

Successful Failure

Training to the Point of Transforming

May 26, 2024

Good morning *true believers* and *make-believers*! We're going to separate you in just a moment, but before we get to that, has something *changed*? What's *different* about you? Hair cut? *No*? Oh, I know: **you're one degree more like Jesus!** Way to go! Cuz *that's* the goal. So, *before* we separate you, answer this: **Are you training to the point of transforming?** Because, *training* and *transforming* are Paul's often repeated one-two punch for *true believers*.

[For God] made His *Light* shine in our [dark] hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. – 2 Corinthians 4:6 NIV



[You see] [The Father] delivered us from the power of [the] darkness and transferred us to the kingdom [of the power of the light] of His beloved Son ... [because] He is the image of the invisible God – Colossians 1:13-15 NAB



[But] [A face] veil remains [over His glory] when the old covenant is read ... because *only* in Christ [in the NT] is it taken away. – 2 Corinthians 3:14 NIV



And we all, with [the] unveiled face, [of Christ] beholding [the power of the light of the knowledge of] the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. – 2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV



For the *grace* of God has *appeared* ... training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [while] waiting for ... the appearing of the [ultimate] glory of our great God and Savior – Titus 2:11-13 ESV

[Therefore] Train yourself for godliness; for while *bodily training* is of some value, godliness [training] is of value in every way, as it holds *promise* for the temporary life and also for the everlasting life to come. – 1 Timothy 4:7-8 ESV

[So] Offer your bodies as [ever] living sacrifices ... [because] this [training] is your spiritual act of worship ... [to] be transformed by the renewing of your mind. – Romans 12:1-2 NIV

[For] All Scripture is God-breathed ... [for] training in righteousness – 2 Timothy 3:16 NIV

[But] For the moment *all discipline* seems *painful* rather than *pleasant*, but *later* it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. – Hebrews 12:11 ESV

But solid food [like that *fruit of righteousness*] is ... for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. – Hebrews 5:14 ESV

[And *training* involves *supplements*; so] Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and *virtue* with *knowledge*, and [supplement] *knowledge* with *self-control*, and *self-control* with *steadfastness*, and [supplement] *steadfastness* with *godliness*, and *godliness* with *brotherly affection*, and *brotherly affection* with *love*. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in [the power of the light of] the knowledge [of the glory] of our Lord Jesus Christ. – 2 Peter 1:5-8 ESV

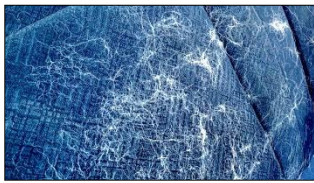
Training for transforming is about *heart and focus*. Because **we can't grow in godliness without acting on the small things that gradually gain the victory over the big things**. It's not about trying harder but *training smarter*. And yet, so many feel so *defeated the moment they're winded*. But *that's* because most believers have *failure all backwards*. **You don't just try to lift 500 lbs. ... you train to lift 500 lbs**. And how do you train? By trying to lift just *one degree more each workout*. **Try for too much too soon and you'll ruin yourself**. So you gotta *make a training plan*. Because **trying and failing feels like losing**; whereas **the goal of training is to push yourself to the point of failure**.

When an *athlete in training pushes to failure*, they see it as *success*, and feel *good* about the *gains to come*. Whereas the *dumbbell who tries to lift too much too soon* feels like a *failure*, because **he's trying to force what only comes by gaining through training by trying for less**. So he'll probably decide *weightlifting is dumb, and quit*. Because **it's way easier to change our beliefs than our behavior**. Which is why we *often find* that those *inside the church* are often just as *anxious, angry, envious, and exhausted* as those *outside the church*. Because **transformation takes determination, because incremental growth takes endurance!** And when we're *winded*, **it's just so much easier to change the way we keep score ... unless we make failing a part of our growing**. Because *failing can help us to see the little victories that we need to celebrate along the way*.



Years ago, I started *tracking* each time I *caught myself ignoring* the Lord's *nudging* – and quickly *realized* I needed some *gains in patience*. So I decided to *go into patience training*, by looking for *opportunities to work that atrophied muscle*. During this time, I *drove to Canada*. And at the *border* I was asked to *pull over and step out*. Now I'm in *training*, so I was *happy to oblige*. Then *six men and a big yellow dog* really went at it! And when they *finally finished*, I *thanked 'em* for the work they *do*. And I *opened my door to find* the dark *velour covered in dog hair*. And I was actually *amused* because *obviously* God had *taken an interest* in my *training*. I immediately *drove onto this interchange*, wherein I had a *yield sign*. So I *slowed*. But the *approaching car also slowed*. But I had the *yield sign*. And at about *20 mph*, he *gunned it and gave me the finger*. But not only was I *on my game*, I kinda *won*. Just after *that*, I *ordered coffee from a drive-through speaker* and was charged *double*, which I *politely pointed out*, only to be *told I was wrong*. But I'm in *training*, so I *happily paid*, and then *showed the cashier the receipt*; because, "In *no way* am I gonna *pay an extra \$1.50!*" So they *hand me the coffee*. And I say it's *missing the cream and sugar*. And they say they *already put it in*. And I say, "Did you?" And I *make 'em give me some extras*. And I *pull ahead, and take a sip*, and they *hadn't*. So I *park*, so I can *add the extras I'd demanded ...* and I *realize* there's no *stir-stick*. So I *stirred it with an old ink pen I found on the floor*.

And I *literally looked up*, and said *out-loud*: "You *win!*" To which I *almost heard* our Savior say, "That's *it?* Cuz I could've *done this all day!*" Now, **our Father isn't out to get us**. However, **He absolutely is out to train us**. And the Lord *loves* when we *allow* ourselves to be transformed, **by training, by trying to gain by degrees**. And then, **by using our failures to see our successes**. You see, I *knew* He'd been *cheering me on*, right until that *stir stick* took me *down!* And when I said, "You *win!*" I started *laughing*. Because, it was just *funny*. Because, what a *dumbbell*.



And as I *replayed* the events that'd *played out*, **my parking lot fit felt more like an athlete taking a break between sets to recover and refresh** before going for another set of reps ... to failure. And I *didn't* feel bad about failing – I *couldn't* – because, **you can't even imagine the dog hair I was sitting in!** And I totally **nailed that one!**

Ever heard the saying: **Don't pray for patience, cuz God'll give it to you!** The thinking being that God will send *trials* and *frustrations* to force you to develop this *fruit* of His Spirit. But it's *just not true*, for one huge reason: He doesn't need to! They're all around you! **There'll never be a shortage of irritating people and infuriating situations!** Know why? Cuz *that's* how it works down here! So by *all* means, do pray for *patience*, because **He'll open your eyes, soften your heart, and cheer you on** ... and quite likely *laugh at your stir stick fit!* And *then*, even when you *fail*, you won't feel like a *loser*, and be *tempted to change the way you measure up or keep score*.



Almost every conflict between the religious and Jesus was over three things: **dietary laws** and **holy days** and **circumcision**. Know why? Cuz *that's* how they kept score. So Jesus was a *threat* because **He focused on true hearts rather than superficial expressions**. And yet they *all* agreed on the *gold standard* by which *true believers* were supposed to *self-assess*.

One of the *scribes* came up and *heard* them *disputing* ... and seeing that [Jesus] answered them *well*, asked Him, "Which *commandment* is the most important of all?" Jesus answered ... "You shall love the Lord your God with all your *heart* and with all your *soul* and with all your *mind* and with all your *strength*. The *second* is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is *no* other commandment *greater* than *these*." And the *scribe* said to Him, "You are *right*," – Mark 12:28-32 ESV



He *had* to admit He was *right*; because *this* is the *heart* of the law. **Love our Father above all, by loving others above yourself**. *That's* the goal. We *all* agree. So **all that's left is to evaluate our current condition and start training to the point of transforming**. Step by step. Because **patience isn't about enduring frustration ... it's about trusting our Creator and loving our neighbor**. Now if you're *already* a very *patient* person, find another fault and go with that. And if you *can't* find a fault, obviously just go with self-deluding *pride!*



But *patience* is a good starting point for training, because it's so *obvious* when you *lose* it; so it's *easy* to *track* your *progress*. And it's so *doable* to quickly *develop* more *patience* or *kindness* or *joy*. But I gotta warn you: **you gotta train like you want it**. And, **you gotta actually want it**. So make a list. Start small. Like I did. Drive the *speed limit*. Let people finish *their* story. When you eat, *chew*. And when you pick your line, don't compare your progress with the *other line*. Oh, and deliberately spend a little time with the Lord in, His Word. But not *too* much. Don't *overdo* it. Just enough to *tune your ear* to His *voice*. As Solomon said:



Do not be *excessively* righteous ... Why should you *ruin* yourself? – Ecclesiastes 7:16 NAS



But *do put* what you *do hear* into *practice that day*. And, **look for and celebrate the little gains**. And *train* like you actually want 'em. There was a Sunday school teacher in my boyhood church. I knew her for *two decades*; and she seemed *perpetually* cranky and irritated. I never saw the joy that *she herself* taught as the *hallmark* of our faith. And **no one was surprised that she stayed that way**. *Everyone wanted her to change, but no one expected her to change.*

Nobody ever said, "We need to call the elders and considered this long-standing believer who isn't being transformed by even one noticeable degree of glory!" She was expected to *affirm our doctrine, attend our services, support our ministry, and avoid the obvious raunchy sins*. But what *wasn't expected*, was that *day after day, degree by degree*, she would **train her face to reflect her faith!** We *didn't* expect that *gradually, over time*, she would become a little *more patient or loving or joyful or kind*. Even though we're told quite clearly that **the fruit of God's Spirit can't not grow in the heart of every true believer.**

So, I want to draw *two* things from this: 1) **No one close to you wants you to stay the way you are**. Especially *Jesus*. Okay? Sorry to be the one to break it to you. I'm *sure* your *good far* outweighs your *bad*; but are you gonna *try to tell me, or yourself*, that you've *topped out?! And if you haven't, why not go for the glory?*

And, 2) let me say, in *no uncertain terms*, that **I, as your pastor, absolutely expect you to be transformed**. This is *His Place!* So I *await and anticipate* that *day after day, degree by degree, you will be yielding to the nudging of God's loving kindness*, so that the *face of Christ* will be *gradually, steadily, increasingly appearing in your face and expressions and attitude*.



Because that's what separates true believers from make believers. So *consider yourselves separated*. Christ didn't *come and die and rise* from the *grave* so we could spend our *time* down here *griping* about how *slow* that *old woman with the coupons* is! **He came and died and rose so that all those, who are truly His, can rise above the ways of this world** by *training to the point of transforming our face as we face the way it works down here!* That is, all "*those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice*". Because, **Christ-like character only comes from practicing making Christ-like choices**.

So when ol' Rose is *trying your patience*, why don't *you* be *training your patience*. Which is very Christ-like. Rather than *restlessly* watching how much *faster* the *other line* is *moving*. Which is very Bruce-like. And don't *give up, or change up* the way you *measure up*, or you'll *end up* settling for so much *less* than the Lord's *best*. Cuz, according to *Scripture*, He's the *greatest body builder of all!*

It was *He* who gave ... apostles ... prophets ... evangelists ... pastors and teachers ... so that the body of Christ may be built up ... in [the power of the light of] the knowledge [of the glory] of the Son of God ... [Because] From Him the whole body ... grows and builds itself up in love, [which only happens] as each part does its work. – Ephesians 4:11-16 NIV

So let's train to the point of transformation, and shine the light of the face of our Father!

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.