

Spiritual Discipline

Step 10: We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12)

It is amazing to see what a human being can achieve through a consistent disciplined effort. How many times have we watched athletes and marveled at the ease with which they perform their sport? We realize that they developed that ability through rigorous training, which is what sets the true athlete apart from the spectator. These are parallels to the disciple of continuing our inventories.

Paul wrote to Timothy, *"Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 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."* (1 Timothy 4:7-8) The word translated "exercise" specifically refers to the disciplined training done by gymnasts in Paul's day. As Christians we need to develop a habit of listening to God rather than simply to our own thoughts. We need to learn God's principles for healthy living and allow those principles to reshape the way we think and act rather than simply continuing to go with what's familiar or comfortable. We need to let God's teaching challenge and stretch and develop us, on a daily basis, to become a brand new person living in a brand new way. We need to take inventory with a new set of guidelines than what we've previously be living.

Spiritual strength and agility only come through practice. We need to develop our spiritual muscles through consistent effort and daily discipline. Continuing to take personal inventory is one of the disciplines we can develop. The Bible describes it as having our senses exercised to discern both good and evil. The Bible also suggests that it

takes ongoing work that is focused and consistent. *"By now you should have been teachers, but once again you need to be taught the simplest things about what God has said. You need milk instead of solid food. People who live on milk are like babies who don't really know what is right. Solid food is for mature people who have been trained to know right from wrong."* (Hebrews 5:14).

What are we doing from day to day, even moment to moment, to train ourselves to hear and respond to the voice of God? What tools are we using to help us learn and grow? In what ways are we challenging ourselves to do things like pray and study and read and reflect, particularly when we don't feel like it, so we can grow into new habits of ongoing surrender to God and to the principles of this new life. We will have some discomfort and some need to "press on" or "hang on". Every new muscle that stretches let's the athlete know it's been stretched. But the discomfort is temporary and the fitness level that results is for the long term.

Like the athlete, we can motivate ourselves to continue in a disciplined routine by looking to our reward. This kind of discipline *"will help you not only now in this life, but in the next life too"* (1 Timothy 4:8). We must not expect overnight results. As we continue practicing these disciplines each day, we'll eventually grow to enjoy the benefits.

Our continued inventory will keep us spiritually fit and strong in the face of temptation.

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. What am I doing on a daily basis to look at my life and respond to God's voice?
2. What tools am I using to help me assess, reflect, learn, and grow?
3. In what ways am I challenging myself so I can grow into new habits of ongoing surrender to God and to the principles of this new life?