

# Training for Glory

## *True Believers and Make-Believers*

May 16, 2021

Good morning *true* believers, and any make-believers present. Has something changed? What's different about you? Hair cut? No? Oh I know what it is: you're one degree more like our Father this week! Way to *go!* That's the *goal*. **So are you training for glory?** You seem a little more free.



Now the Lord *is* the Spirit, and where the *Spirit* of the Lord *is*, there *is* freedom. And we *all*, with unveiled face, beholding the *glory* of the Lord, are *being* transformed into the *same image* ["the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15)] from *one degree* of glory to another. For this comes from the *Lord* who *is* the *Spirit*. – 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 ESV



Being transformed is Paul's often repeated message to believers.

My dear children, for whom I am *again* in the pains of childbirth *until* Christ is *formed* in you, [one bump at a time] – Galatians 4:19 NIV



And we've talked about how Paul instructs me and you to ...

*Train* yourself to *be* godly. – 1 Timothy 4:7 NIV



Can't grow in godliness without doing the *little* things that gradually gain us victories over the *big* things. **It's not about trying harder but training smarter.** And instead of putting pressure *on* us by saying, "You *have* to *get* that prize." No. Paul takes the pressure *off*, by saying:

Run in such a way as to get the prize. – 1 Corinthians 9:24 NIV

It's about *heart* and *focus*. And yet, so many feel so defeated the moment they're winded. But *that's* because most believers have failure all backwards. **You don't just try to lift 500 lbs., you train to lift 500 lbs.** And how do you *train*? By *trying* to lift just *one* degree *more* each week. Try for too much too soon and you'll hurt yourself. So make a training *plan*. Because trying and failing feels like losing; but **the goal of training is to push yourself to failure.** When an athlete in training pushes to failure, they see it as *success* and feel *good* about gains to *come*. Whereas the guy who just *tries* to lift 500 lbs. and fails feels like a loser, because he's *trying* too hard to do what *only* comes by gaining through training by trying for less. So he'll probably decide weightlifting is dumb. Because **it's easier to change our beliefs than our behavior.** So we do.

So it's not too hard to find those *inside* the church just as anxious, angry, envious, and exhausted as those *outside* the church. Because transformation is *tough* and takes *determination*; and progress is *gradual* and requires *patience*. And **when we're winded it's more appealing to change the way we keep score.** But when *training* for glory, failing is part of growing, and it helps us to see and celebrate the little gains along the way as we head toward victory one degree at a time.

Years ago, I actually made myself a training plan by writing down every time I realized I'd ignored that little voice-bump. And quickly realized I needed some gains in patience. And began to train.



This was before COVID, and I actually drove to *Canada!* And at the border I was asked to pull over and step out. Now I'm thinking "I'm in *training*" so I was *happy* to oblige. Then six men and a yellow dog went at it. And when they were done, I *thanked* 'em for the work they do. And I opened my door and the dark velour interior was covered in yellow dog hair. And I was *amused* because I'm in training. I then drove onto *this* interchange wherein I had a *yield* sign. So I slowed for an approaching car. But he also slowed. But I had the *yield* sign. Finally, at 20 mph, he gunned it and gave me the finger. But not only was I on my game, I kind of *won that one*.

Then I went to a drive-through for coffee, and was charged double, and pointed it out, and was told I was wrong. But I'm in training, so I politely paid and then showed her the receipt, because "I'm in no way gonna pay an extra \$1.50". So I get my coffee and I tell 'em they forgot the cream and sugar, to which *they* said they *already* put it in, to which I said "Did you," and made 'em give me more. As I pulled out I took a sip. They *hadn't*.

So I pull over to add the "extras" I was glad I asked for, and I realize there's no stir-stick. So I stirred it with an old ink pen, and looked up, and said out-loud: "You win!" To which I'm sure *He* said "That's it? I could've done this *all day*." Now, **Dad isn't out to get us. But He is out to train us.** But *we* must *allow* ourselves to *be* transformed by *training* by *trying* to gain by degrees. And I knew He was cheering me on – I could *sense* it – right up until I was beat by a *stir stick!*



Almost *every* conflict between the religious and Jesus was over dietary laws, holy days, and circumcision. Because *this* was the *way* that *they* kept score. So Jesus was a threat because **He focused on true hearts rather than superficial expressions.** And yet they *all agreed* regarding the *most* important measure, and they *all believed* that *this* was the gold standard by which each was *supposed* to *self-assess*.

When the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a *lawyer*, [i.e. expert in the law] asked Him a question to test Him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ... [And] You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these *two* commandments depend *all* the *Law* ..." [And His adversaries, the *lawyers*, couldn't *object*] – Matthew 22:34-40 ESV

And behold, [another time, the tables were turned, and] a *lawyer* stood up to put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to *him*, "What is written in the Law? How do *you* read it?" And *he* answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And [Jesus] said to *him*, "You have answered correctly; *do* this, and you will *live*." – Luke 10:25-28 ESV

Because *this* is the *heart* of the law. **Love our Father above all, and others as yourself.** *That's* the goal. We *all* agree. So ***all that's left is to evaluate yourself and make a training plan.***

They *knew* and *believed* and *taught* this *as* the fundamental way to *self-assess* a true believer from a make-believer. And yet they wasted all their energy arguing superficial expressions of spirituality. Why? Because ***it's so tempting to change the way we measure.*** Because ***it's so tough to change the way we think and feel and act.*** Because transformation takes determination, and progress takes patience. Because ***gains in glory come one degree at a time.*** But it's *so doable* to be *way more patient* or *loving* or *joyful* or *content*. But ***you gotta train like you want it.***

Let's use patience as an example. Now if you're *already* a very *patient* person, find another fault and go with that. And if you *can't* find a fault, obviously just go with self-deluding *pride!* But patience is something we can't just try harder to have. ***We gotta train for patience.*** But it's obvious when we lose it, so it's easy to track our progress.

Maybe you've heard the saying: ***"Don't pray for patience,"*** because God will send you trials to force you to develop it. But it's not true, for one *huge* reason. He doesn't *need* to. They're *already* all *around* you! ***There'll never be a shortage of frustrating people and infuriating situations and maddening rules that make no sense!*** Know why? Because ... THAT'S HOW IT WORKS DOWN HERE! So by all means ***"Do pray for patience"*** because ***He'll open your eyes, help you out, soften your heart, and cheer you on!*** And *then* when you fail, you won't feel like a loser and change the way you measure. You'll *laugh* at yourself. Know why? 'Cause you made Dad laugh *too*.



Did I ever tell you about that time I went to Canada? Well the part I left out is that when I threw my little fit and said, "You win!" I started laughing and quickly apologized. It was just *funny* because, what an *idiot*. And *suddenly* quite *magically* ***it was like Dad hit the reset on my autopilot.*** And I was back on course, ready and rarin'. Refreshed. Renewed. I didn't even *think* about feeling *bad* about *failing* because ... you *can't* even *imagine* the dog hair! And I *totally* nailed *that* one!



My parking lot fit felt like a weightlifter taking a breather between sets, in order to recover, before going for *another* set of reps ... to *failure*. ***So make a list. Start small.*** Like I did. Drive the *speed* limit. Let people to finish *their* story. When you eat, *chew*. And don't look for the shortest line at the store; and if you *do*, don't track your progress. ***And deliberately spend some alone time with the Lord.*** And then just ***turn your ear to those voice-bumps*** (especially the ones you heard but ignored) ***and add 'em to the program.***



I made myself go *last* at potlucks, buffets, and holiday dinners. And I assured busy waitresses that it was okay to get caught up with others first. I *made* myself *do* little things like these to *become* more patient, but somewhere along the way I was doing them because I *became* more patient. ***And the more I saw my little gains, the easier it became to allow more growth.***





There was a Sunday school teacher in the church I grew up in. I was around her two decades. And **I never saw the joy that she herself taught as the hallmark of our faith.** She seemed *perpetually* cranky and irritated. And *no one* was *surprised* that she *stayed* that way, day after day, decade after decade. **Though everyone wanted her to change, but no one expected her to change.** Nobody ever said, "We need to call the elders and considered this woman who keeps coming to church to worship the Lord but isn't being transformed by even one degree!"

We expected her to *affirm* our doctrine, *attend* and *support* our services, and to avoid certain *other* sins. But what was not expected was that day after day, week after week, year after year, Jesus Christ would be formed in her life "from one degree of glory to another" simply by turning her ear to those voice-bumps trying to turn her around. We *didn't* expect that *gradually over time* she would become *more patient* or *loving* or *joyful* or *kind*. **The one thing no one expected, is the one thing we're told is of utmost importance** to be allowing to be happening in our heart.

And I want to draw two things from this: 1) **No one close to you wants you to stay the way you are.** Especially *Jesus*. Okay? Allow that *freeing* truth to soak in. I'm *sure* the good *far* outweighs the bad; but *why* would you *settle* for such a sad state when you can go for the glory?

2) Let me say in no uncertain terms that **I, as your pastor, absolutely expect you to be transformed.** This is *His* Place! So I *expect* and *anticipate* that day after day, week after week, month after month, you *will* be yielding to the voice-bumps of God's Spirit, so that Christ *can* be *gradually, steadily, increasingly* formed in your life "from one degree of glory to another." Because **that's what separates true believers from make-believers.** We gotta be *growing* in *reflecting* His *glory*, bit by bit and bump by bump, and *refusing to rest* from His *call* till He calls us on home.

*Then* the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has *ears*, [that are turned to the truth] let them hear. – Matthew 13:43 NIV



Reflect it in ever-increasing measure down here, and you'll *radiate* up there! Christ didn't come and die and rise from the grave so we could spend our time down here griping about how slow the old woman with the coupons is! He *came* and *died* and *rose* so that all those who are *truly* His can *rise above* the ways of this *world* by the renewing of our minds and being transformed into His likeness. **We will become whatever we practice.** Good or bad. So make it *count*. **Christ-like character comes from practicing Christ-like choices.** So when ol' Rose there is *trying* your patience, you be *training* 'em. And praying for *her*. That is *very* Christ-like. Rather than watching how much faster *every* other line is *moving*. That is very *Bruce*-like.

People are watching. **So show 'em the way day-by-day, degree-by-degree, how to be truly set free.** Don't give *up* and *toss* in the towel, or *lawyer* up and *change* the way you measure, or you'll *end up* settling for what I call **pseudo transformation.** But hey, that's *next* Sunday.