

## Going Further – Thursday

### Training to become like Jesus

*Hebrews 12: 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. 2 We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish.*

*Matthew 5: 48 But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (The Message, Matt 5:48 "In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you).*

*Gal 4:19. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you*

*Col 3:12-17. 12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

*2 Peter 1:5-8. 5 So make every effort (try your best) to apply the benefits of these promises to your life. Then your faith will produce a life of moral excellence. A life of moral excellence leads to knowing God better. 6 Knowing God leads to self-control. Self-control leads to patient endurance, and patient endurance leads to godliness. 7 Godliness leads to love for other Christians, and finally you will grow to have genuine love for everyone. 8 The more you grow like this, the more you will become productive and useful in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Gal 5:22-23. 22 But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.*

### Spiritual exercises (disciplines).

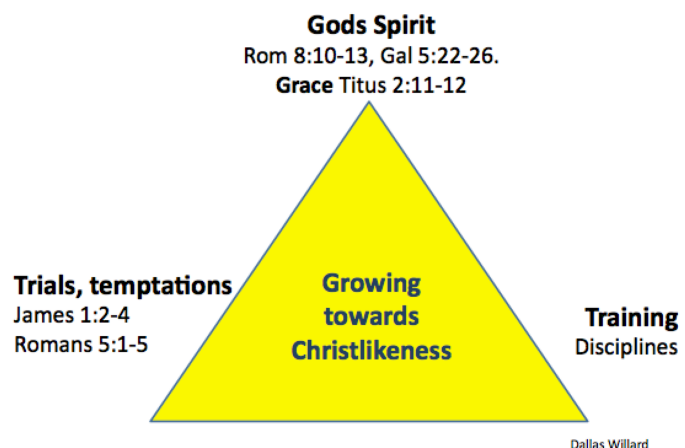
How will I become the kind of person that routinely and easily does what Christ did? Practices we build into our lives to help us remain open to the presence of God's grace.

Grace = Gods power to do the things we cannot do on our own, not simply undeserved favour – *Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us [NRSV "trains"] to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age).*

If we had never sinned, we would still need grace. Christians need grace more than non-Christians do. A Christian uses grace like a 747 burns fuel.

A discipline is an activity that enables us to accomplish what we cannot do by direct effort.

### The Golden Triangle of Spiritual Growth



1 Timothy 4:7 – 8. Do not waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives tales. Spend your time and energy in *training yourself for spiritual fitness*. Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is much more important, for it promises a reward in both this life and the next.

Disciplines are not works. We can't earn favour by doing them. They are wisdom – they help us grow, they create habits in our lives which place in a position for God to form us.

<b>Disciplines of abstinence.</b>	<b>Disciplines of engagement.</b>
<p>Designed to free us from spiritually hurtful entanglements – especially from overdependence on human interactions and work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Solitude</li> <li>Silence</li> <li>Fasting</li> <li>Frugality</li> <li>Chastity</li> <li>Secrecy</li> <li>Sacrifice</li> <li>etc</li> </ul>	<p>Designed to re-connect us with the kingdom of the heavens:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study</li> <li>Worship</li> <li>Celebration</li> <li>Service</li> <li>Prayer</li> <li>Fellowship</li> <li>Confession</li> <li>Submission</li> <li>etc</li> </ul>

They are not intended to be a burdensome source of guilt! Anything that creates greater space for Gods life-giving work within us could fall into this category, not only the classic listed above. Whatever the activity, beware of turning them into religion.

*“Spiritual exercises is meant every way of examining one’s conscious, meditating and contemplating, or praying vocally and mentally, and performing other spiritual actions... for strolling, walking and running are bodily exercises, so in every way preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all the disordered tendencies, and, after it is rid, seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one’s life for the salvation of the soul, is called a spiritual exercise.”<sup>1</sup>*

The basic philosophy of this strategy is to change one’s habits. A habit is what one does without thinking and everything in life involves habits, learning to write, driving a car, and so on. Reacting in anger is a habit, as it speaking ill of another. By changing habits the indirect result is that our character is changed. As a disciple intentionally puts themselves in a position where their will is crossed (for example fasting or silence) then new habits are formed in their body. With the fall, our bodies take on a system of tendencies away from, or against God therefore the task is to form good habits in the body. That way our body responds to our will, and does not take us in a direction contrary to our will.

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<sup>1</sup> St Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola*, (New York: Cosimo Classics. 2007), 1<sup>st</sup> Annotation.