

Discipleship: from Believing to Following

Part 2: The Importance of Discipline (9/27/26)

Please turn to *Deuteronomy 8:1-20*

WHY this sermon series? God has a whole bunch more He wants to do in and through Gateway! He's appointed us to be His Light in this community! To that end, He's preparing us to be able to handle a whole lot more than we are now.

LAST WEEK

- It's good that we believe in Jesus!
- He has Saved us by His grace through faith.
- We are cleansed by His blood, forgiven of all sin, and sealed with the Holy Spirit!
- He's freed us from the divine penalty for violation of the Law, God's commands!
- We are eternally secure in our Salvation and no "proof" is required to show whether we are or aren't!
- Yet do we FOLLOW Him?
- Have we truly picked up our crosses, denied ourselves, and followed Christ?
- If studies are accurate, 62% of US citizens say they're believing Christians, but only 4% are actually "integrated disciples" who live lifestyles that mimic that of Jesus.
- Are we believers or have we taken the next step to walk the path of a Disciple?
- A disciple imitates his teacher Jesus: follows, loves, obeys, lives His lifestyle, receives and does His teachings, and invites others to do the same.
- WWJD? We should do the same.
- What would Jesus NOT do? We should restrain from the same.
- Although freed from the divine penalty of God's Law, we're not delivered from the earthly consequences of our sins.
- Nor are we totally immune from the actions of others, the fallen world, or the devil.
- A disciple embraces and pursues the righteousness bought for us by Jesus rather than indulging in sin.
- A disciple learns how to "fight" like Jesus did against the devil, human enemies, and the fallen world.
- There IS fruit to show whether a person is following Jesus or not.

TODAY we're going to talk about the **importance of self-discipline** and let me share some of the common questions and even objections I've heard over the years:

- *"Is this legalism or does it lead to it?"*
- *"Can't we just walk in God's grace? Why do we have to 'do' things?"*
- *"Are these necessary to maintain my salvation or prove I'm a Christian?"*
- *"Will I fall into lifeless obligation & duty?"*
- *"Does God help me with this, or am I on my own?"*

One of my favorite coffee drinks is a **mocha latte** and here are the ingredients:

- 2 shots espresso
- 2 Tablespoons Chocolate Syrup
- 1 cup milk.

Let's translate that into today's message:

ESPRESSO is ZEAL. When you and I are feeling motivated, pumped, and passionate about something.

CHOCOLATE is KNOWLEDGE & WISDOM of God which, as the Scripture states, is *“sweet in the mouth.”*

THE MILK is Discipline. It doesn't really taste like much, nor does it energize...*it's waking up every day and being a DOER of the Word.*

- ESPRESSO: sometimes we wake up and there is no zeal. We're tired, not in the mood, and feel like doing something else...now what?
- CHOCOLATE: sometimes we feel as though we're “not getting anything out of” our Bible reading, prayer, or a sermon...as though the wisdom of God is eluding us. What do we do?
- MILK. Please notice the amount of milk is far greater than the amount of espresso or chocolate.
 - There is 4x more milk than espresso.
 - There is 8x more milk than chocolate syrup.

If we choose self-discipline even when there's little zeal fueling us, or the wisdom of God seems temporarily elusive, we'll move forward because *we're following our commitment to the Lord vs our feelings.*

Let's follow Jesus vs our moods, preferences, likes, dislikes, and fears.

2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV): “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and **self-discipline.**”

Let me shift gears with a statement that some of you might take as good news:

Diets lead to failure, even when they're successful.

The way to success is a spiritually healthy permanent lifestyle.

A paradigm shift in belief, source, and resource that radically redirects the course of our lives.

So radical that the people who've known us say "there's something different about you."

Let me go back to my first statement, give you a real-life example, then explain: *diets lead to failure, even when they're successful.*

About 8 years ago **I did the Keto diet:** cut out all sugar, most carbs, and increased protein. I also entered into an fitness program at the time. Things went great! I lost weight, lost my late night snacking routine, lost my cravings for sugary/dessert stuff, my heartburn disappeared, and so did my acid reflux. I had more energy, slept a little better, and less brain fog. I got down to 188 pounds and hadn't been there since I was in my 20's. People noticed and complimented me.

Sounds like a success story, doesn't it? It wasn't because guess what happened when I decided to go off Keto? **All the weight came back, and then some.**

A couple years ago *I did another diet called Optavia.* They sent me boxes of food containing packets, and the instruction were to eat 5 packets a day once every 2-2.5 hours. To drink X amount of water as well. At night I was instructed to eat "lean and green" and they even gave me a recipe book for meals to prepare. They included an app that I downloaded where I tracked my progress.

I followed the diet and got down to 180 lbs, the lightest I'd ever been since my early 20's. I also had all the other benefits I previously mentioned with Keto.

Again I ask: *doesn't this sound like a win?* Yes...but it wasn't b/c I **stopped doing the diet and guess what happened?** All the weight came back, and so did all the health problems I mentioned.

Here's what happened: **both of these things were diets that I went on temporarily to "fix" a problem.**

Not a permanent radical lifestyle change to live in a healthy manner.

To follow Jesus and be His disciple is a permanent, radical, lifestyle change that requires denying ourselves and taking up our crosses.

Humanity in covenant with God has followed a pattern since we were first kicked out of Eden and it goes like this:

- We're content & stable, so we live our lives, pursue our own desires, and give God a head nod every now and then.
- Things get bad, and what we used to depend on no longer works. We try to fix it, and can't.
- We finally take the time for solitude and prayer, crying out to God!
- We go back to church, read our Bibles, and fellowship with the saints.
- God responds, God's people respond, others respond, and we're stable...whew!
- Stability turns into contentment so we go back to living our lives, pursuing our desires, and giving God a head nod every now and then.

In other words, **we went on a spiritual diet.**

As soon as we "lost weight" and got a little more fit, we went off the diet.

I start reading now in Deuteronomy 8 and in these verses, we'll see God warned ancient Israel of this very thing:

[Deu 8:1-5 ESV] – 1 "The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful **to do**, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. 2 And you shall **remember** the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, **testing you to know what was in your heart**, whether you would keep his commandments or not. 3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and **fed you with manna**, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. 4 Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. 5 Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.

The Lord is bringing Israel to the PL. Look what He says in verse 2: **“REMEMBER.”** And He tells them to remember **“the whole way”** meaning right now whilst still on the journey, and after they arrive and settle in.

In other words, **“remembering” God (whatever that means) is a permanent lifestyle they will do on a daily basis.**

Verse 2: the 40 years in the desert was a testing period to reveal TO the Israelite people ***what was in *their* hearts.*** God already knew.

Note: if you and I feel like we’re going through a period of trouble and testing, the purpose is the same: ***to reveal to us what’s in our hearts.*** Why do that? **So we know where to deny ourselves and nail to the cross we’re carrying.**

Back to the verses: **Discipline isn’t merely punishment**, although the definition of the word has morphed into that.

SELF-DISCIPLINE is committed consistency to something, denying ourselves of whatever would delay or harm that goal. If I decide I’m going to quit smoking or eating sugary foods, I deny myself those “pleasures,” but the payoff is far greater for my health.

WORLDLY DISCIPLINE from human government **is for the sake of justice and is punishment.** We did bad and broke a man-made law, now we get punished to balance the scales.

GODLY DISCIPLINE is a Father-child relationship. Its purpose is for Father to ***change the character of His child to transform into that of His first Son, Jesus.***

Punishment is for unbelievers. **Christ-like character building is for believers.**

God’s discipline **isn’t** sending fiery serpents or bringing pestilence. Look at what He says here Deuteronomy 8: **the purpose of the 40 years of wandering AND them being denied “normal” food was to discipline (not punish!) them.** His discipline served the purpose of humbling them which resulted in revealing—to themselves—what was really in their hearts.

So does the process of being Jesus' disciple—it will humble us and reveal what's in our hearts.

Remember that the **ancient Israelis were under an inferior covenant to the one we're in now.** Inferior. Yet look what God was doing whilst “disciplining” them: *giving them heavenly manna vs. burger, fries, and a coke.*

For 6 days the **manna would literally fall from the sky** and the Hebrews would gather it in baskets and eat it—they had no other food. Manna looked like dinky white balls they baked into cakes and tasted like “wafers made with honey and oil” (*Exodus 16:31, Numbers 11:7-8*).

The Bible goes on to record the people were at **peak health while eating it;** physically fit, lots of energy, clear minds, etc. *You know the one time they got sick?* When they demanded their old diet of burgers, fries, and a coke...OK it was poultry, but you get my meaning. They were tired of eating manna every day! They wanted food like they had in Egypt! They longed for days when they could eat all the great things Egypt offered them...I meant they were slaves, had no freedom, and were forced to work under a tyrannical state...*but at least they had food variety!*

They demanded meat, *so God gave them meat in Numbers 11.* A bunch of quail miraculously flew into the camp and voila! They broke out the grills, roasted them, and ate until they were stuffed! Guess what happens right after? **They get sick.**

Please notice that, **even in the midst of humbling them, God is blessing them** with 1) heavenly food that keeps them trim, healthy, and energetic 2) clothing that never wears out.

In other words, **When one chooses to follow God, it's not just “self-denial”!**

We deny our earthly desires and our sins—which reap a bitter, destructive harvest—**but we plant AND harvest the things of God. Not just for future judgment, but for right now.**

What if we wake up every day to the food of the word of God?

We don't live by physical food alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. The written word is more available now than it ever has been in the history of the world. What's more is the Spirit of God lives in each of us, and He is the One Who makes the written word come alive and be active in our lives!

What would this do for our spiritual health? Even our physical bodies?

I've quoted studies in the past about prayer and Bible reading, and the physical benefits are astounding! Less worry and anxiety, better emotional stability, greater and longer lasting euphoria, less trips to the doctor. Maybe if you and I were on a steady, daily, lifetime lifestyle of prayer and Bible reading we wouldn't need therapy, pills, and puppies?

The problem with a diet is that our brains set goal and time limits. It will provide a certain (not complete) level of motivation temporarily until we reach some sort of milestone...then it injects a "reward" into our system. Serotonin is the "I feel successful" hormone and dopamine is the "I feel good" one. When we hit our goal weight or look, the brain acknowledges the same, injects the right chemicals as the reward, and then the time limit expires! That's when we start eating all the former foods and amounts we did before—we set the cross back down and stop denying ourselves. **We "forget."**

Let's continue reading in Deuteronomy 8.

[Deu 8:6-10 ESV] – 6 So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. 7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, 9 a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. 10 And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

Before the Hebrew people can enter into the PL, the land flowing with milk and honey, **they need to be ready...in their hearts. Why?**

For God to trust us with more, He has to know He can trust us with what we have now. Remember when your kids were growing up. All us parents prioritize the safety and protection of our children. When our kids prove trustworthy with the freedom and responsibility we give them, what do we do? **We trust them with more.**

If you had a will with money & possessions to distribute upon your death, **which of your kids do you make executor of your will?** The one who was mature, responsible, and fair or the one who makes bad choices and blows his money all the time?

BOTH are your kids, you love both the same, and both will get something...but **you** **will choose the mature/responsible one to manage your will.**

So it is with God which we reviewed in the Parable of the Talents.

I'm moving forward in spiritual disciplines to be the mature, responsible son who obeys His heavenly Dad from love.

- I might want to eat burger and fries spiritually, but my Good Shepherd Jesus maketh me lie down in green pastures to feed me bread.
- I might want to drink Coke spiritually, but GS Jesus leadeth me beside pure, still waters where I can drink.
- I don't want to go through the Valley of Shadow of Death! The place is dangerous and it scares me! My temptation is to refuse and remain where I feel safe!
- Yet my GS Jesus is walking right through there and telling me to follow Him...so I go whether I'm afraid or not.

Let's continue our reading:

[Deu 8:11-20 ESV] – 11 “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, 12 lest, when **you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them,** 13 and when your **herds and flocks multiply** and **your silver and gold is multiplied** and **all that you have is multiplied,** 14 **then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God**, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, 15 who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, 16 who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. 17 Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ 18 **You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get** wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. 19 And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. 20 Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.

I thank God I'm under the blood of Christ, Who cleansed me of all sin and secured my salvation eternally. As John states in *1 John 4:18, Christ has perfected His love within us, because He's made us immune to divine punishment.* Amen!

Now look at verse 11: if you and I stop doing the spiritual disciplines that I'll teach in upcoming sermons, we'll "forget" God until the next time we're in crises. Then, driven to our knees, we'll "remember" God and cry out to Him. We'll start taking the time to pray, read our Bibles, and attend church. We'll make the time to fellowship with the saints, participate in worship, and ask for prayer.

The Lord and His people will respond! We'll be edified and surrounded by love & support, praise God! We'll get back to a place of stability, perhaps even contentment, as we're lifted up out of the miry clay, amen! **Then we'll drop our cross and go back to the way things were.**

DIETS DON'T WORK.

"Remembering" God and living out His spiritual disciplines is a radical permanent lifestyle change where we will deny ourselves and crucify the desires of our old self, but are **blessed by heavenly manna, the renewal of our minds, and the empowering of our spirit.**

The best benefit will be a relationship with Jesus like we've never experienced before.

This will transform us to the point to where we become unrecognizable to others, including ones who've known us for years. Where we shine so brightly, people want to be around us and want what we have.

God has this for all of us and I believe He's specifically prophesied it over Gateway!

DREAM: two mornings ago, God gave me a prophetic dream; all of Gateway went to have LASIK surgery. I had LASIK in 1998 and it improved my vision to the point where I no longer needed glasses and still don't. In the dream, we all stepped up to the operation table one by one and I was the first. After we were done, we waited around for the others to have theirs too.
END.

INTERPRETATION. “Seeing” in the spirit means receiving God’s revelation and wisdom, and therefore maturing! “Blindness” in the Bible means the opposite: unable or unwilling to see the truth and live it. In the dream, all of Gateway was getting LASIK! His plans are for all of us to get a serious promotion and upgrade in the spirit!

I can’t speak for you, **but I’m ready to commit my ways to the Lord.** I want Him to transform me to make me more like Him. I know He won’t leave me to do it by myself, but will co-labor with me in everything He has me doing.