

# Seeing Discipline in a Different Light

**You know you don't *have* to brush your teeth.**



But it is to your benefit if you do.

When you were a kid, did one of your parents continually remind you to brush your teeth? Mine did. I would be headed out the door for school or to solve the world's problems with my Matchbox cars, and my mother would ask, "Did you brush your teeth?" I had three options: lie, rush out the door and pretend I didn't hear her, or brush my teeth.

I brushed my teeth.

(At night, we went through the same litany, but it had to do with cleaning my ears. The common phrase I heard was, "Go clean your ears. It looks like a potato patch in there." My mother was obsessed with oral hygiene and aural hygiene.)

Over time, my mother asked me less and less about my teeth. I don't think it was because she no longer cared; instead, she knew I was brushing my teeth (probably because of the mess I left in the bathroom sink—an issue my wife still contends with.)

I learned the discipline of brushing my teeth. And it is a discipline, even though I never think about it as such. I've moved from "I *have* to brush my teeth" to "I *want* to brush my teeth."

I brush my teeth because I want to. I see the benefit.

As followers of Christ, we are encouraged to practice spiritual disciplines:

- Daily Bible reading
- Praying
- Giving
- Scripture memorization
- Fasting

Perhaps you do some of these better than others; perhaps you struggle with all of them. They're called disciplines for a reason: they take discipline. And let's admit it: we struggle with discipline.

**What if we moved from seeing these as disciplines we *have* to do to practices we *want* to do?**

I latch on to these spiritual practices because they benefit me:

- They lead me to worship.
- They draw me closer to Christ.
- They help me keep everything else in perspective and balance.

In the middle of His Sermon on the Mount, [Jesus addressed three of these practices: giving, prayer, and fasting](#). The danger in calling these disciplines is our tendency to look at disciplines as something hard, something we have to do. And when we tackle something hard, our human nature wants to announce it to everyone. *Look at me! I gave. I prayed. I fasted.* (Sort of like the runner who places a 26.2 sticker on the back of the family SUV to announce his disciplined accomplishment.)



Jesus mentioned these practices, not as disciplines to be endured and announced to others, but as acts of worship. *Personal* acts of worship. And anytime I'm engaged in worship, I benefit—greatly. I've learned that these disciplines don't make us better people or more righteous; they bring us closer to Jesus who makes us more righteous.

**That's a benefit that motivates me to practice these disciplines.**

Now if I could only remember to clean behind my ears.

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