

# Tankers and Tugboats

## *Training for Transformation*

April 25, 2021

Welcome to where we're trying to *figure* out how to *go* about *being* transformed.

**Are you allowing the Lord's renewing?** Or, in Scriptural speak: **Are you "being" transformed?** And how's that *going*? And by what *means* is it happening? And to what end *goal*? Most believers *desire* to *be* transformed, but aren't exactly sure how it works, or what it even means, and how it happens on a day-by-day basis. So, here's how Paul puts it to the believers in Rome:



Do not *conform* [imitate] any longer to the pattern of this world, but ***be transformed*** [be changed; be transfigured; lit. be *metamorphosed*, like a butterfly] by the *renewing* of your mind. – Romans 12:2 NIV



Ever notice what an odd directive this is? It's a *command* in what's called a *passive* voice. Like "*be* encouraged ... *by* (the encouraging thing I then say)" or "*be* blessed". It's not "*encourage yourself*" or "*bless yourself*" or "*transform yourself*". Because **Paul's not saying to make it happen, but to allow it to be happening.** And how do we allow *that*? "**By [allowing] the renewing of your mind.**" And how do we do *that*? **By not doing what prevents it, and do-doing what permits it.**



Last Sunday I compared God's Spirit tugging on our heart, to a tugboat turning a tanker around, one *bump* at a time. But **a tugboat can only do what only a tugboat can do if that tanker allows it to.** Otherwise it's just a gentle bump-bump-bump up against a Wartsila-Sulzer RTA-96C. That's 109,000 horsepower at 72 gallons of diesel per minute! The tanker's like, "You go on back to the dock, li'l tugboat."



Our Tugboat says, "Apologize." *Bump*. But the tanker says, "Just *avoid* 'em!" Can't fault the tugboat; it's bumping away. So ***be turned by the bumping of your Tugboat.*** The tugboat says, "Hold the door." *Bump*. But the tanker blasts its horn: "We're in a hurry; full steam ahead!" It's one thing to give "the Captain of our salvation" (Heb 2:10 NKJ) permission to come aboard, but ***we've got to surrender our command,*** and stop taking back the wheel. So, what are we supposed to *do*? Try *harder*? Well, if *trying* was all there was to it, we'd all be *renewed* by now.

For I *have* the *desire* to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. – Romans 7:18 NIV

Because *desire* fizzles out. Have you found, as I have, that: ***trying harder doesn't have much staying power.*** We put too much stock in "*trying*" while biting off more than we can chew. So *how* do we get *better* at allowing "the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls" (1 Pet 2:25) to *lead* us and *keep* us from going astray? This is really deep. Ready? By *allowing* Him to *lead*. ***BUMP!*** Admit it, ***those orders He whispers are loud and clear ... unless you grab the wheel and turn away your ear.***



At the end of Paul's run he writes from a dungeon, awaiting execution, to timid li'l Timothy in big ol' Ephesus.



The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires ... they will *turn their ears away from the truth* ... But you, keep your head in all situations ... the time has come for my departure. I have *fought the good fight*, I have *finished the race*, I have *kept the faith*. Now there is in store for me the *crown of righteousness*, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will *award* to me on that day—and *not only* to me, but also to *all* who have longed for His appearing. – 2 Timothy 4:3-8 NIV



Could you run and *finish* a *full* marathon this *afternoon*. If not, **what if you tried really hard?** probably not. A marathon is 26.22 miles, in honor of Pheidippides who ran from Marathon to Athens, announced *victory* over the Persians, *warned* of retaliation, and dropped *dead* ... from running 26.22 *miles!* His statue was installed on the original route to Athens, for the 2004 Olympics in Greece. So the guy the race *commemorates* would say, "Ya crazy? It *killed* me!" The statue depicts a *previous* less *famous* event, titled: Pheidippides misses his ride to *Athens*.



Could you somehow force yourself over that finish line, this *afternoon*, for ten *million* dollars? Your heirs will be happy to hear that. Most of us *couldn't*, no matter *how much* was offered, or *how hard* we tried; and yet *all* of us, with *few* exceptions, and *months* of passionate, persistent, intelligent *training*, could become genuine marathon runners. Whether it's physical, intellectual, musical, or spiritual, **genuine transformation requires incremental training.** We so overrate the power of *trying*, and *underrate* the power of *training*.

In later times [Paul writes] some *will* abandon the faith ... Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. – 1 Timothy 4:1, 7 NIV

Don't *rely* on what you hear from others, or merely *assume* to be true, about our faith. *Train*.

Evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse ... But as for you, *continue in* what you have *learned* ... the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make *you* wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and *is* useful for teaching, [bump] rebuking, [bump] correcting [bump] and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be *thoroughly* equipped for every good work. – 2 Timothy 3:13-17 NIV

Godliness *training* is our only hope; because **godliness trying fizzles out fast.** We read, or see, or hear something inspiring, and say to our self: "I'm gonna try really hard to be like that." But **we get winded and feel defeated and give up.** Could you go out this afternoon and have *only* Christ-like grace and merciful thoughts toward the guy who pulls out, cuts you off, and drives 10 mph *slower*. How about for ten *million* dollars? Jesus said:

[A student] who is fully *trained* will *be* like his teacher. – Luke 6:40 NIV

Trained is just another word for discipled. Hence: discipleship training. **There's no discipleship trying.** And training is simply arranging our life around the things that'll get us to our goal.

Do you *not* know that in a race *all* the runners run, but only *one* gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. [Paul is funny; because when he says “such a way” he means the right *direction*] Everyone who competes in the games [i.e. the Isthmian games at Corinth] 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. [That “crown of righteousness”] Therefore I do not run like a man running *aimlessly*; – 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NIV

Paul is not running in such a way as to get a participation ribbon. Turns out they don’t hand those out in heaven. That’s a down-here thing. Now **you don’t have to win, or even finish; you just have to passionately run as to win:** in the one, right direction with all your heart.



I remember reading about a boy with twisted feet who joined his high school track team to improve his physicality. So he trained to sprint. And he *trained!* And then decided to *race.* From the start he was in last place; but everyone was shocked to see how well he was keeping up. Then he fell. But he got up and kept running. Then the race was over. But he only ran harder.

Then he fell harder. Got up quicker. And sprinted, with bloody knees, across the finish line. And you know *exactly* what happened. The folks in the stands erupted in cheers. Runners, from both sides, and led by the winner, picked him up and carried him in victory. *Why?* Because they instinctively, simultaneously recognized that **he won the race. Just not the one the others were running.** And *his* was more significant, because it was for something *more* than a ribbon.

And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes *according* to the *rules.* [Same holds for the crown of righteousness] – 2 Timothy 2:5 NKJ

The rules of *godliness* training and transformation, in the body of Christ, are the same as *any* serious training – musical, educational, or physical: **arrange your life around the habits that’ll get you to your goal.** But the first rule is: **you gotta have a goal.** From there, the sky’s the limit.



A select few bodybuilders achieve their *full* physical potential. Their arms are the size of my thighs. And their thighs are the size of my waist. *We* have a lot *common!* And they compete by comparing the results of training their body. And if I’m flipping through channels I gotta stop on the bodybuilders. I’m instantly mesmerized: “Wow. Look what training can do for a body.” Paul says:

*Physical* training *is* of some value, but *godliness* has value for *all* things, – 1 Timothy 4:8 NIV

[But as Paul confesses to the Philippian believers] Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 3:12-14 NIV

The way Paul saw it: **If we're not straining, we're not training.** And on fighting the good fight:

[Right after he says to Timothy] I do not run like a man running aimlessly; [he adds that, also] I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, [Paul targets his blows where they count the most] I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. – 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NIV

We each must fight our *own* good fight; but we *do share* the one good *training* manual.

[The Lord] said: "Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may *run* who *reads* it." [Or however we get *His Word* into *our heart*] – Habakkuk 2:2 NKJ



But **we must arrange our life around the disciplines that will eventually and inevitably enable us to become like Christ** in the ways that we simply *can't*, by direct *effort*, this afternoon, no matter how *much* was offered, or how *hard* we tried. And **stop comparing yourself to other runners and despising yourself for not measuring up.** We're not even in the *same* race.

We *each* have hurdles and challenges unique to *our* course. And **it's okay to fall down in front of others.** In fact, it'll set you up for your most powerful witness, and most inspiring moments.

Christ *himself* gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to *equip His* people for works of service, *so that* the body of *Christ* may *be* built up until we *all* reach unity in the *faith* and in the *knowledge* of the Son of God and *become mature*, attaining to the *whole* measure of the *fullness* of Christ. Then *we* will no longer *be* infants, tossed back and forth *by* the waves, and blown here and there *by* every wind of teaching and *by* the *cunning* and *craftiness* of people in their deceitful scheming. *Instead*, speaking the truth in love, *we* will *grow* to *become* in *every* respect the *mature* body of *Him* who *is* the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the *whole body* ... *grows* and *builds itself up* in *love*, as *each* part does *its* work. ... *put off* your *old* self, which is *being* corrupted by its deceitful desires; to *be* made *new* in the *attitude* of your minds; and to *put on* the *new self*, created to *be* like God in *true* righteousness and holiness. ... Do not let *any* unwholesome talk come *out* of your mouths, but *only* what is helpful for building *others* up according to *their* needs ... *Be kind* and *compassionate* to one another, *forgiving* each other, just as in Christ *God* forgave *you*. – Ephesians 4:11-32 NIV

Let 'em run their *own* race. **You focus on the course laid out for you.** Nobody's *perfect*, but being transformed into Christ's likeness not only *can* and *does* happen, but *must*. **It may not look like much this afternoon, but those little bumps accumulate.** And at the end of *your* run, gold, silver, or bronze; ten talents or two; the winner will be declared when Jesus says to *you*:

Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. [Here's your crown] Enter into the joy of your master. – Matthew 25:23 ESV

And then, you know *exactly* what happens: heaven erupts with cheering. But **until then, let's go for the gold;** so those watching *us* will say, "Wow. Look what training can do to *the* body."