

LEAD! C.1 Desire and Discipline

In Which Our Desire For God's Name Inspires Us to Submit To His Discipline

In [Part A](#) of this class we began by studying the theological foundations of Christianity, with a focus on what it means to be [baptized](#) into the "[name](#)" of the [Father](#), [Son](#), and [Holy Spirit](#). In [Part B](#) we explored what it looks like to appropriate that "name" -- [God's character](#) -- through the pursuit of [wisdom](#), as contrasted with the [simple](#), [mockers](#), and [fools](#). For [Part C](#), our final module, we will be focusing on [Skills for Servant Leaders](#) -- the spiritual disciplines necessary to cultivate those virtues in our lives without falling into [pride](#) or [will-worship](#).

Our primary text will be [Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth](#) by [Richard Foster](#), which you are encouraged to supplement with one of the other books listed below. In addition, you are encouraged to actively practice the disciplines as we work through these studies, using tools like the memory verse (below).

However, it is essential to remember that the disciplines are only effective if they are not ends in themselves, but means to our greatest desire, which is Christ Himself...

Memory Verse: *"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* -- [Hebrews 12:1-2](#) (NKJV)

Assigned Reading

1. [Richard Foster: *Celebration of Discipline*](#)
 - Introduction
 - 1. The Spiritual Disciplines: Door to Liberation
2. [Donald Whitney: *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*](#)
 - Introduction
 - 1. The Spiritual Disciplines... for the Purpose of Godliness
3. [Eugene Peterson: *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*](#)
 - Preface
 - 1. Discipleship: "What Makes You Think You Can Race Against Horses?"
4. [Ruth Haley Barton: *Sacred Rhythms*](#)
 - Introduction
 - 1. Longing for More: An Invitation to Spiritual Transformation

Expanded

Anecdote

Read [1 Corinthians 9](#). Why does Paul discipline himself? Is it for the sake of the Law?

Bible

Hebrews 12

Chapter 12 begins where our study on faith leaves off, as faith turns into works:

12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

The Bible is abundantly clear that both salvation (cf. Ephesians 2:8) and sanctification (cf. Galatians 3:3) are due to **God's** work of grace -- appropriated by faith through His Spirit -- **not** a result of our own efforts. At the same, that does *not* mean nothing is required of us. This opening verse helpfully identifies two of our primary tasks:

1. Laying aside sin and distractions
2. Persevering in the pursuit of whatever God has called us to do

Importantly, we must not (and frankly, can not) do these on our own strength, or out of a sense of fear and obligation. [C.1] Instead, these must be done in and through the love of Jesus:

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus is our inspiration, our empowerment, and our assurance. Like Him, we must fix our eyes on the joy that awaits in order to successfully endure the cup set before us (cf. Luke 22:42) -- because there is much to endure:

3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

It is essential to focus on Jesus and remember the example of those who have gone before if we are to have the strength and courage to fight against sin -- to the death, if necessary [C.2]:

4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

Alas, the audience of the Hebrews had forgotten the price of being sons of God (cf. Proverbs 3:11, 12) [*note: women are considered "sons" of God just as much as men are brides of Christ*]:

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

This is a pretty strong picture of "discipline" (another word for "chasten"). While our

primary focus this module is on what might be called self-discipline, it is helpful to first understand how -- and why -- God disciplines us:

⁷If you endure chastening, God [deals](#) with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a [father](#) does not chasten? ⁸But if you are without chastening, of which all have become [partakers](#), then you are [illegitimate](#) and not sons.

Amazingly, the writer inverts our usual understanding of God. We tend to think God is angry and punishing us when we are disciplined, and pleased with us when He leaves us alone. Hebrews is claiming that is precisely backwards: God's stern chastening is actually a sign of His fatherly love -- His deep desire to shape His children into His "name" -- and those left to blissfully follow their own sinful inclinations are the ones most to be pitied. [C.3]

Perhaps part of the problem is that Western culture no longer has much appreciation for fatherly discipline:

⁹Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected [us], and we paid [them] [respect](#). Shall we not much more readily be in [subjection](#) to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they indeed for a few days chastened [us] as seemed [best] to them, but He for [our] [profit](#), that [we] may be [partakers](#) of His [holiness](#).

Either because our fathers failed to discipline us, or disciplined us unwisely, too many of us never really learned to respect paternal authority, making it that much harder to subject ourselves to God's perfect discipline. [C.4]

Of course, it was never easy, even back then -- but it was always worth it:

¹¹Now no chastening seems to be [joyful](#) for the present, but [painful](#); nevertheless, afterward it yields the [peaceable fruit](#) of [righteousness](#) to those who have been [trained](#) by it.

Once we understand that discipline is necessary to train our bodies to run the race before us, we can begin the path of self-discipline:

¹²Therefore [strengthen](#) the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, ¹³and [make](#) straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be [dislocated], but rather be [healed](#).

Which encompasses both our external relationships as well as our inward [character](#):

¹⁴Pursue peace with all [people], and holiness, without which no one will [see](#) the Lord:

For if we neglect those disciplines, we will be unable to see Jesus and enjoy His grace, and will instead make ourselves vulnerable to bitterness...

¹⁵looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

...and folly...

¹⁶lest there [be] any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

... to our everlasting regret:

¹⁷For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

[C.5]

To drive this point home, the writer contrasts the grandeur and terror of Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 19):

¹⁸For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, ¹⁹and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard [it] begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. ²⁰(For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." ²¹And so terrifying was the sight [that] Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.")

with the even more glorious -- and far more welcoming -- Mount Zion (cf. Revelations 21):

²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, ²³to the general assembly and church of the firstborn [who are] registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than [that of] Abel.

Yet though the terms of the new covenant are infinitely more generous, it is even more necessary to abide by them:

²⁵See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more [shall we not escape] if we turn away from Him who [speaks] from heaven,

Because a heavenly gift has a heavenly cost:

²⁶whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven."

And only if we tie ourselves to the eternal "name" of God can we endure:

²⁷Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

However, though we must serve God in all humility and awe, even this can only be done by His grace:

²⁸Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

These then are the tensions we must live with as we pursue spiritual discipline:

- strenuous endurance vs. utter reliance on God
- already made perfect vs. a race yet to be run
- God as Father vs. God as Judge
- future joy vs. present suffering

[C.6] For though Jesus has already paid the full price for our sin, yet there is a price we must pay to manifest God's glory here on earth (cf. Colossians 1:24). Because God will not rest until His "name" is revealed in us -- even if He has to destroy everything that gets in His way:

²⁹For our God [is] a consuming fire.

The question is, will we -- can we -- endure the discipline of submitting ourselves to that fire?

Conversation

1. Do God's commands still sometimes create fear or shame in you? When and why?
2. Share a time your struggle against sin proved costly. Did you give in? Why or why not?
3. When has God chastened you? What did you learn from it?
4. How has your relationship with your earthly father impacted your emotional picture of God?
5. Has bitterness ever impacted your walk with God? How?
6. Which of the tensions listed above is hardest for you to maintain?

Decision

- Repentance: What "roots" does God's consuming fire need to burn away in your life?

- **Action:** Where do you need to build endurance for the "race set before you"?
- **Worship:** Tell God how it feels to approach Him on Mount Zion, instead of Sinai.

Explore More

- [discipline – International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)
- [Hebrews 12: Running the Race with Endurance \(Part 1\)](#)
- [Faith Works | Justification Salvation | Grace Law | Righteousness | Saints Paul & James | Abraham –Welcome to The Crossroads Initiative](#)
- [YouTube – STAY STRONG NEWSBOYS...](#)

For Next Week

For next week, read [1 Timothy 4](#). How does Paul tell Timothy to pursue godliness?

Memory Verse: "Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" -- [1 Timothy 4:15-16](#)

References

1. **Blue Letter Bible.** "[Hebrews 12](#) – New King James Version." Blue Letter Bible. 1996–2009. 22 Mar 2009. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?t=NKJV&b=Hbr&c=12> >
2. **[New King James Version](#)** (NKJV) Copyright © 1982 by [Thomas Nelson, Inc.](#)

