

Beyond Addictions

Free to live a new life in Christ Jesus



Godly Wisdom for Self-discipline and Developing Friendships

Lesson 10

The steady discipline of friendship with Jesus
results in men becoming like Him.

H.E. Fosdick

In the last lesson we looked into the Bible to see what it says about pride and anger. In this chapter, we will look for Godly advice regarding self-discipline and friendships. The way in which you deal with these two issues will either bless you in freedom or be used by the enemy to enslave you again in addiction.

The Importance of Self-discipline

It is absolutely true that you are saved eternally the minute that you accept Jesus Christ. You are born again by the Holy Spirit at that moment. That doesn't require discipline on your part; it is a work of the Holy Spirit. However, just as a new born baby grows and develops through a process over time, you also grow spiritually through a process over time. The process is called sanctification. It means that you are being trained to be more and more like Jesus. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:29, you are being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. This growth process requires discipline and effort.

Self-discipline is a Godly trait; the Lord uses it in your life to train you in righteousness. Through self-discipline, you are able to maintain focus on Christ and to lead a fruitful life. By applying self-discipline in your spiritual growth you will remain free from temptations to return to the sins of the past.

In *Conformed to His Image*, Dr. Kenneth Boa stresses the importance of discipline in our relationship with Jesus.

“There is no growth in the Christian life apart from discipline and self-control ... Spirituality is not instantaneous or haphazard; it is developed and refined. The Epistles are full of commands to believe, obey, walk, present, fight, reckon, hold fast, pursue, draw near, and love ... You and I will not wake up one morning to find ourselves suddenly spiritual ... We grow in godliness as we hear and obediently respond to the Word.”¹

Christian growth comes as we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, pray, read the Bible, and do what it says. Growth is both divine and human. God initiates the actions – He saves, He convicts of sin, He sanctifies. We respond – we obey, we pray, we walk in the Spirit, we persevere. There is no spiritual growth without the involvement of both the initiator and the responder. God is always ready to do His part. In this section, we will see a little of what is required of us.

Diligence in our relationship with God leads to real spiritual growth and eternal rewards.

Like other good relationships (marriage, parenting, friendship) our relationship with the Lord requires effort, self-discipline and diligence in order to grow.

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. Hebrews 6:11-15

We live in a fast-paced world with instant oatmeal, instant relief from acid indigestion, microwave everything and high-speed internet access. We want everything now. However, technological advancement hasn't sped up the process of spiritual growth any more than it has sped up the process of growth in a marriage relationship. Both still require time and commitment.

The Bible says that rewards come *after* patient endurance. In this passage, the writer is encouraging us to show diligence until we reach the end, “that you do not become sluggish but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Then he cites Abraham as an example of one who continued in faith and concludes by saying that it was *after* Abraham patiently endured that he obtained what God had promised him.

¹ Boa, Dr. Kenneth, *Conformed to His Image*, pg. 76

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Just as you do not lose 20 pounds of fat overnight or add 50 pounds to your maximum on the bench press in a day, you do not instantly achieve spiritual growth. God's plan is for us to learn through experience, through trials, through study of His Word and prayer. In order to reap the rewards of walking with God it is necessary to continue in His service, not to check in and out as you desire but to continue walking with Jesus, abiding in Him, trusting Him through the trials of the day. As you string together days of trusting the Lord, like Abraham you begin to reap the fruit of patient endurance. It requires self-discipline.

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.
Hebrews 10:35-37

Starting something is easy; continuing to the end is a different matter. A lot of people will quit when they are discouraged with the results they see in the middle of a trial. They may have believed in the workout regiment when they started but they aren't seeing their weight fall or their strength increase the way they originally expected. They have grown tired and it is possible that they haven't stuck to the plan as carefully as they might think. This is true with Christian growth too.

The writer of Hebrews is encouraging us not to throw away the confidence we had when we first believed but to stick with it. Jesus Christ is changing your life; don't fall away. Whether you see it or not, you are being transformed as you read your Bible and pray. God is continuing the good work that He started when you were saved. You need endurance, particularly on a bad day, in order to continue in the will of God. The full receipt of the promise comes at the end – an eternal home in the heavenlies with Christ, full joy, peace, and complete rest. The Bible assures you that Jesus is coming and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Remember Galatians 6:9 and do not grow weary in doing well, in due season, you will reap if you don't quit.

God desires diligence in our service to Him.

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things (speaking of the new heavens and new earth), be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you. II Peter 3:14-15

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The readers of II Peter were looking forward to the return of Jesus. Peter reminds them that this should affect their diligence in their relationship with Jesus and their service to Him until He returns. Are you looking forward to the return of Jesus? If so, then be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless when He returns.

God's principles tell us that He rewards the diligent in this life too.

He who has a slack hand becomes poor, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.
Proverbs 10:4

Do you see a man who excels (is diligent) in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown men. Proverbs 22:29

These two passages in Proverbs tell us that diligent workers will be rewarded. They earn more than they would if they were lazy and they will do their work for kings rather than doing it for unknown men. Have you ever wondered why one contractor renovates million-dollar homes while the other barely gets by working for the poor? It is possible that the first one is more diligent, works harder to improve his craft, returns phone calls, is on time and simply performs his duties better.

God warns against laziness

A lazy man needs constant supervision in order to accomplish a task. A diligent man does his work as unto the Lord, as a result, he is protected from the results of laziness.

Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, And gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, And your need like an armed man.
Proverbs 6:6-11

Observe the results of being lazy and learn from them. Turn off the television and get to work. Ants don't need a supervisor to know their duty and to perform it. As a result, they have food to eat in winter. It doesn't take a genius to clearly see the results of laziness but it does take discipline to work until the job is finished. It is usually the finishers who reap the rewards.

I went by the field of the lazy man, And by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I

looked on it and received instruction: A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest; So shall your poverty come like a prowler, And your need like an armed man. Proverbs 24:30-34

The writer of Proverbs saw the results of laziness and knew that he did not want his life to be that way. So he was motivated by what he saw to be diligent. We can learn this lesson the same way. Don't think that you have to experience the consequences of foolish or slothful habits in order to learn not to do those things. Learn all you can by observation so that you will not have to experience the sad results first hand.

A lazy man is not reliable and he has an excuse for never finishing the job.

As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the lazy man to those who send him. Proverbs 10:26

Have you ever sent a lazy man on an errand? If so, you understand the truth in this proverb. You wondered why you didn't just do the job yourself. You can break out of the lazy habit by diligently finishing the next task that you are given. Then make a habit of finishing every task you are given.

The lazy man says, "There is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets!"
Proverbs 22:13

As a door turns on its hinges, So does the lazy man on his bed. The lazy man buries his hand in the bowl; It wearies him to bring it back to his mouth. The lazy man is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly. Proverbs 26:14-16

Tony Dungy was a great and Godly football coach for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Indianapolis Colts. His players knew what was expected of them and they also knew what to expect if they didn't get the job done. He expected them to pay attention and to be diligent to correct their mistakes. Coach Dungy's philosophy was, "No excuses. No explanations." A lazy or irresponsible person can always explain why they did not finish the job. In Proverbs 22:13, he goes so far as to say that the reason for not working was that there was a lion in the street and he was afraid to leave the house. This guy probably wouldn't have lasted long under Coach Dungy. "No excuses. No explanations." We should all live with this as a personal philosophy in work and relationships.

Laziness causes the deterioration of the things that you are trying to build into your life.

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Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks. Ecclesiastes 10:18

The longer we wait to fix a problem, the bigger the problem becomes until one day, it finally destroys us. This is true about drinking, drugging, pornography, illicit sex, overeating, car trouble, household repairs, you name it. When you see a problem developing then remember what Barney Fife used to say on the *Andy Griffith Show* and “Nip it, nip it in the bud.” A small leak today becomes a downpour tomorrow. A two cigarette a day habit now will be a two pack a day addiction tomorrow. Be diligent to take action before a small problem becomes a big disaster.

Choose which path you want to walk in.

The way of the lazy man is like a hedge of thorns, but the way of the upright is a highway. Proverbs 15:19

The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich. Proverbs 13:4

God’s promises to those who are diligent include a plain path to walk in, and freedom from the thorns and snares of this world. The thorns and snares of this life include broken relationships due to extramarital affairs, loss of employment due to a poor work record, drunkenness, loss of family contact caused by stealing from them to support a drug habit, etc. Through diligence in your commitment to Jesus, you can be free from these and other snares. Diligence leads to blessings that are not available to those who are lazy.

God is glorified and you are blessed when you are diligent.

Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

Colossians 3:22-25

Have you ever worked in a place where the employees were diligent only when the supervisor was looking? This is a lousy way to spend your day; time drags and very little work is accomplished. Paul encourages all of us to perform our daily work as if we were employed directly by the Lord. Therefore, to do our work heartily or with enthusiasm because we are serving the Lord as we work for others. Some may see this scripture as a liability but is really liberating. It

is much more enjoyable and much more profitable in the long run to do your work as unto the Lord regardless of who is looking over your shoulder. It sets us free to do our work well regardless of whether the boss is watching or not.

God is glorified when you are diligent, when you do your work with the attitude that you are doing it for Him. Christians should be the best employees that a believing or unbelieving supervisor has. Make this your goal and do your work everyday as unto Jesus regardless of who notices and regardless of whether you ever receive recognition for it. You will end the day knowing that you have done your best and that you have represented the Lord well.

Choose your friends carefully; they can change your life.

You are shaped by the people you spend the most time around. An old adage says that you are known by the friends you keep. Another old saying is that “birds of a feather flock together”. We realize that friendships are important but you may not realize how significantly they impact every part of your life. That is why it is important to start each day with Jesus, to spend all day abiding in Him and to build relationships with Godly people who can encourage and counsel you to grow in Christ. Let’s see what the Bible says about choosing good friends.

The Bible says that friendship is a good thing.

Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

God created us with a desire to have fellowship with each other; we are social beings. This can be a real blessing. Thank God for partners in marriage, in work, and in ministry. We work better together when we encourage one another. Choose your marriage partner and your closest friends carefully. They can pick you up when you are down and deliver you from the enemy when you are tempted.

The “threefold cord” mentioned in this passage includes two earthly partners and the One who makes all of our relationships work. When Jesus is involved in the relationship, the bond is strong and it is not easily broken.

Friendship with the world is not a good thing.

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Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. James 4:4

The Bible makes it clear that we cannot indulge the flesh and still claim to love the Lord. James 4:4 is very clear, “Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

Galatians 6:8 explains the results of being a friend of the world. It says that if we sow to the flesh we will reap what we sow. We do not want to make the mistake of believing that we can get drunk, shoot up and generally flirt with temptation all week, and then attend church on Sunday and be right with the Lord. What are your highest priorities? Do your closest friends share the same priorities? Are they interested in following Jesus and going to church or are they interested in clubbing and chasing women?

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

I John 2:15-17

All of those attractive temptations of the world will pass away; they are temporary and they offer no long-term satisfaction. Eternal satisfaction is found in doing the will of God; you will abide forever. Is there enough pleasure in any sin that is worth risking eternal life? Is there any true friend who would want you to risk it? I don't think so.

Too many friends can actually be a problem.

A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Proverbs 18:24

The New American Standard Bible translates this verse, “He that makes many friends does it to his own destruction; but there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.” This may be a more accurate translation of Proverbs 18:24 and it means that seeking too many friends can actually be harmful. Have you ever found this to be the case? I have. You may have been tempted to make friends who did you a great deal of harm. At first, they seemed cool; they may have been rich and attractive, exciting and smart. They drew you into friendship and before you know it, you were trapped in relationships where they expected you to act against your convictions, or to engage in sinful or even criminal activity based upon your friendship with them. If you seek a relationship

with the Lord *first* and let Him direct you then He will bring you into fellowship with the people who seek to help rather than to harm.

Choose them wisely.

He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed. Proverbs 13:20

The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray. Proverbs 12:26

Memorize these two verses. I have never read better reasons for carefully choosing friends. First of all, if you associate with wise men you will become wise. Talking with wise men increases your knowledge, improves your vision and changes your outlook. The world says that you learn from your peers; I believe that you learn most from those who are wiser than you. It is a blessing to have friends with more godly wisdom than you.

On the other hand, a companion of fools becomes just like them and they are eventually destroyed. This is the simple explanation for the failure of some young people who were on the right track and then took a detour. Last year they were on the honor roll at school and active in church. Then they started hanging around the wrong crowd at the park or the game room and their grades begin to slip along with their morals. Now they are considering dropping out of school and they wouldn't be caught dead inside of a church building. What happened? Proverbs 13:20 & 12:26 explain it; they were influenced by fools.

Who is influencing you? Are they wise men or women who can lead you upward or are they unrighteous men or women who will take you down with them?

Read the following passages and see if they describe any of your current relationships.

A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends. A violent man entices his neighbor, and leads him in a way that is not good. Proverbs 16:28-29

Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways And set a snare for your soul. Proverbs 22:24-25

Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." I Corinthians 15:33

A former prison inmate once told me that no man ever falls and returns to prison by himself; he has help getting back there. One of the most important commitments you can make regards whom you spend time with. Angry men will drag you into violence. Don't get into the car

with them. They will ensnare your soul. Evil company will corrupt the good habits that you are developing in your life; stay away from the gangs or groups that corrupt your life.

The Bible tells you to flee sexual sin (I Corinthians 6:18), flee idolatry (I Corinthians 10:14), flee covetousness (I Timothy 6:11) and to flee youthful lusts (II Timothy 2:22). If your “friends” are trying to drag you back into sin, flee, get out!

What is true about friends is even more true when you are considering a spouse.

We are not focusing on marriage relationships in this chapter but it is too important to ignore when you are talking about friendships. The second most important relationship in your life is with your spouse; the first is with Jesus. Marriage should not be entered into lightly nor should you enter into and exit marriage at your own will.

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?
II Corinthians 6:14

This passage applies to a lot more than marriage but it certainly applies there first. Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. It is not God’s design for you to enter into marriage with an unbeliever. Now, if you are already married then His counsel is to remain so. But you should not choose your spouse based upon their personal appearance or shared interests. The primary shared interest that you must have with your prospective mate is Jesus Christ. He has a way of cementing relationships when our eyes are on Him and our devotion is for Him.

Secondly, your spouse should be your closest friend next to Jesus. Do not make the mistake of sharing stories or jokes with your buddies that you would not take home to your wife or husband. No earthly being should be more important to you than your spouse. When the Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce, He quoted Genesis,

And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' "and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." Matthew 19:4-6

“One flesh” is a pretty close relationship. There is no other relationship in the Bible that is described this way. Seek Godly counsel if you are considering marriage or if you are experiencing trouble in your marriage. This bond between a man and a woman is the second most important

relationship in the world. God uses it as an earthly illustration of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church. Marriage should be seriously considered before entering into it and it should be protected once it is begun.

Conclusion

In the last two chapters we have examined more than 50 scripture passages related to these four topics: 1) How should you deal with pride? 2) How to avoid becoming angry? 3) The importance of self-discipline and 4) Choosing your friends carefully. These are four important issues as you move beyond addictions to live free in Christ Jesus. Read your Bible and you will find that there are many verses that address these and other key points that will enable you to grow closer to Jesus and keep you free from slavery to addictions.

God's Word is able to make you wise in every area of life. You can trust it and you can depend upon the Lord to use it to direct your steps, whether the issues relate to addictions or any other area of life. Read it. Study it. Apply it. Continue in it and you will be a true disciple of Jesus Christ (John 8:31). Amen.

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Free to Live a New Life In Christ



Godly Wisdom for Self-discipline & Developing Friendships

Assignment 10

Name: _____

1. Is there any real Christian growth without self-discipline? _____

God is the initiator; we are the responder. What is our role as we grow in our relationship with Him?

2. What can you learn from Abraham's example as it is described in Hebrews 6:11-15? _____

3. II Peter 3:14-15 encourages us to be diligent in our walk with Jesus. How does our understanding of heavenly rewards affect our diligence today? _____

4. Describe the promises that God has for the diligent in Proverbs 10:4 and Proverbs 22:29.

5. What was Coach Dungy's philosophy? _____

How does this relate to God's call for us to be diligent in this life? _____

Relate it to the call in Colossians 3:22-25. _____

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6. The Bible teaches that friendship is a good thing; however it also warns that too many friends can actually be a problem. How can this be? _____

Have you ever experienced this? _____

7. There are five scripture passages on pages 14 & 15 that counsel us on how to choose good friends. Based upon these passages, who should you avoid and who should you seek as friends?

Are you permitting any on the negative list to influence you today? _____

8. "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." This statement describes friendships, business partnerships, marriage and more. What practical advice can you take from this statement in II Corinthians 6:14? _____

Does it mean that you should not have acquaintances who are unbelievers? _____ How do you distinguish between "friends" and "acquaintances"? _____

9. How do you apply II Corinthians 6:14 when you are considering a marriage partner? _____

What does the Bible counsel you to do if you already married to someone who is not a Christian? (I Corinthians 7:10-15) _____

Once you complete this worksheet, mail it to:

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