

Psalm 127:1 1 Unless the LORD builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city,
The watchman stays awake in vain.

Central idea – If we are to make any progress in the pursuit of holiness, we must assume our responsibility to discipline or train ourselves. But we must do this in total dependence on the Holy Spirit to work in us and strengthen us with the strength that is in Christ.

Developing the Discipline of Grace

1. Think of the two wings of the airplane, discipline and dependence. In what proportion do they exist in your life?

--My pursuit of holiness tilts toward the passive (faith) approach.

--My pursuit of holiness is more like the self-disciplined (works) approach.

--My life is unbalanced, as if I am flying on one wing, soon to fall.

--I'm weak in both wings.

--I think I am fairly well balanced between discipline and dependence.

--Other (describe)

2. Often in the Scriptures the concepts of both dependence and responsibility appear in the same sentence or paragraph. For each of the examples below tell how the passage affirms dependence and how it affirms discipline.

--Psalm 119:11-16

--John 15:4-5

--Philippians 4:11-13

--Colossians 1:28-29

3. Think of a challenge to growth that you are currently facing, such as raising your children well or handling an ethical dilemma at work.
 - a. What will it look like for you to exercise dependence in this situation?

 - b. What will it look like for you to bring discipline to bear in this situation?

4. Reflect on a time when you were not sensing God's strength during some deep need or agonizing failure. The Holy Spirit doesn't always strengthen us in such times in a way that enables us to triumph. Why do you think He didn't in your case?

--God was letting me see the sinfulness of my own heart.

--God was causing me to realize how weak I am in myself and how dependent on Him I really am.

--God was curbing a tendency toward spiritual pride and causing me to grow in humility.

--Other

5. The publishing industry has foisted on us a plethora of self-help books, many of which are excellent aids to personal growth and training, albeit from a secular point of view. The problem with such books comes when they tempt us to rely on a regimen of disciplines instead of on the Holy Spirit. This temptation can happen with Christian self-help books (even this one), as well as with secular books
 - a. Name one book you have read, Christian or secular, whose principles you have actually applied and seen change in your life.

b. In applying these principles of self-discipline, were you trusting in God to work, or were you trusting in the plan or techniques to work?

c. Is there anything you would do differently now regarding self-help books?
Explain

6. You believe in the work of the Holy Spirit and you give lip service to this need for dependence in Sunday worship, but do you truly practice it each day?

--Throughout the day, every day of the week, I acknowledge my dependence on Him.

--I mostly pursue holiness in the strength of my own willpower and a very disciplined life.

--My prayer life is meager or perfunctory, which is to say, in effect, I can handle most of my spiritual life somehow on my own.

--My reliance on the Holy Spirit has increased substantially during the last year.

--I must admit I'm not even committed to the pursuit of holiness.

--Other (explain)

7. Both types of prayer – planned and spontaneous – were needed in Nehemiah's situation. We can learn from Nehemiah's example how to pray for ourselves in the pursuit of holiness. Which type of prayer are you more inclined to do?

--I usually persist in planned, protracted prayer until God answers.

--I usually plunge into the crisis situation and pray quick, silent, spontaneous prayers at the time of greatest need.

--I usually pray in panoramic fashion – once at the outset of the day for everything to “pan out” as hoped for.

--What, me pray? Why pray when you can worry?

--Other (explain)

8. Unless you plan to pray and set aside a specific time to do it, you will invariably fail to carry out your good intentions. So if you do not already have this practice, why not stop to make your plan now? What time will you set aside each day for the next week to pray? It helps to write your plan on paper.

The agenda for your prayer time should include asking God to enable you to become free of persistent sins (for example, gossip; irritability; impatience; lack of love; impure thoughts; and undisciplined, wandering eyes) and grow in specific virtues of Christian character. Note that your prayer is for the Spirit to enable you to do these things; you are the one who must act, but the Spirit must enable you.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF ALL THIS?

We need to set aside time each day for planned, protracted, persevering prayer, as well as the spontaneous prayers demanded by each situation we come across. This is the discipline of dependence. Before we are finished, you will end up with about six disciplines. But remember, none is more important than the discipline of dependence, the one weighty wing which balances the other six lined up on the other wing.

Meditate on Psalm 119:106 when you have a chance.