Love,” while the final quality is “Self-Control.” In a real sense, self-control is the first and the last, for the absence of this crowing grace negates the effect of the other graces of the Fruit of the Spirit.

What Is Self-Control?

Lesson Two

Before we discuss what Self-Control is – we need to decide what Self-Control isn’t!

Words like “Self-control – Self-discipline – Self restraint – Temperance” – have strong negative connotations for most people. Many of us can remember the dullness of “Temperance Sundays,” featured in the Sunday school of our childhood. These words suggest the unpleasant prospect of being some kind of legalistically pious killjoy. Satan delights in convincing us that to be self-control – or self-disciplined – is to be a spoilsport, a wet blanket, or a sourpuss.

This concept of the word, “self-discipline,” has rendered the word negative, and the negative associations of the word have, in turn, contributed to the unpopularity of the concept of self-control. It is necessary, then, to get beyond this stereotype and misconceptions of what self-discipline really is. Sadly, people either make too light of it – or too much of it. Both extremes are dangerous!

Don’t Confuse Self-Control With “Godliness!”

There are some who would say that lack of discipline is sin, nut this may not necessarily be true. It is most assuredly, however, one of the “weights” spoken of in Hebrews 12:1 – that says, “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset
us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” It is a lack of self-control that hinders one from running an effective race for Christ. The line between what is “weight” and what is “sin” — “that so easily besets us” — is a fine, thin line indeed. When we know we should be more organized, controlled, and restrained in some area of our life — and we are not — and, if this hinders us from being and doing what God wants us to do — (and how could it not?) — then after a certain point — wouldn’t the lack of this self-discipline become sin? James 4:17 tells us, “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” For instance, if the Holy Spirit leads us to witness to someone, but we fail to do so — maybe we feel we are too busy with other things at the moment — and so we procrastinate, saying to our self, “Someday I will witness to them.” Then we receive a message that that person has died — Doesn’t our lack of self-discipline become sin?

Jesus said, In Matthew 22:29, “Ye do err [sin], not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.” And Psalm 119:11 teaches, “God’s Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Him.” When there is a lack of discipline in being consistent in hiding God’s Word in our hearts, doesn’t it lead to sin?

Can a lack of self-discipline in our prayer life constitute sin? 1 Samuel 12:23 says, “God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you.” Could it be that our lack of self-discipline be sin more often than we wish to admit, grieving and quenching the Spirit of God more often than we care to acknowledge?

A lack of discipline is not necessarily “sin” in itself — and — discipline is not “godliness” in itself. The two may be related, but certainly are not synonymous. No group in history was more strictly “disciplined” than the Pharisees — (The word, “Pharisees” means “separated ones.”) — They meticulously pledged themselves to obey all traditions to the minutest degree and were absolute sticklers for ceremonial purity. Yet they were not godly — (at least not those who were part of the degenerated Pharisaism of Jesus’ day). — In fact, Christ warned that the “righteousness” of the Pharisees was insufficient to gain entrance into the kingdom (Matthew 5:20). Just as they possessed a worthless self-righteousness, so they possessed a vain self-discipline or pseudo-discipline that prompted Christ’s stern condemnation of their hypocrisy, false motivation, and “lovelessness” (Matthew 23). A member of their sect, Saul, exhibited considerable “discipline” in zealously persecuting the church, but he became godly only when he submitted to the risen Christ and was filled with the Spirit (Acts 9:17).

This Saul “transformed-to-Paul” later admonished young Timothy: “Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7). The Greek word translated “exercise” (translated “discipline” in some translations) original came from a word used for Greek athletes engaging in strenuous exercise. The exercise Paul refers to is not physical, but is exercise of the mind, emotions, and will — the “soul” of man — the spiritual development of the believer. Paul teaches that, just as the Greek athlete disciplined himself for the purpose of winning physical contests, Timothy [and all believers] should discipline himself [themselves] for the purpose of excelling in godly living.

It Is Important to Remember That Self-Control is Not an End in Itself.
Another Scriptural principle becomes clear -- “self control is not an end in itself, but rather, it is a means to an end.” For instance, the Greek athlete, after devoting months and years to strenuous training and agonizing struggle in the public games, would not have cast aside his victor’s garland to glory in just his routine and regimentation in order to gain the victor’s crown. Neither does the truly self-disciplined believer glory in spiritual calisthenics, but rather in their purpose – to gain and produce godly living!

Not only is self-control not itself godliness, but also it is not the means to godliness!

Colossians 2:23 states, “These rules may seem good, for rules of this kind require strong devotion and are humiliating and hard on the body, but they have no effect when it comes to conquering a person’s evil thoughts and desires. They only make him proud” (Living Bible)

If self-control led to godliness, the most disciplined individual would be the holiest -- then holiness would be a result of “human works.” The most exciting self-control procedure possible is powerless to make a saint of a sinner -- but will only produce a very regimented sinner!

Perhaps the most disciplined men recorded in history is Benjamin Franklin. As a young man he began -- in his own words -- “the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfect.” Admirable though the project was, Franklin -- a great American patriot and highly skilled in many fields -- did not achieve “holiness.” He later wrote in reference to the English evangelist George Whitefield, “He used sometimes to pray for my conversion, but never had the satisfaction of believing that his prayers were heard.”

When Paul exhorted Timothy to exercise or discipline himself “for the purpose of godliness,” (1 Timothy 4:7) he was simply reiterating the admonition he had given the Philippians believers, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). Meaning that Timothy was to work out what God has already worked in, that is -- “Discipline yourself so the godliness appropriated by faith can flourish.”

Don’t Confuse Self-Control With Mere Asceticism

The belief that self-control, or self-discipline is a means to holiness is a form of asceticism, that teaches that rigorous self-denial, abstinence, strictness, and there re those who even teach that self-inflicted pain are the means to a higher spiritual state. Paul condemns ascetic practices, both in the passage to Timothy discussed above and in his warning to the Colossians about Gnosticism, when he teaches, “Such practices pass for wisdom, with ascetic discipline [Goodspeed], and unsparing severity of the body, but were of no value in combating fleshly indulgence” (Colossians 2:23).

Whatever the practice of discipline might be, if it trusts in external forms and practices to bring about internal spirituality, it will fail. The truly self-disciplined believer must trust the indwelling Holy Spirit to effect external practices that will permit spiritual graces to flourish.
Two other misconceptions concerning self-discipline should be considered here. The first one is “Spartanism.” The Spartans, a warlike people who inhabited Sparta, a city in southern Greece, five hundred years before Christ, became a byword for severe discipline. At age seven, boys were taken from their parents and enrolled in drill companies of fifteen, their military careers lasting until they were sixty years of age. Life was just one continuous trial of endurance, one extended push-up. With the gentler emotions suppressed. Such exacting training perhaps paid off for the Spartans in their victory over the Athenians in the Peloponnesian War. But toughness and severity alone do not constitute true self-discipline.

A form of Spartanism is reflected in the attitude of the believer who “religiously” jogs twenty miles a day because it “toughen the body, clears the mind, purges the emotions, and sanctifies the soul” -- But who can’t walk across the street to help a neighbor in need.

The second misconception is “Stoicism,” a Greek philosophy founded by Zeno in Athens around 300 B.C. Stoicism advocated calm, resigned acceptance of whatever transpired, with stern suppression of all emotions -- a kind of “Que Sera Sera” attitude toward life [What will be, will be!]. There we4e Stoics at Mars Hill when Paul delivered his discourse there (Acts 17:18).

Some believers have adopted what appears to be in very close proximity a neo-Stoic philosophy, that says, in effect, “Because I can accept whatever comes -- pain, persecution, illness, poverty, even death -- as God’s highest good for me, I will be unmoved by any emotion, whether sadness or happiness, disappointment or elation, anger or gratification, fear or hope.” But true Biblical Self-control, or Christian self-discipline, is neither humanly self-sufficient -- nor is it disparaging of God-given emotions. Rather, through the Spirit’s control, the believer achieves a balance of emotion, intellect, and will.

Don’t Confuse Self-Control With “Immoderation.”

This matter of balance, of moderation, is central to Self-discipline. We are told in Philippians 4:5, “Let your moderation be known to all men.” Believers are to manifest the ability to avoid excesses, to stay within reasonable bounds. Accordingly, the self-controlled person will be serious but not somber, or too solemn -- precise but not pretentious, pompous, or showy -- steady but not stodgy, starchy, or dull. He will, in short, be upright, but not uptight!

We must realize that there comes a point at which even a positive quality, if pushed too far, becomes a negative one. A self-controlled person recognizes these boundaries and keeps within them. We have all probably witnessed those who, in their attempt at self-discipline, to gone pass the boundaries of moderation. For instance, they are so organized, that no one better disrupt their schedule; and, in their attempt to be precise and meticulous – have become persnickety, picky, finicky, and extremely difficulty, if not impossible, to please. Ironically, they have become undisciplined in their attempts to achieve self-discipline! Such immoderate attempts at moderation are like truths that have lost their temper. There is an old Chinese proverb that says, “Excess paints a snake – and then adds legs!” Let’s not put legs on the snake!
Don’t Confuse Self-Control with “Constriction”

Self-controlled people learn to cultivate the positive quality, but, at the same time, to avoid the closely associated negative quality. They are constrained -- ("held in close bounds by the love of Christ" according with 1 Corinthians 5:14) -- but not constricted -- (squeezed in, compressed, made smaller -- that is what this worldly system attempts to do. Romans 12:2, in the Phillip Translations, states, “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould.” True, spiritual, self-control holds one in bounds but never in bonds; its effect is to enlarge, expand, and liberate.

The self-controlled person will be straight (that is, upright, honest, and sincere), but not old-fashioned to the point of being unaware of recent happenings and trends. He will be regulated but no necessarily adjusted -- neither to this worldly system nor to the stereotyped notion of what a self-controlled Christian should be. He will keep an open mind -- but not open at both ends. He will be doctrinal -- that is, faithfully and systematically learning the doctrines of Scriptures, however, not dogmatically and ungraciously attempting to apply theoretical dogma with little or no regard to practical living.

Don’t Confuse Self-Control With “Legalism”

Jesus emphasized, in His Sermon on the Mount, of the believer’s rigid conformity to “the letter of the law,” without considering “the spirit of the law,” generating, a dangerous pitfall for those attempting to cultivate self-discipline -- “legalism!” It is not the legalistic life-style that will produce true Christianity. True self-control is tolerant in a two areas: (1) holding one’s self in check, refraining from certain thoughts and deeds, and (2) reacting patiently in a restrained manner, controlling one’s self in times of aggravation and frustration.

The self-controlled person knows how to say “no!” He has will power -- and “won’t” power. While his discipline does not consist of legalistically, slavishly following a list of “don’ts,” he adheres to the Scriptural commands to abstain -- from sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3), from sinful desires (1 Peter 2:11), from every kind of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22). While accentuating the positive, he recognized the legitimate Scriptural stress on the negative: “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of the mockers” (Psalm 1:1).

But self-control is also a matter of doing! The believer’s life is not a great escape, a mere series of evasive actions. When an immature believer gave a report of his Christian life -- “I don’t __________ and I don’t __________ and I don’t go __________ and I avoid __________” -- a wise old saint said, “All you tell me is what you don’t do -- What do you do?”

Self-Control IS…

It is only when we are totally submitted to the Holy Spirit that we are able to live Christ-like. The key to self-control is found in Paul’s admonition, “Do not get drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). A
drunken person is not in control of his or her faculties, however, a Spirit-filled believer is in control, because God works through our faculties. Genuine self-control is Spirit-control; genuine self-discipline is Spirit discipline, nurtured and developed by the believer.

Self-Control – A Characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit

The comment by a Christian man in a Sunday school class is typical. He stated, “This self-control sounds good, and even possible -- on Sunday. I start out on Monday with the best of intentions. But by Wednesday I’ve broken most of my resolutions, and I am frustrated! I guess I’ll just never be a very disciplined person.”

What’s wrong?

Self-Control Is Never Easy!

Self-control is never easy because it cuts against the grain of human nature. Paul graphically describes the frustration each of us has felt, when he wrote, “I do not understand what I do… I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not what to do -- this I keep on doing” (Romans 7:15, 18-19).

What is the answer to this dilemma? Paul answers that question in the next chapter: Doing what comes naturally results in frustrated failure; victory only comes from doing what comes supernaturally. --- Whoever said, “Self-discipline is 90 percent perspiration and 1 percent inspiration” or “Self-discipline is 65 percent resolution and 35 percent revolution,” as some one else described it, are all-wrong; God doesn’t work on percentages, Self-discipline. Self-control, or temperance (whatever you call it) is one of the characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit.

Jesus uses the “fruit” metaphor in John 15, and Paul develops it in Galatians 5. “The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (verses 22-23). This nine-fold fruit of the Spirit comes from the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the new nature. Bearing fruit is natural to the healthy branch. A healthy branch produces wholesome fruit.

You never hear an orange tree, or a grapefruit tree, or an apricot tree groaning and straining and to produce an orange, a grapefruit, or an apricot -- because it is their nature to produce fruit. The fruit appears in abundance as part of the natural process if the branches receive sufficient nourishment and nurture. In the same way, the nine-fold Fruit of the Spirit appears in abundance, a product of the believer’s new nature, if nourishment and nurture are provided.

The Holy Spirit’s, through Paul’s writing, use of the singular -- “Fruit” rather than “fruits” -- suggests that all nine characteristics of the Spirit must be present in the believer’s life. However, usually any discussions on the Fruit of the Spirit gives little
mention to the final characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit -- especially to its indispensable relation to the other eight characteristics.

Scriptures does not teach that there are nine “Fruits” of the Spirit, but rather that there is ONE Fruit of the Holy Spirit -- with nine characteristics -- that is produced in the believer’s life -- with the believer’s co-operation with the Holy Spirit.

The Fruit of the Spirit is perhaps most analogous to an orange made up of nine distinct but connected segments.

Remove any one segment and the fruit is not only incomplete, but soon destroyed, for the other sections dry out and shrivel up. In the same manner, without self-control -- love becomes sugary sentimentality -- joy becomes a heady euphoria -- peace becomes complaisance -- patience becomes leniency -- kindness becomes blandness -- goodness becomes self-righteousness -- faithfulness becomes legalism -- and gentleness becomes weakness.

Basic To The Fruit of The Spirit Is Self-Control

In the same way, without each of the other eight segments, true self-control cannot be developed or maintained. Each characteristic plays a distinct, essential part.

Love

It is the love of Christ what “constrains us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). The verb “synecho,” found in this verse, conveys the idea of “exercising a controlling influence upon,” -- “forcing into close bounds,” -- “leaving us no choice,” -- “compelling,” -- “impelling,” -- “urging,” -- “overmastering.” The Wuest Translation captures the full import of this verse when it renders, “The love which God has (for me) presses on me from all sides, holding me to one end and prohibiting me from considering any other, wrapping itself around me in tenderness, giving me an impelling force.” Christ’s love for us (falling forth our love for Him) is the motivating force of self-control -- or self-discipline!

Joy

If self-control means “getting it all together,” then joy, the second segment, is the means of “holding it all together.” “The joy of the Lord is our strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). It was precisely for “the joy set before Him” that Christ, the perfect model of self-control, “endured the cross, scorning its shame” (Hebrews 12:2).

Peace

Peace, the tranquility and concord that only believers can know because they are in right relation to God and therefore to themselves and others, stands guard duty over
Self-Control

our thoughts and emotions (Philippians 4:7). And Isaiah reminds us that God “will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast” on Him (Isaiah 26:3). Note the process: God’s peace guards my mind, that, as I fix my thought on Him, produces peace, that, in turn, guards my mind, that produces peace. This is not a vicious circle, but a virtuous one. God’s inexplicable peace is both an influence upon and result of self-control – or self-discipline.

Patience

The Greek word, “makrothymia,” translated as “patience” here, is sometimes translated, “forbearance,” conveying the idea of patient endurance, of slowness in avenging injuries -- essential characteristics of self-control. The Greek word appears 12 times in the New Testament – 5 times as an attribute of God -- and 7 times as an attribute of the Spirit-filled believer. Paul makes it clear that this evenness in character and conduct is a divine quality, achieved not through fleshly resolve but through God’s grace. “So mighty is His majesty, He will nerve (that is: empower, invigorate) you perfectly with strength for the cheerful exercise of endurance and forbearance in every situation” (Colossians 1:1 – Goodspeed).

Kindness and Goodness

The next two segments of the fruit are in a sense like two sides of the same one: the word translated “kindness” conveys the idea of kind thoughts, the word translated “goodness” the idea of kind actions. “Kindness” could perhaps rendered “usefulness,” or, “beneficence,” as it has the meaning of being something very practical. Paul uses the term “goodness,” in Ephesians 5, where he is discussing the filling of the Spirit and it’s results, “For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth” (verse 9). And elsewhere he writes that our ability to admonish and edify other believers is dependent upon our being filled with this same attribute of goodness (Romans 15:14).

Faith

The relationship between the 7th and 9th characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit becomes clear when we realize that the word translated “faith” denotes “good faith” -- that is, trustworthiness, honesty, integrity, sincerity -- as well as “steadfastness” -- (stand-fast-ness) and “faithfulness.” Possibly the popular expression, “Keep the faith,” captures the idea expressed here. “Keeping the faith” is exactly what Paul refers to in 2 Thessalonians 4:7 -- expressing the fact that he was trustworthy and faithful to the end. It was precisely this quality of good faith that Jesus said the legalistic Pharisees did not keep (Matthew 23:23), and perhaps this is what Jesus meant when He asked, “When the son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

It is faithfulness that enables us to stand! 2 Corinthians 1:24, “to be grounded and settled” (Colossians 1:23), “rooted,” “built up,” and “strengthened” in the faith (Colossians 2:7). It is the much-needed ability to keep on serving with dependability and consistency; worshiping, working, witnessing, and watching: not growing weary in well-doing (2 Timothy 4:2; Galatians 6:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:13). It is godliness in the
grind and righteousness in the routine. And anyone who thinks that this can be accomplished without lots of spiritual self-control hasn’t tried it!

Gentleness, or Meekness

Perhaps the most misunderstood characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit is “gentleness” or “meekness,” so often equated with weakness. But, if you think being meek is weak, try being meek for a week! This Greek word rendered as, “meekness,” can also be rendered “forbearance.” The gentle person is, in the current idiom, “easygoing.” In discussing the disciplined characteristics of the Spirit-filled life, Paul stresses patience with people through gentleness – “Live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:1-2 & Colossians 3:12-13). Again, the quality is both a cause and an effect of self-discipline; we cannot be truly self-disciplined until we learn something about gentleness, and we cannot be genuinely gentle until we learn something of self-discipline.

The Greek word translated “self control” appears 6 times in the New Testament in several forms. -- For example, the athlete striving for the prize practices rigorous self-control in all things (1 Corinthians 9:25). Paul specifies self-control as one of the qualifications of an elder (Titus 1:8). Peter lists “self-control” among eight great Christian virtues that are essential for fruit-bearing (2 Peter 1:5-8). “If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Self-Control Produces More Fruit!

Just as fruit carries within it seeds for producing more fruit, so the Fruit of the Spirit, if nurtured, produces more fruit. One of the God-ordained purposes of fruit is the eventual production of more fruit. Accordingly, self-control is never self-serving or sterile. It is fertile and procreant, contributing both to new manifestations of the Fruit of the Spirit and to the reproduction of fruit in the form of transformed lives.

Interestingly, the first appearance in the New Testament of the Greek word “egkratiea,” from which “self-control” is translated, is in Acts 24, where we read that Paul reasoned with Felix “on righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come” (verse 25). It is little wonder that on this occasion Paul reasoned about “sobriety,” “continence,” “master of self,” “mastery of the passions,” as this Greek word, “egcrateia” is rendered in various places. If anyone ever needed to be lectured on self-control, it was Felix. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, “Felix reveled in cruelty and lust, and wielded the power of a king with the mind of a slave.” Felix began his eight-year tenure as Roman procurator of Judea by seducing and marrying Drusilla, who was the wife of the king of a small Syrian state.

Paul’s discourse on the need for mastery of the self met with a response all too common today -- Felix was convinced of his need, even to the point of trembling, but he put it off until “I find it convenient” (Acts 24:25). Sound familiar?
Many believers, even well-meaning ones, say, “Sure, I know I need to be self-disciplined. I can’t control my temper. My thoughts are often in the gutter. I overindulge. My life’s a disorganized mess. Maybe next week I’ll get organized. I’ll get it all together — sometime! There is no record in Scripture, or history, that Felix’s “convenient time” ever came. Ours won’t either. It’s never convenient to be self-disciplined — only crucial!

What Can I Compare Self-Control To?

1. Self-Disciple Is Like A Well-Mannered Puppy

Puppies are playful — but ill-mannered. They whine at night, pollute the carpet, and chew everything in sight. After some training they can learn to be quiet — most of the time; to scratch on the door when nature calls, and to chew only on designated items.

Discipline is imposed externally through positive and negative reinforcement — a process that demands self-discipline from the entire family. But if you want an obedient dog and a happy home, you must exert control.

The Psalmist suggest that the self-disciplined person is like a successful dog trainer, who enforces good habits with curbs bad ones through the use of a muzzle. “Where is that?” you ask. Psalms 39:1, “Let me keep my mouth as with a muzzle, while the evil doer is around” (MLB).

Jack London’s wonderful classic, “White Fang,” tells the story of an animal, half dog-half wolf, as he survives his life in the wild and then learns to live among men. There is one story in particular that has left a lasting impression on my heart.

White Fang was very fond of chickens and on one occasion raided a chicken-roost and killed fifty hens. His master, Weeden Scott, whom White Fang saw as man-God and “loved with single heart,” scolded him and then took him into the chicken yard. When White Fang saw his favorite food walking around right in front of him he obeyed his natural impulse and lunged for a chicken. He was immediately checked by his master’s voice. They stayed in the chicken yard for quite a while and every time White Fang made a move toward a chicken his master’s voice would stop him. In this way he learned what his master wanted — he had learned to ignore the chickens.

Weeden Scott’s father argued that you “couldn’t cure a chicken killer,” but Weeden challenged him and they agreed to lock White Fang in with the chickens all afternoon.

In the words of the story, “Locked in the yard and there deserted by the master, White Fang lay down and went to sleep. Once he got up and walked over to the trough for a drink of water. The chickens he calmly ignored. So far as he was concerned they did not exist. At four o’clock he executed a running jump, gained the roof of the chicken house and leaped to the ground outside, whence he sauntered gravely to the house. He had learned the law.”

Out of love and a desire to obey his master’s will, White Fang overcame his natural, inborn desires. He may not have understood the reason but he chose to bend his will to his master’s.

Animal stories have a way of breaking your heart and often reveal a profound truth. The simplicity and purity of White Fang’s love and devotion to his master help me realize that my life will always be full of “chickens.” What I have to settle is, whom will I serve?
2. Self-Discipline Is Like a Bit and Bridle

What the muzzle is to the dog, the bit and bridle are to the horse. The horse, like the dog, must have discipline imposed externally. James 3:3 says, “We put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us.”

The self-disciplined believer is like to a skilled trainer bridling a spirited horse, knowing just when to rein in and when to release the reins. The bit and bridle harness the animal’s fine energies, directing them to useful ends; without this restraint its movement is wasted and its energies dissipated. So it is with self-discipline in the Christian.

3. Self-Discipline Is Like a Ship’s Rudder

The self-disciplined believer is also like an experienced pilot of a ship. James, in chapter 3, verse 4, describes how great ships driven and tossed by fierce winds are steered by a small rudder and are brought unto control by the pilot. It is significant that Scripture uses this recurring image of a ship, listing hopelessly out of control and sinking -- certainly seems to depict the condition of modern society.

Norbert Wiener (who coined the term “cybernetics” from the Greek word meaning, “helmsman”) wrote in “The Human Use of Human Beings,” “in a very real sense we are shipwrecked passengers on a doomed planet.”

Thomas Pynchon, in his novel “V” describes the symbolic scene of a “helmsman painting the side of his sinking ship.”

Perhaps the most accurate picture we could have of modern society, its problems rapidly increasing – is a sinking ship.

God has given us the rudder of His infallible Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to empower us to steer our individual craft with order and precision.

Self-Discipline Is Like Fire – or Water – Under control

Another metaphor used by James, this one to characterize the lack of self-discipline, is fire raging out of control. He writes, “Consider when a great forest is set on fire by a small spark” (James 3:6). Fire under control is a benefit to humanity, but out of control, can be very destructive. Fire warms us and gives light, but it also can burn and destroy. It is estimated that fires kills over six thousands person and destroys more than one billion dollars’ worth of property every year in the United States. Perhaps the crime of Promethus, the Greek mythological Titan who stole fire from heaven and gave it to man, was not so much in giving fire to man as it was in failing to teach him to control it.

God -- who is “a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29), Who’s Spirit is often symbolized by fire (Acts 2:3), whose word is like a fire (Jeremiah 23:29), Who makes His servants “a Flame of fire (Psalm 104:4) -- has given us spiritual fire, and He wants us to use it in a responsible, controlled way. But how like James and John -- (when the inhabitants of a Samaritan village did not welcome Jesus, these “Sons of Thunder” wanted to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them [Luke 9:54]) --
we are in our lack of control and restraint! But Jesus sternly rebuked them for their wrong spirit. We, no less than these disciples, need to learn the restrained use of God’s fire.

Looking at Romans 12, we see how Paul supplies one such lesson. He gives a series of practical admonitions, none of which can be carried out without self-discipline. We are exhorted to leave vengeance to God (verse 19). Then we are commanded to, “Feed our enemies when they are hungry and giving them drink when they are thirsty.” We are to, “heap coals of fire on their heads” (verse 20). They are only “coals,” not blazing flames. (Better the little coals that warm than the raging fire that consumes). Remember, when you play with fire, you are apt to get burned (Galatians 5:13-15).

Paul also warns of another kind of uncontrolled fire -- the fire of enthusiasm. This takes the form of a zeal for God that is not based on knowledge (Romans 10:2). Or, as the Goodspeed Translations renders it, “They have a sincere devotion -- not an intelligent devotion.” Our enthusiasm for the things of the Lord must be tempered by knowledge (especially of God’s Word), by common sense (all too often uncommon), and by tact. Some believers are “on fire for God” one week, then, start “miss-firing” the next. They “come under fire,” then cool off -- (maybe even freeze over!) They hear someone speak about self-control or attend a meeting and hear about a life of holiness, and get “all fired up” -- for a day or two, then cool off again!

Self-Discipline Is Like a Dynamo

Acts 1:8, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you...” The word translated as “power,” comes from the Greek word, “dynamis” -- the word we get our word “dynamite” from. -- Some teach that this text stressing the fact that we should give that kind of power in our lives! Maybe. However, even more interesting is that we get our English word “dynamo,” also is derived from this same Greek word, suggesting the believers are not to “blowup with a big bang” and disappear, as a stick of dynamite would, but rather, to live as dynamos who are consistently producing energy! The self-disciplined believer is like an electrical generator functioning smoothly day in and day out, not creating energy, but transforming and channeling it into useful service.

A source of energy transformed by electrical generators is water that, like fire, is beneficial when it is controlled and channeled, but destructive when it is out of control. The self-disciplined believer resembles the Colorado River controlled by the Hoover, Parker, and Davis Dams that produce domestic and irrigation water as well as electric power for Arizona and a large part of the Southwest. Without these great barriers to control the billions and billions of gallons of water, widespread destruction and death would result.

Self-Discipline Is Like a Well-Fortified City

Another Scriptural illustration of the self-disciplined believer is found in references to a well-fortified city -- its walls and its soldiers. Solomon alludes to such a city twice but from opposite perspectives. In one he shows the negative results of a lack of disciple, “Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.”
(Proverbs 25:28). In the other he shows the **positive** value of self-discipline, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city” (Proverbs 16:32). In the first, the self-disciplined person is, by implication, a city protected by strong walls. In the second, the self-disciplined person is superior even to the mighty general who besieges a city and conquers it.

This comparison was especially meaningful in Solomon’s day when every city was fortified by a thick brick or stone wall. Cities were usually built on hills with fortifications that followed the natural contour of the land. Throughout the Old Testament, these fortifications symbolize strength, security, and salvation (See Zechariah 2:4-5 & Isaiah 26:1). God promised to make Jeremiah “a fortified wall of bronze” against which the ungodly could not prevail (Jeremiah 15:20). Without self-discipline we are defenseless, exposed to attack and easy prey for the enemy. We are rather like the young man who was commissioned to guard the village entrance and close the massive wood and iron gates whenever hostile forces approached. One day he loitered at his post and didn’t hear the sentry’s warning. Enemy soldiers rode freely into the village and slaughtered its inhabitants.

**Self-Discipline Is Like Military Training**

The self-disciplined believer is likened not only to the conquering general but also to the enlisted recruit, who has given up all civilian enterprises so he can please his commanding officer. Paul, in urging Timothy to be faithful in teaching others, also uses a military image: “Take your part with others in enduring hardships as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one when engaged in military service allows himself to become involved in civilian pursuits, in order that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:3-4 [Wuest Translation]). Just as the Roman legionnaires subjected themselves to discipline in the service of the emperor, so we are to be disciplined in the service of the King of kings.

A good soldier **abstains** and **sustains**, each being a part of self-discipline. He renounces everything that will displease his commander. (Note the recurrence of such words as “shun,” “depart from,” “purge from,” “flee,” and “avoid” in 2 Timothy 2:14-26. He renounces not only the evil but also the “less-good.” He doesn’t get entangled in, the Greek word is, “pragmateiais” -- and means any, “affairs, businesses, occupations, transactions” of civilian life. These are not illegitimate or even questionable activities. They are simply activities, perhaps “good” in themselves, but often become enemies of the “better” and the “best.”

The good soldier also **sustains**. He endures, bears up under, or withstands. And the well-disciplined Christian soldier also **prevails**. He or she does not just passively bear, always on the defensive, but forbears and actively, aggressively triumphs.

**Self-Discipline Is Like Athletic Training**

Paul repeatedly uses another metaphor to characterize the self-disciplined believer — the well-trained Greek athlete. 2 Timothy 2:5, “If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules.” The verb
translated “strive for masteries” in the King James Version is translated from the Greek word, “athleō,” -- the source from which we get our word “athlete.” In order to be eligible for the victor’s crown -- a wreath woven of laurel, ivy, and oak leaves -- the athlete was required to discipline himself according to the regulations, both in preparation for and participation in the contest. He was required to spend ten months in rigorous training, that included prescribed exercises, restricted activities, subjection to extremes of weather, and a self-denying diet that prohibited wine and rich foods. In the contest itself he was required to observe strict conditions, such as staying within the designated bounds of the course (no shortcuts permitted!) and wearing lightweight clothing. If he were to break any of these training rules or contest regulations, he would be disqualified.

The point is sobering! If a believe lacks the self-discipline to follow the training rules and the rules of the game, God may even pull him out and let him “warm the bench” while others run the race!

With an even greater sense of urgency, Paul uses the same figure of speech in 1 Corinthians 9:24-26, he (though Paul was the writer, the Holy Spirit was dictating) warns believers to “make tracks for the finish line!”

Paul changes from the image of a runner to that of a boxer in 1 Corinthians 9:26-27, when he writes, “I am like a boxer, who does not waste his punches. I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control, to keep from being rejected myself after having called others to the contest” (Good News Bible). The picture is that of perfect control -- no wasted effort, every movement contributing to the motivating purpose. The physical is in balanced subjection (not put down, but put under) to the mental and spiritual. Perhaps this passage gives the clearest sanction for the self-discipline of a Christian, just as the athlete received a victor’s garland for observing the rules of discipline and a penalty for not doing so, the Christian receives an eternal reward for his disciplined service and disapproval for his undisciplined wasting of his talents.

**Self-Discipline Is Like A Yoke**

This image is a composite figure used by Jesus, appearing in Scripture to characterize the self-disciplined believer. In tenderly inviting those who are weary and over burdened to come to Him for rest, Jesus said, “Bend your necks to My yoke, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble-hearted; and your souls will find relief. For My yoke is good to bear, My load is light” (Matthew 11:29-30 [New English Bible]). The yoke -- a wooden bar or frame fitted around the necks of two draft animals for harnessing them together -- was a Jewish metaphor for both discipline and discipleship.

The yoke denoted subjection to authority and submission to command. Just as the ox bent the neck to the yoke, so the believer should patiently submit as a disciple to the authority and instruction of Christ Jesus. To accept this discipline is to become a disciple, and being a disciple requires yet more discipline. The disciple, in denying himself and taking up his cross daily (Luke 9:23-26) to follow Christ is identifiable with Christ and the cross.
The yoke figure teaches several important lessons about self-discipline. Just as the yoke denotes both hardship and help — (if a beast must pull, the yoke actually aids him) — so self-discipline suggests the two — laborious, grueling, and demanding, but without it there is no true discipleship and consequently no fruit with its accompanying blessing and reward. Further, the passage suggests that there are two forms of yokes — one that infuriates and wearies us, and the one Jesus gives, that paradoxically rests and refreshes us. So it is with self-discipline: there is a false discipline that exhausts and enslaves, and there is a genuine spiritual self-discipline that renews and liberates.

Wanting to make the concept clear to us, the Holy Spirit used a variety of images. Whether it’s a trainer with muzzled dog -- an equestrian with bridled horse -- a helmsman with responsible ship -- fire or water under control and therefore beneficial -- a dynamo producing energy -- a city protected by strong fortifications -- a general conquering a city -- a recruit abstaining and sustaining in order to please his commanding officer -- an athlete striving to win the prize -- or a draft animal, servant, or disciple submitting to the hardship, or help of the yoke — they illustrate self-discipline

The Discipline of Learning God’s Word

Lesson Five

Someone has said, “Tell me what you believe or don’t believe, and I’ll tell you what you’re likely to do or not do.” It is true that practice reflects belief, and right practice must be grounded in right belief. The original and oldest meaning of the word translated, “discipline,” in our Bibles, is “a branch of knowledge or learning” or “a field of study.”

A lesson can be learned by looking at Isaiah 28:9-10, 13 — The drunkards of Ephraim met the prophet Isaiah’s clear, repeated warnings of imminent judgment at the hands of the Assyrians with debased mockery. They asked, (verse 9) “Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. They were saying, “Who does Isaiah think he is to presume to teach us? Whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Does he take us to be little babies just weaned?” Then the scoffers mocked Isaiah’s speaking with a song of rhyming monosyllables imitating the babblings of a child. Verse 10 continues, “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: The Hebrew meaning could be interpreted as, “Law on law, law on law; saw on saw, saw on saw; a little bittie here and a little bittie there” — (Today it would no doubt be sung to a tune such as “Old MacDonald Had a Farm.”)

Then in verse 13 the Lord responds to their blasphemous mockery by imitating the sing-song and representing it as the unknown language of the conqueror. Verse 13 states, “But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.”
This 13th verse offers several important principles. First, those who most lack self-discipline, such as these drunken Ephraimites, most scorn the simplicity, the repetition, the routine required to learn both doctrine and discipline.

Second, these scoffers unwittingly expressed the only way doctrine can be learned — “Only on order, line on line, a little here, a little there” (Isaiah 28:10 NASB). The great truths and principles of Scripture cannot be learned overnight — it takes years and years of regular, consistent, disciplined study — “a little at a time.” Accordingly, Paul admonished Timothy to “study” in order to show himself “approved of God” (2 Timothy 2:15). The word translated “study” in the Greek language suggests not only the spectator’s shout of encouragement to the Olympic runner — (“May you win the race”) — but this same Greek word is also used for the encouragement of a Greek mother to her son as he leaves for school — (“May you do your best”), and was also used for the words of a dying father to his eldest son, (“Take good care of all thee things”). Each of these tasks require a great deal of patient determination — “study to accomplish them!”

Early in his ministry, Martin Luther had to learn this lesson of disciplined study of doctrine — the hard way. When he started out in ministry, rather than preparing a sermon, he would go before his congregation, hoping that God would give him the words to speak. After many attempts and failures, he writes that God spoke to him and said, “Martin, you go into the pulpit unprepared!”

There will be setbacks, discouragements, even seeming egression in our disciplined learning of doctrine. But as James reminds us, “perseverance must be allowed to finish her work” (James 1:4). Peter brings together knowledge of doctrine, discipline, and patience when he urges us to add to our “knowledge, self-control, and to self-control, perseverance” (2 Peter 1:6).

A Major Cause Of The Lack Of Self-Discipline

Doctrine, then, can be learned only through the patient self-disciplined study of the revealed Word of God. Solomon warned that, “where there is no revelation — [in the Old Testament times the prophetic ministry, in our time the completed canon of Scripture] — the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law” (Proverbs 29:18). The Hebrew verb translated, “cast off restraint,” here — (rendered as “perish” in the King James Version) — conveys the idea of “running wild” or “becoming unbridled.” Failure to read and study the Word of God is tantamount to not having God’s Word of revelation at all.

It’s not enough merely to read the Word — “we must let it read us! We must submit to its discipline. For every Scripture is breathed by God. Paul says, “Therefore, it is profitable for doctrine — [Paul uses this word 19 times, 15 times in the Pastoral Epistles alone] — for reproof [for conviction], for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). “Instruction” here conveys the idea of correcting mistakes and curbing passions. God’s Word disciplines us in righteousness — producing moral living.

The solid food of the Word of God, the writer of Hebrews says, “is for mature believes, for those who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:14). The Greek word translated “trained” here — [or, “exercise” in the King
James Version] — is form of the word Greek word “gumnazo,” and means “to train in gymnastic discipline.” This involves the constant, habitual practice of studying and the constant feedback of the discipline of the Word, the solid food. It is the Word of God that gives order to our steps (Psalm 119:133).

It was said that whenever Lord Cairns entered the British Parliament, his very presence brought peace, harmony, and order. What was his secret? He said that it was his habit to spend no less than two hours each morning in disciplined meditation on the Scriptures and in prayer.

**God Is The Source Of Discipline**

Perfect discipline is to be found in God alone, the source of order, the epitome of self-control. Only He is unaffected by entropy – [lack of energy] -- the natural tendency toward disorder and chaos. James tells us that every good and every perfect gift “cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). The word here translated, “turning,” is the Greek word “tropes,” is the same word we get our English word, “entropy” from. In the spiritual realm only God escapes the effect of disorder.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in emptying Himself of His divine prerogatives and taking the form of a servant (Philippians 2), provided the perfect example of self-discipline. And God the Holy Spirit, moved upon the formless void, creating a new world, is Himself the great “Restrainer of undisciplined iniquity” (2 Thessalonians 2:7). And that same Holy Spirit empowers us, activating the gift of self-discipline that is the fruit of His infilling (Galatians 5).

**Satan Author of Disorder**

If God is “not the author of confusion but of peace” (as 1 Corinthians 14:33 teaches) then His adversary – and our – is the author and instigator of disorder. The word here translated “confusion” also means, “commotion,” “unsettle states,” “tumult,” and “sedition” — It has to do with stirring up of discontent, resistance, and rebellion against authority. How aptly these phrases describe Satan’s original and continuing activity. In Luke 21:9 the same word characterizes the wars and commotions of the end time. James uses the word in describing wisdom that is “earthly,” “unspiritual,” and “of the devil” (James 3:15). Such a wisdom, James declares, is accompanied by disharmony, disorder, and anarchy — in contrast to the heavenly wisdom, that is “first of all pure, then peaceable, forbearing” (James 3:17 Moffatt’s Translation)

Satan, through self-will and sedition, introduced disorder into God’s orderly creation. Milton, in his writings, refers to the capital of hell as “pandemonium.” – How appropriate because hell is a place or scene of wild confusion and noise. It is Satan’s intent to make every heart, every home, and every assembly a Pandemonium — a place without any order, control, or restraint. It is God’s intent to bring order, control, and discipline. If “order is the first law of heaven,” as Alexander Pope wrote, then, “disorder must be the first law of hell.”
The logical deduction to be draw at this point — If the spirit of Satan is the spirit of disorder, then the extent of which my life manifests disorder, unrestraint, and lack of control is an indication of the extent to which the spirit of Satan has influenced over me. That’s startling, but I believe it’s a valid conclusion. Isn’t it time we started manifesting the “first law of heaven”?

**Self-Control — A Mark of Spirituality!**

In Corinthians 14:32, Paul told the Corinthian saints, who were having a problem with lack of order, that genuine self-control is a mark of spirituality — He taught, “The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of prophets.” The Good News Bible renders this as, “The gift of speaking God’s message should be under the speakers control.” Without the **Fruit** of the Sprit of Spirit, the **gifts** of the Spirit will be misused or unused! True self-control, the Scriptures teach is really Spirit-control. Whereas being controlled by the carnal self is essentially being in the sway of Satan. (Note the recurrence of the personal pronoun “I” in the account of Lucifer’s fall in Isaiah 14:12-14.)

The basis of undisciplined living is, certainly. One of the main basis of the sin problem — letting “self” rule our life! I do not want to imply that being undisciplined is necessarily sin, however, it very well, may be -- or it may lead to sin! Self-discipline is not sanctification, nor even the means by which holiness is achieved. WE must confront the enemy and -- (like Pogo) -- recognize him for what he is -- **ourselves** -- and then allow the Spirit of God to subdue and control him. Our great need, and a starting place in the acquiring of self-discipline, is to surrender out soul — [mind, will, and emotion] — to Christ, yielding the keys to Him for His control.

**Divine Grace – Means of Order**

Sin is missing God’s mark — God’s target — God’s perfect order for holiness. It is distorting God’s intent into chaos or substituting illegitimate means to achieve God’s ends for man — God’s means of bringing order out of sin’s disorder — of transforming man’s order by Satan to control by God’s Spirit of grace. The word translated as “grace” in our Bibles is from the Greek word, “charis,” meaning that which transforms an unpleasing, disordered circumstance into a pleasing, ordered one. Ephesians 2:1-10 depicts the unregenerate person as being unrestrained, distinctly out of control — (in reality, under Satan’s control) — until God’s grace transforms him or her miraculously into a manifestly self-controlled — (that is, under the Spirit’s control) — well-ordered masterpiece — (Interestingly, the word translated as “workmanship” is the Greek word, “poiema,” the same source as our word, “poem”) — productive of good works. Appropriately, the nine characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit are sometimes called “graces.”

It is a mistake to relegate “grace” just to the initial experience of conversion — and fail to recognize that it is by grace that we “grow” (2 Peter 3:18). The grace of God is essential for learning the discipline of renunciation. Paul wrote in Titus 2:11-12, “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all me. And the grace of God teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.” God’s grace teaches us to live lives of order and self-mastery.
As we continue to walk in the Spirit, appropriating the grace of God and learning through the schooling of grace, we grow and mature. Christian maturity is the process of becoming self-controlled — that in its true sense is being God-control, because God’s grace works through our faculties. Thus Paul could say, "I can do all things through Christ, which strengthened me" (Philippians 4:13).

The Relationship Between Self-Discipline and Spiritual Growth

There is discipline involved in Christian growth. The speed with which a man grows spiritually and the degree to which he grows, depends upon discipline. Some believers mature more rapidly and more deeply than others because they make better use of God-given means of growth, such as Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and witnessing. Self-discipline is essential in each of these areas, and each serves to foster more self-discipline. For example, obedience to the command, “Pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), requires genuine self-discipline. And as one prays regularly, he or she is renewed and strengthened for greater self-discipline. The very nature of prayer itself provides order in the midst of chaos.

Since Christian growth and maturity are dependent on discipline — one of the means of self-discipline is the Christian doctrine of divine testing or chastening. The Book of Hebrews admonishes us not to “make light of the Lord’s discipline,” because God, our loving Father, “disciplines those whom He loves.” So. We are to, “endure hardship as discipline” (Hebrews 12:5-7). The writer of the Book of Hebrews goes on to say, “Of course, no discipline seems at the time enjoyable but painful; later on, however, it affords those schooled in it the peaceable fruitage of an upright life” (verse 11). The word translated, "discipline" here is from the Greek word, “paodea”, meaning, “training, instruction, chastisement, or correction.” It is the same word found in Titus 2:12, where Paul describes the discipline of grace. Learning self-discipline through the Lord’s externally imposed discipline produces “the fruit of peace which grows from upright character” (Williams’s Translation) Manifold trials — pain, suffering, adversity, affliction, hardship, misfortune, reversal --- if encountered in the Spirit, will produce self-discipline.

God teaches us patience through trials and adversity – That’s the very reason you have heard someone says, “Don’t pray for patience, because might answer your prayer.” But it is through pain and suffering that we learn to grow. Just think of the most self-disciplined person you know – Isn’t the one who has undergone considerable adversity? Most likely that is true! It seems like there is nothing like suffering that can smooth out the rough edges of our character. It is those times that we cry out to God.

Reward and Judgment

Our motives of self-discipline must be firmly base on Biblical teaching --- that is, God’s divine promise of reward for self-discipline, and His divine warning of loss of reward for those who are undisciplined. Jesus’ parable of the testing of servants graphically contrasts these two types of people — the disciplined and the undisciplined. (For example, read Matthew 24:36-51 & Luke 12:41-48.) In Matthew 24 it is faithful and wise, providing food for the household until the goodman of the house returns with
commendation and reward. Notice that the Lord commends and rewards not ability, but faithfulness. To remain faithful, in a sinful age, requiring great self-discipline. Our rewards in eternity will be determined to a large degree by how self-disciplined we are.

Although, the unfaithful servant of Matthew 24, knew better, he did not make proper preparations. The servant’s lack of self-discipline is clearly manifest both in what he fails to do and in what he does. He loses control and beats the servants under him; he yields to gluttony and drunkenness; and he wastes the substance, gifts, and time allotted to him. Upon his master’s return he, like the five foolish virgins, of Matthew 25, suffers great loss and retribution. Jesus was emphasizing watchfulness — and what is watchfulness if it is not self-disciplined living? The stern warning is for all of us — “Be on your guard, so that your hearts may not be loaded down with self-indulgence, drunkenness, and worldly worries, and that day, like a trap, catch you unawares” (Luke 21:34 Williams Translation)

Each believer has a rendezvous at the Judgment Seat of Christ, where he or she will receive recompense for the deeds done in the body (2 Corinthians 5:10). This judgment is different than the Great White Throne Judgment, which is for unbelievers (Revelation 20:11-15). The Judgment Seat of Christ is when believers’ works will be judged and be the basis of rewards or the suffering of loss (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). This picture of the Judgment Seat of Christ is taken from the “Bema” judgment, where Greek athletes were rewarded with crowned with garlands of glory because of their victorious triumphant — due to self-discipline. However, for many believers this will be a solemn accounting for the results of self-indulgence and for talents unused and undeveloped.

“If we will judge ourselves, we shall not be judged” (1 Corinthians 11:31). If we discipline ourselves, we shall not have to be disciplined. Self-judgment avoids chastisement; self-discipline precludes divine discipline and produces works that shall withstand the fire of God’s testing.

Self-Control in Biblical Characters

An ancient Chinese proverb says, “Not the cry, but the flight of the wild goose, leads the flock to fly and follow” — meaning example gains more followers than précis instructions. One minister said, “People look at me six days in the week to see what I mean on the seventh.” My mother use to say, “It’s not what you say that is important, but what you do” — or, sometimes she would put it this way, “What you do speak so loud, I can’t her what you say!”

God’s Word provides abundant, concrete examples of the blessings of self-discipline as well as the blight of self-indulgence. In chapter 5 of his epistle, James presents two contrasting lifestyles — undisciplined self-indulgence at the expense of others verses patient, self-disciplined endurance in anticipation of the Lord’s return. In the first six verses James addresses the selfish rich. “[Here] on earth you have abandoned yourselves to soft [prodigal] living and to [the pleasure of] self-indulgence and self-
gratification. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter” (James 5:5, Amplified). Two graphic verbs describe the utter lack of self-discipline. The first, from the Greek word, “truphao,” meaning “to live [revel] to soft [wanton] luxury. This word is derived from the root meaning of, “to break down” — and depicts a life of unrestrained luxury that ends by destroying the strength of both body and soul.

The second verb used in the original Greek language, is even strong and more negative. It is “spatalao,” and means, “to plunge into dissipation,” “to indulge self to the full,” or, “to live in wanton riotousness.” Such living, according to James, has the effect of fattening people like cattle for the slaughter — the inevitable judgment.

In James 5:6, he further accuses these people. They resent self-discipline because it reproves them, and they persecute those who practice such discipline. “Ye have condemned and killed the just.” — Jesus and all who follow His example.

Alcibiades, friend of Socrates, was often riotous and undisciplined, He use to say to the more disciplined philosopher, “Socrates, I hate you; for ever time I see you, you show me what I am.” Self-discipline is a silent reproach to self-indulgence, but if it is genuine and spiritual it does not flaunt itself — but patiently endures, as Jesus died when He offered no resistance in the face of death.

Paul, in describing the self-indulgent disobedience that resulted in the wilderness wandering of the Israelites for forty years says, “Now these things occurred as examples, to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did” (1 Corinthians 10:6).

In contrast, James admonishes us (James 5:7), in the light of the imminent return of Christ, to practice self-discipline, taking as our example those who have spoken in the Lord’s name and those who are called blessed because they endured and persevered. Let’s look at the example of Moses and the children of Israel.

Moses Had Three to Six Million Discipline Problems

Try to imagine approximately three to, maybe six, million self-indulgent, intemperate, complaining men, woman, and children leaving Egypt for the Promised Land. God performed miracle after miracle on their behalf - the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea and destruction of Pharaoh and his armies, the guidance of the pillar of cloud and fire, the sustenance of manna and water from the rock, the victory over their enemies — yet they repeatedly forgot His blessings and lapsed into stubborn disobedience, idolatry, and open rebellion. They never learned spiritual self-discipline, and consequently the original generation was condemned to wander and die in the wilderness, never reaching the Promised Land. Paul reiterates how they lost all restraint, abandoning themselves to idolatry and reveling. They “sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play” (1 Corinthians 10:7). Twenty-three thousand died in one day as punishment for their fornication (verse 8). Exodus 32 describes the death of three thousand in retribution for the idolatrous orgy around the golden calf.

In their stubborn self-indulgence, the Israelites are appropriately described as being stiff-necked or stiff-hearted (Exodus 32:9; 33:3 & 5; 34:9; Deuteronomy 9:6 & 13).
Stephen, in his scathing address to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:51), uses the Greek word, “scleros,” — the same word as our word, “sclerosis” — “a hardening of bodily tissues.” Continued self-indulgence hardens the heart, making one set his ways. Self-discipline is developed as the heart is tender and when the neck is submissive to the yoke of authority. But it is never too late to learn self-discipline. Removing the stony heart and being given a tender heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19).

The obstinate Israelites stand in sharp contrast to the generally consistent self-disciplined Moses. In his lyrical farewell address to the whole assembly of Israel, Moses solemnly warned them of the dangers of self-indulgence, “Jeshurun — [poetic ironic name for Israel, meaning “upright one”] — fattened and grew restive — ay, you fattened, gross and gorged — they forsook God who had made them, scorned the steadfast One, their succour” (Deuteronomy 32:15, Moffatt). This verse pictures Israel ‘growing bloated and sleek,” as the New English renders it. “Gorge yourself, and you do become fat and corpulent,” is the way the Goodspeed translation puts it. The language denotes excess, utter lack of self-restraint. “Restive” accurately characterizes their state, meaning, restless, discontented, and unsettled, but also unruly, obstinately refusing to go forward, like a balky mule.

Moses’ figurative speaking pictures a gradual, continued movement downward. He states, that, “Israel overate, gorged itself, grew fat, bloated, and finally became covered with fat — than forsook God.” Such is always the way with self-indulgence, it engenders more of itself until, in a vicious circle, and it leads one to forsake God. Actions evolve into habits, habits into patterns, and patterns into a lifestyle.

Someone has expressed it this way — “Sow an act, and you reap a habit; sow a habit, and you reap a character; sow a character, and you reap a destiny.” Genuine self-discipline means breaking bad habits and forming good ones. Practicing good actions through self-discipline makes doing them easier, and when they are habitual we can take pleasure in them. When our actions please God and us, we do them frequently, and then, by frequency of act, they grow into good habits.

Moses: Our Example

Among the Old Testament figures, none exemplifies self-discipline more than Moses, the great law giver. It seems only logical that anyone who successfully leads and disciplines a group of people must first master himself. The self-mastery of Moses did not come easily — he had at least three serious lapses.

The first forty years of his life were spend in the royal Egyptian court. There, Moses was instructed in the arts and sciences of the Egyptian. He developed highly disciplined oratorical and leadership qualities. Stephen says he was “learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22). Yet Moses refused to be known as “the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:24-25). His decision illustrates several important characteristics of self-discipline. First, he had a sound, godly value system and set of priorities. “He considered the ‘reproach of Christ’ more precious than all the wealth of Egypt” (Hebrews 11:26 Phillips). He was not self-indulgent or materialistic.
Further, he was able, as the self-disciplined person must be, to take the long view, not sacrificing the ultimate on the altar of the immediate. “He looked steadily at the ultimate, not the immediate, reward” (Hebrews 11:26 Phillips). Only spiritual self-discipline enables one to make decisions “with eternity’s values in view!”

Moses also showed emotional self-control — “He left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw Him who was invisible” (Hebrews 11:27). Finally, he endured, persisted, and held his course unflinchingly, strengthened by his vision of the invisible God.

**Moses And The Fruit of The Spirit**

It seems that the more unrestrained and self-indulgent the Israelites became, the more self-disciplined Moses was required to be. Significantly, the man through whom God was to give the Law manifested the nine Fruits of the Spirit given in the New Testament in Galatians 5:22-23. What greater manifestations of love can one find than Moses’ willingness to sacrifice his own life for his people after their apostasy with the golden calf. Moses prayed, “If You will forgive their sin — and if not blot me, I pray You, out of the book which You have written” (Exodus 32:32). And what greater expressions of joy can one find than Moses’ sang of the redeemed in Exodus 15? Moses’ illustrious career also shows numerous examples of peace in its various forms — individual peace -- peace with God -- and communal peace (freedom from strife, variance, envy, and jealousy). Perhaps the secret of this grace of Moses’ life is most clearly indicated after the victory over the Amalekites when Moses built an altar and called it “Jehovah-Nissi” — meaning, “The Lord is my banner.”

Moses also manifested patient endurance in obedience to God, despite pressure to deny God. Again and again Moses endured complaints, criticism, threats, and open rebellion against his leadership, refereeing between the sinful people and a Holy God. Even when his own sister and brother criticized him, he bore it with gentleness. Numbers 12:3 tells us that Moses was the most gentle, or meek, person on earth. Moses did not defend himself against the criticism, nor did he cry out to God for vengeance. Rather he besought God to heal Miriam when she suffered fro her sins with leprosy. Such a gentle attitude is always the result of humility. To be meek and gentle when all around you -- even your brother and sister -- are arrogant and insensitive requires the utmost in self-discipline.

It is clear that the goodness of Moses was a reflection of God’s goodness. When Moses sought a renewed vision from God, God made all His goodness pass before Moses (Exodus 33:19 & 34:6). And when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, his face shone with the glory of God. But Moses was unaware of it (Exodus 34:29). Similarly, true self-discipline and its effects are always more obvious to others; in fact, the moment we pride ourselves in our self-control and flaunt it, we have lost control!

Moses’ faith and faithfulness are emphasized not only in Hebrew 11 but also in Hebrews 3, that, in turn, echoes what God says in Numbers 12:7, “Moses...is faithful in
all Mine house,” meaning that Moses was loyal and dependable in carrying out his God-given duties.

Moses Wasn’t Perfect

It would be satisfying to end the discussion of Moses on a positive note, but the truth of the manner is that despite all his admirable qualities he was human like you and me. He had at least three major lapses in self-control, each having far-reaching effects. The first lapse came at the end of his forty years in Egypt. When he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, he lost control and killed the Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-12). Zeal, even for the most righteous cause, is not enough, it must be tempered by knowledge (Romans 10:2). Consequently, Moses did not have sufficient self-discipline to command respect from his people. The Hebrews rejected him as their leader, and God sent him to the backside of the Midian desert for a forty-year post-graduate course in self-discipline. During this period, Moses was a shepherd and he thereby learned the fundamentals of restraint and self-control, as well as firth and knowledge of survival in the territory surrounding the Gulf of Aqaba, the area through which he would subsequently lead the Israelites.

Moses’ second forty-year period was climaxed by his confrontation with the burning bush that was not consumed. This incident typified God as a “consuming fire” (Deuteronomy 4:24; 9:3 & Hebrews 1:29). It provided Moses with a graphic symbol of self-discipline — the bush flamed but never burned up; the fire represented power under control — just what Moses needed to learn.

Moses’ doubt concerning his leadership abilities (Exodus 4:1, 10) revealed that he had learned something about meekness in the forty years since he attempted to take the slavery situation into his own hands by killing the Egyptian. But his persistent objections, in spite of miraculous signs and God’s promises to “be with his mouth,” suggest that he may have over-reacted to the point of weakness. His shepherd’s crook, that became the “rod of God,” is a symbol not only of power and authority but also of discipline. Moses, like the shepherd David, knew that the rod and staff of the Great Shepherd gave courage (Psalms 23:4 – Moffatt).

It may be debatable whether Moses’ enraged breaking of the tablets when he descended from the mountain to find his worshiping the golden calf as a “lapse” in self-control or a justifiable expression of “holy indignation.” While it is true, righteous anger over sin is not only justifiable but also essential, however, in this situation, the broken tablets symbolize the already-broken law — and the language seems to suggest an impulsive outburst, a violent outrage resembling Moses’ prior and subsequent lapses in control. “Moses blazed out in anger; he flung down the tablets and broke them,” so renders the Moffatt translation of Exodus 32:30. WE must be wary of excusing as “righteous indignation” those reactions of ours that may in fact be impulsive losses of self-control.

Undoubtedly one of the most serious lapses in Moses’ self-discipline came during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. When the people complained of having no water at Meribah of Kadesh, God told Moses that he was to speak to the rock and it would bring broth forth water. Moses’ reaction involved a six-fold offense so serious
that God forbade Moses’ entrance into the Promised Land. This is what Moses said to the children of Israel and did, “Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand and with his rod he smote the rock twice” (Numbers 20:10-11).

Moses showed a lack of self-discipline in (1) his peevish and resentful attitude (“must we”); (2) in arrogantly taking the credit for himself and for Aaron (“must we”); (3) in speaking unadvisedly (“ye rebels” -- see Psalm 106:33); (4) in loving his temper (“he smote the rock”); (5) in not trusting the power of God (verse 12); and finally (6) in flagrantly disobeying God’s command to “speak” to the rock.

What a tragedy that after all the years of faithful, disciplined service, Moses lost the reward of entering the Promised Land because of this lapse of self-discipline.

Other Old Testament Examples of Self-Discipline

The Old Testament provides numerous other examples of people who manifested self-discipline. Especially noteworthy, for example, is Joseph, who maintained his self-control in refusing to lie with Potiphar’s wife (Genesis 39) and then endured patiently for years in prison (Genesis 39-41). Later, as governor in Egypt, he showed remarkable control in dealing with his brothers, not seeking revenge for the mistreatment he had received at their hands.

Another illustration is the story of Gideon and his 300 men (Judges 7). Gideon started with 32,000 men. When God told him to ask those who were afraid to go back home, 22,000 left. God told Gideon to take another test of self-discipline, those who lapped water like a dog or bowed down on their knees when they drank at the stream, were told to go home -- 9,700 men left. The 300 men who remained were those who showed not only courage but self-discipline. They were chosen to vanquish the 135,000 Midianites.

Samson, for all his mighty strength and deeds of valor, was overcome by his tragic flaw -- he could control everything and everyone but himself. David could defeat Goliath and ten thousand Philistines, but lost control and committed adultery and murder. And Elijah, just after his mountaintop victory over 450 prophets of Baal, lost emotional control when he crept under a juniper tree in the wilderness and requested to die.

Isn’t it interesting how many, if not most, of our lapses in self-discipline come after moments of great victory and joy? Satan often trips us up in self-indulgence after a great church meeting or a real spiritual blessing.

New Testament Examples

The New Testament also gives us personal examples of self-discipline or the lack of it. The disciples expressed great resolve to follow Jesus faithfully -- only to fall asleep in the Garden. And later that evening they scattered when Jesus was apprehended.

Peter, like so many of us, impulsively expressed allegiance to the Master and then, just as impulsively, denied Him. Peter cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant
and was sternly rebuked by Jesus (Matthew 26:51-54). After the Crucifixion, Peter precipitately told the others, “I’m going out to fish” (John 21:3), returning to his former style of life. But a self-centered lifestyle leads nowhere. The resurrected Christ establishes love as the only proper motivation for action.

What accounts for the difference between this impetuous, undisciplined Peter and the self-disciplined, miracle-working apostle described in the Book of Acts? It is the same difference that can transform our lives into fruitful servants of God -- the power of the Holy Spirit that works through individuals, controlling faculties and energizing wills. The rushing mighty wind and the tongues of fire that signaled the Spirit’s outpouring on Pentecost symbolized the controlled power of God. The fire that burned in the bush but never consumed it and the fire-like tongues that appeared over each Spirit-filled believer symbolized other things as well -- the purging of self-will, the burning away of the dross of self-indulgence, and the flaming forth of authoritative power -- under control!

Jesus, Our Perfect Model of Self-Control

Not only do we lack the ability to control ourselves, as we read God’s ideal in Scripture, we realize that we lack sufficient discipline even to begin becoming self-disciplined. However, to compensate for our human weakness, God has provided the dynamic of self-discipline by the power of His Holy Spirit and the Model of self-discipline in the Person and life of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Peter wrote, “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His footsteps” (1 Peter 1:21). Jesus Christ is our perfect example! Peter uses two metaphors here to describe Jesus as our example. Both show us in the role of dependent children.

Remember when you were learning to write in cursive penmanship? Remember how you tried so hard to reproduce those twenty-six squiggly characters, but your awkward, uncoordinated movements produced only embarrassing scrawls? You found that you could improve as you teachers made the letters for you to trace and copy -- maybe even held your hand as she steadied your pencil -- as you both went over the letters. This is exactly the picture the Holy Spirit -- through Peter --- here. The word translated, “example,” is from the Greek word, “hypogrammos,” and means, “a line of script a schoolchild copies in imitation, a writing pattern to follow.”

Jesus is the Word, perfectly structured and exemplary

--- The indwelling Spirit is our Teacher, taking the things of Christ and showing them to us (John 14:26 & 16:13-14).

Jesus is also the Trailblazer! Hebrews 12:2 can be read, “Looking unto Jesus the Author (Trailblazer) and Finisher of our faith.” Youngsters have the experience of trudging through deep snow by following in the tracks of their parent. In just such a way the
believer, energized by the Holy spirit, develops self-discipline by following the example of Christ. “As children copy their fathers you, as God’s children, are to copy Him,” Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:1 (Phillips Translation).

By the Holy Spirit’s enablement, we must be extremely careful, in every action and situation to be master of our self. By the advantage of the Holy Spirit to control circumstances and not let circumstances control us. Only then can we be master and ruler of our lives, not a slave to our carnal desires and reactions. If we are to be free men, living true Christianity, enjoy the freedom and high destiny that God has for us, we must follow the example of self-discipline that Jesus Christ left for us.

**Jesus Christ, the Perfect Model**

Jesus Christ, as a Man, perfectly exemplified all the graces of the Fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5. John 15:13 tells us that “No one has greater love then the one who lays down his life for his friends” -- and Jesus even gave up His life for His enemies!!” Paul urges us to imitate this high example of love -- “Live a life of love, following the example of Christ” (Ephesians 5:2 – 20th Century New Testament).

The writer of the Book of Hebrews tells us that we should be “Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross. (Hebrews 12:2). The word translated in our Bibles as, “looking unto:” has a much stronger significance in the Greek than it sounds in our English language. The original word conveys the idea of regarding fixedly, with undivided attention, by looking away from everything else -- a discipline, rather than a distracted, look.

Note that one of the supreme lessons to be learned from Christ’s example is that a proper motivation and sanction of the disciplined endurance of suffering is the promise of joy!

The third grace, “peace,” is such an essential part of the nature of Christ that Isaiah’s prophecy, given nearly 800 years before Jesus’ birth, referred to Christ as the very “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). At His birth angels announced “peace on earth among men with whom He is pleased” (Luke 2:14 New American Standard Bible).

Christ is also the perfect example of “patience,” as Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:16, “I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe in Him.”

Paul, defending his apostolic authority, appeals to the Corinthian believers on the basis of “the gentleness (or ‘kindness’) of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:1, Goodspeed). Jesus invited all who are weary and overburdened to come, bend their necks to His yoke of discipline, and learn from Him because He is “meek and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29). What greater picture of self-disciplined condescension than that of the mighty King of kings, the supreme Lord of the universe, “mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden” (Matthew 21:5)?

Jesus exemplifies perfect goodness even in the midst of a corrupt environment, illustrating self-control over circumstances and environment.
Finally, Jesus exemplifies faithfulness -- to the Father, to His task of redeeming mankind through His death, to His promises, even to His unbelieving people -- despite great difficulty and great opposition from the forces of darkness. “He was faithful to the One (His Father) who appointed Him” (Hebrews 3:2); “the One (Jesus) who calls you is faithful and He will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:24); “He who promised is faithful (2 Timothy 2:13). And it is precisely the faithfulness of Christ that enables us to maintain our own self-discipline, “The Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and keep you from evil” (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

These spiritual graces all manifested to perfection in the life of Christ, work together, each complementing the others, to produce self-control, that, in turn influences the other eight.

The Self-Discipline Of The Incarnation

This self-discipline of Christ is perhaps nowhere more clearly shown than in His incarnation. And this same humble attitude and disciplined mind should be manifest in our lives. Paul, in Philippians 2:5-8, puts it this way,

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus; Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross!”

Note the six characteristics of self-discipline exemplified in Jesus’ “humbling Himself.” (1) He willingly set aside His rights, His privileges, His prerogatives. To do so requires great self-sacrifice, but should we do less than willingly surrender our rights for His glory? “The student is not above his Teacher, nor a servant above his Master” (Matthew 10:24). “As you stand in awe of Christ,” Paul writes, “submit to each other’s rights” (Ephesians 5:21)

How foreign to most of us this submission is, for we insist stubbornly on our “rights.”

(2) Jesus showed self-discipline in making Himself “of no reputation.” He wasn’t concerned with His image. He did not say, “Why, I can’t become a servant. What would people think?” -- or -- “People won’t know I’m God if I do that!”

(3) Jesus showed submission in taking upon Himself the form of a slave. Service always demands great discipline. Perhaps this is the reason so few of us are willing to do it. Jesus’ service was maintained by inner resources; motivated by the prospect of joy and by love for the Father and for sinful man.

(4) His condescension, His disciplined descent, is seen also in His assuming the likeness of men, who the psalmist refers to as being made “a little lower than the angels” (Psalm 8:5). In having done so, He is able to “be touched with the feeling of our infirmities...in all point having been tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrew 4:15).
(5) & (6) The characteristics of self-discipline have to do with Jesus’ death. Not only did He choose to die, but He chose the most ignoble and ignominious form of death conceivable -- that of a common criminal. The Son of God, being God, need not have died. He could have stepped back into heaven from the Mount of Transfiguration or, at the very least, He could have died quietly with friends in Bethany. Instead, He disciplined Himself to die an accused death, ”Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

Jesus Had Total Self-Discipline

Jesus exemplified perfect self-discipline in all areas of His life. He was disciplined not only mentally, but also physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually, Luke described Him at the age of 12 -- “Jesus grew in wisdom [mentally] and stature [physically], and in favor [emotionally] with God [spiritually] and man [socially]” (Luke 2:52).

Physically

Jesus subjected His body to the discipline of fasting -- on one occasion for 40 days and nights (Matthew 4:2). He taught His disciples its benefits and, for certain effects such as the exorcism of some demons, its necessity (Matthew 17:21 & Mark 9:29).

All three of the recorded temptations of Christ entailed testings of His self-control over His physical nature:

(1) When He was ravenously hungry, Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread -- a temptation to live by sight rather than by faith. But Jesus resisted with the Scriptural principle that the spiritual always takes precedence over the physical, the supernatural over the natural, and the eternal over the temporal. Natural, legitimate physical needs, such as hunger, must be satisfied in God’s way and in God’s own time.

(2) In the second temptation, according to Matthew’s account, Satan urged Jesus to test the divine promise of physical protection by jumping from a pinnacle of the Temple. But Jesus again resisted Satan’s insistence that He test the promises of God.

(3) The third temptation was perhaps the most subtly appealing of all: it was a temptation to do wrong (assent to Satan) for the right reason (reclaim the world for God). Satan tempted Christ to reclaim the world by taking a shortcut (worshipping him) rather than by suffering physical anguish and death on the cross.

Satan tempts us in these same three ways -- indulge your physical desires, flaunt the physical to presume on God’s protection, and spare yourself physical suffering and pain. Only self-discipline of our physical nature and disciplined use of the Scripture will win the victory for us, as it did for Christ, our Example!

Emotionally

Because Jesus was the God-man -- as much God as if He were not man, and as much man as if He were not God -- and was tempted in all areas, just as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15), He manifested all forms of human emotion without losing control. His great love never degenerated into sentimentality or blinded Him to reality.
To witness Jesus emotions we see that He found delight in doing His Father’s will (Psalm 40:8) and in fulfilling the law of God (Psalm 119). He found joy in enduring the suffering and shame of the cross.

We must not underestimate the agony, the sorrow, and the extreme depression of Jesus in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37-38 & Mark 13:33-34). But He did not give in to despair; He was not overcome by it. Rather He submitted to the will of His Father. Isaiah described Jesus as, “a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief…” But “it was our grief He bore, our sorrows that weighed Him down” (Isaiah 53:3-4). He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44), and He openly wept at Lazarus’s grave (John 11:35). But never did Jesus lose the balance between the sorrow and the joy of His mission, between pain and pleasure, between depression and exultation -- never did He identify with suffering and defeat to the exclusion of the joy of victory.

Jesus showed concern, but never anxious care or worry. His lifestyle was disciplined but casual because of His trust in His Father. He told His disciples, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head,” (Matthew 8:20). He lived what He preached about the cure for anxious care (Matthew 6:25-34).

He also illustrated how to be angry without sinning, as Paul admonishes in Ephesians 4:26. In purifying the Temple of unscrupulous merchandizes, He exemplified holy indignation, even making a whip of cords and driving out the animals and moneychangers (John 2:13-16). Of course, w must be careful that we do not justify as “holy indignation” what is really carnal loses of temper resulting from wounded pride. The object of Jesus’ legitimate anger was the violation of the sanctity of His Father’s house, not violation of Himself. He illustrated that we cannot love, as we ought to love unless we hate where we ought to hate.

Our Lord was verbally and physically violated, but His reactions to these abuses where always forbearing, restrained, and loving. For a picture of His genuine self-discipline in action, read Isaiah 50 and 53, the account of the suffering servant. Note especially Jesus’ reaction, “I gave My back to those who beat Me, My cheeks to those who pulled out My beard; I did not hide My face from mocking and spitting” (Isaiah 50:6). There has never been such condescension, such power held in perfect control!

In rebuking Peter for cutting off the ear of the high priest’s servant, Jesus says He could have called twelve legions of angels to His aid, but He did not. When Jesus picked up the servant’s ear and instantly healed him, we see a perfect obedience to the godly trait of blessing those who persecute you, of overcoming evil with good (Romans 12:14 & 21). This kind of self-control certainly goes against the grain of human nature. God would never command us to do something without providing the means by which it can be accomplished. God, the Father, gave a perfect Model in the Person of His Son.

Socially
Jesus also provides the perfect example of social and domestic self-discipline. He was submissive to Joseph and Mary. Luke 2:5 says, “He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedience to them.” Further, He was in subjection to civil authority. He admonished individuals to “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Matthew 22:21). He perfectly exemplified the self-disciplined subjection to authority as enjoined by Paul (Romans 13:1-7 and by Peter (1Peter 2:13-25).

**Spiritually**

Jesus could truthfully say what ought to be our ideal, “I seek not to please Myself but Him who sent Me” (John 5:30) This was not a grudging submission because His Father’s will was His very nourishment (John 4:34). His whole purpose in coming into this world was to carry out the will of His Father (Hebrews 10:7).

In Jesus’ short life on earth, He exemplified the disciplined redeeming of time (Ephesians 5:16 & Colossians 4:5). He was never hurried, yet He was never late -- *His timing was perfect!* When He received word that His friend Lazarus was sick, He tarried for two days. Mary and Martha chided Jesus for not arriving *“in time”* to heal their brother (John 11:21 & 32). But Jesus illustrated that the sole criterion for the disciplined use of time is “that God’s Son may be glorified through it” (John 11:4).

In the process of carrying out His Father’s will, Jesus resolutely headed toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). Isaiah 50:7 tells us that “He set His face like flint.” -- This is a figure that conveys Jesus’ resolve and unswerving purpose. Never has there been such a unmatched manifestation of cool self-control and calm composure as in the suffering of Jesus Christ. Peter, in the passage where he presents Christ as our line of script to imitate, echoes Isaiah’s description of the suffering servant — “*When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats*” (1 Peter 2:23). Under the severest of provocation, Jesus manifested the ultimate in restraint, in submission, and in quiet forbearance.

Jesus’ self-control is shown especially in His silences. It is more difficult to remain silent in the face of personal affront and provocation than it is to speak out in defense of a challenged cause. Before the false accusation of the chief priests and elders, Jesus remained silent; before the interrogation of Pilate, Jesus answered not a word (Matthew 27:12-14). When He spoke, it was said that, “*No one ever spoke the way this Man does*” (John 7:46), because He possessed a tongue that was “*well-trained*” (Isaiah 50:4). When He spoke, His disciplined words, seasoned with the salt of grace, were filled with transcendent wisdom, but no less did His manifest His discipline by the strength of His silences.

Perhaps most amazing of all is Christ’s self-discipline in willing His own death, even though His enemies thought the event to be in their own hands. Jesus said, “*I lay down My life, No man takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord…I have authority to take it again*” (John 10:17-18). How often in our lives it appears that the forces of evil are in control, yet, all the while God, working in and through us, is the center of control.
Underlying the disciplined will, heart, body, and mind is the disciplined spirit. Anyone lacking disciplined devotion can lay claim to a genuinely self-disciplined life. This is why the secular humanistic self-help books on “How to take control of your life” are ultimately ineffective. They overlook or ignore an indispensable dimension -- the spiritual! Again, Jesus is the perfect model. Mark tells us that Jesus “in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35). Later Jesus sent His disciples away and went into the mountain to pray. Luke writes that Jesus went into the hills and prayed all night long (Luke 6:12).

Do we have the kind of self-discipline manifested by Jesus? You might say, “Impossible!” And, it certainly is -- in our own strength! That’s why human resolutions and fleshly attempts at self-discipline are doomed to failure. But we must not forget the promise Jesus made to every one who believes in Him, “Greater works than these shall he do” (John 14:12) because He was going to the Father and sending the Holy Spirit to empower every believer. To why did Jesus attribute His victory? -- “The Spirit of the Lord is on Me,” He said (Luke 4:18).

Indwelling every believer is the self-same Spirit who empowered the perfectly disciplined Christ. The Spirit of Him who raised up Christ from the dead gives life to our mortality (Romans 8:11), enabling us to master our circumstances. -- The same grace -- (that which severs to transform unpleasing circumstances into please ones) -- that enabled Christ to transform death to life, despair to hope and chaos to order is available to every believer today.

Someone may be thinking, “Sure, that’s all very good, this talk about Christ as the model of self-discipline. But He was God, and since God is the very essence of order, how could Jesus fail to be perfectly self-disciplined? But we’re mortals with an evil nature, and we fail all the time!” It’s true. As mortals, we fail when we operate in the flesh. But we have available to us the same source of victory Jesus had. We must appropriate it as He did. As God, He was not able to fail, but when He became a man, he determined, by the strength of the Holy Spirit, not to fail -- and He did not fail! As God, He was not able to be undisciplined, but when He became a man He determined, by the power of the Holy Spirit, not to be undisciplined. And by following His example, energized by the Same Spirit and appropriating the same divine grace, we too are able not to be undisciplined.

**Discipline of the Whole Man**

"Get control of yourself!" -- Every hear that? -- Or, maybe, “Pull yourself together!” Perhaps you have said, “One of these day, I’ll get it all together.” We promise ours self, “I’ll get with it!” But where do we begin and how do we start?

There isn’t any enchanted pill that we can swallow that will produce instant self-control – no charming wand to wave and immediately find self-control – not even some magical formula giving three easy steps and we learn self-control. Self-control is one of
the characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit -- and it is wisdom to remember that fruit trees must be cultivated, nurtured, pruned, and allowed to mature -- a process that requires time and deliberate effort.

In the process of growing fruit, there is a definite starting point when the seed is planted. Then, given the right conditions, it germinates, spouts, and grows into a tree capable of bearing fruit. In the same way, genuine spiritual self-discipline must begin somewhere, sometime. It doesn’t just happen! Christian self-discipline must begin with the seed of the Gospel springing up unto salvation.

The beginning of self-control is to be mastered by Christ, to yield to His lordship. Augustine asked, “Wouldn’t thou have thy flesh obey they spirit? Then let thy spirit obey thy god. Thou must be governed, that thou may’st govern.”

SELF-DISCIPLINE INVOLVES THE WHOLE SELF

Genuine self-discipline necessarily involves the whole person, all of our faculties. Our being created in the image of God means, among other things, that we are fashioned after the pattern of God’s trinity. The Godhead consists of God the Father, God the son, and God the Holy Spirit; human personhood consists of soul, body, and spirit. Paul prayed that God would sanctify the Thessalonians wholly, completely, through and through and that their “whole spirit, soul and body might be kept blameless” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). In the same manner, the divine ideal is that we become self-disciplined in all three areas.

The spirit is that part of us that permits awareness of God and communion with Him. The soul constitutes the very seat of our personality, that is comprised of intellect, emotions, and will. The body, of course, includes our physical being, our senses and sensations. Or to express it in another way -- our spirit is God-conscious, the soul is self-conscious, and the body is world-conscious.

One truly can be self-disciplined only if all three areas are engaged. An individual who strives to control a violent temper or who works hard at losing weight is dealing with only a part of the human personhood; so, regardless of the degree of success, he or she cannot lay claim to genuine self-discipline. The spiritual dimension of this life is missing or dormant. It does not seem valid to speak of “partial discipline” because the human facilities are so closely interrelated that there intimate, mutual actions and reactions are all but indiscernible. Are we not told that only the living, powerful Word of God is able to “pierce even to the severance of the soul and spirit” (Hebrew 4:12)?

The person who is spiritually dead or the believer who ignores or neglects the spiritual side of his or her nature is incapable of experiencing self-discipline as it is presented in the Scriptures. The law itself is spiritual (Romans 7:14), therefore, no carnal effort to achieve perfection can ever succeed.
The person whose "spirit" is "dead in sin" (Ephesians 2:1-3) or not yielded to the Holy Spirit may at times achieve certain limited curbs and controls that may appear to be self-discipline, however, with one entire dimension of personhood uninvolved (that is the "spirit" dimension), genuine self-discipline is impossible.
Surely this is one of the reasons for the frustration of Benjamin Franklin in his project of self-discipline that he described in his Autobiography:

I would conquer all that either natural inclination, custom, or company might lead me into. As I knew, or thought I knew, what was right or wrong, I did not see why I might not always do the one and avoid the other. But I soon found I had undertaken a task of more difficulty than I had imagined. While my attention was taken up and care employed in guarding against one fault, I was often surprised by another. Habit took advantage of inattention. Inclination was sometimes too strong for reason.

Though he admittedly borrowed the plan and methodology of self-inventory from the great Puritan, Cotton Mather, Franklin essentially failed in his noble project for several reasons – just as many a person has tried and failed. He was a non-spiritual man attempting to develop spiritual virtues through mere resolution and human strength. Such an attempt is like trying to grow fruit without a tree.

Imagine with me, if you will, of such a dialogue as this . . .

“Gr—r-u-u-u-unt, Gr-o-o-o-a-a-a-n, Str-r-r-a-a-ain”
“Hey, fella, Whatcha doin there?”
“Gr-r-r-u-u-u-unt. Why I’m producing fruit. The fruit of moderation and sincerity and order and frugality and...and...”
“Butdon’tcha hafta have a tree to produce fruit?”
“Str-r-r-a-a-ain. A tree? Who needs a tree when ya got determination? Oh, but I do have this branch from a friend’s orange tree.”
“Say, could I sample one of your oranges?”
“Gr-o-o-o-a-a-a-n. Orange? Oh! Well, I don’t have any yet. But I’m working on it.”
“No oranges? Well, how about a little tangelo? No? A kumquat then? Not even a kumquat? Say., fella, don’tcha think ya better go plant a fruit tree?”

The incomplete, spiritually dead person can be holy only when made whole [the word “holy” and “whole” are derived from the same Old English word] by being filled with the Spirit of God.

**SELF-DISCIPLINE BEGINS WITH SPIRIT CONTROL**

Where does one begin then in one’s desire to be self-disciplined? The only logical place to begin is with the Holy Spirit working through our spirits, that part of us that is God-conscious -- that permits our awareness of God and our communion with Him.
For the unbeliever this means repentance, receiving Christ as Savior and being made spiritually alive. For the believer it means continuous commitment and cleansing and continuous filling by the Spirit, submitting to the lordship of Christ.

Paul describes contrasting lifestyles. He admonishes us to “be not drunk with wine, wherein in excess: but keep on being filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). A person controlled by alcoholic spirits loses control and acts in an unrestrained and unbecoming manner -- a Spirit-filled person yields control to God and acts in a manner that is disciplined and becoming.

To be filled with the Spirit is not to possess more of the Spirit, for He indwells every believer in all of His fullness (Romans 8:9 & 1 Corinthians 6:19); rather, the Spirit possesses more of the believer, exercising full control over his or her faculties. When the Holy Spirit masters the human spirit, it, in turn, is able to master the soul (the seat of our personality and the part of us that is self-conscious) and body (that part of us that is world-conscious). According to the remainder of Ephesians 5, evidence of the Spirit’s control is praise, rejoicing, thanksgiving, and self-controlled submission in relationships.

Jesus taught, “The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). Jesus is here referring to the human spirit of the believer is providing the genuine, enduring motivation of self-discipline, because it has been brought unto the control of God’s Spirit.

John 3:6 tells us that, when we are “born-again” -- “That which is born of the Holy Spirit is our ‘spirit.’ ” It was Adam’s “spirit” that died -- [was “separated from God”] -- when he sinned. Until one accepts Christ as his Savior, he is “dead in trespasses and sin” (Ephesians 2:1) -- when one receives Christ, his “spirit” is “quickened” [made alive!]

Once one is saved, he should experience daily, even hourly, cleansing, filling, and yielding to the Holy Spirit. But more than submission to the Holy Spirit’s control is necessary! It is only the beginning. It is necessary to “walk in the Spirit” to maintain a disciplined devotional life -- every day! To have a disciplined spirit, the believer needs his or her spiritual daily dozen.

1. Daily Prayer

What does discipline have to do with praying? Just a little bit of everything! Self-discipline is both a cause and effect of prayer. Without spiritual self-discipline we do not really pray. Peter urges believers, in view of the 4end time, to “be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray” (1 Peter 4:7). Moffatt renders the verse “Steady then; keep cool and pray.” That’s not bad advice is it? Keep cool -- steady, collected, self-controlled -- for the purpose of prayer.

But how can we get cool and stay that way in such a frantic world as this? Would you believe through prayer? “We can really pray only when we are self-controlled, but we become self-controlled through prayer --- but, you say, “How can that be?” It’s a gracious cicle. Self-discipline is a Fruit of the Spirit, as we have seen, but it must be cultivated
and developed, just as a measure of faith is given to every person (Romans 12:3) but at the same time faith “comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).

Disciplined praying is praying that is at once in the Spirit and with the human spirit. It is effectual and fervent, persistent and unceasing, full of faith and faithful (See Ephesians 6:18; 1 Corinthians 14:15; James 5:16; Luke 11:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; James 5:15; and Luke 18:1). Disciplined prayer that disciplines the spirit is regular, consistent — daily! The Psalmist repeatedly refers to his calling upon the Lord daily (Psalm 86:3), and Daniel’s daily prayers sent him to the lion’s den. Such dedication in one’s prayer life requires and produces discipline of spirit.

2. Daily Praise

With prayer must come daily, disciplined praise, “Daily shall He [God] be praised,” the Psalmist writes in Psalm 72:15. Or better yet, “Seven times a day I praise You, God” (Psalms 119:165). Disciplined praise, like disciplined prayer, is essentially an attitude, a mind-set, a lifestyle, so that David could say, “From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the Lord’s name is to be praised” (Psalm 113:3) and “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psalm 34:1).

“Continually? and At all times? That may have worked for David in the Old Testament, but for me, now, in the 21st century? With my schedule that seems impossible? You must be kidding!” No, David was not kidding, nor was Paul when he listed the giving of thanks “always for all things” as one of the results of being filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:20). It’s easy to praise God when the sun shines and people smile, but it requires Spirit-motivated discipline to praise God when the rain pours and the boos roars and inflation soars!

At such times we need the kind of spiritual discipline manifested by Samuel Sewell, the American Puritan businessman who, having prayed for spiritual renewal, made this diary entry on June 16, 1707:

My house was broken open in two places, and about 20 lbs. Of plate stolen away, and some linen; my spoon and knife and neckcloth was taken. I said, Is not this an answer to prayer? ... I say Welcome Christ!

To the spirituality uninitiated person, this may sound like sheer madness. In a similar vein, Paul made a triumphant statement that may appear nothing short of masochistic to some people: “Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities...I take please in infirmities” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). But it is God’s Spirit who gives our spirit victory so that we can praise Him continually!
3. Daily Commitment-Keeping

David spoke of a related daily spiritual discipline, when he said, “So will I sing praise unto Thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows,” in Psalms 61:8. A self-disciplined person keeps promises, even when keeping them is no longer a personal advantage. This passage in Psalm 61, and others throughout the Old Testament, stress the importance of keeping our word, of following through in doing what we promise, not only to God but also to other people. Our greatest ability is dependability. If you say you’re going to be somewhere at a certain time, are you there — on time? A major part of our Christian testimony is the keeping of our commitments, following through on our promises.

4. Daily Bible Study

A fourth kind of daily spiritual discipline is the reading, memorizing, and study of the Scriptures. The believers in Berea “were finer spirits” than the believers in Thessalonica, for they received Paul’s preaching with “great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). The word Greek word that is translated, “examined,” in our Bible, does not mean some casual thinking of, but rather, it conveys the idea of “scrutinizing intensely, weighing, sifting, appraising, and discerning carefully.” Paul uses the same verb to characterize the typical activity of the truly “spiritual” person -- when he wrote, “He that is spiritual discerns all things, yet he himself is discerned of no man” (1 Corinthians 2:15).

And why is the spiritual person “discerned of no man”? Because this person is “discerned” by the very Scriptures he or she discerns -- “The Word of God is living and active…it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). The Word of God serves to discipline our spirits. When we daily examine the Scriptures, those living words in turn examine our own spirits. Again a gracious circle is established -- as we discipline our spirits to study the Scriptures, the Scriptures discipline our spirits.

Those who are disciplined in spirit hunger and thirst after righteousness and, as our Lord promised, shall be filled and perfectly satisfied (Matthew 5:6), but not satiated or glutted so that they lose their taste for the things of God. Perhaps there have been times -- especially when you were young -- that you ate so much of one thing that you lost your taste for it. No one can get too much of the Word of God, but it is possible for our taste to become dulled through sporadic reading, misreading, and lack of appropriate application and spiritual exercise. It is entirely possible for us to become weary in and of well-doing. A truly self-disciplined spirit prevents this, motivates us to search the Scriptures regularly, thus further enhancing our spiritual self-discipline.

It may surprise you to realize that the only place in the Bible were “success” is mentioned is in connection with daily meditation on the Scriptures. When Joshua assumed command of the Israelites after the death of Moses, he gave them this secret, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then shalt thou have good success” (Joshua 1:8).
The success of our self-discipline will be determined to a large degree by the quantity and quality of Bible study and prayer. If we do not have a regular time set aside each day, then we should begin or improve your program of self-discipline with this important step. At first it might be just a very few minutes a day. We need to choose the most suitable time of day and faithfully keep that appointment with the Lord. We should not become guilt-ridden, or demoralized, if we miss — we all do occasionally! With God’s help we can win the battle of discipline at this crucial point, and victory here will spur us on in the other areas of our life.

5. Daily Self-Denial

To be genuinely self-disciplined one must become a disciple of Jesus, who set down this exacting requirement, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). Haven’t all of us, like Henderson, the protagonist in Saul Bellow’s novel “Henderson the Rain King,” heard a voice within us speaking constantly?

“I want, I want, I want!...It only said one thing, I want, I want!...At time I would treat it like an ailing child whom you offer rhymes or candy. I would walk with it, I would trot it. I would sing to it or read to it. No use.”

No, it’s no use to pamper selfish desires, cater to it. That will not make it go away. There’s nothing to be done but renounce it and consign it to the Cross — until we hear only “God wants.” Discipline of the spirit makes the difference.

6. Daily Dying

Though dying daily is closely related to self-denial, there is a fine, though perhaps “vague,” difference. Paul declared, “I die every day” (1 Corinthians 15:31). While it is true that he faced literal death every day of his life — fighting wild beasts in the arena at Ephesus or severe beatings, stonings, and shipwreck — however, Paul has in mind far more than the tests and trials that he went though in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The context refers to “dying to self, his own ego, his carnal desires and wants, in order to live fully for Christ.” In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, “Every day we experiences something of the death of Jesus” (2 Corinthians 4:10 Phillips).

It was not the morbid extremes of his life that Paul is referring too, but rather, he has in mind — dying daily to the old nature. Of course, keeping before us the real possibility of imminent physical death — (as some interpret this passage) — is a sobering reality that will stimulate us to greater self-discipline. However, Paul had something even more crucial than that. He is referring to our “dying daily” to our own wants and desires and living our life every day completely, unreservedly, for Jesus Christ.

7. Daily Renewal

In the same passage where Paul talks about our dying daily to our self nature, he encourages us not to lose heart for “though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly,
we are being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). The Phillips translation renders this verse as, “Every day the inward man receives fresh strength.” This promise is at the heart of spiritual discipline. Unless our spirits are refreshed and strengthened daily, self-discipline in other areas is sure to break down sooner or later.

After David has lost control and committed adultery with Bathsheba, he prayed from spiritual renewal. He prayed to God, “Put a new, steadfast spirit in me…give me a willing spirit as my strength, that I may teach offenders how Thou dealest, till sinful man turn back to Thee” (Psalm 51:10, 13 Moffatt). A renewed spirit produces a self-disciplined spirit, that in turn results in disciplined service.

But how does this daily renewal come about? Isaiah provides the answer, “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31). To “wait” in this context does not mean to sit passively with hands folded. The Hebrew word conveys the idea of conscious, disciplined attention, active meditation upon the things of God, who says that spiritual renewal lies — “only in returning to Me [Almighty God] and waiting for Me” (Isaiah 30:15). Our strength lies in staying quiet before God. David says much the same thing, “Wait upon the Lord; be of good courage, and He will strengthen thine heart, wait, I say, on the Lord” (Psalm 27:14).

The impulsive way is often easier than waiting. It takes spiritual self-discipline to be still without being passive and sluggish. In his poem, “On His Blindness,” John Milton conveys this idea of active waiting — “They also serve who only stand and wait.” The secret of renewal, then, goes something like this -- the indwelling Spirit, as we yield to Him, produces the Fruit of self-discipline, that motivates us daily to wait upon the Lord, and this active devotion in turn reinforces the discipline of our spirit.

8. Daily Fellowship

Another exercise of spiritual discipline is daily fellowship with God and fellow believers. Of the early church it was said, “Daily they frequented the Temple together” (Acts 2:46). The verb used here conveys the idea of perseverance and unremitting continuance. The same word appears in verse 42, where we are told that the believers, “persevered in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in breaking of bread and in prayers.” The word appears again in Ephesians 6:18 to describe intercessory prayer, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints”.

The first-century believers met daily to pray, to praise God, to eat together, and to build each other up in the faith. They knew the real meaning of Christian fellowship. It seems as if, in our culture, and the schedule we are bound to keep that Christians meeting together on a daily bases is an impossible, however, we need to ever keep before us -- if we are to preserve and continue steadfastly in our Christian growth, fellowship with other believers, even when it’s difficult, is the way of a discipline spirit.

9. Daily Encouragement
One of the results of such disciplined fellowship is that believers are edified through exhortation. This daily encouraging and comforting is yet another exercise of the self-disciplined spirit. Hebrews 3:13 instructs us to, “Exhort one another daily... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Or, as the Phillips translation renders this text, “Believers should help one another to stand firm in the faith every day.” This passage suggests that we are not only to develop discipline in our own spirits but also to assist in the development of self-discipline in fellow believers.

The Greek word, “parakaleo,” that is translated as “exhort,” that is derived from the word, “paraclete,” that is a Scriptural description of the Holy Spirit. When we are disciplined in our spirit by the Holy Spirit we serve a function that is an extension of the Spirit’s function! God “comforteth — [this is the same word, “parakaleo”] — us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:4). This is spiritual self-discipline in action — and multiplied!

It’s easy to see how exhortation, especially daily exhortation, would create opposition that flair into bitter criticism. Self-discipline of our spirit by the Holy Spirit will help us to prevent this. Paul urges young Timothy to ‘reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine’ (2 Timothy 4:2). The Greek word translated, “longsuffering” conveys the idea of utmost self-discipline, being persistent and never-ending in patience.

You may wonder what ordinarily do we talk about with fellow believers — even when we see them at church. Usually, most talk about the weather, last week’s football game, the kids, or, the high cost of living. Do we share spiritual victories and struggles? Wouldn’t we be surprised if our old question, “How are you?” received an answer like, “I’m not well, spiritually — I pray but I don’t hear an answer. I’ve been constantly defeated this week!” When was the last time you heard a rejoicing response like, “I’m praising the Lord for what His done for me this past week. Let me share it with you...?” Exhortation such as this does not come from talking about the weather — unless we’re talking about the Lord’s showers of blessings!

10. Daily Witnessing

If daily encouragement of fellow believers is one manifestation of a self-discipline spirit, a reasonable witness to unbelievers is another. We are told that, on his visit to Athens, Paul “was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present” (Acts 17:17). Again, at Ephesus Paul spent three months reasoning and persuading in the synagogue and two full years “reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.” The result was that “all who lived in Asia heard the Word of the Lord” (Acts 19:9-10). Paul’s witness for the Lord was not sporadic and hit-and-miss, but regular and daily!

We are commanded to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have,” however we are to do it “with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15-16). This readiness to reason, in a cautious and courteous manner,
is borne of spiritual self-discipline. Without it, e may alienate and repulse an unbeliever. We may win the argument, but lose the soul.

11. Daily Giving

The regular, systematic meeting of the material needs of fellow believers is also important. In the first century church, there was daily distribution of food (Acts 6:1). When the church grew and expanded throughout Judea and Samaria, seven Spirit-filled deacons were appointed to administer the distribution. Christians today should be no less systematic in regularly ministering to the physical needs of others.

Pious platitudes do not feed hungry people. Patting the needy person on the shoulder and say, “There, there,” is no enough. James condemned such inaction when he said, “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?” (James 2:15-16).

Being a hearer and a doer demands a self-disciplined spirit. Giving and sharing may demand sacrifice and personal self-discipline on our part. It may require keeping the old car a while longer, doing without those new golf clubs, postponing plans for the trip to Hawaii. But isn’t this one of the acid tests of our Christian commitment? James reminds us that “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

12. Daily Vigilance

The last of the believer’s daily dozen exercises for a disciplined spirit is continuous, vigilant watching. Proverbs 8:34, pictures wisdom saying to us, “Happy is the man listening to me, watching daily at my gates, keeping watch at my doorposts.” To “watch daily” at the gates of wisdom means that we constantly should be aware of what is going on. We should be mentally sharp and spiritually alert.

Jesus enjoined His followers to watchfulness — “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is…Watch ye, therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh…Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto You I say unto all, Watch” (Mark 13:33-37). Luke’s record of these words makes the failure to watch and be ready clearly associated with lack of self-discipline — “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting [self-indulgence], and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares” (Luke 21:34).

To watch also means to be on our guard, to have our defensive and offensive weapons always ready. Paul urges believers to “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love” (1Corinthians 16:13)

Paul further admonishes believers in the last days to keep awake, alert, watchful, cautions and on their guard and self-controlled. Those of the night, those who are self-indulgent, sleep on, but we, who belong to the day, should control ourselves (1 Thessalonians 5:6 & 8). Are we daily watching for wisdom, daily watching for the Lord’s
return, daily watching out for Satan’s wily strategies? Or are we spiritually sluggish and dull?

Paul summarizes the point best when he urges young Timothy to watch in all things, to be self-controlled always -- to keep his head (2 Timothy 4:5).

The Disciplined Mind

Lesson Nine

In order to have a truly self-disciplined mind, we need a self-disciplined spirit -- as we saw in our last lesson. In a very real sense, genuine self-discipline is not only a Fruit of the Holy Spirit but it is also a fruit of our own “spirit.”

Let’s imagine a huge computer. Let’s say that it is the size of the Empire State Building, towering 102 stories -- 1,250 feet into the air. Within this intricate system billions and billions of electronic circuits hum -- huge magnetic core cylinders rotate -- storing information and compiling output data -- zeros and ones alternate and combine with sophisticated precision. Do you have that picture contained in your mind’s eye? Now, let’s say suddenly the control panel flashes a warning -- the central processing unit malfunctions -- reels of tape spin erratically -- output data is distorted. For all its impressive design, this mechanical marvel is simply a unit out of control -- and as such it fails to serve the purpose for which it was created.

Our human mind is rather like this computer. Scientists have estimated that if a computer capable of performing the functions of the human brain could be built, it would have to be at least the size of the Empire State Building in New York City. Of course the brain is far more complex and efficient than any computer, and the mind, part of the human “soul,” is much more than the gray matter of the brain.

Our ability to think, reason, and reflect is a special gift of God --- a part of what it means to be created uniquely in the image of God! There are those who will argue most insistently that their pet possesses not just instinct but reasoning ability as well. Perhaps they have what is referred to as a “soul” -- but certainly not a “spirit.” Listen to God says, “Do not behave like horse or mule, unreasoning, creatures, whose course must be checked with bit and bridle” (Psalm 32:9). The point is that animals are controlled by force, but God guides us through our understanding, and it is our mind that is instrumental in controlling our behavior and curbing our appetites. It is certainly correct to say, “Self-control is primarily mind-control.”

Before man’s disobedience that brought about humanity’s Fall, man’s human mind was harmoniously in tune with God’s divine Mind -- perfectly ordered and controlled. But sin alienated the human mind from God, darkened man’s intellect, and introduced mental disorder and lack of intellectual discipline. Paul describes the unregenerate have minds as, “clouded with darkness.” He writes that man’s mind, apart from Christ, is “alienated from the life of God because ignorance prevails among and their
minds have grown hard as stone” (Ephesians 4:17). Before we are redeemed we were “enemies in our minds by wicked works” (Colossians 1:21).

The human mind was “once a fair and stately place” ruled by “monarch Thought,” says Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “The Haunted Place.” But “evil things...assailed the monarch’s high estates” so that now “vast forms...move fantastically To a discordant melody.” Satan, the prince of disorder, and his hosts of angels, now work in and through that fallen place. The “lute’s well-tuned law” has changed to discord and confusion.

Which Comes First – A Disciplined Mind Or Disciplined Thoughts?

There are those who believe that control of thoughts can be regained through human effort and that order can be restored by cleaning up the rubble and doing some interior mental decorating. Any consideration of mental discipline must deal initially with this crucial question, “Do we achieve a disciplined mind by thinking disciplined thoughts or do we think disciplined thoughts because we have a disciplined mind?” This all sounds vaguely reminiscent about which came first poultry or eggs, doesn’t it?

Someone wrote, “To be heavenly-minded we must think heavenly thoughts...God must have all our thoughts if we would experience the sanctification of our minds.” Just what does that mean? Does it mean if we have “heavenly” thoughts (and what precisely are those?) long enough -- (how long? - five years? ten? twenty? fifty?) -- we will acquire a “heavenly mind” — (and just what is that?)? And, as someone has said, does possessing a “heavenly mind” mean we are of no earthly good?

Undoubtedly there is some truth to what was written in the statement above, but the point needs a considerable amount of qualification. First, it is important to realize that disciplined, or heavenly, thoughts simply cannot be produced by an undisciplined, or “unheavenly,” mind. Jesus Himself, in His Sermon-on-the-Mount, made this principle clear when, referring to man’s heart, said, “Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit” (Matthew 7:17-18). According to Jesus, the criterion for appraisal is the fruit. Solomon makes the thought processes the very indicator of moral character, when he said, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). What do you think about in your unguarded moments? When you’re all by yourself, just turning things over in your mind or just before you fall off to sleep at night? Are they unrestrained thoughts of self-indulgence --- lust of the flesh, conniving thoughts of covetousness and greed, impulses of unforgiveness, or bitterness? Surely the fact that we all occasionally have such thoughts underscores the fact that we need a self-disciplined mind.

If an undisciplined mind can never produce disciplined thoughts, then the solution would obviously lie in achieving a disciplined mind. Right? Can’t the “disordered, haunted palace” be cleaned up, straightened up, tidied up -- set in order? The answer is “No!”

Why “No?” Why not? Can’t we get our work crews in there to sweep and scrub and polish and refurbish and, and ... What we need is a lot of positive thinking and ... “
Sorry, but it just won’t work. Jesus told of a house, vacated by an unclean spirit, that was made perfectly straight and clean in Luke 11:25. You think that this is a perfect picture of a self-disciplined personage? If you think so, you would be wrong! Jesus said that the house, clean and empty wasn’t what we should desire. He goes on to say that the unclean spirit joined with seven other demons even more wicked than himself and returned to dwell in the house. And the final state of the man was far worse than the first.

Jesus is not simply saying that self-reformation is utterly futile, nor only that an empty, idle mind is the devil’s workshop, but what Jesus was teaching was that nothing less than an entirely new palace under new ownership and management will bring about total self-control!

The Scripture teaches that there are two distinct, diametrically opposite kinds of minds: -- (1) the carnal mind, or the mind of the flesh, and (2) the spirit mind, the mind of Christ. Note what Paul says of these two minds, “People who are controlled by the physical -- think of what is physical, and people who are controlled by the spiritual -- think of what is spiritual” (Romans 8:5 Goodspeed).

Paul goes on to say that “the carnal mind is death. But the mind controlled by the Spirit is life, and peace, because the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Romans 8:6-7). — [The word “death” here is not necessarily “eternal death,” but rather the word can mean, “separation from God’s purpose and plan for one’s life,” as it does here!] — Because the mind of the flesh cannot submit to the laws of God, it can never be truly disciplined. The old palace, though swept, polished, and refurbished, is still haunted by those vast forms of evil.

God has made provision for that palace -- [your mind] -- to be completely renovated, made totally new. You and I, the moment we received Christ as Savior and became God’s children, received the mind of Christ, the very understanding and intellectual conception of Christ Himself. “We have the mind of Christ,” Paul writes fellow believers (1 Corinthians 2:16). And in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). What an amazing truth!

WHAT KIND OF MIND IS YOURS?

Have you ever thought about the kind of mind you, as a believer have? Sounds like a rather circular process, doesn’t it --- thinking, with your mind obviously, about your mind? But it’s not a futile spiral, for only when we realize what we have can we use what we’ve got!

Paul tells us about the kind of mind God has given every believer, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). It’s interesting and significant that the Greek word, “sophronismos,” translated, “of a sound mind,” is also rendered “self-restraint,” “self-control,” and, “self-discipline.” Forms of the word, usually translated, “sober,” or, “soberminded,” are popular with Paul, who establishes the trait as a qualification of those who minister the Word (Titus 1:2, 2 & 4-6)
This same word is used in 1 Peter 4:7, where Peter writes, “Be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.”

**The Demonic Was Totally Out of Control**

Both mark and Luke use the same word in their accounts of Jesus casting out the legion of demons at Gadara. Here we have a vivid demonstration of the two minds. Note the “before-after” picture. When Jesus arrived, a man met Him who was mentally, spiritually, physically, and emotionally out of control. Here is the carnal mind with a vengeance! This man lived, appropriately, among the tombs. Not only did he lack self-discipline -- he could not even be controlled by others, “No one could bind him any moa, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot; but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him” (Mark 5:3-4). This was an extreme case, but there’s a basic principle here that makes this case illustrative of every carnal mind -- When Satan is in control, the human mind is out of control and, like the giant computer on the ruined palace, it is thwarted from its purpose of creation.

The demoniac’s practice of “shrieking and mangling himself with sharp stones” (Weymouth) sound like a caricature of humanity’s useless attempt to achieve self-discipline through asceticism -- [abstaining from normal pleasures of life; denying material satisfaction] -- **Nothing but the power of Christ would work then, or today!**

Don’t miss the “after” picture! When the townspeople came out, they saw the man who had been possessed of a legion of demons sitting, dressed, “and in his right mind” -- this phrase is translated from the Greek word, “sophronounta,” meaning, “perfectly sane” (Mark 5:15). Here is a perfectly self-disciplined mind. He instantly, unquestionably obeyed when Jesus sent him to proclaim in his own country the great things that Jesus had doe for him. But what about his fellow countrymen, what reaction did they have? The fact that they were awe-struck by sanity and preferred having their herds of swine to the Savior suggests that then demoniac’s was not the only undisciplined mind present there.

**God Wants Us To Have A Certain Frame Of Mind**

We, of course, realize that once a person receives a spiritual mind -- at his “new-birth” -- his thoughts are not always perfectly disciplined from that moment on. Why is this? Because, even though the very mind of Chris is ours, we do not always appropriate it by faith or permit the Spirit of God to control our minds and apply them to our daily experience. Although we possess a “spiritual mind,” it is subject to the influence of our old nature, a sinful world, and Satan’s forces.

Consequently, Paul gives such admonitions as this one in Philippians 2:5, when he wrote, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Why are we told that we should possess a mind that we supposedly already have? The word translated “mind” here is not the Greek word, “nous” -- (as found in 1 Corinthians 2:16) -- but “phroneo,” that means “to be in a certain frame of mind,” or “to have a certain mind-set.” We are to have the same mental disposition, the same attitude that Christ had in emptying Himself of His divine prerogatives and submitting to death on the cross.
Paul further stresses the necessity of disciplining our minds in Colossians 3:2, when he wrote, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Again, Paul uses the Greed word, “phroneo,” the idea being to “practice occupying your minds with the things above” (Williams), directing our thoughts to dwell upon the spiritual realm. The question we need to ask ourselves is, “Do we cultivated the habit of holy thinking?” We tend to get so immersed in the physical, the finite, and the temporal that we seldom think on the higher realm of the infinite and the eternal.

Let’s look at how we should go about acquiring a disciplined mind ——

**Prepare The Mind**

How can such discipline of mind be achieved? Certainly not by clenching our fists, fritting our teeth, and saying to ourselves, “I’m going to think holy thoughts today. I’m going to; I’m going to.” Peter, who in the early years of his discipleship usually spoke first and thought later, offers this as a preliminary step — “Gird up the loins of your mind; be sober” (1 Peter 1:13). The word for “mind” here is translated from the Greek word “dianoia,” meaning “mode of thinking,” or “disposition of mind.”

“Girding up the loins” reminds us of the Israelites who ate the Passover with their loose outer robes gathered up about their waist and secured with a girdle or belt. They had to be ready to travel at a moment’s notice. Runners, wrestlers and warriors all “girded themselves” for two reasons: (1) to prevent their loose, flowing garments from impeding action, and (2) to brace up their bodies with strength — two tasks of preparation that require self-discipline. Peter’s expression means, “Get ready to accomplish something strenuous and demanding with your minds.” Implicit here is the idea of disencumbering our minds, freeing them of whatever might distract and hinder. “Tighten up your belt about your minds, keep perfectly calm” (Williams). We do this in much the same way that we tighten the belt around our waist — by pushing back, saying no, and doing without. Instead of wasting hours in front of the television, filling our minds with trivia, we could flip the switch and occupy our minds by reading a good Christian book.

Besides disencumbering our minds, we must positively prepare, or hone, our minds. We must be mentally alert, sharp, and always ready for intense concentration. Studying, memorizing, and meditating upon God’s Word will “brace up” the mind. Paul urges in Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,” — “let it be at home in you.” A good idea is to carry memory verses on cards with you so when you have to wait --- in line at the bank, in traffic, at the dentist’s office --- you can occupy your mind with the Word of God --- maybe, not only leaning to memorizing Scripture, but it will help you from getting impatient and frustrated! .

**Focus The Mind**

Another step in disciplining the mind involves fixing the mind, by a deliberate act of the will, upon God. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusts in Thee” (Isaiah 26:3).
Self-Control

The undisciplined mind, often full of distress and unresolved doubt, is easily unsettled and disturbed. Paul urges the Thessalonians that they “be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled” (2 Thessalonians 2:2). The Greek word that is translated “shaken” here, is “saleuo” — the same word Luke uses to describe the effect of the storm on the house build upon the sand (Luke 6:48). The storm beat vehemently upon two houses, but it could not shake the house founded upon a rock. Phillips paraphrases of this verse in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 is, “Keep your heads and don’t be thrown off your balance.”

Luke uses the word again in Acts, where he quotes David’s Psalm — Psalm 16 — “I have ever fixed my eyes upon the Lord; because He is at my right hand I abode unshaken” (Acts 2:24 Weymouth). Paul describes the immature, undisciplined believer as being “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching” (Ephesians 4:14), but the mature (or “maturing”), self-disciplined believer should be “firm, incapable of being moved” (1 Corinthians 15:58 Williams).

Some believers remind me of the story I heard of the pig farmer who called his pigs by tapping his shovel on a fence post. He would tap his shovel on a post of the fence and the pigs would come running for their dinner. All went well until woodpeckers moved into the area. They would “tap, tap, tap” in one corner of the pen — and the pigs would come running. Then “tap, tap, tap” in another corner, and there went all the pigs. It wasn’t long before those pigs ran off all their valuable weight. — [I can’t verify the story, but it is told as truth] — But it serves as an excellent example of believers who have undisciplined minds — running helter-skelter after every new “exciting” teaching. They never seem to get “settled in their minds” so they can “abound in the Lord’s work.”

Robert Frost wrote,

“We may choose something like a star
To stay our minds on and be staid.”

We must choose the “Bright and Morning Star” (Jesus Christ) and “stay our minds on Him,” we experience the peace of God. This peace, according to Philippians 4:7, “transcends human understanding, will, in turn, keep constant guard over our hearts and minds as we rest in Christ Jesus.” The more we fix our minds on God, the more peace we receive to guard our minds so they can fix ever more intently upon God and produce even greater peace.

The Peace Of God Guards Our Minds

What a striking metaphor this is — the peace of God is a sentinel standing constant watch over the renovated palace of our mind. No long can that “hideous throng” of “evil things” enter at will. When ugly thoughts approach, the sentinel cries, “Halt, in the name of the Monarch who controls this citadel! What are your credentials? What is the password?” And the thought, attitude, and the mind-set without proper credentials and password, is denied admission.

You may feel that this sounds like a silly fairy tale — and maybe it does to some, but if such a screening process is not going on in our mind, we have not learned the Scriptural truth of divine thought control. Paul writes, “We refute arguments, and theories
Self-Control

and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the true knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away captive into the obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Paul is referring to making every thought be compelled to come under the authority of Christ — every mental perception being brought into submission to Christ. This, of course, refers to the false arguments of people we encounter, but also to our own thoughts, coming from our carnal nature.

When a thought comes to our mind — wherever it comes from — it is not sin, however, if we allow that thought to remain and lead us to lust (or desire) it becomes sin. "You can't keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair!" We can't keep those hideous forms from congregating at the door of the place, but we can keep them from entering the throne room. And we can take those thoughts captive and transform them into thoughts of beauty and glory to God.

What to Think About

What credentials does the sentinel demand of thoughts seeking entrance into the place of our mind? What password is required? What "open sesame" allows entrance into our mind? There is a list of 8 reflections that Paul gives in Philippians 4:8; an index of what the disciplined mind thinks about.

(1) Whatever is true — reliable
(2) Whatever is noble — honorable, valuable, worthy of reverence, respect-compelling,
(3) Whatever is right — equitable, fair,
(4) Whatever is pure — stainless, noncontaminating, fit to be brought into the presence of God,
(5) Whatever is lovely — lovable, amiable, endearing, that which calls forth love
(6) Whatever is admirable — gracious, winsome, attractive, kindly, commendable, laudable, respectable
(7) Whatever is excellent — lofty, virtuous
(8) Whatever is praiseworthy — commendatory, honorable

How does such a process work? Thing about truth? Sounds good. But how can I get hold of that? What's truth?

When we realize that the written Word and Christ — the Living Word — constitute and illustrate each of these eight virtues, our thinking toward this verse will be revolutionized. For example, God's Word is truth (John 17:17), and Jesus is "the way — the truth and the life" (John 14:6), and so on through all eight virtues. We may have trouble thinking about purity in the abstract, but here's something concrete — "the commandments of the Lord are pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:8).

If we, "commit our works unto the Lord…our thoughts will be established" (Proverbs 16:3), we can take those thoughts captive and transform them into thoughts of beauty and glory to God.
has promised to put His laws into our minds (Hebrews 8:10), to “*engrave them in our innermost thoughts*” (Hebrews 10:16 Knox) as part of the palace décor!

One process remains in the on-going self-disciplining of the mind. The palace was totally renovated when Christ became its Monarch, but it requires continual *renewal*. Paul urged the believers to “*be transformed* — [this is the same word used in the Gospels to describe the transfiguration of Christ] — *by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2) — “*let God remold your minds from within*” (Phillips) Again Paul refers to our being “*mentally and spiritually remade*” (Ephesians 4:23 Phillips). Without this daily, even moment-by-moment, renewal through the filling of the Spirit, we will become weary and we will faint in our minds (Hebrews 12:3).

Without constant renewal, we become sluggish, exhausted, maybe discouraged. Then our defenses are down, and evil thoughts catch us unawares. But if Jesus is in control of our minds, our minds will be under control.

May our “*spoken words and our unspoken thoughts be pleasing*” to the Monarch of the palace (Psalm 19:14 Living Bible).

**The Disciplined Heart – Our Emotions!**

In Greek mythology, Prometheus stole fire from heaven and gave it to mankind for his benefit. Resulting from this Greek fable came a legend that “*every human carries a flame of emotion in his or her heart.*” That lead to the saying, “*If this inner flame of emotion is carefully tended and controlled, it brings its bearer great benefit. But if it is allowed to flicker or to rage out of control, it causes great destruction.*”

There are those who are ashamed of their flame of emotion — thinking of it as a form of weakness. Others even wish it were gone, and try to stifle it. To the extent that they are successful in quenching it’s burning, they become cold and less human.

Then there are those of the opposite extreme who make no effort to control the flame and even fan it to a fury that sometimes destroys both them and others.

There are those, however, who recognize the benefits as well as the dangers of the flame. But these are, at times, powerless to control the flame of emotion, and in an unguarded moment, the flame suddenly blazes into the open to the embarrassment and harm to themselves and those around them.

Have you found yourself in one of these categories? Do you recognize the embers of emotion, the flames of feelings, within your own life? Our emotions are a gift from God --- and not by some Greek mythological Prometheus --- and as such they neither should be downplayed nor overindulged. Who can say which extreme is worse --- the ice of no emotion or the fire of uncontrolled emotion?

The poet, Robert Frost wrote:
Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I’ve tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.

Mr. Frost concluded that . . .

...for destruction, ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

What does this have to do with my emotions? If we are to fulfill the design of our creation, we must neither freeze nor burn out of control. Of course, better a little fire that illuminates and warms than a big one that burns.

Emotions Have Been Called “Animals of the Heart.”

Our emotions have been described in terms of animals in the heart. Ambrose Bierce, in his “The Devil’s Dictionary,” wrote, “In each human heart are a tiger, a pig, an ass, and a nightingale.” He refers to the fact that “each of us have a powerful tiger of ferocity -- a pig of envy and greed -- an ass of cowardice, folly, and fear -- a nightingale, whose beautiful song of love is compensation for sorrow and suffering.” He continues, “What a snarling, grunting, braying, and twittering they make! There’s no expelling the animals completely, although some have been known to substitute a lamb for the pig and a horse for the ass. There’s much to admire about the nightingale and the tiger -- when they’re under control.”

A poem by William Blake brings the images of flame and ferocity together:

Tiger, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night
What immoral hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

He continues:

Did he simple his work to see?
Did he who make the Lamb make thee?

Actually, God did make us will all our emotion capacities --- our tiger as well as our lamb. And only if we are yielded to His control will our “tiger” burn bright but under control so as not to consume us.

Have you ever thought about the number of vivid expressions us to describe intense emotions? Ever notice how many terms refer to emotions as “heat” -- What about, “hot under the collar,” “get steamed,” “lose your cool,” “flame up,” or, “fume?” Other expressions of emotions imply intense pressure and describe its result -- “explode,” “flip your lid,” “blow your stack,” -- [or top, cork, gasket, wig, noggin] -- and “hit the ceiling.” Still others imply ferocity and a total breakdown of control --- “fly off the handle,” and “hopping mad.” Or how about that common description — “He just came all unglued?”

Eugene O’Neill, in his play, “The Great God Brown,” wrote:
“Man is born broken.
He lives by mending.
The grace of God is glue.”

Certainly it is only by God’s grace that we can keep from coming "unglued" --- but grace is so much more, and the human condition requires much more than glue.

Even expression of love is often described in terms that suggest lack of control, imbalance, and complete loss of equilibrium -- Listen to these, “fall head over heels,” “flipped,” “smitten –[or, stuck with],” “stuck on,” “crazy over,” “wild about,” or, “mad about.” And a former love is referred to as, “an old flame.”

Reaction to physical, mental, or emotional hurt often provides a stabilizing power.

Lack of Self-Discipline Is Most Obvious In Our Emotions

Our lack of self-discipline seems to show up nowhere so glaringly as in our emotions. We may be able to keep our undisciplined thoughts to our self, but our undisciplined emotions have a way of manifesting themselves to everyone around us. Why is this? It is because our emotions are responses to our relationships.

And something else, another reason we lack self-discipline in our emotions, is because of the predominance of our emotions in our whole makeup. Some more than others -- but all of us, in various degrees, are emotional creatures! And this is so because God made us in His own image. Our ability to feel is grounded in the very nature of His own being. The Scripture describes God as an emotional being. He loves (John 3:16 & 2 Corinthians 5:14) – He grieves (Ephesians 4:30 & John 11:35) – He is capable of anger (Psalm 7:11 & Matthew 21:12) – He is jealous (Exodus 20:5 & 34:14) -- and so forth!

Each of God’s emotions is positive and healthy. Because of His nature, He is incapable of guilt or fear -- (the guilt Jesus experienced while on the cross was caused by our sin; it was not His own.)

Since we have been so “wonderfully made,” as Scripture declares (Psalm 139:14), why do we have to many problems with our emotions? Why do we experience negative emotions -- and why do even the more positive ones so often get out of control? Why is it that “the heart is the most deceitful of all things, desperately sick” (Jeremiah 17:9)? The answer lies in the devastating effects of man’s Fall way back in the Garden of Eden. Before man’s Fall, apparently only positive emotions, such as love, joy, and delight, existed in humankind and were the natural responses of Adam’s and Eve’s relationships with Jehovah, each other, and with the animal kingdom. Scriptures tell us that Adam and Eve were perfect masters, not only of all living creatures but also of all their own faculties. However, we cannot help but notice the change in their emotions immediately after the Fall. Whereas before, Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect, blissful communion with God, now they felt shame for the first time (Genesis 3:7). God’s Word states that before they sinned they were “nude,” but after the sin they went “naked!”
Shame brought another new emotion -- guilt! And with the guilt came fear, cause them to attempt to hide from God.

Confronted with his sin, Adam experienced another emotion, anger and blame -- He said to God, “The woman You put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (Genesis 3:12). Other emotions came as part of the curse: anguish (for women in childbirth, (Genesis 3:15) -- sorrow for man in toil for survival (Genesis 3:17-19) -- disappointment and depression over expulsion from the Garden, and later, grief as a result of death. Apparently it was their sin, too, that elicited from God such emotions as sorrow, holy anger, righteous jealousy, and hated of sin.

In addition to introducing new, negative emotions, the Fall of man distorted the positive emotions by making them uncontrolled and misplaced. Ever since, mankind has attempted to satisfy God-given emotional needs in ways not pleasing to God. For example, every person has an inherent need to love and be loved. And God has provided legitimate means to satisfy these needs, as He did when He created Eve from Adam. Emotional problems arise when we seek fulfillment in illegitimate ways -- by loving things, -- by lusting rather than loving -- by loving an “unsuitable” person -- or loving in the wrong way -- by loving others more than we love God - etc.

The Seven Basic Emotions

Some psychologists say there are just three basic emotion -- love, fear, and anger. Others say there are four -- love, fear, hate, and guilt. They believe that various other emotions are only extensions of the basic ones. They state that worry, anxiety, and often depression, guilt, jealousy, and grief are only forms of fear! And also, that, tenderness, sympathy, compassion, and even joy, happiness, and delight stem from love! They teach that anger sometimes manifests itself as hate, or, milder forms, appear as annoyance or irritation.

It seems to me that an easier way to understand man’s emotions is to compare them to the colors of the rainbow -- recalling the seven major categories, or colors, in the spectrum of the rainbow can help us visualize the gamut of our emotions.
Each of the seven emotions can be positive or negative. To grow toward perfection we must initially and basically have a new heart, just as Christ must make our spirit alive and our mind must be renovated. The unregenerate heart is perverse and deceitful, defying even understanding (Jeremiah 17:9), must less disciplining. But God’s promise of a heart transplant for Israel is applicable as well for us — “I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 11:19). Only this new heart, a heart capable of knowing God (Jeremiah 24:7) and experiencing emotions in a God-ordained way, is able to be disciplined.

One of the finest, often overlooked, Scriptural examples of a disciplined heart is Ezra. This Jewish priest and scribe won the permission of the Babylonian king to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. He led eighteen hundred Jews from Babylon to the Holy City, a nine hundred-mile journey that took four months. His success in rebuilding the Temple, opposing compromise with paganism, and reestablishing the old forms of worship attests to his great discipline. What was his secret? Note Ezra 7:10, “Ezra had prepared his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and it teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel.” To study, to practice, and to teach God’s truth — that’s a self-disciplined life!

Ezra, whose name means “help,” can be a real help in our effort to understand self-discipline. We will never be called upon to lead 1800 people on a 900-mile journey to rebuild a Temple, but we can realize the same kind of self-discipline in our homes, communities, and places of employment.

Understanding Emotional Self-Discipline by Its Six Factors

We are dealing with the “Disciplining of the heart.” Exactly what is involved? What makes some emotions negative and others positive? And what makes even the same emotion positive at one time but negative at another? There are at least six factors to consider in analyzing our emotions and determining to what extent we must discipline them.

First, we need to establish what is the nature of the emotion itself and what is its relation to other emotions? This question leads naturally to other considerations, such what motivates the emotion, and what is its purpose, its object, its occasion or time, its degree or extent, and how should we respond to emotional stimuli? In other words we ask the questions of our emotions -- What? Why? When? How much? and How?

1. The Nature Of The Emotion

Would you believe me if I were to tell you that if you don’t hate, you are probably lacking in emotional discipline? Believe it, not because I tell you, but because of what we find of it in God’s Word. The Scripture clearly indicates that we can’t love what we ought to love if we don’t hate what we ought to hate. For example, the Psalmist makes it clear that our love for God and good should produce hatred of all that is hostile against them. Psalm 97:10, for instance, says, “Those who love the Lord hate evil.” Genuine love produces hatred of its opposite. To love truth is to hate falsehood. To love purity is to hate impurity. To love justice is to hate injustice.
The extent of our hatred of evil should be determined by the extent of our love of good. Isn’t it logical, for instance, that because I love my wife and family I will despise those things that would bring them harm? If I don’t, wouldn’t you have the right to wonder about how much I really loved them? It’s the same with our love for God. If we truly love Him, that love will evoke hatred of whatever comes between God and us. “Hate evil, love good,” God commanded Israel (Amos 5:15). But so often we, like them, “hate good and love evil” (Micah 3:2) -- a sure sign of an undisciplined heart!

Solomon links righteous hatred with another emotion -- for or awe of God. He writes in Proverbs 8:13, “To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride, arrogance, evil behavior, and perverse speech.” 1 John 4:18 tells us that a disciplined heart does not feel terror toward the heavenly Father, when it says, “There is no fear in love, for perfect love drives fear...The man who fears is not made perfect in love.”

We are told that, on a physiological level, fear alerts us to danger. It stimulates the flow of adrenalin that helps us overcome or escape difficulty or danger. But such a natural, legitimate fear should not turn into a cowardly, paranoia that imagines danger behind every door. Sam Fathers, a wise old man in William Faulkner’s story, “The Bear,” tells young Ike McCaslin, “Be scared! You can’t help that. But don’t be afraid.”

Justifiable hatred is hatred that is prompted by love and godly fear. All other kinds are displeasing to God and must be removed by the Holy Spirit. Just so, our fear of God, -- a reverential awe -- is grounded in love and manifested in hatred of evil. 2 Timothy 1:7 says, “God has not given us the spirit of fear but one to inspire strength, love, and self-discipline”

In the same way, disciplined love is the kind that is genuine, sincere, without hypocrisy (Read Romans 12:9). Today love has several definitions. There’s a love and then there’s “luv” -- the latter being saccharine and superficial. “Oh I luv you,” someone glibly utters. However, they don’t even know you, nor have they even taken the trouble to remember your name even after numerous corrections.

Genuine love also motivates us for good. It is patient, kind, not proud, not rude, or self-seeking, not easily angered, keeps no score of wrongs, delights in truth, practices, hopes, trusts, and perseveres. (See 1 Corinthians 13”4-7).

Even the sorrow of believers should be a hopeful sorrow. Paul urged believers not to grieve as do others who have no hope in 1 Thessalonians 4:13. Also, guilt is positive if it serves its purpose of bringing us to repentance, but once the sin is forgiven and put under the blood of Christ, we must also forgive ourselves, forget the past, and press on to win the prize for God (See Philippians 3:13-14). A morbid grief or guilt can rob us of our joy and hinder our service for Christ.

Jealousy and anger may seem to be totally negative emotions and therefore to be avoided. But just as God is “jealous” in that He demands exclusive allegiance, and is righteously indignant over sin, so we are to reflect those holy emotions. Paul wrote the Corinthians, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.” He writes in 2 Corinthians 11:2,
“My jealousy over you is the right sort of jealousy, for in my eyes you are like a fresh, unspoiled girl whom I presenting as fiancée to you true husband, Christ Himself” (Phillips).

In another sense, just as “He – [God] – jealously desires the spirit which He has made to dwell is us” (James 4:5) -- meaning “just as the Spirit that dwells in us jealously desires us, so we should jealously desire the Spirit and His control over us.”

Just as there is a holy jealousy, so there is a sinless anger. Paul urges us in Ephesians 4:26, to “Be anger and yet do not sin.” Scripture warns that thee are times to be angry, however, when we are angry, we must make sure it is the kind of anger that is not the result of a sinful emotion. It is true that we all need to learn how to be good and angry at certain things, but, we must not label as “holiness indignation” what is, in fact, a carnal “flying off the handle.”

What is sinless anger? It is an anger prompted by love of God and good, along with hatred of evil. Jesus manifested such an anger when He drove the moneychangers from the Temple.

Let me share two responses to this same situation -- one impulsive and carnal, the other restrained and spiritual -- illustrates these two kinds of anger. One of the major television networks ran a film hat was offensive to Christians in its explicit sensuality and its profanity. One believer made a big stir locally by wrecking his television set with a sledge-hammer and then writing a nasty anonymous letter to the local station. Another believer equally as disturbed by the offensive film, enlisted the help of fellow believers and called the network and the local affiliate to object courteously and graciously. Which response do you suppose achieved the greater good?

2. The Motive Of The Emotion

Closely related to the kind of emotion is its motivation. For example, why do we get angry? Isn’t it usually because our rights are violated, our dignity threatened, or our purposes frustrated? And are not these also the primary sources of our hate and fear? But with Jesus it was never so! He expressed anger at the moneychangers not because His own rights, dignity, or purposes were violated, but rather, it was because His Father’s house was being desecrated (John 2:16).

Not only by His example but also by His explicit teaching did Jesus illustrate justifiable anger. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus dais, “I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment” (Matthew 5:22). The implicit principle is twofold: gratuitous, or needless, anger is always wrong, and anger with a just cause -- violation of good by evil -- is justifiable. We just need to be sure it’s God’s cause and not our own!

I have, on occasions, attempted to reflect on what caused me to be angry or upset. In almost every case the cause was a real, or imagined, threat to my own ego.

Even highly positive emotions -- such as love and grief -- can be wrongly motivated. We can love selfishly; seeking only what will profit us. Even generous acts of
charity can be motivated by a desire to achieve public acclaim or to make us feel good. And a large part of grief can be basically selfish. We may feel deprived and almost resentful that the absence of the loved one will disrupt our pleasant routine.

3. The Object Of Emotion

A major importance in disciplining our emotions is to consider their object — especially in the case of hate, love, and fear. The undisciplined heart hates, loves, and fears, things and people, indiscriminately.

God’s Word teaches that those who truly love God ill hat the things He hates. Solomon lists seven things God hates (and implies even more) when he writes, “Haughtiness; lying; Murdering; Plotting evil; Eagerness to do wrong; A False witness; Sowing discord among brothers” (Proverbs 6:16-19 Living Bible) Note that the object of justifiable hatred is things and actions, not persons.

Like our heavenly Father, we should hate the sin but love the sinner. Jesus made this point clear in the Sermon on the Mount, when He said, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.’ – [this was the teaching of the Pharisees] – But I say unto you…do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:43-44).

Our love of good should evoke justifiable hatred of evil, but, while we hate the evil deeds, we need to love the evildoer. This is a hard lesson to learn — and even a harder one to live!

It is a lesson that we will have to relearn and be reminded many times because it runs counter to our natural inclination — and demands great spiritual self-discipline. We may not be able to remove the emotional stimulus, but we can learn to control the emotional response by the help of the Holy Spirit.

The disciplined heart hates only things and actions, not people — and it loves only people, not things or actions. 1 John 2:15 states explicitly, “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” Those “things” may be slightly different for each person, however God’s Word — [in this same 1 John 2:15] — divides them basically into “lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”

For some, money and material things are the objects of love. Paul told Timothy, “The love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). — [You don’t have to have money to love it] — For others, the love object may be an unbeliever — [speaking of romantic love] — or, if married, someone other than the spouse. The disciplined heart never makes such provision for the flesh. Rather it makes us “Flee youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22). Someone has put it this way, “If you don’t want to eat the devil’s apples stay out of his orchard.” This requires emotional discipline, especially in apple season when the fruit is ripe and red and juicy!

Of equal importance with the emotions of hate and love objects are fear objects. We naturally and legitimately fear that which endangers us, but sometimes we
experience an almost neurotic feeling of anxiety of some object or danger. How many of the things we fear and worry about end up being imaginary ills that never transpire? In the disciplined heart, “mature love casts out such fears” (1 John 4:18) and replaces them with faith.

It is hard to be afraid and love at the same time, and even harder to trust and be afraid at the same time. And it becomes more complex to be afraid as our love and trust deepens and matures.

As we tell our children that because we love them we would not allow the things that they fear to harm them. Our heavenly Father has given similar us instruction about what we fear. David asked in Psalm 27:1, “The Lord is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid?” We should fear no one but God, and that in the sense of reverence, awe and respect. Jesus told us clearly whom we should and should not fear, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). The reference here is not to Satan, as some have supposed — but to Almighty God! Nowhere in Scripture are we told to fear Satan — only to resist him (James 4:7).

If we have the reverential awe due to God and if we love Him with a genuine, mature love, those common fear objects will no longer be a threat. We’ll not fear ten thousands of people who oppose us (Psalm 3:6), or the army that fights against us (Psalm 27:3), or what an enemy can do to us (Psalm 56:11), or a person’s reproach (Isaiah 51:7). We’ll not even fear natural calamities, so-called “acts of God.” — “Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea” (Psalm 46:2).

Do you have a problem controlling fear? Try reading and meditating upon Psalm 91, especially verses 5 and 6, “You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.”

One mother, though she was a believer, tells how she feared and worried when her children would go out with other young people. Then she tells how there came a definite time when she stopped worrying. She said that we became convicted that such fears were sin, and when she was worrying, she wasn’t trusting. She cast all her cares upon God (1 Peter 5:7) and He removed the worry. What a testimony it was some years letter as she fearlessly faced her own death from cancer, firmly fixing her trust in the Lord.

The believer with a disciplined heart “will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord” (Psalm 112:7).

4. The **Timing** And **Occasion** Of The **Emotion**

The disciplined heart subjects emotions to yet another criterion — that of occasion or timing. The Scriptures teaches that even emotions that may be positive in themselves can, if expressed at the wrong time and place, be negative. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon lists twenty-eight items for which there is a season, a right rime and a wrong time (chapter 3). At least a dozen of these are emotions or directly related in emotions.
He says, for instance, there’s “A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance” (3:4). Both grief and guilt can be the cause of weeping. I have known those who have never ceased grieving for their mate, who died several years earlier. Some who make frequent visits – even daily – to the grave. Also damaging is guilt that continues long after God has forgiven the sin. In John Steinbeck’s “The Grapes of Wrath,” Uncle John indulges his guilt with a compulsion to confess to everyone — “I done things I never tol’ about,” he says. Ma Joad gives him this advice, “Tell em to God. Don’t go burdenen’ other people with your sins...Go down the river an’ stick your head under an’ whisper em to the stream.”

A mark of the disciplined heart is its ability to share in the emotions of others, to empathize (that literally means, “feel in” or project ourselves into the feelings of others). Can we truly rejoice over the blessings and accomplishments of others -- without faking it? Do we truly feel sadness and compassion with a brother or sister in the Lord is hurting? We are commanded to “rejoice with those who rejoice; and mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15), but the undisciplined heart can secretly rejoice at another’s adversity and feel jealous or sad when another prospers, if we are not diligent in our commitment to a disciplined heart.

Perhaps lack of emotional discipline shows up no more glaring than in the insensitivity of untimely, out-of-place emotions. We’ve all known (and possibly have been) jokesters who laughed or even tried to evoke laughter at the wrong time. The funny one-liners seemed so funny to others, but extremely hurtful to the one who was the target of the shot!

Robert Frost, in “Home Burial,” describes a couple in Vermont who, having buried their only child in a family plot behind the house, struggle to understand the other person’s way of handling grief. The wife thinks her husband is callus because of the timing of his comments --

“I can repeat the very words you were saying,
`Three foggy mornings and one rainy day
Will rot the best birch fence a man can build’
Think of it, talk like that as such a time!”

The disciplined heart is sensitive to the feelings of others and expresses emotions in a timely, tactful way.

Ecclesiastes 3 also suggests that there is an appropriate time for expressing love -- “a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing” (3:5). Showing affection is desirable, but especially young couples must remember that there is a suitable time, just as there’s a suitable time for hate and anger -- “a time to hate, a time for war “ (3:8). Even righteous hatred of evil and holy anger at its results can become evil if they overstay their time. The Almighty sets the pattern -- “He will not always chide; neither will He keep His anger forever” (Psalm 103:9).
Closely related to timeliness is the *extent* of an emotion. For example, feeling no fear at all in the face of real danger is foolhardy, but feeling excessive fear is cowardly. Even righteous anger, if excessive, may pass easily into sin. Certainly, anyone is a fool if they cannot be angry at evil and wrongdoing, but he is a wise and disciplined person who will not allow himself be excessively angry.

But how much emotion is too much? Certainly we can never love God too much -- no, not people either. Christ’s teaching that we cannot be His disciples if we do not hate father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters -- in Luke 14:26 -- emphasizes comparative emotions. The Greek language has particular words of “comparing” love -- and special Greek a word that is used that simply means “by comparison, you love one more than the other.” That is, Jesus does not want us to love our families less but rather to love Him more, so that by comparison, the former actually meaning, “love less by comparison” -- may seem like hatred -- which was the only English word that could be used in translation.

*A basic principle emerges here!*

The extent of any emotion should be determined, at least in part, by its stimulus or object. For example, some believers, a few years back, became incensed at an appearance of the atheist Madalyn Murry O’Hair -- (the woman who fought to have prayers removed from schools). -- Their anger was more intense than in the past over such issues as the blatant peddling of pornography or over the disruptive sowing of discord among brethren. Christ’s word about straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel seem pertinent here.

Because of His absolute glory, we can never love God too much; and because of its utter degradation, we can never hate sin too much. But other emotions are often excessive. For example, we can be overburdened with guilt, overwhelmed with grief, and overwrought with fear and anxiety.

Of course we do not usually think through our emotions as this all may suggest. We do not consciously reason, “Now the stimulus does not warrant any greater anger on my part than a 2.5 on a scale of 1 to 10.” Any such reasoning, if it comes at all, comes *after* the fact, or the explosion, after the emotion has been expressed. “I rally blew my cool that time. I sure got carried away on that one. Lord, help me not to lose control that way again.”

This is one of the reasons that emotions are so difficult to control; if the stimulus comes, can the response be far behind? So, the Holy Spirit must work previous conditioning in us for spiritual responses. This brings us to the final criterion.

6. The **Response** of Emotional Stimuli

Ultimately our concern with emotional discipline comes down to the basic question, “How should I respond to emotional stimuli?” Emotional self-discipline is largely a matter of right reactions. Not only negative emotions but also positive ones are reactions, often to other emotions. For example, our love for God is a reaction to His love for us -- “*We love Him because He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19).
There are many Christians -- maybe most -- who would say they have fairly good control over their “actions!” They attend church regularly, maybe serve in some capacity in the church, teach a class, and they have a rather active devotional life. They would probably say they don’t lie, cheat, steal, commit murder, or adultery. But what about their “reactions?”

Let me just ask you, “How would you react emotionally to such stimuli as the following?”

- A neighbor flips cigarette butts into your yard
- A fellow worker delights in baiting you and belittling your faith?
- A “friend” spreads unfounded, malicious stories about you?

The list could go on forever! But whatever the emotional stimulus, do we respond in kind? Do we return the same kind of emotion -- anger for anger, antagonism for antagonism, surliness for surliness? Or, to use Paul’s words, “repay…evil for evil” (Romans 12:17). If so, we are controlled by that emotion -- we are overcome by evil.

Studies have been made by some, who have come to the conclusion, that “the emotional tone of a roomful of people is altered by the most predominant mood of any one person in that room.” All too often people are like chameleons, changing emotional color to fit the mood of those around them. For example, in a business meeting or in a church board meeting angry words evoke angry reaction that only further perpetuate the angry mood. There is a Scriptural truth that says, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

Have you ever had he experience of getting up in the morning feeling exuberant and enthusiastic about the days’ activities --- only to feel your mood changing when someone grumpy -- or depressed person -- or someone remarks about how dreary the weather is? In such cases, disciplined hearts will not react in kind. They will not be control, but will react with opposite emotions, setting new emotional tone.

7 Ways To Respond to Emotional Stimuli

There are at least seven possible responses to emotional stimuli. The self-disciplined heart chooses the most suitable.

1. Agree or Express

Perhaps the easiest, most natural response is simply to agree to the stimulus and express unrestrained emotion. Doing otherwise, we are told, harms our psyche, squelches spontaneity, and gives us nasty “hang-ups.”

But “letting it all hang out” is one thing -- expressing an emotion suitable is another. Disciplined expression of an emotion is typified by at least five characteristics: (1) the emotion is expressed spiritually, not carnally and selfishly -- thus, assuring the proper nature and motive. “Lead the life of the Spirit,” Paul says, for “then you will never satisfy the passions of the flesh, but will, by implication, fulfill the emotional needs of the higher nature” (Galatians 5:16 Moffatt).
(2) The disciplined emotion is expressed deliberately, not rashly — thus assuring the suitability of time and occasion. Deliberate emotional expression gets the mind involved, tempering feeling with thought. It is typified by a calm "sweet reasonableness" (as Luther translated Philippians 4:5).

Henry David Thoreau wrote in, "Walden,

"Let us spend one day as deliberately as nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails. Let us rise early and fast, or break fast, gently and without perturbation; - [the act of being perturbed] - let company come and company go, let the bells ring and the children cry — determined to make a day of it. Why should we knock under and go with the stream?"

(3) To assure suitable objects, disciplined emotions will be expressed discriminately, not randomly. For example, we will be able to hate sin but at the same time love the sinner. We have probably all heard this idea expressed so often that it has become trite. But it's a significant principle nevertheless — and one we can practice only with God’s help. We can show Christian love to one who sins, while at the same time detest their actions.

(4) Emotions must be expressed positively — thereby reinforcing the positive nature of the God-given emotion. Even positive emotions can be expressed negatively, creating a detrimental effect. For example, sincere, well-meaning believers, motivated by legitimate hatred of evil, should not express legitimate anger negatively. I heard of a man who took a baseball bat and demolished the television set because, he said, "it's nothin' but a filthy boob tube." And another man, who raged at a teacher and, because of objections, ripped up a novel that had been assigned for his daughter to read, but that he felt was unsuitable for anyone to read.

(5) Finally, disciplined emotions are expressed restrainedly, assuring the suitable degree of extent of the emotion. Too much, even of a good thing, can be damaging. Neither the man who demolished the television nor the father who tore up the novel showed restraint.

2. Repress

Another way of responding to emotional stimuli is to repress the emotion. Repression forces the emotion into the subconscious and pushes it down every time it surfaces to the level of consciousness. Scarlett O'Hara in "Gone With the Wind" represses unpleasant emotional reality of baying, "I'll think about that tomorrow." With us it may go something like this — "That really burns me, but I'm not going to dwell on it now." Repression only puts an emotion on "hold." It does not deal with it positively. And usually it later surfaces, larger and stronger, when we lest expect it.

3. Suppress
Many people confuse “repression” and “suppression.” They may be very similar, however, there is a difference. They differ in that suppression involves a conscious dismissal or expulsion of emotion or thought from the heart and mind rather than a mere forcing of them into the subconscious. Consequently, suppression is a much more desirable option. One might say, for instance, “That really burns me, but I’m going to put it out of my mind and forget it.”

That may sound very good, but the problem is that something is missing. We simply cannot by resolution and strength of our own will successfully expel emotions. They have a way of not going or, if they do, a persistent way of returning again and again.

When we have some disagreement between us and someone else, it can grow into a real conflict. We may feel that their words and actions are unfair, even unchristian. We may try to put the matter out of our mind -- but it will keep coming back and, eventually, will begin to irritate and annoy us. It can fester and become inflamed. That’s what repressed resentment and anger always does! What we need to do is to ask God to forgive us and to remove the resentment. He will do so, however, it may very well take speaking to the one we felt hurt us and make things right. God can give us peace and a renewed love for the person involved!

4. Assess and Address

The missing element is the need to assess the emotion, to examine its cause, its essence, and its object. In this process, it is beneficial to address our self and God too,

“It really burns me, Lord, when a driver is so inconsiderate and reckless as that. He tailgated, then passed and cut in so sharply he almost ran me off the road. And then gave me an obscene gesture. As if I had done something wrong! I was traveling at exactly the speed limit. Oh, well, it’s silly to get upset over that and let him set my mood. Maybe he’s late for an appointment. Or the poor guy may have a problem that’s bugging him. Maybe he’s had a fight with his wife. It’s a cinch he’s not going to be around long if he keeps driving like that! He probably doesn’t know you, Lord. I bet a lot of the nastiness like that is due to people’s insecurity and problems. Lord, help that guy come to know You as his Savior before he kills himself. And thanks for helping me not lose my cool.”

By first assessing the stimulus and potential emotion and addressing ourselves and God; saying exactly how we feel about the stimulus, we can achieve the ability to carry out the next possible response.

5. Possess

We “possess” or control the emotion when the Spirit of God possesses us! The Scripture teaches that the disciplined heart has a high tolerance level. James 1:19-20 says, “Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to talk, slow to get angry; for man’s anger does not promote God’s righteousness.” According to Solomon, the emotionally self-possessed
person is greater than a mighty conqueror. He writes in Proverbs 16:32, “Better is he who is slow to anger than the mighty hero.” Such emotional domination involves expelling negative feelings from the heart as well as compensating for them.

6. Harness

To harness an emotion is to control it for useful ends. The harnessing of an emotion can take several forms. As illustrated in the self-dialogue above, potential anger can be transformed into the positive emotion of compassion.

An incident in the life of Jesus illustrates the possessing and harnessing of emotion. When the critical, hypocritical religious leaders scrutinized Jesus to see if He would heal a man on the Sabbath, we see three different emotions fusing one into another. Mark 3:5 states, “When He had looked around about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, He said unto the man Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out and his hand was restored as the other” An angry glance becomes grief or deep distress over their callousness, and this in turn is expressed in compassion for the man with a paralyzed hand. Ironically, according to Luke’s account, the critics were the ones who lost emotional control Luke 6:11 says, “They were furious.” Can you imagine how most of us would have reacted to such a provocation? But Jesus dominated the anger, transformed it into grief and expressed both love and compassion.

A second way of harnessing emotions is compensating and finding release in another, more positive and acceptable way. For example, some suggest that one way to handle frustration and anger is to take it out playing some exhausting game, or jog a mile or two. A way to alleviate grief or depression is to set about doing something that will benefit others as well as yourself -- bake a cake for someone, mow the lawn, or take the kids to the zoo.

Think right now of someone who bugs you, someone you really can’t stand. First remind yourself that Jesus died for that person. Now try to think of some way you can show him or her kindness. It might be just a little thing -- a sincere compliment. Allow the potential antagonism, annoyance, or anger to be transformed, by grace, into love. You may be rebuffed, but remember, the best way to control the flame of anger is to heap coals of fire. – [That saying comes from the early days when neighbors would “carry coals of fire” on their head to aid and help those whose cooking and heating fire had gone out]

There remains one way of dealing with emotions that has virtually been neglected in discussion on the subject.

7. Prepossess

To “prepossess” is to preoccupy our minds with good thoughts. Probably many of our emotional battles are virtually lost before they begin because we have established predispositions to react wrongly. May Christians seem to have a simplistic notion of emotional provocation that goes something like this -- Satan flits to our side and, when an emotional stimulus occurs, whispers “Go ahead and indulge your emotions.” And we do or don’t -- depending upon some mood of the moment. But the truth of the matter is
that we do not stumble in an instant or lose emotional control in a moment. The predisposition to react a certain way has been forming, building, germinating for some time.

Paul urges us to “clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ.” And to “not make provision for the flesh to gratify its cravings” (Romans 13:14). In other words, we must prepossess our emotions, seize and occupy them before the stimuli appear.

The tragic results of failure to prepossess emotions are illustrated in Scripture. It seems certain, for example, that David had fallen long before that evening when he walked upon the rooftop of the palace and saw Bathsheba bathing. His fall was seeded with the “tarried still at Jerusalem.” –- “at the time when kings go forth to battle,” and maybe even before that (2 Samuel 11). Why did he tarry and walk restively upon the rooftop? Certainly this ‘man after God’s own heart” did not consciously plot to commit adultery and murder. But when the stimulus presented itself, powerful predispositions surfaced, and the great man lost emotional control.

In the same manner, the fall of Samson very likely began even prior to the time when he “went down to Timnah, and saw there a young Philistine woman” (Judges 14:1). Before he “went down” there apparently “went down” into him very powerful emotional predispositions that led ultimately to his defeat. Similarly, the tragedy of Lot and his family probably began even before he “pitched his tents near Sodom.” Even before he indulged his envy and love of material things when he “looked up and saw the whole plain of Jordan was well watered” (Genesis 13:10,12). You and I, by what we see and hear and read and do today, are establishing emotional predispositions that will influence positively or negatively, our responses to future emotional stimuli.

We can prepossess our emotions only if the Word of God and the Holy Spirit possess us. For only then will our hearts be established (James 5:8). Note the verb tenses in David’s words, “He will not fear evil tidings, his heart is steadfast trusting in the Lord. His heart is upheld; he will not fear” (Psalm 112:7-8). Because the believer’s heart is established (present), he will not fear (future) --- a beautiful example of emotional prepossessing.

“It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace,” the writer of Hebrews says (13:9). God has made provision to “establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God” (1 Thessalonians 3:13). How? God’s holiness is established through the most powerful of all emotions. Note the preceding verse of the chapter -- “The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men.” Love is such a powerful emotion that it will cover a multitude of sin (James 5:20).

Emotional Self-Discipline Begins With Love

Here, then, is a logical and Scriptural place to begin the disciplining of our emotions --- with the motivating force of love. Note how it works. Because God first loved us, we love Him (1 John 4:19). If we truly love God, we will love other people (1 John 4:7-8). And to the degree that our love matures, it will expel fear (1 John 4:18), as well as depression, jealousy, anger, and hatred.
Jesus warned that in the last days “the love of most will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). Doesn’t that sound like a description of our own day? Even many Christians, like the believers at Ephesus, have left their first love (Revelation 2:4). Is it any wonder, then, that “men hearts fail them for fear” (Luke 21:26)? Is it surprising that the breakdown of emotional discipline is so wide-spread?

We cannot reverse a world-wide cooling of the heat of love any more than we can control the world-wide flaming of passion. We cannot melt the glacier or extinguish the conflagration. But we can have our own flame of love stoked by the God of love; and, through His power, control our flame of feeling.

The Disciplined Body

Stuart Hamblin wrote a song back in the 1950’s sometime that hit the charts. Most of us remember it. It was entitled, “This Ole House.” How are things going at your house — that is, your body? Is it in disrepair and disorder? Or is it running orderly and smoothly functioning?

Comparing the body to a house is certainly Scriptural. The Apostle Paul speaks of our being in an “earthly tent” while earnestly longing for a heavenly house not made with hands (See 2 Corinthians 5:1-2). And Solomon used the image of a house to describe the process of our bodies growing old (Ecclesiastes 12:3-7).

It is unfortunate that so many Christians seem to think they have no time to care for this “earthly house.” Because they understand that spiritual matters are of prime importance, they seem to have no sense of responsibility to take good care of their physical body. A suitable motto for the believer would be, “A Spirit-controlled person has a well-disciplined body.”

Christians Hold Various View Of The Body

How do you regard your body? Our attitude toward our body is of real significance in our Christian experience and particularly in self-discipline. Some believers have an admiration, even adoration, of their body, while other go to the other extreme and have a feeling of disgust for their body. Some adore their body and others demean it. Probably most just ignore their physical body as something just to “put up with it.” — After all, didn’t Jesus say, “Give no thought to the body and what you wear?” (Matthew 6:25 & 31). However, Jesus never said — and the Scriptures nowhere intimate — that the body is unimportant! Jesus asked in the very same passage the rhetorical question, “Isn’t the body more important than clothes?” (Matthew 6:25). The point is that the body is more important than material things and less important than spiritual matter of the Kingdom of God, which, according verse 33 is to be sought after first. The first step toward physical self-discipline is to view the body in the right perspective.

What to do about my body — adore it — deplore it — deplore it — or, ignore it?
One view of the body is to adore it. This is a view that the body is a glorious thing, is held by neo-pagans, some mystics, and nudists. The believer’s proper Scriptural view -- marvels and praises God’s wondrous creation of the human body, but he does not revere or worship it.

Then there is extremity opinion of the ascetic pagans -- and even some of the early Puritans and contemporary Christians -- that man’s body is repugnant, repulsive, even disgusting. One early Puritan wrote, “the body is food for warms, filthy, shameful a source of nothing but temptation to bad men and humiliation to good ones.”

Why such a demeaning view of the body?

Paul warns of this very thing especially in his letter to Colosse and Coninth -- and church history reveals that during the 2nd century, heretical Gnosticism arose teaching that physical matter -- including the body -- was evil, despicable, and vile. A result of this belief was an utter disregard for the body, even their denial of the resurrection of the body (Luke 20:27). Paul warned he church at Colosse about “their self-humiliation and their ascetic discipline” (Colossians 2:23 Goodspeed) or “their policy of self humbling, and their studied neglect of the body” (Phillips).

Some would point to Philippians 3:21, where Paul writes, “Who shall change our vile body, that it be may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able to even subdue all things unto Himself.” These folk misunderstand this Scripture, feeling that it demeans the body. However, the word translated as “vile” in the King James Version, is from the Greek word, “tapeinosis,” -- its meaning does not mean, “degrading,” or “disgusting” -- (or even, “wretched,” as Phillips renders it) -- but rather its meaning is more, “humiliation, as Acts 8:33 translates it -- or, “low estate,” as Luke 1:48 and James 1:10 translates it. It refers to the low state of sin and shame into which the body of man has degenerated as a result of man’s sin. Instead of it being immortal, glorious, and powerful as the ruler of all creation as originally planned by God when He created Adam in the Garden of Even (Genesis 1:26-31 & Psalm 8:3-6). It is now vile, depraved, sinful, sickly, mortal, and subject to the lowest humiliation and eternal ruin (2 Corinthians 4:16; Romans 1:18-32 & 6:19; Genesis 3:19).

However, careful reading of the context of Philippians 3 will show that the Apostle Paul was emphasizing our citizenship is in heaven, from which we eagerly await Christ’s return, who will “transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.”

Still another view of our body is what St Francis called, “a donkey, a beast of burden” -- C. S. Lewis refers to the body as “a useful, sturdy, lazy, obstinate, patient, lovable and infuriating beast; deserving now the sick and now a carrot; both pathetically and absurdly beautiful.”

There is no doubting that we all have felt that our body was a “beast of burden,” -- “an escapable animal that walks with us,” as Schwartz presents the body in, “The Heavy Bear.” He calls the body, “that lumbering bear, with its carnal appetites,” in his poem. Well, doesn’t it seem that Paul cries out this same frustration when he writes, “I do not do the
good things that I want to do; I do the wrong things that I do not what to do...Who can save me from this doomed body?” (Romans 7:19 & 24-25).

Just What Is The Correct, Biblical Attitude Toward Our Body?

I believe that John Quincy Adams had a good attitude toward himself when was he 80 years old and was asked, "How is John Adam's today?" John Quincy Adams answered, "Quiet well, thank you, But then house in which he is living in is becoming rather dilapidated. In fact it will soon be quiet unlivable, and I shall have to move out any day now. But John Quincy Adams is quiet well, thank you!"

This American Statesman knew a great truth; that we are ageless being, but we live in a body that is decaying. Funerals demonstrate a great Bible truth. When we see the body, it is very obvious that the one we knew is not a body. His complete body is there, but he is gone.

It cannot be said anyone actually goes into the "grave" because, long before body placed there, the one who once lived in the body is gone.

In this study of “The Discipline of the Body,” we must remember that the Bible teaches that, "We are completely separate from our body". God's Word always makes a distinction between person and the body. God made the body out of dust, and it will return to dust. The "real person" was created by "breath of God." God created a replica of Himself and placed it inside an “earth-suit” -- a “body.” Even psychology, that is about 150 years old, realizes the real person is an unseen individual who gets his information about the outside world through his five senses.

Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

Thee is coming a time when there will be an unveiling and we will not just see bodies, but we will really get to know each other. All we see now is the "earth-suit," housing what God originally intended to be His own eternal, spiritual image.

Astronauts, going into outer space, must wear "space-suit," because his body was created for earth. Man's body is an "earth-suit" to get around on earth Actually, death, for the child of God, is a "jail-break" -- because man was originally created in "image of God" with capacities far greater than his physical body at this present time can possibly achieve. As long as man is in his body, the "image of God" is limited merely to natural function. Just think of it -- Man was originally created in the image of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God!

Therefore, the body is temporarily restricted in earthly container!! It will only go as far as legs carry it; and it can only work until its strength gives way. Even its thinking is limited to its brain becomes it comes with body. Man was designed for eternity; capable of spanning the ages. But as long as he is in his body he is momentarily cut off from the realm of his true existence -- God's presence!
To grasp a true understanding of our body, we need to realize that God's Word teaches there are three stages of man's existents:

1. Earth stage, to prepare to eternity
2. An Intermediate stage, when man leaves his physical body, and
3. The Unending Eternal stage, forever and ever!

We are all well aware of our earth stage, from the moment of conception until our earthly death, when our spirit and soul leaves the body. Scripture teaches for the Christian, “Absent in the body, is to be present with the Lord!” The question many have is “What form does the body have from death until the physical resurrection?”

The Apostle Paul shares a beautiful picture in 2 Corinthians 5:1-9 when he write, “For we know that when this tent we live in now is taken down—when we die and leave these bodies—we will have wonderful new bodies in heaven, homes that will be ours forevermore, made for us by God himself and not by human hands. How weary we grow of our present bodies. That is why we look forward eagerly to the day when we shall have heavenly bodies that we shall put on like new clothes. For we shall not be merely spirits without bodies. These earthly bodies make us groan, but we wouldn't like to think of dying and having no bodies at all. We want to slip into our new bodies so that these dying bodies will, as it were, be swallowed up by everlasting life. This is what God has prepared for us, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit. Now we look forward with confidence to our heavenly bodies, realizing that every moment we spend in these earthly bodies is time spent away from our eternal home in heaven with Jesus. We know these things are true by believing, not by seeing. And we are not afraid but are quite content to die, for then we will be at home with the Lord. So our aim is to please him always in everything we do, whether we are here in this body or away from this body and with him in heaven” (Living Bible)

To complete our thought here the third stage --“The Eternal Stage” -- we turn to Revelation 22:1-6, that describes, “God's Divine Travel Folder.”

John writes, “And the Angel showed me a river of pure Water of Life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb...On each side of the river grew Trees of Life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month...There shall be nothing in the city that is evil; for the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there and his people will worship Him...And they shall see His face...And there will be no night there--no need for lamps or sun--for the Lord God will be their light; and they shall reign for ever and ever. Then the angel said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true’...Blessed are those who believe and whose names are written in the scroll.”

When we are parted from a loved one because of physical death, we respect the body, because it is very difficult to disassociate it from our loved one who dwelt in it and animated it. But, in reality, it is only a worn out garment that he has set aside. So, whether it is planted in a cemetery, buried at sea, or cremated, we reverence it, because of the tender memories that are gathered about it -- and looking with confidence to the fashioning of a perfect body that is in Christ Jesus.

As I have stated at many a funeral, “Cherishing memories that are forever sacred; sustained by a faith that is stronger than death; comforted by the hope of a life that shall endless
be, we commit all that is mortal; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust, but the imperishable spirit is forever with the Lord.”

Disciplining The Body Is Understanding It’s Importance

1. The Body Is Important Because God Fashioned It And Values It

One of the best reasons for considering the body important and deserving of care and self-discipline is that God fashioned it and values it. It is His creation — “fearfully and wonderfully made...intricately fashioned” (Psalm 139:14-15). God’s regard for the body is evidenced by the archangel Michael’s contention with Satan over the body of Moses (Jude 9) and by the fact that God himself apparently buried Moses’ body (Deuteronomy 34:6). Our bodies are important to God, so much so that He has promised to resurrect them (1 Corinthians 15).

2. The Body Is Important Because Jesus Assumed One

One of the most awesome truths taught in Scripture is that Jesus assumed a body of flesh and blood. He did not disdain our human form but, superbly self-disciplined. He took on mortal flesh with all of its weaknesses and frailties but not its sin. Apparently the only man-made thing in heaven is the wounds in Jesus’ hands and side -- in the body He will occupy forever.

The very fact that the Second Person of the Godhead took on the human guise (Philippians 2:7-8), gives dignity to the human form. And the result of His doing so saves us from the penalty of sin; we are now being saved from the dominion of sin as we yield to the Spirit’s control; and when Jesus returns we will be saved from the physical infirmities what are the results of sin’s curse. Some day we will experience the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23), but we are to be “redeeming” the body now, that is, buying up, through self-discipline, its opportunities for service.

3. The Body Is Important Because The Holy Spirit Indwells And Sustains It

The most astounding of all, perhaps, is the claim for the dignity of the believer’s body is the fact that the Holy Spirit has made our body His home. Paul wrote in Romans 8:9, “You, however, are not controlled by the flesh, but by the Spirit if indeed the Spirit of God is at home in you.” The very same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in our bodies! And He has promised to give life to these death-doomed bodies (Romans 8:11). This is a promise primarily for the resurrection in the future however it can be applied -- to some extent -- in the present. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit refreshes and sustains us in our physical weakness. In Romans 6:19 Paul refers to the weakness of the flesh -- the in Romans 8:26, Paul says that the Spirit helps or takes share in this same weakness.

I couldn’t begin to remember the number of times that I have heard believers tell how they felt completely exhausted, totally drained physically -- (I have experienced it many times myself!) -- Then, by being in a church service, or some Christian fellowship,
receive, what seemed to be a burst of spiritual renewal through prayer and the study of God’s Word -- and also there also accompanied a feeling of being physically refreshed! So many Christians have related how they would come home from a long days work, wanting nothing but a good meal, some time with the family, and maybe some reading or watching a little television, and then earlier to bed. But it was “church service night” and they -- more often than not -- had to literally “force” themselves to attend -- but usually they would come away refreshed not only in spirit but also in body as well!

4. The Body Is Important Because It Is The Seat Of The Soul And Spirit

The various faculties of our makeup are closely interrelated. So, any lack of self-discipline in one area shows up negatively in the other faculties of our being. For example, failure to deal with anger, fear, or guilt is often manifested in such physical disorders as high blood pressure, headaches, backaches, ulcers, or digestive problems. Emotional problems can cause compulsive eating, that may result in obesity and general lack of physical health. Psychosomatic ills, those originating in our aggravated by mental or emotion difficulties, further indicate the interrelationship.

“What does all this have to do with the `Discipline of the Body?’ ” Simply, because, not only does lack of self-discipline of the soul and spirit affect the body, but the physical condition also affects the soul and spirit either negatively or positively. Lack of a balanced diet and proper rest may cause depression, irritability, or a short temper. Let me get personal -- “How can you expect to be your sharpest for the Lord spiritually, mentally, and emotionally, if you begin the day without a nutritious breakfast and then for lunch gorge yourself with junk food?”

All of us know from experience that what we eat, as well as how, how much, and how often, affects how we think and feel. Overindulging makes us feel dull and listless. Jesus taught by word (Mathew 17:21) and example (Matthew 4:2) the discipline of fasting. Going without a meal or two (or more) can clear our thinking and help to discipline the soul. David said, “I humbled myself with fasting” (Psalm 35:13). Have we ever been so burdened with someone’s spiritual need that we had no desire to eat and ten, like Jesus at the well with the Samaritan woman, we had no need for physical food— (John 4:31-34) Can we say, as Jesus did, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work (John 4:34).

Because the body is the seat of the spirit and soul, it is the battleground, the arena, of spiritual activity. It is through the body that evil from the mind and heart is manifested in action; it is also through the body that the graces of the Christian life are revealed in action. These mortal bodies, if properly disciplined, provide the means of glorifying God. Paul admonished in 1 Corinthians 6:20, “Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” What does it means to “glorify God in your body?” -- to “glorify God” — [the Greek is the source of our world “doxology”] — is to honor God, exalt God, praise God, extravagantly worship God, cause a manifestation of dignity toward God, recognize God’s excellence, and majesty.

Do you feel that this is making excessive demands? These are not my demands, and besides Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:1-20, that these are not our own bodies! He
writes, “You are not your own, you were bought at a price.” It may be a very difficult concept to accept but Scripture teaches us that our body is God’s possession by right of, for creation, and then by right of redemption. Our bodies are loaned to us for a short time so that the Holy Spirit, through our disciplined presenting of those bodies, might manifest the life of Christ to the world. This one of the most amazing thoughts that I can possibly imagine – that God own my body and the Jesus Christ, by the divine power of the Holy Spirit takes up His abode within me -- but that is exactly what Scripture teaches me!

How else can the world see the glory of God if not in our physical lives? Just as Jesus, in a human body, revealed God to man, so believers, as sons of God conformed to the image of Christ, reveal the glory of God. Paul said that we “bear about in the body the death-marks of Jesus, so that by our bodies the life of Jesus may also be shown. In the midst of life we are constantly handed over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may yet be evidenced through our mortal flesh” (2 Corinthians 4:10-11). Is the life of Jesus being manifested in our bodies? Can we honestly say we glorify God if we excessively over eat, if we are flabby and out of condition, if we are not in control of our physical appetites?

Also because the body is the seat of the soul and spirit, what we do in and with the body will be the basis for rewards of believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Paul said, “We have all to appear without disguise before the tribunal of Christ, each to be requited for what he has done with his body, well or ill” (2 Corinthians 5:10 Moffatt) So, it seems that our physical self-discipline can play a significant role in determining the effectiveness of our present service for Christ -- and even, possibly, future rewards.

Once we recognize the important God has placed on the body and once we begin to shed the negative attitudes toward our bodies, the battle for physical self-discipline is at least partially won. We realize that the body is not an idol to be worshiped, but neither is it a dilapidated old house unworthy of careful maintenance and order. It may at times remind us of an obstinate, ludicrous donkey or of a clumsy, ever-present bear, but the fact that we have bodies is no joke.

Perhaps the best way to understand what God wants us to know about physical self-discipline is to examine the figures use in Scripture for the body. There are at least seven such figures, each providing insight into the role of self-discipline.

**Biblical Figures of Man’s Body**

1. **The Body Is A “Second Skin“ To Be Well-Pleasing To God**

Paul uses a dual figure of tent and clothing to characterize the body. It isn’t just coincidental that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to choose these two items that both share a common source of material – “skins of animals.” Paul writes to the Corinthians, “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, since when we are clothed we will not be found naked” (2 Corinthians 5:1-3).
Our current state in this life is that of a camper “roughing it” temporarily in a tent. Interesting, and revealing, is that the word that the King James Version translated as “tabernacle,” in 2 Corinthians 5:1, is the same basic word used by John uses in his statement that “the Word was made flesh and dwell among us” (John 1:14). Jesus “tabernacled” among us -- He “pitched His tent” in our midst. Because He did so, John continues, “we behold His glory.” Jesus as “God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16), or revealed and made visible in human form, so the glory of God should show forth in our bodies. “The light of the knowledge of the glory of God [shone] in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6) -- and so it should be with us!

Our faces -- and our entire bodies -- communicate to those about us, something in ways we least imagine. Psychologists say the first six minutes spent with a new acquaintance are crucial in forming impressions. Maybe we should ask our self, “What announcement does this earthly raiment, my body, make to those about me?” “What does my ‘body language’ say about my faith?” “Does my personable appearance, calm, and well ordered conduct, show forth the Spirit in my life?”

Self-discipline permits God’s divine glory that is within to shine out. But the process is not passive. Paul says, “We labor — [are ambitious to do something; strive earnestly’ use one’s utmost efforts, exert oneself to accomplish a goal] — that, whether present or absent — [from the body] — we may be accepted of Him [be well-pleasing unto Him]” (2 Corinthians 5:9). There’s nothing passive about that! The verb translated “labor” is the same word in 1 Thessalonians 4:11, when Paul urges believers to “strive eagerly to be quiet,” -- that is, to live quietly and calmly and attend to their own affairs and work with their own hands. That’s self-discipline at its best! When this is so, we are “accepted of Him,” that is, “well-pleasing to God” -- the same word is used in Romans 12:1, where Paul urges us to “present our bodies as a living, holy, well-pleasing sacrifice to God.”

I realize, of course, as we all must, that there are sometimes sincere believers who have physical problems with the body that is beyond their control. It is not my intention, nor desire, to heap unwarranted guilt on anyone, but rather, to simply state that God’s wants us to do every, and any, thing we can to keep the body He has loaned us in the best possible shape, and condition, we can.

2. The Body Is A Temple To Be Sanctified

Another significant figure used in Scripture to characterize the body is that of the Temple, sanctuary, or shrine, in which the Holy Spirit dwells. Paul asked Corinthians, “Do you not know that your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you wee bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). One of the most powerful argument for physical self-discipline is this -- the believer’s body, dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, is God’s possession, not only by right of creation, but also by right of redemption!

At a Temple, the body is a place for and means of worship, not an object of worship. Just as we do not worship the physical structure of the church, so we do not
worship the body. But we do respect the church building. We keep it clean and well-conditioned, and so we must do with our body.

It’s significant that a major event near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and then again near its conclusion was His purifying of the Temple. John’s Gospel records the first cleansing of the Temple in chapter 2 and verses 13-22, and the other Gospels record Jesus’ second cleansing of the Temple in Matthew 21, Mark 11, and Luke 19. In both cases, Jesus found the Temple turned into a market of trade, with trafficking in sacrificial animals and money changing being carried on in the outer Court of the Gentiles. Jesus took dramatic action, driving the desecrators out and removing the corruption. On the first occasion, in John’s account, Jesus then drew an analogy between the Temple and His body.

When Jesus purified the Temple of Jerusalem He was justifiable angered by the prostitution of the synagogue; its purpose was for prayer and worship, but it had become a place of merchandising. The same is true with the temple of the body; it purpose is to being glory to God (In Isaiah 43:7, God says, “I created him — [referring to man’s body] — for My glory,”) but so often it is corrupted and used for ignoble ends. Just as Jesus cleansed the Temple building, so must we cleanse the temple of our body whenever necessary, and keep it from defilement.

What an awesome thought — Just as the divine Presence dwelt above the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, so God’s Spirit dwells within our bodies! We should be able to say, as David did, speaking of Almighty God “I love the house where You live…the place where Your glory dwells” (Psalm 26:8), because our body, like the Temple of old, is, or should be, “the mansion of His majesty (Moffatt Translation). In God’s Temple everything cries “Glory!” (Psalm 29:9), and in the temple of our body every member, every last cell, should shout, “Glory to God!” The songwriter Frances Havergal expressed the importance of God’s indwelling as follows:

“Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee;
Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages for Thee…
Take myself and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee.”

The question we need to ask our self, “Are my various members — feet, and legs, hands and arms, eyes, ears, and tongue — functioning in coordinated, harmonious control?”

3. The Body Is A Living Sacrifice To Be Presented To God
Not only is our body the temple in which we offer the sacrifices of praise and service, but it is also the “sacrifice” itself. Paul writes in Romans 12:1, “I beg you, therefore, brothers, through these mercies God has shown you, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies as a living sacrifice, devoted and well-pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service” (Williams Translation). Just as Christ gave Himself on the cross once-for-all as a sacrifice in death, so we are to yield our bodies as a sacrifice in life. Just as the Levites were consecrated to God (Numbers 8), to live sacrificial lives of service before the Lord, so we are to deny self, recognize the claims of Christ upon us, and present our bodies to live sacrificially for Him.

Although the actual presentation of our bodies as living sacrifices is a one-for-all act, we must continually put to death the deeds of the body. Paul wrote, “We are under obligations, but not to the physical nature, to live under its control, for if you live under the control of the physical you will die, but if, by means of the Spirit, you put the body’s doings to death, you will live” (Romans 8:12-13 Goodspeed). We do not have to be controlled by the body’s base sensual appetites nor by its cravings, however legitimate in themselves, but rather, these fleshly desires can be hindrances to our spiritual effectiveness. Victorious control over both is possible through the Spirit! Ultimately physical self-discipline is spiritual self-discipline, because, as Jesus said, “The spirit is willing, but the body is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

4. The Body Is An Earthen Vessel To Be Sanctified And Fit

Another figure used by Paul to characterize the body is that of a common earthenware jar or clay pot containing a priceless treasure -- “This precious treasure - this light and power that now shine within us - is held in a perishable contain, that is, in our weak bodies. Everyone can see that the glorious power within must be from God and is not our own” (2 Corinthians 4:7 Living Bible). The precious jewel of the Gospel is held in a fragile clay utensil so that, by contrast, the surpassing power of the treasure may be seen to come from God. The idea is that of a foil, bright metal placed under a jewel to increase its brilliance -- and by extension anything that through strong contrast underscores enhances the distinctive characteristics of another.

What this passage of Scripture is saying is that our bodies are likened unto clay pitchers in which the light of the world glows. They may be scratched or chipped or cracked, but they must never be dirty, because dirt will keep the light from shining forth. We need to ask our self, “What is the condition of my vessel? Is it opaque — (not letting light pass through) — or translucent — (letting some light pass through but diffusing it so that objects cannot be clearly distinguished) — or transparent — (transmitting light clearly and distinctly) ?”

Paul further uses the vessel figure in his admonition when he wrote, “In any large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter — (both the contamination and the contaminated vessel) — he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work” (2 Timothy 2:20-21). The noble vessels are gold and silver platters and goblets for use at royal weddings and
state banquets, whereas the lowly vessels are commonplace clay water jars. Both sets are functional, each serving a useful purpose on the right occasion. Ultimately, of course, the outward appearance is not all-important -- it’s what’s inside the vessel that counts.

Jesus, referring to their lives, using the illustration of cleaning cups and platters, told the Pharisees to "cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matthew 23:26). This point is that we are to have a pure heart in a pure body. How is this accomplished? Paul states in the remained of the chapter to practice godly self-discipline. We are to flee from youthful impulses of the body and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, gentleness, patience, meekness, (2 Timothy 2:22, 24-25).

Physical self-discipline is suggested even more obviously in Paul’s third use of the vessel as a figure of the body in 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5, when he writes, “Every one of you should learn to control his body, keeping it pure and treating it with respect, and never regarding it as an instrument for self-gratification, as do pagans with no knowledge of God” (Phillips Translation). These same two philosophies or life-styles are still present today. One says, “Indulge yourself! If it feels good do it! Do what comes naturally! You only go around once in life, so ye gotta’ grab all the gusto you can get!” The other says, “Deny yourself! Abstain from carnal indulgence! Practice restraint! Exercise spiritual control over the physical!” We must ask our self, “Which lifestyle is mine?”

The implication of Paul’s words is that mastery over the body is something to be learned! Self-discipline requires us not do “what comes naturally,” but rather, to do what comes supernaturally. The question is, “How can we learn to master our bodies in holiness and honor rather than in the gratification of our passions?” Paul gives the secret in the same passage -- in 1 Thessalonians 4 -- when he writes in verse 3, that we should live a holy life “because it is God’s will that we be holy.” He states in verse 7, “God has called us unto holiness” — and then in verse 8 says, “He has given us His Spirit, who is holy.” Mastery of the body must come from the inside out, through the Spirit’s control, rather than from the outside in, through a program or lists of do’s and don’t’s.

True self-discipline of the body is essentially mind over matter -- the mind of Christ over the matter of our bodies! If we have not already done so, we need to being mastering our body. We need to find a form of physical exercise that meets our own personal needs. Most people are convinced of the benefits of regular physical exercise -- weight control, increased energy, decrease likelihood of heart attack, relaxation -- but few actually begin, and fewer still continue.

Many of the physical fitness programs are effective and admirable, but physical fitness is only a part of genuine physical self-discipline. Paul said in 1 Timothy 4:8, “Bodily fitness has a certain value, but spiritual fitness is essential both for this present life and for the life to come” (Phillips Translation).

5. The Body Is A Fountain Out Of Which Living Water Flows
The outward working of the indwelling Spirit is also depicted as a fountain. The basis for the figure is two passages in John’s Gospel. In the first, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well that the water He gives “shall be a well, spring, or fountain springing up in her into eternal life” (John 4:14). Later, at the Feast of Tabernacle, Jesus again use the figure, when He said, “He that believeth on me…out of his belly (innermost being) shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38).

On the final day of the week-long Feast of Tabernacle, the priest took a pitcher to the Pool of Siloam and poured the water as a liberation on the west side of the altar. According to Jesus’ analogy, the pitcher -- and by extension, the well, the fountain, the river bed -- represents the body, and the water flowing forth represents the indwelling Spirit (verse 39). The image s perhaps closed to that of an artesian well, that continuously spouts water to the surface due to pressure caused by underground water draining down from higher elevations. Our body, which is but “dust,” (Psalms 103:14), is the channel for the Water of Life and the power of the Spirit. A self-disciplined body is a free, unobstructed channel.

6. The Body Is A Beast To Be Bridled

James says that any person who is able to control his speech is mature and “able to bridle the whole body” (James 3:2). The infinitive translated “to bridle” denotes holding in check, restraining, or guiding with a bridle. The implication is that the body, like a beast of burden, has abundant energy that must be harnessed in order to produce beneficial work. Without the bridle the energy is wasted, or, even worse, destructive. The body’s appetites also need to be restrained and properly guided -- illegitimate ones denied and legitimate ones channeled to God-honoring fulfillment.

But what is the bridle of the body? It’s the same as the light shining through the tent or the Shekinah Glory from the Temple, the treasure in the earthen vessel, and water flowing from the fountain --- the indwelling Spirit of God, who works through our spirits by the Word of God and our conscience. Just as the Spirit is “the restraining power” that restricts the activities of the mystery of iniquity (2 Thessalonians 2:7 Phillips) until the church is raptured, so for the individual believer He bridles the physical energies and holds in check the appetites.

7. The Body Is A Servant To Be Subjected

A final Scriptural figure for the body is that of an unruly servant being brought severely into subjection. Paul said, “I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27). In the context of the passage, perhaps the best rendering of the verb is “to discipline by hardship” or “to coerce.” One translation of this verse renders it, “I discipline my body and make it serve me, so that, while heralding to others, I may not myself be disqualified”

Paul wrote that he bore in his body the brand-marks of Jesus’ ownership that distinguishing him as a slave of Jesus (Galatians 6:17). The apostle bore in his body the scars of persecution for his faith in Christ. Most of us will probably never bear such
physical marks, however, we should be aware that our bodies are to be “slaves” of God’s, and that our body should manifest God’s life (2 Corinthians 4:10-11). The question we need to ask is, “Are we consciously aware each day of our bodies as slaves of Christ -- living to serve and please Him?”

Either our body is disciplined to serve Christ, as our spirit rules our flesh as it comes under the control of the Holy Spirit -- or it is undisciplined -- in which case we serve it. Paul said, in Romans 7:24, “Who can save me from this doomed body?” (Goodspeed). Here, of course, “body” represents the entire sinful nature. Some Bible scholars believe that Paul was referring to the grotesque practice of punishing a murderer by chaining to his back the corpse of his victim until it literally rotted away. Is it any wonder that the apostle cries out with such anguish?

Elsewhere Paul refers to those who have made their bodies, bellies, or their fleshly appetites their “god” or their supreme object of concern. In the church at Philippi there were some libertines who had distorted Christian liberty into immoral license (Philippians 3:18-19). In the same manner, in the church in Rome there were some who, instead of being slaves to Christ, were slaved to their own stomachs (Romans 16:18). Like them many believers today live to eat rather than eat to live -- for Christ. How pathetic to be a slave of one’s own midsection!

Paul writes, “Everything is permissible for me, but I will not become a slave to anything. Foods are intended for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will finally put a stop to both of them” (1 Corinthians 6:13 Williams). Paul here sets down the principle of Christian liberty, subjecting it to the two-fold principle of expediency or benefit and self-control. In the Greek he uses a play on words -- “Everything is in my power but I will not be brought under the power of anything.”

Paul is talking here about a form of physical indulgence we don’t hear much about in evangelical circles -- “gluttony.” “God has given us an appetite for food and stomachs to digest it – but [the Living Bible renders it] don’t think of eating as important, because some day God will do away with both stomach and food.”

Eating is not an end in itself, but rather eating should simply be a means to gratifying our God-given appetite for food, satisfying our hunger, and nourishing our bodies. God certainly expects us to enjoy, with moderation, this sensuous experience. After all, God gave us our taste buds! And have you ever thought of the spiritual dimension of eating? It is a perfect symbol of fellowship -- (The word “Companion” comes from two Latin words meaning “bread-fellow” or “messmate,” someone with whom you eat bread.) -- Jesus often ate with His disciples and others, as when He multiplied the loaves and fishes and when He prepared breakfast on the shore after the Resurrection -- and His offers to feast with anyone who will open the door to Him (Revelation 3:20).

However, Jesus always put eating in its rightful place. When the disciples returned with food after His conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, He told them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about...My food is to do the will of Him
who send Mt and to finish His work” (John 4:32,34). Although Jesus miraculously multiplied the bread and fishes to feed five thousand hungry people, after fasting forty days and nights He did not turn stones to bread to satisfy His own legitimate hunger. What was the difference? Self-discipline made the difference -- the first was His Father’s will, the second wasn’t -- the first was sustenance for others, so they could hear spiritual truth, the second was for Himself at the solicitation of Satan. Jesus could say no to food. Can we? Going without a meal or two (or more) can clear our thinking and help to discipline the soul, as well as the body (Psalm 35:13). Someone has said that the best form of physical exercise is pushups --- that is, “pushing up from the table!”

It may surprise us to find that “gluttony” is placed next to sexual impurity in Scripture (1Corinthians 6:13), perhaps the chief of the seven deadly sins in exacting the heaviest physical penalties this side of the grave.

| Of course, each of the other seven deadly sins – envy, pride, covetousness, anger, lust and sloth – is rooted in or manifests itself through the physical. The “deadly” sins are no more ghastly than others, but indulgence in them leads to or involves the sinner in numerous other sins besides. |

Someone has said, “There are five ways of sinning by *gluttony* -- eating too much, too often, too greedily, too expensively, and with too much fun.”

The apostle Paul goes on to say, “the body is not intended for sexual immorality but for the service of the Lord, and the Lord is for the body to serve” (Williams Translation). Our bodies were not designed for self-indulgence, but, Scripture tells us, our bodies were designed for the Lord and His glory. If we do not use our bodies to bring glory to God, we are misusing, and ultimately abusing, them.

If, among the seven deadly sins, *gluttony* and *lust* are most obviously sins of and against the body, sloth, also a sin directly related to the physical, is on the opposite end of the spectrum. Whereas gluttony and lust are sins of commission, of doing or acting, sloth is a sin of omission, of passivity. Sloth is a disinclination to work or exert oneself, laziness, and neglect of duty. It is the disciples snoozing while the Master agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:40-45).

But sloth is so much more than ordinary laziness -- sleeping at the switch, putting off the writing of letters, or accomplishing difficult tasks that we know should be done. It is slackness in the face of spiritual good or uninvolvedness in the spiritual best. Accordingly, some of the most slothful people are those who seem to be the busiest.

Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus, might seem slothful, but judged by the deeper concept, Martha, busy and distracted, is perhaps the slothful one in that she is uninvolved in the spiritual best.
Inactivity is not necessary sloth, any more than activity is necessarily indicative of physical self-discipline. Some are constantly moving, always on the go, hyperactive even in good things but unengaged in the spiritual best. The difference lies in the discipline. In fact, sloth in its dual sense (really opposite sides of the same coin) seems to lie at the heart of any lack of self-discipline.

The “don’t-care feeling,” as someone has described sloth, or the “don’t-care-enough-to-do-anything-about-it” attitude, is the great enemy of self-discipline. To be physically self-disciplined we must care. We must care enough to “acquiesce in our own being,” that is, to recognize the God-given significance of the physical and come to terms with our bodies. — (“My body may not seem much to others but it’s what God gave me, so I’m going to make it the best I can by caring for it, keeping it fit, trim, and well-conditioned.”)

We must care enough to make this
- tent well-pleasing to God,
- to keep the temple clean,
- to present acceptably this living sacrifice,
- to keep the vessel fit,
- to maintain the fountain unobstructed,
- to bridle the beast,
- to refuse to be a slave of our bodies and show our bodies who is master.

“The Lord wants to fill our bodies with Himself” (1 Corinthians 6:13 Living Bible).

Do we care enough to let Him?

The Disciplined Tongue

We have all heard that old adage, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” Well, we also know that that just ain’t true! Of course, we know that it is true that words are only ciphers or symbols in the form of puffs of air passing through our vocal organ and, that, in itself, cannot fracture our clavicle, or bones, as a brink thrown at us and hitting its mark. However, words, mere sounds and signs, are able to hinder, hurt, or help the cause of Christ, much less our own physical body. Words may not break bones, but they can break hearts and lives. A Japanese proverb says, “The tongue is but three inches long, yet it can kill a man six feet high.” Solomon writes, “The words of a talebearer are as wounds” (Proverbs 18:8).

Probably the surest test of self-discipline — the acid test — is whether or not we can control our tongues. Ah yes, that tongue. Isn’t it the first thing our doctor examines when we are sick? If it’s coated, we probably have a fever; if it’s yellowish the digestion probably isn’t right; it it’s bright strawberry red it could be any number of ailments. Just as the condition of our tongues is an indicator of our physical health, so the tongue is an
indicator of our spiritual health. James said that if a person “can control his tongue he can control every other part of his personality” (James 3:2).

Testing For Tongue Control

For this test you will need a mirror to stand in front of. Now extend that three-inch, flat, muscular organ between your teeth, known as “your tongue.” Think back over the past and remember all the difficulties that flapping muscle caused -- the cutting remarks you made -- the angry words of impatience directed to someone -- the flattering words of insincerity spoken to others -- the name-dropping and boasting -- the gossip about a neighbor -- the unkind words you directed at someone -- the words of criticism your tongue let fly before your mind was in gear. Don’t you wish you could recall those words as the automobile companies recall defective parts? But it can’t be done! Once they’re past the teeth, they’re gone -- never to be reclaimed! That’s why control of the tongue is so crucial. Benjamin Franklin wrote:

“A slip of the foot you may soon recover,
But a slip of the tongue you may never get over.”

Even biting the thing won’t bring back words that should never have been spoken.

How does your tongue react in that unguarded moment when something unexpected happens like, for instance you hit your thumb with the hammer -- or someone “cuts you off” in traffic -- or you accidentally spill something? Or, perhaps, when that person you thought was your friend unleashed a scathing attack on you?

What about profane, if not vulgar four-letter (or, even five-letter) words -- are they absent from your vocabulary. Or, those common expressions that are compromised versions of the original forms -- the so called “minced oaths?” -- [For example, do you use such “minced” forms of sacred names as “golly,” “gosh,” “goodness” “jeez,” “gee,” “jiminy,” “jeepers creepers,” “gol darn,” “Judas Priest?”] -- I, of course, am unable to mention all of the various slang people use in a moment of annoyance, or irritation, to express their sudden, momentary, feeling. Like one lady, after her pastor had preached on the use of slang, came up to him and said, “I appreciate your message, pastor, ’by golly,’ I’m sure glad that I don’t use any of those slang words!”

I wonder if those who, in a moment of uncontrolled anger, tell someone to “go just in the lake,” would say that if they realized, that, originally, that meant to tell someone to “go jump in the Lake of fire?” Nonbelievers are sometimes amused at the curious inconsistency of believers who are offended at profanity but who use toned-down forms of the originals.

Biblical Hope For Tongue Control

I believe that all sincere believers desiring a self-controlled life will agree that our tongues need to be controlled. Their lack of control indicates a wider and deeper lack of
self-discipline. What is the prognosis? What is the change of recovery and what prescriptions are required?

The Book of James, in the New Testament, has more instruction about tongue-control than any other book in the Bible, with, perhaps, the book of Proverbs of the Old Testament. James 3:2 offers this major premise, “If you can control the tongues you can control the entire personality.” James 3:8, offers a minor premise, when it states, “But you cannot control the tongue because it is an intractable evil” (New English Bible). So the conclusion would be, “Therefore, you cannot control the entire personality.” Sounds petty grim, doesn’t it? Let’s dig a little deeper and see if we can understand the basic principles involved.

First, let’s consider the question, “In what sense can it be said that control over what we say enables us to have control over what we think and feel and do and are?” How can control of that little three-inch muscle called a tongue have such far-reaching effects? Size, of course, is no valid indicator of importance. James reveals that we are all guilty of stumbling over our tongues. No one is so perfect, so mature, that he or she is guiltless of a slip of the tongue at one time or another in anger or guile.

Even the most exemplary saints have at times lost control of their tongues. Even the apostle Paul, not realizing that Ananias was the high priest, berated him. In Acts 23:3 Paul says to him, “God shall strike you, you whitewashed wall.” How different is the example of our Lord, who alone is faultless in control of the tongue. We are told that “He committed no sin, and do deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate, when He suffered, He made no threats” (1 Peter 2:22-23).

The statement of James further implies that because the most difficult mistakes to avoid are those of the tongue, the individual who successfully controls that member has a Christian character that is well developed and disciplined.

However, the verse in James has an even deeper, more significant implication. Tongue-control is a matter of life and death. Solomon said, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue; those who indulge it must eat the fruit of it” (Proverbs 18:21 Goodspeed) -- or, as Moffatt translation renders this verse, “the talkative must take the consequences.” Solomon must have anticipated James’s words when he wrote, “He that guards his lips guards his soul” (Proverbs 13:3), and “He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity” (Proverbs 21:23).

James reiterated several other basic principles state by Jesus. The tongue merely reflects the heart -- “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). What fills the heart spills from the lips. An evil source produces evil results and a good source produces good results. Jesus said, you don’t get figs from thorns or grapes from a bramble bush (Luke 6:44). James 3:12 echoes the plant metaphor I adding to the necessity of a good source the need for consistency in our speech, when he writes in James 3:12, “Can the fig tree bear olive berries? Either a vine, figs?” James clinches the effectiveness of these rhetorical questions with the decisive statement, “Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.”
It appears that this view — that the tongue merely expresses what the heart possesses — conflicts with James’ earlier statement that control of the tongue makes possible control of the entire personality. Doesn’t that seem to imply that you can control the tree by taking care of the fruit, or make the fountain produce sweet water by cleaning up the container of bitter water? Perhaps an answer to this basic question will also illuminate the minor premise in the premise given earlier — “You cannot control the tongue because it is an unruly evil.”

Both James and Jesus clearly indicate that what we say is determined by what we are. James implies that tongue-control is achieved only by achieving complete self-discipline. But James also says that no person can control the tongue. That’s true and consistent with other Scriptures — man can’t but God can — and will if we permit Him to do so!

**Our Words Can Control Our Thoughts**

But there is another crucial point. Jesus said, “What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him unclean, but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him unclean” (Matthew 15:11). An undisciplined tongue corrupts the entire being. It’s obvious that our words can blight or bless others and that we can be hurt or helped by the words of others. Note that Jesus says that the words a person uses can also affect, for good or ill, the person who says them. — “If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought,” George Orwell. Benjamin Whorf, in “Language, Mind, and Reality,” wrote, “The forms of a person’s thoughts are controlled by inexorable laws of pattern of which he is unconscious. These patterns are the unperceived intricate systemization of his own language…” Stuart Chase, in an article entitled, “How Language Shapes Our Thoughts” that appeared in Harper’s observed that language “molds one’s whole outlook on life.” For “thinking follows the tracks laid down in one’s language” So, while it is true that our words reflect our state of mind and heart, it is also true that the words we use influence our thoughts and attitudes.

The language some use to describe the Eternal Godhead is far removed from the Scripture concept of Deity. Using language — such as “groovy” or “hip” or “neat,” or referring to Jesus as “cool cat” — demeans the user’s concept of Christ and affects his attitude toward God! What a striking contrast between such undisciplined, sacrilegious language and the Old Testament Jewish reverence for the sacred name of Jehovah — even to the point of their refusing to pronounce the name.

It seems to me that God’s commandment, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord God in vain,” could also include, “Thou shalt not use vain names for the Lord God.”

Jesus stresses the fact that our destiny is a destiny of words. Christ taught not only that we are accountable for our words but also that words will be the very basis of judgment — “For by your worlds you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Mathew 12:17). Words can be either your servants or your masters. If they are your servants, they will safely guide you in the way of truth, however, if they are your master (as Bishop Horne states it) “they intoxicate the brain and lead into swamps of thought where there is no solid footing.”
James, in his writing, makes the argument, “Heart-discipline makes for tongue-discipline,” however he makes the point that we can achieve heart-discipline through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In earlier lessons we dealt with how to achieve spiritual mental, emotional, and physical self-discipline. I would now like to consider what is involved in achieving disciplined speech!

How Can We Control The Tongue?

The “Canterbury Tales” states,

“The first virtue, son, if thou wilt learn
Is to restrain and keep well thy tongue.”

The English poet Francis Quarles makes the chorus a duet when he wrote,

“If thou desire to be held wise,
Be so wise as to hold thy tongue”

And, an anonymous author makes the wise advice a trio when he wrote,

“If wisdom’ s ways you widely seek
Five things observe with care:
Of whom you speak
And how and when and where “

You will find throughout the Word of God there are three major images or expressions used to characterize our speech -- not just the “tongue,” but also the “mouth” and “lips.” In some passages all three are used interchangeably -- “The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be cut out. The lips of the righteousness know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse” (Proverbs 10:31-32). In the same way, Paul, in stressing that the entire world is guilty before God, refers to all three as part of unredeemed human nature -- “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness” (Romans 3:13-14).

The thee are sometimes depicted as working together as part of a unit, as in David’s prayer of repentance -- “Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saved me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness, O Lord, upon my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise” (Psalms 51:14-15).

Of these three terms “lips” is used least, but the most specific -- whereas “mouth” is the most common, particularly in the Old Testament, and somewhat more general, sometimes referring to the throat, the palate, and the checks as well as to the oral cavity. “Tongue”, sometimes used to denote a language or dialect, often refers to the articulation of speech, whereas lips often convey the idea of a door or gateway to the mouth -- the tongue is the first to move in preparation for speech -- and the last change to cut off words before they issue for never to be reclaimed. God help us to pray daily as David did -- “Set a watch, O Lord before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Psalms 141:3).
Each of the three words is described by vivid images that convey power and the necessity and difficulty of it control. For example, all three are likened to an unruly horse or mule needing a bit and bridle — “lips” (See 2 Kings 19:28 & Isaiah 37:29) — “mouth” (See Psalm 32:9 & 39:1) — and “tongue” (See James 1:26 & 3:2-3). They are also presented as “wild creatures that cannot be tamed” (See James 3:7-6). Two are associated with a raging fire — “lips” in Proverbs 16:27, and “tongue” in James 3:5-6. The same two are compared to deadly poison — “lips” in Romans 3:13, and “tongue” in James 3:8. The lips are a trap for caching birds and small animals, according to Proverbs 12:13 & 18:7, and so is the mouth in Proverbs 6:2. The mouth is likened to a tree producing good or bad fruit (Proverbs 12:14 & 13:2), as is the tongue (Proverbs 15:4). The tongue is compared to a sharp sword in Psalm 57:4 & 64:3, and to a sharp razor in Psalm 52:2. As someone has said, the tongue is not steel, yet it cuts. If you have a sharp tongue, you may cut your own throat!

The tongue is likened to a bow in Jeremiah 9:3 and an arrow in Jeremiah 9:8, and the tongue is like a ship’s rudder in James 3:4, small and maybe not very impressive looking, but powerful enough to control the destiny of an individual. Surely James did not overstate the case — His argument is unmistakable — he reasons that if you control the helm of a ship, you control the ship — if you control a horse’s mouth, you control the horse — if you control your speech, you control your entire personality.

The Word of God provides some specific details on what disciplined speech is and how it can be attained.

1. A Disciplined Tongue Is Subdued

Do you want to know the secret of a meaningful, virtuous life? Peter offers the following prescription, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech” (1 Peter 3:10). The single verb in the original means “to restrain,” “prohibit,” or “cause to pause” or “refrain.” Very clearly, the idea is to restrain the natural tendency of the tongue.

Peter wrote this! Think of how much sorrow and trouble Peter would have spared himself if he had learned the secret earlier and followed his own advice given here. Just to consider one occasion, when Jesus foretold His death and resurrection, impulsive Peter rebuked Him, saying, “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to You.” Jesus then said to Peter, “Out of My sight, Satan” (Matthew 16:22-23). When the tongue is not subdued, that is, put under the authority and power of God, it tends to flap for the Devil.

About a week later, on the Mount of Transfiguration, another incident happened — impulsively proposed they build three tabernacles on the mountain (Matthew 17:4). This time, God the Father rebuked Peter’s impetuous suggestion, and the words are especially fitting — “This is My Son whom I love, with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him.” Peter was talking when he should have been listening.

Peter didn’t learn the lesson easily. In the Upper Room, when Jesus began to wash His disciple’s feet, Peter blurted out, “You shall never wash my feet” (John 13:8).
Later Peter boasted, “I will lay down my life for You” (John 13:37), but later that evening Peter sinned grievously with his tongue when he denied Christ and cursed. Even after the Resurrection, Peter was the first to blurt out, “I’m going out to fish” (John 21:3), back to self-will and to fruitless efforts. And it was Peter who was quick to ask Christ about John’s death, “What about him?” (John 21:21) -- worrying about the other fellow.

Can’t we see ourselves in Peter? But this impetuous man became a dynamic witness for Christ. What made the difference? In studying his two epistles, one cannot help but note what he has to say about “speaking.” In 2 Peter 2:18, he warns against false teachers who “speak empty, boastful words.” He encourages us to get rid of all evil speaking by craving the pure milk of God’s Word in 1 Peter 2:1-2 -- and, in 1 Peter 2:21-22, commands us to follow the example of Christ.

In 1 Peter 3:15, Peter tells us that we are to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give a reason for the hope that we have” -- revealing that just to silence the tongue isn’t all there is to subdue it. But rather, to be silent when we ought to speak out can be as grave a sin as speaking when we should remain silent.

Don’t you imagine that, if the Spirit of God could subdue Peter’s uncontrolled tongue, He could discipline yours and mind too? Certainly the Holy Spirit can -- if we first recognize the danger of perverse lips. Then, yielded to the Spirit, we must, by an act of the will, purpose to restrain our speech. David said, “I have resolved that my mouth will not sin” (Psalm 17:3). And he said, “I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle (Psalm 39:1). Then there must come the continuous prayer of commitment, such as the one David prayed in Psalm 19:14, “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” This ought to be a prayer on our lips daily!

2. A Disciplined Tongue Is Sanctified

Words acceptable to God assure that our tongues are sanctified.

When Isaiah 6:5 was written, the time is about 740 B.C. Uzziah, 11th king of Judah, has died after a 52 year reign. The prophet Isaiah, in the Temple perhaps to seek God’s guidance during such a critical time, has an overpowering vision of God’s majesty and holiness. His immediate reaction is to cry out, “Woe is me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and live among a people of unclean lips” (New American Standard Bible), The Living Bible renders this passage as, “I am a foul-mouthed sinner, a member of a sinful, foul-mouth race.” Isaiah’s sense of guilt centers upon his lips that had spoken the language of a corrupt heart. Only when a live coal from the altar purged his lips was the prophet fit to go forth in service.

Whether this experience is referring to Isaiah’s initial call or a reconsecration for service, we really do not know. One thing is clear -- the condition of lip-impurity is universal and widespread. The passage is reminiscent of Moses’ experience when he was called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. He replied, “I am of uncircumcised lips” (Exodus 6:30). It’s not simply that Moses was a stammering, faltering speaker. Moses felt the need for sanctified lips — lips set apart and made holy! Just as physical
circumcision was the sign of God’s covenant with Israel, so symbolic circumcision means the special setting apart and the force of authority that accompanies it. Similarly, on the day of Pentecost, tongues of fire rested on the disciples as they were set apart to speak the good news. Jehovah promised Moses, “I will be with the mouth” (Exodus 4:12 & 15). God offers that promise to us today—Let’s claim it!

Maybe there was a time that you found yourself about to real tell someone off—but you caught yourself and let God give you gracious words to say instead. --- I am trying to learn, at those moments of irritation and annoyance, to stop and think first (maybe twice) before speaking and to give the Holy Spirit a chance to substitute gracious words for the impulsive ones that I may have in mind.

When our tongues are yielded to the Lord, Jesus Christ, He sanctifies them—which means, that He sets them apart for good things and makes them holy so they speak only the best things! Then you and I can say with Solomon—“Listen, for I have worthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right, My mouth speaks what is true...All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse” (Proverbs 8:6-8). Can you make that claim? Does it sound like arrogant boasting? In our own strength it certainly would be, but when the tongue is subdued and sanctified, God controls it. Solomon gives further insight when he writes, “The heart of he righteous studies how to answer; but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things” (Proverbs 15:28). Two kinds of responses are described here. One is that of the unsanctified tongue, which spews forth a flood of evil words without thinking. The other is that of the sanctified tongue, which answers only after the heart has carefully weighed, pondered, and deliberated upon the best answer.

How should we give a reason to everyone for our hope? We can give the reason of our hope by sanctifying Christ as Lord in our hearts. When we revere and honor Him, He sanctifies our tongues so they will be ready to answer, as they should.

3. A Disciplined Tongue Is Seasoned

Paul tells us, in Colossians 4:6, that in order to answer everyone, as we should that, “our speech should be constantly seasoned with salt of grace (Weymouth Translation). The idea conveyed by the salt is that our speech should not be insipid—meaning, dull, lifeless, tasteless, flat, uninteresting. Winsomeness; that is, charm, engaging, attractiveness, and pleasantness should characterize our talk. Someone has well said, “The way to win some is to be winsome.” Knox translates this phrase in Colossians 4:6, “with an edge of liveness.”

The word “seasoning” conveys several ideas. Discipline seasoned with kindness is correction tempered, softened, or made less harsh and severe. A speech season with humor is one to which interest and zest is added. Seasoned lumber is made more suitable for use by aging and drying, and a seasoned actor is one whose experience has improved his performance. A person seasoned to a hard life has become accustomed to hardship through experience and maturity. Grace seasons our speech in all these ways.
The comments we make -- especially those that are necessarily blunt, should be tempered with graciousness. Some will say, "Well, I believe we ought to say exactly what we think and feel about something. Let the chips fall where they may." I must admit that there are many times that is exactly how I feel -- and, even been guilty of doing just that in the past -- but my prayer is that God will help me (and you) to be candid, but with consideration and graciousness. God wants us to be straightforward -- but in a gracious way!

Grace is that divine gift that takes an unpleasing circumstance and transforms it into a pleasing one. Grace in our lips makes our words "gracious." Jesus perfectly illustrates the disciplined tongue as one "seasoned with grace." One of David’s Messianic Psalms says of Him, “Grace is poured into Thy lips” (Psalm 45:2). And when Jesus began His public ministry by reading and expounding Isaiah 61 in the Synagogue, everyone was amazed at His "gracious" words (Luke 4:22).

Do gracious words proceed out of our mouth? That’s God’s ideal for us. Solomon writes about “the righteous man who has grace in his lips” (Proverbs 22:11), “whose mouth is a foundation of life,” whereas “violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked” (Proverbs 10:11).

God intends us to experience grace every day of our lives (See Titus 2:11-13). We need to learn the secret of appropriating God’s grace and applying it to our speech so it can change a potentially unpleasant or ugly circumstance into a pleasing one -- even in those irritating, nitty-gritty situations of life.

4. A Disciplined Tongue Is Sterling

One of the most vivid images of the disciplined tongue in the Scriptures is that provided by Solomon, when he wrote, “The tongue of the righteous is choice silver but the heart of the wicked is of little value” (Proverbs 10:20). Do we have a “silver tongue?” I’m not speaking of silver-tongued eloquence and persuasive ability. I mean is our tongue genuine sterling silver? Is our speech in every way of sterling quality -- pure, excellent, honest?

The Psalmist provides a vivid description of the undisciplined mouth -- the wicked man’s “mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue” (Psalm 10:7). Here are enumerated the five major tongue-sins -- profanity (and vulgarity), lying (craftiness, deceptiveness), verbal oppression and threats, mischief (tale-bearing, rumor-mongering, gossiping, troublemaking), and boasting (including flattery). How does our tongue measure up in this catalog of offenses? Do we need to confess one or more and let the Holy Spirit deal with them?

God commands His people, “Keep thy tongue from evil, and they lips from speaking guile” (Psalm 34:13) -- (an admonition repeated by Peter in 1 Peter 3:10). Guile is slyness, craftiness, trickiness, and deceitfulness in dealing with others. Elsewhere we are commanded not to deceive with our lips (Proverbs 24:28).
One of the greatest abominations to our God is “a lying tongue,” according to Proverbs 6:17 — “lying lips,” according to Proverbs 12:22, and, “a lying mouth,” according to Psalm 63:1. I hear someone say, “Oh, but surely no Christian believer would ever deliberately lie or be deception, would they?” Would to God that were true. But the undisciplined tongue, even of a believer, is deceitful and false (See Psalm 120:2-3)

Modern language now suggests that undue exaggerated facts has its place in our life and has brought about the lie that is not quite a lie and truth is not quite the truth. The English economist William Bagehot said, “There are lies, flagrant lies concerning church statistics — (It’s called “speaking evangelistically”) — that is not quite telling an outright falsehood but embellishing the facts somewhat to give a more positive impression.” Solomon wrote in Proverbs 12:19, “Truthful lips — (the sterling lip) — endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.”

5. A Disciplined Tongue Is A Single One

The genuinely self-disciplined believe does not speak with “forked tongue” or with a double tongue, that is, saying one thing and doing another or saying one thing at one time to one person and another at another time or to another person. One of the requisites the apostle Paul sets down for spiritual leaders is that they be straightforward in their talk — “not shifty and double talkers but sincere in what they say” (1 Timothy 3:8 Amplified Translation).

The double tongue goes right along with the double heart and double mind. The Psalmist wrote, “They speak vanity every one with his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart do they speak” (Psalms 12:2). They say one thing but think and feel another. How often we’re like the man at church who greeted a couple effusively, “Oh my death brother and sister, we’ve missed you. We think about you a lot, you know, and we pray for you every day!” — after which he turned to his wife and whispered, “What is their name anyway”? I just can’t seem to place them.”

The Scripture speaks about false words that belie true feelings. David wrote of false talkers in Psalm 55:2, “His speech is smooth as butter, yet they are drawn swords.” And Jesus quotes Isaiah’s prophecy about hypocrites who honor Christ with their mouth, but whose heart is far from Him (See Isaiah 29:13 & Matthew 15:8). Is there a doubleness in what we say? Do people know that when we say something it’s genuine, true, and honest? Are we men, and women, of our word? Do we keep our verbal commitments? There’s no place in a Christian’s life for use of the double tongue.

6. A Disciplined Tongue Is Soft And Sweet

There’s nothing quite so pleasant as a sweet tongue. Not a sweet tooth but a sweet tongue is a mark of self-discipline. It always has a considerate word of kindness — even in response to bitterness. Do people criticize us and say nasty thing about us and to us? “Speak softly and carry a big honeycomb!” Are there those who spread false rumors and gossip about us? Remember — “Our tongue should be soft and sweet.” Do acquaintances and associates belittle our testimony for Christ, trying to provoke our anger? Don’t forget to always speak softly and sweetly.
To respond to verbal unkindness with sweet words is to go against the grain of our old nature — that says, “Blast ’em! Let ’em have it in return! No one’s gonna talk to me like that!” To respond to spitefulness with gentle words is to go counter to the world’s thinking, expectation and practice. But the Scripture teaches, “A soft answer turns away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger” (Proverbs 15:1) and only makes things worse. The next time someone lambastes you, be prepared to hold your tongue until the Holy Spirit gives you an appropriate response. And if nothing fitting comes to mind, say nothing! Maybe the old idea of counting to ten before blowing your stack isn’t so bad after all. But while you’re counting, ask God to provide a soft, sweet response that will turn away anger rather than fan it. The other person will probably be so flabbergasted he or she just may be silenced!

My mother use to repeat that catchphrase, “Honey attracts and traps more flies than does vinegar” — that we all have heard. The wise one, Solomon, writes, “The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips. Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones” (Proverbs 16:21, 23-24).

Many feel that is someone “tells them off” and hey don’t respond in kind, they are cowardly. But soft and sweet are not weak! In fact, the opposite is true. It’s much easier to respond in kind than to go counter to our old nature and the way of the world. Solomon said, “a soft tongue can break a bone” (Proverbs 25:15).

The Scriptures provide several beautiful examples of the disciplined tongue as sweet and soft. The perfect model, of course, is Jesus — “When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate” (1 Peter 2:223). In Song of Solomon, the bridegroom says to his bide, “Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue” (Song of Solomon 4:11). How different it is to have milk and honey under the tongue than to have “poison of vipers on their lips” (Psalm 140:3) — “their mouths full of cursing and bitterness” (Romans 3:13), -- and the tongue “full of deadly poison” (James 3:8).

God’s ideal for us is that we have sweet mouths filled with milk and honey. The apostle Paul wrote, “When we are cursed, we bless” (1 Corinthians 4:12). You mean meet abuse with blessing, preacher? Yes, that’s exactly what I mean God’s Word to teach.

The poet William Blake wrote, “To respond with sweet, soft words of blessing relaxes not only the tension of the situation but the speaker as well.”

Solomon’s beautiful portrait of the virtuous woman includes as part of her exemplary character a sweet, disciplined tongue — “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness” (Proverbs 31:26). Perhaps you’ve known such a woman — maybe your own mother or grandmother. My own mother was quiet, soft-spoken, even shy, but when she spoke it was with wisdom, and her tongue knew “the law of kindness.” I do not recall ever hearing her utter one word of profanity or vulgarity or complaint or deceit or abuse. The law of her tongue seemed to be, “If you can’t say something positive and uplifting, better not say anything at all.” Such a law is Scriptural — “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29).
Want to have a sweet mouth? What have you been eating? Have you been feasting on garlic and onions of Egypt? Well — it’s going to take more time than a few mints. Try David’s diet — “How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Psalm 119:103). Nothing will taste sweeter and sweeten your mouth more than the Word of God. Start the day with a Scriptural lozenge, and before you go to sleep at night slip one under your tongue.

One of the best examples of a soft and sweet tongue responding to violent anger is recorded in the story of Gideon. After God had miraculously used Gideon’s three-hundred disciplined men to put the thousands of Midianites to flight, Gideon summoned troops from the other tribes to pursue the escaping hordes. The Ephraimites succeeded in killing the two high ranking Midianite generals. But the tribal leaders, the Bible records, “were violently angry with Gideon” because he had not sent for them when he first went out to fight the Midianites (Judges 8:1 Living Bible). They “criticized him sharply,” as the New International Version states. The New English Bible renders, “reproached him violently,” and the Modern Language Bible states, “they accused him severely.” Notice Gideon’s response, “He said, ‘God let you capture…the generals of Midian. What have I done in comparison with that? Your actions at the end of the battle were more important than ours at the beginning’” (Living bible). What a diplomatic response! And note the effect on the Ephraimites, “As he said that, their anger at him melted (verse 3 Moffatt) God can do the same with our tongues. Let Him sweeten them!

7. A Disciplined Tongue Is A Singing One

“To bless relaxes,” it’s stated. And, as we e relaxed, our tongues are loosed to sing! Genuine self-discipline always has such a liberating effect. It nee binds, restricts, or cramps or style; rather, it brings the freedom to enable us to sing, to praise God, even in adverse circumstances. That momentous night when Paulo and Silas were in Philippi the circumstances were anything but conducive to singing praises to God. The time was not favorable -- a dark, damp prison; the situation was not favorable -- they had been severely beaten and were not confined most uncomfortably to the stocks. Most of us would have grumbled, complained, felt sorry for ourselves, and blamed God, But here were two disciplined tongues that prayed and then sang praises to God. Most of us glibly sing, “O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing My Great Redeemer’s Praise” -- but we hardly use the one we have! We don’t need a thousand tongues, only one that is genuinely disciplined.

David said, “I will extol the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips” (Psalm 4:1). “Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise” the write of Hebrews sys; “the fruit of lips that confess His name” (Hebrews 13:15). It doesn’t take much discipline to praise God when the sun is shining and everything goes well. But what about the other two-thirds or three-fourths of the time -- when the sun is hidden and everything seems to go wrong? Is our tongue disciplined enough not only not to grumble, but actually to praise God then?

God’s ideal for His people is “the praise of God…in their mouth and a double edged sword in their hands” (Psalm 149:6). “Sing loudly and carry a sharp sword,” would be
another way to express it! The two-edged word, that is the Word of God, and the high praises of God are closely related. With God’s Word filling our minds and hearts, we will have praises on our tongues. David said, “My lips shall utter praise when Thou has taught me Thy statues. My tongue shall speak of Thy word” (Psalm 119:171-172). According to this passage, the Word is both the means and the subject of praise.

We learn self-discipline from instruction in the principles of God’s Word — and praise is the result! When we practice devotional discipline and meditate upon our Savior — praise is the result! “My mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips, when I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate upon Thee in the night watches” (Psalm 63:5-6). Is this our regular experience? Do we sing God’s praises continually? God help us to let His Spirit instruct us in His states about tongue-discipline. If we will, our experience will be that of David, “He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God” (Psalm 40:3).

Notice the glorious results of such a disciplined singing tongue — “Many will hear of the glorious things He did for me, and stand in awe before the Lord, and put their trust in Him” (Psalm 40:3 Living Bible). Do the words we speak cause individuals to reverence God and put their trust in Him? If not, then maybe we need to let God teach us to discipline our tongue.

Did you hear about the physician who tried to x-ray his patient’s jawbone — but all he could get was a moving picture? You and I need to be still before God and let His Word x-ray our jawbones to real the flaws that need correcting. Then we will together glorify God with one mind and one mouth (Romans 15:6).

The Discipline Of Time

Lesson Thirteen

Imagine that you open the paper tomorrow morning and read this classified ad:

This is a strange ad, however, there is a lesson to be leaned here — one that each of us could take out in our own names. For most of us waste, squander, and lose, every day, sizeable amounts of that precious commodity — time! Instead of investing the 86,400 golden seconds of each day, we all too often lose them or merely spend them. And once they are lost or spent, they are forever gone!

In a sense, the old saying is true, “Time is money!” Time is what we are able to find to make when we really want to, but what we plead a lack of when confronted with something we really don’t want to do.

How many time have we argued, “We don’t have enough time. We’re just too busy?” How many folk have said, “Pastor, I’d love to be responsible for that task, but I just don’t have the time. My schedule is so demanding. There just isn’t enough time in the week for me to get everything done that I would like to do.”

LOST
Yesterday, somewhere between dawn and dusk, an undetermined amount of gold bullion in units of sixty ingots each;

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No reward is offered, because the treasure is irretrievably lost

NO REWARD IS OFFERED, because the treasure is irretrievably lost.
Of course, we all need to understand that there are some occasions when it’s not only legitimate to decline, but also unwise and out of God’s will – because the task demands either time or energy that we cannot honestly give.

It is a part of self-discipline to say “No” when a negative response is warranted. But let’s not fool our self and face up to the truth -- Our real problem may not be “over-commitment,” but rather, just lack of self-discipline in the use of time. One of the most serious misconceptions today is that busy-ness means service and that super-busy-ness means over-commitment.

Most times when we say, “I’m just too busy,” what we really should say is something like this -- “I have just as many hours in my day as anyone else, but I’m so undisciplined in my use of time that I don’t seem to get much of anything accomplished. Seems like the busier I am and the faster I go, the less I get done! I wish I could get it all together and make better use of my time, but I just can’t seem to manage it!” We all could use some help in this area. There probably is not one of us who could not use our time more effectively.

Ever feel like the frustrated writer who said, “I spent the morning putting a comma in and the afternoon taking it out”?

Certainly, there’s nothing wrong with being busy with matters as long as our lives don’t become so cluttered with running here and there that we don’t accomplish anything for the Lord.

Managing Time Is Really Learning How To Mange Yourself

There is certainly no dearth of books on time-management in our day. The libraries and bookstores shelves are loaded with them. And seminars -- both Christian and secular -- for the last decade have been abundant. It is not my purpose here to reiterate what the best of these have offered. I want us to consider time-management within the context of self-discipline! How can we learn to manage our time effectively if we haven’t begun to lean to manage ourselves spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and physically? In fact, we don’t manage or control time anyway -- we manage or control ourselves in time!

To attempt to manage time outside the context of self-discipline of the total person is like trying to control the right front paw of a tiger while ignoring the rest of the beast. If we tried that, before we know it, we would be under the tiger’s paw or in the tiger’s jaw.

Many of the management programs make grandiose promises and sweeping generalizations -- like, “We all have the same number of hours in the day!” or “Nobody has any more time than you do!” or “Your clock and mine run at the same rate!” This all sounds valid -- and it usually has the effect of making us feel guilty because we are not accomplishing all the things someone else is. Of course, it’s true that all of us have the same number of hours in our day. But it’s also true that the time we have at our disposal every day is elastic. The neighbor down the street, with four children to
support with an eight-to-five job, obviously does not have as much time at his disposal, as does another neighbor without any children, and lives on investments from an inheritance.

There’s an interesting prayer that each of us ought to pray regularly in Psalm 90:12, when Moses is praying to God and he prays, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” Our prayer should be something like this -- “Lord, help me to take such careful inventory of my time that I will be able to apply myself wisely to accomplish the tasks You have for me.”

The 17th century English poets would wrote “carpe diem,” -- “Seize the day!” That’s pretty good advice! Robert Herrick put the same idea in these words:

“Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,  
Old Time is still a-flying;  
And this same flower that smiles today,  
Tomorrow will be dying”

A contemporary of Herrick’s, Andrew Marvell, expressed the same image this way:

“At my back always I hear  
Time’s winged chariot hurrying near”

I realize that there are those who have had to go through various sicknesses and diseases -- for instance, very serious illness like cancer, etc -- that I feel almost like I am unsympathetic -- to I mention what I am about to relate. My health problem seems so trivial when compared with others that I have known.

I don’t want to sound too melodramatic, but I had an experience that caused me to believe I heard “Time’s Chariot” hurrying at my back when I informed that I was a diabetic. I realize that many people have diabetes -- that is very common -- and no “big deal” with many -- and that with many it isn’t anything that is so troubling. And, it is true that if they take care of themselves and follow their dietary schedule -- they will live a full, normal life. But the point with me is, all of my life the Lord had blessed me with good health. Every time I went to a doctor, (which I must admit wasn’t too often); I received a report of good health. The doctor would invariably say that I was in “perfect health.” Though they might add, “I should lose a few pounds!”

When I was 73, I went to a doctor -- simply due to a very small “skin tag” that had begin to give me pain, so I felt that it should be removed. After an examination, on my second trip to the doctor, he told me that my blood and urine revealed that I had diabetes. I realize that is no “big deal” with many, many people, but as far as I knew there had never been anyone in my family background that ever had diabetes. And, because I had good health all of my life, that it was more of a shock to me than perhaps it would have been to someone who has had physical ailments during their lifetime.

To say that I was shocked and dazed is to say the least. I began to realize that I could not take my health for granted. If I wanted to live a rich-full life I would have to
practice self-disciplined. Just eating whatever and whenever I felt like it was now out of the question -- but the alternatives were considerably less desirable. The doctor told me that diabetics face the likelihood of early death through complications, and that is what would happen to me if I did not adhere to a strict diet that would bring my blood count down.

I’ve shared this illustration to remind all of us that it is important that we need to sincerely — “number our day.” I have asked God that I use the “present time” -- whatever time I have left on earth -- in the most effective, efficient way possible. I have chosen as my motto to live a text from Psalm 71:18, “When I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare Your power to the next generation” (New International Version).

God has tasks for each of us and He will give us, sufficient time to complete those tasks if we are faithful to Him and use our time wisely.

**Make Better Use Of Time By Keeping Eternity In View**

We can only come to terms with *time* as we have a commitment to *eternity*! A strong commitment is essential in any form of self-discipline -- a commitment to God and His Spirit for control and a commitment of ourselves to the rigors of genuine discipline. When we make a decision to accomplish something, the time comes when the emotion and glamour wears off -- only a firm *commitment* will carry us through consistently.

We are creatures of time, but our commitment to its proper use must go beyond mere mechanical time to *eternity*. Our commitment must be in time but always in regard to eternity -- with eternity’s values in view -- *always with reference to eternal implications*! It’s only the eternal values that give time meaning. And in a real sense time has been given to us to prepare for eternity. The poet Robert Penn Warren expressed in his poem, “Bearded Oaks:”

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“We live in time so little time
And we learn all so painfully,
That we may spare this hour’s term
To practice for eternity”
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Perhaps we could say that time is best used that most prepares us for eternity.

We may be ever so busy making time -- (a curious, impossible phrase) -- saving time, on time, even ahead of time, but the flurry of activity will be meaningless -- *unless* we have a basic commitment to eternity.

Have you heard of eh pilot whose voice come over the loudspeaker, shortly after the plane was airborne? He said, “Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Welcome aboard. I have good news and bad news for you. First, I’ll give you the bad news. We are lost and are not sure where we are or where we are heading. However, there’s nothing to be alarmed over. The good news is that we are make excellent time.” This is like a lot of individuals today. They are lost, with no sense of purpose, no direction, no understanding of where they are headed -- but they are making excellent time!
Even born-again, sincere, Christians — if their sense of purpose and goals in life are all the wrong ones — are not God’s will and purpose — it is senseless for them to study time-management in an effort to travel rapidity in the wrong direction! If you are on the wrong train, every station is the wrong station — regardless of how fast the train get there. If you destination is in one direction, it really doesn’t matter how much time you gain and save traveling the wrong way.

Do you hear God’s voice saying, “This is the way; walk in it” (Isaiah 30:21). Or, as David said, “The king’s business is urgent!” (1 Samuel 21:8), but we should e certain it is the King’s business we are about before we hasten to do it. It is interesting that God’s command is to walk, not run! One of the common metaphors of the Christian life is that it is a “Christian walk” — not a dash, or a shuffle, or a scurry, but a “walk!” Nor is it a saunter, a ramble, a stroll, or a shuffle -- but a “walk!” A walk suggests a deliberate, steady, consistent, moderate pace involving definite progression.

Jesus Was Always “On Time!”

Our example to live by, Jesus Christ, manifested perfect self-discipline in the use of time. Though He is the eternal Son of God, He was born “in the fulne4ss of time” (Galatians 4:4). He clearly operated according to a definite timetable, often stating, “His hour had not yet come.” Yet He was never victimized by mechanical time. There is no reference in Scripture in His running, yet He sensed the urgency of passing time (See John 4:35).

When Jesus was summoned to Bethany when his friend Lazarus was sick, The bible tells us that “He waited two days before starting out and arrived four days after Lazarus had died.” It appeared that He was late — (the time-management experts would no doubt have said He was “irresponsibly negligent”) — but He wasn’t! He kept perfect time. His seemingly late arrival, like the sickness itself and subsequent death, were :”for God’s glory (John 11:4). The principle here is that you and I -- controlled by the Spirit of God as Jesus was -- should use our time in such a way as to bring the greatest glory to God --- even if we go against the best human advice of the day!

On another occasion, an influential ruler of the synagogue urged Jesus to come immediately to heal his daughter who lay dying (Mark 5:23). Now the efficiency experts would have advised Jesus to go quickly and directly to Jairus’s house — and then come back and tend to the woman in the crowd. Their advice would be, “Finish one task at a time!” -- “Follow through!” -- “Don’t let yourself be distracted!” -- “It’s only logical that since the little girl is more critically ill and is dying, you should go there first. Hurry along the side streets and if anyone tries to detain you, let the disciples handle it. You must learn to delegate responsibility. You can’t do it all, you know. You’re getting over-committed. If anyone persists in detaining you, you’ve go to be firm and tell them you’re too busy with a more critical case.”

First we have a delay in the case of Lazarus and now we have a distraction! It seems unthinkable. I can almost hear some time-management experts of today saying, “If only the Son of God had been able to benefit from our modern efficiency expertise, there’s no
self-control

"telling what He might have been able to accomplish! If only He could have attended that two-day time-management seminar . . ."

My point is that Spirit-controlled use of time may at times run diametrically counter to the human logic of efficiency experts. Can you even begin to imagine what the “experts” would have said about Philip’s God-directed decision to leave Jerusalem, where he was apparently reaching vast multitudes with the Gospel, and go south into the desert of the Gaza Strip, not even knowing about the one geographically strategic individual whom he was destined to meet (Acts 8)? I can hear them saying, “Now that’s just about the silliest notion I’ve ever heard of! You’re pulling out of the Greatest Jerusalem Evangelistic Campaign and going to the desert? What a waste of time and talent. Be reasonable. Phil, Jerusalem is where it’s at. That’s where the people are. What do you expect to do in the desert — are you bent on ministering to lizards? Look, it’s so all-fired important, why don’t you send an associate evangelist? A cancellation in Jerusalem at this time will hurt your image!”

It certainly is not wrong for us to learn all we can from the best minds of our day, but we should also be so spiritually disciplined that we will go counter to their advice if God so leads.

To illustrate my point I share a true story of a doctor with impressive credentials -- graduated with honors from Columbia University, medical degree from Harvard, thriving practice, the respect of his colleagues, and an outstanding Christian testimony in his community -- gives up his lucrative practice and took his wife and three young children to the Third World, where he labors as a medical missionary in obscurity and hardship, because God spoke to his heart to go.

I have to ask your opinion, “Is he using his time and talent wisely?” Many of his friends and even some of his relatives didn’t think so. “Why, he could have stayed here in the States and carried on his practice, been active in the Christian Medical Society and his local church, He’s just dissipating his time and talents out there!”

Invest Time -- Don’t Spend It

Of course, it goes without saying that the best way to use time is to use it God’s way. But, you ask, “What is God’s way?” God’s way is not to spend time, but rather to buy it up, and invest it. A key Scripture on this subject of time is when the Holy Spirit said to each of us, “Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16). Phillips translation renders this passage as, “Live life, then, with a due sense of responsibility, not as men who do not know the meaning and purpose of life but as those who do. Make the best use of your time, despite all the difficulties of these days.” We find the same exhortation in Colossians 4:5, where we are instructed to, “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.” The Modern Language Bible renders it this way, “Conduct yourself wisely toward outsiders, using your time to the best possible advantage.”

In the verses quoted above, the verb, “redeem” means, “to rescue” or, “to recover” our time from waste or loss, then to invest it in purposeful, God-ordained service. Just
as Christ redeemed us -- in fact, because He bought us from the slave market of sin -- we ought to, and can with His help, redeem our time.

We are to redeem our time from all those things that would waste it -- like a farmer drains a swamp or marsh and transforms it into rich, fertile farm land. Farmer who own river-bottom land sometimes will drain the sloughs and cultivate it into rich, fertile soil for a bumper crop of corn - or whatever! Sometimes farmers “redeem” land by clearing trees, grubbing out stumps, burning debris, and then plowing and fertilizing the soil until it is rich, lush, and productive, producing a bursting harvest. To redeem anything is no easy task; it demands a workable plan for recovery -- and a great deal of sacrifice.

Perhaps there is a segment of time in your life that is producing nothing fruitful -- maybe it’s even a total waste -- and you “buy up” that time and invest it for God!

Can you think of hours or minutes that you could redeem? We redeem our time when we invest it in such activities as providing honest livelihood -- talk, playing, and praying with others -- doing good for others and edifying our brothers and sisters in Christ -- sharing our faith with unbelievers -- reading, studying, and meditating on the Scripture and communing with God -- and honing our spiritual intellectual, emotional, and physical self-discipline. To redeem time effectively, we need to be aware of what we redeem it from! There are certain thieves of time of -- stumps that must be rooted out if we are to reclaim the land for fruitful use.

1. Dissipation Is A Thief Of Time

“Dissipate” means “to break up” – “to scatter -- or “to drive away” -- so, it would include wasting, squandering, or overindulging to the point of wasting time and energy on frivolous pleasure. Dissipation is the opposite of self-discipline.

Dissipation is illustrated in the parable of the Prodigal son. The younger son, who wasted his substance in undisciplined living, scattered and wasted his goods and money that had carefully earned and saved over the years by his father. He over indulged himself in frivolous pleasure until he ended up in the pigpen. Now that’s dissipation with a capital “D.” But what we need to realize was that his indulgent lifestyle wasted his time as well as his substance.

We aren’t told how long the son was gone from his father’s house, but Luke 15 includes several things about the significance of time.

- “When he was spent all” (verse 14) -- is the “when” of dissipation.
- “When he came to himself” (verse 17) -- is the when of contrition.
- “When he was yet a great way off” (Verse 20) -- is the “when” of reconciliation.

The latter two took place in an instant; the former went on perhaps for many months and perhaps years.

There are those who may be inclined to smugness at this point -- because, after all, they have never wasted time and substance in riotous living as the young son did.
But, there’s no room for self-righteousness, because all of us have surely squandered precious time in frivolous attempts to find pleasure. -- And for those who still insist they haven’t, there the “elder brother” syndrome. Just in from the field where he was working, he became angry and refuses to join the homecoming celebration because he has served many years and has not, at any time, been disobedient. Of course, that’s admirable -- and his father doesn’t deny it. True, he wasn’t off wasting time and money; he was at home busily serving -- but from all indications, it was time-serving (Read Luke 15:28-32).

What’s a “time-server?”

A “time-server” puts in his or her time, promptly punching the clock, but with no principles of higher motivation, merely making behavior conform to minimum patterns of expectation. With that kind of attitude, I ask you, what good was all the older brother’s busy-ness and time spent in the field? You don’t have to go to a far country and live in sin to waste or misuse time. The believer who is self-disciplined in the use of time serves the Lord, not time, and does so because “Christ’s love compels” him or her (2 Corinthians 5:14), not because he or she is depositing years of good needs in a spiritual bank so as to obligate God to send blessings. -- Saying something like, “I’ve been faithful in church for thirty-five yeas, paid my tithe, served on the board, taught Sunday School, gone calling…I just don’t understand why God would let this happen to me -- etc.”

The saddest thing about the story of the Prodigal Son is that there is no indication that the older brother ever went in to the feast. Time-servers, like most clock-watchers, are ordinarily miserable, resentful people. They seem to think that spending lots of time is synonymous with using time wisely and that reward for service is based on length of time spent.

2. Procrastination Is A Thief Of Time

The word “procrastination” comes from the Latin word, “crastinus,” meaning “of tomorrow” -- it literally means, “to put forward until tomorrow.” We all procrastinate occasionally -- the difference being that the person who lacks self-discipline habitually puts things off -- saying, “Sooner or later” (which invariably means later, or more likely never). It’s seldom now, usually then -- seldom today, usually tomorrow -- seldom immediately, usually next week -- seldom this time, usually some time. And anyone who claims that he or she does not occasionally put things off is putting us on! Surely one of Satan’s cleverest wiles is “in a little while.”

Have you ever thought about why we put things off? Why do we put off until the last minute getting in that report -- completing that assignment -- filing income tax -- cleaning out the closet -- fixing the leak -- renewing the subscription -- making the call -- writing the letter? Postponement until later of things we should do now is based on four basic conscious or unconscious illusions.

(1) The notion that the task is unpleasant, or more unpleasant then it really is, in terms of the effort, cost, or time required. Have you noticed that we seldom procrastinate if the task is pleasurable? Can you imagine a golf enthusiast saying to a
friend, “I know I haven’t been out on the course all year, but I will go one of these day. I really will. No, I can’t make it Saturday. I have too much to do around the house. Maybe I can the following Saturday. No, guess not. Just remembered that I have to clean out the garage. Look, we’ll get together sometime. I call you. Okay?”

(2) A second illusion is that we cannot, or do not wish to, face up to the imagined unpleasantness of the task. Humankind cannot bear very much reality. Part of the unpleasantness may be a fear of failure. To be sure, the task may very well be difficult and unpleasant. But the imagined difficulty is almost always greater than the real. And the difficulty and unpleasantness of many tasks become aggravated because of the postponement. We need to consider the cost of putting things off. For example, if I hear a small noise in my car engine and just ignore it. I’m likely to end up with major damage and a large bill.

(3) A third illusion is that by postponing indefinitely, the task will go away so we’ll never have to perform it. It is possible to deceive ourselves with the notion that if we put something out of our minds and don’t think of it, we’re “off the hook.” It’s the old, “What you don’t, know won’t hurt you” syndrome. Such reasoning is nothing less than dangerous escapism. It carries the kind of pathos evoked by the boy who, squatting behind a narrow light pole, thinks he can’t be seen because he can’t see anyone.

(4) A fourth illusion is that another time — any time but the present — would be better, that is, easier, more convenient. There are some believers who never “buy up” the time to serve the Lord because they’re waiting for a “better” time. — They use such excuses as: “I’ll start sharing my faith when I finish this Bible study” — “When I learn a more of The Bible, I’ll get active in church” — “Just as soon as I get settled in my job, I’ll be available.” We’re always going to get organized — next week! But, who says next week is to be a next week? The ultimate illusion of procrastination is the presumption that there will be another time, another opportunity.

Solomon warned, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth” (Proverbs 27:1). Jesus gave a parable of a rich young farmer, teaching this truth — This farmer thought he had “many years” to live, but God said, “This very night your life will be demanded.” The warning of James is sobering, “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year thee, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow” (James 4:13-14).

Remember Felix with whom the apostle Paul reasoned of up-righteousness, self-control, and judgment? His procrastinating reaction has a familiar sound, “When I can spare the time, I will send for you” (Acts 24:25 Modern Language Bible). There’s no evidence that a “more convenient time” ever came.

Remember, as youngsters when we were in a hurry to go somewhere or do something and someone yelled, “Wait!” and we responded with a pun, “Wight broke the wagon!” Of course, it was a different kind of “wait.” However, “wait” can break your wagon.
Are you going to procrastinate improving your self-discipline?
- If not now, when?
- If not here, then where?
- If not this, than what?
- If not this way, then which?
- If not, why not?

3. Misapplication Is A Thief Of Time

A third thief of time is waste through merely spending it rather than investing it. We spend time when no lasting value comes from it; we invest time when we are engaged in God-ordained, God-honoring activities -- for anything which God ordains, He honors, no matter how small, and what He honors will have lasting value.

Time and energy misapplied are time and energy wasted. Moses, in a verse we looked at earlier (Psalm 90:12), suggest that learning to “number our days” involves “applying our hearts unto wisdom,” Investing time rather than spending it requires a concerted, conscious effort -- and instruction from God Himself.

We have all had “apply yourself;” said to us -- and, probably said it to others our self. But what does it mean? It means to concentrate our faculties, our entire being, diligently and intensely on the matter at hand. This is surely what Solomon meant in his advice of Ecclesiastes 9:10, when he wrote, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.” Or as the Moffatt translation renders it, “Throw yourself into any pursuit.” Throwing yourself into your work leaves no room for half-hearted, slovenly efforts. Paul gave similar advice in Colossians 3:23, “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord.” The word “heartily” means literally “from the soul” or “with your whole heart and soul.”

Have you ever honestly admitted to yourself, perhaps late at night after a difficult day, “My heart just wasn’t in the work?” If your heart’s not in it, neither is your mind and will. Unapplied efforts mean misapplied, and therefore wasted, time.

We also misapply time when we spend it wantonly on activities that may be perfectly legitimate in themselves, but that pilfer time from more beneficial things. When “good” things steal time from the “best” things, they cease to be “good!” It is easy to fall into the trap of watching television for hours and misapply time that could be used in reading a good book. Or, maybe even reading a good book could misapply time that should be invested in reading the best book – God’s Word!

4. Distraction Is A Thief Of Time

Another common thief of time and frequently a cause of misapplication is distraction. Any success in time-management lies in setting realistic goals and then methodically setting about to achieve them. But when we allow other matters to divert our attention, we not only do not achieve the goals but we waste time as well. Jesus set His face “like flint” to go to Jerusalem and die for us (Isaiah 50:7) -- and nothing could divert Him from that goal.
The apostle Paul expressed his concern that believers should “stand upon the Lord without distraction” (1 Corinthians 7:35). How it must have grieved Paul that Demas, mentioned twice as a faithful fellow-worker (Colossians 4:14 & Philippians 24), was later diverted by his love for the world and forsook Paul (2 Timothy 4:10). For that matter, John tells us, “many” of Jesus’ disciples, unable to accept the “hard sayings” of Jesus, “turned back and no longer followed Him” (John 6:66).

Not only individuals but entire churches can be distracted from the Spirit—filled self-disciplined path, “You wee running a good race,” Paul wrote in Galatians 5:7, “Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?” Their spiritual progress had been arrested by false teaching -- that diverted them from the truth. The verb translated “hinder” is a term that has tow uses: (1) a military use -- soldiers cutting in front of opposing forces and arresting their progress -- (2) or a sports use -- an Olympic runner cutting in front of another runner and breaking his stride.

Phillips Translations renders this verse, “Who put you off the course you had set for the truth?” This version suggest the “red herring” technique, that is often used in arguments and consists of the attempt to draw attention from the major issue by raising a minor, irrelevant, or false one. The name of the device, “red herring,” comes from the practice of drawing a smoked herring across the trail to divert the chasing hounds.

Some believers progress well for a while, growing in the Lord by strides -- but then somebody comes along with a “smoked herring” and off the course they go, after some new “exciting” cult or doctrinal emphasis. If you’ve been distracted from God’s best, if you’re off the trail of God’s perfect will, then you’re wasting precious time!

5. Disorganization Is A Thief Of Time

1 Corinthians 14:40 says, “Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way,” and in verse 33 it says, “God is not a God of disorder but of peace.” Disorder and confusion, whether in a worship service or in our personal lives, are not of God. Satan would delight if he can turn an innocent meeting of people into a free-for-all. If he can merely keep us unorganized, or disorganized, so that we waste time and accomplish little for God, he’s won the victory! That’s why the Psalmist prayed so earnestly, “Order my footsteps in Thy Word” (Psalm 119:113) -- meaning, “God, You take the rule and management of my ways.”

Beware of the deadly “D’s!” Think of how much time we waste because we are dissipated, dilatory, desultory, distracted, and disordered.

It’s not enough, though, merely to ward off the thieves of time or, using that other metaphor, “to grub out the stumps.” We need a positive plan for the investment of our time. Permit me to suggest five steps, or stages, in such a plan.

1. Analyze
Any effective plan for improved time-management must begin with a careful assessment – a taking stock of where we’ve been, where we are, and where we want to be. Such an inventory ought to be made continuously -- a good time would be at the end of every year; every month; every week; and even every day. We need to evaluate how we’ve used our time and determine how it could be better used. We have only 168 hours a week with which to work. We sleep about 56 hours a week. Those who are still working, and not retired as yet, work about forty hours a week. In addition, there are number of things that we must do every day -- like eating, bathing, grooming, commuting, take care of household duties, spend time with our families, have devotions, and so forth. We need, perhaps, to create some kind of a chart to see where our time goes.

The question we are seeking to find is, “Have I made the best use of my time and how could I better invest it?”

I realize that what all this suggests is drastic and revolutionary for most of us, however, this was the practice of the Puritans in the early days of our country. Believer, in modern America, at least, seem to have lost the art of such disciplined personal mediation. Maybe it is time we got back to this practice.

The seventeenth century had a special name for this intensified living and use of time -- “carpe diem” -- “seize the day!” We need to grasp every moment and use it for God’s glory. We need to squeeze every drop from life’s orange (or lemon). It would help us a great deal to, at the end of each day, week, month, and year to take a brief inventory -- (if only “mentally”) of how we use our time, how we might have used it more profitably, and what we really accomplished. This practice can be, at times, frustrating and humbling, however I believe God will bless this kind of effort and enable us to maintain a sense of accountability of time.

For example, these resolutions about time that were made by Jonathan Edwards when he was a student at Yale University;

\begin{itemize}
  \item Resolved: To live with all my might, while I do live.
  \item Resolved: Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.
  \item Never let me lose one minute of time, nor incur unnecessary expenses, that I may have the more to spend for God.
  \item Let me never delay anything, unless I can prove that another time will be more fit then the present.
\end{itemize}
2. Itemize and Prioritize

It’s logical that since we have only a limited amount of time, we should be sure the most important things get first attention. But what are the most important things in your life? Have you ever sat down and worked out your set of priorities based upon your scale of values?

It appears to me that proper Scriptural priorities should be . . .

1. Our relationship with God – our spiritual growth
2. Our family — our domestic life — spouse, children, relations
3. Other people (social) — brothers and sister in the faith — (unbelievers!)
4. Our job and colleagues — (Vocational and professional)
5. Self-concerns (Vocational/Recreational/Educational)

Many sincere Christians have their order of priorities wrong. Their profession is in first place — other people come before God and family — and self-concern are uppermost.

Jesus, in His Sermon-on-the-Mount, stressed the need for right priorities and clearly indicated the paramount one “Seek for — (aim at and strive for) -- first of all His Kingdom, and His righteousness -- (His way of doing and being right) -- and then all these things taken together will be given you besides” (Matthew 6:33 Amplified Translation). The Williams Translation renders this verse, “As your first duty keep on looking for His standard of going right, and for His will, and then all these things will be your besides.” The implication is hat if we put the first thing — spiritual relationships — first, the other things, including other relationships, will fall into place.

When we realize that when we put God and His work first, we are better able to utilize the time we spend on other priorities. This is exactly what Jesus promises in Matthew 6:33 and, if we have not claimed this promise and tested it in elation to the use of our time -- we need to do it now!

3. Devise and Schematize

Once we have established a set of God-honoring priorities, we are ready to go a step further and plan some definite goals. We need to set goals and develop a plan for achieving them. Some people live their life like Lewis Carroll’s character Alice in “Alice in Wonderland.” When Alice meets the Cheshire Cat, she says, “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

The Cat replies, “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.”

“I don’t must care where – “ says Alice.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” says the Cat. “You’re sure to get somewhere — if you only walk long enough.”

People ask, “Would you tell me, please, the best way to do things to save time?” An apt reply might be, “That depends a great deal on what you want to do.”
“Well, I don’t really know . . . “ – “Then it really doesn’t matter how you proceed!”

There are no short-cuts to genuine self-discipline, and there is no way to improve the management of time without a clear sense of purpose.

When you stop to think it through there is a difference between a purpose and a goal! A “purpose” is a general intention or determination -- however a “goal” is a more specific objective or aim by which a purpose is to be achieved. For example, it may be someone’s purpose to be a better parent. And one goal by which he might possibly achieve this purpose might be to spend more time with his children -- taking them on outings, or various kinds of trips, playing ball and games with them.

We mentioned earlier how Paul had a clear purpose and goal in life -- “One thing I do; forgetting what is being and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

It would be helpful to have in mind three kinds of goal lists -- (1) long-range goals (career and lifetime goals) -- (2) medium-range (decade and yearly), and -- (3) short-range (monthly, daily, and sometimes even hourly). We need to get our self a notebook and keep a record of what we absolutely must accomplish -- what we probably should accomplish -- and what we believe we’d like to accomplish. We need to spend time each day prayerfully planning. It’s good to set dates for our self, and when we finish a task, cross it off our list. Doing this will give us a psychological boost!

We, of course, must set “realistic” goals. It would be foolish -- and discouraging -- to plan more than we can reasonably accomplish. That would only program our self for failure. However, if we do not accomplish all we’ve planned, we should not berate our self with guilt; but rather, try to assess why we didn’t. It may have been that the goal was unrealistic -- maybe one or more of the time-thieves snatched the time away.

4. Organize and Mobilize

After we have set goals, we must have an organized plan for carrying them out. A good place to start is with the prayer of Moses -- “Teach us to order our days rightly, that we may enter the gate of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12 New English Bible). Notice that Moses refers to ordering days, not years, or even month. Although it’s important to plan ahead, we must learn to live one day at a time.

Many have a problem at this point because they try to set their entire life in perfect order -- over night! It is important that we begin realistically -- maybe with things round you -- your desk, filing cabinet, etc. Get these things organized, then more on to other important matters. There’s a line at the end of T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land.” -- The scene is that all of Western civilization is collapsing: “London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down” The speaker realizing that he can’t restore the entire world to order, says, “Shall I at least set my lands in order?” We cannot organize the entire world or even all of Christendom and God doesn’t expect us to. But we can at least set our own life in order. As individual Christians around the world let God teach them order and self-discipline, Christendom can become the example of order.
My “modus operandi” -- method of operation -- may not work for you, any more than yours would work for me. Some use detailed planning sheets of things to be done -- appointment sheets, and a compact appointment book. Others use a box of 3 X 5 cards, writing things to be done daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly.

5. Improvise and Realize

It’s important to plan and organize, but we don’t need Robert Burns to remind us that, “the best-laid schemes of mice and men go oft askew.” Company arrives unexpectedly -- someone gets sick -- the phone rings and rings again and again. The self-disciplined person must be able to improvise graciously. That is, he must make necessary adjustments when unforeseen events disrupt the careful plans, and he must do so without frustration and despair.

Interruptions will occur! We should never be so rigidly structured that we cannot help and meet to people’s needs because it might disrupt our plans for the day.

I can imagine that he priest and Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan had important ecclesiastical duties to perform in Jericho. I wonder how many believers hurrying to a church service, or some church function, would stop to help a person in need. I wonder, would I?

Self-discipline also calls for spiritual improvisation with ability to scrap all of our best-laid plans when unforeseen events occur and to all the Holy Spirit to make changes. To be organized as a genuinely self-disciplined person is not to be inflexible. The founder of a rescue mission work had a favorite phrase -- “Flexible in the power of the Holy Spirit!” Organize, but, when your plans are disrupted be flexible enough tin the Spirit to improvise!

Time, like faith and grace and life itself, is a precious gift from God entrusted to our stewardship. How much of it we have is not too important as what we do with what we have. In the Parable of the Talents, one servant had five coins, another two, and another just one. The first two servants wisely invested their talents and received the praise of their lord, but the servant who merely buried his one talent was condemned for his wickedness and slothfulness (Matthew 25:14-39). What are we doing with our gold bullion -- losing some between each dawn and dusk, squandering some in undisciplined living, spending it on things that are temporal -- or investing it with eternity’s values in view?

Discipline Of The Home

Lesson Fourteen

Remember this childhood nursery rhyme?

“There was a crooked man,
And he went a crooked mile,
He found a crooked sixpence
Upon a crooked stile:
He bought a crooked cat,
That caught a crooked mouse --
And they all lived together
In a little crooked house.”
However, Mother Goose never told us whether or not the crooked man and the crooked woman raised a family of even more crooked children. If “crookedness” is a self-perpetuating trait in the physical realm — as this little ditty seems to imply — then lack of self-discipline is even more self-perpetuating in the domestic real.

Not only do parents who lack self-discipline unwittingly promote similar traits in their children, but also such parents are unprepared to discipline their children in such a way as to instill self-discipline. How can we effectively discipline someone else if we haven’t learned to discipline ourselves? I’m convinced that there is no genuine discipline unless it is rooted in the parents’ self-discipline that, in turn, develops self-discipline in their children.

The great flaw in the vast number of books on the rearing of children is the absence of discussion of the need to help children develop self-discipline. Externally imposed discipline is essential, and we need to know as much about it as we can learn, however it is, in the final analysis, only a temporary process. There comes a time, all too soon, when parents are no longer there to say — “Do this” and “Don’t do that.”

Genuine discipline, if successful, must gradually become “internalized.” For the Christian young person growing up, the indwelling Holy Spirit assumes discipline when He is in control, by the sensitive conscience, developing Christian character. Remember 1 Corinthians 11:31-32 teaches us, “If we will judge ourselves, we will not be judged.” It is important that children develop this built-in disciplinarian. But how can they if parents have never learned self-discipline, and if parents have never learned how to pass it along to their children?

Can you remember when you first heard the voice of that internal disciplinarian saying something like this: “Now I shouldn’t do that. Mother and father don’t want me to do it. If I do, they’ll get angry and maybe punish me somehow and I wouldn’t like that!” Weighing carefully the consequences of our actions through recollection of past discipline teaches a child self-discipline.

Don’t Just Punish - Build Character!

The primary purpose of discipline of a child, then, should be the development of an ordered, organized, self-controlled, self-disciplined person. It appears that so much discipline today is short-sighted. In the minds of all Discipline must never just take the form of authoritative control just to enforce current obedience and ensure submission to rules. If our child disobeys by not taking out the trash, the problem is only about the immediate matter of compliance — When yelling at the child has no effect, the solution is not for the father, in a fit of rage because his favorite television program is interrupter, to storm into the child’s room to threaten and coax until the job is done. This is not true discipline, but rather, it is an undisciplined response to undisciplined living!

To label as “discipline” those acts of enforcement that neither exemplify nor develop self-discipline. It would like labeling as “education” — just the enforced routine memorization of isolated facts without training the mind where to find information,
what to do with facts, and how they relate to **truth**. Genuine discipline is more than picking up a youngster, plopping the child down on the right path, and zapping him or he when wandering off the path. It is **teaching** the responsibility of **choosing** the right path. This is the principle of the Scriptural promise — “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6) — or, as the Living Bible renders it, “Teach a child to choose the right path, and when he is older he will remain upon it.” A child will remain upon the right road because the externally imposed discipline has developed a self-disciplined Christian character. Discipline is so much more than just punishing the child, but rather, it is training him in righteousness. As someone as said, “The woodshed must lead to the tool-shed and the workshop.”

The woodshed speaks of the negative action — “You’ve disobeyed and done wrong. This will help you remember not to do it again!” But the workshop speaks of positive action — “Here’s how you can do it right!”

### Three Essential Elements Of Genuine Self-Discipline

The book of Hebrews discusses two types of discipline — (1) one that was concerned only with the immediate, and (2) one that was concerned with permanent effects. Here’s the verse: “Our fathers disciplined us only a short time, as it seemed proper to them; but He does it for our good, in order that we may share His holy character” (Hebrews 12:10) Williams Translation). A free paraphrase might be, “Our fathers disciplined us for their good — that they might have a peaceful life — but God disciplines us for our own good, that we might become self-discipline as He is.” Three essential elements of genuine discipline are taught there -- (1) Genuine discipline is for the good of the one being disciplined -- (2) genuine discipline has long-term effect -- (3) and genuine discipline results in the disciplinarian’s very character being shared with the one being disciplined. The truth is that if the disciplinarian is not self-disciplined himself and his is not earnestly seeking to instill self-discipline in the one being disciplined -- that is, his main purpose in the discipline is not to build self-discipline -- then none of these three traits will be realizes.

This passage in the book of Hebrews emphasizes both the “afterwards,” and the “later” purposes of discipline “Later on, however, to those who are trained by [discipline], “it yields the fruit of peace witch grows from upright character” (Hebrews 12:11 Williams Translation). Or as the Living Bible paraphrases it, “Afterward we can see the result, a quiet growth in grace and character.” With much of what goes by the name of “discipline” today, there is no “afterwards” -- except perhaps some imaginary results. However, discipline at its highest, and true purpose, is not just momentary, but rather, it is **training** in self-discipline -- and will yield fruit to those who are trained by it.

The rod, symbol of power, authority, and discipline, is important in Scriptural passage on the rearing of children. In fact, may might be surprised to lean that the familiar saying, “Spare the rod and spoil the child” is not in the Bible. The closest equivalent is Solomon’s statement, “He who spares the rod hates his son” (Proverbs 13:24). But a question equally as important as “Do you bear the rod?” -- Meaning, “Does the act of discipline ear the fruit of self-discipline?”
David, writing from the perspective of a shepherd wrote in Psalm 23:4, “Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” The “rod” of Moses and Aaron, symbol of authority over and discipline of as many as three and a half million — [some commentators suggest as many as six million] — later budded, blossomed, and bore almonds. The primary significance of the budding rod was the divine authentication of the Levitical priesthood and, by extension, its typology of the resurrection of Christ, God’s High Priest. But beyond its primary significance, the budding rod provides an apt picture of the rod of discipline and later bears the fruit of a strong Christian character. Can it be that the paddle or hickory switch can take root bud, blossom, and produce fruit?

Only if we, by example, instill self-discipline is it true, Biblical, discipline that will have lasting effect and bear fruit. “Daring to discipline” is not enough --- we must dare both to exemplify and promote self-discipline.

It Takes Self-Discipline To Discipline Properly

What happens if we discipline and there is no self-discipline? Consider the example given at the top of the last page — [the child who failed to take out the trash] — The fathers’ lack of self-discipline shows up in at least three ways (1) He’s not in control of himself. When his yelling is ignored and he has to interrupt his favorite television program, he becomes enraged and storms into the child’s room. When we attempt to discipline while in a rage, we are likely to do more harm than good, because it is obvious to the child that we do not have ourselves in control. Think of the glaring inconsistency being dramatized to the child -- He can help but be thinking something like, “Dad, is trying to control me, but he can’t even control himself!”

Human anger can be a very fragile thing! It actually can be a tremendous force for good, but so easily, be a capacity and potential for evil. Being “human” we must be extremely careful concerning our ability to become angry. Anger, given certain provocations, such as open defiance, can be legitimate, perhaps, even a desirable emotional reaction — as long, as we can be angry and not sin — (Ephesians 4:26, “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”) However, verse 27 continues, showing what uncontrolled anger will achieve: “Neither give place to the devil.”) -- Jesus displayed anger but it was always under control. On the other hand, “rage” is excessive anger uncontrolled, often leading to violence. Jesus never showed rage, and neither should we. I have known of those who became so enraged they seriously abused their children — how unfortunate for children to become victims of parental lack of self-discipline. Thus Scripture warns, “Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

The attempt to discipline when we don’t have ourselves under control can also have the psychological and spiritual effect of provoking our children to wrath. The Amplified Version of Ephesians 6:4 states, “Do not irritate and provoke your children to anger — do not exasperate them to resentment — but rear them (tenderly) in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Like the book of Hebrews, Paul refers to two distinct types of discipline: (1) Marked by lack of self-discipline, “goads to resentment” (the New English
Bible renders it) and (2) Grounded in self-discipline, lovingly, tenderly, controllable
trains with the kind of discipline God uses with His children.

Lack of self-discipline produces (provokers) lack of self-discipline (wrath) in the
child. There are various ways that parents provoke their children. Endless scolding and
constant nagging can cause provocation in a child— even over-correcting, by overly
stringent demands, by refusal to listen to their point of view, by always being negative,
by inflexibility; by refusal to listen to their point of view, by always being negative; by
inflexibility, by refusing to forgive and forget; by never admitting mistakes and seeking
their forgiveness; by demeaning them as person or unnecessarily embarrassing them
before their friends; by failing to manifest the clear distinction between our love for
them and our hatred of their wrong-doing and disobedience.

A lack of self-discipline produces anger and resentment in the child. You cannot
install self-discipline in others by speaking loudly and carrying a big stick. A fiery,
uncontrolled temper -- spanking at the drop of a hat -- does not produce self-discipline
in others!

The Family Is A Training Ground

The family essentially is a training ground for the development of self-discipline.
Parents are responsible for both demonstrating self-discipline before their children and
instilling self-discipline in them. Ideally, each member of the family, including the
parents, is developing his or her own self-discipline and at the same time, whether
consciously or not, serving to enhance self-discipline in others in the family.

Since the family of is God’s intended training for self-discipline, is it any wonder
that Satan is attacking the family with greater intensity today than at any other time in
history? If the home is disrupted and broken or if the family does not fulfill its function,
many people may never develop self-discipline.

The question here is, “What can I do about the need for self-discipline within my
family? How can I, as a parent, instill self-discipline in my child and how can we enhance it in
each other?”

1. Self-Discipline Is Caught

In any corporate situation -- home, church, school, business -- self-discipline is
perhaps best learned by personal example. The authority figure -- whether parent,
pastor, teacher, or executive -- must consistently practice self-discipline, manifesting a
pattern of self-control in action. In those common, ordinary, daily affairs of life when
we’re unaware that we’re being observed, little eyes are watching us. If Dad or Mom
acts and reacts without control week after week, month after month, year after year --
how do you think the children are going to act and react? The best legacy we as parents
can leave to our children is a legacy of godly self-discipline.

The Psalmist had something of this in mind when he wrote, “The lines [boundaries]
are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage” (Psalm 16:6). In a real
sense, learning self-discipline is a matter of establishing boundary lines. It’s a matter of
learning where and how to "draw the line" beyond which we will not go! Stop for a moment and examine your own boundary lines. Note how many of them have been drawn after the manner of those in your parents' lives or drawn over lines actually established by your parents.

In my own case, I remember any number of times I heard my father, early in the morning, get up and pray for several minutes before he had to go off to work. And I cannot forget my mother’s deep concern for each of us children — I can hear her now praying in her room, crying out to God, for us — and praying with us, reading God’s Word to us each morning — and he example of godliness, lived out before us.

Just as positive attitudes have a way of begetting positive attitudes, so good habits of self-discipline tend to beget good habits of self-discipline in children. The truth is illustrated in the legacy Moses received from his parents. Even though Moses was raised in Pharaoh’s court, the brief time his parents had with him was sufficient for him to “catch” by example their self-discipline. Two clauses in Hebrews 11 provide the basis for this conclusion. We are told that by faith Moses’ parents hid their three-month-old baby, “and they were not afraid of the king’s edict” (Hebrews 11:23). Four verses later we are told that by faith Moses, as a young man “left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger.” It seems valid to conclude that the spiritual and emotional self-discipline practiced by the parents begot the same in the son.

The principle of perpetuation works in the negative sense as well. Four times the Scripture reiterates the fact that divine discipline for sins of fathers continues down to the third and fourth generations of children — (Exodus 20:5 & 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9). Remember Abram’s lapse of spiritual and emotional control (Genesis 12:10-20)? And do you recall Isaac’s experience in Gerar (Genesis 26:7-11)? Like father, like son! Isaac also feared, lost control, and did what? Sure enough, he lied about Rebekah, saying she was his sister.

Have you ever found yourself asking such question as, “What’s getting into these kinds today — they’re so wild and unrestrained?” Could it be that they’ve learned their lessons well at home?

2. Self-Discipline Is Wrought

The consistent practice of self-discipline, as essential as it is, is not enough to instill it in children or the members of a corporate unit. After all, the development of self-discipline, like any other form of behavior modification, is not automatic, nor does it come about by a process of osmosis — [a subtle, gradual absorption]. Self-discipline must be carefully wrought, that is, formed, shaped, elaborated with a great deal of conscious effort.

It is unlikely that a child will learn self-discipline if he is never disciplined! The undisciplined life of a parent and his evil sons in story of Eli, the priest, of the Old Testament is a tragedy filled with misery and despair. We do not know a whole lot about Eli, except that he was a good man, a pure man, but weak and indecisive as a father. He must have been at least spiritually, physically, and emotionally, self-
disciplined, because his priestly duties would have required that. But his two sons were undisciplined to the point of blasphemy. They gluttonously and forcibly demanded a portion of sacrificial animals for themselves, and even before the fat was burned as the law required. And they committed fornication at the very door of the Tabernacle.

Eli warned his sons of their shameful practices, but certainly not with the urgency their deeds warranted. The problem was obviously a longstanding one, because they were already grown men. The Scripture calls the two — “worthless, not knowing the Lord” (1 Samuel 3:13 Modern Language Bible). He failed to restrain them. His sons were subsequently killed in battle, and when Eli, an old man of ninety, heard the news, he fell off his seat and died of a broken neck. Had he not died of a broken neck it might well have been a broken heart. What a tragedy it is to see men of God, living self-disciplined lives and faithfully serving God, perhaps the reason being that their children never learn self-discipline — and the reason just may be because they were not properly disciplined.

An 18th century English poet, Alexander Pope, expressed this basic principle this way — “Just as the twig is bent, the tree’s inclined.” If the twig is not bent in the right way by a skilled, self-disciplined hand, it will grow crooked and gnarled. If it is not bent and tended at all, it will grow wild and bear no fruit.

A child psychologist, Dr. Lonnie Carton, writes, “Saying `no’ to children at the right time in the right way can help them to grow, to acquire social responsibility, and to learn self-discipline.” He then specifies three “no’s” that parents should use: (1) the “lifesaving no” — stressing the consequences of dangerous activities; (2) the “challenge no” — stimulating creativity and responsive effort to strive by saying, “It may be too hard for you, but you can try it;” and (3) the “convenience no” — reminding the child that parents and teachers cannot drop everything and put the child’s interest ahead of adult priorities. Daring to say a calm but forceful “No” and enforcing it can help to develop self-discipline in a child. For example, “the convenience no can develop patience and the need to wait!” — [“priority no” might be a better title].

There are some other “no’s” that the believer, desiring to develop self-discipline in his child’s life. The counterpart of the “lifesaving no” would be the “spiritual welfare no” — a forceful negative response to any behavior that would be spiritually damaging to the child or anyone else. For example, Christian parents should have the fortitude to forbid habit that are injurious to the child physical health (such as smoking) — not only is it harmful to their physical health, but also to their Christian testimony!

There could be a “divine no” added, as a negative response to anything forbidden by God in the Scriptures. For example, it would seem to be that parents should take a clear stand on the Scriptural command against believers being unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18) in marriage, business ownership, secret societies, and etc.
We must learn to say “no” to our children as long as they are under our supervision -- Things could have been different for Eli and his sons if he had said, “No!”

3. Self-Discipline Is Taught

It is important that children know why they’re being punished, that they understand the nature and consequences of their wrong-doing, and that they grasp the basic principle involved so in the future they can discipline themselves. Further, it’s important that we take and make opportunities to instruct our children in self-discipline. Remember Solomon’s words, “Train a child in the way he should go and, when he is old, he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6). I’m told that the original Hebrew language of this verse implies -- that the phrase, “the way he should go,” refers, not only the religious teaching of the God’s Word, but also, “according to the child’s own unique characteristics.”

We must be sensitive in making provision for individual differences, in adapting the discipline to the child and situation. As most parents realize, each child is unique, with a different temperament and different needs. These differences must be taken into account both in disciplining children and in seeking to help them develop self-discipline.

For example, we are told that although children with:

1. a choleric temperament — [that is: “hot, quick, active, practical, and strong-willed”] -- usually have a stronger tendency toward self-discipline; each of the major temperaments presents its own unique challenge.

2. The sanguine -- [“warm, buoyant, lively and `enjoying’”] -- will benefit from his optimism and love for people, but will have special problems with disorganization, restlessness, weak will, emotional instability, and egotism. While, the choleric will benefit from his tenacity and practicality, but he will have to control a quick temper and impetuosity.

3. The melancholic -- [“analytical, self-sacrificing, gifted, perfectionist...with a very sensitive, emotional nature”] -- will benefit from his sensitivity and precision, but will need to control moodiness and pessimism.

4. The phlegmatic -- [“calm, cool, slow, easy-going, well-balanced”] -- will be strong in efficiency, dependability, and practicality, but he will have to control his lack of motivation, indecisiveness and stubbornness.

There is a serious danger in pinning neat labels on our self or on other people. Such a practice is usually a popular means of avoiding thinking and the effort of really getting to know a person. It gets us off the hook to say, “Oh, I’m a sanguine (or my son’s a sanguine) so there’s no hope of my becoming (or his becoming) self-disciplined.” -- All of us, regardless of our temperament, require “Spirit control!”

The apostle Paul noted the spiritual self-discipline hat first dwelt in Timothy’s grandmother, Lois, then in his mother, Eunice, and then in young Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5). Surely this reflects the influence of teaching in the development of self-discipline in
children of successive generations. Or, as Dr. Lonnie Carton said, “self-discipline can be inculcated by reasoning on the child’s level of comprehension.”

Someone has well said, “The poorest education that reaches self-control is better than the best that neglects is.” Daniel Webster said, “Educate your children to self-control, to the habit of holding passion and prejudice and even tendencies subject to an upright and reasoning will, and you have done much to abolish misery from their future and crimes from society.”

Even more important is the fact that you will have helped them to become equipped for the Master’s use.

4. Self-Discipline Is Besought

To beech is to ask for something earnestly. When was the last time you asked God to help your child develop self-discipline? Do you make a habit of praying with your children, entreating God to help them correct a problem in the lack of self-control?

It is also important that we follow up our prayers, by putting feet and action to our prayers by seeking self-discipline in our children. This can be done by admonition, by constant encouragement, and by positive reinforcement. We are commanded to bring our children up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). What does “admonish” mean? To admonish is both to caution, reprimand, or reprove mildly and to remind, urge on, or exhort. We all need occasional warnings, and reminders about self-discipline, as well as exhortation and encouragement. So do our children.

When you see your child react in a self-disciplined way, why not express your pleasure — and God’s approval? We need to stress the righteousness of self-discipline through positive reinforcement (encouragement and praise) and to stress the wrongness of unrestraint through negative reinforcement (warning, reprimand, and discipline).

5. Self-Discipline Is Inwrought

It’s essential that we help our children make self-discipline habitual, the norm of their behavior. The kind of lifestyle can be inwrought, that is, worked or woven into the entire fabric or pattern of everyday life by offering practical guidance. Paul told Timothy that the spirit God has given us is, “one to inspire strength, love, and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7 New English Bible). As parents we must help our children develop this spirit that inspires to self-discipline.

The key concept here is practical application of principles already taught. When we consistently practice self-discipline ourselves, we are doing this. When we effectively discipline them, we are doing this. We can do it also when we observe individuals out of control.

For example, when we witness incidents of impatience of those around us, these occurrences can provide opportunities to talk about patience — and the danger of such uncontrolled actions, or reactions, and the need for God’s grace to make us forbearing in trying situations.
Perhaps when children describe actions and reactions that happened at school, there’s an opportunity to ask something like, “How do you think this person involved should have reacted?” What should you have said and done? How do you think the Lord would have wanted you to respond?” The same thing can be done when the family is watching television together or when you are reading a book to your children.

Each of these means of instilling self-discipline — to practice, by discipline, by teaching, by admonition, and by application — ought to be a consistent part of domestic routine. Anything less, will amount to “offering a stone for bread, a snake for fish, a scorpion for an egg” — as Jesus’ parable of parenthood has it (Luke 11:11-13).

If we finite parents can “give good gifts to our children, how much more our infinite heavenly Father offers the best gift” — the Holy Spirit and His power. It’s not enough to give our children merely good gifts, such as food and clothing. We must give them the best gift. Primary among these best gifts is a legacy of spiritual self-discipline. Such a legacy can be realized only through God’s great gift of the Holy Spirit, who controls and disciplines believers and enables them to control and discipline themselves.

Self-Discipline In The Body of Christ

I’m not really a “ballet” type of fellow — even though I do like the soft, swaying music that accompanies it — but I recently read something someone wrote about the climactic scene of the ballet, “Swan Lake,” that illustrates an important concept of our responsibility within the mystical Church that Jesus Christ has established here on earth.

This writer spoke of “The stage being filled with whirling, swirling, twirling movement. Kaleidoscopic patterns form, rotate, and then re-form. Individuals, couples, and small groups gracefully interweave, perfectly synchronized.” Then he states, “Suddenly we realize that we can’t hear any music! And yet there are no collisions, no bumping; not every any stepping on toes! The only explanation would seem to become kind of transcendent order of music, many rhythms, all keys at once, a predestined choreography in which each participant meshes with the others. And all move in graceful coordination to produce a beautiful work of art.”

I couldn’t help but think as I read this that if the church, that is, the universal body of believers, could be “choreographed,” that’s the way it ideally would appear. Believers have been redeemed “out of every tribe and language and people and nation,” according to Revelation 5:9. Each one is unique, with a different temperament, personality, character, and physical attributes. Each has a distinctive outlook, philosophy, and perspective. Yet each shares a common salvation in Christ Jesus.

This common bond of our Christian faith is nowhere so clearly revealed as when we meet the fellow believers — wherever we meet them, across this nation, or around the world — we find opportunity to fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. We may not always understand their language but we can enjoy a communion that goes beyond the language barrier. This is possible because all Christians everywhere are
citizens of heaven, as Paul writes in Philippians 3:20, “For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Harmonious Exercise of Spiritual Gifts Depends On Self-Discipline

God has given every believer in every local congregation diversified abilities, talents, and gifts. When we are self-disciplined enough to use them, the needs of every believer will be met.

I have a study on “The Gifts God Gives” — showing how the three gift chapters of the New Testament present these God-given gifts

- Romans 12:6-8 — the “Motivational Gifts”
- Ephesians 4:11-12 — the “Ministry Gifts,”
- 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 — the “Manifestation Gifts”

— so I will not go into great detail on the “Gifts” at this point in this study.

The human body is an amazing arrangement of many quite different functions. One cannot help but be astonished at the smoothness with which the body articulates a great many functions. There are the major senses of seeing, hearing, speaking, etc., all functioning as a unit in one body. The various organs all work together sharing in a marvelous harmony and yet each one doing something different. That is this characteristic that is so remarkably evident in God’s intention for the Body of Christ. In the human body every organ is a distinct and peculiar thing, having a function different than anything else in the body. You cannot substitute one organ for another. You never heard of a surgeon replacing a defective stomach with a pair of lungs. It cannot be done. Every organ — (our place in the Body of Christ) — must exercise the function that God gives when one becomes a believer in Jesus Christ. Your Ministry Gift is your privileged function within the body of Christ. No one else can do it just as you would. Others may have similar gifts but they cannot do what God has called you to do in the Body of Christ.

In his fantasy novel, “Parelandra,” C.S. Lewis likens the ministry of believers within the Church to “The Great Dance” of the redeemed. He describes it this way . . .

In the plan of the Great Dance, plans without number interlock, and each movement becomes in its season the breaking into flower of the whole design to which all else had been directed. Thus each is equally at the center and none are there by being equals, but some by given place and some by receiving it, the small things by their smallness and the great by their greatness, and all the patterns linked and looped together by the unions of a kneeling with a sceptered love...

There seems to be no plan because it is all plan; there seems to be no center because it is all center...

The Great Dance seemed to be woven out of the intertwining and waving of many cords or beads of light, leaping over and under
one another and mutually embraced in arabesques and flower-like subtleties. Each figure...because the master-figure or focus of the whole spectacle, by means of which his eye disentangled all else and brought it into unity.

The emphasis is on unity and union, on intertwining and interlocking, on linking and looping, on giving and receiving, on plan, design, and pattern. Such graceful movement is possible only if each participant is in sync -- and such synchronization is possible only through the utmost of self-control.

How can each individual be in such harmonious control with no audible music to follow -- also including the blaring, harsh music of this world system screaming? In the answer to that question lies the great mystery and power of the Church -- and the secret of self-discipline -- “Christ in us” (Colossians 1:27). The key to individual self-control is to be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Self-discipline is the key that unlocks the treasure chest of spiritual gifts within the Body of Christ and releases them to function for the benefit of every believer.

We all have heard the saying, “If every member were just like me, what kind of church would my church be?” Permit me to reward it -- “If every member were as self-disciplined (or as undisciplined) as I am, what kind of a church would my church be?” Would the services ever begin on time? Would the songs and sermons be well prepared and effectively presented? Would the outreach to the community be effective and consistent? Would anyone ever be led to Christ? Would believers be built up in the faith? Would the needy be cared for? Would the sick be visited and ministered to? In other words, would the work of God be done if it depended upon the extent of my self-discipline?

Just as self-discipline needs to be instilled in every member of the family, so it needs to be instilled into every member of the family of God. Each of the means of instilling self-discipline in children applies as well to the family of God and specifically to any local body of believers.

It is significant, and well worth our carefully studying the Scriptural requirement for spiritual leadership within the church -- and realize that the effective discipline of one’s own family -- and before that his own self-discipline -- “must be circumspect and temperate and self-controlled,” (1 Timothy 3:2) The spiritual leaders in the church “must lead an orderly, disciplined life...He must rule his own household well, keeping his children under control, with true dignity, commanding their respect in every way and keeping them respectful. For if a man does not know how to rule his own household, how is he to take care of the church of God?” (1 Timothy 3:4-5 Amplified Bible).

One cannot help but notice the order of prerequisites -- self-discipline is essential to family discipline, and effective family discipline (that installs self-discipline in the children) is essential to discipline in the Body of Christ. The health of our homes and
churches depends upon the *self*-discipline of individual believers, particularly of spiritual leaders.

The point is -- lack of self-discipline in an individual life, a home can be lost! And lack of self-discipline in a church, a community can be lost. And all this comes about because of the lack of individual and corporate self-discipline.

In Ephesians 3:21, Paul prayed that there would be “glory in the church,” then, in the next chapter he makes it clear that this “desired glory” results from unity in diversity. He specifies seven unities -- “one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:4-6). Note that we are not commanded to *establish* unity, just to *maintain* it. Unity comes as a matter of course when individual believers manifest humility, gentleness, and loving patience in bearing with one another’s faults (verse 2). Unity is maintained when individual believers are self-disciplined.

The Church Is A Body – Its Members Need Coordination

The most common metaphor used in the Scripture to characterize the church is that of a living body. The body consists of many different parts, each with its own unique function, “There are certainly many limbs and organs, but a single body” (1 Corinthians 12:20 Amplified Bible)

The metaphor is clear -- just as there are feet and hands, ears and eyes and a nose in our physical bodies, so there are different kinds of people with different God has equipped every believer with the various gifts -- *motivational gift*, *ministry gifts*, and *Spirit manifestation gifts* -- to functions within the church and its various ministries.

Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 12:21, “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you,’ neither can the head say to the feet, ‘I have no need you.’ ” Similarly, in the body of Christ, no Christian is unimportant! It cannot be said of anyone, “We don’t need you!” We all need each other -- God intends it so!

Can you think of anything so ridicules as the foot rebelling and saying something like, “Why am I always the one to hit the hard pavement? Look at those lily-white hands up there, just hanging around, dawdling all day and never getting dirty. I think this body ought to do a flip and let those hands do the walking for awhile?” Or can you imagine that one morning one foot insists on going one way while the other foot persists in going another direction?

Or can you imagine an ear rebelling and saying, “I’m not appreciated for what I do, not like those eyes in the favored position in front. All I’m good for is holding the temple of these glasses so those eyes can see. I’d like to let the glasses fall and break, Then maybe I’d be appreciated more around here?”

It all sounds pretty silly, doesn’t it? But is it really any sillier than a member of the body of Christ resenting to fellow believer because he or she may have a more conspicuous position or may receives more attention?
There is a dreaded physical affliction in which individual cells of the body are in undisciplined rebellion, attacking healthy cells. It’s called “cancer” — more commonly known as "carcinoma," — Paul warned Timothy that undisciplined, unholy talk, “will spread like a cancer” (2 Timothy 2:17 Beck Translation).

Jesus said, “A city, or house divided against itself cannot stand” (Matthew 12:25). And, neither can a body at odds within itself survive for very long!

Lack of self-discipline brings discord, and eventually division, in the body of Christ. Sometimes when its lack leads to conflicts, it becomes necessary for the pastor and spiritual leaders to exercise church discipline on the basis of such passages as Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5. Paul spoke of the need to deliver undisciplined members of the church to Satan for the destruction of the flesh in order to prevent further spiritual disorder. Failure to exercise this kind of church discipline today has resulted in the splitting of numerous churches, but the original source of problem is lack of self-discipline.

God has made ample provision for unity and harmonious functioning of every part of the while. “God has so adjusted — (mingled, harmonized and subtly proportioned the parts of the whole) — body, giving the greater honor and richer endowment to the inferior parts which lack — (apparent importance)” 1 Corinthians 12:24 Amplified Bible) This is why Paul commanded, as part of our spiritual/relational discipline, that we “give preference to one another in honor” (Romans 12:10 New American Standard Bible).

Can we honestly say that we give preference — (give them first choice) — to our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus? Do we really esteem others better — (of more account, more important, and superior) — than ourselves, as Paul commands us to do in Romans 12:10? Only when we are fully under God’s control will we “stop looking after our own interests only (and) practice looking out for the interests of others too” (Philippians 2:4 Williams Translation) Do we manifest the mind of self-discipline that puts the needs and interest of fellow believers before our own “rights” and desires?

God’s prescription for a smoothly functioning body appears in each one of the passages that discusses spiritual gifts — Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. The secret lies in each member being under the control of the head, which is Christ. “Under His control all the different parts of the body, fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided “ (Ephesians 4:16). Or as the Weymouth translation renders it, “the body grows by the aid of every contributory ligament.” Just as the human brain controls each part of the physical body, so Jesus as Lord controls each part of the body of believers. Trouble arises when any member refuses the control of the Spirit of Christ.

The natural tendency is to seize control ourselves rather than to let the Spirit control us. Ironically, this is not genuine self-control at all. Our old sinful nature is allied with Satan, so whenever that “self” assumes control, essentially “the god of this world” is in control. The Scripture clearly indicates that there are only two forms of control — we
can walk after the flesh, with Satan in control; or we can walk after the Spirit, with God in control (Romans 7:1. It’s one or the other.

We can walk after the Spirit only by being dilled with the Holy Spirit in obedience to Ephesians 5:18. We wrote of this in chapter 8, “The Discipline of the Whole Man.” This involves mental self-discipline. Paul urges us to “be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Ephesians 4:23). And it involves discipline of the emotions and tongues -- “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor” (Ephesians 4:25).

We are “intimately related to one another in Christ” (Ephesians 4:25 Phillips Translation). God makes a harmony in the body when the members of the body mutually care for one another. Each individual believer’s attention should be directed outward to the needs of others.

In rebuking the Corinthians believers for their undisciplined disorders at the Lord’s Table -- (carnality, drunkenness, division) -- Paul urged them to examine themselves and judge themselves in order to escape divine chastisement. He said, we “partake unworthily if we do not discern the Lord’s body” (1 Corinthians 11:29). While it is true that we must recognize with due appreciation the Lord’s broken body, symbolized by the bread -- Paul’s primary meanings is the necessity to discern, recognize, appreciate, and be concerned about our fellow believers who make up the visible body of Christ. This is a view is supported by the subsequent chapters 12-14 that discuss the Church as “the body of Christ.” And, in the preceding chapter, Paul writes, “We being many, are one bread, and one body” (1 Corinthians 10:17). William Barclay’s translation of the clause in 1 Corinthians 11:29 lends further support to such a reading, “He does not realize that the church is the body of Christ, and therefore a unity with no divisions.”

How does discerning the body relate to corporate self-discipline? Self-discipline goes much further and deeper than recognizing and appreciating our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. The body of Christ must manifest what the physical body does -- the principles of compensation.

Can you imagine if a member of your physical body is hurt, that the other members of your body reacting as some member of the body of Christ react when a fellow believer is hurting or is taken in a fault? Not only would the hurting member of your body resent having to carry more of the load, it might even attempt to hurt the other members, getting in a few good licks when nobody is looking.

Fortunately, our physical bodies don’t operate that way. Whenever one members or organ is hurt or incapacitated, the rest of the body works harder to compensate. Loss of eyesight usually results in a keener sense of hearing. An infection in one part of the body, even if it’s only the little toe, affects the entire system. White blood corpuscles are produced in bone marrow throughout the body to fight the infection.

This principle of compensation should also be true in the spiritual body when a fellow believer’s self-discipline breaks down. Paul wrote, “Brothers, if someone is caught (overtaken) in a sin, you who are spiritual (spiritually self-disciplined), should restore him gently (emotional self-discipline). But watch yourself (mental self-discipline), or you also may be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). How do we react when a
Christian brother or sister makes a false step? An impulsive, undisciplined condemning response should well drive that one farther from self-disciplined living to the point where only severe divine discipline can bring reclamation. On the other hand, a gentle, loving reaction can restore that believer to fellowship and encourage him in his own self-discipline.

**The Church Is A Building – Its Stones Need To Be Built Up**

The unity of self-disciplined believers serving the Lord together is also compared to a well-designed, well-constructed building. Paul wrote, “You are a stricture of God’s design,” (1 Corinthians 3:9 Knox Bible). And He also wrote in Ephesians 2:20, “You are a building which has been reared on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Weymouth Translation).

Each of the persons of the Trinity has a distinct part in this spiritual building. Those who comprise the building are of God’s household. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone. And the Holy Spirit is both the instrument of its construction and the inhabitant of the building (See Ephesians 2:19-22).

The success of any building project depends upon at least four factors:

1. There must be a superlative design, a set of blueprints. This is the work of God the Father, for we are “God’s building.”
2. There must be a strong foundation. God the Son, the founding-stone, provides this requirement. “No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11). The chief cornerstone provides the model to which all the other stones must conform.
3. There must be a building superintendent who chooses the right materials and directs the construction. The Holy Spirit, who, in His sovereignty, calls out a people for His name and draws them to the Cross; performs this function.
4. Essential element in construction is the builders themselves. Have you ever notice that we as believers are both the stones and the builders? Peter says we are like “living stones” rejected by men but chosen by God. Then he admonishes us to let ourselves be used in building the spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). Williams has translated this verse with a strong reflexive mode — “Keep on building yourselves up, in living stones, unto a spiritual house.”

It is God’s plan that individual believers edify other believers and, in turn, be edified by them. To edify means to build up, establish, improve, contribute to the advancement of a person’s spiritual condition, to instruct or enlighten.

The reason I emphasize this Biblical concept here and spend so much time on it is that a major component of edification is self-discipline, both of the edifier and of the one being edified. Have you ever noticed that almost every time edification is mentioned in the Scripture it’s associated with self-discipline? Paul says that spiritual gifts are given explicitly “for the edifying the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12)/ In fact, all things are to “be done for the purpose of edifying,” Paul says twice — (1 Corinthians 14:26 and 2 Corinthians 12:19). In other words, a criterion for determining our behavior is,
“Will it build up my brothers and sisters in Christ? Will this act hinder rather than help fellow believers?”

If we are spiritually self-disciplined, we will graciously curb what we might be inclined to do or say if the act or remark might damage another “living stone.” We should gladly conform to certain disciplines rather than hinder our brother’s spiritual welfare. For example, if a brother or sister, who may have strong convictions against certain things — and our indulgence would cause him or her “who is weak in faith” to “stumble” — we should exercise self-discipline in forgoing what we feel we have “liberty” in doing. We should be willing to abstain from any activities that would offend or hinder our brother of sister in the Lord.

You say, “That’s pretty hard teaching. Where do you find that in the Bible?”

Romans 15:1-2, “We who are strong ought to bear t=with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor, for his good, to build him up.” Here is where individual self-discipline can lead to corporate self-discipline. This is a please for Christian patience, and attribute self-discipline. We are to be “forbearing” — (rather than the bears we so often seem to be) — We are to “bear with the weaknesses of our brothers and sisters,” not insisting on having our own ways. The strong, self-disciplined believer retains his spiritual liberty in Christ (“all things are lawful for me”), though he does not do everything he may have a “right” to do (“all things edify not”). A believer who insists on doing everything he feels he is at liberty to do, not only lacks self-discipline, but also he is unlike Christ, who did not please Himself (Romans 15:3). And in living to please himself, such a person does not build up fellow believers and encourage them in self-discipline.

A disciplined tongue, for example, will speak positive words of encouragement, building up rather than tearing down. Ephesians 4:29 tells us, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building other up according to their needs.” The key word in this verse translated “corrupt communication” in the King James Version is very forceful, carrying the image of a rotten, putrid fish. Have you ever walked along a beautiful lake or river and come across dead fish that someone has left? It’s hard to imagine a more unpleasant smell. God says that’s what our undisciplined, unwholesome talk is like.

But when our tongues are self-disciplined and our speech is sprinkled with the salt of grace (Colossians 4:6), we build others up by “ministering grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29). In his farewell address to the Ephesians elders, Paul commanded them “to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up” (Acts 20:29). If we are self-disciplined, we will speak words of grace. Gracious words will minister grace to those who hear. Grace ministered to others builds them up. And to be built up means, among other things, becoming more self-disciplined.

Grace, that divinely imparted ability to transform unpleasing circumstances into pleasing one, is both a cause and an effect of self-discipline that, in turn, produces more self-discipline. The self-disciplined living of a few individuals can spread to others in a
local assembly. Which of us has not been encouraged and strengthened in our self-disciplined living by fellowship with other believers? We need one another!

Perhaps praying together, studying God’s Word together, and sharing concerns with other Christians will build us up -- by edifying and inspiring us -- but also, perhaps, by “rubbing off some of our rough edges.” Whenever you get two “living stones” -- or four, six, eight, or more -- close together, the rough edges begin to show up. We all have them. Rough edges like self-centeredness, egotism, covetousness, greed, envy, sloth, a critical attitude, cynicism, a sharp tongue, and others. Can you imagine trying to build a smooth, straight, level building with rough, uneven, jagged stones? That’s what God has to work with -- you and me. But He isn’t finished with us yet! He’s putting us with other stones so those rough edges can be rubbed smooth. Or maybe they have to be chiseled into shape. The chiseling and abrasion aren’t pleasant, but they are necessary.

Have you ever wondered why that surly neighbor has to live on your street? Maybe you have some rough edges God wants removed so you’ll be a smooth stone for His building. Have you wondered why you have to work with that unpleasant person who is so insensitive and thoughtless in his remarks? Maybe God is using that trying situation to smooth some rough edges on your character. Does someone at church you always seem to clash with bother you? Let the grace of God smooth out those rough edges and, with the mortar of His love, fashion you as a part of His glorious building.

But the smoothing of rough edges must come as part of the process of loving acceptance and fellowship, not from our selecting a stone-in-the-rough and resolving to smooth it out to conform to our image of what the person should be like. Such efforts, sincere though they may be, are ordinarily misguided manifestations of our own lack of self-discipline, itself perhaps one of our rough edges. Be wary of setting out to change someone else! You might get changed yourself!

Sometimes we edify and enhance the self-discipline of individuals we may think we have little or no effect upon. Similarly, we are sometimes edified by and learn lessons from the least likely individuals. Most of the people who have influenced my Christian growth haven’t been flashy, sophisticated ones in the limelight. Rather, they’ve mostly been simple people, many of them you might consider shy and retiring. But they had it all together for the Lord and were faithfully serving Him. No flashing lights, no fanfare, no applause, from the crowd. But God doesn’t require those things. You don’t even necessarily need a mortarboard to build up the temple of the Lord.

The Church Is A Bride – She Needs To Be Adorned For The Bridegroom

Every true believer from Pentecost to the first resurrection comprises the bride of Christ. The preparation and adornment of the bride for the Bridegroom demands the utmost in individual and corporate self-discipline.

The Eastern pattern of marriage in Bible times involved three separate stages of the wedding. The Scripture speaks of all three, draws analogies with the Christian life, and suggests implications about self-discipline.

1. There was the espousal or betrothal, a legally binding mutual commitment
In the spiritual realm, when we are converted, we are espoused to Christ. The teaching of 2 Corinthians 11:2 is, “I promised you to one husband, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him (Christ).” The emphasis here is on chastity. The bride presented to Christ must be pure and without blemish.

The applicability of self-discipline should be obvious: component parts of the bride should help each other discipline themselves unto godliness. For too long we’ve assumed godly living to be simply an individual matter; you live your life as you will, and I’ll live mine. That’s the way of the world. But it’s not the intended way of life in the body, the building, and the bride of Christ.

John Donne, the 17th century English poet, expressed this interrelation in one of his meditations from “Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions,” -- “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory wee, as well as if a manor of they friend’s or of thine own were; any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls: it tolls for thee.” We might well paraphrase these words as follows: “Any brother’s defeat, any sister’s fall, diminishes me, because I am involved in the bride of Christ.”

The effect of this involvement was borne out in a prayer group when one man told how he was sorely tempted in a certain way. Each member of the group sincerely bearing the man’s concern, interceded on his behalf. God used this devotion and encouragement to give the man glorious victory over the besetting temptation.

Another emphasis in our spiritual betrothal to Christ is subjection. Ephesians 5, says that wives are to be submissive to their husbands just as the church is submissive to Christ. Again the relation to corporate self-discipline should be obvious. The church as a whole is submissive to Christ only as individual members are. And this submission of individuals to Christ entails, as Paul says earlier in the same chapter, “submitting ourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21). We willingly yield our rights in love. And that requires some self-discipline.

2. A second stage of the Eastern wedding was the coming of the bridegroom, attended by friends and musicians, to the bride’s house.

The bridegroom would there receive her from her parents and take her to his own house. The spiritual parallel is the return of Christ to earth to rapture the church, His bride.

The apostle John describes this glorious event as he saw it in his Island of Patmos vision -- “The wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7). Note the bride’s meticulous preparation of adornment. And note that the bride is preparing herself. The bride, John says further, was given in fine radiant linen -- bright and while (verse 8).

Psalm 45, a beautiful bridal song, describes her. She is glorious! Her clothing is interwoven with gold. Wearing raiment of needlework, she is brought unto the king.
The wrought gold, beautiful ornamental work resulting from the hammer and tremendous heat, perhaps suggests the discipline of adversity and suffering. The garment of fine needlework may well represent a life of devoted service. But it’s John who tells us what the bride’s exquisite garment symbolizes; “The fine linen is (signifies, represents) the righteousness — the upright, just and godly living (deeds, conduct) and right standing with God — of the saints” (Revelation 19:8 Amplified Bible).

It’s our responsibility as part of the bride of Christ to prepare for the Bridegroom’s return not only by hastening that day through our evangelistic efforts but also by encouraging each other in disciplined, godly living. That’s our bridal adornment. There’s nothing that motivates disciplined, godly living like a reminder of the Lord’s imminent return. That’s what John says in 1 John 3:3, “Everyone who has his hope before him purifies himself, as Christ is pure.” By keeping this hope before us, reminding each other of the Lord’s soon return, we can enhance the corporate self-discipline of the bride. By so doing, we can be obedient to the command to “watch and be sober-minded” (1 Thessalonians 5:6), or as the Twentieth Century New Testament renders this verse, “be watchful and self-controlled.” The tragic results of being unprepared, of failing to watch and be self-disciplined, are clearly shown in the Parable of the Five Foolish Virgins (Matthew 25).

When was the last time we “comforted” a brother or sister with a reminder that Jesus could return soon? -- The word translated as “comforted” in our Bibles means, “to strengthen much.” In 1 Thessalonians 4:18 we are commanded to comfort each other in this meander. When did we last encourage another and build another up with the promise of Christ’s return? We are commanded, “Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another” in the light of the Lord’s return (1 Thessalonians 5:11). This form of exhortation can generate corporate self-discipline as perhaps nothing else can.

3. The third stage of the Eastern marriage is found in Revelation 19 – the wedding feast

After the bridegroom, bride, and accompanying friends and musicians returned to the bridegroom’s house, other friends joined the joyful festivities. “They are led in with joy and gladness; they enter the palace of the king” (Psalm 45:15). The eating and merrymaking usually continued for a week or more. The spiritual parallel is Christ’s return to the earth with His bride to establish His thousand-year reign on earth.

Further implications for self-discipline lie in the fourfold charge to the bride as recorded in Psalm 45, “Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear; Forget you people and your father’s house” (verse 10). There really are two things we who make up the bride of Christ are to do. We are to focus our whole beings upon the Bridegroom, and we are to forget the old fleshly, self-centered life.

This same twofold, positive-negative practice is reflected in Paul’s admonition, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:2). This high ideal is possible to achieve only if we have died to the world and have a new life in Christ (verse 3). We can help each other set our minds on Christ -- and keep them set on Him.
Sometimes just a word -- especially if it’s God’s Word -- will help someone refocus his or her mind on Christ. It might be a single word like “Maranatha,” -- “The Lord is coming.” Or it might be a pat on the back and an assurance such as, “God love you, and I love you.”

The “good word” reinforcement of self-discipline might be an appropriate promise from Scripture we share with a brother or sister. One verse that has helped me a great deal, especially in my frustrating efforts at self-discipline is -- “The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5). The promise has really two applications. Not only is it referring to Christ’s return; it also means that He is every present, readily available, easily accessible whenever we need Him. And is there every a time when we do not need Him?

Without Him, or lives are undisciplined and out of control. Without the head, the body is simply an uncoordinated bag of bones. Without the chief cornerstone, the building is simply an shapeless pile of stones. Without the Bridegroom, the bride is simply an incomplete entity, without fulfillment or even a reason for existence. But because the Lord is at hand, or moderation, or forbearance, our sweet reasonableness, our self-discipline can be known unto and among everyone.

The Lord is at hand to help you because more self-disciplined spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically, verbally, and in terms of time management. Why not begin, with God’s help, your own project for achieving self-discipline? Start with a prayer of commitment, yielding control to the Spirit of God in obedience to Ephesians 5:18. Renew the commitment each day. Keep a daily journal of your transactions and progress.

There’s nothing quite like the testimony of the lives of believers who have it all together, who are firmly in the driver’s seat, who are individually and corporately self-disciplined. Your life and mind can be such a one, for “God is the Energizer within you, so as to will and to work for His delight” (Philippians 2:13).