

## "LIVING A DISCIPLINED LIFE"

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few"

(These words spoken by Jesus are to be found in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, the seventh chapter, verses 13, and 14.)

### INTRODUCTION

A disciple of Socrates, some three hundred years before the time of Jesus, offered this observation regarding life. He said:

"Seest thou not a certain small door, and a pathway before the door in no way crowded, for only a very few travel that way since it seems to lead through a pathless, rugged, and stony tract. That is the way that leads to true discipline."

Centuries later, another scholar, Walter Phelps Hall, a professor of history at Yale University offered his idea of one of the most important and basic lessons regarding life when he said:

"The rock bottom thing about life is to keep on going when we don't want to keep on going, and to be willing to give up what isn't necessary".

And so it is that the long experience of mankind is witness to the truth of these words of Jesus about the straight and narrow gate, and the wide gate and the easy way. These words are part of a lesson that applies to all life. To be sure, there's nothing particularly theological about it. It doesn't take a Yale professor to understand its truth. It's a rather simple fact, and it's written hard on the face of every day.

Life demands discipline! We don't like to be reminded of this fact too often, but it's true. Discipline of character. Discipline of cooperation. Discipline of emotion. Discipline of mind. Discipline of time. Discipline of work. These are the narrow gates that lead to the wide open seas of rich and abundant living. And yet the tragic thing is that we're not willing to pass through these gates. We much prefer the easy, undisciplined ways.

"Straight is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

This idea of a disciplined life operates for great living in every compartment of life. And with the pressures and complexities of life constantly pushing in on us, we need to capture this secret of living a life that is disciplined. This morning, I would just like to touch upon one principle, if you can call it that, of this disciplined life. And this I would do very briefly.

### PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT REQUIRES DISCIPLINED EFFORT.

it's well for us to remember that personal achievement in any area

of life demands and requires disciplined effort. To be sure, it's an old story, but it's still true. Some of you have heard me refer to these lines by Harry Emerson Fosdick on other occasions in this pulpit, and the chances are that you'll hear them again on future occasions.

"No horse gets anywhere till he is harnessed.  
No steam or gas ever drives anything until  
it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned  
into light and power until it is tunneled.  
And no life ever grows great until it is  
focused, dedicated, and disciplined!"

For instance, just take the field of music. In the biography, "The Life and Letters of Peter Tchaikowsky", the author, John Lane tells of the strict, self-imposed discipline that it takes to be a composer. Compositions never come to the composer through inspiration alone. John Lane said this of Tchaikowsky:

"He found that he must go to his desk every day and do something the best he could just to get out some music. Then in time, and quite unexpectedly, rich musical ideas would come pouring into his head faster than he could write them down."

In other words, the discipline of perspiration precedes inspiration.

And what's true in the field of music is equally true in the field of sport. So often I find illustrations and quotations for sermons in places where you would least expect to find them. For instance, on one occasion someone asked Jim Corbett what it was that made a champion. Rather off handily, he remarked: "Well...when you're down and you think you're out, then get up and fight one more round".

And yes....even the clergy cannot escape from this. Dr. Charles Jefferson, pastor of the Broadway Tabernacle church here in this city for over thirty years was a preacher of great gift. And yet he didn't rely on his talent alone to do the work; he also had the will to discipline his powers. On one occasion, he gave some advice to a group of theological students:

"Gentlemen," he said, "Write". Write out in full at least one sermon each week. In addition, write articles and letters. You may never get the articles published, but the writing will do you good. It will keep the cobwebs out of your mind. If you do not like to write, write anyhow. If you find it painful to write, write nevertheless. If it kills you to write, make yourself do it. Blessed are they who die in the lord!"

And yes....blessed is he who lives according the laws of God. The laws of life as they relate to success and personal achievement are clearly marked by God. They are the laws of self restraint and renunciation. And they carry with them the obligations of devotion to duty and self sacrifice. They imply the self imposed discipline of directed energy and sustained effort. These are the narrow gates through which we must first pass before we will realize our full potential as children of God. In order to enter them, we must be

willing to give up the easy way of self-indulgence. The pampered soul is a stranger to great living. We need to remember that in order to get, we must first be willing to give up certain things. For personal achievement in any area of life requires stern and disciplined effort.

LET US PRAY:

Help us, Our Father, to discipline our thoughts, and our desires. For in so doing, we shall be gaining those things that are important and good and lasting. As we come to thy table this morning, help us to come in a spirit that is worthy of those who have decided to follow the way that thy Son traveled. This we ask in thy name and for thy sake. Amen

## LIFE DEMANDS DISCIPLINE

TEXT: "Enter by the NARROW gate; for the gate is WIDE and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is NARROW and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

A disciple of Socrates, said, years before the time of Jesus:

Seest thou not a certain small door, and a pathway before the door, in no way crowded, for only a very few travel that way, since it seems to lead through a pathless, rugged, and stony tract. That is the way that leads to true discipline.....

Centuries later another scholar, Walter Phelps Hall, Professor of History at Yale University, gave his idea of the most important lesson in life in these words:

The rock bottom thing about life is to keep on going when we don't want to keep on going, and to be willing to give up what isn't necessary.....

And so it is that the long experience of mankind is witness to the truth of the words of Jesus about the straight or narrow gate, and the wide gate and the easy way. It's a teaching that applies to all of life.

There's nothing particularly theological about it...

It certainly doesn't take a Yale Professor to learn its truth...

It's a simple fact of life.....written on the face of every day...

Life demands disciplines. Discipline of mind. Discipline of time. Discipline of work. Discipline of sacrifice. Discipline of character. These are the NARROW gates that lead to the wide open areas of free and abundant living. And yet so few of us are willing to pass through these narrow gates. So many of us find the easy and undisciplined ways much more attractive.

"Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads unto life.....and those who find it are few!"

This idea of the disciplined life operates for great living in all the areas of our daily experience.....at home - at school - at work - at church. with the PRESSURE and COMPLEXITY of life constantly pushing in on us, we need to capture the secret of disciplined living.

HUMAN PROGRESS DEPENDS  
ON DISCIPLINED MINDS.

In the first place, I'm sure that we would all agree that human progress depends on minds that are disciplined. The SLOW AND TORTURED trail of human progress has been blazed by men and women who have passed through the narrow gates of disciplined mind and will. The ideas, the plans, the programs that have illumined the long road of history have been born in sacrifice and devotion to the discipline of truth and thought. Whether the field is  
medicine or mechanics...

statesmanship or science...

religion or the arts....

The story is the same..... Human progress depends on minds that are disciplined! Our world is full of narrow gates. If we hope to pass through them, we must learn the lesson of disciplined thinking.

The scientist has been taught the meaning of disciplined thinking.

Consider some of the narrow gates he has passed through.

For instance, the pancreas glands of pigs was thought to be useless until someone came along and discovered insulin. Now the glands from some seventy-five hundred pigs must be processed in order to get just one ounce of insulin. Certainly a narrow gate!

Certain rocks were trampled over for centuries by men before they were found to contain uranium. Now two million tons of rocks are processed in order to get four tons of uranium.

Science demands exacting discipline. Careless and haphazard thinking have no place in the world in which we live. It takes a  
disciplined mind.....

and a disciplined hand

to drive a jet plane or a high powered car. And by the same token, it takes disciplined minds to create a society that will survive the destruction of atomic warfare.

There are other narrow gates that mark the progress of men. They are the narrow gates of human brotherhood, of cooperation among the nations, of the recognition of the rights and dignity of all men regardless of color, class or creed.

We are beginning to see that the broader ways of hatred and war and exploitation lead to destruction.....

We are beginning to see that minds disciplined by science must also be disciplined by the word of God.....

We are beginning to see that our minds must be disciplined by love, justice, and goodness, and not by tradition, prejudice and loyalty to creed and class....

When you leave New York City by ship for Europe, you sail down the harbor and before you reach the sea, you pass through the Narrows. It is a distance of one mile, with Long Island on one side and Staten Island on the other. In a sense, this is a parable of life. It underscores the teaching of Jesus. It is only when we pass through the narrow gates, that we enter into the great sea of human progress and fulfillment.

Disciplined emotions....

Disciplined ambitions....

Disciplined consciences....

Disciplined thinking.....

We must not be afraid to pass through such narrow gates. They are the sure and safe route to the salvation of man and society.

Human progress depends on minds that are disciplined!

"Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads unto life....and those who find it are few."

PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT

REQUIRES DISCIPLINED EFFORT:

In the second place, these words of Jesus reminds us that personal achievement requires disciplined

effort.

Someone once asked Jim Corbett, "What makes a champion?" He replied, "When you're down and you think you're out, then get up and fight one more round!"

His words underscore the thought that personal achievement demands stern and disciplined effort. It's an old, old story. It's true in every field of activity.

Take music. In the biography, The Life and Letters of Peter Tchaikowsky, the author, John Lane, tells of the strict self-imposed discipline it takes to be a composer. Compositions never come to the composer through inspiration alone. John Lane, says of Tchaikowsky:

"He found that he must go to his desk each day and do something the best he could, just to get out some music. Then in time and quite unexpectedly, rich musical ideas would come pouring into his head faster than he could write them down....."

In other words, the discipline of perspiration precedes inspiration!

And take sports. Here we are moving into the basketball season. I'm reminded of a basketball coach I had in high school who use to stress the importance of being able to shoot with either hand. Day after day in the practice sessions, strict attention and discipline was given to the development of the ability to shoot with either hand. First - fifty lay up shots with the right hand. Then fifty lay up shots with the left hand. Lazy and undisciplined ways never produce winning teams. There must be determination and discipline....

Discipline in practicing different shots....

Discipline in shooting from the foul line....

Discipline in keeping the training rules....

Discipline in time and schedule.....

what glory is there if you make the basketball team, but can't discipline your time to the extent that you fall behind in your other obligations... and your grades begin to slip lower and lower...

It's a far cry from Peter Tchaikowsky to basketball and school work, but the principle is the same. Disciplined effort is essential. It's true in every field of human endeavor. Even ministers cannot escape from it.

Dr. Allan Knight Chalmers, for 17 years the minister of Broadway Tabernacle in New York City and at present Professor of Homiletics at Boston University is a preacher of great gift. But he also has the will to discipline his powers. One time to a classroom of seminary students, he said:

" Gentlemen, write. Write out in full at least one sermon each week. In addition, write articles on all sorts of subjects. You may never get them published but the writing will do you good. It will keep the cobwebs out of your mind. If you do not like to write, write anyhow. If you find it difficult to write, write nevertheless. Even if it kills you to write, make yourself do it!"

The laws of life as they bear on our success as persons are clearly marked by God. They are the laws of self-restraint, self-renunciation, and self-control. They carry with them the obligations of self-sacrifice and devotion to duty.

They imply the disciplines of sustained effort and directed energy.

The PAMPERED soul is a stranger to great living. We must GIVE up if we are to GET. Harry Emerson Fosdick put it this way:

"No horse gets anywhere till he is harnessed....  
No steam or gas ever drives anything until it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned into light and power until it is tunneled. And no life ever grows until it is FOCUSED, DEDICATED, and DISCIPLINED!"

In the second place, then - Personal achievement requires discipline.



SPIRITUAL GROWTH COMES ONLY  
FROM DISCIPLINED CHARACTER

Now if we carry our thinking one step further, we come to the very heart of the message of Jesus

concerning narrow gates. And that is that spiritual growth comes only from disciplined character.

Lives without the stern disciplines of Christian character are shallow.....

and empty.

One time a hobo, or a professional tramp was asked how he ever decided which way he would travel. "Why that's easy," he said. "In the morning when I get out of the hay or straw where I've slept during the night, I go out of doors and find out which way the wind is blowing. And then I always go with the wind to my back." Perhaps that is the reason he is a tramp....

On the narrow way that leads to spiritual growth, there's no guarantee of a wind to our backs. The wide and easy way never bring out the best that is within us. Spiritual growth comes through struggle and disciplined living.

It's only when the strings of a violin are pressed that the tones become clear, rich and compelling.....

It's only when a rose is crushed that its perfume is exuded....

Only through struggle and stern discipline do we grow into the fulness of life.....

Face the wind. Don't travel the easy way with the wind to your back....

There's also special meaning in this message of Jesus for the training of children and young people. Occasionally we find ourselves in some confusion as to how far we should go in exercising discipline over our children and young people.

We've heard it said that we should not restrict, restrain or repress children and young people.....

We've been urged to let young people express themselves freely....

We want them to grow up to be independent without being hampered by parental discipline.....

And perhaps we're in danger of becoming too modern in removing too many of the narrow gates and disciplines for our young people.

To those who face such confusion, let me share with you some words from an unknown author:

"I have been told not to interfere with any child.... to bend his will to mine, or try to shape him through some mold of thought. Naturally as a flower he must unfold. And yet do not flowers have the discipline of the wind and rain, and though I know it gives the gardner much pain, I've seen him use his pruning shears to gain more strength and beauty for some blossoms bright.....it seems to me that only weeds unfold naturally."

To my way of thinking there is no more important or rewarding task than to shape the mind and character of a child or young person after the mind and character of Jesus. This takes careful pruning and guidance. It takes love, and discipline, and understanding on the part of the parent.

Only through the narrow gate of disciplined character do we grow spiritually. Lives without the stern disciplines of Christian character are shallow and empty. Lives without God are empty. Lives without the anchorage of religious faith are empty.

Only as we discipline ourselves, do we find a life that is rich, mature and everlasting. For you see.....spiritual growth comes only from disciplined character.

Of such is the disciplined life.....

First: human progress depends on disciplined minds.

Second: personal achievement requires disciplined effort.

Third: spiritual growth comes only from disciplined character.

I would like to close by sharing with you lines taken from the poem, The Road Not Taken, by Robert Frost. As a young man Robert Frost was faced with the decision of choosing one of two possible roads to follow in life. Whatever the two ways were, we do not know for sure. We do know he could not travel both; he had to choose.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence.  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Two ways. The broad and easy way. The straight and narrow way. A person cannot travel both. One leads to dissatisfaction and the other leads to the fulfillment of life.

Which one will you take?

The one less traveled by.....the one which  
demands discipline...

I hope so....for it will make all the difference  
in the world!

LET US PRAY:

Guide us, Our Father, through the narrows of life and out into the depths of great living. Help us to discipline our lives so that we may pursue those things which are valuable above all others. Give us the vision to see the rewards and blessings of a life that travels the untraveled way. Amen.