

The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 7:13 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

Matthew 7:14 Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The primary interpretation of these verses is to the Christian regarding personal discipline. They *can* have application to salvation in terms of eternal destinations; but they are really for saved disciples to gauge their level of personal spiritual discipline.

The **gate** of Christian discipleship is **narrow** and the **way** is **difficult**. But those who faithfully follow Jesus' teachings find the abundant **life**.

On the other hand, there is the **wide gate** - the life of self-indulgence and pleasure. The end of such a life is **destruction**. This is not a discussion of losing one's soul, but of a failure to live out the purpose of one's existence.

Saved by grace through faith, we sometimes think 'discipline' is a dirty word. It sounds too much like works. It sounds like legalism.

It's not! It is an essential part of growing in grace. It's a matter of your motivation.

Kent Hughes:

Legalism is self-centered; discipline is God centered. The legalistic heart says, "I will do this thing to gain merit with God." The disciplined heart says, "I will do this thing because I love God and want to please Him."

The writer to the Hebrews explained it like this:

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

The apostle Paul frequently used sports analogies. He spoke of himself as a disciplined runner who was committed to finishing the race; he spoke of himself as a disciplined boxer who kept himself in top shape:

1 Corinthians 9:25 And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable crown.

1 Corinthians 9:26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air.

1 Corinthians 9:27 But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

It's baseball season so we can use ballplayers as examples. The all-time homerun record is on the line. Ruth held it for decades; Aaron broke it; Bonds is going to break Aaron's record.

Think about those three men for a moment, starting with Ruth. If stories about him are true, you might get the feeling that natural talent is all you need. Discipline can be abandoned.

Joking about his legendary indulgences, once he said to a waiter at dinner, "Gimme four steaks, a dozen eggs, pound of bacon, three kegs of beer, fifteen potatoes, eighteen [women], seven cigars, and a dish of chocolate ice cream."

That's his reputation. But there's more to the story.

Babe Ruth was only thirty years old in the spring of 1925 and his body was failing him. That baseball season was one of the worst of his career. There was talk that he might be finished. The well known truth was that the Babe had failed his body, with too much of everything, too much food, alcohol and fast living. It all caught up with him that year; he collapsed, suffered a series of convulsions and was operated on for an intestinal problem. George Herman Ruth, the man, was a mess.

Babe did something that ballplayers of his time did not do, he found his way to a gymnasium in New York City. Artie McGovern and his Madison Avenue gym specialized in working with the famous and wealthy. Artie stated that Ruth was

'as near to being a total loss as any patient I have ever had under my care.' He weighed 254 pounds, his digestive system was a wreck, his muscles were soft and flabby, the slightest exertion caused him to be short of breath and even his vision was affected. Artie preached discipline and a new way of living... exercise and a healthy diet. Amazingly, Babe Ruth listened and followed this new regime. You can be sure that it was not easy for him. In six weeks, his body's decline was halted and reversed, he lost 44 pounds. When training for the 1926 season began, Babe Ruth was tan, healthy and filled with optimism and everyone noticed. Babe spent every winter, for the rest of his playing career, training with Artie McGovern. He went on to be the record-breaking Babe Ruth that we know of and love today. (Source of the above information about Babe Ruth: "The Big Bam" by Leigh Montville, soon to be published by Doubleday, as reported in Parade Magazine, May, 9, 2006).

Even natural talent only carries you so far without discipline.

Then there is Barry Bonds. He will forever be tainted by accusations of steroid use. Use of performance enhancing drugs and substances is cheating discipline by taking shortcuts. You might achieve great things; but the cost, in the end, is terrible.

Henry Aaron quietly went about his business, combining talent with discipline to leave a solid legacy in his profession.

How disciplined are we? I think we are great at passive discipline. Bible reading and Bible study are examples of passive discipline. *It's incredibly important!* And it causes us to grow in our faith. But, as far as discipline, it's not that tough to read! Or to sit and listen to a study.

(Sadly, many people are getting lazy even in passive disciplines. Churches spend a great deal of money and effort making their facilities overly comfortable).

Jesus described some of the more active disciplines earlier: Giving, fasting, and praying. **These produce more spiritual sweat!** They cost me something. They require real sacrifices. I must battle my flesh to exercise them.

We want to be spiritual athletes – at the top of our game.

These verses *can* also have an application to the gospel by depicting the two roads and destinies of the human race:

1. The **wide gate** and **broad way** lead to **destruction** (Proverbs 16:25).
2. The **narrow gate** and **difficult way** lead to **life**.

Jesus is both the gate (John 10:9) and the way (John 14:6). People always want to object to Jesus being the exclusive way to God. They think that there ought to be many ways, many paths, leading to God.

Jon Courson:

You will hear over and over again that "Spirituality is a journey up a holy mountain, and no matter which route you take, when you get to the top, you will find God. So just wander wherever you feel inclined and embrace the other pilgrims on their paths. Don't try to convert them, for every route leads to the top of the mountain, and they will find God just as you will." Bunk. The analogy is all wrong. You see, it is not any mountain upon which God sits and man meanders. It is a sheer face, a stone where there are no handholds and no footholds - a rock that is insurmountable and un-climbable.

Maybe this analogy will help put all this together: Jesus is the narrow gate you enter(ed) to receive eternal life. Once on the path, you find yourself walking *against* everyone who remains on the broad way! You're going against the flow. It's like an obstacle course you must navigate in order to get through to your rewards.

You'll need spiritual agility... awareness... acumen... in order to safely dodge on-coming obstacles! It comes as you discipline yourself.