

# Discipline in Ministry

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[ 0 : 00 ] Can I just read a few verses from 2 Peter 1 in verse 4?

Peter says, Make every effort to add to your faith goodness and to goodness knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control perseverance, and to perseverant godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But if anyone does not have them, he is short-sighted and blind, and he has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

So what Peter is doing there, of course, is he's reminding us about the precious, say, promises of the gospel. And he tells us it is through these promises that we will be able to partake of the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in this world.

[ 1 : 40 ] And it's for that reason, he says, therefore for this reason, he says, I want you to do something. And I want you to make every effort to add certain graces and disciplines to your faith.

And the one that we have in view together this afternoon is self-control. Now you notice at the end of that he mentions love.

And we want to come back to that later on. And Peter gives us this wonderful promise. He says, if we increasingly possess these things, he tells us it will mean that we won't be unproductive or ineffective.

And we believe that is in the ministry. And he reminds us, of course, also that if we don't exercise self-discipline, self-control, we are short-sighted.

And what we are doing is we are courting failure. And it will lead in our spiritual life to be ineffective.

[ 2 : 50 ] So all the talks and lectures we have had so far this week, they have been about subjects. And whenever you come to speak about something that is personal, we all, I'm sure, shy away from it because perhaps something of ourself is going to be in it.

And I'm sure when the topics were given out, the folk felt that I needed this particular talk more than anyone else.

And even if the brethren could not recognise that, I'm sure God knows it very much indeed. When I was thinking about this, it would have been possible, wouldn't it, to go to the great masters in this subject, to look at a Baxter and a Reform Day pastor, to look at some of Spurgeon's lectures a little further on, someone like Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones and John Stott, and even some of the helpful articles that we've seen, perhaps especially from the principal.

And I was wondering, was there a book I could recommend or something even more up to date? And I asked around, and I've read most of this, but I'm sure I can recommend it.

It's about a year old. It's on Being a Pastor by Derek Prime and Alistair Beck. And they look at the issues of being a pastor, some of them in self-discipline.

[ 4 : 18 ] And then what they do, they speak about the theory, and then they give their own comments, what they've actually experienced in their own ministry. One of the persons that we always think of when we think of self-discipline, of course, is the life and ministry of McShane.

And I just happened to mention it briefly to David Robertson, and yes, you're right, he thought that we could bring his book here. So I want to mention this book.

And perhaps David will say something more in the context of McShane and his self-discipline. I think it's always good for us, whenever we come to these subjects, to remember Francis Bacon's great dictum.

And he said that men need to be reminded more often than they need to be taught. And I'm sure I'm going to be looking at sometimes suspects that are very familiar when we think of self-discipline.

I was also encouraged last week that in our Glasgow meeting, or the Glasgow South meeting, for strategy for the way head for the church, that it was interesting time and time again, including at the end, what were the things we needed in our lives, ministers, members, and as churches.

[ 5 : 44 ] And what happened was that there was a great need for a closer walk, for a more spiritual awareness in our own lives. I want to underline just four disciplines.

And I'm speaking mostly from my own personal experience. And when I go through there, I'm speaking usually as a failure. I think the first thing that we need to remind, the first discipline will be this, is the acceptance of two great facts.

And I believe we need to return to these constantly in our ministry. And especially this first truth, it is the only way that we will ever have self-discipline.

And the first fact we need to remind ourselves is this, we have to remember our calling. We are ambassadors for Christ.

And we'll come back to that word, ambassador. Dr. Packer does us a great favour in his introduction to Baxter's Reform Pastor.

[ 7 : 00 ] Because he tells us that when it was being printed, Baxter insisted in that the words reformed would be in bold letters.

And I used to think what he was getting at was he wanted to make sure this book was Calvinistic. I'm sure it was. But he was using the reformed word as the same as a renewed ministry.

A renewed minister in zeal and faith and in love. And he tells us that in his own day, and I'm sure it's true now, that churches, generally speaking, rise and fall in the proportion to their character and to the spirituality of their ministers.

We need self-discipline to make sure that we know that the honour of our Lord rests upon us as a community, perhaps more than in any other group.

We know that it is so easy for us to let the world blaspheme the name of Christ. There is always a dread that someone would say, there goes a lazy minister, or there goes a worldly minister, there goes someone who condemns us with a sermon and condemns himself with his lifestyle.

[ 8 : 33 ] When you read books about self-discipline, they really underscore what Kenny was saying earlier. And that is, if we know that we are dealing with men and women and boys and girls who are lost, and if we believe that team, they are going to a lost eternity, that great risk, if we are worth our salt, will help us to lay ourselves unspently out in their service and for the good of their conversion.

In other words, we need self-discipline to come back time and time again and ask, what is my prime task as a minister? And if we undermine our credibility, then we know that other folk will say, well, why should anyone else bother if the minister is not characterized with self-discipline?

Dr. Johnson once said that if a man knows he's going to be hanged, it concentrates the mind wonderfully. We need self-discipline so that we would always, as much as possible, ask the Lord to give us an atmosphere that we live in in eternity.

Because if we don't feel that truth, how can we speak feelingly to anyone else if we don't know it as a reality in our own life?

Now why do we emphasize that particular truth? Because we believe that truth will impart an overwhelming sense of clarity and proportion to our ministry what it will do will inform us in what really matters and what is really necessary.

[ 10 : 35 ] You know, I think what I'm trying to say is this, that self-discipline will always be a by-product of a proper view of the privilege of being an ambassador for Christ.

That's not to say we're trying to lay the hold weight of a lost world upon a minister's shoulder. It's not saying that God does not use others in building up his kingdom.

But what it does tell us is this, that these would be the exception to the rule. By and large, he tells us he uses his servants.

If we were asking this question, what is the meaning of self-discipline? And I think a good way to look at it is to think of church discipline.

You know, in church discipline we are told that the words used, you remember, it's something, to restore something, or to mend something, or to bring something back to its original condition.

[ 11 : 46 ] We always emphasise that in church discipline it's always something positive. It's not a negative, it's to equip someone to engage in the battle with greater success.

What I'm saying is when we come to ourselves, we are able to look at it in that way, of the same focus. Now this is not some punishment, it's not some misery to be brought through, but it's to give us grace to do the work of a ministry in a better way.

After all, whenever we think of renunciation, all we are renouncing are those things that stand in our way from following Christ.

And it's Christ we are committed to. Now it's good to remind ourselves that this is not an end in itself. You know, worldly discipline turns me off.

I think it's cold, I think it's selfish, I think it's focused in self. And we need to remind ourselves that whenever we are self-disciplined, it is only so that we are able to serve better.

[ 13 : 05 ] that if we fail here, I think Peter is saying we are going to fail everywhere. Now we know also, don't we, that much of this particular truth about self-discipline is unseen.

It would be better to ask our lives how we are doing in that particular road. But we know that while the work to achieve it is unseen, we know that the fruit of self-discipline is seen in our character and it's seen in a balanced way we live.

Shed in his book, Sermons to the Spiritual Man has a wonderful sermon for it means to have Christian discipline or Christian moderation.

And Calvin tells us this, he sums up this first discipline in this way, that a man who never cares for the salvation of others, who neglects his own salvation, will never have a real care over someone else's.

You see, we're speaking of something that's a relationship and this relationship is headed our services so often visible.

[ 14 : 27 ] So what I'm trying to emphasize is this, that God wants quality of life, we believe, rather than the quantity of service. So the first discipline is we remind ourselves constantly of our calling and we look at self-discipline as a privilege and not a chore.

And then there is this second discipline, and I want just to look at some of the pitfalls that I'm sure we've all experienced and all fallen into.

And again, some of these are personal to myself. I think the first pitfall we could take as this is to be careful how we deal with our heroes in the faith, those men and women who are our examples.

people. We believe that God has given them to the church for one great reason, to encourage us, and perhaps to function as a goal towards.

But we need always to remind ourselves that they were sinners like ourselves, and despite all their gifts, they would never get off the ground of grace.

[ 15 : 44 ] And what happens often is this, that we need to remind ourselves that these men had great difficulties. I was reading in McShane, when I mentioned to David there, he mentions one time he was in absolute despair.

We know that he bossed and once said he was as if he was staked in his parish. He was in agony. And therefore we're in good company there.

We need to watch how we read. Not so long ago, we all know that Wesley would have all those early morning prayer sessions, and we strive for that.

But if he was up early in the morning, he made it a rule that he made sure he had an early night. And there is always the danger of venerating those whom God has given to inspire us and to use them in a way that the devil comes out.

I'm sure you can read a book and you might say after it, you know, I've never experienced that. And you might think, well, have I any grace, have I any ministry gifts at all?

[ 16 : 56 ] And of course the devil will often make sure that we take to heart the successes and we forget about the difficulties. And these men would say something like this, listen, there's no masterpiece.

I once heard Al Martin preach and he said regarding this that there was no mastery, something that we are missing in self-discipline. He said if you, the apostle Paul, over to a communion and you were amazed at his preaching and his power and followed him up to bed and you heard him praying, what would he be praying?

He would be saying, oh, wretched man that I am. I know that they are giant and before then we are just like pygmies but they do minister to us.

But we have to remind ourselves that we need self-discipline there so that we read them right. One of the books I've always found really valuable is Martin Lloyd-Jones Spiritual Depression.

Now you might think, well I would, but I'm just mentioning that, it's a lot of positive things. But one of the things that he re-emphasises time and time again is this, that he says we have to know ourselves, know yourselves.

[ 18 : 20 ] One of the temptations surely in the ministry is to try and be something you're not. Remember when I was a student to Angus Morrison's late father Reverend Malcolm Morrison took me aside once and he said to me, Alistair, he said, just try and be yourself.

And I've been struggling at that ever since I suppose. But we know what we mean is God uses you, he uses us as ourselves.

That's why I think in Martin Lloyd-Jones' book, Preachers and Preachers, he does us all a great favour in this way, that he tells us that we have to avoid universal set rules.

And what happens if you cannot follow them, perhaps you feel that you're a failure. We're all different. And he tells us we have difficult physical diets and we have different spiritual ones.

You remember the rhyme, Jack Spratt could eat no fat and his wife could eat no lean. And I think there's a spiritual dimension to that.

[ 19 : 39 ] Some of us are able to pray more in the morning. We must realise what is best for ourselves. And I think the first pitfall is this, do yourself and watch what we read or how we read.

And then something else, another pitfall is this, I think we have to be self-disciplined in the realm of our moods and our emotions. They can so often govern us and the trouble with emotions and moods are far too strong and they fling in the towel much sooner than our minds do.

And the danger is sometimes that we read providence through our feelings and through our emotions and we forget to go to the cross.

And perhaps we need to grow up here more than in any other realm. In Packard's book on holiness he speaks about the Peter Pan syndrome and he says he wanted always just to be a boy he always just wanted to be fun and to be childish.

Another commenter once said that one of the greatest problems in society is extreme emotionalism masquerading in an adult lifestyle.

[ 21 : 09 ] And I think we can be shaped and we can be infected in this way through our feelings. And we want to be what to be in guard and use self-discipline here in the realm of our feelings.

Alec mentioned that earlier when he was speaking about marriage that feelings are given a greater place than honour and we're to remind ourselves that we're married to Christ and we serve him despite often the way we feel.

another pitfall is in the realm of opposition. Now we're all opposed and I'm sure we would also agree that it's most difficult when it's God's people who are opposing us.

And God's people have a unique capacity don't it either to sweeten our days or to make them miserable. And the minister can never be popular in that way because we always refuse to take sides and because of that we can be misguided, miscalled, we can be maligned.

But sometimes you find that when you need someone most it is then that they turn away from us. criticism comes I know it comes rightly but perhaps it comes from just a few faults and that seems to colour our day or colour our whole ministry.

[ 22 : 54 ] And we're to be self-disciplined to say well there's a lot of other things that are going well and good. It is a I suppose when we look at something is it half full or is it half empty.

I had a funny story about that that I suppose we can remember for ourselves it was a true story about a man called Danny Smith he went into a bank in Ottawa in Canada and he was really hard up and he felt he didn't have enough in life.

And he would end with a family gun that was in the house and he held up the teller and as he was going out to the bank the police came and he was arrested.

But the police were intrigued after that because they recognised that the gun that he was using in the hold up was just a one off it was a limited edition and we found out that the gun was worth a hundred thousand dollars and so often perhaps we've got more than what we imagine and we've to watch when we are thinking of the opposition it is always true by God's grace that there are more who are with us than that.

are against us. If we need self discipline and opposition we certainly need self discipline also when we are praised we've heard about that so we won't go on about the dangers of pride of fishing for approval and for applause and self discipline will always tell us if they really knew us they wouldn't be praising us at all and like Spurgeon said you're only aware of the stars when we can't see the sun.

[ 24 : 55 ] We are very ordinary and so we are disciplined in that way whenever we are opposed or wherever we are applauded. Perhaps we could just miss some of these out and move on to another pitfall and that is the way that we so easily fail to recognise the things that are really needful or the one thing needful.

Every day there are things that are desirable but there is often only one thing that must be done and if we only remembered one thing from this day gathering this afternoon if there was a watchword that we could leave with one another could we not say it as necessity?

You see if we were sufficient for all things we could do everything but life is short and we are dull and eternity is close and it's good in this way if you think of necessity and say in different situations he's my own path he's going to decide on the things that need to be done.

You see men are attracted to novelty as we are and we so often shy away from the great things. Now I think it was Stott who once said that the great encouragement when we think of the necessities of the ministry of this that they're few in number and they're shut up in very narrow limits.

And he said also something like this if a necessity is the mother of invention that necessity will often determine what to avoid and what to engage in.

[ 26 : 58 ] And we're asking ourselves we need to be disciplined to ask ourselves well is this really necessary? Another pitfall as we know is indolence, laziness.

We confess often don't we that we're as lazy as we can afford to be. We all know that ministry is the privilege that none of us keep office hours.

And Martin Lloyd-Jones said that even in his own life as he mentions and preaches and preachers he says the temptation just to thrift every day away there is a general slackness in our lives.

But I believe also there is this I think there is a satanic element. We heard Kenny saying our enemies are not natural. We know these scriptures they're evil.

And personally we're fighting for our very lives here. There is this tremendous temptation towards indolence.

[ 28 : 02 ] What about procrastination? My wife tells me that my favourite day is tomorrow. Everything's tomorrow. And sometimes we can be at our desk and you don't feel like doing that.

And you say well I'll be in a better mood later on at a more appropriate time. Now that can be true can't it? We can go back and something can live. But generally it's true that if we don't plan it won't happen.

And there is something else that I have learned and I'm sure you have yourself that it's often the things that we are compelled to do that will really be blessing.

The things that we find difficult to do is usually the area that will find great room for growth.

Because the things that we find difficult are the area I'm sure that there is a great team blessing in doing these things and not putting them off.

[ 29 : 16 ] what about worldliness? Ministers are worldly like anyone else and there is always a danger isn't there that we can shrink away from things if it's against our interest.

We preach regularly against covetousness but what about ourselves? Remember that incident in that? you know if it was a deadly sin for Simon Magus to try and buy the gift of God for money it's very solemn if we are selling it short and forgetting that souls rely on our unworldliness there.

And I once heard Finna Mackenzie saying it pressed between not so long ago discussion like this and perhaps you know we've forgotten in our ministry the element of sacrifice that we forego things for the sake of the gospel.

And then of course there's a wilderness unique to the ministry jealousy looking at another man's status and we need and we need to remind ourselves that the Lord gives us a work and a ministry to accomplish.

Now none of us are a stranger to these things. So what about this one? Perhaps it's a pitfall we could discuss later on. The tendency we have to blame circumstances is.

[ 31 : 01 ] I'm thinking here perhaps about interruption. Now because of the open ended nature of our work it is right that we are always available for our people.

And in each congregation I'm sure you can instantly think of perhaps many or even one individual that you know really tries you here. I have someone in my congregation he's called Fergus well she's called Fergus there's a difficulty there and I'm not breaking any confidences but I often think that this individual shall either destroy me or shall elevate me into a saint.

In other words she's certainly good for our sanctification. And when I think of interruptions again we could speak about that how do we deal when we have all of those requests made to us.

Now one of the things is that what we're saying is let's go back to this arbiter and perhaps we could say well at that time is this necessary?

We cannot do everything but I believe God in his wisdom always knows we can do what's necessary. a third discipline quickly.

[ 32 : 27 ] I've headed it here the assimilation of food and we've certainly been doing that in the last few days together. Health today is a critical thing.

We're told that what we eat and drink is absolutely vital and we need we are told a balance in that way.

And often we say to one another we are what we eat. Since we've left college I've noticed that some of us have grown.

I don't know if it's growing in grace but we've certainly grown. And perhaps you feel you know this week that as you looked at all the speakers you've said there's too many McDonald's and perhaps again we could be disciplined here that we've had too many McDonald's in that way.

What I'm speaking of here is spiritually I'm speaking in the spiritual realm the same truth as here we need a balanced diet.

[ 33 : 38 ] Packery in his book tells us that there is always a balance between truth experience and practice. I'm sure some of us know that he has diagrams there that we're doing around a good number of years ago.

We used to see them often and I don't like these things personally but I'm going to mention them for this reason because our people notice it and they're marking it.

Remember the three figures there? These matchstick figures and the first one we are told is this. Here is this man or woman believer or a minister. Remember he's got a huge head.

Huge head. And of course it means that this person he's academic. I'm not speaking against that.

It's all head knowledge and perhaps it become a name in itself. Even John Owen confesses that as an early young minister he preached and he wrote for distinction.

[ 34 : 43 ] And that's always a danger that we are known simply for that reason. And then you remember the second figure is this matchstick man but he's got a huge body and this person he cares little for doctrine but matters is feeling and experience and he's all heart.

And then there is another picture this man now he's got enormous legs and he's an activist and he's restless and what he puts the emphasis on it's doing that matters.

Now I know that's simplistic but again there is a balance there because our folk comment on that if we are either one of these threes.

one of the things that I found most helpful was a sermon by Sancter I came across a number of years ago and it's a sermon on being an ambassador for Christ and in the sermon he does a very helpful thing he draws a contrast between the Christian minister and a man called Sir Samuel Hoare who was later on Lord Templewood and this man was an ambassador for our country during the second world war and he was dispatched to Spain at a very critical time and that man tells us in his book the privileges of being an ambassador and one of the things he boasts in most of all is access it was something that was jealously guarded it was absolutely vital for him that he had access to a sovereign that he knew his mind and he tells us in that day it was a sworn undertaking by the post office that the dispatch boxes would always arrive unopened 24 hours every day and they could say when my sovereign speaks

I'm going to listen when I speak to him he will hear me and he says nothing external could stop that communication and he tells us the only thing that stopped it was indifference if we take that into the spiritual realm and we ask ourselves where we have access always into the king of kings I'm not going to speak about prayer because there is an utter unworthiness I'm sure in most of our lives that we fail here more than anywhere else although we have the privilege of access and we have so many books on how to pray and when to pray and the most difficult thing as we all know is to engage in prayer but perhaps because we find it so difficult it's a great indication of the importance of prayer in our spiritual battle and of course

[ 38 : 15 ] Satan is there as well I'm sure we've all read of those prayers heroes and warriors and the time they prayed for and I've never been able to reconcile that it's always humbled but Alistair Begg says a helpful thing he tells us this if we can't match them for the time they pray well can we not try and pray so fervently as they did even if it's only for five or ten minutes we know it's easier to study for five hours than to have half an hour to pray the next part of the sermon always seems more urgent than turning aside to prayer and yet we know that the impulse to pray produces often our best sermons and our best works and self discipline tells us this it's not a distraction and don't listen to the evil one can't we be professional also as we are told reading the bible what we mean by that is always trying to get something that applies to someone else or perhaps in our public prayers praying for others in a way we don't really pray fervently for ourselves this man



Samuel Hortel tells us this that he says that's the privileges of being an ambassador and then he tells us that there are dangers of being an ambassador and we'll finish with this thought very quickly he tells us what are the dangers and he tells us he found that he was too long away in a foreign land he said the trouble was I often found I did not have enough visits home to breathe my own native air and he tells us a very interesting thing he found himself that he got denationalised and he tells us the horrible thing about this was this it was so insidious it was a process he tells us when he went first out he tells us he was British through and through he could have turned round and there was a maiden Britain in his back he tells us he saw everything from his sovereign's point of view he was absolutely determined that he would speak only and live only to his prime allegiance but then he tells us he lived with the others it was very cosmopolitan and he heard other points of view and he says the great pressure was eponymous this way to be loyal to the commission that his sovereign gave him his prime allegiance now could we not think of being de-spiritualised that we fail often to come back and to breathe to read and to remember our prime allegiance allegiance and he tells us lastly this the great thing that he loved above all that helped him he tells us was coming back home to his own people and that's the fourth discipline what we've been able to enjoy together this afternoon or these days it's the importance of fellowship when we're alone or perhaps when we voluntarily take up a position of isolation perhaps it's when we're down or we're bitter or we're fed up we know that it is then that we lose our way and we need self-discipline that our

Christian brother ministers their friendship is invaluable there because when we're our own I think sometimes we hold too close or too strongly to opinions that really don't matter and we see it's scriptural that we have close friends those that we're spiritually closer to in that book I was recommending there's an interest in a section that the authors say that sometimes in most friendships you find that one is more talented than another brother and he tells us in that situation it is a God who brings them together and fellowship in that way sometimes it helps us perhaps to exercise grace and patience with someone and perhaps in the other person it would avoid jealousy in their parts friends professor Collins used to say that every minister should have a soul friend or a soul mate and I'm sure that's something we all have and we should remember that in our discipline

I think it's also good just one more we all want to be applauded and there's nothing wrong with that but the authors say remind us there that when that happens you've got to be disciplined in this way what you have then is admirers but perhaps not friends and admirers often love us for the sake of our talents but our Christian brethren will love us for ourselves and through Christian fellowship it's always admonishing it's always encouraging and faithful are the wounds of a friend and perhaps you know a phone call a quick conversation to a fellow minister can mean the difference from a day of defeat turning into a day of victory perhaps it helps us to see something from another angle and we know how precious fellowship is we're told that as we have fellowship one with another that in the things essential we have unity in those things that are not essential liberty but in all things love and the only way we will have self-discipline again is to remind ourselves that without love we've got absolutely nothing everything must have its source in love and time and time again we need the love of God shed abroad in our hearts perhaps in this hall to remember we need the power of a new affection because love it pervades everything you see a good thought is confined to the understanding volition stops at the will but love you see is diffused absolutely everywhere and it's love that will interpret it every unexpected disappointment all the deferrals of hope all the difficulties the bitterness the grudges the self-pity all these wasting disease of the soul it will help us to persevere in self-discipline

I remember when I was licensed to preach one of the ministers told us this never forget this that God loves you sometimes we are conscious finally have been humbled and could I just mention another sermon that I found wonderfully helpful in this way there was a sermon about the return of Ezra and Nehemiah and the text was that they began with building the altar here they are they returned from Babylon everything is in ruins the temple is destroyed and they tell us this where to begin they begin by building the altar and that's where we begin we always have the temple in view what God is able to work within us but we begin at that place of sacrifice so