

NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE 5

Spiritual Discipline: How We Cross the Bridge

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." – 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

"As a boy growing up in Cincinnati, Ohio, my scariest moment happened when a fierce tornado ripped through our little suburban neighborhood... The wind howled and the rain poured down... The rain was so heavy it caused flooding in the streets everywhere. It was the worst natural disaster that little town had seen in decades.

Over the next week, rescue workers were everywhere attempting to restore what had been demolished. One particular scene sticks in my memory. It was a building that had caved in, and desperately needed repair. However, the rain had flooded the property – making it impossible for workers to get to it on foot. Interestingly, they built a bridge to the damaged building in order to repair it. I remember seeing scores of little bridges in these disaster areas. The bridges enabled the workers to get from where they were to where they wanted to go, and fix the damage.

...Discipline is like those bridges that help me get to where I need to go. In order to repair the damage, I need to build a bridge of discipline to get me there... Here's what I know about the discipline bridge: it takes time and effort to build it, but once this bridge is in place, it actually makes the journey easy. I can get back and forth with ease."¹

If you were told to leave campus today and run a marathon, how would you do? Would you finish or would you pass out? It is common knowledge that a person cannot simply "try" to run a marathon and expect great results. He must train diligently over an extended period of time. Simply trying will not suffice. It is similar in the Christian life. As the apostle Paul states, we are called to run the race that Christ has set before us – and not only run it, but win it. The Christian life is no 5k race; it is a marathon and those who diligently train run well and finish strong.

We are all destined for great things in God, but we have to be willing to enter into a life of training verses trying. There is a difference. John Ortberg states, "Trying hard can accomplish only so much. If you are serious about seizing the chance of a lifetime, you will have to enter into a life of training. You must arrange your life around certain practices that will enable you to do what you cannot do now by willpower alone...spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder, but of training wisely."²

So what does wise training look like for a Christian? It is not a matter of "running aimlessly or boxing in thin air," as Paul puts it. Wise training requires knowing the race that lies ahead of you and what it will take to complete

Pre-Article Questions:

1. What area of your life would you say you are most disciplined in, for example: academics, exercise, athletics, hobbies, personal hygiene, maintaining relationships, spiritual routines, etc.. What motivated you to stay disciplined in this area?
2. What area of your life do you feel you could benefit from more discipline in and why?

1. Elmore, Tim. *Habitudes: Images That Form Leadership Habits & Attitudes*. Georgia: Growing Leaders Inc, 2004. 41.

2. Ortberg, John. *The Life You've Always Wanted*. Michigan: Zondervan, 1997. 46-47.

the course. Our race requires spiritual training, diligence, and discipline. We must be willing to intentionally practice the spiritual disciplines in order to keep our goal and our prize, Jesus Christ, in focus, and so that others who witness us in the arena of life will long to run with us. The spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, giving, and celebration are not meant to discourage us or bog us down. They are meant to empower and liberate us, making our race a steady one and our finish assured. These disciplines are a bridge that once in place, helps us to obtain our full potential in Christ our Lord.

In the midst of our course, the Holy Spirit acts as our personal trainer. Once we commit our lives to Jesus Christ, we receive a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). The Spirit of God living in us gives us His power, love, and self-discipline, making it possible for us to will and to do the things we cannot accomplish in our own strength. The race is not impossible when the Holy Spirit is running beside us, helping, comforting and guiding us along the way.

Don't dread the discipline it takes to run the race marked out for you. Stay focused, for our prize is worth it. As Paul states, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1). Throw off the things that are hindering your walk with God and make the decision today to run with resolve and train wisely for the race. "Do you see yourself as someone who is running the spiritual Olympic event of his or her life? Or are you simply 'jogging for Jesus?' If you're serious about fulfilling God's plan for your life, it's time to shift into high gear and to start putting all your spiritual, mental, and physical energies into getting the job done. You have to remove all distractions and commit yourself to a life of discipline, balance, and devotion." ³

Scripture Questions:

1. Before reading this, what has been your understanding of discipline in context of your relationship with God?
2. Read and discuss any observations you may have about 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and Hebrews 12:1. What is the prize we are running the race of life for? How are we to obtain the prize?
3. "Discipline: Any activity I can do by direct effort that will help me to do what I cannot now do by direct effort... Spiritual discipline: Any activity that can help me gain power to live life as Jesus taught and modeled it," (Ortberg, 51,52). Read and discuss these verses on the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and solitude. Matthew 6:5-18, Mark 2:18-20, Luke 5:15-16. How do these disciplines empower and strengthen our Christian walk?

Application Questions:

1. "God changes lives in response to faith. But just as there is no faith that does not act, so there is no act without some plan. Faith grows from the experience of acting on plans and discovering... It is time to take what you have learned and make your own specific plan for your life with them. This will come down to what you do on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday." What are some practical steps we can take to implement the spiritual disciplines in our lives on a daily basis?

Application Questions:

2. Which of the spiritual disciplines would be the most difficult for you to incorporate into your life? How can the community of Chi Alpha help you enter into a life of training with the spiritual disciplines?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for giving us a spirit of love, power, and self-discipline. Thank you for these practical tools that will enable us to walk more closely united with you. Help us not to neglect the importance of the spiritual disciplines and give us the motivation to make them a part of our lives. Correct any false ideas or any negative attitudes we may have about them. Please help us to remember that the disciplines are a bridge to loving you and knowing you more. We fix our eyes on you, Jesus, as we train wisely for the race set before us.

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Memory Verse:

1 Corinthians 9:24-27, "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."

Take this week to practice one discipline of abstinence and one discipline of engagement from the attached examples. Meet with your prayer partner from this week for a meal. Discuss three of the attached disciplines and accompanying verses, as well as your own attempts.

*Additional Disciplines:*⁴

Disciplines of Abstinence

Solitude: The practice of spending time without any others or any distractions // Luke 4

Silence: No noise or conversation. Just you and God // Habakkuk 2:20 & 1 Kings 19:12

Fasting: Abstain from food, media, entertainment, or anything else that occupies your time // Matthew 6:16-18

Frugality: Use your money for purposes outside your own needs for a time // Exodus 36:6-7

Secrecy: Do not allow anyone to know of the deeds you do or the money you give in order to avoid doing them for the wrong motivations. Only God needs to know // Matthew 6:5-6

Sacrifice: Stretch your sense of what you can do without for the sake of those who have less // Luke 21:1-4

Disciplines of Engagement

Study: Memorize Scripture and expand your universe of biblical study // Colossians 3:16 & 2 Timothy 3:16

Worship: Engage in corporate worship and include worship in your own prayer time // John 4:24 & Revelation 4:11

Celebration: Practice being grateful and thankful in your own relationship with Christ and express encouragement and thankfulness to others // Psalm 139:14 & Psalm 16:7,9,11

Service: Give your time to the church and/or to others. Ponder tithing your time // Isaiah 58:6-7, John 12:26

Prayer: Take deliberate steps to pray regularly and with purpose. Praying through the Psalms is a good way to increase your "prayer vocabulary." // Luke 11:1-13 & 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Fellowship: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." // Hebrews 10:25 & Acts 2:42-47

Confession: Practice confessing your sins to trusted people who will pray with you and be spiritual allies // James 5:16 & Psalm 139:23-24