

# 3 Reasons Discipleship Takes Daily Practice



from the *Jesus Film Project*



We tend to think of discipline as a synonym for punishment, so we try to avoid it. But the word comes from the same root that gives us the word *disciple*. The Latin word *disciplining* means “instruction, teaching, learning and knowledge,” and *discipulus* is a pupil or a student. When it comes to being a disciple of Jesus, becoming disciplined in our daily lives is critical. Discipline creates habits, habits turn into routines, and routines determine the kind of people we become. And this kind of discipline is about much more than avoiding certain behaviors; it’s about making specific choices to build patterns into our lives.

This is why the Bible tells us, “A sluggard’s appetite is never filled, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied” (Proverbs 13:4). But, unfortunately, when we’re not diligent about spiritual growth and character development, it happens haphazardly—which means that we’re often led about by our appetites and desires.

Here are three reasons why intentional daily practice is so critical to our Christian lives.

## **1. Faithfulness is demonstrated over time**

We all long to be considered trustworthy, but that doesn't happen by accident. It's a culmination of daily choices. This doesn't mean that we can never make mistakes, but the significance of those mistakes depends upon our history.

Think about it this way. At what point does someone become unreliable to you? If they screw up one? Twice? There really isn't a magic number, is there? If someone has consistently demonstrated that they're dependable, a few mistakes don't really color your opinion of them. But if you're not sure if you can count on someone, you probably don't consider them reliable, right?

This is what it means to be faithful. It's not about making a single correct decision. It's not even about being loyal more often than not. It's about making consistent daily choices over time that culminate in a character of faithfulness.

## **2. Daily habits make all the difference**

Isn't it funny that we can go to the gym one time and we're immediately looking in the mirror of the effect it's had? It's too bad it doesn't work that way. Getting in shape is a process that happens through regular discipline. The crazy thing is that it doesn't take much. A daily 15-minute run is infinitely more valuable than an hour once a month.

We don't often experience the cumulative effects of discipline because we set our sights too high. Of course, we all want to have a persistent prayer life, but if we try to go from nothing to an hour (or even 30 minutes) a day, we're going to struggle. The fact is that five or ten minutes of daily prayer can have a more significant impact on our lives than more extended periods every once in a while.

The critical thing to remember is that creating good habits increases our confidence and discipline. Five minutes of daily prayer a day might not seem like much, but maybe it's 100% more prayer than you are currently doing. By setting a simple goal you can reach, you empower yourself to set more goals. Maybe you add 10 more minutes next year, or perhaps you add 15-minutes of Bible study.

Don't be afraid to set small achievable goals. Not only do they have an actual impact, but they also spur you on to set more goals!

## **3. Discipleship is a process**

If discipleship was simply about information, Jesus could have held a three-day seminar for the disciples and then sent them on their way with a workbook. But for three years, the disciples learned from Jesus by receiving His teaching, watching how He interacted with the world, and practicing ministry. Jesus left them with a lot of responsibility, but He'd already helped them

develop into people who were ready for it. If you follow Jesus, you're already a disciple, but discipleship is an actual process that happens over time.

Minister and scholar Eugene Peterson made this observation in his book *Long Obedience in the Same Direction*:

“There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.”

We need to embrace the concept that growth is a long apprenticeship. You can't microwave holiness, and that's one reason that people struggle with it. It would be amazing if we were given a single temptation test, and if we passed it, we'd instantly be transformed. But holiness is the product of the small, tedious, seemingly inconsequential decisions we make every day.

Answer these questions:

1. What is this saying about God?
2. What is they saying about you?
3. Does this encourage you to take action steps?