

One Sermon That Changed The World

Practice Makes Perfect

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West Side Church of Christ
Searcy, Arkansas
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Scripture Reading

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

“And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matthew 7:24-29 ESV).

[Begin with all Christian soldiers on steps singing “Wise Man built...”]

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Kim Linehan was an American Olympic swimmer who, for 8 years, held the world record in the Women’s 1500-meter freestyle. Competing at 18 years of age, Kim would do endless exercises and swam 7 to 12 miles a day. But when she was asked “what is the hardest part of your regimen?” she gave this reply: “getting in the water.” Of course it was. The practice schedule was grueling. But that’s what perfection requires.

Michael Jordan wanted to be the best basketball player who ever lived.

- Michael Jordan practice schedule
 - MVP 1988 (just 3rd year in the league, averaging 37 points a game).
 - But in 1989, Jordan sensed he needed to be better. Personal trainer Tim Grover: started strict workout-regimen to accompany his already strict

diet. Grover described MJ: most competitive ever met; always felt like somebody else was going to outwork him so he was going to outwork them; knew his strengths and weaknesses; turned weaknesses into strengths. Every year: evolution in his game (new shot, new move). Never satisfied no matter how many championships, titles, what people said, accolades, always wanted to get better. Most practices had starting 5 on same team; but Michael put Scotty Pippen on the other team to always play against the best. He worked until he had no weaknesses in his game and did whatever the team needed to win. His game was easy because he practiced extremely hard. From so much practicing from all the different aspects, studying film, being so well prepared, he always had the edge of the competition. There is more to preparing for a basketball game than dribbling. Knowing opposing team capability. It's a job. The more you are prepared for it, the better you will be at it. But preparation takes hard work and sacrifice.

- How long it takes to make something a habit
 - It takes 66 days for a new behavior to become learned, and nearly a year for it to become fully formed.
 - Can happen without intentionality: addiction to phones, social media.
- S
 - 26 million Americans “stopped” reading the Bible during COVID.
 - How many of us have regular spiritual practices outside of official church gatherings? 77% of Americans have a Bible. “Do you read the Bible outside of a church service 3-4 times a year?” 39% said yes.
 - Official church gathering IS a spiritual practice (and a good one)..But...
- 168 hours in a week.
 - Average person spends 3hrs 15 min a day on their phone (2.5 hours of that on social media). 20% of us spend nearly 5 hours a day on their phone.
 - Just take the low average: that's 864 hours a year scrolling through apps, or 36 days! A whole month every year!
 - If you attend Bible class, Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wed night agape every single week, that's 208 hours a year (or 8 days a year).
 - Is 3-4 hours a week of spiritual nourishment the kind of “practice” that sounds like we are serious?
- Need to practice

PRACTICING PERFECTION

- Practice what?
 - Not “rules” per se. Literal reading problematic; but so is just fulfillment without God's prerogative. “Whoever denies me before men”...Yet Peter

does exactly that. And he is given hope. They can't be separated from the person who gave them.

- Not “moral ideals” per se. Better: Like wisdom literature. Jesus doesn't always turn the other cheek. Loving enemies is like God...who will come in flaming fire to take vengeance. Still problematic interpretation: Seeing them as moral ideals still turns them into a checklist. And doing every single one of them, you can still have a heart far from God.
- But practicing the presence of God (a spiritual “bent”). False view—just try harder by doing more right things than wrong things. Key insight: not a ritual religion but an inside-out heart way of life. Changing what I want.
- God is our Rock (Deuteronomy); and we find this in Christ (1 Cor).
- Example: Brother Lawrence.
- An inside-out religion means we aren't trying harder to fight our desires, we are asking God's Spirit to change our desires (Gal 5:22-24)
- Matt 6: praying, giving, fasting=stand-ins for any and all spiritual practices. Goal: to want less.
- So irony: less is more. Going down the ladder is going up. How to fight materialism—want less. How to fight gluttony—want less. How to fight marriage troubles: want less. How to deal with troubling neighbors: expect less. Want less from others (since God supplies); expect less from others (since God gives validation); instead, desire to live out the perfect goodness of God. Want to want what God wants.
- Most practice will not be doing more, but wanting less.
- Example: simplicity, solitary, solidarity, celebration, peacemaking, quietness. : creates environment that can withstand any storm. Example: storm shelter. What are you doing in there? (nothing; family time; sharing concerns). Why is it safe? (intentional planning; life giving within and protection from without). Shelters do not change the weather or even try to stop the weather. They shield you from the weather.
- It is a life-transforming moment when we realize the Sermon on the Mount does not call for us to pray that God remove us from storms, or to train us to overpower the storms; but, instead, that he prepare us to withstand the storms by standing firmly on the rock.
- What we need, says Dallas Willard, is for churches to develop a “curriculum for Christlikeness”—one centered around, for example, the Sermon on the Mount. “Imagine, if you can,” writes Willard, “discovering in your church letter or bulletin an announcement of a six-week seminar on how genuinely to bless someone who is spitting on you.” (Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 313)
 - I can imagine that very thing, thanks to Lee Daniel's [The Butler](#). I remember watching that emotional and memorable lunch-counter scene,

where the movie shoots back and forth between the staged protest in the restaurant, and the grueling preparation it took to get them there.

“You know that ya’ll can’t sit here.”

“We would like to be served please.”

“This is unprecedented,” declares a voice, harking back to their earlier preparation, “what we are talking about. But it needs a patience that none of us have ever seen. We are organized. We have a leader with every group. We have lookouts, and local phone numbers with ambulances ready. And when one wave comes off that lunch counter, what follows? A whole ‘nother wave of students sitting at that lunch counter, blowing their minds.”

When one student expresses discomfort hurling such insults, the leader responds “you came here to get yourself prepared, and to get her prepared.”

The scene shifts back to the lunch counter. A mob forms outside.

Coming into the restaurant, the hate-filled racists treat the men and women at the lunch counter mercilessly. They smack their heads, pull their clothes, scream in their faces, pour food all over them. And, yes, spit in their face.

But the men and women sitting at the lunch counter endure it all. Because they were prepared.

When you read the Sermon on the Mount, you are reading an outlined curriculum for Christlikeness. The “hardness” in the message speaks to the seriousness of the cause. We are apprentices to Jesus—and Jesus prepares us for the cross.

- Key words: “let it.” (Greek: Amen)
- No longer reactionary, but pro-active (or pro-receptive): and not for my own agenda, but for Christ to be formed in me.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- Prayer as a way of life

- Reading–YouVersion’s “Guided Prayer”: One of our members told me “I had been using YouVersion's Guided Prayer mode as a prompt. It helps establish mindset, provides a short scripted prayer that can be saved . When you have saved several you can cycle through them in a series when you do the Guided Prayer function.”
- the Bible Project's reading plan in YouVersion
- “Every Moment Holy” Series
- “This day I pray” . com. Diary of Private Prayer

QUESTIONS TO ASK

How strong is my foundation?

How are you building your house?

How do you know that you are building on the rock and not on sand?