

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: January 20, 2008

Preparing To Freely Walk Out God's Purpose

by Dan Trygg

“...discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; ⁸ for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come. ⁹ It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. ¹⁰ For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. ¹¹ Prescribe and teach these things. ¹² Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. ¹³ Until I come, hold fast to the *public* reading of *Scripture*, to the exhortation (coming-alongside) and to the teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the elders. ¹⁵ Cultivate these things; be *absorbed* in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.”

I Timothy 4:7-15

Most of us don't like the notion of discipline. We don't like the sound of that word. It sounds either like hard work, or maybe even punishment. Unless we grasp what discipline is all about, and what it is for, it seems to us like a bunch of rules and restrictions. If we are convinced of its value and effectiveness, however, it is much easier to embrace discipline and to make the investments and sacrifices it requires. Basically, **discipline is a plan or strategy for personal growth or to accomplish a goal.** I recently went to the movie, *The Great Debaters* (An excellent movie, by the way.). In one exchange, between a wise pastor and his son, the pastor-father reminds his son to get started on his homework. He asks his boy, “What should you be doing now? The son replies, “My homework.” “And why is that?” asks the father. The son replied, “Because **now I do what I have to do, so later I can do what I want to do.**” That is a good summation of what discipline is all about. **Note that there are three aspects: (1.) a plan or strategy**, some kind of activity that is required; **(2.) delayed gratification**, this plan or strategy produces positive results, but they are for some future time; and **(3.) the payoff**, the desired result that working the plan is supposed to bring about. Note that **the payoff is expressed in terms that are descriptive of freedom, ...we get to do what we want to do.**

We all have to deal with discipline at some level or another. When we come from the womb, we are without any discipline or self-control, whatever. We immediately reacted to our personal feelings and surroundings. If we were uncomfortable, we cried. If we felt the need to poop, we did. We didn't care what anyone else thought. It was all about us. Instant gratification. Then, as we grew, the people around us began to have expectations that we would control our bodily functions. We began to find that we were not permitted to do anything we wanted. Some things were off limits, or were unacceptable. We did not like to hear the “no” word. We threw tantrums, whined, cried and pouted, but, in the end, we learned how to control ourselves enough to navigate in the social contexts in which we lived. Delayed gratification. **Most of the discipline of those early years was introduced to us from the outside, by parents, teachers, and other people. Eventually we were asked to knowingly participate in those disciplines.** We were given more responsibility for doing our homework, practicing our lessons, working out for sports, studying for tests, practicing for driver's license, etc. Delayed gratification. We did what we had to do in order to get the grades we wanted, or the level of mastery we wanted, or the skill level we wanted, the job we wanted, or the freedoms we wanted. **We did what we had to do in order to be able to do what we wanted to do.**

Now that we have become God's children, **there is a higher calling upon our lives than what we realized before. To fulfill that calling, we must apply ourselves to growth and developing new skills.** There is a reason we are called “disciples” (Gk. - *mathētēs*). It is because a *disciple* is expected to be an active follower, one who learns (Gk. - *manthanō*) by instruction, experience, experimentation, and practice. It implies a process of training, utilizing strategies of *discipline*, in order to become equipped and mature. It means doing what you *have* to do now, so you can be and do what you *want* to later. It means putting aside immediate gratification in order to invest in future growth.

The word used in I Timothy 4 is even stronger than the word for “discipline”. The Greek word, *gumnazō*, from which we get the English derivative, “gymnasium”, means to “train by vigorous exercise”, to “work out”. Our culture is really into physical fitness (in *theory*, at least). The Bible recognizes that physical exercise is of some value. That is a good thing. Many of us are comfortable with *that*, but we don't want to hear any more, or consider the rest of what Paul is saying. Most people don't even do the bodily discipline, but at least they can understand it. Others may have discipline here, in this area of life, but not for the rest of what Paul has to say. Paul goes on to state that **godliness is profitable for all things, having promise both now in this life as well as for eternity.** Then, as if to underline the point, he says, “The word is faithful and worthy of all acceptance.” In other words, “You can count on this to be true.”

Have you experienced this? Have you found that changing your focus from what the world system promotes to what God says is important has produced good things for you? Has it made your life better? The Bible says it will. **Are you convinced of the truthfulness and dependability of this statement?** Is God's way best, or are you still trying to play both sides of the fence? You can't have it both ways. God's blessing and the fulfillment of His will in your life is *limited* by how much you give yourself to Him and His ways. **Notice what Paul says about how convinced he was, "For unto this we labor and we strive, because we have hoped in the living God."** The word for "labor" means to "work hard unto weariness", and the word for "strive" is the Greek word, *agōnizomai*, which means to "wrestle, struggle, strain every nerve". (Did you recognize the word "agony" in the first part of that word? It originated here in this Greek word, which was also used to describe the intense struggle of Olympic wrestlers as they locked and grappled with their opponents.). **This takes discipline to a new level! Paul was so convinced that godliness was beneficial that he worked hard at it, and even pushed himself to struggle and strain in his desire to grow.** He paid the price every day in order to become a deeper, more mature man of God. His hope really *was* in God. He was committed, sold out, and his efforts demonstrate that he *really* meant it.

Paul then turns to Timothy, a much younger man who is now responsible to lead others, and advises him, "Prescribe and teach these things." **Timothy was to pass along not only the content of the sound doctrine he had been taught (vs. 6), but also the passionate heart and committed example of a person sold out to Jesus.** Paul said, "Don't let anyone despise your youth, rather become an example to them." In other words, the quality of your walk will silence any other criticisms that people may throw at you. **What areas are we to become an example to other people? In what we say, ...in our habitual conduct, ...in godlike-love, ...in faith, ...and in purity.** You are to be an example or model of what a Jesus-person looks like. Jesus should be revealed through your words, actions and attitudes. Of course, you and I cannot do that by ourselves. The only way we can really show people Jesus is if Jesus Himself is living in us *and we are living and abiding in Him* (I Jn. 3:6; Jn. 12:35,36; Eph. 5:7-18; Rom. 13:11-14; II Cor. 2:14-16). That does not happen by itself. We must learn to walk with the Spirit of Christ which is in us (Rom. 8:1-17; Gal. 5:13-26). **We must discipline ourselves for godliness. We must exercise ourselves to learn to tune in to the Spirit, so we can learn to detect His promptings and become responsive to Him.** We must invest ourselves to do what we have to do now, so that we can become free to live as we want to live, by the power of the Spirit. **Paul knew that Timothy was paying that price, day in and day out. As a result, he was able to demonstrate the presence of Jesus in his life by what he did and said.** Remember that **Timothy was one of Paul's closest disciples.** He had been trained under Paul's leadership and oversight for a number of years. He had taught Bible studies and preached the word before. He was a gifted teacher, and was good at getting people established in their faith (Acts 17:10-15; I Thess. 3:1,2). **Now, however, he was in a new place of responsibility.** He had been a faithful servant, carrying out the instructions Paul would give to him. Now, however, he was the one expected to lead and give direction to others. Paul would still come by to check on him, but Timothy was going to be setting the direction of things. **Therefore, the aged apostle gave him a handful of practical ministry activities to focus on** during his absence:

"Hold to the reading of the Scriptures." This is important. Note that the reading of Scripture is differentiated from "the teaching". God has uniquely inspired the Scriptures to be profitable for equipping us. God wants to use those writings to speak to us *directly*. He wants us to get used to hearing from Him through the Word. Next, **"hold to ...the coming-along-side-to-help"**. Instead of "exhortation", the word here is *paraklēsis*, meaning "coming alongside to help". To translate this as "exhortation" is too limiting. It can mean any number of things, exhortation, encouragement, comfort, help, intercede, implore, etc. The real point is that we "come alongside others to help". Paul is advocating this as a ministry discipline. It takes risk, effort and oftentimes compassion to do this. It requires that we go out of our way to come alongside someone else. Sometimes it can be frustrating, aggravating and irritating, because they may not be responsive, right away. Nevertheless Paul advocates that we keep doing it. It is part of the work-out process. We get built up by it, and the other person is benefited, as well. **Hold to ...the teaching.** In the early church, the believers were giving themselves to the "doctrine of the apostles" (Acts 2:42). There is a body of basic doctrine that we ought to be learning and teaching to others. This is part of our spiritual training, as well. We need to familiarize ourselves with what is sound, clearly demonstrable apostolic teaching, and be deploying that sound doctrine into the lives of others. As we do that, we will be matured, as well. **Don't neglect your spiritual gift.** This is important, because the flow of the Spirit will be strongly expressed through the area of our giftedness. We must seek to identify our gifts, and be utilizing them in service. It builds us up, and tunes us in to the Spirit. **Finally, "take pains with these things"**. The Greek means not only to "think about", "practice", and "cultivate", but even to "rack your brains about", definitely implying strong effort made to understand, develop and implement these things. **"Be absorbed in them"** or "be devoted to" these things. Paul says to keep working in these things, because they will produce the desired results.