

# Discipline vs. Obsession: All for the Glory of God

“Discipline” is defined as *“activity, exercise, or a regimen that develops or improves a skill; training.”*

Hard-working students who diligently study before exams and take assignments seriously are disciplined. As are Olympic athletes perfecting their sport, musicians honing their craft, moms and dads prioritizing their family’s spiritual growth and physical health, and hundreds of other people who pursue excellence in their given fields and callings.

Discipline, according to the Bible, isn’t always fun—“it’s painful”—but in the end, it always “produces a harvest of right living” (Heb. 12:11, NLT).

In my experience, obsession is discipline taken to a deadly extreme. It’s defined as, *“the domination of one’s thoughts or feelings by a persistent idea, image, desire, etc.”*

A disciplined student who gets hooked on caffeine pills so she can study longer each night could be called obsessed with good grades. (Jessie Spano, anyone? Google “Jessie Spano Caffeine Pills” if you’re not familiar with the notorious *Saved by the Bell* episode. But I digress ...).

Olympians who push their limits, mentally and physically, while training eighteen hours a day could be described as obsessed with winning. Musicians who never give themselves a break from their instrument and place practice in front of people could be considered obsessed with fame. Parents who try to plug their children into every sport, club, and church activity could be obsessed with keeping up with the Joneses.

If you know my testimony, then you know that I have

struggled—and at times, continue to struggle—with obsessive eating and workout habits. I was introduced to strength training when I was sixteen, and instantly fell in love with the *discipline* of showing up every day to the gym and pushing myself through every set and repetition. My trainer taught me all I know about nutrition, and I embraced the *discipline* of eating fresh fruit, veggies, and lean meat or fish at lunch instead of pizza and fish sticks like everyone else. A few years later, as many of you know, this newfound discipline became the victim of my broken heart ...

You see, after my first boyfriend, my first love, broke up with me, I grabbed hold of my healthy habits as if they were the only lifesaver within miles of my sea of sorrow (dramatic, yes, but that's what breakups are!). I counted on the weights, the treadmill, Spin classes, Pilates, and perfectly portioned meals to lift my spirits and grant me a sense of control over my topsy-turvy life. I didn't even notice the transformation that was taking place—discipline had become *obsession*.

For the sake of space and time (I know blog readers don't want to read posts as long as novel chapters!), I won't go into every facet of that initial battle. What I want to emphasize today is one of the most important lessons I learned during that time, a lesson the Holy Spirit mercifully reminds me of time and again. That lesson comes from 1 Corinthians 10:31, which says:

“Therefore, whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.” (MEV).

When we don't consciously study, practice, write, work, workout, etc. for the glory of God, then we naturally default and do all for the glory of *Self*. James, the brother of Jesus, wrote, “where jealousy and **selfish ambition** exist, there will be **disorder** and **every vile practice**” (James 3:16, ESV, emphasis mine). The adjective before “ambition” is important to notice, because like discipline, ambition in and of itself

is a positive quality. It is when we allow the Self, our created body, to minimize the Creator and magnify our own God-given gifts that we follow the treacherous road to “disorder” and “every vile practice.”

I still struggle with my eating/workout disorder sometimes, especially when I’m feeling stressed, but I have learned to bring both my anxiety and the temptation to seize control before God in prayer.

I love this quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson: “You become what you think about all day long.” To me, it complements this line penned by King Solomon over 2,000 years before: “as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7, KJV).

I believe Scriptures emphasize cherishing God’s Word (Psalm 119:11), thinking about Him (Isaiah 26:3), praying continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and fixing our thoughts on what is “true, and honorable, and right” (Philippians 4:8) because the Lord knows that in so doing, we will become more like His express image, that is, His Son Jesus.

Working out and countless other disciplines we pursue have “some value,” as Paul wrote to Timothy, but we must remember that “godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:8, NIV). No matter what you do today, ask the Lord to take the lead. Let Him inform your decisions, fill you with strength, clear your mind of Self, rid your heart of envy, and show you how *everything* you do can be an act of worship, if you’ll only surrender your burdens and agendas and trust Him to keep you in *perfect peace* (see Isaiah 26:3).

Stay fit, stay faithful.

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