

Dear Walt,

It was fun watching you work in your recording studio last week. I'm amazed at your patient discipline in listening again and again to music, looking for the right sound or selecting the right instrument. Good music requires good discipline.

In one of my favorite books on art, *Walking on Water*, author Madeline L'Engle writes, "The paradox is that the creative process is incomplete unless the artist is, in the best and most proper sense of the word, a technician, one who knows the tools of his trade, has studied his techniques, is disciplined."

You know that art and discipline are partners, Walt. When artists speak of their craft, they often stress the labor, warning how difficult the path to mastery is. Andres Segovia, the great Spanish guitarist, said that mastery requires "the stern discipline of lifelong practice." For the listener, music might seem effortless, but for the musician, it's "the product of supreme effort and devotion, the feast at the end of the season."

One of the world's greatest composers, Johann Sebastian Bach, demonstrated the power of discipline. "His encyclopedic reach was a matter not of vision or vainglory but of work. He produced something new virtually every week of his life," writes Daniel Boorstin. His genius was grounded in discipline.

What happens if discipline is neglected? Gordon MacDonald laments the wasted talent of the poet, William Coleridge. He writes, "Coleridge had every poetic gift but one--the gift of sustained and concentrated effort . . . the books were never composed outside Coleridge's mind, because he could not face the discipline of sitting down to write them." Art without discipline leaves one with hollow idealism. "But the music in my head is not real, just something to strive for. Notes take on life only when I strike the strings," writes musician Glenn Kurtz.

I can understand art and discipline. But, discipline in ministry is a paradox for me. On one hand, I disregard discipline in order to experience the moment-by-moment leading of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, I potentially quench the Holy Spirit by ordering and controlling my life. Which is it? Jesus shows us the way.

I think we diminish Jesus' humanity when we assume that his divine nature gave him a photographic memory. His title of "Rabbi," was built on years of studying the Scriptures. Typically, Jewish boys would've mastered and memorized most of the Pentateuch by the age of twelve. Jesus' "advanced" rabbinical training meant mastering the rest of the Jewish Scriptures.

Jesus' divinity did not magically replace the hard work of study and memorization. When the opportunity arose in ministry, the Holy Spirit took Jesus' hard work and used it in a supernatural way in people's lives. The way of Jesus is the way of self-discipline and self-control.

Ministering in artful ways means exercising self-discipline. When I first became a Christian, I memorized sixty verses from the Bible (The Navigators' Topical Memory System). I use these verses over-and-over again. People will comment, "That verse was exactly what I needed. How did you know the verse and its reference?" The Holy Spirit took my simple discipline of memorization and has multiplied its impact into dozens of lives. What appears haphazard or spontaneous is simply the fruit of self-discipline.

My friend, John Ed Robertson, used to say that "disciplemaking means sticking with people until they get it." This is hard work. It's easy to expect people to "get it" by reading a book, completing a bible study, or attending a seminar. We give them a pat on the back, expecting a one-time experience to permanently alter one's habits or character. What presumption! People "get it" when we repeatedly motivate, model, and keep one another accountable. This is the hard work of the "field-hands," sent by the Master to the harvest (Matthew 9:36-38).

Like the artist, our ministry craft must be practiced, practiced, practiced. The hidden but hard work of Bible study, prayer, and the routine application of Scripture are all part of an artful minister's training. When these habits are combined with ministry opportunity, the Holy Spirit infuses the setting with His transforming power.

In Exodus 23:29, 30, the Lord makes a provocative statement to Moses, "Little by little, I will drive them [the tribes in Canaan] out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land." This little-by-little approach, Walt, is descriptive of artful ministry. One hour of Bible study, one appointment made, or one more prayer walk helps us take possession of the land, putting us in a place for God to bless us and others.

A pastor friend said it best, "Discipline is the runway for the Holy Spirit."

This whole discussion reminds me of the old adage, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." As artful ministers, let's take the detour from hell and be people of discipline, Walt. Keep practicing!

