

WITH COMPLETE STUDY GUIDE

DISCIPLINES
of a
GODLY
MAN

R. KENT HUGHES



“Discipline is a subject about which the Scriptures say much—but contemporary authors have been peculiarly silent. Kent Hughes fills a gaping void with this superb volume. You’ll be challenged and encouraged as you read. And if there is a spark of spiritual desire in your soul, this book will surely kindle it into a blazing passion for godly discipline.”

—John MacArthur, pastor, Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, and author of *Ashamed of the Gospel* and *The Glory of Heaven*

“I enjoyed reading *Disciplines of a Godly Man* because it challenged my spirit. I highly recommend it to men who are not thin-skinned.”

—Mike Singletary, former Chicago Bears middle linebacker and two-time NFL Defensive Player of the Year

“This is a book for men who are eager to learn how to be more effective. It comes from the pen of one who has learned to serve as he has led and who is able to provide the reader with many practical applications of eternal truths.”

—C. William Pollard, Chairman and CEO, The Servicemaster Company

“[This is] one of the best books I’ve read. . . . What an outstanding volume. . . . I guarantee: Digest this book and you will bid the blahs farewell.”

—Charles R. Swindoll, President, Dallas Theological Seminary

“In *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, Pastor Kent Hughes provides an inspiring and practical guide for men who seek to reflect God’s glory in their lives. This book is a challenging text for personal devotions as well as for assisting young followers of Christ to grow in their walk with God.”

—Lieutenant General Howard D. Graves, U.S. Army, retired; former superintendent United States Military Academy, West Point, New York

“The best contemporary book of spiritual guidance I’ve read in a long time. Usually for this type of food I have to look for a book that is at least 75 years old. This book is a surprising exception. And it has the added advantage of being very relevant to specific needs in today’s world.”

—Ajith Fernando, National Director, Youth for Christ, Sri Lanka

“I am so weary of the peculiar therapeutic atmosphere in which we live today that is scared stiff to tell anybody to do anything or to warn anybody of dangerous consequences of failing to take responsibility for his or her life. . . . So to open [*Disciplines of a Godly Man*] and find someone taking seriously the biblical call for ‘agonizing to enter the kingdom’ and striving like a gymnast to become godly and boxing and sweating like a champion to get victory over sin is the most refreshing thing I could have set my eyes on. So thank you for your courage and for swimming against the stream. May the Lord cause your book to run and the truth in it to be glorified and obeyed.”

—John Piper, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, and author of *Desiring God* and *God’s Passion for His Glory*

DISCIPLINES
of a
GODLY
MAN

Tenth Anniversary Edition

Revised Edition

R. KENT HUGHES

CROSSWAY BOOKS

A PUBLISHING MINISTRY OF
GOOD NEWS PUBLISHERS
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

*For my sons
Brian Thomas Hoch,
James Jefferson Simpson,
Richard Kent Hughes II
and
William Carey Hughes*

Disciplines of a Godly Man.

10th Anniversary Edition, Revised Edition, copyright © 2001 by R. Kent Hughes.

Original edition copyright © 1991 by R. Kent Hughes.

Published by Crossway Books, a publishing ministry of
Good News Publishers, 1300 Crescent Street, Wheaton, Illinois 60187.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Cover design: Cindy Kiple

First printing, original edition, 1991; first printing with study questions, 1995

First printing, 10th anniversary edition, revised edition, 2001

First printing, trade paperback edition, 2006

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are taken from *Holy Bible: New International Version*, copyright © 1978 by the New York International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hughes, R. Kent.

Disciplines of a godly man / R. Kent Hughes.—Rev. ed.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-5813-4758-6

ISBN 1-58134-758-8 (alk. paper)

1. Discipline—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Spiritual life—Christianity. 3. Men—Religious life. I. Title.

BV4647.D58 H84 2001

248.8'42—dc21

2001004098

MV	15	14	13	12	11	10	09	08	07	06		
13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments *vii*

INTRODUCTION

1 Discipline for Godliness *11*

RELATIONSHIPS

2 Discipline of Purity *21*

3 Discipline of Marriage *33*

4 Discipline of Fatherhood *45*

5 Discipline of Friendship *57*

SOUL

6 Discipline of Mind *71*

7 Discipline of Devotion *83*

8 Discipline of Prayer *95*

9 Discipline of Worship *109*

CHARACTER

10 Discipline of Integrity *123*

11 Discipline of Tongue *135*

12 Discipline of Work *147*

13 Discipline of Perseverance *157*

MINISTRY

14 Discipline of Church *169*

15 Discipline of Leadership *179*

16 Discipline of Giving *191*

17 Discipline of Witness *201*

18 Discipline of Ministry *211*

DISCIPLINE

19 Grace of Discipline *223*

RESOURCES

- A The Bible on Audiocassette 233
 - B James and Deby Fellowes's Witness to Their Faith 235
 - C Personal Reading Survey 241
 - D M'Cheyne's Calendar for Daily Readings 251
 - E Through the Bible 263
 - F Topical Guide to Daily Devotional Bible Reading
in a Year 269
 - G Selected Proverbs Regarding the Tongue 275
 - H Hymns for Personal Adoration and Praise 279
 - I Choruses and Scripture Songs for Personal Adoration
and Praise 281
 - J Praise Psalms Especially Appropriate for
Personal Worship 283
- Notes* 285
- Scripture Index* 297
- General Index* 301

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I WOULD LIKE to thank my secretary, Mrs. Sharon Fritz, for her care and pride of workmanship in typing the multiple revisions of the manuscript; Mr. Herbert Carlburg for weekly proofreading and many suggested improvements; Mr. George Grant for his expert editing though busy in far-off England; Mr. Ted Griffin, Managing Editor of Crossway Books, for his discerning eye which has made clear the incomprehensible and for the preparation of the study questions; and my wife, Barbara, who possesses the gracious wisdom to cut through the irrelevant and get to the heart of things with the perpetual James-like question, “So what difference does this make in the way we live?”

INTRODUCTION

DISCIPLINE FOR GODLINESS

SOMETIME IN THE early summer before entering the seventh grade, I wandered over from the baseball field and picked up a tennis racket for the first time . . . and I was hooked! It was not long before I became a ten-year-old tennis bum. My passion for the sport became so intense, I would idly hold a tennis ball and just sniff it. The *psst* and the rubbery fragrance of opening a can of new tennis balls became intoxicating. The *whop, whop* and the lingering ring of a sweetly hit ball, especially in the quietness of early morning, was to me symphonic. My memories of this and the summer which followed are of blistering black tennis courts, hot feet, salty sweat, long drafts of delicious rubbery tepid water from an empty ball can, the short shadows of midday heading slowly toward the east, followed by the stadium “daylight” of the court’s lights, and the ubiquitous eerie night bats dive-bombing our lobbs.

That fall I determined to become a tennis player. I spent my hoarded savings on one of those old beautifully laminated Davis Imperial tennis rackets — a treasure which I actually took to bed with me. I was disciplined! I played every day after school (except during basketball season) and every weekend. When spring came, I biked to the courts where the local high school team practiced and longingly watched until they finally gave in and let me play with them. The next two summers I took lessons, played some tournaments, and practiced about six to eight hours a day — coming home only when they turned off the lights.

And I became good. Good enough, in fact, that as a twelve-and-a-half-year-old, one-hundred-and-ten-pound freshman I was second man on the varsity tennis team of my large 3,000-student California high school.

Not only did I play at a high level, I learned that personal discipline is the indispensable key for accomplishing anything in this life. I have since come to

understand even more that it is, in fact, the mother and handmaiden of what we call genius.

EXAMPLES

Those who have watched Mike Singletary (perennial All-Pro, two-time NFL Defensive Player of the Year, and member of the Super Bowl XXV Dream Team) “play” — and have observed his wide-eyed intensity and his churning, crunching *samurai* hits — are usually surprised when they meet him. He is not an imposing hulk. He is barely six feet tall and weighs, maybe, 220. Whence the greatness? *Discipline*. Mike Singletary is as disciplined a student of the game as any who have ever played it. In his biography, *Calling the Shots*, he says that in watching game films he will often run a single play fifty to sixty times, and that it takes him three hours to watch half a football game, which is only twenty to thirty plays!¹ Because he watches every player, because he mentally knows the opposition’s tendency — given the down, distance, hashmark, and time remaining, because he reads the opposition’s mind through their stances, he is often moving toward the ball’s preplanned destination before the play develops. Mike Singletary’s legendary success is testimony to his remarkably disciplined life.

We are accustomed to thinking of Ernest Hemingway as a boozy, undisciplined genius who got through a quart of whiskey a day for the last twenty years of his life but nevertheless had the muse upon him. He was indeed an alcoholic driven by complex passions.² But when it came to writing, he was the quintessence of discipline! His early writing was characterized by obsessive literary perfectionism as he labored to develop his economy of style, spending hours polishing a sentence, or searching for the *mot juste*—the right word. It is a well-known fact that he rewrote the conclusion to his novel *A Farewell to Arms* seventeen times in an effort to get it right. This is characteristic of great writers. Dylan Thomas made over two hundred handwritten(!) manuscript versions of his poem “Fern Hill.”³ Even toward the end, when Hemingway was reaping the ravages of his lifestyle, while writing at his Finca Vigia in Cuba he daily stood before an improvised desk in oversized loafers on yellow tiles from 6:30 A.M. until noon every day, carefully marking his production for the day on a chart. His average was only two pages — five hundred words.⁴ It was discipline, Ernest Hemingway’s massive literary discipline, which transformed the way his fellow Americans, and people throughout the English-speaking world, expressed themselves.

Michelangelo’s, da Vinci’s, and Tintoretto’s multitudes of sketches, the

quantitative discipline of their work, prepared the way for the cosmic *quality* of their work. We wonder at the anatomical perfection of a da Vinci painting. But we forget that Leonardo da Vinci on one occasion drew a thousand hands.⁵ In the last century Matisse explained his own mastery, remarking that the difficulty with many who wanted to be artists is that they spend their time chasing models rather than painting them.⁶ Again the discipline factor!

In our own time Winston Churchill has been rightly proclaimed the speaker of the century, and few who have heard his eloquent speeches would disagree. Still fewer would suspect he was anything but a “natural.” But the truth is, Churchill had a distracting lisp which made him the butt of many jokes and resulted in his inability to be spontaneous in public speaking. Yet he became famous for his speeches and his seemingly impromptu remarks.

Actually, Churchill wrote everything out and practiced it! He even choreographed the pauses and pretended fumbblings for the right phrase. The margins of his manuscripts carried notes anticipating the “cheers,” “hear, hears,” “prolonged cheering,” and even “standing ovation.” This done, he practiced endlessly in front of mirrors, fashioning his retorts and facial expressions. F. E. Smith said, “Winston has spent the best years of his life writing impromptu speeches.”⁷ A natural? Perhaps. A naturally disciplined hard-working man!

And so it goes, whatever the area of life.

Thomas Edison came up with the incandescent light after a thousand failures.

Jascha Heifitz, the greatest violinist of this century, began playing the violin at the age of three and early began to practice four hours a day until his death at age seventy-five — when he had long been the greatest in the world — some 102,000 hours of practice. He no doubt gave his own “Hear, hear!” to Paderewski’s response to a woman’s fawning remarks about his genius: “Madame, before I was a genius, I was a drudge.”

We will never get anywhere in life without discipline, be it in the arts, business, athletics, or academics. This is doubly so in spiritual matters. In other areas we may be able to claim some innate advantage. An athlete may be born with a strong body, a musician with perfect pitch, or an artist with an eye for perspective. But none of us can claim an innate spiritual advantage. In reality, we are all equally *disadvantaged*. None of us naturally seeks after God, none is inherently righteous, none instinctively does good (cf. Romans 3:9-18). Therefore, as children of grace, our spiritual discipline is everything — everything!

I repeat . . . *discipline is everything!*

PAUL ON DISCIPLINE

This being so, the statement from Paul to Timothy regarding spiritual discipline in 1 Timothy 4:7 — “train yourself to be godly” — takes on not only transcending importance, but personal urgency. There are other passages which teach discipline, but this is the great classic text of Scripture. The word “train” comes from the word *gymnos*, which means “naked” and is the word from which we derive our English word *gymnasium*. In traditional Greek athletic contests, the participants competed without clothing, so as not to be encumbered. Therefore, the word “train” originally carried the literal meaning, “to exercise naked.”⁸ By New Testament times it referred to exercise and training in general. But even then it was, and is, a word with the smell of the gym in it — the sweat of a good workout. “Gymnasticize (exercise, work out, train) yourself for the purpose of godliness” conveys the feel of what Paul is saying.

SPIRITUAL SWEAT

In a word, he is calling for some *spiritual sweat*! Just as the athletes discarded everything and competed *gymnos* — free from everything that could possibly burden them — so we must get rid of every encumbrance, every association, habit, and tendency which impedes godliness. If we are to excel, we must strip ourselves to a lean, spiritual nakedness. The writer of Hebrews explains it like this: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1). Men, we will never get anywhere spiritually without a conscious divestment of the things that are holding us back. What things are weighing you down? The call to discipline demands that you throw it off. Are you man enough?

The call to train ourselves for godliness also suggests directing all of our energy toward godliness. Paul pictures this elsewhere: “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. . . . Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave” (1 Corinthians 9:25-27). Intense, energetic sweat! We should singularly note that a sentence later in the context of Paul’s command to “train yourself to be godly,” he comments on the command and the intervening words, saying “for this we labor and strive.” “Labor” means “strenuous toil,” and “strive” is the Greek word from which we get “agonize.” Toil and agony are called for if one is to be godly.

When one seriously trains, he willingly undergoes hours of discipline and even pain so as to win the prize — running 10,000 miles to run 100 yards at one's best. The successful Christian life is a sweaty affair!

No manliness no maturity! No discipline no discipleship! No sweat no sainthood!

WHY THE DISCIPLINES?

Understanding this, we now get down to the reasons for this book, which are two.

First, in today's world and Church, disciplined Christian lives are the exception, not the rule. This goes for men, women, *and* the professional clergy. We cannot excuse ourselves by saying this has always been the case. It has not! As to why this is so, several common-sense reasons could be tendered, such as poor teaching or individual sloth. But underlying much of the conscious rejection of spiritual discipline is the fear of legalism. For many, spiritual discipline means putting oneself back under the Law with a series of Draconian rules which no one can live up to — and which spawn frustration and spiritual death.

But nothing could be farther from the truth if you understand what discipline and legalism are. The difference is one of *motivation*: legalism is self-centered; discipline is God-centered. The legalistic heart says, "I will do this thing to gain merit with God." The disciplined heart says, "I will do this thing because I love God and want to please Him." There is an infinite difference between the motivation of legalism and discipline! Paul knew this implicitly and fought the legalists bare-knuckled all the way across Asia Minor, never giving an inch. And now he shouts to us, "Train [discipline] yourself to be godly"! If we confuse legalism and discipline, we do so to our soul's peril.

The second reason for this book is that men are so much less spiritually inclined and spiritually disciplined than women. A recent study conducted in the United Methodist Church reveals that 85 percent of the subscribers to that denomination's premier devotional booklet, *The Upper Room*, are women. Moreover, the same statistics hold true for their other devotional booklet, *Alive Now*, which has a 75 percent female readership.⁹ This is corroborated by the fact that the overwhelming majority of books purchased in Christian bookstores are bought by women.¹⁰ Women simply read more Christian literature!

It is also true that far more women are concerned about the spiritual welfare of their mates than vice versa. The magazine *Today's Christian Woman*

has found that articles focusing on the spiritual development of husbands have garnered the highest readership.¹¹ All this is sustained by hard statistics. A Gallup Poll conducted in June 1990 revealed that 71 percent of the women surveyed believed religion can answer today's problems, while only 55 percent of the men agreed.¹² The typical church service has 59 percent females versus 41 percent male attenders.¹³ Furthermore, married women who attend church without their husbands outnumber by four to one the men attending without their wives.¹⁴

Why? Certainly the pervasive American male credo of self-sufficiency and individualism contributes. Some of this may also be due to the male avoidance of anything relational (which, of course, Christianity is!). But we do not concede that women are simply more spiritual by nature. The parade of great saints (male and female) down through the centuries, as well as spiritually exemplary men in some of our churches today, clearly refutes this idea. But the fact remains that men today need far more help in building spiritual discipline than women.

Men, what I am going to say in this book comes straight from the heart and my long study of God's Word — man to man. In writing this I have imagined my own grown sons sitting across the table, coffee cups in hand, as I try to impart to them what I think about the essential disciplines of godliness. This book is eminently user-friendly. The Church in America needs real men, and we are the men!

COSMIC CALL

We cannot overemphasize the importance of this call to spiritual discipline. Listen to Paul again from 1 Timothy 4:7, 8: "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 life and the life to come."

Whether or not we have disciplined ourselves will make a huge difference *in this life*. We are all members of one another, and we are each either elevated or depressed by the inner lives of one another. Some of us affect others like a joyous tide, lifting them upward, but some of us are like undertows to the Body of Christ. If you are married, the presence or lack of spiritual discipline can serve to sanctify or damn your children and grandchildren. Spiritual discipline, therefore, holds huge promise for this present life.

As for "the life to come," spiritual discipline builds the enduring architecture of one's soul on the foundation of Christ — gold, silver, and precious stones

which will survive the fires of judgment and remain a monument to Christ for eternity (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Some may minimize the importance of spiritual discipline now, but no one will then! “[G]odliness has value for all things”! The disciplined Christian gives and gets the best of both worlds — the world now and the world to come.

The word *discipline* may raise the feeling of stultifying constraint in some minds — suggesting a claustrophobic, restricted life. Nothing could be farther from the truth! The obsessive, almost manic discipline of Mike Singletary liberates him to play like a wild man on the football field. Hemingway’s *angst* over the right word freed him to leave a mark on the English language second only to Shakespeare. The billion sketches of the Renaissance greats set Michelangelo free to create the skies of the Sistine Chapel. Churchill’s painstaking preparation freed him to give great “impromptu” speeches and brilliant ripostes. The disciplined drudgery of the musical greats released their genius. And, brothers in Christ, *spiritual discipline frees us from the gravity of this present age and allows us to soar with the saints and angels.*

Do we have the sweat in us? Will we enter the gymnasium of divine discipline? Will we strip away the things that hold us back? Will we discipline ourselves through the power of the Holy Spirit?

I invite you into God’s Gym in the following chapters — to some sanctifying sweat — to some pain and great gain.

God is looking for a few good men!

Food for Thought

What is spiritual discipline, and why is it so important? What usually gets in our way (see Romans 3:9-18)? What can a lack of spiritual discipline do to your life?

Reflect on 1 Timothy 4:7, 8 (“train yourself to be godly”). What is the literal meaning of “train” here? Practically, step by step, what does this mean you should do?

What does Hebrews 12:1 say about this? What things are holding you back in your walk with God? Why are you hanging on to them?

Is there a cost to spiritual discipline? Check out 1 Corinthians 9:25-27. What could greater discipline cost you? Are you prepared to pay the price? Why or why not?

“No manliness no maturity! No discipline no discipleship! No sweat no sainthood!” True or not true? How do you feel, deep inside, about this challenge?

How does spiritual discipline differ from legalism? Which do you most often practice? Is a change needed? If so, how can you bring this about?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to Him about it right now!

Think About It!

Can we really become disciplined men of God — a spiritual Mike Singletary or Winston Churchill? Aren't we just setting ourselves up for defeat? Answer this in your own words, without using evangelical clichés.

RELATIONSHIPS

DISCIPLINE OF PURITY

ONE NEED TURN on the television for only a few minutes to feel the heat of the oppressive sensuality of our day. Most of the oppression is crude. A boring trip around the TV channels at midday invariably reveals at least one couple wrapped in bed sheets and much sensual monotony. But the heat has become increasingly artful, especially if its purpose is to sell. The camera focuses close up, in black and white, on an intense, lustful male face, over which is superimposed an amber flame, which then becomes a glowing bottle of Calvin Klein's Obsession as the face intones its desire. Newer spots feature subtle cinematic images with prose from D. H. Lawrence — “. . . to know him, to gather him in . . .” — and Flaubert's Madame Bovary as she wanders around her illicit lover's bedroom.¹ The sticky steam of sensuality penetrates everything in our world!

But even with all this, many sensualists want more. Professor David A. J. Richard of New York University Law School, who advocates freedom for hardcore pornography, argues that “pornography can be seen as the unique medium of sexuality, a ‘pornotopia’ — a view of sensual delight in the erotic celebration of the body, a concept of easy freedom without consequences, a fantasy of timeless repetitive indulgence.”² Pornotopia? Now there's a word! It sounds like a new section of Disneyland. Autotopia . . . Pornotopia . . . Fantasyland. “Absurd!” we think — and it is — but sadly, Richard's arguments are actually being given serious weight today. It is no wonder we live in a culture that sweats sensuality from its pores!

And the Church has not escaped, for many in today's Church have wilted under the heat. Recently *Leadership Magazine* commissioned a poll of a thousand pastors. The pastors indicated that 12 percent of them had committed adultery while in the ministry — one out of eight pastors! — and 23 percent

had done something they considered sexually inappropriate.³ *Christianity Today* surveyed a thousand of its subscribers who were *not* pastors and found the figure to be nearly double, with 23 percent saying they had had extramarital intercourse and 45 percent indicating they had done something they themselves deemed sexually inappropriate.⁴ One in four Christian men are unfaithful, and nearly one half have behaved unbecomingly! Shocking statistics! Especially when we remember that *Christianity Today* readers tend to be college-educated church leaders, elders, deacons, Sunday school superintendents, and teachers. If this is so for the Church's leadership, how much more for the average member of the congregation? Only God knows!

This leads us to an inescapable conclusion: The contemporary evangelical Church, broadly considered, is “Corinthian” to the core. It is being stewed in the molten juices of its own sensuality so that it is:

- No wonder the Church has lost its grip on holiness.
- No wonder it is so slow to discipline its members.
- No wonder it is dismissed by the world as irrelevant.
- No wonder so many of its children reject it.
- No wonder it has lost its power in many places — and that Islam and other false religions are making so many converts.

Sensuality is easily the biggest obstacle to godliness among men today and is wreaking havoc in the Church. Godliness and sensuality are mutually exclusive, and those in the grasp of sensuality can never rise to godliness while in its sweaty grip. If we are to “discipline [ourselves] for the purpose of godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7, NASB), we must begin with the discipline of purity. There has to be some holy heat, some holy sweat!

LESSONS FROM A FALLEN KING

Where are we to turn for help? The most instructive example in all of God's Word is the experience of King David as it is told in 2 Samuel 11.

Life at the Top

As the account begins, David is at the summit of his brilliant career — as high as any man in Biblical history. From childhood he had been a passionate lover of God and possessed of an immense integrity of soul, as attested by Samuel's words when he anointed him as king: “Man looks at the outward appearance,

but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). God liked what He saw. God liked David’s heart!

His was a brave heart, as was evidenced when he met Goliath and returned the giant’s fearsome rhetoric with some spine-tingling words of his own — then charged full-speed into battle, nailing Goliath right between the headlights (1 Samuel 17:45-49).

David had an archetypal sanguine personality brimming with joy, enthusiasm, and confidence and overflowing with irresistible charisma. He was the poet — the sweet Psalmist of Israel — so in touch with God and himself that his Psalms pluck the heartstrings of man even today. Under his leadership all Israel had been united. David hardly seemed a candidate for moral disaster. But the king was vulnerable, for there were definite flaws in his conduct which left him open to tragedy.

Desensitization

Second Samuel 5, which records David’s initial assumption of power in Jerusalem, mentions almost as an aside that “after he left Hebron, David took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem” (v. 13). We must note, and note well, that David’s taking additional wives was *sin!* Deuteronomy 17, which set down the standards for Hebrew kings, commanded that they refrain from three things: 1) acquiring many horses, 2) taking many wives, and 3) accumulating much silver and gold (cf. vv. 14-17). David did fine on one and three, but he completely failed on number two by willfully collecting a considerable harem.

We must understand that a progressive desensitization to sin and a consequent inner descent from holiness had taken root in David’s life. David’s collection of wives, though it was “legal” and not considered adultery in the culture of the day, was nevertheless sin. King David’s sensual indulgence desensitized him to God’s holy call in his life, as well as to the danger and consequences of falling. In short, David’s embrace of socially permitted sensuality desensitized him to God’s call and made him easy prey for the fatal sin of his life.

Men, it is the “legal” sensualities, the culturally acceptable indulgences, which will take us down. The long hours of indiscriminate TV watching, which is not only culturally cachet but is expected of the American male, is a massive culprit of desensitization. The expected male talk — double entendre, coarse humor, laughter at things which ought to make us blush — is another deadly agent. Acceptable sensualities have insidiously softened Christian men, as statis-

tics well attest. A man who succumbs to desensitization of the “legal” sensualities is primed for a fall.

Relaxation

The second flaw in David’s conduct which opened him to disaster was his relaxation from the rigors and discipline which had been part of his active life. David was at midlife, about fifty years old, and his military campaigns had been so successful, it was not necessary for him to personally go off to war. He rightly gave the “mopping up” job to his capable general, Joab — and then relaxed. The problem was, his relaxation extended to his moral life. It is hard to maintain inner discipline when you are relaxing in this way. David was imminently vulnerable.

David did not suspect anything unusual was going to happen on that fatal spring day. He did not get up and say, “My, what a beautiful day. I think I will commit adultery today!” May this lesson not be wasted on us, men. Just when we think we are the safest, when we feel no need to keep our guard up, to work on our inner integrity, to discipline ourselves for godliness — temptation will come!

Fixation

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” (2 Samuel 11:1-3)

It had been a warm day, and evening was falling. The king strode out on the rooftop for some cool air and a look at his city at dusk. As he gazed, his eye caught the form of an unusually beautiful woman who was bathing without modesty. As to how beautiful she was, the Hebrew is explicit: the woman was “beautiful of appearance, very” (v. 2). She was young, in the flower of life, and the evening shadows made her even more enticing. The king looked at her . . . And he continued to look. After the first glance David should have turned the other way and retired to his chamber, but he did not. His *look* became a sinful *stare* and then a burning libidinous sweaty *leer*. In that moment David, who had been a man after God’s own heart, became a dirty, leering old man. A lustful fixation came over him that would not be denied.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer made the observation that when lust takes control, “At this moment God . . . loses all reality. . . . Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God.”⁵ What a world of wisdom there is in this statement! When we are in the grip of lust, the reality of God fades. The longer King David leered, the less real God became to him. Not only was his awareness of God diminished, but David lost awareness of who he himself was — his holy call, his frailty, and the certain consequences of sin. This is what lust does! It has done it millions of times. God disappears to lust-glazed eyes.

Men, the truth demands some serious questions: Has God faded from view? Did you once see Him in bright hues, but now His memory is blurred like an old sepia photograph? Do you have an illicit fixation which has become all you can see? Is the most real thing in your life your desire? If so, you are in deep trouble. Some decisive steps are necessary, as we shall see.

Rationalization

From deadly fixation, King David descended to the next level down, which is rationalization. When his intent became apparent to his servants, one tried to dissuade him, saying, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” But David would not be rebuffed. Some massive rationalization took place in David’s mind, perhaps very much as J. Allan Peterson has suggested in *The Myth of the Greener Grass*:

Uriah is a great soldier but he’s probably not much of a husband or a lover — years older than she is — and he’ll be away for a long time. This girl needs a little comfort in her loneliness. This is one way I can help her. No one will get hurt. I do not mean anything wrong by it. This is not lust — I have known that many times. This is love. This is not the same as finding a prostitute on the street. God knows that. And to the servant, “Bring her to me.”⁶

The mind controlled by lust has an infinite capacity for rationalization.

- “How can something that has brought such enjoyment be wrong?”
- “God’s will for me is to be happy; certainly He would not deny me anything which is essential to my happiness — and this is it!”
- “The question here is one of love — I’m acting in love, the highest love.”
- “My marriage was never God’s will in the first place.”
- “You Christians and your narrow judgmental attitudes make me sick. You are judging me. You are a greater sinner than I’ll ever be!”

Degeneration (Adultery, Lies, Murder)

David's progressive *desensitization, relaxation, fixation, and rationalization* set him up for one of the greatest falls in history — and his *degeneration*. “Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, ‘I am pregnant’” (vv. 4, 5). David was unaware he had stepped off the precipice and was falling, and that reality would soon arrive — the bottom was coming up fast.

We are all familiar with David's despicable behavior as he became a calculating liar and murderer in arranging Uriah's death to cover his sin with Bathsheba. Suffice it to say that at this time in the king's life, Uriah was a better man drunk than David was sober (v. 13)!

A year later David would repent under the withering accusation of the prophet Nathan. But the miserable consequences could not be undone. As has often been pointed out:

- It was the breaking of the *Tenth* Commandment (coveting his neighbor's wife) that led David to commit adultery, thus breaking the *Seventh* Commandment.
- Then, in order to steal his neighbor's wife (thereby breaking the *Eighth* Commandment), he committed murder and broke the *Sixth* Commandment.
- He broke the *Ninth* Commandment by bearing false witness against his brother.
- This all brought dishonor to his parents and thus broke the *Fifth* Commandment.

In this way he broke all of the Ten Commandments that relate to loving one's neighbor as oneself (Commandments Five through Ten). And in doing so, he dishonored God as well, breaking, in effect, the first four Commandments.⁷

David's reign went downhill from there on, despite his laudable repentance:

- His baby died.
- His beautiful daughter, Tamar, was raped by her half-brother Amnon.
- Amnon was murdered by Tamar's full-brother Absalom.
- Absalom came to so hate his father David for his moral turpitude that he led a rebellion under the tutelage of Bathsheba's resentful grandfather, Ahithophel.
- David's reign lost the smile of God. His throne never regained its former stability.

Men, we must understand that David would never have given more than

a fleeting glance to Bathsheba if he could have seen the shattering results. I believe with all my heart that few, if any, would ever stray from God's Word if they could see what would follow.

The record of the tragic fall of King David is God-given and should be taken seriously by the Church in this "Corinthian age" as a warning regarding the pathology of the human factors that lead to a moral fall:

- The *desensitization* which happens through the conventional sensualities of culture.
- The deadly syndrome which comes through moral *relaxation* of discipline.
- The blinding effects of sensual *fixation*.
- And the *rationalization* of those in the grip of lust.

In David's case the cycle included *adultery, lying, murder, familial degeneration, and national decline*. The pathology is clear, and so are the horrible effects of sensuality. Both are meant not only to instruct us, but to frighten us — to scare the sensuality right out of us!

THE WILL OF GOD: PURITY

Sometimes people under the Christian umbrella simply do not buy what I am saying in regard to purity. They consider such teaching to be Victorian and puritanical. Victorian it is not. Puritanical it gloriously is — for it is supremely Biblical. In answering such people, I take them to the most explicit call for sexual purity I know, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8:

It is God's will that you should be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

If the reading of this passage is not convincing enough concerning the Biblical ethic, we must understand that it is based on Leviticus 19:2, where God says, "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy" — a command which is given in the context of warnings against sexual deviation. I also want to point

out that in 1 Thessalonians we are called to avoid sexual immorality and are three times called to be “holy.” To reject this is to sin against the Holy Spirit — the living presence of God — as the Thessalonians passage makes so clear.

As the New Testament scholar Leon Morris has written:

The man who carries on an act of impurity is not simply breaking a human code, nor even sinning against the God who at some time in the past gave him the gift of the Spirit. He is sinning against the God who is present at that moment, against One who continually gives the Spirit. The impure act is an act of despite against God’s good gift at the very moment it is being proffered. . . . This sin is seen in its true light only when it is seen as a preference for impurity rather than a Spirit who is holy.⁸

Therefore, for a professed Christian to reject this teaching regarding sexual purity is to reject God, and this may indicate a false faith!

THE DISCIPLINE OF PURITY

Men, if we are Christians, it is imperative that we live pure, godly lives in the midst of our Corinthian, pornotopian culture. We must live above the horrifying statistics or the Church will become increasingly irrelevant and powerless, and our children will leave it. The Church can have no power apart from purity.

This demands that we live out Paul’s dictum: “train yourself to be godly” — holy sweat!

Accountability

An important place to begin our training is with the discipline of accountability. This to be done with someone who will regularly hold you accountable for your moral life, asking you hard questions. If you are married, ideally you should use your spouse, but I also recommend another man, one who will give you no quarter in sensual matters. You need someone of the same gender who will understand your sensuality from the inside out — someone you can be completely honest with, to whom you can confess temptations and attractions. You need someone who will help you toe the mark and keep your soul faithful to God. Mutual accountability is the ideal. In this connection I think of a certain salesman who regularly maintains accountability via phone contact with other Christian salesmen, and even works at scheduling trips to cities at the same time they will be there.

Prayer

Along with this comes the discipline of prayer (more on this in Chapter 8). Pray daily and specifically for your own purity. I am amazed that so few men who are concerned about their lives pray about it. Enlist the prayers of your spouse and friends, and pray for others in this respect. Do not wait to be asked. Pray for the purity of your friends too. They need it, and so do you!

Memorization

Next, fill yourself with God's Word through the discipline of memorization. Our Lord set the example *par excellence* in rebuffing Satan's temptations with four precise quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures (cf. Matthew 4:1-11). The Psalmist said, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word" (119:9). And, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (119:11). Of course, he was referring to all of God's Word, not just the passages which deal with sensuality. Nevertheless, I have seen the disciplined memorization of 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 change a man's life. (Other helpful passages include Job 31:1, Proverbs 6:27, Mark 9:42ff., Ephesians 5:3-7, and 2 Timothy 2:22, some of which are commented upon below.)

Mind

The discipline of the mind is, of course, the greatest of challenges (and will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6). And Scripture regularly presents its discipline as a discipline of the eyes. Men, it is impossible for you to maintain a pure mind if you are a television-watching "couch potato." In one week you will watch more murders, adulteries, and perversions than our grandfathers read about in their entire lives.

Here is where the most radical action is necessary. Jesus said, "And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than have two eyes and be thrown into hell" (Mark 9:47). No man who allows the rottenness of HBO, R-rated videos, and the various soft-core pornography magazines to flow through his house and mind will escape sensuality!

Job gave us wisdom for our day: "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl" (Job 31:1). How do you think Job would live in our culture today? He understood the wisdom of Proverbs: "Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?" (Proverbs 6:27). Men, Job's covenant forbids a second look. It means treating all women with dignity — looking at

them respectfully. If their dress or demeanor is distracting, look them in the eyes, and nowhere else, and get away as quickly as you can!

The mind also encompasses the tongue (see Chapter 11 of this book), for as Jesus also said, “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). Paul is more specific: “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving” (Ephesians 5:3, 4). There must be no sexual humor, urbane vulgarities, and coarseness, as so many Christians are so prone to do to prove they are not “out of it.”

Hedges⁹

Men, put disciplined hedges around your life — especially if you work with women. Refrain from verbal intimacy with women other than your spouse. Do not bare your heart to another woman, or pour forth your troubles to her. Intimacy is a great need in most people’s lives — and talking about personal matters, especially one’s problems, can fill another’s need for intimacy, awakening a desire for more. Many affairs begin in just this way.

On the practical level, do not touch. Do not treat women with the casual affection you extend to the females in your family. How many tragedies have begun with brotherly or fatherly touches and then sympathetic shoulders. You may even have to run the risk of being wrongly considered “distant” or “cold” by some women.

Whenever you dine or travel with a woman, make it a threesome. This may be awkward, but it will afford an opportunity to explain your rationale, which, more often than not, will incur respect rather than reproach. Many women business associates will even feel more comfortable dealing with you.

Never flirt — even in jest. Flirtation is intrinsically flattering. You may think you are being cute, but it often arouses unrequited desires in another.

Reality

Be real about your sexuality. Do not succumb to vain gnostic prattle about your being a Spirit-filled Christian who would “never do such a thing!” I well remember a man who indignantly thundered that he was beyond such sin. He fell within months! Face the truth — King David fell, and so can you!

Divine Awareness

Lastly, there is the discipline of divine awareness. This is what sustained Joseph through the temptations of Potiphar’s wife. “How then could I do such a wicked

thing,” he said, “and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9) — and he fled. “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22).

Men, the heat of our culture oppresses us with its obsessions and pornotopias. Many in the Church have wilted. The statistics tell it all. In order not to become part of those statistics, there has to be some disciplined sweat. Are we men enough? Are we men of God? I pray we are!

Food for Thought

“The contemporary evangelical Church, broadly considered, is ‘Corinthian’ to the core. It is being stewed in the molten juices of its own sensuality.” Do you agree or disagree? Concerning your own church? Concerning your own personal life?

“At this moment [of lust] God . . . loses all reality. . . . Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer). Have you found this true in your own battles with temptation? What is the most effective way to prevent moral lapses?

Is 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 too narrow to consider as binding on Christian men today? Why or why not? If not, how can we put this passage to work so we will be victorious in our fight for purity?

What does *God’s* holiness have to do with *our* holiness (see Leviticus 19:2)?

Considering the prevalent immorality of our culture, how can we possibly hope to keep our thoughts and behavior pure?

Is the admonition to maintain “hedges” in our relationships with the women in our lives really necessary? Isn’t this a putdown of women? Of ourselves?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to Him about it right now!

Think About It!

List at least half a dozen specific, practical applications concerning sexual morality from David’s experience in 2 Samuel 11.

“Discipline is a subject about which the Scriptures say much—but contemporary authors have been peculiarly silent. Kent Hughes fills a gaping void with this superb volume. . . . If there is a spark of spiritual desire in your soul, this book will surely kindle it into a blazing passion for godly discipline.”

– JOHN MACARTHUR, PASTOR AND BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

“This is a book for men who are eager to learn how to be more effective. It comes from the pen of one who has learned to serve as he has led and who is able to provide the reader with many practical applications of eternal truth.”

– C. WILLIAM POLLARD, CHAIRMAN AND CEO, THE SERVICEMASTER COMPANY

“To open this book and find someone taking seriously the biblical call of ‘agonizing to enter the kingdom’ and . . . boxing and sweating like a champion to get victory over sin is the most refreshing thing I could have set my eyes on.”

– JOHN PIPER, PASTOR AND POPULAR AUTHOR

“An outstanding volume for men and women alike! . . . Over 250 pages devoted to the practical outworking of discipline on subjects like purity, marriage, prayer, the tongue, the mind, our work, leadership, ministry, and many, many more. I guarantee: Digest this book and you will bid the blahs farewell.”

– CHARLES SWINDOLL, PASTOR AND BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

“I enjoyed reading *Disciplines of a Godly Man* because it challenged my spirit. I highly recommend it to men who are not thin-skinned.”

– MIKE SINGLETARY, HALL OF FAME LINEBACKER FOR THE CHICAGO BEARS

“An inspiring and practical guide for men who seek to reflect God’s glory in their lives. This book is a challenging text for personal devotions as well as for assisting young followers of Christ to grow in their walk with God.”

– LIEUTENANT GENERAL HOWARD D. GRAVES (U.S. ARMY, RETIRED),
FORMER SUPERINTENDENT, UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY (WEST POINT, NY)

R. KENT HUGHES is Senior Pastor of College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, and earned his D. Min. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is a father of four and author of numerous books for Crossway, as well as the series editor for the popular Preaching the Word commentaries. His wife, Barbara, has published a companion book, *Disciplines of a Godly Woman*, and together they wrote *Disciplines of a Godly Family*.

MEN / CHRISTIAN LIVING

ISBN-13: 978-1-58134-758-6

ISBN-10: 1-58134-758-8



CROSSWAY

www.crossway.com

U.S. \$15.99