



Self-Discipline

Many people tend to get disappointed in themselves for being someone who procrastinates, has a lack of motivation, has difficulty following through or finishing a task, has no willpower, or feels like they're just plain lazy. I think we all struggle or have struggled with this in our lifetime. As we think about self-discipline, it's important to understand that how you do one thing is how you do everything. Meaning, for example, if you're going to be undisciplined with your food protocol, you're probably also going to find that you're undisciplined in your financial budgeting or your time-management, and maybe in the way you pursue Christ and Christian living. If it shows up in one area, it's going to show up in all the areas of your life in one way or another. How you do one thing is how you do everything. That's why self-discipline is so crucial - it helps you build the habit of following through on your commitments in order to accomplish your goals and live the Christ-like life.

We must note that self-discipline is not the same as motivation. Motivation is great, but it is fleeting. You might even say self-condemnation is motivation. But it's like a spark that ignites a fire, but it doesn't keep the fire going. And that's because it's coming from a place of guilt – beating oneself up. But self-discipline comes from a place of self-love and is like the fuel that keeps that fire burning.

By definition, self-discipline means to exercise power over one's self. It's a personal quality and identity shift that helps you become the kind of person who consistently follows through on their commitments. It is not just something you do; it is who you are. Self-discipline is not resistance or restriction; it is a way of life that leads to success and fulfillment.

What you do today will determine the person you will be tomorrow. Because self-discipline is self-love and self-care for your future self. The thing you don't want to do now is exactly what your future self wants you to do. For example, if you want to fit into a dress for your daughter's wedding and you need to lose a few pounds, you will make decisions today based on what your future self would thank you for. You will eat healthier, exercise more, and avoid junk food. Seeing things today from a Future-Self perspective is a great way to fuel the fire of self-discipline.

Self-discipline doesn't even require willpower. When you make choices that align with your faith-values and goals, you strengthen the neural pathways in your brain that support that behavior. Over time, those pathways become stronger and more automatic, making self-discipline feel more natural and effortless. It's something that we practice with intention. The pre-frontal cortex is the part of our brain that is responsible for decision-making, planning,

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and self-control. This area of the brain is particularly important when it comes to self-discipline. When we exercise self-discipline, we activate and strengthen the prefrontal cortex, which makes it easier for us to make better decisions and resist temptation in the future. On the other hand, when we give in to temptation and procrastinate, we weaken the pre-frontal cortex and make it harder for us to exercise self-discipline in the future. This is why it's important to develop habitual patterns in our lives. The more we practice it, the stronger our pre-frontal cortex becomes, and the easier it becomes for us to make better decisions and stay on track. This is training your brain, creating new patterns of behavior. Which you do, one action at a time, little by little.

Your brain is like a computer and you, by your will and freedom of choice, are the data input processor. If you *decide* what you want to do, you decide that you are the kind of person who consistently follows through, you make that identity shift by your will or choice, then your brain is going to get in line. It's when we *think* we're at the effect of our procrastination or laziness or lack of self-discipline that we've already become defeated. And for someone who's recognizing that they lack self-discipline in many areas of their life, they can become frustrated with themselves and beat themselves up – and maybe even just give up and throw in the towel - instead of finding the source of the problem and seeing a radical life change.

Here are three steps to help you develop greater self-discipline in your life:

The first step is to set clear, specific goals for yourself and determine why it's important to you. It's hard to be disciplined when you don't know what you're working towards. So, take some time to think and pray about what you want to achieve. Your goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and tied to a timetable. Write them down and make them visible. Write them on a sticky note. Put them everywhere so you can see it: On the bathroom mirror, on your computer in your office, on the dashboard of your car. Set several alarms throughout the day to remind you of your goals. Inundate your mind with it so there's no chance you'll forget. When you've created this kind of mass messaging to your brain, you are prompting the Reticular Activating System to put a filter around it so that you are more aware than ever of your goals and why they're important to you. These goals can be big or small. They could include plans to grow your business or something like limiting your social media consumption. Pray and ask the Lord where you need to be more disciplined. The idea is to take back control of something you feel out of control of – some area you are without self-discipline.

The second step is to create a plan of action. Once you know what you want to achieve, it's important to figure out how you're going to get there. This is where you set yourself up for success. Break it down into manageable steps you can take daily or weekly. For example, if you want to start exercising more regularly, don't try to go from zero to running a marathon overnight. Instead, start with a ten-minute walk each day and gradually increase the time and intensity. Or, if you want to lose weight, set a goal to lose 10 pounds in the next three months.

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Then, break that down into weekly or even daily goals. You might need to start tracking your calories, find a workout routine that works for you, and meal prep on Sundays. Write down your plan and make it as detailed as possible. This will help you stay on track and hold yourself accountable. If you want to start getting up 30 minutes or an hour earlier than the rest of the family to spend time in the Word and worship, then you might make a bed-time routine the night before to ensure you're getting enough sleep, and perhaps set your alarm across the room so you have to get out of bed to turn it off. You may designate a special place for this meeting with the Lord and have your Bible and journal and pen, and anything else you might need already there and ready for your morning meeting. Then treat your goals like appointments that you cannot miss.

Finally, the third step is to stay motivated and consistent. One way we do this is to practice self-compassion. It's easy to beat ourselves up when we fall short or struggle with self-discipline, but that only leads to negative self-talk and a lack of motivation. Instead, practice self-compassion by acknowledging that self-discipline is a process and it's okay to make mistakes along the way. Celebrate your successes and learn from your failures. Remember, self-discipline is not about perfection, it's about progress. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Lamentations 2, verses 22 and 23, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." When you mess up, and you will, just thank God for new mercies and move on. Don't beat yourself up. Don't give up. Just acknowledge it, be aware of what derailed your efforts – what thoughts and feelings were there - and move on. That's practicing mindfulness, the very thing that's going to clear the path for your success. Doing this allows you to become conscious of your behaviors and how they affect your goals. Then, you can identify your bad habits and replace them with good ones.

Another way to stay motivated and consistent is to remember that self-discipline is a habit, not a one-time decision. It's something you have to practice every day. And one of the best ways to stay motivated is to focus on the end result. Remember why you set this goal in the first place, and that self-discipline is self-love and self-care for your future self. Imagine, what is your future self that has just achieved that goal doing now? How does she feel? How does she look? What is she experiencing? And finally, what would she be telling you to do today?

How you do one thing is how you do everything. If you can learn to be disciplined in one area of your life, you can apply that same level of self-discipline to other areas as well. Set a specific goal, create a detailed plan of action, and support yourself by doing things that keep you motivated. Self-discipline is a personal quality and identity shift that requires a change in mindset and habits. But we don't do this work alone. Thank goodness! We are partnering with God. And by the power of His Holy Spirit, we are enabled to live a self-disciplined, successful, Christ-like life.

Work It Out: Download the Self-Discipline Worksheet as a guide