

A Disciplined Life

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of discipline in the Christian life, covering three areas: time, money, and the body.

Duration: 31:07

Scripture: Ephesians 5:15, 2 Timothy 1:7

Topics: "Spiritual Discipline", "Stewardship"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of self-evaluation as the new year approaches, focusing on discipline in three key areas: time management, financial stewardship, and bodily discipline. It highlights the need to make the most of our time, be faithful in handling money, and practice self-control over our bodies to grow spiritually and fulfill God's purposes.

Transcript

Look forward to a new year. You know, once a year it's good to evaluate our lives. I don't think there's anything special about 31st of December more than any other day, but in one sense it's good.

You know, God, it is God who decided that the earth goes around the sun in 365 and a quarter days. We didn't decide that. So, in that one revolution, once a year it's good for us to examine ourselves and see how it has gone in this year with our lives.

And as we look towards the future, as we come one year closer to the coming of Jesus Christ, and we shall we think of the time when we shall stand before him to give an account of our life, we want our lives to fulfill whatever God wants to do through us before he comes. And in order to do that, I want to share some things with you. Let's turn first of all to 2nd Timothy chapter 1 and verse 7. 2nd Timothy 1 verse 7. God has not given us a spirit of timidity.

God does not want any of his children to be shy about confessing Christ. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but he's given us a spirit of power and love and discipline. Many of us have, I believe, taken seriously the exhortations given in this church to repent, to confess all our sins, to keep a good conscience, to confess the sin as soon as it's committed, believing that the blood of Christ cleanses us.

And I believe also a number of us have prayed that God would fill us with his Holy Spirit. We've read the word, and it seems that we've done all these things. And yet, if we are honest, many of us have to say that

we have not had a very satisfying experience in the Christian life.

Would you say that the year 2009, it's finished now, you had a very satisfying experience of Christ in the Christian life? And you need to ask yourself why. And I want to suggest to you that it's possible because there's one element that's been missing, and that is discipline. You can never become holy without discipline.

You can read the Bible as much as you like. You can be filled with the Holy Spirit. You can keep a good conscience, but if you don't subject yourself to God's discipline, you will still miss out on God's purposes.

God has not given us his spirit of laziness. He gives us a spirit. It's not something I have to do myself.

In the world, they teach that you must discipline yourself, you must do this, you must do this, do this. But here it says God has given us his spirit of discipline. So, when the Holy Spirit seeks to discipline us in certain areas, it's possible for us to resist that or to ignore what he's saying.

And then, of course, he'll never force us to go a pathway that he sees we don't want to go. So, I want to help tell you something practical. And I want to encourage all of you, at least those who have years to hear, to please take these three areas that I want to talk about seriously in the coming year.

It's all right to make a decision before God or people talk about New Year resolutions. But so long as you're depending on God and say, Lord, I want you to help me in this, I'll never make it otherwise. So, the first area where we need to really ask God to help us to be disciplined is in the area of the use of our time.

See what the Bible says in Ephesians in chapter five. Everybody says that the days are evil. You look at the newspapers, it's pretty clear the days are evil.

2009 was more evil than 2008. Without being any prophet, I can say that 2010 is going to be more evil than 2009. So, if the days are evil, so what? Here it says in Ephesians five, verse 15 and 16.

Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time because the days are evil. So, don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. There's one area, you know, you can look at some other brother and say, I don't have the gift he has.

God gives different gifts to different people in the body of Christ. And also, you know, even natural gifts, many of us are different. Some are more intelligent, and some have got more money, and some have got many things like that.

But there's one area where all of us are exactly equal, and that is we all have exactly 24 hours a day. Nobody gets 25. Nobody gets 23.

We are equal. But what we do with those 24 hours a day, there's a lot of difference. Some people make tremendous good use of that time and make a lot of progress.

Others, like the man who buried his talent in the ground, waste it, and by the end of the year, they don't have much to show. So, when you look back over this year, you know, I think we could all acknowledge that there's a lot of time we wasted. And you can never get it back.

You know, there's one thing that even Almighty God cannot do. He cannot give you the 365 days of 2009 once again. It's gone.

It's gone. If you lose money, he can give that back to you. If you lose health, he can give it back to you.

If you lose your reputation, God can still enable you to have a reputation. But when you waste your time, even Almighty God can never give it back to you. He can forgive you, sure.

But what you could have accomplished for Christ is gone. It's gone forever. You can do something about the future, but you can't do about the past.

And it's not primarily a question of reward. I don't believe we should live for reward. There may be rewards, but that's not what we live for.

But if any of us understand the tremendous price that Jesus Christ paid in order to make us his children, I cannot imagine that we won't have a sense of, Lord, I owe my life to you. What shall I do for you in return? Just come to meetings? Lord, will you? I think I've wasted a lot of my life in the last year, but will you do something with my life this year? Will you help me, Lord, to make use of each day? What a word this is. Make the most of your time.

Make the most of your time. Please keep that in front of you this year. Make the most of your time.

And if you really take that seriously, you'll find at the end of this year, if the Lord carries this coming year, you'll be amazed as to where you have reached spiritually in your own life, how much of God you've come to know, and how much of a blessing your life can be to others. So, I'm not saying that we shouldn't go on a picnic or we shouldn't relax. We need to sleep.

We need to relax. And all that is essential. I'm not talking about reading the Bible and praying all the time.

No. But think of bits of time that you could use which you've wasted in the past. You know, God is always against wastage.

There's a beautiful illustration of that in John's Gospel, chapter 6. John's Gospel, chapter 6, it says, after feeding the five thousand, I mean, the disciples were just keeping on collecting this bread and fish from Jesus. He just kept on multiplying. I really would like to have been there to see how those loaves and fish multiplied.

And they would serve and come back and serve and come back. And there's such an abundance and it was all, Jesus wasn't holding, he couldn't hold so many in his hand. It was all on the ground beneath him in the grass.

You know, lots and lots of hundreds of loaves of bread and thousands of loaves of bread and fish. And then when everybody had eaten, and it says in verse 12, John 6, verse 12, when they were all filled, everybody had second, third helping, and they were all completely satisfied. Jesus said to his disciples, now you've got to do something.

Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing is lost. That's a little principle. God does not believe in wastage.

Just because there's an abundance doesn't mean we should waste. A lot of people have plenty of money wasted. A lot of people have plenty of time wasted.

There was plenty of loaves and fishes that day. And Jesus said, don't waste it, gather it together. And when they gathered it together, there was 12 baskets full.

Now, if they had ignored it, they would have just had nothing. So, if you gather up the fragments, fragments, the small bits of time that you can get during the day here and there in this coming year, you can become a Bible scholar to some degree by the end of the year. For example, I've suggested to people, why don't you determine that you will spend 15 minutes, just 15 minutes out of 24 hours to study the Bible with our verse-by-verse studies.

They're not very expensive. We've got the whole of the New Testament in verse-by-verse now, every single verse from Matthew to Revelation. You could either get a set of that or you could download it from the internet.

And many of them are in little 12, 13 minute chunks. So, you could do it very easily. And it depends, you know, you could do it at morning or night or sometime.

And if you miss a day, then try and catch up on it on a Saturday. And if you can't, never mind. If you missed a day, just do it the next day.

Don't get discouraged because you missed a day or two. A little fragment of time. Do you know what would happen? Do you know the number of New Testament books you would have studied in depth by the end of this year? Make the most of your time.

And when God can seize that, he's able to put his word in your heart. Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. It's a wonderful thing, God's word.

I tell you, God's word in my heart keeps me from sin. God's word in my heart ensures that I always have a word to encourage somebody when I meet them. Don't you meet a lot of discouraged people around you? In your workplace, people who come to visit you, your friends, somebody.

You'll have a word for them. If you discipline yourself, the faithful use of time. Make that a prayer.

Lord, now some of you may have more than 15 minutes. That's great. I'm not asking you some big huge chunk of time.

15 minutes a day of solid Bible study. And as I said, if you miss one day, don't get discouraged. It's like doing exercise.

Just do it the next day. You'll be amazed how much you can accomplish. The second area where we need to discipline ourselves is in the use of money.

Luke chapter 16. Luke chapter 16. Jesus said and verse 11.

If you are not faithful in the use of unrighteous money. Now, money is not all. If you have earned your money, honestly, it's not unrighteous.

But you know, Jesus had the habit of comparing one with another. For example, when he said you must hate your father and mother and wife. He doesn't mean actually hate.

It means compared to your love for God and Jesus, your love for your earthly relatives must be so small, it's almost like hatred. So what he's saying here is compared to spiritual wealth, even money is unrighteous. That's what he's saying.

It has no, it doesn't help you to be righteous. And if you're not faithful in the use of money, how will God give you the true riches? So I see here something that if I want the true riches of God, that'll keep me for, that'll make me wealthy for eternity. And the true riches of God are revelation on his word, partaking of God's nature, the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

All these things are dependent on my being very faithful with money. And it's possible when you have very little money, you're very careful. But a godly man is careful even when he has a lot of money.

Again, I'm not saying that you shouldn't spend any money on having an ice cream or going for a meal or going for a vacation or going for a picnic. That's not my point. That you have to decide according to the resources God has given you.

But think for example in this year, if you say, Lord, I'm not going to waste money unnecessarily this year. I'm going to be a little more careful with the way I spend money. Like I was in the old days when I had very little.

How careful I was. But you have blessed and prospered me and I've become careless. But now I can carelessly spend and think what you've lost, eternal riches.

You know, when God gives us more money, did you know that he is testing us to see what you're going to do with it? Are you going to be as faithful as you were in those days when you had hardly anything? I remember the days in CFC, in the early days when almost all of us were, not almost, all of us were really poor. I was the only one who had a scooter from my naval days. Others didn't even have a scooter.

They had cycles, they walked, they came by bus. It's not like that now. Does it mean we have become more spiritual? Not necessarily.

I'm not saying you don't become spiritual if you buy a car. That's not the point. It's not a question of how much you have.

It's a question of whether you're faithful in the use of it. It's a question of whether you unnecessarily waste it on things that are unnecessary. You know, there's something about being frugal and disciplined in the sense that you don't waste, pick up the fragments so that nothing is lost.

There's something that God honors there. When he sees that I'm very careful with this thing called money, I feel that God gives us money to test us. I really believe that.

I believe in many, many areas in my life with money God has tested me. What's going to be your attitude to that? Are you going to be careless? Are you going to waste it? Are you going to be miserly and stingy and think only of yourself? Are you going to get depressed if accidentally you lost something? Dear brothers, this year, let's learn to be a little more disciplined in the use of money. If any of you are in debt, will you please ask the Lord to help you to clear your debt as far as possible? I'm not talking about a house loan or something which may take a little longer.

But I'm talking about, you know, taking a loan for some unnecessary luxury. I remember years ago, I told a young brother when he was getting married, I said, don't get into debt. It's better not to have a grand, you know, feast at your wedding after borrowing money and getting into debt.

No, I think God will be honored if you have a very simple feast without getting into debt. God will honor you. I've seen people, I've seen brothers in our churches who live very simply.

They couldn't afford, I remember one wedding I went to in one of our churches where the feast was one Coca-Cola, that's it. Praise God for such brothers. You'll only find them in our churches.

And then also, I think of another brother who borrowed and borrowed and had a grand feast and he was so much in debt, he couldn't clear it for years and finally left the church. Try your best to live within your income and to save some so that you don't end up having to borrow from somebody in a time of need. Ask God to help you.

Lord, this year I'm going to be different. And of course, this requires the cooperation of your wife. I want to encourage all of your sisters.

Don't waste money buying unnecessary clothes when you already have so much and you already have so many. We have more than enough to clothe ourselves with. These little things are what has prevented you from becoming a spiritual man or woman.

But say, Lord, give me the spirit of discipline in the area of money this year that I will not waste it. And if you have some saving, think of your children. You can give a better education for your children.

Prepare them for life on this earth. Every time you spend, you're taking something away from your children and making it more difficult for them when they grow up, even from a very earthly standpoint. So, I believe that this wasteful attitude and a careless attitude without any discipline in our spending is the reason we are losing out so much spiritually.

It's very practical. God has given us a spirit of discipline. If you're not faithful in the use of unrighteous men, who will entrust the true riches to you? Say, Lord, this year I want true riches.

I want a greater revelation in scripture. I want to learn things I never knew before. I want to partake of God's nature more this year than I've ever done before.

I want to have a greater anointing of the Holy Spirit. And I want to be disciplined. Please take that seriously and ask God to show you where are the areas where you spend money unnecessarily.

The third area is in the discipline of our body. The first is time. The second is money.

The third is our body. See, our body is made of dust, but God breathed into Adam and gave him a, he became a soul. There was a spirit in him which is always pulling him upwards.

There's this part of the body which is made of dust pulling us downwards. We are here in between, pulled in these two directions. And God gives us the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, if you don't have the power of the Holy Spirit, you're just going to drag down and down and down and down and down to all the earthly things. But when you have the power of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome that. Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, 1 Corinthians 9, the Christian life is like a race.

And he says, don't you know, 1 Corinthians 9, 24, that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize. Run in such a way that you can win. The wonderful thing about the Christian life is, I mean, if there are 200 of us here, all 200 can come first.

All 200 can come first. That's what it means here. Run in such a way that you will win.

But in order to do that, he says in verse 25, 1 Corinthians 9, 25, everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. Think of these people who win the 100 meters. They can't afford to get so fat, eat and eat and eat and eat and eat.

They'll never come. They won't even come qualified to get to the Olympics. He says they discipline themselves.

They keep their body fit. They deny themselves many things that they like to eat because they want to be fit to get a gold medal. And he says they do it.

They do all this to get something that perishes. But we have the opportunity of getting an imperishable medal or crown from God, provided you're going to be faithful. So what do I do? Verse 27, I discipline my body and I so that after I preach to others, I'm not disqualified.

I want to encourage you, my brothers, in this new year to eat a little less than you ate in 2009. You won't die. You'll be much healthier.

I want to encourage you to fast, not every day. Try once a month. If you haven't done it before, start with one meal, skip a meal, skip fast and say, Lord, I want to devote myself to you.

There are a number of blessings that come from fasting. One is it breaks the slavery to food that we have. There are different types of fasts.

You can fast, for example, say Daniel once fasted for three weeks saying, I will not eat any tasty food for three weeks. I want to see God for something in this time. He ate a little bit, but maybe avoided all meat and whatever was the equivalent of ice cream in all of those days and disciplined himself.

So there are different ways. And then, of course, you can fast completely, but please drink plenty of water when you fast. That's important.

And start with one day a month and say, Lord, no, particularly if you get a holiday or something, you don't have to go to work and say, Lord, I want to skip my meals today and spend a little of that time listening to some message or reading the Bible and spending a little more time in prayer, perhaps asking God to answer some particular burden you have, you know, some problem that's not being solved. Remember once when the disciples couldn't cast out a demon and their father brought the boy to Jesus and said, I brought him to your disciples, they couldn't do anything. Jesus said, cast out the demon in one word.

The disciples said, why couldn't we do it? And Jesus said, some demons are a little stronger than others. Some of the other demons you could cast out easily, but this particular time you need to pray and fast. There are certain things I don't, I can't explain prayer.

There's a power in it. So, and the other advantage of fasting is, you know, I don't believe that most of us know what it is to be hungry. A lot of people in the world are hungry.

You miss meals for one day, just one day, and you'll know what hunger is like. You miss it for two days, you'll see what many people in our country are facing when they can't get food to eat. I want to encourage you to be disciplined in the area of eating especially.

I believe that many of us will get victory over the lusting of our eyes if we learn to be a little more disciplined in the eating of food. There's a very close connection between overeating and lusting of the eyes. God has given us a spirit of discipline.

We can enjoy a good meal whenever God gives it to us, but we also need to be disciplined. So, make this coming year a year of discipline. Lord, I want to be disciplined in the area of my time, my money, my body.

I want to give myself to you. Fill me with the Holy Spirit. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

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