

Psalm 42:1-8

There is a phenomenon called the “rapture of the deep.”
It refers to what happens when a deep sea diver spends too much time
at the bottom of the ocean and cannot tell which way is up.

When the diver finally surfaces, she usually has the bends—
a condition in which the human body cannot adapt to the oxygen
in the atmosphere.

The “rapture of the deep” is a condition which can afflict anybody,
deep sea divers or not.

It happens when you become totally immersed in something—
so much so that it consumes you altogether.

It could be a movie, a book, a conversation, a project, an experience.
It transports you to another world, and you lose your bearings completely.

When you finally surface you can hardly breathe.

The ordinary world seems disorienting in comparison.

The Psalmist writes of this desire to go deep into the spiritual life.

In Psalm 42 the psalmist says that just as the deer longs for fresh cool water, so his
soul longs for God.

He longs to be immersed in the presence and power of God,
so that his problems and suffering will not consume him.

He is sick and tired of himself—his worries, his concerns, his reality.
He wants to experience the rapture of the deep, to lose himself in God.

Verse 7 of Psalm 42 says “Deep calls to deep.”

It’s is a beautiful description of the spiritual longing within each of us,
a desire to grow closer to God.

Perhaps somewhere in your life you feel the longing to go deeper.

To grow in your relationship to God.

“Deep calls to deep,” the God who created us in God’s image
invites us to go much deeper in the spiritual life.

And that is a journey which requires discipline.

Now I realize that when most people hear the word discipline
they think of pain and punishment—spankings or time out.

But in the religious sense, discipline is a path to liberation.

Discipline is a guide for spiritual maturity which takes
you into yourself and closer to God.

Discipline is something which can be practiced in the midst of ordinary life.
It does not require walking on burning coals or sleeping on a bed of nails.

It can be a part of the daily routine of busy people
who have jobs and kids, responsibilities and commitments.

In fact, the practice of discipline is best exercised in the midst of daily life.
Just as you make the time to brush your teeth and take a shower, you can also
make the time to pray, worship, reflect, study.

Such disciplines add infinite quality to your life.

The Christian disciplines include simplicity, prayer, study, fasting, confession,
service and worship.

A disciplined life is so contrary to American culture that it sounds outdated.

Our culture tells us to do whatever we want whatever we want.

While it does sound appealing, such a life is shallow, selfish, and aimless.

When I was a teenager I wanted nothing more than to be free of any
sort of structure or discipline. I had major authority issues.

I could not wait to be accountable to myself alone.

I longed for the day when I could do exactly as I pleased—
sleep until noon, eat chocolate all day long,

dress the way I chose, do what I wanted when I wanted.

But you know what? That day never came, although I am still waiting.

It never came because I have always had to be accountable to someone
besides myself. I have always had to be disciplined about my behavior.

I have never really been able to do exactly as I pleased,
and that is a good thing!

If left to my own devices I would be lazy and self-indulgent in every way.

You cannot imagine how lazy I would be. Well, maybe you can imagine...

(Video Clip of Melanie at home in pj's eating Ice Cream in Bed)

George Bernard Shaw's definition of Hell was that place where
you are forced to do exactly what you want to do all the time.

Discipline really makes life so much easier in the long run,
it takes you out of yourself so that you can contribute to the world.

It reminds you that your life is not your own—you are accountable to others.

In a deep spiritual sense, our lives are not our own.

We were placed on this planet for a larger purpose than serving ourselves.

To endlessly indulge yourself is to violate God's intention for you.

Paul reminds us of this very thing, when he writes,
 “You are not your own, you were bought with a price.”
 The faithful discipline of Jesus which took him to the cross
 means that we are not our own. Our lives and salvation came at a price.
 We are expected to be accountable to God for our lives.

Discipline and accountability bring a joy that this world cannot give,
 because the secret is that there is great liberation in discipline.
 Discipline makes life so much easier.
 You don't have to decide whether or not to tell a lie, or keep that money or go to
 church on Sunday. You do not have to debate every decision,
 wondering about what is right and what is wrong.
 You know already. When you practice discipline, everything is easier and you feel
 better about yourself. God asks us to live disciplined lives for our own good, not
 because God is mean and humorless.

The structure of discipline is there to help us, not hinder us.
 It liberates you from the tyranny of constantly serving yourself.
 Jim Rohn said, “We all must suffer from one of two pains:
 the pain of discipline or the pain of regret.
 Discipline weighs ounces—regret weighs tons.”
 Do you have many regrets? I certainly do.
 Interestingly enough, most of my regrets stem from a lack of discipline. They
 have to do with
 relationships in which I did not do enough, and now it is too late.
 If only I had been more thoughtful. If only I had been more persistent.
 If only I had not been so wrapped up in myself.
 Regret weighs tons, but we don't have to carry it forever.
 We can get out from under it by accepting forgiveness,
 and practicing discipline.
 You can begin today by doing something that is good for you,
 whether you feel like it or not.
 Take a walk, spend time with a child, pass up dessert,
 forgive somebody, call your mother, pray, study, serve your church and help those
 in need.

The short lived dilemma of deciding to actually do something
 and the act of doing it, are nothing compared to the anguish of regret.
 Discipline also helps you to get exactly what you want out of life.
 Of course, first you have to decide what it is you want.

This sounds obvious, but so many people cannot articulate what they want,
beyond the vague desire to be happy.

When we invest time thinking about what we really want, we learn some things.

First, we learn that we don't really want what we think we want,

at least not enough to do something about it.

We don't want to be healthy enough to give up unhealthy food;

we don't want a good family life enough to really work at it;

we don't want to change the world enough to sacrifice our comfort.

We also learn that many of our wants are in conflict with one another.

We want financial peace but we also want to spend according to our

whims; we want to be leaders but we also want to be popular;

we want to be spiritual but we also want to hold on to our bad habits.

When you discover what you want out of life, you also need to ask:

Do I want it enough to do something about it, enough to do without
something else?

Is it in line with God's desires for me?

Do you have the discipline to make it happen?

Said Leo Tolstoy: "Everybody things of changing the world,
and nobody ever thinks of changing himself (herself!)"

In the Gospel of John, Jesus equates discipline with love.

He said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And I will pray to God and God will send you the Spirit of truth
to be with you and within you." (John 14:15-17)

Jesus knew that when we love someone or something, we can easily
practice disciple as we put their needs before our own, seek their good
before our own, think of them before we think of ourselves.

There once was a farmer who lay on his deathbed in despair
over the fate of his very lazy sons.

When he was almost gone, an inspiration came to him.

He called his lazy sons to his bedside and drew them in close.

"I am soon to leave this world," he whispered. "I want you to know that

I have left a treasure for you. I have buried it out in the field.
Dig carefully and well, and you will find it, and then share it among
yourselves evenly.”

The sons begged him to tell them exactly where he had buried it,
but he breathed his last and said no more.
As soon as he was buried, the sons took up their shovels and began to
turn over the soil in their father’s field.

They were greedy and they did not get along very well.
But they dug and dug until they had turned it all over twice.

Nothing—no treasure anywhere.

But they decided that since the field was so well prepared that they
would plant the crops just as their father had done.

They prayed for rain, they worked together frequently.
It grew very well for them. After the harvest they decided to dig again,
and finally find the treasure.

Again they found nothing, but prepared the field again for sowing.

That year’s crop was much better than the one before.

This went on for years until they had grown accustomed to the cycles
of the seasons and the rewards of working together in daily labor.
By that time their disciplined farming earned them enough money to live
very comfortable lives. They grew very close and content.

They had everything they could ever want or need.

It was then and only then,
that they realized what a great treasure their father had left for them
out in that field.

Sometimes it takes many years for us to appreciate the satisfaction and
rewards that come to those who are faithful.

The world is in great need of people who understand the true freedom
that comes from this important practice of discipline.

People who understand their lives are not their own to do with as they
please, people who are willing to delay gratification and focus upon

something other than the constant satisfaction of their own desires.

A person who is disciplined is truly free,
and just like Jesus, such a person can change the world.

Thanks be to God.

Remain seated we will sing "As the Deer"