

Making a Difference – The Power of Discipline

Discipline can be used or abused, but the truth is we all need it. Note, today we will be focusing on *self-discipline* and not correction or rebuke. It is far better to correct yourself than to wait for someone else to correct you. Self-discipline is a very powerful tool and every one of us has the ability to apply it correctly. Carrie Latet, a famous Author / Poet said, “*You must admit you have self-control before you can use it.*” **2 Timothy 1:7** says, “***For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.***” The original Greek word implies *disciplined thought patterns*. So, self-discipline (the ability to discipline our thoughts) is something we’ve already received from God.

Self-discipline can be defined as the means of attempting to guide thoughts, and then behaviour, along a specific path to a directed aim or goal. Self-discipline or self-control is perceived in a few ways. One of which is philosophical and might be described as the exertion of a person's own will on their personal self – their actions, behaviours and thought processes. Much of this comes from the correct perception of self and the ability to set up boundaries for that self. Self-control is centred in the ability of a person to exert their will over the inhibitions and restrictions of their body or mind. The apostle Paul stated clearly that everyone who competes for the prize must exercise self-control in all things (*1 Corinthians 9:25*).

The course that God has already marked out for your life requires you to be disciplined in everything. If you lack self-control you risk being disqualified and never attaining the prize that is set before you (*1 Corinthians 9:27*). Self-control is not only essential for you to fulfil your destiny in God, but it is also necessary for your success and comfort, and achieving a happier life.

How many times have you got all fired up about something and then only to find that your enthusiasm has evaporated into the atmosphere? How many times have you made a firm decision, and really meant it, to do something or finish something? Only to find that a few days (or even a few hours) later, you’ve given in to your own lack of self-control and have gone back to the comfortable routine you’re so used to. This happens to everyone and it’s only because you haven’t exercised enough self-control – you’ve been undisciplined!

Even though we are essentially ‘spirit beings’, biological impulses drive our emotions. We cannot do away with them, but we can do much to manage them. Self-control, which is like an ongoing inner conversation, is what frees us from being prisoners of our own feelings. People engaged in such a conversation feel bad moods and emotional impulses just as everyone else does; however, they find ways to control them and even to channel them into useful modes of behaviour.

People who are in control of their feelings and impulses are able to create an environment of trust and fairness – not just with themselves but with everyone.

Signs of emotional self-regulation are not hard to miss. They always display an ability to say no to impulsive urges and produce integrity. Self-discipline or self-regulation enhances your integrity, which is not only a personal virtue but also a sign of strong character.

Many bad things that happen in life are a function of impulsive behaviour. Most people rarely plan to do bad things; instead, an opportunity presents itself, and people with low impulse control end up doing it. By contrast, consider someone who is scrupulously honest. When challenged with a negative impulse, he or she will choose to counteract it with a positive thought or action – rising above temptation. To some people this may sound like some religious ritual, but in fact it’s practical, sensible and vital to good human behaviour.

Temptation in itself is not sinful. However, the way you respond to temptation will either lead you to sin or encourage righteousness.

The first step in learning self-control or self-regulation is to take responsibility and realise that it is your body and your mind that you are dealing with - no one else's! You can, and will, control them as soon as you decide to. Self control is something you must pursue in a very determined way, because losing self-control leads to a life of poverty, stress, bad habits (of many kinds) and other things that make life unbearable. When you learn how to identify your faults you can learn how to control yourself in a much better and more effective way. After you've done this, you will be able to protect yourself by steering clear of the traps already set for you.

“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us...” Hebrews 12:1. “Let us” implies self-control! You must remove every trap.

The Law of Control

There is another aspect of discipline that's important to your well-being, and that is “being in control.” This is sometimes referred to as the Law of Control, but from the outset I must make it clear that this law has nothing to do with controlling others. Nor has it to do with high-and-mighty authoritarian or dictatorial attitudes. But rather, the “feelings of control,” or lack of it, that effect your everyday life.

You feel good about yourself to the degree to which you feel that you are in control of your own life. The reverse of this law is that you feel negative about yourself to the degree to which you feel you are not in control of your own life or that you are controlled by other people or circumstances. Too many people have fallen into this trap and spend their lives miserable and discouraged. You can choose to be in control or be controlled; it's entirely up to you.

The psychological profession has long recognised the importance of feelings of control as a critical element in human personality and performance. Psychologists believe that feelings of control can greatly impact on your mental disposition and may be a contributing factor in many personality disorders. The term they use is “locus of control.”

The locus, or place, of control refers to where ever you feel the control is located (in any part of your life). If you feel that you personally make decisions that determine the direction of your life, you are considered to have an “internal locus control.” But if you feel that your boss, your bills, your husband or wife, your childhood experiences, your health, or anything else controls you, or forces you to do or refrain from doing what you really want, you are considered to have an “external locus of control.”

The best location of your “place of control” is inside of you. ***“For greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.”*** When you develop an internal focus of control (when you become “God inside minded”), you will have a sense that you are behind the wheel of your own life. You will feel that you are steering toward your destiny and that your future is in your own hands. This position creates very low stress levels and guarantees higher performance in all areas. In this setting, you instantly become more relaxed, and a real pleasure to be around! On the other hand, if you have an “external” locus of control, and you feel that what you are doing is being dictated by the devil, other people and outside pressures, then your stress levels will climb significantly and your personal performance levels will drop dramatically. All who have studied this area

of human behaviour, and there has been 30 years of research in this field, agree that a “sense of control” is absolutely essential for you to perform at your best and enjoy life to the full.

You must therefore establish an internal focus of control for you to live a happy and stress-free life. In you, right now, is the power to deal with all those things (or people) that are causing you the greatest amount of stress, anger or frustration. The things that you feel you have little or no control over can be brought under your control once more. All you have to do is ask the Holy Spirit to help you, and then accept that you are being **strengthened with might** through God’s Spirit in your **inner man** (*Ephesians 3:16*).

No Christian should live under the tyranny of “outside” control. People who live this way tend to be very negative, pessimistic and helpless, because they feel as though they have little or no control over their lives. Such people always blame others for the situation they’re in and invariably make excuses for their problems. They think they are victims of circumstances or that everything is down to luck and good fortune. As a result, they have developed a victim’s mentality which hinders progress in all areas of life. Remember this, you cannot live with a victim’s mentality and at the same time live the abundant life that Christ’s has secured for you. It’s either one or the other! And if you are truthful, you’d have to admit that you’re only a victim to the degree that you have allowed yourself to be.

On a practical note, you can take control of your life by;

- Shifting to “internal locus control,”
 - Controlling change through goal setting, and
 - Controlling your thought life.
- (1) Start by examining your life carefully and taking note of the parts of your life that cause you the greatest amounts of stress, anger, or frustration (on a regular basis). You will find that these are usually situations in which you feel you have little or no control.
 - (2) The starting point of dealing with any stressful person or situation is for you to identify it clearly. Once you have identified areas of stress clearly, you must make a quality decision in each of these areas, to either get in or get out, to do something, or stop something that you are doing. Whether it is a job, a relationship, or an emotion, the act of making a decision to take an action will reduce your stress. You will also increase your sense of personal ‘power’ almost immediately.
 - (3) Clearly identify the areas in your life where you feel trapped, where you feel as if there is nothing you can do about it. Then ask yourself this, “What one change can I make that will put me back in control?” Whatever the answer, resolve to do something about it immediately. And remember, with God’s help nothing is impossible!