

In The Grip Of His Grace 3

Focused Living Ministries

Spiritual Sweat! II Timothy 2:1-7

In 1972, a Stanford research team conducted what is famously known as the ‘Marshmallow Test.’ Each subject (average age 4 years old) was seated in a room with a marshmallow in front of him. The child was instructed that if he could wait for just the few minutes he would be left alone, he would get all the marshmallows he desired when the team returned. But, if could not wait, he could only have one. You can imagine the battle between impulse and restraint, gratification and delay, trust and obedience. Each child developed a strategy of discipline. They would sing, play with their toes or tell stories. One actually licked the table near marshmallow as if flavor had seeped into the wood. As the study participants were tracked for the next 40 years, there was a strong correlation between strong inner discipline early in life and later life success. Kids who showed discipline were better able to cope with stress, less likely to give up under pressure, more likely to mature when discouraged, socially competent and scored 250 pts higher on their SATs. Kids who did not have inner discipline were stubborn, inflexible and indecisive; likely to have deeply resentful attitudes later in life; easily upset by life’s frustrations; prone to delinquency, substance abuse and broken relationships. **Why do men struggle with discipline? Spiritual discipline? With what ‘marshmallows’ of inner discipline are you currently struggling?**



(Prov 25:28; I Cor 9:24-27; I Tim 4:7-8; II Tim 1:7; 2:22-23; Heb 12:5-11; Gal 5:23-24) According to these verses, how important to God is the character quality of inner discipline and self control? Why? How does discipline develop courage? (Soldier!)

(2 Tim 2:1; 2 Cor 12:7-10; Col 1:28-29; Phil 4:13; I Cor 16:13-14; Jer 9:23-24; Acts 4:33, 6:8; Eph 3:7) God knew that Timothy struggled with discipline so he moves Paul to write his friend to help him develop discipline where it counts. God wants us to **“be strong”** (en + dynamo) in His grace on the inside so we can live strong for Him on the outside. He has wired us to be strong from the inside out. How does our culture teach men to be strong in themselves and avoid weakness at all costs. Why do we often see ‘grace’ as weakness? Why does God see grace as being the core of our strength and inner discipline? The degree that you are not motivated by God’s **grace** in Christ is the degree that you will **grind** your way through life.

You may say that you are not very disciplined. But in reality you are extremely disciplined to pursue whatever you value (cost vs value). The question is not, “Why am I so spiritually undisciplined?” but **“Do I really VALUE the things that God values?”**

(II Tim 2:2-6) To help Timothy live strong in God’s grace Paul describes 4 common pictures of discipline.

A **BANKER** who invests God’s life principles. (2)

A **SOLDIER** suffering hardship for his Captain. (3-4)

An **ATHLETE** competing for the prize of Christ. (5)

A **FARMER** bearing fruit for the land owner. (6)

What do each of these men **value** (treasure) and how do their lives show courageous inner discipline in order to obtain it. With which of these do you most identify? Why?

Discipline (30 days) 2 Tim 2:15

Desire (30 days) Ps 42:1; 73:25-26

Delight (30 days) Ps 1:2 ; 40:8

(2 Tim 2:2-4; Matt 28:16-20) A **soldier** focuses every facet of life on the **mission** assigned to him by his superior. He does not become **“entangled”** in things which might cause him to forget the mission. What is the mission to which God has called you in this season of life?

(2 Tim 2:5; 1 Cor 9:23-27) The real test of an **athlete** is not the **public** event but the **private** training. **“Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness”** (1 Tim 4:7-8; *gymnao/ gymnasium*). A true athlete thinks nothing of training 4 years in private for a public event lasting 90 seconds. So Mr. Studly Bicep Flexing Ab Ripping Jock Man, how is your private training in prep for your public performance for the King?

(2 Tim 2:6; 2 Cor 3:6-9; Prov 24:30-34) A **farmer** is a man who knows how to partner with God for growth. A farmer clears the land and plants the seed, but if the Lord does not supply the sun and water, there will be no harvest. The hardest work for the farmer is disciplining himself to trust the Lord. What seeds have you faithfully planted for Christ this week for which you are patiently waiting for God to grow?