

# THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-DISCIPLINE

(Psalm 63:1-8)

If you were to make a list of the top ten basketball players of all time, Dirk Nowitzki would have to be on the list. He has been called the best shooting big man of all time and is #6 in most career points.

Of course, he grew up in Würzburg, Germany and went straight from high school to an amazing 21-year NBA career with the Mavericks. How many times did we see incredible games with Dirk Nowitzki, Kobe Bryant, and Tim Duncan? Of course, all three of them will be in the basketball Hall of Fame.

When Dirk was growing up in Germany, he spent hours and hours and hours every week with his coach Holger Geschwindner, practicing his shooting, layups, and free throws. Not only that, he allowed his coach to give him tips and tell him how to be the best he could be. There is no doubt that his self-discipline and teachable spirit made him into one of the greatest players ever—a 14-time All Star as well as World Champion!

Now, in the spiritual race we are all running as Christ's followers, our goal is not to win an earthly prize (an NBA Championship) but an eternal one. Our goal is to hear Jesus say: "Well, done, good and faithful servant."

So this morning, if you want to be a spiritual "Dirk Nowitzki" ---if you want to be inducted into God's Hall of Fame as a dedicated follower of Christ---I want you to know that **you can do it** regardless of your age, your circumstances, or your current lot in life!

**Title:** The Importance of Self-Discipline

For decades now, soft drink companies have run TV commercials in order to get you to "Obey Your Thirst." And over the past couple of weeks, my goal has been to motivate you to thirst after God and the things of God by looking at the life of David.

David was a disciplined follower of God. Over and over in the Psalms we hear David saying things like this: ***"Lord, I've got to know You better! I'm hungry and thirsty for you, Lord. I want to know you like as much as a man in the desert wants a drink of water."***

This morning, in my last message in this mini-series, I'd like to give you two key ingredients when it comes to the personal discipline involved in connecting with and becoming like God.

1. **Discipline** involves determination

In verse 8 David said, “**My soul follows** close behind You. . .”

**Follows close behind** = “**clings**” (same word God used in Gen 2:24: “a man shall leave his father and mother and shall **cleave** unto his wife, and they shall become one flesh”).

**In Psalm 143:6** (NET), David said the same thing using these words:

*“I lift my hands to you in prayer. I thirst for you as parched land thirsts for rain.”*

David didn’t say, “One day, when things are better, I will start connecting with God.” He didn’t say, “If it happens, great!” David was **determined** to be close to God.

In his book, *Too Busy not to Pray*, Bill Hybels wrote,

**Authentic** Christianity is not learning a set of doctrines and then stepping in cadence with people all marching the same way. . . It is a walk — a supernatural walk with a living, dynamic, communicating God. . . **The archenemy** of spiritual authenticity is *busyness*, which is closely tied to something the Bible calls worldliness — getting caught up with the society’s agenda, objectives, and activities to the neglect of walking with God.

Even though David was the King over an entire nation, he kept his priorities straight — God first, and everything else second. And he was determined to keep it that way.

And when we live this way, Jesus tells us that we will be “filled” (= inwardly satisfied):

*“**Blessed are** those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).*

Several years ago, I had the privilege of meeting **Bill McCartney**, (the former head football coach at the University of Colorado) after he spoke here in Dallas. McCartney told the following story:

*When I took the job as head football coach...in 1982, I made a solemn promise: I told everybody that, with me, God was first, family second, and football third. But I didn't keep that promise for long. The thrill and the challenge of resurrecting a football program in disarray simply took too much time and attention. As my teams kept winning year after year, I kept losing focus of my priorities. When we won the national championship in 1990, many people said I had reached the pinnacle of my profession. But for me, there was an emptiness about it. **I had everything a man could want**, and yet something was missing. I was so busy pursuing my career goals that I was missing out on the Spirit-filled life that God wanted me to have. All because I had broken my promise to put God first and foremost in my life.*

Bill McCartney won a national championship but acknowledged that because **he had “benched God”** in order to do it, he was empty.

Any time we “bench God” in our day-to-day lives, emptiness is always the result. God designed it that way:

**Jeremiah 2:13** . . . *My people have done two evil things: They have forsaken me—the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!*

We don't mean to bench God, do we? We don't mean to dig wells that can't hold water, but we do. Let's take our cue from King David this morning and get a holy determination to open God's Word and to seek Him in prayer.

The discipline of devotion involves determination, but it also involves another important ingredient — time.

## 2. **Discipline involves time**

Many years ago, John Ortberg served as an assistant pastor at a church in the Chicago area and shared this insightful story. He said:

Not long after moving to Chicago, **I called a wise friend to ask** for some spiritual direction. I described the pace of life in my current ministry. The church where I serve tends to move at a fast clip. I also told him about our...family life: we are in the van-driving, soccer-league, piano-lesson... years. I told him about the present condition of my heart, as best I could discern it. [Then I asked him], **“What [do] I need to do to be spiritually healthy?”**

Long pause.

**“You must ruthlessly eliminate** *hurry from your life,*” he said at last.

Another long pause.

*“Okay, I've written that one down,”* I told him, a little impatiently. *“That's a good one. Now, what else is there?”* (I had [a lot] to do ... so I was anxious to cram as many units of spiritual wisdom into the least amount of time possible.)

Another long pause.

*“There is nothing else,”* he said. *“You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”*

[Reflecting on this interaction, Ortberg said], “I've concluded that my life and the well-being of the people I serve depends on following his prescription, for hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. Hurry destroys souls.”

Going back to Dirk Nowitzki, Dirk took time to practice and to learn from his coach. It's what made him great. In the same way,

you need to take time for **your “Coach”**---to interact with Him and to allow Him to give you tips on how you can improve. It takes time. You must eliminate hurry and make time for Him!

In Psalm 63, David took time to interact with his “Coach.” He talked to his Coach about what was bothering him, about things that were going well, and thanked his Coach for how He had helped him in so many ways (not legalistically!!!!):

### **Personally in the morning**

*Psalm 5:2-3 Give heed to the voice of my cry, My King and my God, For to You I will pray. My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; In the morning I will direct it to You, And I will look up.*

### **Publicly in the daytime**

*Psalm 63:3-4 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.*

### **Privately in the evening**

*Psalm 63:6-7 When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches. Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice.*

**Richard Allen Farmer** is a great pastor and a tremendously accomplished pianist as well. I got to hear him share the following story at a Moody Bible Institute Pastor’s Conference. Farmer said:

*I have a 95-year-old grandmother. No one has heard me preach more than three times without hearing a story about my grandmama. The saddest thing I can probably say about you is that you’ll not get a chance to meet “Sweetie Pie.” She lives in New York City, and we are [extremely close]. I am the second born of her 65-year-old daughter, and she makes me happy.*

*We talk on the phone every Sunday night no matter where I am in the world. When I talk to her or when I see her, as I will next week, it’s not drudgery for me to enjoy her presence.*

*Over these last forty-three years, I have simply bathed in the sunlight of her presence. I don’t say, “Oh, I’ve got to go see my grandmother.” It’s: “I get to see Sweetie Pie.”*

(Now he made application):

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*... the Psalmist. . . says it ought to be your delight to come up into Papa's face and enjoy His presence. It presupposes a relationship that makes you want to be there.*

Just like Richard Allen Farmer took time to call and to bask in the love of his grandma, **every one of us need to take** time and let our loving Heavenly Father wrap His arms around us and say, "Keep going, child. I'm here. You're doing great. Keep on going ... don't quit."

### **Application**

Discipline involves determination---are you determined to know God and His Word---to seek Him in prayer? Are you?

Discipline involves time---will you make time to draw close to God?

Leroy Eims, the great Christian leader told the following story:

One spring our family was driving from Fort Lauderdale to Tampa, Florida. As far as the eye could see, orange trees were loaded with fruit. When we stopped for breakfast, I ordered orange juice with my eggs. "I'm sorry," the waitress said. "I can't bring you orange juice. Our machine is broken."

At first I was dumbfounded. We were surrounded by millions of oranges, and I knew they had oranges in the kitchen--orange slices garnished our plates. What was the problem? No juice? Hardly. We were surrounded by thousands of gallons of juice. The problem was they had become dependent on a machine to get it.

Christians are sometimes like that. They may be surrounded by Bibles in their homes, but if something should happen to the Sunday morning preaching service, they would have no nourishment for their souls. The problem is not a lack of spiritual food--but that many Christians haven't grown enough to know how to get it for themselves.

Isaiah 26:8-9 O LORD, we have waited for You; the desire of *our* soul is for Your name and for the remembrance of You. <sup>9</sup>With my soul I have desired You in the night, yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early. . .

Twelve percent of all American adults read the Bible every day of the week, while 52 percent do not read it at all. Another 33 percent read the Scriptures at least once during a typical week.

More blacks (70 percent) read the Bible than Hispanics (49 percent) and whites (42 percent). More women (50 percent) read it than men (39 percent). The South can retain its label as the Bible belt: 56 percent of southern adults read the Bible at least weekly. On the other end of the spectrum is the Northeast, where only 30 percent do.

More than one in four (26 percent) evangelicals read the Bible daily; another 50 percent read it weekly or more. But 22 percent of evangelicals report that they never read the Bible outside of church.

A pilot was flying his small plane one day, when he heard a noise which he recognized as the gnawing of a rat. Wondering what its sharp teeth were cutting through, he suddenly realized with horror that it might be an electric wire. Then he remembered that rodents can't survive at high altitudes. Immediately he began climbing until finally he had to put on his oxygen mask. Soon the gnawing sound ceased, and when he landed he found the rat -- dead.

Do you want to destroy the power of evil in your life? Then read the Bible regularly, meditate upon its truths, and actively do God's will. Sinful appetites can't survive in such spiritual heights. Listen to the Heavenly Father as He calls, "Children, come up higher!"

In his book, *Out of the Blue*, Orel Hershiser described an encounter with Dodger's manager Tommy Lasorda that changed his life. Lasorda called Hershiser into the office and shouted, *"You don't believe in yourself! You're scared to pitch in the big leagues! Who do you think these hitters are, Babe Ruth? Ruth's dead! You've got good stuff. If you didn't, I wouldn't have hired you."* Lasorda continued: *"I've seen guys come and go, son, and you've got it! Be aggressive. Be a bulldog out there. That's gonna be your new name: Bulldog. With that name, you'll scare the batters to death! Starting today, I want you to believe you are the best pitcher in baseball. Look at that hitter and say, 'There's no way you can ever hit me.'" Two days later Orel pitched relief and in three innings, he gave up only 1 run. Lasorda's talk (he calls it his "Sermon on the mound") had worked.*

Christian, maybe you've lost your desire for God and the things of God. Maybe your devotion to Him is not what it ought to be. Maybe you haven't read His Word or personally shared the gospel with someone in a long time.

I hope today's message was a wake up call to you. Just like Tommy Lasorda motivated Orel Hershiser, our Lord is not just speaking to you, HE'S SHOUTING — "Starting today, I want you to believe that you can become the follower of mine you've always wanted to be! You've got great stuff! You've got My presence and my promises! You were once called darkness — your new name is LIGHT! Today, I want you to believe that by My grace and with My help, nothing is gonna keep you from becoming a bible reading, faith sharing, prayer warrior of a Christian!"

In his book *Good Morning Merry Sunshine*, Chicago Tribune columnist Bob Greene chronicles his infant daughter's first year of life. When little Amanda began crawling, he records: "This is something I'm having trouble getting used to. I will be in bed reading a book or watching TV. And I will look down at the foot of the bed and there will be Amanda's head staring back at me.

"Apparently I've become one of the objects that fascinate her. ... It's so strange. After months of having to go to her, now she is choosing to come to me. I don't know quite how to react. All I can figure is that she likes the idea of coming in and looking at me. She doesn't expect anything in return. I'll return her gaze and in a few minutes she'll decide she wants to be back in the living room and off she'll crawl again." The simple pleasure of looking at the one you love--what Bob and his daughter enjoyed--is what we enjoy each time we worship God and bask in his presence.

The meaning of earthly existence lies, not as we have grown used to thinking, in prospering, but in the development of the soul.

-- Alexander Solzhenitsyn