

Week One Daily Training Tips

Welcome to God's Gym

personal / group study for use with the message of January 16th and 17th, 2010

“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” (1Timothy 4:7,8 NIV).

This lesson is about the process of spiritual maturity and “the assessment”. On your first visit to the gym, the trainer will weigh you in, check your fat-ratio, ask you other health questions, and set some initial goals. It takes a commitment and time to grow spiritually!

Introduction.

Day 1: The Assessment.

Read 1 John 2. (First Epistle of John, not the Gospel!)

Take some time to process your own spiritual growth path since the time that you became a Christian. Where are you in the ‘spiritual family’ (children, young men/women, father/mother)? If you have a close friend or mentor, you might want to ask for their help in evaluating your progress. Ask God to give you a real heart for spiritual growth in the coming weeks, spiritual growth like you’ve never experienced before.

Read.

Day 2: Obstacles to growth.

Read Galatians 5.

“You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (Galatians 5:7)

Paul wrote to the Galatian church. He laments that although they had made a great start in their spiritual journey (“you were running well...”), they had encountered some obstacles that were now hindering their spiritual growth. He asks them to honestly identify those obstacles to growth and to remove them. (In their case, the obstacles were people who were introducing spiritual teachings contrary to what Paul had taught them; ideas that were actually counter-productive to their spiritual growth. Further, they were failing to learn the important secret of *walking in the power of the Spirit*, which we will talk about next week.)

You can go to the gym all you want, but if you are allowing things outside of the gym to hinder your physical progress, you are not going to see the results you want. The same thing applies in our spiritual growth. We have to identify the things that hinder us, and take steps to remove them. As you think about your own life, what are the obstacles that have hindered you from running well in your life with God? Be honest. Ask God to shed light on this for you. Write down the specific obstacles to growth that you can identify.

Day 3: GRACE + TRUTH + TIME = GROWTH.

Read Ephesians 4.

In their book, *How People Grow*, Christian counselors Henry Cloud and John Townsend teach us that people basically need an *environment of growth*. This environment for spiritual growth consists of three important elements.

GRACE: An atmosphere in which we are allowed to admit our sins, weaknesses and faults without fear of condemnation; a setting in which grace is applied to all of our shortcomings; a group of people who will lavish us with God’s unconditional love, regardless of how immature we are. A place where authentic, vulnerable Christian living is encouraged and modeled.

TRUTH: An environment in which biblical truth will consistently be spoken into our lives; where truth will be taught and lies will be challenged; where people will tell us what we need to hear, not what we

want to hear. An environment where I am continually encouraged to saturate my heart and mind in God's Word. There is no growth without God's truth working its way deep into our lives.

TIME: An environment where spiritual progress over time is the expectation; where there is allowance for spiritual immaturity, but there is also the continual challenge to grow; an environment where there are people at different levels of spiritual maturity; a place where it is O.K. to be where I am, but not O.K. to stagnate there forever. A "no shame, no same" sort of environment.

Think about your own spiritual life and, particularly, the people you are surrounding yourself with. Are you living in a spiritual environment as described above, where there is a healthy mixture of GRACE and TRUTH and TIME? If not, then what do you need to do to change the environment for your spiritual growth?

Day 4: Setting Goals.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

Take another look at your Spiritual Fitness Self-Test results. What might be some initial goals that you set for yourself during the next 9-10 weeks? Maybe you already have your spiritual development goals/disciplines in place. If so, that's great! But if not, why not take some time to pray about and ponder some basic goals. For example, here are some general ideas. (Don't try to do them all!)

- I will make it my goal to read my Bible every day for 15 minutes.
- I will aim to learn to pray conversationally with God throughout my day.
- I will take a class or read a book on Christian apologetics (reasons for faith).
- I will enroll in one of the new spiritual growth classes at church.
- I will take the step of joining a group.
- I will fast from T.V. for the next 9 weeks!!!
- I will look for opportunities to be more open about my faith with others.
- I will check out opportunities to serve at church, or in the community.
- I will look into the missions trip.
- I will take a class or study a book on financial stewardship.

There is an old saying: "Shoot at nothing, and you'll surely hit it every time!" It really would be good to set some specific training goals for yourself. Write down what you come up with.

Day 5: Study again the Top Ten Reasons to pursue Spiritual Growth (from last week's message notes). Are you truly convinced that it's worth it to pursue spiritual training?

1. Spiritual growth gives us strength to overcome the Evil One.

I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (1John 2:14).

2. Spiritual growth gives us discernment for wise living.

"But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to discern between good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

3. Spiritual growth gives us stability in a world of conflicting opinions.

"We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14).

4. Spiritual growth gives us the foundation to endure when trials come.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock" (Matthew 7:24-27).

5. Spiritual growth enables us to have a fruit-filled life.

“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers” (Psalm 1:1-3).

6. Spiritual growth puts us on God’s path for our life.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5,6).

7. Spiritual growth equips us fully for whatever the future holds.

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

8. Spiritual growth benefits the people who live close to us.

“Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith” (Acts 14:22).

9. Spiritual growth brings God’s peace into our lives.

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:8,9).

10. Spiritual growth stores up a great reward in heaven.

“Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1Timothy 4:7,8).

*All scripture taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.

Questions.

ThinkAboutIt...

1. Are you in a spiritually healthy environment, so that you can grow?

ReflectOnIt...

2. Reflect on the “Top Ten Reasons to grow spiritually”—What are your goals, what benefits do you want to obtain?

RespondToIt...

3. Pray for God to give you a heart that desires to grow. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to a friend that will encourage you to grow in your faith.
4. Begin to spend time training in God’s Gym. Take time to pray, read the Word and spend time with other believers.

Extra.

EXTRA WORKOUT TIP: Next Sunday we will be talking about “The Ultimate Supplement,” the Holy Spirit. See if you can find passages in the New Testament that deal with the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. Learn all you can about the third Person of the Trinity before next Sunday. Hint: Eph.5, Galatians 5, Romans 8. Read 2 Corinthians 3:18, 1 Corinthians 2:14-15 and 3:1-3, and John 16:33.