

Hurst Green Evangelical Church
3rd Feb 19
1 Tim 4:1-16
Christian Discipline

An example of why we need to be discipline is to imagine yourself going for a drive with a car full of chattering friends when you realise that you are lost.

You have a problem – finding the right way to your destination!

So what do you do? Well it is not sensible just to plough on in the hope that you will recognise something and so find your way to the destination. Although this is the stereotype applied to us men for some reason.

You stop and in the old days you would find someone to ask and perhaps get the map book out although now you would reach into the glove compartment and pull out the sat nav and switch it on.

You would then remove any distraction. You would turn off the music and ask the chattering friends to shut up as you needed to concentrate.

You could then focus on the one thing that mattered at that time – finding the right way to your destination.

Christian discipline is a little like that:

- You realise that you are going in the wrong direction or in danger of going in the wrong direction and you need to sort this out.
- You know that ploughing on is unlikely to work! Although some try this - particularly in the more liberal churches.
- Asking someone is like finding someone to disciple you and the map book is of course the bible.
- Although now a days it is all on your phone or tablet as you use the Internet.
- Removing any distraction is ensuring you find time to look for the right direction without the distractions of the everyday world. Removing the weeds that spring up and try and choke you – remember where that comes from?
- Then in the quiet you can concentrate and hear God giving you the directions you need to find the narrow gate.

Without that discipline you are ploughing on in the vain hope you will find the gate almost by accident.

Hebrews 12 talks of this in terms of running a race and focusing on winning the prize – fix your eyes upon Jesus and be disciplined.

And remember Jesus is recorded several times as going off to a quiet place to be with his father. If he needed to do it we need to do it even more!

So our reading today was from 1 Timothy and is all about Christian Discipline and I chose it because it does not hide discipline behind an analogy such as a race but is clear in what it is saying

1 Timothy 4:7 (ANIV)

⁷ ~~Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.~~

Now before you notice that this is to Timothy and he was a church leader and come to the conclusion that this does not apply to you but only to people like Margaret and I let me tell you that that would be wrong.

Remember Colossians 3:16

Colossians 3:16 (ANIV)

¹⁶ *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

As you teach and admonish one another – we are all teachers because we all partake in discipleship and training each other and in doing that ensure that you do not see this as a hierarchy. You know – I teach him because he is newer than I am and she teaches me because she is more spiritually mature.

We all learn from each other and do not regard yourself as higher than your brother!

Now as Christians we are surrounded by adverts and glossy magazines promising us something for nothing – does that surprise you?

- Attend this conference and it will change your life.
- Read this book – it has the answer to whatever your current problem is.
- Subscribe to the magazine, blog or newsletter and it will change your views.

And however else you would like to put it.

They are trying to offer us an effortless way to achieve something that can only be achieved by effort. Some of those things may help but they are not the answer. The only actual answer is discipline.

This last week I was offered a computer programme that would connect you all and let you communicate – a sort of social media just for our church. We do not need that; we do it anyway and a programme would be a barrier rather than an enabler!

Beside my chair I have my reading pile and I have many good books on my bookshelves but they do me no good unless I read them and find things to apply in my life and apply them

That last bit is key – and apply them and that is where discipline comes in. Knowing them and wanting to apply them is one thing but they are only effective when they are applied. When I discipline myself and make the changes in my life.

I was after a quick verse from our reading to stick in here but every time I read it the next verse also need including so I give you the whole chapter to take a look at.

So let us look at a few lessons from this chapter

1 Timothy 4:3 (ANIV)

³ *They (hypocritical liars) forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.*

You will find many groups that start to control by demanding certain things and forbidding other things.

This does not deny that certain things are not fitted for a Christian because they do not reflect Gods glory and in various places in the bible they are listed and I will not dig them all out. Don't forget that the lists in the Old Testament still apply unless the New specifically changes things. Sin is Sin!!

Then we need to look at our motivations **Eternal issues are at stake**

Surely it does not get more important than that.

1 Timothy 4:8 (ANIV)

⁸ *For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

That is how important godliness is – it holds promise for the life to come.

You find Christians who get wrapped up in the temporal – in the here and now. They will even show you how their fad is endorsed by the bible and hold the secret to the narrow gate. It could be pine nut kernels or mindfulness.

You will find the bible used to justify all forms of dietary preference but they forget Phillip and the sheet of animals and verses such as

1 Timothy 4:4-5 (ANIV)

⁴ *For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,* ⁵ *because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.*

They may be good, they may be useful but they are not the answer to eternal issues. Only godliness does that and as verse 7 tells us we can and should train ourselves to be godly!

With eternal issues at stake what other motivation should we need and yet we still find many, including many Christians, who focus and worry about the myths and old wives tales rather than when really matters.

For

1 Timothy 4:10 (ANIV)

¹⁰ *~~(and for this we labour and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe.~~*

Now there are important things in this verse. The “saviour of all men” is often misused to try and say that all men are saved by the loving God.

If that were the case why are we being exhort to train ourselves to be godly? Because not all men are saved! Jesus himself tells us that many will find the wide gate for that is easy.

That word many grieves me. A year or so ago we had that life aim of getting to heaven and taking as many as possible with me. Yet many will miss out and we need to work to be sure that all the people we know have the opportunity to find the narrow gate.

But another aside. With Christian Discipline you must always remember that you discipline yourself. You can encourage others to be disciplined but you cannot make them.

Now some hints and tips –**What Christian Discipline is and what it is not**

1. It is an ongoing process!! You cannot say I am disciplined and that is that because tomorrow you must also be disciplined!! Bad luck; if you take this route and because it affects eternity you should then you need to apply this daily until you hear that “good and faithful servant”
2. Discipline is hard work.
 - a. If it was easy we would have done it already! In the Olympics they refer to the disciplines and the analogy of the race is all about discipline.
 - b. You have to choose this. You recognise the discipline needed for athletes. They choose to forego certain things because they want to attain a goal. We choose to forego worldly things because we want to achieve an eternal goal.
 - c. Self-Control is a fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5) . Letting the spirit work in you is part of the discipline. You forego certain things but by letting the spirit operate you gain other things and one of those is self-control.
 - i. Self-control gets you to read your bible when you would rather watch TV
 - ii. Self-Control gets you to the prayer meeting; the bible study etc when you have had enough for today.
 - iii. Self-Control gets you visiting and loving fellow believers when you have enough to do in your own life.
 - iv. Self-Control gets you active in things like the local befrienders scheme.
3. Discipline means that you discard anything that might hinder you. The reading talks of myths and old wives tales and they still lurk in our society. But there are other things, they may not be wrong in themselves but they could hinder us in our goal.
4. Because we always have our eyes set on our goal. Our eternal goal which we achieve by becoming more like Jesus. We love as he loved us but we also do greater things than he did.
5. Discipline means managing your time. You cannot claim to be disciplined if you allow your time to be frittered away on things that do not lead to your goal. How you spend your minutes and hours is how you spend your days; how you spend your days is how you spend your lives; how you spend your days determine how you will spend eternity!
6. Discipline is not opposed to grace. People try and dismiss discipline as legalistic but that is only true if your motive is wrong. Discipline opens doors for you that are not available to others. If you are disciplined you can learn to play the piano and so enjoy music. For us we are discipline so that we can enjoy the fruits of the spirit and so that grace may flow in our lives.
7. Discipline is not driving yourself relentlessly. You need time off; God rested after creation and Christ took time to be by himself. A disciplined Christian builds rest into his timetable.
8. Discipline is not rigid. We are still open to God and his moving and any plan we have is subject to change at a moment’s notice if God calls.

So what does that mean?

- Discipline is an essential part of godliness
- Godliness is essential because it affects your eternity
- There are no short cuts – you have to have the right focus to attain the rewards of the narrow gate.
- If you have chosen Jesus as your saviour why would you not want to discipline yourself to achieve godliness and fulfil your witness in this world?