

Gym for Your Soul

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'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.' (1 Timothy 4:7,8)

In this verse, the idea of *'training yourself to be godly'* is being compared to physical training. In fact, the word 'train' is translating the Greek root word *gumnazo*, from which we derive the English word 'gym'. I wonder how often we think of training ourselves in godliness as something requiring repetitive effort that will shape us into the image of Christ?

There is a tension in the Christian walk between what God has done and what He is busy doing.

It is easy to think of becoming righteous as a passive process in which God does all the work, but this is only half of the story. The Bible often describes the trials and the many difficulties we face in our journey of faith as vital to the transformation that God is working in us (James 1:2-4). The resistance we face in our lives is the gym which shapes our souls into the mature athletes that God intends us to be.

There is a tension in the Christian walk between what God has done and what He is busy doing. We see this tension often in Scripture, for example: *'Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the **new self**, which is **being renewed** in knowledge in the image of its Creator.'* (Colossians 3:9,10, emphasis mine) We are new creations which are being renewed!

Is righteousness what I do or is it something I have been given?

Many Christians wrestle with the concept of righteousness. Is righteousness what I do or is it something I have been given? The Bible actually speaks of it in both ways. Righteousness is something I choose, a thousand times a day, because I am righteous. And I am righteous because

God has given me His righteousness.

Training Myself to Be Godly

So *how can I train myself to be godly?* This is a crucial question, because the choices I make will actually determine whether I become who God has made me to be or not.

1. Fill Your Heart and Mind with Christ

'And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory.' (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Before we can look at *'taking our thoughts captive'* or *'putting the flesh to death'*, we need to consider what we are filling our hearts and minds with. There is a principle in nature that we *'become what we behold'*. We see this even within marriage. There is a rather scary scientific phenomenon in which couples begin to take on each other's mannerisms and facial expressions and actually begin to look like each other! Likewise, in the kingdom, as we fill our lives with worship for the King we love, as we meditate on His Word, we fill our hearts and minds with a vision of Him and we slowly transform into His image.

2. Consider Who You Are Now

'Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.' (Rom 6:11)

My true identity now is that I have died to my life of sin and I am alive in Christ. Although this is my spiritual reality, I need to constantly remind myself of this fact. If I forget my identity in Christ, I will begin to act according to my old patterns of sin.

There is an amazing, old story about a man called Augustine who was saved from a horribly licentious lifestyle involving many prostitutes. After his radical conversion, he was walking down the street and one of his previous prostitute girlfriends saw him and began crying out after him. When he persistently ignored her, she cried out, 'Augustine, it is I!' To which he replied, 'I know, but it is no longer I.'

By the power of Christ, you are no longer the person you used to be.

3. Walk According to the Spirit

'For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.' (Romans 8:13)

This is a phrase which we hear a lot in church, but how do we actually *'walk according to the Spirit'* and *'put the flesh to death'*?

A good test of this is when you are tired, when you are wounded, when the pressures and temptations of life are pressing in on you. In these moments, will you choose to:

- **Respond** in faith and love, or
- **React** according to how you feel in the moment?

A vital part of training ourselves in godliness is choosing not to blindly follow our feelings when we are being tested. Nine times out of ten, your feelings will be from the flesh and not prompted by the Holy Spirit. If you consistently choose to react according to your feelings, you can quickly begin to find yourself enslaved to sin again.

To live according to the Spirit means I choose love, I choose joy, I choose righteousness.

To live according to the Spirit means to make a decision to honour Christ rather than to be carried along by waves of emotion. Some mornings I wake up feeling grumpy and angry with the world (usually after sleep deprivation from my small child!) and in that moment I have a choice. To live according to the Spirit means I choose love, I choose joy, I choose righteousness. I put some worship music on and I fill myself with God. As I do this, I find my emotions eventually come in line with the decision I have made.

Walking according to the Spirit means carefully weighing up what I say out loud.

Walking according to the Spirit means carefully weighing up what I say out loud. If I speak prompted by an emotional reaction, I can very easily give voice to the thoughts of Satan and sow destruction. Sometimes we can justify our outbursts by saying, 'But what I said is true' or 'What I said is how I really feel'. But these are not good enough reasons for venting. The measure of what we say should be: Does this build up in love? Does this honour God? We will reap what we sow with our words.

4. **Renew Your Mind**

'Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.'
(Romans 12:2)

Renewing our minds is a slow, ongoing process and a vital part of training ourselves in godliness. We will be bombarded with a thousand thoughts every day that are not the truth of God. It is a spiritual discipline to *'take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ'*. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

To use a very practical example, let's say it is the end of the month and money is scarce and I'm on my way home from church. I notice a concerning 'thunking' sound coming from my car. Anxiety immediately grips me and ties my stomach into knots. How much is this going to cost? Where am I going to find the money to fix this?

Making my thoughts obedient to Christ involves:

Recognising

- What are the lies I am believing?
- What thought-patterns have I fallen into that dishonour God?

- What destructive attitudes have I taken on about God or about myself?

In the example of the broken car, what is it specifically that I am anxious about? I am worried about how I am going to find the money. What lies have I believed? I have unconsciously believed the lie that I am my own provider. I have unconsciously been relying on myself instead of God. Self-reliance is the best recipe for anxiety!

Resisting

Once I have recognised the lie that I have believed, I need to expel that thought from my mind. I choose to no longer believe the lie or entertain my destructive thoughts.

Reminding

I choose to remind myself of the truth of God's word and pray His truth over my situation. God has said that if He provides for the plants and the birds, how much more will He provide for me?! He has commanded me not to worry but rather to trust Him as my good, heavenly Father.

The good news of the Gospel is that we are no longer victims of sinful passions or our circumstances.

The great hope extended to us through the Gospel is that we can become new creations. God is not doing renovations on this old house – my house has been demolished and is not experiencing a resurrection!

The Spirit empowers us to be transformed into the masterpiece that God has made us to be. The good news of the Gospel is that we are no longer victims of sinful passions or our circumstances. The same power that raised Christ now lives inside of me! As we train ourselves in godliness by repeatedly choosing to respond in righteousness, every day, God is transforming us into the glory and radiance of His Son.