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Grace Notes

From Rev. Dr. Leigh Ann Shaw

DISCIPLINE: 1: punishment, 2: a field of study, 3: training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character, 4a: control gained by enforcing obedience or order, b: orderly or prescribed conduct or pattern of behavior, c: self-control, 5: a rule or system of rules governing conduct or activity.

As General Conference wrapped up last week, I've been thinking about what it means to be a United Methodist Christian. The "United Methodist" part of faith is about tradition and experience. It is a lens to look through to experience Jesus Christ. The "United Methodist" part of faith is not absolutely necessary for salvation, it is a choice we make about which part of the Christian family we want to have potlucks with and sit in worship with.

To be clear, the entire Christian family follows Jesus Christ. We are all saved by Grace through Faith. We all read the Holy Scriptures, interpret them, and try to live them. Whether you are Catholic, or Lutheran, or Baptist or some other branch of the Christian family, you are first and most importantly, a follower of our Lord and Savior. Yes, some would argue this point and mince definitions about who is in and who is out, but the way I understand it, we are all beloved children of God.

Last month I shared with you about vision and visioning. I shared with you about God's ability to transform our life in ways that you never might have imagined. This month I'm thinking about the discipline required to get to God's vision. Discipline is one of the things that separates United Methodist Christians from other followers of Jesus Christ. Discipline gets treated like a bad word in our world today but discipline is the workhorse of robust spirituality.

John Wesley, the founder of our denomination, was very disciplined. He was orderly and methodical. Wesley was a model in study, prophetic speech, health care and holiness. Wesley got up every day at 4 a.m. He read the scriptures until 6 a.m. He advocated and taught all people should get at least 2 or 3 hours a day of exercise; he particularly advocated walking in fresh air. Wesley preached about eating less meat and more vegetables. Wesley encouraged adequate sleep, but only so much as was needed to serve God. John Wesley lived obediently his self-imposed habits which fostered faithfulness toward God and service in the world.

If you want to figure out the vision God has for your life, it starts with choosing habits which support your faithful relationship with God. Henri Nouwen saw spiritual disciplines as a means "to create space to meet with God that you otherwise had not planned on." Spiritual disciplines help us develop soul memory and sacred rhythms to engage God. Without discipline, someone who loves sports is just engaging in a hobby for fun. With discipline, your body can become an athlete with endurance and strength. Spiritual disciplines do for your faith what physical workouts do for your body.



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The United Methodist Church has discipline in its DNA. We are built on a tradition of discipline that leads to a healthy relationship with God and inspires us to care for others. Every quality athlete knows you have to practice, get up early in the morning and train. Every United Methodist Christian knows that faithful living means living a disciplined life. In order to see what God is calling our community to do, it begins with order and discipline. Don't let discipline be a bad word anymore, but adhere to daily study, prayer, and healthy living.

Grace and peace,  
Pastor Leigh Ann Shaw