

FAITH TRAINING

A man had a hunting dog named Sam. One day they were out hunting together and he and Sam were separated. The hunter called out again and again for Sam but the dog did not return. It was getting dark and the hunter had an important appointment in town and had to leave, but he really loved Sam and did not want to lose him. Then he remembered an old trick a dog trainer had once taught him. He took off his hunting jacket and laid it down under the branches of a small bush. All night he worried about his dog. In the morning he went back out to the woods and sure enough, there was Sam curled up on his jacket with his nose under the sleeve. The dog looked up and wagged his tail. His eyes seemed to say, "Where have you been friend? I have been waiting for you all night, but I knew that you would come back." Later the hunter thought to himself, when I get lost and don't know what to do, do I have the same sense as that dog? Do I trust to look for some part of God's word and curl up in it? To wait patiently, knowing that my Friend will find me if I just have faith in him?

1Tim 4:7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 8 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. 9 This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance 10 (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.

The Christian life is not so much about trying than it is training. Often we fail in the Christian disciplines because we do not understand this point. We set a goal for ourselves and then try hard to reach them but so often fail. Why? Not because of a lack of effort but because of a lack of exercise. To run with perseverance the race God has marked out for us requires faith training.

Paul uses the example of physical exercise to illustrate a great spiritual truth. The Greeks put much importance on bodily exercise, because athletic events were of great importance to them. What is most important here, and the lesson that we must learn, is that Christians should put as much effort into the exercise of godliness as these athletes did into the exercise of their bodies. How does a Christian exercise for godliness? This can be seen by studying the athlete.

1. Building Strength –

The athlete builds his muscles through tension. This is done by stressing and straining the muscles until they grow. For us as Christians, we need to learn to exercise our faith. Again, this is done through tension. It is done by placing ourselves in a position where we need to trust God. It is learning to rely upon Him completely. Doing this strengthens our faith, just as the athlete builds his muscles.

What is faith? When John Paton was translating the Bible for a South Seas island tribe, he discovered that they had no word for trust or faith. One day a native who had been running hard came into the missionary's house, flopped himself in a large chair and said, "It's good to rest my whole weight on this chair." "That's it," said Paton. "I'll translate faith as 'resting one's whole weight on God.'"

Philip Yancey defines faith as: "Believing in advance in something that will only seem logical when seen in reverse." How does the bible define it?

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Heb 11: 8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God

By faith Abraham went where he was told to go. Even though it did not make any sense to him, he was obedient to God and went. He left his comfortable home and traveled through Caanan where he lived in a tent – a temporary structure. He did this because he was looking forward to a "city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God".

Faith is taking God at His word and going, even though you may not understand or even have doubts about where you are going. When I was in University I learned the importance of exercising your faith. After failing miserably at first I decided to begin working out my faith. I and several other students started a small group with a local pastor and called it the heretic's club and every week we would think up the hardest question we possibly could about the Bible. At first we tiptoed as if we were on thin ice not wanting to break through. Eventually we found that the Bible could take care of itself and there were answers for our questions. I and a few others got involved in an evangelistic program called the 10 Myths of Christianity. We would publicly debate the existence of God and the claims of Christ. Many times I went back to my dorm room confused and found myself debating in my sleep. Through this I began to grow as I never had before.

There have been many times when I have had to step out in obedience and faith. Whenever I have done this God has opened a door to blessings.

In 2001 Naomi and I left Kuwait and I served as a pastor in a Mennonite Brethren church in Niagara-on-the-lake. This church had gone without a pastor and had been looking for several years. There was a lot of excitement and growth when I started. Attendance was up, we had gone to multiple services and had hired additional staff. Everyone was happy. However, after a few years I was approached by the director of the denomination's mission. We got talking about the Middle East and he asked me if I would ever consider going back. I said no, but slowly God began telling me that I needed to go back. I resisted the idea because I was worried about the church. How could I tell them that I was thinking of leaving after the amazing years we had just had?

In addition, the church in Kuwait was not looking for anyone. The person that I had raised up to replace me was doing well and they were not looking for new pastors. Still, I had the sense that God was telling me that it was time to resign. I was preaching a series on obedience at the time and my own hypocrisy was killing me so I took the head of the elder's board out for lunch. He was obviously upset when I said that I was resigning, he just sat there looking at his food.

I went home from that lunch feeling that I had made a HUGE mistake. A few hours later our phone rang. One of the pastors in Kuwait had resigned and, after praying about it, they wanted to know if I would ever consider returning. I knew then that God was calling me back, but I still felt bad for the church we were leaving. I called the head of the elders only to realize that he was silent not because he was mad, but because God had also been calling him into pastoral ministry! Within a month the church transitioned and continued to grow. God rewarded that obedience.

In what areas are you exercising your faith? How is it being stretched? When was the last time your faith was really tested?

Exercise is seldom fun. That is why it is seldom done. What do you do when you recognize that your walk with the Lord is getting dry and that your faith needs a workout. Likewise, church that start out in great faith and vision can grow inward and lose their sense of purpose over time.

About 350 years ago a shipload of travelers landed on the northeast coast of America. The first year they established a town site. The next year they elected a town government. The third year the town government planned to build a road five miles westward into the wilderness. In the fourth year the people tried to impeach their town government because they thought it was a waste of public funds to build a road five miles westward into a wilderness. Who needed to go there anyway? Here were people who had the vision to travel three thousand miles across an ocean and overcome great hardships to get there. But in just a few years they were not able to see even five miles out of town. They had lost their pioneering vision. With a clear vision of what we can become in Christ, no ocean of difficulty is too great. Without it, we rarely move beyond our current boundaries. -- Lynn Anderson.

As we exercise our faith it grows. The more you test your muscles the more they can handle. The more we see God's love and mercy in our lives and the deeper we trust Him the greater things He can entrust to us. E.g. the girls carrying in groceries from the car.

2. Building Endurance –

Athletes exercise not only to build strength but also endurance. No one becomes a marathon runner overnight. It is something which requires great discipline and constant attention. Endurance means hanging in there even though everything inside you is telling you to stop. In our Christian walk we need to build endurance as this is not a short walk but a long haul to the finish line. Often we will face trials that will test our resolve. Peter understood this well and the book of 1 Peter has a great deal to say about suffering.

1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Verse 10 really summarizes the whole book. When we face hard times in life it is important to remember that God is a God of all grace. He knows what you can handle.

Peter uses 3 familiar words which he understood very well to encourage those who are facing trials.

a. God ... will *restore* you –

The word restore here is the Greek word KATARTIZO (KATA - according to and ARTIOS - complete or perfect) It means to mend or make perfect.

The meaning of the word is clear, especially for Peter. Peter spent a lot of time as a fisherman mending his nets. In fact this is what he was doing when Jesus first called him.

Matt 4:21 - Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing (mending) their nets

After Peter had denied the Lord 3 times he was back fishing on the lake when Jesus again came and said throw out your nets. Although we are not told it, Peter was probably mending his nets as he was in the boat and had been fishing all night (the net was in the boat at the time as they were able to throw it out immediately). As he was mending the nets Jesus came to mend Peter.

Like a net there are times in our lives when we be torn. When the weight of the world and our sins will tear us in places. Jesus came to Peter and helped to mend his life back together making him strong and useful again for service.

Many years ago a man's Model-T Ford stalled in the middle of the road. He couldn't get it started no matter how hard he cranked nor how much he tried to advance the spark or adjust things under the hood. Just then a chauffeured limousine pulled up behind him, and a wiry, energetic man stepped out from the back seat and offered his assistance. After tinkering for a few moments the stranger said, "Now try it!" Immediately the engine leaped to life. The well-dressed individual then identified himself as Henry Ford. "I designed and built these cars," he said, "so I know what to do when something goes wrong." God, as our creator knows how to "fix" us when our lives are broken by sin.

Are there any areas of your life could you use a little mending today? God can restore you.

b. make you strong/firm -

The Greek word used here for strong means to *strengthen* and firm means to *make stable*. Both of these words come from the root - HISTEMI which means *to stand*.

Eph 6:13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, *to stand*.

The word is used by Jesus to Peter:

Luke 22:31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, *strengthen* your brothers."

This is exactly what Peter is now doing! Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt like the ground was pulled out from under you. Everything is in turmoil. Peter had been in this position. When Jesus was put to death everything seemed to be lost. His whole world came crashing down around him. Jesus prayed that through it all his faith would not fail. That when the day of evil came he was able to stand.

There are times in life when we loose our balance. Life can throw things at us that, if we are not on our guard, can knock us off balance. E.g. Gladiators on the pedestal. Are you feeling a little wobbly today? Is there an area of your heart that needs some stability? Stand firm through it!

c. and steadfast –

The Greek word used here is THEMELIOO which is the same word meaning *foundation*. It means to lay a stable and sure foundation. It is the same word used in

Matt 7:25 - 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.

This is similar to the words of Jesus to Peter:

Luke 16:18 - And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

When the storms of life blow and they hit us like a flood it is good to know that we have a firm foundation beneath us and that God himself will anchor us and make us firm.

Max Lucado wrote a book years ago called 6 Hours one Friday. He began the book talking about a time when he had a boat and a hurricane was coming. He was going to tie it to the dock but an older and wiser sailor told him to take it out deep and anchor it with three lines. He went on to say then when the storms of life blow we need to do the same. Anchor deep in Christ and remember that My Life is Not Futile, My Failures are Not Fatal, My Death is Not Final.

How is your anchor holding today? Are you secured to the rock?

Years ago a military officer and his wife were aboard a ship that was caught in a raging ocean storm. Seeing the frantic look in her eyes, the man tried unsuccessfully to allay her fears. Suddenly she grasped his sleeve and cried, "How can you be so calm?" He stepped back a few feet and drew his sword. Pointing it at her heart, he said, "Are you afraid of this?" Without hesitation she answered, "Of course not!" "Why not?" he inquired. "Because it's in your hand, and you love me too much to hurt me." To this he replied, "I know the One who holds the winds and the waters in the hollow of His hand, and He will surely care for us!"

This year, we want all of us as a church to grow in our faith. One of the ways to grow in your faith is to be in an intentional discipleship program. That is what we have been developing as a church over the last few years. This fall we want everyone to get involved in that program.

Our Intentional Discipleship Track is in 4 stages:

101 - Membership - What will be the community of your life?

If you have never been baptized or become a member of BBC - this is the course for you!

Over 5 sessions we give an understanding of salvation, baptism, communion, church membership, and philosophy and vision of Bramalea Baptist Church. The 101 course is required for baptism and membership at Bramalea Baptist Church, and will be the basis for the 201, 301 and 401 courses as well.

Baptism and Membership Welcomes will take place on November 1, 2015 and January 3, 2016

201 – Maturity - What will be the character of your life?

If you are baptized and have become a member of BBC, but want to grow as a disciple - this is the course for you! 5 sessions focus on the habits that disciples of Jesus need to build into their lives - 1/ Spending time in the Bible 2/ Prayer 3/ Giving 4/ Fellowship with one another. This course is the next step after 101 and before 301.

301 – Ministry - What will be the contribution of your life?

If you are a member of BBC, have gone through a discipleship course or process and want to know how best to serve - this is the course for you! You were shaped to serve God and to build up others through your service. In 5 practical sessions we will guide participants to understand their giftedness (SHAPE - Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, Experience) and how to utilize those in ministry for the Lord.

401 – Mission - What will be the communication of your life?

If you are a mature believer and member of BBC serving the Lord but want to focus on your mission in life - this is the course for you! You were made for a mission and to be a messenger of God. In this dynamic 5 session course, you will learn more about your life mission and discover how to share Christ effectively wherever God leads you - across the street or around the world. The course includes evangelism styles, communication skills, how to build a bridge of friendship, developing a global perspective, reaching unreached peoples and much more.

We want this to be a year where all of us as a congregation grow in faith. We are developing a Church App that you can use on your phones and tablets to stay better connected with what is happening at the church.