Self-Discipline

Detailed Outline
Part 1 of 3

Introduction

A. Did you know that one of the qualifications for an elder is “discipline” or “self-control”?

 “[An elder must be] . . . hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.”  
(Titus 1:8 ESV)

B. To protect yourself from sin and temptations and to be effective in your work and stewardship, you need self-discipline.

C. Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out that one of the chief characteristics of all the great men and women of God of the past is self-discipline:

“I defy you to read the life of any saint that has ever adorned the life of the Church without seeing at once that the greatest characteristic in the life of that saint was discipline and order. Invariably it is the universal characteristic of all the outstanding men and women of God . . . Obviously it is something that is thoroughly scriptural and absolutely essential.”  
– Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Spiritual Depression, p. 210

I. What the Bible Says about Self-Discipline

A. A self-disciplined person is a strong and mighty person!

“Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.” (Prov. 16:32)

1. The point is: “the proverb considers self-control the highest kind of human power.”

2. The disciplined person is like a mighty person of war. He or she has won the great battle over one self. The ability to rule an unruly spirit and conquer self is like being a mighty warrior.

3. Notice he specifically says the passion of anger has to be brought under self-control.

4. William Barclay well illustrates the tragic results of the undisciplined life by telling the sad story of the wasted life of the multitalented poet, critic, and theologian Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834):

Coleridge is the supreme tragedy of indiscipline. Never did so great a mind produce so little. He left Cambridge University to join the army; he left the army because he could not rub down a horse; he returned to Oxford and left without a degree. He began a paper called The Watchman which lived for ten numbers and then died. It has been said of him that, “he lost himself in visions of work to be done that always remained to be done. Coleridge had every poetic gift but one—the gift of sustained and concentrated effort.”
In his head and in his mind he had all kinds of books, as he said himself, “completed save for transcription.” But the books were never composed outside Coleridge’s mind, because he would not face the discipline of sitting down to write them out. No one ever reached any eminence, and no one having reached it ever maintained it without discipline.

B. The man without self-control is easy prey to every vice and temptation.

1. An undisciplined person has no protection from the enemy.
   
   “A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.” (Prov. 25:28)

2. In the ancient world, walls were placed around a city to defend it from outside forces. A city without walls is defenseless—open to all kinds of villainy. It has no protective wall, from the many enemies without!

C. The spiritually fruitful man is a self-controlled man.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace … self-control.” (Gal. 5:22–23)

1. The Greek word for self-control is enkrateia, a word made up of two words:
   
   a) Ego “I” and kratos “strength”
   
   b) So the word conveys the idea of self-control, self-restraint, self-mastery.

2. In the Expositor Dictionary of Bible Words, Larry Richards defines the Greek word, enkrateia as, “to have power over oneself and thus to be able to hold oneself in” (p. 546).

3. TIME Magazine did an article on “Why Intelligent People Fail.” It looked at highly educated people from Harvard and Yale and compared them to people with little education but who had succeeded greatly in life. They found the secret to a person’s success was two things:
   
   a) They were skilled in interpersonal relationships, and
   
   b) They were all self-disciplined.

4. The Holy Spirit wants to produce this in you! He will work this in you.

D. The leader of God’s people must be self-controlled.

“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim. 1:7)

1. The Spirit here is the Holy Spirit.

2. Timothy must guard against cowardice and timidity in the face of persecution and danger. But the Spirit is present and he gives power and self-control.

3. Power, love, and self-control are three positive qualities characterizing the presence of the Holy Spirit.

4. Self-control “[Self-control] depicts the control over one actions and thoughts that prevent rash behavior and aids a balance assessment of situations.” – Philip Towners

5. A secular magazine article made this comment: “Among the young, especially, self-discipline has been valued far less than self-expression, or self-fulfillment.”
E. A self-controlled leader resists worldliness.

“For the grace of God has appeared ... training us ... to live self-controlled ... lives in the present age.” (Titus 2:11–12)

1. This is in contrast to worldliness.
   a) Worldliness is self-indulgence, self-fulfillment.
   b) But the Spirit of God, the word of God trains us in self-control.
   c) Jesus Christ and Paul were disciplined men, and God wants to develop that in you.
   d) Leaders need to be role models of self-control.

2. I remember going into a pastor’s home once, and I immediately saw total disorder. Every room was a disaster. I sat down with the pastor, and the first thing he said to me was, “We’re having some problems in the church.” Of course they were having problems in the church – he was having problems in his own home! The complete disorder at home brought disorder right into the church.

F. The self-disciplined man controls the daily appetites of his life.

“Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we are 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.”
(1 Cor. 9:25–27, emphasis added)

1. Paul was a man who disciplined his body.
2. We have to guard against laziness, lust, greed, self-indulgence, sleep, eating.
3. We need this wonderful virtue.

G. Long-lasting spiritual growth requires self-discipline

“Train [discipline] yourself for godliness.” (1 Tim. 4:7b)

1. Think of yourself as a spiritual athlete.
   a) You need a program of training.
   b) Training for a sport always involves personal commitment, concentration, self-discipline, hard work, pain, sacrifice, and a program for training.
   c) Without these elements, there is no training.

2. The simple fact is, there is no deep, long-lasting spiritual growth without a disciplined life of prayer, reading and studying of the Bible, and responsible Christian service.

3. Our personal character is shaped and defined by our power of self-control or our lack of self-control.

4. You cannot develop strength of character or godly life without self-discipline. Many of our personal problems and failures are due directly to a lack of personal self-discipline.
“Perverted values, wasted time, dulled thinking, flabby bodies, and distorted emotions provide ample evidence of our undisciplined lives.” – D. G. Kehl, Christianity Today, Oct. 7, 1983, p. 33

“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control... For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:5-6a, 8)

“[Older women] are to teach what is good, and so train the young women... to be self-controlled.” (Titus 2:3-5)

“Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.” (Titus 2:6)

“For the overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach... hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.” (Titus 1:7-8)

In the following section, we will look practically at how to develop discipline into our ministry and our personal life.
II. How to Develop Self-Discipline

A. Start by making a conscious decision to be a self-disciplined person.

“Each person chooses to be controlled or uncontrolled in thinking and living. But the first step is a personal decision to be disciplined.” – R. H. Kelly, Divine Discipline, p. 68

1. Self-discipline can be learned and improved upon, but it takes effort and a desire to improve.

2. In a popular magazine, an article addressed this issue. It said,

“New research suggests that a lack of self-control during youth may predict health problems, less financial stability, and criminal record by adults. The good news is that self-control can be learned.” – Alice Park, TIME Magazine, Feb. 7, 2011

3. We also have the Holy Spirit and the people of God to help us.

“We should be examining ourselves and disciplining ourselves always.” – Martin Lloyd-Jones

B. Consistently pray about developing greater self-control.

1. Since self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, like love and joy, we can pray that the Spirit will help us to develop greater self-control.

2. Jesus taught that “men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). Persevere, don’t give up on prayer.

C. Here are some initial suggestions.

“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.” (1 Cor. 9:25–27 ESV)

1. Start small. You can’t climb Mt. Everest if you don’t start on a small incline, hills, small mountains. Start with your desk, car, or room. Clean it, then keep it clean. When something is out of place, train yourself to put it where it belongs. Then extend that discipline of neatness to the rest of your home.

2. Be on time. This may not sound very spiritual, but it’s important. If you’re supposed to be somewhere at a specific time, be there on time! Develop the ability to discipline your desires, activities, and demands so that you can arrive on time. Remember than when you schedule an appointment, you implicitly give your word that you will be there on time!

3. Do the hardest job first. Doing this will prevent the hardest jobs from being left undone. Remember that procrastination frustrates people around you! If I am preaching on Sunday, I start my Sunday sermon on the preceding Monday.
4. **Organize your life.** Plan the use of your time; don’t just react to circumstances. If you don’t control your time, everything else well! Be diligent about this! God is organized!

5. (See “Time Management” section of this website)

D. **Some practical organization helps**

1. **Organize your life and stay with it.** Decide to not live a disorganized, chaotic life. Change your mentality.

2. **Use a daily planner.** Write down appointments, plan ahead, and remember your duties. Write down prayer requests.

3. **Plan your day and your week.** My wife and I take a day at the beginning of the week to compare calendars to look ahead and plan the week, and plan time for family, recreation, and rest. I read an article on the President of the United States’ schedule, and despite his busy schedule, he takes time for rest and exercise. He also takes Saturday and Sunday off for rest at Camp David.

4. **Create a checklist.** When you hear a prayer request, or of someone having an operation, or a phone call that needs to be made, write it down. Carry a pen and paper to do this.

5. **Organize your desk and workplace.** Keep papers and piles organized. This will allow you to spend time actually working at your desk, rather than shuffling a confusion of papers.
III. How to Develop Self-Discipline

D. Some practical organization helps (cont.)

6. **When you work, work.** Stay focused on your task. Stay off the internet, avoid the newspaper, push out distractions. Sociologists tell us we live in the days of distraction. Get your core jobs done in the morning before distractions of the day start crowding in.

7. **Seize small units of time.** This is so important for busy elders. If you have 10 minutes here, 15 minutes there, maybe you’re waiting for someone in a restaurant, or in a doctor’s waiting room. Over the course of one month, those small units of time add up to huge amounts of time. Seize those small units of time. Make necessary phone calls, answer e-mails, get the small things done that are blocking you at other times from getting larger tasks done.

8. **Do your most important tasks first.** Learn to do what has to be done first. Get the biggest jobs out of the way first.

9. **Follow through in your responsibilities.** There is nothing more frustrating than an elder who doesn’t follow through with his responsibilities. Remember that not following through will frustrate others and give you a reputation of irresponsibility. Check responsibilities off your list right away.

10. **Don’t be a slave to the phone, e-mail, or text messaging.** We live in an age of constant connectedness, and we become slaves to the phone. When you are studying your Bible, or when you have a task to get done, turn the phone off. You can return calls later. If we don’t control the phone, it controls us.

11. **Plan for rest, exercise, and your family.** If you don’t plan to make time for these, they will never happen. It is your job to control your time so you have time for rest and take control in this hyper-busy, manic world we live in today.

12. **Pray about over-busyness and over-commitment.** This is a problem I hear over and over – “We’re too busy, we’re too overcommitted.”

   a) I once asked a man who is a lawyer what his biggest frustration was as a lawyer. He said, “People feel they have to have access to me 24 hours a day. If I don’t answer immediately, they go to another lawyer. I never have time for my family.”

   b) You must learn to say “no.” If you are going to master the Bible as an elder, you must have time to study the words of God. You may have to say “no” to some hobbies, sports, trips. You have to limit yourself to the task God has given you.
E. Welcome responsibility
   1. When you have an opportunity to do something that needs to be done, volunteer for it if you have a talent in that area.
   2. Welcoming responsibility forces you to organize yourself.

F. Hold yourself accountable to someone else
   1. In achieving specific goals, ask a friend or spouse to call you to account.
   2. We all operate better if we know we have to give an account to someone else for our actions and promises.

G. Take care of your body
   1. 68% of Americans say that they don't exercise because they lack the self-control.
   2. Remember to get enough sleep and physical exercise. You need to be as disciplined in going to bed at night at the right time as to get up in the morning.
   3. For the energy and strength you need for doing your work you need rest. Remember body and spirit are connected. If you are sick or unhealthy, it will affect your spiritual life. Hudson Taylor said, “It takes strength to pray!”

H. Seek to be disciplined in every area of your life
   1. Discipline touches every area of your life.
      
      “Self-discipline is essential to success in all areas of life.” – R. H. Kelly, Divine Discipline, p. 67
   2. Some people are disciplined only in one area of their life, usually in that area that they are interested in.
   3. But a disciplined person is a balanced person, and is disciplined in all dimensions of life: physical fitness, mental fitness, financial fitness, spiritual fitness. We need to be balanced.

IV. Conclusion: The Holy Spirit Wants You to be an Orderly, Self-Controlled, Disciplined Person.

   A. This is his will for your life.
   B. It is a life-and-death issue.
   C. It is a requirement of an elder.
   D. It is a foundational issue to so many other aspects of life.
   E. This is a never-ending work in life.
   F. Keep on praying, keep on persevering, don't give up when you fail, press forward.
   G. You can learn to be a self-disciplined Christian leader.