

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"A disciplined life...a flexible life"



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Mary D. Ford

Author M. Scott Peck, MD, opens his book The Road Less Traveled with a simple, yet universal, truth.

"Life is difficult."

Why? "What makes life difficult is that the process of confronting or dealing with life's challenges is a painful one. Challenges, depending on their nature, evoke in us frustration or grief or sadness or loneliness or guilt or regret or anger or fear or anxiety or anguish or despair. Since life poses an endless series of challenges, life is always difficult and is full of pain as well as joy."

The temptation? To avoid life's challenges; to turn away from opportunities for growth that can be found in grief or loss; the desire to withdraw from the world; the desire to withdraw from ourselves.

What do we need to counter this temptation?

Discipline.

Dr. Peck asserts that "discipline is the basic set of tools we require to deal with life's challenges."

Now, be honest. When you hear the word discipline, you think "rigid," "lock-step," "inflexible." Right?

Well, time to expand your definition. "Extraordinary flexibility is required for successful

living in all spheres of activity. Health demands an extraordinary capacity to flexibly strike and continually restrike a delicate balance between conflicting needs, goals, duties, responsibilities, et cetera."

This is the essence of discipline. It's all about knowing when to "take hold," and when to "let go." Ultimately, it's about knowing how to do both.

Health, happiness, and holiness ultimately rely upon being disciplined enough to be extraordinarily flexible. It is truly a kind of freedom. St. Francis de Sales observes: "The effects of this freedom are a great inner serenity, a great gentleness and willingness to yield in everything that isn't sin or an occasion of sin. It's a flexible disposition, able to do gracefully the virtuous or charitable thing. We have occasion to practice this freedom whenever things don't go the way we'd like them to go; for anyone who is not attached to their own ways will not grow impatient when things go otherwise."

Successful people are those who are ready for anything, both that for which they plan, and that which is unexpected. Discipline enables us to know when to stick with "Plan A," or when to switch to "Plan B"...or "Plan C",

or "Plan D."

This interior discipline, this rolling with the punches, this willingness to deal with life on life's terms – not ours - "will make you grow in perfection and detachment more than you can imagine," observes St. Jane de Chantal.

She writes to a friend who, in fact, chose to scrap something into which he had invested much time and energy: "I believe that it was God who inspired you not to go on with your original plan. In this, I assure you, you have certainly followed the true spirit of our blessed Father (Francis de Sales), for, as you know, he wished us to be courageous in our undertakings, and flexible in letting them go when God, in His good pleasure, indicates that we should."

The words of a country song come to mind: "You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away, know when to run...."

What a gift! The ability to pursue what we have planned for life; the ability to accept what life has planned for us. The ability to do both.

That's discipline. That's flexibility. That's freedom.

That's very good news!