

# Self Discipline

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Do I make New Year's resolutions? You'd better believe I do. I love the thought of having a clean slate, a new chapter, a fresh canvas...in short, a "do-over." It's a chance to do everything better a new time around. So, at 11:35 AM on New Year's Day, I sat before my trusty, seven-year-old MacBook Pro, ready to put my goals for the year ahead down on paper, with a plan for holding myself to them. I didn't want to get crazy or anything—everything I put on the list had to pass the "realistic" litmus test—even so, I soon realized there is so much I want to accomplish in 2016! As I meticulously listed goal after goal (39 things in all), neatly categorizing them in color-coded ink, I began to reflect on what scripture has to say about such things.

I was reminded that, "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps."(Proverbs 16:9) I had certainly planned my course for the year. I was aspiring to improve myself intellectually, health-wise, financially, work-wise, in my relationships, and even "miscellaneous." Upon review, I saw nothing on this detailed list that seemed unworthy of God's approval, blessing, and favor. I was pumped!

On the first Sunday of the New Year, our pastor encouraged the congregation to ask the Lord to drop into our spirits one single word that would serve as a guide for us for the next 12 months. Almost immediately I sensed what that one word for me would be: *discipline*.

As educators we use the word *discipline* frequently. The context this word most readily brings to mind is synonymous with *punishment* or *consequence*. These are only two of the meanings the word can have. For me, I knew that God was calling me to, in the case of several of my resolutions, *discipline* myself so that I would *not* suffer consequences at a later time. This form of discipline—*self-discipline* is really the way God designed mankind to function.

When he created Adam and Eve, God gave them the opportunity to exercise self-discipline when he presented to them many deliciously wonderful foods to eat, yet told them to abstain from one particular fruit. Original sin came into the world disguised as a lack of self-discipline when Eve gave in to the temptation to disobey God. In that seemingly simple act, I believe that not only was man cursed to till an unyielding ground and struggle for food and provision from that time forward, I believe that our species was marked with the propensity to live undisciplined lives.

As Christian educators, and as Christian parents, we are woefully remiss if we fail to counsel with our children about self-discipline. I encourage you to require your child to

practice this attribute in age-appropriate ways in your home. Begin with simple chores like feeding the family pet daily without being nagged or reminded and work your way up from there. (I once had a friend who had three children and by the time they reached middle school, she had trained them each to be responsible for preparing the family's dinner one night a week. What a great opportunity that was for age-appropriate self-discipline to thrive! I hate that I did not think of that for my three children and our family while I had the chance.) If we don't build into our expectations for our students and children that they will develop and demonstrate this quality, little else that we do teach them will "stick" or even matter. On the other hand, King Solomon, declares, "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." (Proverbs 22:6) Let's remember that we are not raising children—we are raising adults, adults for whom God has plans to prosper and give a future and a hope. Let's covenant at this stage of our children's lives to do our part in seeing God's best become their reality.