

Sermon – September 20, 2020  
“Training vs Trying”  
Crown of Life Lutheran Church  
Pastor Dave Schilling

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Let's pray, "O Lord, speak to each of us wherever Your love finds us this morning, speak to us in our minds, speak to us in our hearts, speak to us by the words of my mouth, and in the thoughts we form. Speak, O Lord, we, your servants, are listening. Amen (please be seated)

Our theme for today can be summed up in this question, “Why do I need spiritual disciplines to grow in my faith?”

One of the goals of our church is that we would grow in number, not just so we can feel better about ourselves, but because Jesus commanded us to grow.

The last thing Jesus said to his closest followers before His ascension was, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

It is called the Great Commission. Jesus wants us to reach out to those who are not among us yet. Even when we are successful at helping someone into a relationship with Jesus, the hard truth is people fall away.

How many of you know someone who was once on fire with God and now is not? How many of you would say that was part of your own story at some point? I suspect many of us can.

And we know there are big and small fall-aways. A big fall-away is like when someone makes a very intentional decision not to follow God anymore.

But there are also subtle fall-aways. People wouldn't know it just by looking at you, but maybe your faith isn't quite as strong as it once was.

The passion you had isn't as strong as it once was. Those subtle clues can last a few hours, a few days, a few months.

Pastors are not immune to this, either, except we have this one added thing ... we have to somehow get it all worked out by the weekend EVERY week.

Spiritual growth is not so much taking small steps toward God. It's more often taking two-steps forward, one step back, three steps forward, two steps back ... I think you get the idea.

If you are connecting with this theme, today is for you.

Whether you are new to this whole Jesus/Church thing, or if it's your first time back in a while, or even if your relationship with God isn't what it once was, you have come on

the perfect week.

Today we are talking about how you can actually grow in spiritual maturity.

We ask ourselves, am I moving forward spiritually? Am I Stagnant? Am I moving backwards?

Maybe you have had feelings that God may be disappointed in you...

Here is a cool thing we see over and over in the life of Jesus. Jesus ALWAYS called people to a higher standard, but he NEVER condemned them when they fell short.

Jesus was the ultimate encourager. He was always cheering people on. "Get back up. Let's try again. I believe in you."

That's why people were constantly flocking to him. Those who felt the least worthy and most rejected in this world, felt the most loved and accepted by Jesus.

It is really encouraging to recognize that the people in the Bible faced the same things we do today.

We are going to take a close look at our lesson this morning from Hebrews, where it sounds like the whole church had faded away.

God looks at us as individuals, but He also looks at us as a church. We as a church will reproduce not just what we SAY, but what we DO. Your spiritual maturity is bigger than you ... it impacts others around you as well.

What if we as a church doubled in attendance, and all the new people had the same passion for moving forward in spiritual maturity as we do ... would that be a good thing or bad thing? While you think about that, let's get into our text for this morning Hebrews 5:11-6:3.

Do you remember what the problem was that the author was describing in this text? In a nutshell, the people were no longer even trying to understand.

Remember these are Christians. The author is NOT saying they have given up on God; he's saying they have GIVEN UP on moving forward in spiritual maturity.

The Hebrews author is describing people who still needed elementary truths, even though they had many "mature" believers among them. They still needed milk. They still were not ready for solid food. The author of Hebrews is saying this to you today...

"You need to grow up spiritually. Every time someone offends you in the slightest way, you get hurt and take it so personally. Any time the pastor challenges you to do something out of your comfort zone, you ignore it. You freak out every time you have to wait on someone for a few minutes."

This is the natural way we will act, if left to ourselves. If you are not intentional in growing in spiritual maturity, then over time you will drift from God.

It is not that you purposefully walked away from God; you just got complacent ... to the

point where, like the author of Hebrews says, "You are not even acquainted with righteousness."

So, the important question from our text is, "How does one drift so far from God?"

The author gives some answers for us personally and as a church, if we understand and accept the fact that God wants us to grow in spiritual maturity. Let's begin with Hebrews 6:1...

"...let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity..." Hebrews 6:1

I presume that every single person here today and watching our live streaming wants to mature in our faith.

So, it would be a waste of time for me to rail on you about how you need to grow spiritually. I believe we ALL want the end result – it's the getting there that's hard.

So, do you want a deep faith? Do you want to NOT get ticked off at the drop of a hat? Do you want to NOT get stressed out by small, inconsequential stuff?

We want to be people who are kind and forgiving, and secure in who we are as a child of God.

We don't want to be devastated every time someone critiques us.

We want to be full of joy and for people to say that they look up to us. We want God at the end of our lives to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

The first thing we need to know is that ALL the stuff we want for our own lives, God wants for us, too. He wants to help us, so let's learn how to let Him.

Our text in Hebrews says this...

"But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." Hebrews 5:14

The passage specifically says they "trained themselves". It was not done by God, not by their pastor, not by their parents, but by themselves.

I want to clarify in no uncertain terms that when it comes to receiving Christ, it is COMPLETELY God's work. We know we cannot do ANYTHING to earn our salvation ... absolutely nothing.

But salvation is not what the author of Hebrews is dealing with here. The author is making the case that once you come to faith, when you begin GROWING your faith, you play an important role in that process.

It's like the difference between using a rowboat, a motorboat, and a sailing boat. While we have a really important role in our spiritual maturity, it is not all up to us to move forward. God IS the one who actually enables us to grow.

At the same time, it's not like we can just turn on some engine and expect God to make us grow automatically. So, our job is more like a sailboat. We are to put ourselves in a place, and schedule our lives in a way, that God meets us and moves us towards Him.

Here is where we need to realize there is an immense difference between training to do something and trying to do something.

Training is required for any significant challenge in your life, and while it is difficult, training always leads to more joy, more fulfillment.

For example, if I was a Rigby high school student who wanted to play football for the very first time, I guarantee you that Coach Armando would not let me play in a game until I had been properly trained in the skills necessary to become a team player.

Listen to what the Bible has to say about spiritual maturity and training in 1 Corinthians...

"Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." 1 Corinthians 9:25

How about 1 Timothy...

"Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." 1 Timothy 4:7-8

Finally, 2 timothy...

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Training methods used to grow in your faith are called spiritual disciplines. They are valuable because they enable us to do what we could not do with willpower alone.

For example, disciplines like reading the Bible and prayer enable God to train us to display the fruits of the spirit in our lives ... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control.

A disciplined person is NOT someone who exercises a lot of discipline. Instead, a disciplined person is someone who can do the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, with the right spirit.

And spiritually speaking, the goal is not to calculate how many verses we read, or how many times we pray, but to use the Bible and prayer as opportunities for God to speak to us and to grow our faith.

Here is a few basic steps that would help you train in any spiritual discipline. First step is...

1. Decide that you are going to train.

You can't drift into spiritual training. You must decide to train. If I am going to grow

2. Get a workout plan.

And start by establishing some goals.

The physical training industry is a billion-dollar business. The #1 thing they will give you is a schedule. They first will give you basic fitness steps like exercise, getting enough sleep and eating right.

Then they normally ask, "Do you have any specific goals you want to work on, as well?" For example, I want a six-pack, but not the kind you keep in the refrigerator.

The same is true spiritually. There are some basic spiritual habits that are good for all Christians, no matter where you are in your spiritual journey. Then there are some that are more specific for what you are dealing with in life.

While exercise and a healthy diet are your one-two punch for physical health, your one-two punch spiritually is the Bible and prayer. The Bible is the primary way that God speaks to you, and prayer is the primary way you speak to God.

God also wants you to be growing in spiritual maturity in ways that are specific to you. We will talk about some of them in a couple of weeks.

As an example, a brilliant Christian professor (Dallas Willard) at USC was once challenged by a student in class about something he'd said in his lecture.

The professor heard the argument, smiled and said, "Good comment. That seems like a great place to end today."

His Teaching Assistant came forward and asked incredulously, "Why did you let that kid get away with that? You could have run intellectual circles around him."

The professor said, "I'm practicing the spiritual discipline of not always needing to have the last word."

1. Get some workout buddies.

The word we often use for this spiritually is ACCOUNTABILITY. Christianity was never meant to just be an individual experience.

One of the lesser-known descriptions of the church is that we are like a deodorant stick ... we rub off on one another. When we are pursuing after God alongside others, our ability to grow goes way up ... activities like Bible Class, fellowship events, and servant events.

## 2. Take a first step.

The good news is that faith is contagious, and when you take a step of faith, it always grows more faith in you. It's why Jesus says faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains.

So, I want to challenge you to take a step of faith before you even leave the room today. Here are a few great first faith steps you can decide to take...

- Start reading the Bible on your own.
- Attend Bible class on Sunday morning.
- Set aside several minutes to pray daily.
- Begin tithing.
- Invite a friend to church.
- If needed, set a date to be baptized.
- Engage in our many community projects

One last thing that is really the biggest step that goes unseen, and that is to...

## 3. Move from "Got To" to "Get To."

God 's ultimate goal is not that you would just obey him but that you would love him, and obedience would overflow out of that.

God is the only one that can do this transformational work within us, where we are so blown away by what God has done for us that our only possible response is to live for Him.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Je sus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

For the joy set before Him he endured the cross and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Our ultimate inspiration has to be Jesus. It has to start with him. It's not all about moving toward an arbitrary line of spiritual maturity; it's about moving toward a person ... toward Jesus.

When we really start to get this, then our spiritual disciplines MOVE from something we "Got To Do" to something we "Get To Do". That changes EVERYTHING.

Understand that God wants you to grow in spiritual maturity.

So, let's all stop trying ... and start training. From now on let's allow God to move our pursuit of Him from something we have GOT to do ... to something we GET to do.

Amen