The Road Less Traveled:  
Who Needs Discipline?  
1 Timothy 4:6-10  
Englewood Baptist Church  
Sunday morning, Sept. 12, 2010  

A man by the name of Robert Frost wrote a poem that has become quite famous. This poem describes a traveler who comes to fork in the road. He cannot take both paths, since they diverge in different directions. The poem begins like this:

The Road Not Taken  
Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could…

All of us have had moments like this. Moments of decision where our destiny lie before us and a decision had to be made. Some of you are college students and you know what I’m talking about. You had narrowed your college decision down to two schools. One was there, one was there. You could not attend both. You had to choose one over the other. That’s pressure! Frost describes a man under that kind of stress.

And this is how the poem ends…  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

What made the difference in the life of this traveler? It was his willingness to walk the unpopular path. The path less traveled is usually the one with greater resistance, the path of inconvenience, the path of delayed gratification. The path less traveled is the one that tests us, that challenges us, that takes determination and spiritual grit.

The reason I share this with you this morning is because today I launch a series of sermons on the Spiritual Disciplines. Most people refuse to travel the path of holiness and discipline. It is easier to

- sleep in than it is to read your Bible and pray.
- Eat the buffet than to fast a full meal.
- Carve out time for writing email than it is to write out a prayer in a journal.
- Spend our free moments on the phone than it is to quiet our hearts and sing a praise song to God.

Without a doubt, the road of discipline is the road less traveled. But what I would like to do over the next few weeks is to challenge all of us to become more focused in our pursuit of Christlikeness.
Have you fallen into a spiritual funk? Are you lacking motivation to read the Bible, to pray, to fast, to rest? If so, these messages will hopefully light a fire under you and help you to grow in godliness.

Listen to the words of Richard Foster. I think these words challenge us all as we focus our thoughts in this direction. He says:

*Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.*

–Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

How much depth is to be found in you? Look with me this morning at a classic text on the importance of spiritual training as Paul challenges Timothy to a deeper spiritual life. This is what he says…

Read 1 Tim. 4:6-10

What Paul is clearly seeking to do in young Timothy is to move him to a greater state of godliness. Spiritually Timothy was here. In order to survive the stress of leading his local church, he needed to get there. This jump could not be made with a single prayer or with the laying on of hands. There was only one way to progress spiritually. And that was to put himself through training.

And in this passage, Paul lays out exactly…

**What is Needed for Greater Godliness**

1. **A solid spiritual diet.**

Look what Paul says in vv.6-7a…

Paul first addresses the importance of good teaching and a nutritious spiritual diet. As it is with food, if you choose to fill your stomach with Cool Whip, Laffy Taffies, Snicker Bars, and Bon Bons, you will certainly stunt the growth of your body. Junk food is not your best friend.

In the same way, every Christian must be careful what he/she is taking in and absorbing into his mind. This involves two things.

**Spit out the bad teaching.**

Paul makes a sarcastic insult to the people who were filling the pulpits of his day. They are teaching “old wives tales”. That is, their preaching lacked intelligence. These so-called preachers were not even attempting to stick to the Scriptures, but instead, they were telling stories and putting no careful thought into their “sermons.” You have probably heard the expression, “the mind is a terrible thing to waste.” Without question,
there are many preachers even today that fill up all their time on Sunday to simply tell colorful stories and make people feel warm inside. They use a lot of words and yet they never really say anything. They just repeat themselves like this:

People, we must go down the road. The road leads to Calvary, the Calvary road. Ah yes the road, the blessed road, the winding road. Calvary, you remember, is the high hill where Christ died. Christ died on Calvary to set us free. Sweet Calvary.
See we are free, free indeed. Free to be free. Free, free, free...

Have you ever heard a preacher like that? I have. Listening to that kind of preaching is like eating Chinese food. An hour later, you’re hungry again. There is no substance, no challenge to mind, to the will, to the heart. Stay away from teachers who don’t really teach the Bible. They say a lot but they never say anything.

But notice, Paul says to Timothy in v.6. He says…

**Eat up the solid teaching.**

V. 6 says, “point these things out to the brothers!” What things? The truths of the faith, the good teaching that he had always followed. I want you to see those two words, “brought up.” Those words literally say, “nourishing yourself in.” Timothy, you have been nourished in the meat of the Word of God. Don’t develop an appetite for anything less.

I have been a student of the Bible for 25 years now and I have so immersed myself in Scripture that I have a nose for it. I can smell good preaching fast. Whenever I listen to preachers, I can tell by the end of his introduction if he is going to read the Word, teach the Word, apply the Word OR if he is going to chase his favorite rabbits down a trail for the better part of the hour.

Paul said this to Timothy:

> “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”
> 2 Tim. 2:15

Pastors are supposed to preach the Word of God, not entertain an audience. And in the same way, all of us are called to correctly handle the Word of truth…to study it and to soak it in. When we do this, we grow spiritually, and we feed the soul.

Greater godliness requires a greater spiritual diet.

Now let me say a word to college students. By this time, you have received your syllabi and you have bought your textbooks, and you have a mile high stack of hardback books perched on your desk in your room. They are calling out your name and they must be read in short order. All of this reading is good for the mind and will stretch your intellect, but if there is just ONE piece of advice I can give you over the course of your studies. Do not neglect this book for all the others. As Jesus said, “You should practice the latter without neglecting the former.” Read your textbooks,
but make the time for solid teaching of the Word. This is, after all, the only LIVING book on your shelf, the only Word that can judge the thoughts and the attitudes of the heart. Don’t use your major as a major excuse for a 4-year fast of Scripture.

Now, beyond the idea of eating good meat, Paul moves on to the idea of exercise. Look at the end of v.7... “...train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present and the life to come.”

#2, Greater godliness requires...

2. Plenty of spiritual exercise.

“Train yourself,” says Paul. That word train is the root word for “gymnasium” in the English language. It carries the idea of a sweaty workout. Paul says, “Gymnasticize yourself for the purpose of godliness.”

Do you ever go to the gym? Here’s what we know about the gym. We hate going but we’re glad we went. That’s right. We hate going, but we are glad we went. Exercise makes us stronger and it makes us fit for the challenges of life.

In the same way, disciplined bible study, planned out prayer times, designated periods of fasting, scheduled times of retreat and reflection...these things we have to force into our phone calendar, but when we make spiritual exercise a priority, we come out feeling stronger.

And let me just go ahead and shoot down our most famous excuse. “I don’t have time.” If you really want to see how much time you have, I would encourage you to carry a log with you this week and mark down how much time you...

How much time do I...

Watch television
Read and respond to email
Read newspapers and magazines
Surf the internet
Make small talk
Engage in recreation and exercise

None of those things are necessarily wrong. I use them as a way of saying, “we make time for the things we want to do.” And here we get to the crux of the issue.

Why did Paul want to force himself into spiritual training? Why did he discipline himself to go deeper in study and in prayer? What was the purpose for pursuing godliness? The answer to that question is found at the end of chapter 3.

Look with me at 3:16...

Paul never lost sight of the glory of Christ. The spiritual disciplines were nothing more than God-given paths to the throne room of Jesus. And so it wasn’t about legalism, a “work my way to heaven” kind of faith. No, it was about growing closer
to the Lord. “You must exercise!” said Paul to Timothy, so that you will get stronger
in the faith.

Now, what I would like to do with the remainder of my time today is to provide a
quick overview of the various spiritual disciplines that have brought the greatest
blessings upon the saints over the centuries. All of these have Scriptural support, but
I do want to say this up front. I am not asking you to put into practice all 12 of these
exercises. There is no way for you to give each of these equal attention unless you
move to a monastery and become a monk. I’m not recommending that.

What I am saying, however, is that these pathways to holiness have been used by God
for millennia and you would be wise to fill more of your time with some of these
things.

A Sample of Spiritual Disciplines

1. **Meditation: learning to live by God’s voice.** In our contemporary culture,
   the Enemy majors on three main things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If the Devil
can keep something buzzing in your ear and some great task always
tantalizing your eye, then he can keep you from focusing your thoughts upon
God. The Psalmist said it this way…

   **Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Psalm 119:97**

   Meditation is not some weird New Age activity. New Age is all about
   emptying the mind. Biblical meditation means taking one passage of
   Scripture a day and choosing to dwell on it. In your car, at the bathroom
   mirror, on your lunch break, stopping the mad rush of the day and dwelling on
   the Word. It’s really simple. Few people do it.

2. **Prayer: ongoing conversation with God.**

   Prayer is the interstate to intimacy to God, the MAIN road and the main way
   that God changes us. Mark 1:35 says that Jesus woke up early and went to a
   lonely place, and there he prayed. Jesus was a pray-er, even more than he was
   a preacher. The gospels show him regularly withdrawing from the noise of
   the world to share his heart with the Father. Find me any person in the past
   that has done great things for God and you will discover a steady secret life of
   prayer. You cannot build a relationship with a stranger. Through prayer, you
   get to know God and you begin to think his thoughts.

3. **Fasting: a private, physical act of humility**

   David said in the Psalms, “I humbled my soul with fasting.” Ps. 69:10
   I am going to devote an entire sermon on this subject, but most of us
   understand the idea of a fast. We forgo food to focus our thoughts on God.
   There are other ways to fast besides food, but the main idea is to increase our
   awareness and dependence on God. Jesus did not command us to fast, but he
did give us instructions on how to do it. He assumed that it would be an
ongoing activity in the church. More on that later.

4. **Study: the renewing of our minds**

The Apostle Paul said in Romans 12:2 that we should be changed from the inside out. That process begins up here. Phillippians says it this way: *whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Phil. 4:8* When we study, we force ourselves to concentrate and to comprehend. I mentioned meditation before. Meditation is devotional—aimed at the heart. Study is analytical—aimed at the head. There is some overlap, of course, but when we study, we are focusing our minds on heavenly things. Of course, the greatest object of our study is the Scriptures.

5. **Simplicity: learning to live with less things**

The writer of Ecclesiastes said it like this: “God made man simple; man’s complex problems are of his own devising.” Ecc. 7:30 The more things we own, the more headaches we have. It’s not wrong for us to own things, but our culture creates an insane attachment to material items. I like the way Richard Foster says it in his book, *“We crave things that we neither need nor enjoy. We buy things we do not want to impress people we do not like…We are made to feel ashamed to wear clothes or drive cars until they are worn out. The mass media have convinced us that to be out of step with fashion is to be out of step with reality.”* --Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* I think this is an issue that we all struggle with. We just get sucked up into it and we forget that Jesus said, “A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of things.” Full sermon on that coming soon.

6. **Silence and Solitude: Getting away from people in order to gain greater strength**

Solitude is not about shutting people out of your life. Solitude is about storing up a greater love for God so that you have something to offer those around you. The fruit of solitude is a heightened sensitivity toward people and a greater sense of compassion. Jesus began his ministry with 40 days alone in the desert. Before Christ chose disciples, he spent an entire night alone in the desert hills. When Jesus received the news that John the Baptist was dead, the Bible says he got in a boat and he went away from people. We’re going to learn in the coming weeks how important it is to recharge and retreat.

7. **Submission: laying down the burden of demanding your own way**

It is sad that inside the church, the only time we ever hear a sermon about submission, it is directed toward wives in marriage. But the Bible calls all Christians to submit and to lay aside our obsession with being right. How many people fuss and fume over some little thing that didn’t go as they wished. They
stew and they waste precious time and they ulcers form in their tummy. Jesus made it clear that leadership comes by being servant of all. Have you found the freedom that comes through giving up your rights?

8. Service: saying no to the world’s system of authority
If the cross is the sign of submission, the towel is the sign of service. When we choose to serve others, we put them above ourselves. We lower ourselves. It is crucifying the flesh. Here is a challenging question: When is the last time you did something for somebody and you kept it completely anonymous? You did it solely to please the Lord and with no desire to increase your reputation with men? That is a spiritual discipline and nothing flips the world upside down more than a man who cares nothing about credit. He serves the Lord.

9. Corporate Worship: gathering with believers in holy expectancy
Worship is not just going through the motions of church. Worship is coming to the assembly with a sense of anticipation that God is alive and God wants to say something to us! In worship, the air is charged with expectancy. Hebrews 10:25 says, that we “should not forsake the assembly as some are in the habit of doing.” It is in this circle of believers that fire often falls from heaven and we leave with a mysterious power that we did not possess prior to. Is worship ingrained into the rhythm of your life, or do you fit it in on the weeks when you have no bigger plans?

10. Confession: putting an end to pretense
The Bible says, “Confess your sins, one to another, and you will be healed.” There is something mysterious about transparency. When we speak our sin, and we name it before others, we find renewed strength and encouragement. Today, we call it, “Accountability.” It can happen in Sunday School classes, in a booth at a restaurant, or on the couch in your home. We have all experienced the power of a person who puts away pretense and expresses his sorrow for sin. The church needs more people who are willing to share the struggle of a sin-sick world. When we confess, we break down walls that divide us. It makes us feel free.