

The Excruciating Decision Every Christian Must Make Someday

You choose: Will it be the pain of discipline or the pain of regret? One yields a sense of extreme fulfillment, the other, a lingering sense of defeat. We pray for God to heal rather than for help with self-discipline to change harmful habits. If you struggle in this area, these two sermons may help: and .

Throughout Scripture, we see that God disciplines those He loves. Psalm 94:12 (NIV) says, "Blessed is the one you discipline, Lord, the one you teach ..." We are also encouraged to discipline our bodies. We cannot effectively be filled with the Spirit and lack discipline. John MacArthur adds, "True faith is never seen as passive—it is always obedient."

The message of self-denial is not popular, but it is powerful. The famous football coach, Tom Landry, made a good observation, "The job of a football coach is to make men do what they don't want to do, in order to achieve what they've always wanted to be." We could also say, "The job of a pastor is to help men do what they don't want to do, in order to achieve what they've always wanted to be."

Romans 6:16 identifies this principle, "Do you not know that to whom you yield yourselves as slaves to obey, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" Either way, we are slaves—we are God's servant or a slave to our passions and desires. 2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV) says that the Spirit "does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." Those who say that discipline is legalism are dead wrong. We are called to yield to the Spirit and quench sin—but when we

yield to sin we quench the Spirit.

Self-control is required of leadership. Titus 1:8 (NIV) adds that leaders “must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.” John Wesley required fasting so that his leaders disciplined their appetites rather than allowing their appetites to lead them. William Penn said, “No man is fit to command another who cannot command himself.” In 1 Corinthians 9:27 (NIV), Paul said that he strikes a blow to his body and makes it his slave so that he will not be disqualified for service. An undisciplined leader is an oxymoron.

One of the best ways to learn and exercise self-control is through fasting. When Jesus directs us to do something, the outcome is always good spiritually and physically: “when you fast” (see Matt. 6). Scripture doesn’t say, “When you sin and if you fast,” but rather, “If you sin and when you fast.” Fasting is not optional. The obvious benefit of fasting is spiritual, but the physical aids the process. Can you pray and seek God better with a headache, tight pants and a very sluggish, lethargic body? Of course not.

What you put in the mouth [body] and the mind [soul] affects the—when you feed the spirit, it affects the body and the soul. For example, a person may say, “Please pray for my panic attacks, angry outbursts and anxiety.” We can do that, but you may want to consider halting your highly addictive caffeine, sugar or nicotine habit. The physical affects the spiritual.

Much of the healing I have seen over the years was the result of good stewardship of the body. With more than 12 million U.S. children being obese and millions more being malnourished, the need to address this has never been greater. Caffeine, Coke and junk food are fueling the disease epidemic. We pray for God to heal rather than for help with self-discipline to change harmful habits.

No one is perfect, but we are called to discipline our bodies and use wisdom. God does heal miraculously, even in our ignorance, but the exception only validates the rule. Romans 13:14 (MEV) tells us to “make no provision for the flesh.” We must take action and choose the pain of discipline over the pain of regret.

Fasting cleans house. When the flesh is restrained, anxiety, fear, unbelief, doubt, lust, jealousy, bitterness and anger are minimized. The myth that fasting is bad for you is unfounded and has been disproved numerous times. Be careful when getting advice from those who profit from the advice. Nearly 75 percent of U.S. clinical trials in medicine are paid for by private companies who benefit. For example, “Coffee is good for you—the more the better.” (Paid for by large coffee companies). “Take this drug to lose weight,” never mind the fact that side effects involve internal bleeding, seizures and panic attacks. “Eat this kids’ cereal—look how much fun it is,” never mind the GMOs, food coloring, additives, preservatives and toxins. America, wake up! You are what you eat. Fasting doesn’t kill us; overconsumption does. No one profits from fasting except the faster.

Joel Fuhrman, M.D. rightly noted, “The body’s wondrous ability to self-digest and destroy needless tissue such as fat, tumors, blood vessel plaque and other nonessential and diseased tissues, while conserving essential tissues, gives the fast the ability to restore ... youth to the system.” Most research on cancer and fasting supports the healing process. Chemotherapy’s goal is to stop or slow the growth of cancer cells, but the body has a natural, God-given way to do this without harming the healthy cells—fasting. Disease is often a toxicity problem by what we consume; fasting is the detox solution. Granted, spiritual health and wholeness is the goal when fasting, but the physical benefits are also worthwhile.

Did you know that Type 2 diabetes is nearly eliminated when we

control the diet and stop fueling the disease? It's not necessarily a progressive disease –there is hope if you starve the fuel source. Begin by eliminating junk food. The reason most find it nearly impossible to fast is because they are withdrawing from poisons and addictive substances. Educate yourself and seek medical support and consultation if need be. But keep in mind that most are not supportive of fasting simply because they are trained to ease the pain rather than eliminate the problem.

In closing, discipline and self-control do not motivate God to love us more, but I find that I do love Him more. Nothing feels as good as choosing the pain of discipline over the pain of regret.