

Self-Discipline

ILLUS – When I was a kid, I would have thought that it would have been really cool if, when I got home from school, my mother said something like: “Son, I’m giving you two choices. Pick one. You can either do your homework, clean your bedroom, mow the lawn, and weed the garden. Or you can have a nice big piece of chocolate cake, and then go out to play.

What would you have chosen?

I reckon most of us would go for the chocolate cake and playtime any day.

Because there’s one thing that is very rare in any child.

Most people avoid it, most people need more of it, most people don’t have a lot of it.

The lack of this quality is why so many fail to achieve their goals in life and don’t fulfil their life’s potential.

What is it that is so rare, and yet so necessary?

Personal self-discipline.

Gal 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control...

Self-discipline is all about self-control.

Discipline is necessary for:

1. Study

ILLUS – Take music as an example of study. Wouldn’t it be great if when you practised all your scales, all your friends gathered round and said, “Whoa, that is really cool, man. Play that again.”?

Then you’d be really motivated to do it.

But nobody says that when you play scales, so learning an instrument is hard work.

This is true for any area of study.

That’s why discipline is essential.

2. Finances

Shops bank (literally) on people’s lack of self-control.

ILLUS – You’re walking through the shopping centre, minding your own business, and you see the absolute best outfit in a shop window. You have this conversation going on inside your head: “I’ve got to pay the electricity bill.” “But it looks pretty amazing.” “Nah, the electricity is more important.” “But just take a little look.” So you go inside and you hear a voice, “May I help you with anything?” Here’s a question: What is the job of the person who asked you that? To sell you something. “It’s okay,” you say. “I was just looking at that outfit in the window.” (That’s right, you were just looking. But that’s how Eve lost it too. She was just looking.) “You’d look great in that!” says the shop assistant. And before you know it, you’re trying it on. Five minutes later, you’re walking out the door with it.

Self-discipline.

Apparently, only 8% of Australians ever achieve financial independence. And yet, in Australia, that’s a goal that the majority of people could easily reach.

But the Australian philosophy is: “She’ll be right.”

But the state of our finances has often got a lot to do with self-discipline.

3. Health & Fitness

ILLUS – I would love to be able to tell you that every morning when my alarm goes off, I say, “Ah, another beautiful new day. Good morning, my sweet. It’s time for our morning bliss – our exercise.” Reality: The alarm goes off. “Stupid alarm. Who keeps setting that thing?” “You do.” “You ready for our exercise?” “If I have to.”

It’s hard work, and I’d rather sleep another ½ hour or so.

But you can’t maintain good health and fitness without good personal discipline.

You’ve got to exercise regularly, and watch your diet.

That’s not easy to do – unless you’re self-discipline.

4. Personal Relationships

ILLUS – Golfer Greg Norman was interviewed on TV about the breakdown of his 27-year marriage. The problem? Neglect.

Good marriages don’t just happen.

And good children don’t just fall out of the sky.

ILLUS – 150 years ago, an evangelist thought it was okay to be away from his family 90% of the time because he was doing the Lord’s work. But his two sons became two of America’s most notorious criminals – Frank and Jessie James.

Marriages and families, in fact, all relationships take time and effort.

5. Spiritual Growth

Here are some of the things that make Christians grow: Active service in the church, authentic worship, evangelism, prayer, giving, commitment to God’s Word, regular fellowship.

There’s a reason these activities are referred to as Christian disciplines.

For every Christian to grow, all of these activities require personal discipline, or they just fall by the wayside.

Anything worthwhile requires self-discipline.

Characteristics of disciplined people

1. Organised

They discipline themselves to work within necessary time constraints.

They are tidy – within reason.

Prov 14:4 Where no oxen are, the trough is clean; but much increase comes by the strength of an ox.

In other words, it’s easy to keep everything clean and tidy if you don’t do anything.

A certain amount of mess is inevitable – it’s proof that you’re still alive.

But if you’re constantly searching for your tools, documents, dress, bills, letters, keys, cash, wallet, phone, isn’t that a problem?

A disciplined person usually knows where to find things.

Of course, if you put things back in the same place each time, it’ll be less of a problem.

2. A planner

Having no plan is a plan to fail.

Peter Daniels: If you want something tomorrow, you must plan something today.

Pr 21:5 The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty...

A person who plans is punctual.

They get to appointments on time, they pay bills on time.

They don't constantly forget things

They may have the occasional lapse of memory, but it's not the norm.

If you have a problem in this area, the remedy is simple: write it down immediately.

3. An achiever

ILLUS – I remember when I was teaching piano, I listened to one little kid, and he was bad. We're talking primary school here, so it's not exactly Mozart. I said, "You been practising?" "Yeah," he replied with wide-eyed innocence. "Are you sure?" I asked. "Yeah." "How much practice have you been doing?" "I've played this song three times every day." "Really. Okay, play it for me." And I timed the song. When he'd finished, I said, "You played this three times every day, and that's all your practice?" "Yes." "Do you know how long this song is?" "No." "Thirty-five seconds." "Three times through means you practised 1 min and 45 seconds a day. Do you really think you're going to get better with 1 min and 45 seconds practice a day?"

Pr 22:29 Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before unknown men.

The foundation of excellence is self-discipline.

If you want to achieve anything in any area of life, it takes self-discipline.

It's something I didn't have when I was at school, and the main reason I dropped out.

I've known numerous people over the years who had to return to study because they didn't put the effort in the first time round due to a lack of self-discipline.

Achievers also achieve because they meet deadlines.

They pace themselves by doing consistent work and not leaving it all to the last minute.

ILLUS – Some people are nice and relaxed, having a good time, then suddenly: "Aaagh! I've got to have this report in by tomorrow morning." "When did you find out about it?" you ask. "Two months ago."

Everything is urgent because they don't work on things till the situation is desperate.

Ask yourself: Do I get things done when I'm supposed to? Or am I constantly late handing in reports, submitting assignments, returning library books, lodging tax returns.

How often do you have to plead for an extension? Or make excuses?

Disciplined people fulfil their commitments when and how they promise.

They aren't habitually double-booked.

They don't break promises to family due to the fact that they forgot about some other important appointment.

Mat 5:37 But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No." For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

That's a very strong statement.

Jesus was saying, "You want to know what's of the devil? Saying you'll do something and not doing it. That's of the devil."

There's a saying: Say what you mean, and mean what you say.

Follow through.

4. Balanced

Balance is important.

Being balanced means knowing when to stop.

Musicians, artists, actors, businesspeople, sportspeople – so many have lost so much due to a lack of discipline.

They didn't know when to stop.

But there's more to life than making money, playing music, or involvement in sport.

Relationships are always more important.

If a person takes any area of life and concentrates on it to the point where other areas are neglected, that's not discipline – it's imbalance.

Balance means maintaining an even workload.

It means taking time to relax.

Even God rested from all His works on the seventh day as a pattern for us.

Jesus took His disciples aside to rest. (Mark 6:31)

You'll always be able to think of something else to do, but you need to take time to rest.

5. They prioritise

This means putting things in order of importance.

If it doesn't need to be done before you leave home, don't try to cram it in.

Make sure that if you have a deadline for something – handing in an assignment, paying a bill, leaving home by a certain time – that you focus on the things that need to be done in order to fulfil your responsibility.

Then you can look at doing other things.

6. Singleness of mind

By that, I mean a sense of purpose, a vision, something that drives you on.

This aspect of self-discipline gives a person the ability to set goals and stick to them till they've achieved their aim.

They don't jump constantly from one thing to another.

They finish the things they start.

They do unpleasant tasks when they need doing.

They are not procrastinators.

They don't put things off as long as possible, sometimes never getting them done at all.

ILLUS – Most kids have certain foods that they don't like. Dinner's just been served, and little Johnny is staring at that plate thinking: "Aw, not Brussels sprouts again. I hate Brussels sprouts." A lot of kids leave the part they don't like till last, and hope they'll get away with not eating it. But parents are really smart. "If you don't eat your Brussels sprouts, you don't get dessert." "What's for dessert?" "Chocolate mud cake, and it's got triple-choc ice-cream, and chocolate topping, and the chocolate has been genetically modified for extra chocolate flavour." "Alright, alright, I'll eat the Brussels sprouts." If they are smart, a child soon works out that the best way is to eat the things you don't like first. The rest comes easy. There's always enough room for dessert.

It's not easy maintaining your motivation when all you've got left to do is the unpleasant stuff.

Get unpleasant tasks done early.

When I was teaching music, I used to tell kids to do their music practice in the morning.

Here's the challenge: Be a disciplined person.

Ask the Holy Spirit for help and He will help you.