

If You Want Peace and Joy, You Need to Embrace This Difficult Habit

When I tell people at our conferences that I'm going to teach about discipline and self-control, there is usually a negative response, like a groan or sour facial expressions. We tend to think of these terms as something bad or hard.

While I agree that choosing discipline and self-control is not always easy or fun, the truth is it's vital to having the good life Jesus wants to give us (see John 10:10).

The bottom line is if you want peace, joy and fulfillment in your life, you have to exercise discipline and self-control.

Count the Cost

A big part of discipline is obedience. Being obedient to God, from the big stuff to the small stuff (and especially in the small stuff), is so important to having a peace-filled life.

Hebrews 12:11 (ESV) tells us that "for the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Are you at a point in your relationship with God where you feel like He's dealing with you about something but you're not listening to Him or obeying Him? Have you "gotten away with" something for a long time and now it feels like God is telling you He won't put up with that particular behavior anymore?

In my opinion, there's nothing worse than going to bed or waking up with a guilty conscience or trying to pray when you know there's something between you and God that's not settled.

I remember a time when God spoke to my heart that I needed to be more respectful of my husband, Dave, and not have an attitude when he asked me to do something for him. This was so hard for me because I had issues with submitting to people, and especially men, because of the abuse I had experienced for years when I was growing up.

But as I put my trust in God and followed His direction, He gave me the grace to do the right thing. And I firmly believe that if I hadn't obeyed Him in this area of my life, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing today in ministry.

Delight in Discipline

Operating in discipline and self-control to be obedient to God brings peace, which leads to joy. When we don't obey, we often feel guilty, especially if we are knowingly ignoring God on an issue. That kind of guilty thinking breeds condemnation and can make you think wrongly about everything in your life, including yourself. And that's miserable way to live!

I've discovered that when God shows me something in my life that needs to change, it's actually a really good thing. Because everything He tells us to do is for our good!

So now, instead of feeling bad when He corrects me, I choose to rejoice and thank Him for loving me and helping me have a better life.

I realize that rejoicing might seem like the complete opposite of what you want to do when you're being disciplined by God, but it's really the best way to respond. Even though it doesn't feel good at the time, it's necessary to produce what we say we want.

We all have dreams for our lives, whether it's a closer walk with Jesus, better physical health, a different career, healthier relationships or any other goal in life. But we can't get there without discipline and self-control. You've

probably heard the phrase “no pain, no gain.” I like to say you can’t have “the perks without the works.”

Many years ago, when God put it on my heart to teach His Word all over the world, there were a lot of things that needed to change in my attitudes, mindset, and behavior. As I got serious about my relationship with Jesus and studying the Bible, I began to grow and develop the character of God in my life. It wasn’t easy, but it was more than worth the pain I experienced in the process.

Your Action Plan

It’s important to understand that discipline is more than just willpower. You can’t do the things God is showing you to do unless you lean on Him. Jesus says in John 15:5b (AMP) that we must remain in Him because “apart from Me [that is, cut off from vital union with Me] you can do nothing.”

Spending quiet time with God in prayer and Bible study is how you abide in Christ. Start small by sitting still and listening for God to speak to your heart. Ask Him to show you what He wants you to do, and trust Him to do the work in you that needs to be done.

Be patient with yourself because it won’t all happen overnight. Second Corinthians 3:18b (ESV) says we “are being transformed into the same image [of Christ] from one degree of glory to another.” Pray for Him to change you little by little, one day at a time, and know that something good is happening on the inside of you!