

church of Christ at Greenwood

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Discipline

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“He that would be superior to external influences must first become superior to his own passions” (Samuel Johnson).

LIFE PRESENTS US WITH NO GREATER CHALLENGE THAN WHEN IT ASKS US TO DISCIPLINE OURSELVES. There aren't many good things that can be accomplished without self-mastery, but this kind of discipline is as difficult as it is important. To learn to discipline ourselves effectively, we must usually pass through a painful apprenticeship. Most of us will fail many times before we master the ability to channel our talents in a consistently good direction.

Too often, we spend our training energies learning nothing more than how to do what we want to do. Having learned that, we then insist on the right to do whatever we want. But as Aristotle pointed out, “What it lies in our power to do, it lies in our power not to do.” The highest form of discipline is the ability to refrain from doing what we MIGHT do in order to achieve goals consistent with what we OUGHT to do. Just because a thing can be done, that doesn't mean it should be done. Knowing the difference, discipline can subordinate a lesser impulse to a higher principle.

Things like self-esteem and self-respect are high priorities with many people nowadays. It's ironic, then, that self-discipline is not valued any more than it is. Folks who have been down the road far enough to know what works in life and what doesn't report that we won't like ourselves if we don't discipline ourselves. As Abraham Joshua Heschel said, “Self-respect is the fruit of discipline; the sense of dignity grows with the ability to say no to oneself.”

So the ability to govern ourselves is critical. But as we've said, it is difficult. Since it comes from growth and training, it's not a skill that can be learned overnight. We need to get in the game and start learning discipline, while also being patient with ourselves.

The main thing is to COMMIT to whatever our primary priorities are. This sounds simple, but there aren't many people who have actually done it. The old saying may sound trite, but it's true: “We can have anything we want, but not everything we want.” Some choices have to be made; some things have to be given up. So, my friend, don't let your life be marred by lower priorities that you're too weak to let go of.

“Discipline is remembering what you want” (David Campbell).

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9.24-27)