

CROSS

LEARNING SELF-DISCIPLINE

TRAINING

BY JEFF DIEDRICH

ProTeens

Cross Training: Learning Self-Discipline

By Jeff Diedrich

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Introduction

On April 19, 1982, the New York Mets were rained out of their game against the Expos in Montreal. Tom Seaver had been scheduled to pitch for the Mets. When the Mets returned to New York the night of the 19th, most of the players went directly home from LaGuardia Airport. Seaver, however, got a ride on the team bus to Shea Stadium, which was deserted and in darkness. He went directly to the locker room, put on his uniform, filled a bucket with baseballs, and began the long walk across the diamond to the right field bullpen. When Seaver reached the bullpen, he stepped onto the mound and began throwing baseball after baseball against the screen behind the plate . . . When asked why he put himself through such an inconvenience, he said, “It was my day to throw. I always throw on my day to throw” (Taken from *The Mental Game of Baseball*, Dorfman & Kuehl, 53).

Richard S. Taylor wisely notes, “Discipline is the mark of maturity. Without discipline, the character will remain weak and infantile” (*The Disciplined Life*, 39). Spiritual maturity is the mark of a disciplined life. Attention to the details of our daily life, practiced over a period of time, will define you as a person. Just as Tom Seaver was able to win 300 games due to rigorous self-discipline, so Christians will be noted for holiness because of their walk with God.

Many in society hate discipline. They don’t understand it, don’t want it, and can’t handle it. But God demands it. It is important that you teach these five lessons to your teens so that they will be challenged to repetitiously, religiously, and refreshingly step on the mound to practice the discipline of grace.

How To Teach This Study

Hot Shots are written with the firm belief that teens learn much better when they are actively involved in the learning process. Teaching does not have to be dry, boring lectures or fruitless question and answer sessions. The most remembered lessons are those that included taste and touch, humor and drama, discussion and study, video and music. Active learning uses all these elements and more. It places the student shoulder-to-shoulder with the teacher instead of twenty feet away. It brings stories to life and gives information meaning. It changes thinking, speech, behavior, and life.

The sections in each lesson have a specific function within the lesson.



The Warm-up is an exercise that creates a sense of togetherness and begins the meeting with a fun game or interesting discussion.



The Bridge introduces the subject content with a thought-provoking illustration.



The Content is the explanation and application of the lesson.



The Closing summarizes experiences and calls for a commitment from the teens

Different active learning styles are used to reinforce and illustrate the content, including: discussion, role play, question and answer, sight, smell, taste, video, music and many more!

Before you start the study...

Read the Introduction, Course Objectives, and Overview. It is important that you understand the scope of this study before you promote it.

Before each lesson...

1. Read through the, lesson and take note of the Lesson Aim, Objectives, and materials needed for active learning segments.
2. Plan ahead to modify the lesson if necessary. Your facilities or equipment may limit you. Substitute your own ideas if necessary.
3. Each lesson is designed to be taught in 20–30 minutes. Preparation will enable you to shorten or lengthen the lesson to meet your time limit.
4. Be excited when you teach! An excited teacher produces students who are excited about learning. If you can't get excited about an active learning segment or a warm-up, develop your own that will work with your teens.



Course Objectives

By the end of this course the teens will:

- Be able to identify the major components of self-discipline.
- Understand the importance of self-discipline in their lives.
- Focus on specific areas of their lives to exercise discipline.
- Have a plan for maintaining the habit of self-discipline.

Overview

Lesson 1: The Word I Love To Hate—Defining Discipline

- **Lesson Aim:** To identify the major elements of self-discipline.
- **Texts:** 1 Corinthians 9:25–27; 2 Timothy 2:3–5

Lesson 2: From Fat To Muscle—The Purpose Of Discipline

- **Lesson Aim:** To understand the purpose of self-discipline.
- **Texts:** 1 Timothy 4:7; 1 Corinthians 9:27

Lesson 3: Steel In Your Backbone—Areas Of Discipline

- **Lesson Aim:** To help teens see the relevance of meditation and prayer.
- **Text:** Psalm 119:9–16

Lesson 4: More Steel In Your Backbone—Other Areas Of Discipline

- **Lesson Aim:** To teach the importance of journalizing and worship.
- **Texts:** Psalm 119; Matthew 4:1–2

Lesson 5: Holding Onto Habits—Persevering

- **Lesson Aim:** To encourage the teens to continue (begin) spiritual disciplines.
- **Texts:** 2 Timothy 1:7; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Hebrews 3:13; 2 Peter 1:5–6

Recommended Resources

Blanchard, John. *How To Enjoy Your Bible*.

Bridges, Jerry. *The Discipline of Grace*.

_____. *The Pursuit of Holiness*.

Edwards, Jonathan. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*.

Klug, Ronald. *How to Keep A Spiritual Journal*.

Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline*.

Hughes, Kent. *Disciplines of a Godly Man*.

Lewis, Peter. *The Genius of Puritanism*

MacArthur, John. *Unleashing God's Word in Your Life*.

Morgan, Edmund. *The Puritan Family*.

Schaeffer, Francis. *True Spirituality*.

Sproul, R. C. *Knowing Scripture*.

Steer, Roger. *The George Mueller Treasury*.

Taylor, Richard S. *The Disciplined Life*.

_____. *The Disciplined Life—Style*.

Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*.

Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

LESSON 1

The Word I Love To Hate: Defining Discipline

Lexington, Virginia is home to one of the oldest military schools in America—Virginia Military Institute. No one who visits that campus can come away without sensing that Stonewall Jackson still runs it according to his strict disciplinary methods. Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson earned his nickname at the first battle of Bull Run on July 21, 1861. When the Yankees were gaining the advantage in the battle and the Confederates were running away, a southern commander looked over at Jackson’s men who stood firm. He told his men to look at Jackson’s, who stood like a stone wall.

Such discipline is a rare commodity today.



To identify the major elements of self-discipline.



Students will:

- Be challenged to be more disciplined.
- Be provided a glimpse into Paul’s life.
- Develop a proper motivation for self-discipline.
- Understand the rules of discipline.



1 Corinthians 9:25–27 and 2 Timothy 2:3–5

These passages give us a good look at Paul’s personal gymnasium of life. These passages open our eyes to the amount of dedication and intensity that is needed in training our temple to honor the Lord.

The Lesson



Break up the class into small groups of 3–4 each. Explain to them that you are going to assign them a task. Each group must accom-

What You Need:

four paper bags
Play-Doh
sturdy cardboard
cupcakes, icing, sprinkles
lined paper and pens
basketball rim
Nerf basketballs
a bag of candy

plish the job and give you the final product. Each of these assignments should be inside a paper bag with a number assigned to it. Decide the order that the groups will pick and then have them select which bag they want to work on.

Bag #1: Give this group some Play-Doh and a slip of paper that says, "Create a tall basketball player out of this Play-Doh. After you are done, show your teacher and then smash him (the Play-Doh guy, not your teacher)." Provide them with a sturdy cardboard foundation to create the figure on.

Bag #2: A tray of undecorated cupcakes and the necessary items to decorate them. The slip of paper should read, "Decorate your own cupcakes and eat them after you have shown the youth pastor your wonderful creations."

Bag #3: Provide four pieces of lined paper and four pens. The note should say, "Write a detailed list of every item you have in your room back home. Once the page is full, you may stop."

Optional Bag #4: Have a plastic basketball rim mounted on a wall before class starts. Put two Nerf basketballs in the bag with paper reading, "Go shoot hoops from the chairs. Keep score to see which team wins the bag of candy."



Naturally the group that gets bag #3 will be hating life because everyone else is having fun. Ask the group that used bag #3 what they felt when they first saw their assignment. How did they feel when they saw everyone else having fun?

Explain that discipline is not always fun. It causes you to miss out on excitement and pleasure. But self-discipline is vital to living.



Before you begin teaching the material, prepare your mind by reading these definitions of discipline.

"Training to act in accordance to rules, instruction designed to train to proper conduct or action" (*The Random House Dictionary*).

"Self-discipline is the ability to regulate conduct by principle and judgment rather than impulse, desire, high pressure or social custom. It is basically the ability to subordinate" (*The Disciplined Life*, R. S. Taylor).

"Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do when it ought to be done whether you like it or not" (*Physics and Politics*, Walter Bagehot).

Let's examine what comprises self-discipline. What is involved when you ask a teenager to discipline himself unto godliness?

Discipline Is A Choice

1 Corinthians 9:25

Paul makes reference to the Isthmian games that were held in Corinth every three years. Only a few highly trained and qualified men would compete in the race. Ten months of grueling training would go into this competition before the participants would spend the final month in the stadium with a personal trainer.

Life is much like that race, only all Christians are in the race. The beauty of this is that we can all win if we discipline ourselves to godliness. That is where the choice lies. Many are in the race, but only a few will choose to discipline themselves.

Many Christian teens have entered the race through salvation but are lagging behind. They must make the decision to discipline themselves. It all starts with their attitude.

Discipline Is Unnatural And Painful

1 Corinthians 9:27

Paul was making reference to the boxing competition that was held at the Isthmian games. The ancient boxers wrapped their knuckles with leather straps and would bludgeon their opponent black and blue. Paul uses the term “keep under” or “buffet” symbolically to show “rough treatment” or “to torment something” (*B.A.G.D. Greek Lexicon*). It literally means “to hit under the eye.”

This was more than just shadow boxing. This meant Paul denied himself meats offered to idols, protected himself from the sexual rituals of Corinth, and much more. His body would be his slave because he told it what to do.

2 Timothy 2:5

The word “strive” is sometimes translated “compete as an athlete,” but it literally means “to agonize.” The idea here is to work yourself into exhaustion by extraordinary physical effort. This requires dedication to earn a future reward. Those seeking immediate gratification will soon drop out of this good struggle for purity. We are used to pampering ourselves. To live the hard life or to go without something is rare. This is why teens have a tough time with self-discipline. They see their parents and peers getting what they want—now!

The self-disciplined teen thinks biblically, not worldly—learning to do without earthly pleasures in order to gain spiritual rewards.

Distribute copies of “Pay the Price.” Instruct the teens to use their imaginations as they complete the exercise.

What You Need:

copies of “Pay the Price”
chalkboard or overhead

After the teens are finished, have them tell you what they wrote and why. Then briefly explain the price that has to be paid by anyone who wants those positions.

- Professional athlete: God-given talent, extreme dedication, long hours of practicing fundamentals, proper diet, etc.
- President of U.S.: Excellent education, previous political office, hours at fund-raisers and on the campaign trail, little time for family.
- Doctor: Twelve years or more of advanced education, thousands of dollars devoted to books and education, limited social life, sleepless nights spent studying.

Discipline Is An Expression Of Love

2 Timothy 2:4

One of the purest motives of obedience is love. The secular soldier obeys his orders out of a sense of duty or loyalty. That is a good motivation, but the best comes from a heart that truly loves the commander. This theme is expressed throughout Scripture (Deut. 10:12; 11:1; Josh. 22:5; Ps. 97:10).

Teenagers wonder why they have to read their Bibles, pray, etc. The key for them is to discipline themselves to do those things, even when they don't see the immediate benefits. In time, they will grow to love God, and the more they love Him, the more they will enjoy the spiritual disciplines of life.

Ask your teens what God has done for them as Christians generally and specifically. Write these on the chalkboard or overhead. By focusing on all God has done for us, we will learn to love Him more. You may be surprised at how they can be motivated by grace, not manipulated by guilt.

Discipline Is Obedience To The Rules

2 Timothy 2:5

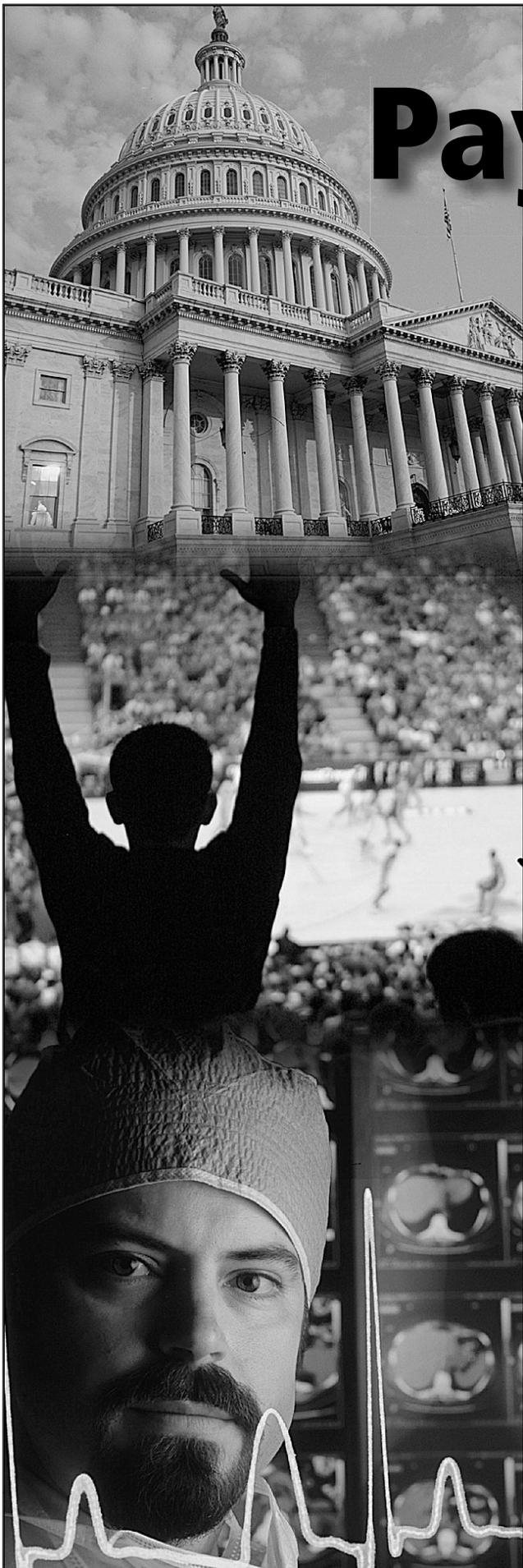
One key condition for victory is outlined for Christians who are running the race of life. You must compete by obeying the rules. In this most important of races—where the reward or punishment is eternal—you cannot break the rules. You have to run with integrity. A mark of self-discipline is obedience to God's rules.

At the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, Ben Johnson of Canada was favored to win the 100-meter race over Carl Lewis of the USA. Both men had won their share of medals in previous meets, and once again they were matched against each other. Ben Johnson blew away Carl Lewis in this exciting, drama filled event and smashed the world record in the

process. But wait! The post race drug test showed that Ben Johnson had used steroids; consequently, he was stripped of his medal—making Carl Lewis the winner.

Many Christians feel that they can just live their Christian life nominally and still be rewarded in heaven for their efforts. Many will get to heaven and find no reward because they did not obey the rules by keeping themselves pure of sin and serving the Savior. Some professing Christians will die and not go to heaven because they tried to run the race on their own terms, proving that they were never true believers (Mt. 7:21–23).

Pay The Price



Let's pretend for a minute. Imagine you could be any one of the following people listed below.

Determine whom you would want to be and then explain why.

Professional Athlete

(unlimited salary, fame, travel, sponsor)

President of the United States

(unbelievable power, world recognition)

Prominent Doctor

(financial security, prestige, help people)

L E S S O N 2

From Fat To Muscle: The Purpose Of Discipline

Michael Johnson amazed the world when he set new records for the 200– and 400–meter races at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. When he was asked why he spent ten years shaving just over a second from his time, he replied, “Success is found in much smaller portions than most people realize . . . At times we live our lives on a paper–thin edge that barely separates greatness from mediocrity and success from failure. Life is often compared to a marathon, but I think it is more like being a sprinter: long stretches of hard work punctuated by brief moments in which we are given the opportunity to perform at our best.” (*Reader’s Digest*, March 1997)

Many unsaved Olympic athletes have a firm grip on discipline and its rewards. Christians need to imitate that spirit of dedication by agonizing so they too might experience the adulation of victory.



To understand the purpose of self–discipline.



Teens will:

- learn that discipline is commanded
- realize that discipline keeps them eligible for service
- understand how discipline cultivates godliness
- be encouraged because discipline reaps eternal rewards



1 Timothy 4:7 and 1 Corinthians 9:27

These are classic passages that help define the purpose for disciplining ourselves to godliness.

What You Need:

glass of muddy water
pillow
pizza box
clock
remote control
lipstick
sports magazine
music tape
copies of “Get A Grip”
pens

What You Need:

glass of muddy water

The Lesson



Ask them this question, “How many of you would be willing to drink this glass of muddy water?” If someone says they would, then spit in the glass and ask them again. Then ask, “If I would pay you \$1,000, would you drink this?”



People are willing to do strange things if they are properly motivated. They will study for years to be a doctor, go through boot camp to be a Marine, and diet to lose weight. What will motivate you to self-discipline?



Teens need reasons why they should put themselves through the agony of self-discipline. Here are a few.

It Is Commanded

1 Timothy 4:7

The word “exercise,” also translated “train” or “discipline” comes from the root *gymnos* from which we get the English word gymnasium. This literally meant to exercise naked. The traditional Greek athletic games were conducted in the nude. Now you can see why the Jews of the Roman Empire opposed the building of these gymnasiums.

Kent Hughes says, “it was and is a word with the smell of the gym in it—the sweat of a good workout. ‘Gymnasticize (exercise, work out, train) yourself for the purpose of godliness’ conveys the feel of what Paul is saying” (*Disciplines of A Godly Man*). In other words, to put yourself through this type of workout is not an option; it is a command.

It Keeps You Eligible For Service

1 Corinthians 9:27

The word “castaway,” sometimes translated “disqualified,” means “disapproved, rejected after testing.” In the ancient Olympic games (and our modern ones), an athlete would be disqualified from competition if he didn’t compete according to the rules of the game. Even though he may have won the competition, the infraction of the rule caused him to lose the wreath and the glory.

John MacArthur says,

Many believers start the Christian life with enthusiasm and devotion. They train carefully for a while but soon tire of the effort and begin to “break training.” Before long they are disqualified from being effective witnesses. They do not have what it takes because they are unwilling to pay

the price (*1 Corinthians*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. 215–16).

Fortunately, God's grace covers believers' sin, and Christians can still be used by God even after sinning. But remember, the nature of your sin may limit the scope of your ministry.

It Makes You More Godly

1 Timothy 4:7

An attitude of godliness esteems Him far above anything else and keeps Him at the center of our daily affections. Naturally, one of the primary goals of life is to strive for godliness. The way we accomplish this goal is to deny self-indulgence and cultivate a serious mind focused on righteousness, as Titus 2:12 teaches.

Naturally this point goes along with Galatians 6:7 which speaks of reaping what you have sown. We often think of this verse negatively—"I reap the consequences of my sin." However, this verse is also a great promise—you can reap spiritual benefits from spiritual exercise.

Ask your teens to list the benefits of the following: prayer, Bible reading, witnessing, godly friendships, respecting authority, telling the truth.

It Helps You Control Your Body

1 Corinthians 9:27

What is the natural tendency of man? To sin? Why are there no college courses on how to be lazy, disorganized, unprepared, or unloving? The Bible clearly tells us that we were born with a natural bent to sin that is not completely eliminated until eternity. Battles will never be won if we do not discipline ourselves and deny ourselves those sins. Several verses graphically reveal the power and effects of the natural desires of the flesh (Jer. 17:9; Eph. 4:22; Jas. 4:1; 1 Pet. 2:11).

Instead of becoming wicked practitioners of the flesh, Paul exhorts us to pummel ourselves daily into spiritual shape by denying the desires of the flesh. To give up fighting and to stop resisting temptation will only lead to constant defeat. Fighting the flesh is a marquee event for which we must prepare.

Lay out some items that represent what may control our lives: pillow (sleeping in each morning), clock (controls our schedules), pizza box (food in general), remote control (television), music tape, lipstick (fashion), magazine (sports), peers (have a teen stand up). Ask the teens to explain how each item controls us and try to list some more things in our lives that control us.

What You Need:

pillow
pizza box
clock
remote control
lipstick
sports magazine
music tape

It Reaps Eternal Rewards

1 Timothy 4:8 — eternal life

1 Corinthians 9:25 — heavenly rewards

The prize that was given to the winner of the Olympic games was an olive wreath that faded with time and had no eternal value. Paul contrasts these silly earthly awards with the brilliance of an eternal crown in heaven.

It is interesting that various cities held athletic games in honor of specific pagan gods. The Isthmian games that Paul referenced were held near Corinth in honor of Poseidon. Everett Ferguson notes, “The religious games began with sacrifice and prayer, and the contestants made vows to the deity (such as prayer before football or the national anthem before baseball)” (*Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 91–92).

The pagans trained hard and earned a corruptible wreath, yet if they had a Christian perspective on life, their work ethic and self-discipline could have been redirected toward exercising their bodies in godliness. What do our lives show to be our priorities? How does our own lifestyle reveal what motivates us?

Distribute copies of “Get A Grip.” Let them work on this for a few minutes and then close in prayer.

What You Need:

copies of “Get A Grip”
pens



Get A Grip!

Name an area of your life that you feel is in control of you (e.g., food, entertainment, dating, etc.).

How long has this been in control of you? _____

How does it affect your ability to glorify God? _____

What steps are you going to take to be in control of your body? _____
