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Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles... *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

## Discipline

*Mary's Perspective:*

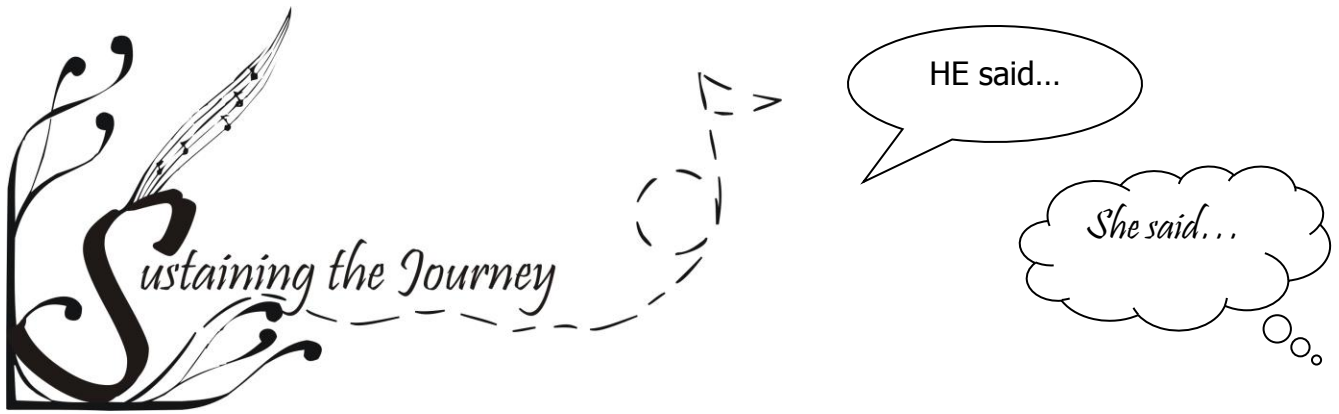
*noun:* **discipline**

*The practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience.*

Recently I experienced a change in my day-to-day life that has given me reason to ponder the concept of discipline. As I'm sure is common, sometimes the desire to be disciplined is not always strong enough to make one take the required steps to become disciplined! Aversion to punishment can motivate, but to successfully implement true discipline, one needs a combination of desire, structure, and consequences. To facilitate structure, one might turn to a concept common within religion: ritual. I know we've written about this before, but to summarize... We are a people of ritual. Rituals positively support discipline. Consider some examples:

In Churchworld, we have this large set of rituals that form the liturgy. Catholics are called to make holy the Sabbath, attending Mass. That's the discipline. The ritual is that Saint So-and-So Church offers Mass at 8am, 10am, and noon every Sunday. As a people of faith, we are called to pray regularly. That's the discipline. Many incorporate prayer into their daily ritual, such as brush teeth, shower, have a cup of coffee, say the rosary, move on with the day. Faith-based institutions offer rituals to support regular prayer, such as holy hours, morning prayer, Eucharistic exposition, etc.

Beyond issues of faith, we embrace other disciplines (or at least we try to). For example, many espouse the belief that a healthy life is a balanced life. Taking time for mindfulness, proper eating, exercise, work, relationships, and rest requires discipline. Some of the "punishments" for failing to maintain this discipline are poor health, a pot belly, anger, frustration, and tiredness. However, the discipline of exercising regularly really takes a commitment, and a ritual can support it. If I say, "I'll exercise some time this week," that time never comes. I'll find other things to occupy my days. But if I say, "I will go to the gym on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and I will park far from the door on Tuesday and Thursday to get in some extra walking," then my morning ritual each day this week will support the discipline of regular exercise. Having a plan takes some of the decision-making out of the equation, so that I'm not tempted to sleep in or stop at the donut shop. I know, whatever day of the week it is, what I need to do.



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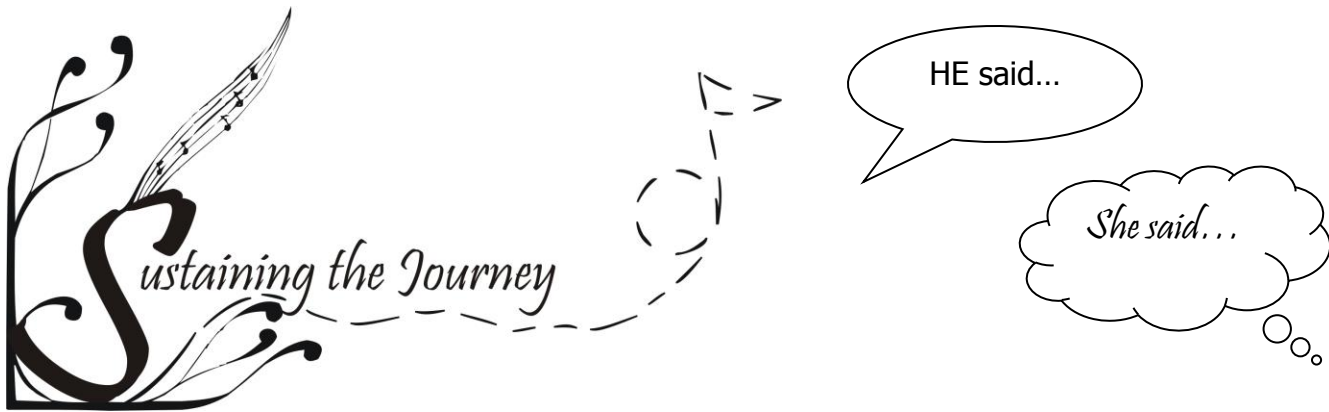
I believe one of the biggest challenges to discipline - whatever you want to be disciplined about - is idleness. It's almost counter-intuitive... one would think that if there is a change in life that results in having extra time, that time easily gets filled with whatever desired discipline (meal planning, prayer, exercise). But the contrary can be the reality. On summer break from college, one may be committed to completing a particular project. However, with lots of free time, it feels like there will be plenty of time for the project later, and right now socializing sounds more fun. If a job change leaves one with new-found freedom, rather than being disciplined about exercise, it becomes easy to sleep in or watch more television. That gym/walking ritual described above goes out the window. A friend once told me that some down time was good for me - similar to "sleep mode" on my computer. It allows for meditation, reflection, and regrouping. Unfortunately, I'm not always clear on where the line between "reset" and "complete and utter blob" is drawn! The desire for discipline can become blurred by the novelty of sleeping in or exploring daytime television. It's at these times that I find myself seeking ritual and inspiration.

For me, inspiration for discipline comes from many different sources. One friend lost his job and decided to change careers to a completely different field. He used the down time between employment to take a class, get a certification, and re-invent himself. Another friend, a very successful business woman, lost a major client due to circumstances beyond her control. Although her current employment became precarious, rather than succumb to stress, she used the change to initiate better balance in her life. She blocked her days carefully to include sales canvassing, exercise, regular dinners with her significant other, and attention to the relationships in her life, both business and personal. Yet another friend, after a job change, was motivated by an insurance cost incentive to join a gym. She has faithfully made a ritual of meeting a workout buddy three times a week.

My daughter decided she had a month where her calendar was not quite as full as the rest of the year, and took that as an opportunity to join a yoga studio for a month of unlimited classes. She encouraged me to join her. I have learned much from this experience. First, to quote an instructor, "chair yoga is definitely not for wimps." Also, I like the mindfulness component, focus on stretching, and attention to breathing. I do not like "downward dog" position... ever. Although there is definitely an eastern root to yoga, much of what happens in that studio could easily occur within a church, temple, or choir practice. The discipline of regular practice, working to improve in strength and flexibility, has benefits beyond simply physical.

Note - I highly encourage the practice of yoga for anyone who wants to improve their singing. Attention to posture, mindful breathing, an "opening" of oneself (both physically and mentally) all contribute to better foundations for singing. Albeit grudgingly, I acknowledge that even downward dog has its benefits.

So where is this all going? Perhaps a little attention to discipline would be good for all of us. I propose you find one thing - just one, we're not trying to move a whole mountain here - that you could do better. Doesn't



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matter what it is. Playing an instrument better, sight-singing, regular exercise, meal planning, prayer... just pick one area where you'd like to improve. You know it will take some discipline.

Instead of being haphazard (it's easy to just let life happen while you bumble along), analyze the situation. What is the goal? What discipline will it take? For example, if your goal is to play more proficiently or sing better, regular practice is a key component. If weight loss is the goal, eating healthfully and exercising are important. What are the negative consequences of not being disciplined? (Singing flat and looking fat?) How will you mindfully make that discipline a reality? What rituals will support your success? Blocking regular time into your week and adding it to your to-do list can be helpful.

Seems like a dumb exercise, because intuitively we know what we need to do. But for me, the disconnect lies in knowing what I need to do and actually *doing* it. That's where the ritual helps. When I think about the workshops we have presented, a common factor is structuring time for ritual to accomplish the discipline. Whether it's an evening for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (we addressed the rituals leading up to going to Mass and the discipline of being attentive to ministry) or a workshop for cantors (building in rituals of singing warm-ups in the car and praying the psalms throughout the week), often we look to improve some facet of life as individuals or a group.

Where are you struggling? Where do you need more discipline in your life?

*Bob's Perspective:*

Mary is spot on with this one, and I'm not sure how much is left for me to add. That being said, I would like to offer another definition for discipline. The basis of this definition comes from a very wise Martial Arts Teacher, who all but pounded this into our heads over years of training. In context, it was about how a martial artist should approach practicing – but this definition could really apply to almost any activity in life, including just living life itself.

**Discipline is** *“doing what you have to do, when you have to do it, whether you want to do it or not.”*

**Amen.**