

Step 6 - Commitment to Crosstrain

1 Tim 4:4-9, Col 1:9-12, Heb 6:1

Well brothers and sisters – we are making progress in moving through these 8 steps of discipleship, having looked at Steps 1 through 5 so far...

And I am praying that the Holy Spirit has been using the material and information in this series to help make you more aware of how you can be intentional in contributing to the process of making disciples...

And also helping you to identify where you are at in your own discipleship process, and then challenging you and encouraging you to continue to progress in that process - and move towards growth and maturity as a disciple.

So that as the apostle Paul says in Col 1:10 *“you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God...”*

And that “bearing fruit” reminds us of what we are building on... looking back at Step 4 – about Connecting People to the Congregation - grafting them into our community, like branches into a vine or a fruit tree, in order that they get the life giving sap - spiritual vitality from the Holy Spirit, and their lives start to bear fruit... just as we ought to be bearing fruit.

And then last week in step 5 – we looked at the importance of helping people come to a point where they make a Confession and Commitment to Faith of mark their transition from being unsaved into being saved – much like how a marriage ceremony demarcates the transition from being single to becoming married.

So after steps 4 and 5 – where people whom we are discipling have been successfully grafted into the congregation and they’ve solidified that connection with their Confession and Commitment to Faith - it might seem that the process of discipleship has concluded for them - or for us...

Because they- or we- are at church regularly and they are saved – woo-hoo, success! And we'll all live happily ever after in Christian fellowship until Jesus returns, end of story.

Well not quite... to continue with the analogy that we used for Step 5 last week - a young man who gets married learns quickly in the first couple of years that just because you “got the girl” and had a great wedding – doesn't mean you get to coast on your past success.

You have to continue to put in the effort and time over the years to develop your relationship with your wife, and not let things slip into a relationship rut.

And it works the same way in the discipleship process, we need to watch out that those who are being discipled are not left to coast and get into a rut after completing Steps 4 and 5..

And so today we are looking at how we continue to grow and mature as disciples in Step 6 – A Commitment to Crosstrain.

So this morning I want to share with you, a little creational wisdom, a.k.a green spirituality, gleaned from being committed to physical cross-training at the gym, and how that can instruct us on continuing to grow and mature in our discipleship and avoid plateaus and ruts...

So... grab your gym bag - we're off to work out and cross-train this morning.

Now I've been going to the gym for about six years now – because when I turned 37 I realized that *“I'm about half-way there... so I gotta start looking after myself.”*

So I joined the local gym and one of the trainers gave me the introductory fitness tour, showed me how to use the machines and advised me on what exercises I should do to build muscle and burn fat.

And I have to say that the initial results of starting to work out were great, I could see real growth.

I felt better, I had more energy and I was definitely getting stronger and building muscle.

And these results motivated me to commit to working-out for the rest of the year – sort of like completing steps 4 and 5 in the discipleship process.

Now, maybe you've experienced something similar results from working out or regular exercise.

Now let's pause here for a moment to see how experiencing this creational truth from exercising can help reveal a scriptural truth from 1 Timothy 4:7-9

Paul writes *“Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, 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. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.”*

And right away we notice that to understand Paul's instruction on training oneself to be godly depends on the reader having some experience with what it means to do physical training.

Additionally our understanding of the benefits of being godly - depends on our ability to understand the benefits which physical training has for us.

So - If you have actually experienced the truth of how physical benefits come from the effort and commitment and endurance that working out requires – then you really get, you really understand, the truth of what Paul is trying to communicate to us about godliness in this passage.

And there is a parallel progression, a cross over of understanding between the experience of working out and its benefits, and what we experience when we start training for godliness, that growth and depth in faith that we experience as we mature in discipleship – which is why I'm calling it “cross-training.”

So when you first start to read your bible, pray, attend worship, and become involved in a ministry on a regular basis you are going to experience some real growth as a disciple.

Your faith is going to become stronger, you'll find that you are more enthusiastic, life seems to be better, you feel closer to God, you understand more about of the mysteries of the faith – and all of this motivates you to want to continue with growing as a disciple.

We'll call this initial discipleship growth in "Type A growth" and most of us here have experienced, or are experiencing this type of growth as disciples - or we wouldn't be here.

But on the off-chance that you haven't experienced this initial "type A" growth in the discipleship process yet – let me motivate you to start building that Type A growth into your life this morning.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

"But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames."

So - if you have completed steps 4-5, but have not yet seriously started to work at maturing as a disciple, on the foundation of Jesus in your life – don't wait any further, get started this year with your type A growth and start investing in your reward in the new heaven and earth.

And friends this verse should also motivate us to not get comfortable and settle for only "Type A" initial growth, but to push on for "Type B growth" which leads to a deeper maturity.

As Hebrews 6:1 puts it *“Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God...”*

So let me take you back to the gym three years after I had started working out and I had settled into a workout rut.

I was still doing the same exercises that I started with – but I was used to them – so they weren’t very effective anymore, plus I had developed some bad habits with my form.

But I was comfortable and familiar with my routine and it was making me feel like I was doing something good for my health.

But I wasn’t seeing any more real growth or weight loss, and the truth was my routine wasn’t good for my health.

My right knee began to feel stiff and sore and I developed a pinched nerve in my lower neck.

And isn’t that often the way it can go with our training in discipleship as well friends? The years go by and the initial things that helped us grow as disciples, bible reading, prayer and worship attendance, become routine and a rut.

And we expect that what helped us experience our initial growth as disciples is somehow going to continue to make us grow – but the fact is we’re only growing familiar with it and it’s not producing any further discipleship growth in our lives.

But brothers and sisters in Christ – that’s not what Christ wants for His Body. He wants His Body to continue to experience real maturing growth – after our initial growth.

Now the truth is friends, that maturity as disciples only comes through awkward, uncomfortable, difficult – even painful experiences. That is Type B discipleship growth.

That’s why Hebrews 12:11-12 says *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it*

produces a harvest of righteousness and peace [maturity] for those who have been trained by it.”

So back to the gym again.

Eventually my injuries forced me to realize that I needed help to recover from them, and help to starting working out in such a way that I would get out of my rut.

So I signed up for personal trainer at the gym and through that experience God provided healing for my injuries... and getting out of my workout rut taught me a great deal about what Type B growth towards maturity requires of us.

So the first thing that I had to learn was this.

Be willing to admit that even though you’ve been doing something for a while – if you’re not an expert, you need to learn new things, and you probably have to unlearn some bad habits and relearn some proper ones.

So even though I had been working out for a few years and had even experienced some previous results I had to swallow my pride and admit I had developed some bad habits.

I had to unlearn lifting by always using my shoulder muscles and relearn how to lift by correctly engaging other muscles.

And I needed someone else’s expertise to point this out to me, and keep pointing it out to me until I got into the correct habit myself.

So brothers and sisters in Christ, in order for us to get out of a discipleship rut and move on to maturity through type B growth, we must swallow our pride and admit that even though we may have been training as Christians for many many many years...

We have probably picked up a few incorrect habits in our disciplines along the way that we need to unlearn, and we probably need to re-learn, or at least be reminded of some of

the basic aspects of reading scriptures, prayer, worship and service.

As Proverbs 15:32 says *“Those who disregard discipline despise themselves, but the one who heeds correction gains understanding.”* Amen?

Now the second thing I learned through my personal training time was accepting that feeling awkward, inadequate, and uncomfortable are a normal part of the package and you have to be able to work through feeling this way.

Prior to my personal training time I was actually lifting some impressive levels of weight – albeit incorrectly... but now that I was lifting correctly my I couldn't lift nearly as much as I had before – that was embarrassing, I felt like a wimp.

And lifting using the new and correct techniques felt awkward and uncomfortable – and I wasn't good at it at all, it was difficult and hard to learn these new techniques.

My trainer would show me what I was supposed to do, and I would maybe get it half right – and even to this day there are still muscle groups I really struggle to identify and use.

But this was all par for the course – if I stuck with what felt comfortable and what I was used to I wouldn't really be addressing the issues that I needed to work on right?

So brothers and sisters in Christ, in order for us to move on to maturity as disciples through type B growth we need to accept that it will involve feeling uncomfortable, awkward, inadequate and that it is hard and difficult.

And friends these feelings are not indicators that something is wrong- but that in fact, we are on the right path for maturing in discipleship.

Jesus said *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”* (Mat 16:24) so this is another reason step 6 is called a commitment to Cross-train.

Now the devil wants to prevent us from becoming mature Christians so he lies to us – and says that growing in godliness should feel good all the time, that it should leave us feeling inspired and good about ourselves, and if it doesn't then we should continue to subject ourselves to it.

But we know that in enduring hardship in physical training is simply about doing what is difficult and it leads to good rewards...

It's not about being a masochist and deliberately avoiding fun and joy as the enemy would have us believe - so we need to take that truth from God, revealed in creation, and live by it when it comes to training ourselves in godliness.

That's Hebrews 12:11 again right? *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*

Now the third thing I learned through my personal training time was that it's important to pay attention to any pain and talk about it, because there is something you can do about it.

When you are training and lifting weights and exercising there is the very real possibility of injuring yourself – even when you are lifting properly and under supervision.

And this is another reason to learn to get used to feeling awkward and unpleasant - because then you can easily distinguish between feeling uncomfortable or real pain.

So when I felt real pain I would tell my trainer and to my amazement he was always able to diagnose why I felt pain and tell me what I could do about it.

Usually I would stretch out specific muscles right then and there and the pain was gone and I could back to working out.

Occasional it was a strain and so he just changed up the exercise and gave that muscle time off to recover, with more stretching exercises to do at home to help it heal.

So I learned it was important to pay attention to the pain and talk about it - because there was always something that could be done about - most times rather easily.

So brothers and sisters in Christ, in order for us to move on to discipleship maturity through type B growth, it is critical for us to pay attention to and identify the pain as well.

We need to be able to distinguish when we are merely feeling uncomfortable from when we feel real pain.

But real pain is not an excuse to stop the training – in fact identifying pain is how we zone in on what needs some more work on in us in order to truly mature as disciples.

Type B growth isn't about getting better at covering up our character flaws or hurts and so on - so that we look better in

front of everyone else... it exposes them to us - so we can talk about them with those who are helping to disciple us; our minister, Christ Care group leader, our fellow Christians....

Because something can be done to address what

That pain we feel is identifying something in us that we need to go and receive prayer ministry for, so that the Holy Spirit can work on it and reveal what is needed to bring healing to it.

Remember friends our Lord Jesus said *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."* (Matt 9:12) and James 5:16 says *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."* Amen?

So – brothers and sisters, if you are stuck in a discipleship rut... if you need to help someone get out of a discipleship rut – then its time to engage in Step 7 and Commit to Crosstraining.

Now we have a really helpful tool that we use here at Valleyview called "the 3 Colors of Spirituality" and if you are

being challenged to get out of a rut this morning and want to do something about it- come and speak to me... and I can get you set up with this resource that can be a great help to you.

And sometimes, God just decides he's going to let us go through some hardships in life that will bring us into a deeper more mature stage of discipleship.

Hebrews 12:7-8 says *"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all."*

So if you are experiencing that right now, I encourage you to come and speak with me as well.. so that we can support you and encourage you as God Himself is supervising your Type B Cross-training plan.

Because brothers and sisters, it is part of how we go from being un-disciplined... or undisciplined to becoming disciplined

and disciplined so that we may *"live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God..."*

Amen.