

The Cruciform Life: Cruciform Discipline

Jan. 7, 2017

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Guided Prayer of Silence

(Here is an exercise to help your group as you worship. You can go through it together or in groups in meditation and/or in prayer)

Work through a guided prayer of silence. As the leader of the group, lead the group to:

- Give thanks for 5 things God did this year
- Praise God for 5 attributes that are suggested by what we've thanked Him for (people will have to think about this one a bit!)
- Express your faith that God will work in 3 specific ways in the year to come

Icebreaker

Share about one really good habit you have. How did it come about? How have you continued to develop it?

Text for Discussion: I Cor. 9:24-27

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

"The chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken." Habits are powerful and such a part of our lives that the only way to overcome one is to cultivate another. But as much as New Year's is an opportunity to consider what habits we wish to start, stop or continue, the simple truth is that we're not very good at keeping our resolutions. We live out of our hearts and desires more than our minds and rational thoughts. So although we endeavor to live healthier, better lives, we often end up doing quite the opposite. We make the same mistakes, believing we can *think* our way into a new life. But neither reason nor willpower is enough. How then do we change?

The way to the good life is the way of Jesus, for in Christ we see both God's wisdom and how humanity is meant to be. Imagine how different our lives would look if we really believed that! But for God's wisdom to take root, we must accept that change is slow and requires discipline, training and self-control. There are no Gospel prodigies. Living according to God's wisdom doesn't come easily. So if we want to live the beautiful life God intends for us, we have to want it and we have to be disciplined enough to pursue it. We also need to realize and know that this work and sacrifice is worth it – that one day we will see Jesus as He is, and when we see Him, we will joyfully think to ourselves, "It was all true!" So, where do we start? How do we begin putting Christ first in our lives?

First, we must **rest** in the Gospel and its promise that the race is already over. Our stress over performance and success can end because the beautiful life we seek isn't achieved; it is freely received by faith in the One who already lived it on our behalf. This joyfully frees us to heed God's commandment to rest and reset our hearts toward the Gospel.

Second, we must engage in **spiritual exercise**. How we decide to live affects our experience of God's love because our daily choices are constantly forming us, leading us either toward God or away from Him. Our salvation is not a reward for this spiritual exercise. But we are called to pursue lives that reflect this glorious gift. So we must train ourselves to make better choices. Here are three exercises to pursue in 2018:

(1) Learn how to read the Bible. If the Christian life involves a conversion of the imagination, this requires saturating our imaginations in God's world, God's ways, and God's promises. And doing so requires a plan. **(2) Learn how to pray.** To grow personally and as a community, we must become people who enjoy prayer and know how to because we believe in prayer's power to change the world. **(3) Memorization.** When we memorize something long term, we are getting it into our bloodstream and are compelled to reflect on it.

Willpower is not enough when we seek to live new lives through new habits. We can't do this on our own. We need community – for accountability, for companionship, as training partners and cheerleaders. There will be times when we feel tired or weary, and community will help us through this. But we must also remember that just because we

are in a wilderness, it doesn't mean God is displeased with us or is not in control. Just as Jesus needed God's assurance on His race, we too must hear God's words toward Christ, because in Him, they are true of us as well: "You are my beloved... with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11).

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How will you train yourself for godliness this year?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

Opening questions...

- How does running for an "imperishable wreath" motivate you to pursue spiritual habits?
- As regards to the Gospel life, it's been said that "God is opposed to earning, not effort." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What is the difference between the two?
- Read I Tim. 4:7. Is there a difference between your training to live "in the Kingdom" and any other training you would do in your life? If so, what is it? If not, why isn't there a difference?

Digging Deeper/Application...

Rankin suggested several steps with regard to our spiritual training...

- REST was the first idea mentioned. How have you learned to rest in Jesus? How have you personally experienced that "the race is over"?
 - How do disciplines of abstinence (Sabbath, fasting, simplicity, etc.) help us to rest? How do they create space for us that enables us to work on disciplines of engagement (i.e., bible study, prayer, corporate worship, etc.)?
- EXERCISE was a second idea mentioned.
 - Based on your normal weekly rhythms of life (i.e., what you are "exercising" each week), what are some things you are training for? What are you running after? (Ideas might include, money, success, comfort, amusement, etc.)
 - Rankin mentioned several types of "exercise" – Bible reading, Bible memorization, and prayer. Does one of these particularly appeal to you? Which one, and why?
 - If you were to pick one of these things to focus "training" in – how could your community group help you pursue it?
- What spiritual habits can replace the practices of "comparing and competing" in our lives?
- What are some spiritual practices that can help us see ourselves as God sees us?

Praying for One Another

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests.)

- Thank God that He has provided us with ways (spiritual habits or "spiritual disciplines") to train in godliness.
- Pray for one another – that we would become (and stay!) motivated in our training.
- Pray for each other – ask God to specifically help each individual who has identified a new "training" process.

Experiment of the Week

Choose one of the Bible reading plans suggested on Sunday, and try it for one week together. Next week as you meet, check in with each other to share and see how it went.

Check out the suggested plans here:

<http://pacificcrossroads.org/helpful-resources-new-years-resolutions/>