

Dribbling and Disciplines

All of us would – or should – agree that discipline is necessary in order to perform the services to our residents in the mission to which we are called in Life Care, Century Park and Life Care at Home.

In its original sense, discipline referred to systematic instruction given to *disciples* – followers of the teachings of a leader, a philosophy or a religion – to train them as students in a craft or trade or to follow a particular code of conduct. The phrase, *to discipline*, however, usually carries a negative connotation because of the need to maintain order – that is, ensuring instructions are carried out. Order is often regulated through punishment.

Self-discipline, however, refers to the training that one gives oneself to accomplish a certain task or to adopt a particular pattern of behavior, even if one would rather be doing something else. It is not considered complimentary, for example, if someone is said to be undisciplined in a job or an assignment, indicating he or she is not focused on, or prepared for, designated responsibilities.



Mark Galli, senior managing editor of *Christianity Today*, addresses this subject, including spiritual disciplines, in *Discipleship Journal*:

I love to play basketball. Just being on a court, dribbling, shooting, making moves, rebounding – to me, it’s a type of dance, an art.

One afternoon, during my college years, I was shooting hoops at my girlfriend’s house. I was working on my Earl-the-Pearl (Monroe) move – dribble to the top of the key, fake right, spin left, accelerate to the basket for a layup. I practiced it 15 or 20 times.

A few weeks later, I overheard my girlfriend’s father say to a friend: “Mark sure is a disciplined young man. You should see him practice basketball. He just never lets up.”

Me disciplined? I wondered. Basketball workouts weren’t discipline for me. I loved playing. I enjoyed perfecting those moves. Although I panted and sweated and wore myself out, I never had to “discipline” myself in practice ... I just loved the sport. Basketball was its own reward.

We should practice the spiritual disciplines for the intrinsic satisfaction they can give us. Jesus has taught us something that should be obvious but often is not: Knowing God is its own reward. The disciplines are merely the dribbling, the moves, the jump shots of the spiritual life.

We can no more enjoy God without the spiritual disciplines than we can enjoy basketball without dribbling or shooting. But the disciplines are not duties, laws, demands or requirements. They are merely the conditions in which the joy of God is experienced.