



Life Principles Notes™

Living the Extraordinary Life Part 5: A Life of Self-Discipline

Summary:

No one ever said the Christian life would be easy. Jesus Christ promised us a lifetime of joy and fulfillment, and also one where tests and trials are part of the journey. He assures every single one of us an extraordinary life. But there is a price to pay: the commitment of self-discipline.

We all recognize the tragedy of undisciplined living in today's world. Some people are physically ill because they lack self-discipline. Others are

unsuccessful in careers or in marriage for the same reason. Thousands of men and women sit in prison right now simply because they have not learned to control their desires.

What about you, my friend? What area of your life is out of control? Do you struggle to take charge of some particular yearning? If so, you have allowed yourself to be a slave to that desire. But you can experience victory in whatever battle you may be fighting. Let's discover what the Word of God has to say about the life of self-discipline.

Scriptural Principles:

1 The Christian life is goal-oriented. The apostle Paul compares the godly life to athletic competition in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. He writes, "I run in such a way as not without aim . . . I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (vv. 26-27). Life for the believer is a race to the goal that God has established for each of His followers. It is "not without aim"—that is, it is purpose-driven. We run to win the race, and winning requires personal discipline. We make the body our slave rather than being its slave.

2 Discipline is meant to result in godliness. "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7). The word for *discipline* means "to treat the body roughly." A committed athlete pays the physical price for fitness, and a committed believer will pay a price as well. With a goal of Christlikeness, we train our minds, bodies, and spirits to focus on our Lord and His will for our lives. Most importantly, we bring our desires under control through the power of the Holy Spirit.

3 Discipline is not the same as legalism. The legalist believes that the Lord's favor can be earned through the right kind of behavior. However, we can win divine favor only by God's grace, through the sacrificial death of His Son. The legalist, nevertheless, foolishly concentrates on depriving himself to prove his spiritual righteousness in God's eyes. Disciplined believers seek not to impress God but to please Him. They bring their desires under control for the purpose of living a godly life, which gives the Lord pleasure.

4 Discipline is necessary because God calls us to a life of holiness. We are to avoid the old appetites we once yielded to in ignorance. Instead, we are to be holy, as Christ is. (1 Peter 1:14-16) No one can live a sinless life, but we can bend our hearts toward God, walking in obedience before Him and making His pleasure our greatest desire. We will stumble at times, but in the life of holiness, we never cease training our spirits to bring every desire under the control of the Holy Spirit, who lives within us.

5 Our enemies are the world, the flesh, and the Devil. This world's system opposes the godly life we try to lead. "Fleshly" or carnal temptations lure us to gratify our human appetites; the penalty is enslavement. Meanwhile, the Devil watches for every opportunity to divert us from the central goal of godliness that would result in our living the extraordinary life. God has pardoned us from our sins, but He has not removed us from the presence of sin. Therefore, we face trials and temptation at Satan's hand every day. Discipline is the spiritual weapon that can strengthen us daily to withstand evil enticements.

6 Each of us is responsible before God for our own discipline. No one can be disciplined for someone else. Students must pass their own examinations or they will receive poor grades. They must have the personal discipline to pay attention in class, take notes, and prepare for the final test. Similarly, nobody wants to fail in the Christian life, so we must take responsibility for our own preparation and training. Otherwise, the undisciplined life will have very dangerous consequences.

7 Consequences of the undisciplined life. Since people who lack discipline are not focused on holiness, they become entangled in activities that are displeasing to God. Many live in a way that actually is damaging to their health; undisciplined eating is one example. Financial problems are common, because those who can't control their desires become slaves to materialism. Another result of undisciplined living is poor performance, since doing our best takes self-control. A lack of self-control also easily leads to slothfulness. People without self-discipline often become reckless in their speech—a dangerous habit, since the uncontrolled tongue can do terrible damage. They are often tardy for appointments and prone to wasting both time and energy. Finally, an undisciplined believer has a poor testimony in a life that is representing God's Son.

8 The requirements of a disciplined life. How can you start to live the life of self-discipline? Begin with a specific purpose. Next, "identify and detach": identify the desires that war against your soul, and choose to walk away from them. Then, pursue discipline with diligence. There is no room for compromise. Refuse to let feelings dictate your course of action, and move forward, regardless of how you feel at the moment. Be consistent: starting and stopping will prevent your success. Next, learn to say no—practice self-denial. Jesus said that if we want to follow Him, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. (Matthew 16:24) Finally, allow yourself to fail. No one is perfect. When you stumble, focus on the goal, and keep walking in the Spirit.

9 The rewards of a disciplined life. Discipline's first reward is a lifestyle that is orderly and less stressful. Second, you will feel good about yourself: you will have a sense of achievement that results in a positive attitude. The disciplined life also contributes to good health, because you will be more likely to eat properly, exercise regularly, and care for your body more effectively. As you allow the Holy Spirit to increase your discipline, you'll be rewarded with greater productivity. You will have a positive influence on other people, who will be inspired by your example. Finally, the disciplined life will contribute to your intimate personal relationship with God—the greatest treasure you possess.

Conclusion:

How about your own life? In what area do you struggle to control your desires? Remember, it's your decision whether to remain under the slavery of your appetites. Through a life of self-discipline, the Holy Spirit can lift you toward more contentment, more peace, more success, longer life, and a greater impact for our Lord and His eternal kingdom.

If you choose to pursue a holy life, the Lord will enable you to bring every area of your life under

control. The Holy Spirit will be your counselor and encourager. Then all the rewards mentioned, and many more, will blossom in your life.

God wants you to be free of life's worldly burdens. He desires that you live an orderly life characterized by self-control and the other fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23) Commit yourself to His guidance, and start living the extraordinary life today. 📌

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