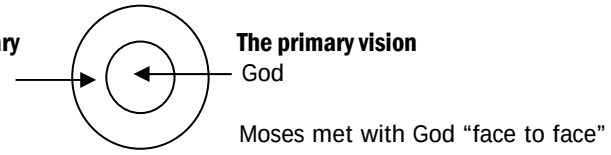
Some Disciplines of the Christian Life 1/4

Vision and Discipline

Introduction

- To do a work for God you need vision.
- In this part of the world our greatest need is for men and women of vision.
- We need groups of people with a united vision. The glue that keeps a company together is a common vision.
- Fresh vision leads to higher expectations.
- Don't confuse secondary visions with our great primary vision.
- Our **primary** vision is seeking God whom we love. It is "abiding in Him". This is our core vision.
- The **secondary** vision is the work God has given us. It is a picture of the future – what it will look like at the finish! It is a God-given dream of what you believe God is going to accomplish through you.
- When the secondary vision shrinks and becomes hazy, don't focus on restoring the secondary vision. Focus on God and ask Him to magnify Himself to you.



- How are we to hold on to the vision and see its fulfilment?
- Two things are essential for the God-given vision to be realised:
  1. The anointing and empowering of the Holy Spirit. This is God's part.
  2. Discipline – our part

The anointing of the Holy Spirit (very briefly)

- We need to open up our whole being to the Holy Spirit and ask Him to fill us. In the accounts of "filling" in Scripture the people knew they had been filled.
- Cultivate His presence – live in the awareness of Him.
- Know His accessibility and His amazing resources.
- He is the Father's gift to you.
- Every person is as full of the Holy Spirit as he/she wants to be.

A daily check list before start-up (cf. airline pilots)

The purpose of the checklist is to have a heart full of the Holy Spirit all day. There is power in repeated action!

- ✧ **Express your love to God** verbally, out loud at least 5 times each day.
- ✧ **Give verbal allegiance to the Lord Jesus** as your Lord at least 5 times a day.
- ✧ **Practice confession** – a daily examination to release yourself from any condemnation, shame, guilt or fear. Ask for power to put away every un-Christlike

habit. 'Others may, you cannot'. Don't condemn or criticise others. Seek the more excellent way of modelling a Christlike lifestyle.

- **Ask the Holy Spirit to fill every part of you** – your mind, body and spirit. Ask Him frequently. Be conscious of the ***"fellowship of the Holy Spirit"*** (2 Cor. 13:14). Seek to get to know Him. Talk to him aloud – especially in emergencies.
- **Speak out aloud God's promises** especially in areas where you want to grow in truth and faith – e.g.
  - ✓ purity in thought
  - ✓ having a humble heart
  - ✓ speaking the truth
  - ✓ having a gentle spirit
  - ✓ relying on God
  - ✓ etc.
- Battle to make the **Sermon on the Mount** the criteria by which you evaluate your life. Make this how you decide what "success" looks like.
- Put on the armour of God piece by piece daily.
- Sing, speak out or read out aloud Scripture – especially the promises of Scripture.

In our part of God's work we are beginning to see progress. Fresh vision and higher expectations are evident. But you need **two hands** to do the will of God:

vision and discipline

Discipline is an indispensable characteristic of men and women who have achieved much for God. Certainly we need men and women of vision to give momentum to what we are trying to do, but this is not enough. We need to **recover discipline**.

Discipline isn't unique to Christians. Churchill is an example of discipline. As a writer he wrote 57 books. This was in addition to his responsibilities as a politician. [He was very busy as Minister for the Colonies, Minister of Home Affairs, Minister of Trade, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister during World War II.] His books were largely about history – one in five volumes. He was also a pilot, an artist, a farmer, a stone and brick mason, a polo player and a collector of tropical fish. How did he do all this? He knew something about discipline!

Discipline isn't popular today. It smacks of legalism and fanaticism. But it is terribly important! In the Holy Spirit you can live in discipline because discipline is a fruit of abiding in the Holy Spirit. You receive the **gifts of God** by faith. Character comes from discipline.

I am not advocating Christian stoicism – getting hold of yourself by the scruff of the neck. There is no joy in that! It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and the results are a delight.

The Disciplines of the Christian Life

There are several of these. We need to get beyond mere pensive longing. The complacency of many of us is a scandal. Our contentedness with inadequate and imperfect progress in the life of holiness is a disgrace. Let us press on for the prize (Phil. 3:14)

We must set our faces like flint. We need resolution! The desire to fulfil the vision must become all-compelling for God's glory.

There are different **types of discipline**:

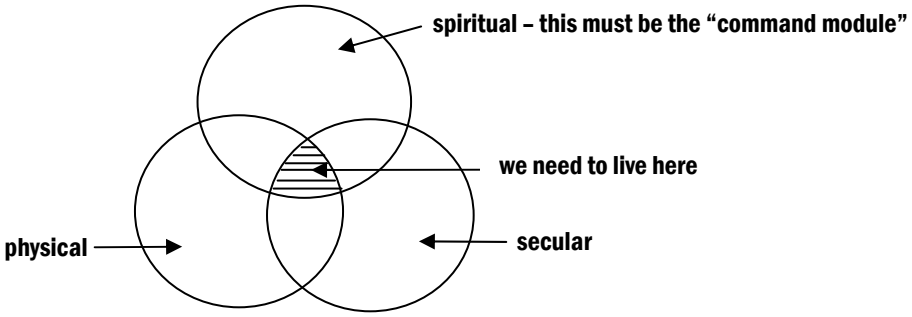
- **Physical disciplines** (Proverbs concentrates on this area.)
  - ✓ eating/gluttony
  - ✓ sleeping/laziness
  - ✓ sexuality
  - ✓ exercise

- **Secular disciplines** (Ecclesiastes says much in this area often playing 'devil's advocate' saying all is vanity without the fear of God behind it:

  1:13 life is meaningless
  2:44 pleasure is meaningless
  2:8 work is meaningless)
  - ✓ use of time
  - ✓ money and its use
  - ✓ setting of goals/ambition
  - ✓ work practices

- **Spiritual disciplines** (The Psalms are full of these.)
  - ✓ prayer and meditation
  - ✓ fasting
  - ✓ submission to leadership
  - ✓ etc.

These different types of discipline are interrelated. What you do in your body relates to what is happening spiritually. If we are disciplined in one area it will help in the other two areas as well.



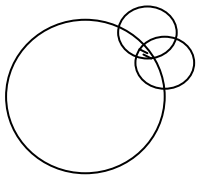
The dangers of an over-emphasis on discipline

- Guilt
- Criticism
- Tension with others
- Legalism

Three problems to avoid

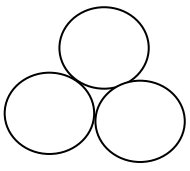
1. **The problem of inflation**

   (An over-emphasis in one area)



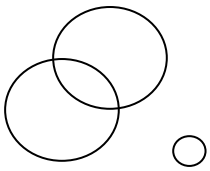
2. **The factor of interaction**

   (Treating each discipline independently)



3. **The factor of isolation**

   (One discipline area considered irrelevant)



Remember to be hard on yourself and easy on others. Bear your own cross. Don't lay it on others. Practice the presence of God. Cultivate fellowship with the Triune God by prayer, humility, obedience and self-abnegation. If you do this, rapid progress will follow.

We are going to look at four disciplines:

1. **The discipline of sonship**
2. **The discipline of discipleship**
3. **The discipline of fellowship**
4. **The discipline of apostleship**

The discipline of sonship (Heb. 12:5-13)

These are the disciplines the Father gives to us.

- We don't choose these disciplines. We don't choose to put ourselves under them. It is something the Father does. They are not voluntary.
- The discipline comes to us because of the Father's love for us (v.6). The Father's discipline is creative. It coaches us. It prepares us and equips us for the future.
- **Don't make light of this discipline**. These disciplines tend to discourage us. If we don't realise we are under the Father's discipline, we easily get weary of it.
- Remember that we are disciplined as sons (v.7). As a father, it is really sad when you see your children not taking your warnings seriously.

So we are to live under the discipline of God. This is the tough edge of God's love for us. If we don't know anything of the Father's discipline, then we are illegitimate and are not God's children. Before we can exercise leadership and the discipline of others, we must realise that we ourselves are under discipline.

There are probably things in your life that you wish were not there. It may be that they are there because you are under discipline by the Father.

Two examples of this:

- **Joseph**

  "As for you, you meant evil against me but God meant it for good....." (Gen. 50:20)

  Joseph knows that God is going to use him. He had two dreams. He is a man of great destiny. Yet he was betrayed by his brothers, sold as a slave, framed by Potiphar's wife and forgotten by the butler. Still there was no bitterness in his heart. Joseph was living by faith in God's promises. He held on to the vision – learning through discipline. Joseph never let the vision die. So learn to **endure** the Father's discipline (Heb. 12:7).

- **David Livingstone**

  David came from a poor family in Scotland. He had six brothers and sisters. The whole family lived in one room. At ten years old David was sent to work in a cotton mill. Work started at 5.30 am and he worked till 6.30 pm with half an hour for breakfast and an hour for lunch. At home in the evening he studied by candlelight in that small room. In this way he passed his secondary school exams and amazingly got a scholarship to study medicine at Edinburgh University because he sensed God had called him to Africa.

  Cotton mills are very hot and humid. When he eventually pioneered God's work in central Africa (where it is hot and humid), he thanked God for the Father's discipline.

  He found himself rising at 5.30 am and working until 6.30 pm. After that he studied and wrote by candlelight – often in a crowded African hut! The Father's discipline had prepared him for the future! The hardships of his childhood were the Father's training for his ministry.

So the Father disciplines us through circumstances. We can receive these circumstances as the Father's discipline and welcome them as preparation for the future. The alternative is that we allow those circumstances to lead to bitterness, cynicism and unbelief. Hard circumstances can be very productive in our lives or they can be wasted. Heb. 12:9 says, ***"Submit to the Father and live"***!

A little boy was forced by his father to lie on his bed as a punishment. As he lay there he said to his father, *"I may be lying on my bed, but inside I am standing up!"* It is possible to obey but not to submit! We are to submit to our Father out of deep respect and love for Him. Submission is deeper than obedience.

This is not Christian stoicism – gritting your teeth and bearing it. There is no joy in that. Rather it is an understanding that God has a wonderful purpose in ordering **all** the circumstances around us.

There are many examples of this principle in Scripture – e.g. Moses and the 80 years of preparation as he was disciplined and taught through circumstances and prepared by the Father. The same can be seen in numerous missionary biographies.

The disciplines of the Father are often directed to the whole issue of **pride**. In our company there is a sense that you have achieved something when you get asked to be on certain committees, you write for various journals and you speak on various platforms. This kind of status seeking has permeated the Christian world – being a Christian celebrity. This is devilish if we are motivated by a desire to get to the top – to gain recognition. If this is in your heart you will come under the discipline of the Father! Unless we are free from this in our hearts, we bring pollution into the work of God. God will discipline us to totally get rid of this sort of garbage from our lives. We need to long for a servant spirit!

Dr. David Yonggi Cho, the pastor/leader of the largest church in Seoul, Korea tells of the disciplines of the Father in his life. He started his ministry at the close of the Korean War in a small ex-army tent given to him. One night soon after this he went out and measured the largest church building in Seoul and then went home and prayed, "*O Lord, I want a church larger than that!"* He says that for the next ten years he was physically weak and often sick trying to run his church from his bed. He knew he was under the discipline of the Father for his motive of pride rather than seeking God's glory. He learned to humble himself.

The way the Father disciplines us varies. Sometimes it is **physical** – learning to endure hardness as a disciple. It may be **emotional** separation – you want to be married soon and the Father says, *'No, wait'* and then separates you for a while.

The really important fact is that as we submit to the Father's discipline He really does produce fruit in our lives and ministries.

"Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet." Heb. 12:12

Act right and you will 'feel' right.

A reminder of the discipline of disobedience

Scripture give is an example in the life of Samson of the discipline of God when we deliberately disobey. Samson is a great warning of the disaster of undisciplined discipleship.

Moses was well trained in all the learning, judgement and knowledge of Egypt. Moses was a man of the **brain**. Both Samson and Moses had faith, but Samson lacked **faithfulness**. Note what Paul writes to Timothy, ***"Discipline yourself for Godliness"*** (1 Tim 4:6-7).

Samson stood for God as a lone leader in a very dark period of the history of the People of God. Gideon could get 300 picked men to follow him. Samson could only get 300 foxes! Samson was willing to allow 300 men of Judah to betray him!

Samson disobeyed the vows of a Nazarite that he had taken and as a consequence he lost his sight, he lost his strength, he lost his freedom and he lost his dignity.

He was called to be God's man. This was **observable** in his uncut hair. It was to be **demonstrated** in a disciplined life devoted to the will of God and the service of the people. But Samson foolishly kept company with the wrong people in the wrong places. Samson yielded to self-indulgence. He trifled with God's power.

Scripture says that three times the Holy Spirit came upon him mightily and sadly three times the enemy made fun of him. We see the sad consequences in the life of a disciple who went about ignoring the discipline of God.

But failure never needs to be final as the death of Samson proved. Samson makes it into the list of the great heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. The door is always open to repentance and restitution. A man doesn't really start praying until his heart starts crying great tears of repentance – ***"God be merciful to me a sinner!"*** In His love for us, God is not going to allow us to believe we can save ourselves! This may mean the pain of suffering disappointed hopes, frustrated plans and lost opportunities again and again until at last we realise the truth **"Without Me – nothing"**. If you throw out self-centred living you will find the fulfilment of the vision God has put on your heart.