

The Long and the Short of it – Snapshot: Discipline  
October 10, 2010

Today we're continuing in our series, our snap-shot series not so much that God wants us to have but that we need to have and so, God wants to help us to have in our life and today we have been given the topic of discipline. As I was thinking about that this week, and actually a little bit last week, I was thinking this is such a great time to be talking about discipline, because it's Thanksgiving weekend and most of you have already or will shortly be, enjoying Thanksgiving dinner together with some people. Usually if you have the traditional Thanksgiving meal you have the turkey and the stuffing and the potatoes and the gravy and the sweet potatoes and all the veggies and all the sides. It's one of those events that you go to and you sit at the table and you say, "I'm just going to take a little bit of everything and your plate get's heaping full and you realize only half the dishes have come around so far. So I thought "that's just wonderful, we have this weekend where people are just doing their best but still end up with this heaping plate of food and I'm supposed to stand up here and talk about discipline. Well, that's just wonderful and not only that, but discipline is one of those things that I think everyone needs more of but no one wants to be told that they don't have enough of it. And so, I'm thinking this is just a wonderful topic for me to be given this morning and I thought "well who was the genius who put all that together and decided that this should be the weekend to talk about discipline". And then, I realized that was me, I can't blame anyone else and so, there it is. And so, this morning I don't want you to set your expectations too low but, I come at this topic freely admitting that I am no expert in this department and I don't have a total grasp on discipline, either in theory or in practice. So, please don't think that I'm standing up here thinking I've got it all figured out because I don't. And so, this morning what my best hope for our time together this morning is that maybe from things I've been reading and studying and things I've seen in God's word and the experience of my life, hopefully I can give you just maybe just a little different slant on things, or maybe help you see things just in a slightly different way than you have before and that will be helpful to you as you try and live your life and follow God and have discipline in your own life as we go on from here.

So that's kind of, that's where I've set the bar this morning, if you want to set it higher, great. If you already had it lower I understand, that's okay too. But that's what we're aiming for as we start to talk about discipline.

As I looked into the subject and studied a bit, I decided 'you know, really before we can talk about discipline, the first thing I think we really need to do is, we need to unlearn a few things about discipline. Because I found that most of my struggles about discipline come from having learned things about discipline that aren't actually true or helpful to me. And so, I thought here's what we're going to do. The first thing we're going to do is unlearn a few things about discipline. The first thing I want us to try and unlearn this morning is that Discipline equals punishment. We kind of have that notion in our head that discipline is

always all about the punishment, about the consequences, about the making you pay for what you've done, kind of thing and that's kind of the concept we have of discipline. I looked it up on wikipedia and it said "Discipline in the most general sense, discipline refers to a systematic instruction given to a disciple. To discipline, thus means, to instruct a person to follow a particular code or conduct". I read that and I thought "I like that, that definition of discipline is one that I can work with". Discipline is instruction. Discipline is what a teacher does to a disciple and it's instruction and it's training and it's teaching. And I thought 'now that model of discipline is something that I think I could work with'. The problem is that I think most of us don't have a wikipedia understanding of discipline, we have a Webster's understanding of discipline. Webster's puts number one, in big bold letters, **DISCIPLINE IS PUNISHMENT**. That's what discipline is all about the punishment and then I saw number two, it did have instruction, but it said 'that's obsolete, that's outdated, forget about that, that's old news'. In number four, they've got 'training that corrects or perfects mental faculties or moral characters' but the problem is, most of us can't get past that number one. That punishment idea and so we think discipline is the thing that happens to us when we're bad. When we do something wrong, that's when discipline shows up. When we fail or we're inadequate, then discipline comes in to correct us and get us back on course and make us pay for the wrong that we've done. And so when we're at home and we don't eat our vegetables or clean our room or we talk back to our mom or we break our curfew or whatever it is we do at home that incites this discipline, we think of punishment, right? We, depending on your generation, you might get spanked or you go to time out or you get grounded or maybe you lose your allowance or something like that and that's what happens at home.

At work, when you aren't living up to you boss' expectations, when you don't get the project done on time or you lose a big account or whatever it is, then you suffer corporate discipline and maybe that means that you get your wages docked a little bit. You have to come in and work on weekends or worse case scenario you get the axe and you're sent on your way. And that's kind of what happens with discipline at work.

And we kind of apply that same sort of notion to God and we think that discipline, when it comes to God, is punishment. God watches and when you do something wrong God punishes you and that's how discipline works with God. And we look at verses like Prov. 3:11-12 that says:

"The Lord disciplines those He loves".

And we kind of think of the story of the little boy who had done something wrong and his dad was going to spank him and before he spanked the child he said "Now son, I'm doing this because I love you". And the son says "maybe you could love me a little less, because you know, I'm not so excited about the result of this discipline this punishment that's coming". And so, we have this notion that discipline is always about the punishment, about oppression,

inflicting pain and forcing you to do what I want. And if that's our perception of discipline, first of all, it's not going to work very well in our life, but probably more importantly, it gives us a skewed perception of God. It gives us this perception of God that He is up there in the sky looking down on us and watching us and just waiting for us to mess up so that He can zap us with the ethereal cattle prod and get us back into line and make us pay for what we've done. It gives us this idea that He's up there thinking us all these random and arbitrary "thou shalt and thou shalt not's and setting up these series of hoops that we must jump through one after the other just to see if we can do it and just waiting for us to miss one so He can jump in and punish us and discipline us. I don't believe that that's the picture of God that the Bible paints for us. I think that if we take discipline in the notion of training and of teaching and of coaching, I think it gives us a better picture of what God does when He disciplines us. And if we have that view of training in mind and we go back to that same verse in Proverbs 3, it gives us a totally different perception of what it was saying. This time it reads:

"But don't, dear friends, resent God's training, don't sulk under His loving correction. Is the child He loves that God trains a father's delight is behind all of this".

And so, this morning, the first thing we want to unlearn about discipline, is that discipline isn't punishment. What discipline is all about is training. And if you have been one of those people who have experienced discipline or have experienced punishment and have been treated poorly and have been hurt and abused and treated wrong and bad all in the name of discipline, I want to tell you that, that is wrong. I want to tell you that God wants to heal you of those wounds that you are carrying from that. And if you have been told over the years and have been led to believe that God's discipline is all about punishment, is all about making you pay for every little mess-up that you have done in your life, I want to tell you that, that is wrong. And that is not how God used discipline. God's discipline is to train you, and to coach you along the way.

The second thing we want to unlearn this morning about discipline, is the idea that discipline leads to depravation. Now this is a real simple line of logic to follow because, when I see that piece of chocolate cake and it looks very good and it probably is very good. Discipline says you shouldn't eat that piece of chocolate cake right now, you have already had two, discipline deprives me of the joy of eating that cake. Or when you go into a store and you see that wonderful, perfect little gadget, toy, that you just need to have. And discipline says "you don't have money for that right now". Discipline deprives you of the joy of getting to buy that and take it home and enjoy it. And when your alarm goes off in the morning and tells you it's time to get up and go jogging or go swimming or go do whatever exercise routine that you have tried to set out for yourself, what you really want to do is hit the snooze button and enjoy several more minutes of sleep. But discipline says, "No, you can't have that sleep, you've got to go and run or job or swim or whatever it is". And so, we get this sense that discipline is all about depravation. It's about keeping us from the joys and the things we really want and it prevents us from being happy and having these things and it's

just one of those things that you just have to you know, grit your teeth and accept and bear your way through. But the truth is, that discipline leads to more, not to less. You see, discipline is all about this thing called “Delayed Gratification:”. Now delay is never a good thing. We have a hard time wrapping our minds around delay, ever being something desirable, right? And it goes against the grain of our society. We live in an instant culture. We live in a world where everything is right here and right now. We get on our Blackberry or our Iphone and we instant message our friends and contact them right now. I was talking to Roy earlier this week at his office and he said “I can’t imagine living back in the time where we didn’t have E-mail and overnight couriers. How would you do business back in the time like that, because you’ve got to have the stuff right now” We live in this instant world. Go to your Superstore, your grocery store and look at the food products available. Look at how many different things are available to you instantly. And to me, what points out the ridiculousness of this intantness, is that we have instant coffee and I looked at that and I thought “Do we really need instant coffee? How long does it take to make a cup of coffee? Or instant oatmeal. It’s not like oatmeal takes a real long time to cook. You know, if we had instant turkey dinner, I’d be down with that. But, instant coffee? Really is that a time saver. But if it’s instant, we want it. We live in this day of microwaves and drive through. Be honest with me, how many of you have been in a drive-through of any restaurant and found yourself getting annoyed that the people working inside the restaurant weren’t able to make a full meal for you in your car in the time it takes you to drive the 30 feet from where you ordered to where you pick up. What is taking them so long? All I ordered was meals for four people and I drove 30 feet. You should be done by now. We live in an instant world where we expect everything to be here right now. But discipline says “you know what, we be content with something lesser now, for something greater, later. We endure now, so we can enjoy later. And discipline says “if you do that, you end up ahead in the long run”.

Tom Landry, famous coach of the Dallas Cowboys said “the job of football coach is to make men do what they don’t want to do, in order to achieve what they’ve always wanted to be”. You see, that’s what athletes do right? They train. And if you ask an athlete, “do you enjoy doing the training? Do you enjoy doing the workouts?” They’ll say ‘no’. But if you ask an athlete “why do you do it?” “Well, I do it because if I train, I might win”. And if you ask an athlete who has won “was it worth all the training to win?” They’d say “Yes, absolutely”. “Would you do it again?” “I don’t know, but it was worth it this one time”. The training is what we do to be worth something better down the road. We discipline ourselves for a payoff down the road.

I want you to try and think of a time when being disciplined, doesn’t pay off down the road. Can you think of a time in your life when being disciplined didn’t actually turn out better in the long run? Or can you think of a time when being undisciplined didn’t short change you from what you might have had if you had been disciplined? See,. That’s what God is trying to do. And the payoff, God says, when He tries to discipline you is this. He who disciplines shows the way of life. Ignore correction and you are lost for good. God disciplines us,

because He wants us to experience the very best that life has to offer. He says:

“Don’t take the easy short-term solution, because that pales to the long-term reward”. We’ve used this verse many time, maybe you guys are sick of me saying it but, I’m going to keep using it and I hope it gets burned in your head cause to me, this is the core of what God is trying to do in our lives, Jesus is talking, it says:

“A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy, but I have come that they might have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of”.

God is challenging us to be content with lesser things in this life to receive much greater things in the next life. But not only that, God says: “I want you to have great things in this life as well”. You know, what makes sin, sin, is not just the fact that God said so, what makes sin, sin, is this. God made the world and God made us and God knows how we function best and so God knows what we need to do to experience the best life that this world has to offer. And so He comes alongside us and He trains us and He says “Do this, because this will add goodness to your life”. And He says “Don’t do this, because this will take goodness away from your life”. God says “Let me train you and show you what to do and what not to do so that you can be what you always wanted to be”. You see, discipline does not lead to deprivation, discipline actually leads to greater gratification down the road.

So, now it’s time to put practical feet on this thing if we can. And this is the part that I find rather challenging and part of the reason I find it challenging is because it’s really personal and you probably don’t want me to talk about the thing that you need more discipline at as I don’t want you to talk about the things I need more discipline at. And so it’s kind of a sensitive topic. But more than that, there’s this inequity here because some people are simply better at being disciplined and accepting discipline, just by nature. Just the way some of you, not me, some of you are wired. You’re just better at that. It just comes more naturally to you and some of you are farther along in this process because you have more experience being trained, right? Some of us are fairly new at this. Some of you have been doing this thing for several years. Some of you have been doing this thing for a lot of years. And so, just by the course of experience you are further ahead in all of this. Just like an athlete, you would expect a veteran quarterback to be a little better off than a rookie quarterback, all things being equal and so, the biggest challenge here and we all have different vices and we all struggle with discipline in different areas of your life and so trying to talk about something specific becomes really hard and so I’m just going to kind of shot-gun here a little bit and see if we can hit a few things and hopefully some of that sticks and it’s helpful to you. We all struggle with different things. Maybe you struggle with shopping. You can’t go into a store without coming out with something. Maybe your challenge in discipline is getting to work on time. Maybe your challenge with discipline is leaving work on time, going home when the day is done. Maybe your challenge is with lots of things. Maybe its controlling your speech or your anger or your temper or what you eat.

There's all these different things that we struggle with, being disciplined with and it's actually hard, in church we don't actually talk about this much and so we kind of have this sense that being disciplined with this stuff is our job. Spiritual stuff God will help discipline us and walk with us through that. But this stuff we're kind of on our own. If you want to lose weight, well, just don't bother God with that because God is busy with people who want to develop a better prayer life. If you are having financial troubles, well you figure that out. Maybe you go to a finance counsellor or whatever but that's kind of your thing to figure out. I want to suggest to you this morning, that when God wants to train us in life. When God wants us to get the most out of life it covers all of these things as well and God wants to assist you in all that. And so, I want to challenge you to try something here with me this morning. I don't know how it will turn out. But here's what I want you to do. Look at that list or think of other things that are in your head, or think of one thing where in your honest heart, this is where I really struggle being disciplined. Okay? Take a minute and think of that. Now, I want to invite you to ask God to help train you to deal with that. Ask God to help you become disciplined. To teach you and instruct you to conquer that in your life. Now I'm not saying that you're going to wake up 10 pounds lighter tomorrow. Or that your going to get a \$100.00 in your bank account out of nowhere just by including God in this process of your life. But I do believe that God wants to help us in those things. Jesus says in Matthew:

“Which of you, if your son asked for bread, will give him a stone, or if he asked for a fish will give him a snake. If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him”. Matt. 7:9-11.

In Luke 11:11-13 he says almost the same things.

“If your son asks for a fish will you give him a snake. If he asks for an egg will you give him a scorpion. If you then, even though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him”.

Jesus is saying ‘you know what, you guys are selfish and self-centred and imperfect and distracted, yet for the most part you treat your kids good. How much more will God help you when you are in need. How much more will God assist you when you need it. And he even says ‘how much more will God give you the Spirit to be with you and walk with you and guide you and I do believe that goes to things greater than just the Holy Spiritual things that we usually limit Him to. Invite God to train you in the areas of your life that you struggle in.

Then there are the spiritual areas and there are as many different spiritual areas that we struggle in as there are other areas. Avoiding sin. Forgiving people. Finding quiet time

with God. Stewardship. All of these different things and what I want to tell you this morning, is that, with all of these things and more, the whole concept of delayed gratification still applies. You know, sometimes setting time aside to read God's word or to spend time in prayer, that forces me to give up some other things. But, is the idea of being content with less now because I gain something more later. The biggest example of that, that struck me this week that I just couldn't shake is this idea of sharing your faith. Sharing your faith is one of those things that is challenging. That when you have to talk to someone about what you believe in God and try and share your faith with them, it can be awkward, it can be uncomfortable, it can be risky to your relationship, and it's tough to do sometimes. But I believe the concept holds that we endure that now for the reward later, when they end up with a relationship with Jesus. And if we aren't willing to endure that awkwardness now, we will never see the reward that comes later. Peter says in II Peter:1:3-4:

“God's divine power has given us everything we need, for life and for godliness for our knowledge of him who called us by His own glory and goodness through these He has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them, you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires”.

God wants to train you and nurture you and bring you into His divine nature and escape the substandard life that the world has to offer.

I don't know how much of that has been helpful to you. I hope that through our time this morning you have seen, at least a little bit, a different view of how God views interacting with you and disciplining you and training you and teaching you. Probably better than anything I have said this morning is what the Hebrew writer said in Hebrews 12:5-11. I'm going to leave you with those words this morning.

“Don't feel sorry for yourself, or have you forgotten how good parents treat their children. That God regards you as His children, my dear child, don't shrug off God's discipline but don't be crushed by it either. It's the child He loves that He disciplines. The child He embraces He also corrects. God is educating you. That's why you must never drop out. He's treating you as dear children. This trouble you are in isn't punishment, it's training. The normal experience of children. Only irresponsible parents leave children to fend for themselves. Would you prefer an irresponsible God? We respect our own parents for training and not spoiling us, so why not embrace God's training so we can truly live. While we were children our parents did what seemed best to them but God is doing what IS best for us. Training us to live God's wholly best. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later, of course, it pays off handsomely for it is the well-trained who find themselves mature in their relationship with God.

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