

Prayer and Worship
Hebrews 10:19-25, James 5:13-18

Friends, there aren't many stories as inspiring as the ones about a long shot race horse.

In fact if my movie memory serves me correctly - most of the great race horses, like Secretariat, Phar Lap, Seabiscuit were all long shots... which means that their owners were initially skeptical as to whether or not they would amount to anything on the race track because they didn't appear to have all the right stuff, and so their owners were hesitant to invest the training they needed in order to race.

But then, some trainer sees the horse and looks past the outward appearances and perceives that in spite of a difficult temperament or some physical disadvantage, that particular horse actually has the heart of a champion in them.

Deep down the horse really loves to run, and compete, and win – he just needs some training to make it happen.

And so the trainer convinces the owner to give them the horse so they can train him, find the right jockey to ride him, give him all the right sort of feeding and care so that he can reach his potential and become a champion race horse!

And in the end; that is exactly what happens – all the training pays off and the horse goes on to win all sorts of races and become a legend.

So why am I talking about legendary race horses this morning friends? Well because they are a good illustration of how the right kind of training and discipline can help unleash the heart of a champion and make someone into a champion.

I could just as easily use Rocky Balboa, the boxer, as an example as well. He's a little guy, who at first glance doesn't seem to have the size or the weight to be a prize winning boxer – but the guy has heart.

He gutsy, tenacious, he doesn't give up – he wants to win!

So, in spite of the odds stacked against him, Rocky Balboa disciplines himself and he trains to fight. And again, the combination of heart and training leads to victory!

If Rocky had the heart but no training, he wouldn't have a chance... and if he had all the training but no heart – well, he wouldn't have been able to keep going in the face of such formidable opposition – and he would have given up.

A Champion needs to have the heart and they need to have the training!

So to – in order to fulfill the mission which our Lord gave us - *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you”* - we need to have both the heart and the training.

Without the training – well, we are just a bunch of well intentioned “mission-aries” and without the heart – our

training is not enough to keep us going in the face of opposition and criticism and disappointment.

So – this past month we've focused on developing the heart of discipleship – the Five Solas, by Grace Alone, by Faith Alone, by Scripture Alone, by Christ Alone, to God's glory alone...

And from the feedback I got from you as we looked at what the Five Solas meant – I'm pretty sure that they sum up the heartbeat of our faith here at Valleyview – Amen?

So – we've got Heart! Now – we need to engage in some training, some discipline so that we have practical, hands on, rubber hits the road sorts of ways to live out our heart of discipleship.

The Apostle Paul encouraged Pastor Timothy to do exactly this, in 1 Timothy 4: 7-10 he writes; *“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.*

Friends our mission is to make disciples – to pass on the heart of discipleship to those people who live in this community around us – and we must train ourselves to be godly in order to do this.

So – just as any professional athlete trains by turning their daily activities of eating, sleeping, being active and staying flexible into a disciplined routine, we too must turn our usual Christian activities of prayer and worship, serving and giving, reading and studying, and encouraging and being held accountable - into a disciplined routine to train ourselves and help others to become Godly.

Because as Paul says - *Godliness has value for this life and the life to come!* Amen? Amen!

Now friends, this is where the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

Because we might be all fired up and ready to go and motivated to get into a disciplined routine to grow in

Godliness and we're thinking – "I'm going to be out at church every Sunday, and I'm going to start spending more time in prayer – yes... I'm going to be disciplined about it!"

But have you ever noticed that the minute we try to turn something into a consistent disciplined routine – we suddenly come across all sorts of things that seem to conspire against our intentions.

As soon as we determine that Sunday mornings mean we're going to make it a priority to be out at church gathering with our fellow Christians for worship... suddenly there's all sorts of other things popping up on the week-end to challenge that!

The moment we're determined that we're going to start our day off by spending some time bringing all our cares and concerns and needs for ourselves and our family and our community to God in prayer... wouldn't you know it, we start having trouble waking up on time, and feeling alert in the mornings...

And this isn't just because the devil, the enemy, is working to oppose us – a large part of it is because we've become used to fitting these sorts of things into our schedule when we have leftover time...

We put our regular schedule and routine together and then we fit in the worship and prayer when there's some space for it...

But Friends – training to become Godly means that things like worship and prayer, giving and serving, studying and reading, and encouraging and being accountable become the main building blocks for our routines and we adjust the rest of what we do to fit in around these...

That's a pretty radical shift isn't it! But it's an extremely important one, because over time... what we spend our time on communicates volumes to those we are discipling.

And this morning we just promised to help two young boys grow as disciples of Jesus Christ – and friends over that time

that they spend here at Valleyview with us, they will see what we spend our time on.

When they are here they will notice who else is here...or not here – and it trains their thinking about what is important.

Friends our children and youth observe us and our routines – and if we are routinely allowing other things to become a priority on Sunday mornings so that we miss worship, so that our children miss worship...

We are unintentionally passing on that its ok to fit God into our lives wherever and whenever He might fit – and that He doesn't need to be at the center and or take priority over other things.

I know that not's what we intend - but if aren't disciplined about how we live out the heart of discipleship – unfortunately that's what we communicate.

So, that's why we are focusing this month on how we can change our routines and schedules in order to intentionally train for Godliness, but as we emphasize the importance of doing this I don't want you to misunderstand what we are trying to do.

I'm not calling for us to do this legalistically or rigidly or perfunctorily.

I don't want you to think that we do this because we are trying to earn God's love – that's not Sola Gratia right...

And I don't want you to believe that discipline connects us to Jesus – that's not Sola Fide...

Why are we doing this? Well, let's go to Romans 12:1-2 and see what Paul has to say to the early Christians in Rome as he also urges them to make worship a central part of their daily routines and activities...

What's the reason why they ought to do this? Because of God's mercy... not to earn God's favor; not to trust in their own abilities – but because of God's mercy.

So to with us friends- we work to become disciplined because of God's mercy as we have seen shape our heart in the Five Solas.

We to should obey the Word of God in Romans 12:1-2 as it speaks to us and urges us *"to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is our reasonable act of worship"*

And what better way to get started on obeying this than by committing ourselves to make sure that *"our bodies"* are regularly attending Sunday worship and are involved in regular times of prayer...

And as we do this we make sure that our bodies are *"living sacrifices"* as well. We don't want to be perfunctory about this, simply attending, just sitting through the service, doing

our duty – but we’re alive, engaged, participating, responding... Amen?!

And the discipline required is reflected in the fact that we “offer our bodies as living sacrifices.” When we sacrifice something we give up something, it’s no longer ours to do with as we see fit – so it takes discipline to relinquish ourselves to God.

We’ve given ourselves over to God for his use – so now we are set apart – we are holy... and this is pleasing to God – because we are working at centering our lives around Him and focusing them on Him and this is as it should be - this is Godliness.

However we will always be tempted in subtle ways to unsacrifice our lives, take them back for our own use and our sinful nature and the enemy will try to persuade us to give in to that temptation.

For example – you’ve determined to be regular and consistent in attending Sunday worship, and then you look at your

schedule and you see that on the first Sunday of the month you have to be away for work – not much you can do about that...

But then the next Sunday you’ve got company coming to visit you for the week and they are planning on arriving on the Sunday morning and then leaving the following Sunday morning..

So all of a sudden you’re looking at the possibility of only attending worship on one Sunday out of a whole month... and it’s tempting to justify this.

The enemy would want you too. He’ll tell you that these are good reasons, that there’s nothing wrong with company or being out of town for work, besides you’ll be at church more next month...

But the following month something else will come up – and so on and so on...

Friends, we are trying to establish a routine with worship, we are trying to center our schedules around God...not work God in around our schedules – right?!

So, we need to be disciplined and make the sacrifice and say I'm going to have to ask my company to come after 12noon when I get home from worship and we'll figure out something for them the following Sunday...

Maybe they can come to church with me, or I'll let them sleep in late and we'll go for brunch afterwards – but I'm not going to let this mess up my worship routine!

Because friends, the more we get used to doing this for something like Sunday morning – being disciplined to say no to other things so that we can say yes to worship – it starts to get easier and easier to be disciplined in everything else that “our bodies” are involved in outside of Sunday worship – and live in such in way as to be in accordance with God's good, and pleasing and perfect will.

And we need a lot of discipline for that, because we're talking about living in accordance with God's will for everything we do; like our relationships and our sexuality, our finances and our shopping habits, what we watch and listen to on TV and the internet, how we play sports and how we do our jobs and what jobs we do, even mowing our lawns and drinking beer afterwards... everything!

And we know this is what Paul is hinting at because after saying offer your bodies as living sacrifices... he goes on to say, as we read from the NIV version this morning – that this is our true and proper worship.

Which is good in one sense because we are familiar with the word '*worship*' and we know what that is all about – at least in regards to Sunday mornings... which as I've said, is a good place to start.

But another way to translate what Paul wrote here which goes a bit deeper is “*this is your service to the Word.*”

So what is true and proper worship? It is service to the Word – by which everything was created. Serving the Word by obeying the Word in everything we do. Make sense?

And the more we discipline ourselves to Worship the Word made Flesh on Sundays – the more we are able to exercise the discipline we need to be obedient to the Word in all the other areas of our lives from Monday to Saturday.

So do you see how this is training us for Godliness, how we live out the Heart of being a disciple of Jesus in this way?

And more importantly - are you willing to start thinking about your life in this way?

Because Paul's next instruction is that we are *"not to conform to the pattern of this world any longer but be transformed by the renewing of our mind."*

Now there is a little word play here again. Often times when the bible says *"world"* it being translated from the Greek

"cosmos" which is this beautiful arrangement that God created, but not in this case.

In this case it's the word in the Greek is *"aon"* so we can more accurately say *"do not conform to the pattern of this age, this era any longer..."*

So what is the pattern of this age, the spirit of the times in which we live?

There's a few actually; secular humanism, scientism, technocracy, moralistic therapeutic deism... take your pick – but just don't conform to them any longer.

As those who have offered their bodies as living sacrifices to God, we are not to organize our schedules and lives around the priorities of secular humanism, or make the same assumptions as scientism, or live by the principles and beliefs of moralistic therapeutic deism.

Instead through practicing the discipline of saying “no” to whatever gets in the way of consistently and regularly gathering with the body of Christ and worshiping our Lord – our minds and what we believe start to change and we are transformed.

Pretty soon we have a new mindset – one that is more concerned with figuring out and testing God’s good pleasing and perfect will - and obeying it, and our schedules and routines start to get readjusted to reflect that obedience – and we are living out the heart of discipleship.

So – in looking at Romans 12:1-2 we can see how important it is that we become disciplined in regularly attending Sunday worship – much in the same way that a training routine is essential for an athlete.

But what specific exercises will that athlete perform in their training routine? And what specific things ought we to engage in when we gather together on Sundays that will contribute to the renewing of our minds.

Well, James 5:13-18 has some very simple and practical suggestions for us.

When we are experiencing troubles – we should pray.

When we are experiencing happiness - we should praise.

In other words when we gather together we will always have a reason to be praying or praising or doing both... because life is full of troubles and happiness.

Think back over this past week – what troubles did you have?

What happiness did you have? This morning you have the chance to pray and praise about them!

And perhaps some of your troubles have to do with sickness?

That may be the occasion for you to ask the elders or those who serve in the prayer ministry of the church to specifically pray for your healing and anoint you with oil to assure you of the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

And not only does the Holy Spirit bring physical healing; He also brings spiritual healing.

First, He points out the symptoms which indicate that we've done something wrong, and then identifies what we've done wrong, in order to give us the conviction that it is wrong.

So James 5:16 says *"confess your sins to one another - that you may pray for one another and be healed."*

Friends, if you can't talk about your sins with your fellow Christians who can you do this with? Who else is going to pray for you and assure you that Christ forgives you and encourage you to live in His grace and mercy?

No wonder Hebrews 10:23-25 says *"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing..."*

Because it is when **we** meet together for worship that we perform these very basic, but important, exercises; Prayer, Praise, Prayers of Healing and Confession, and assuring each other of the forgiveness we receive from Christ.

So friends – consider the message this morning as one of the ways in which we might spur each other on to be disciplined to do those good deeds, in love – and train ourselves for Godliness.

Because friends, Godliness has value in this life – and in the life to come – so train as one who has the heart of a disciple, as one who is striving to fulfill our Lord's command and one day hear Him say "Well done good and faithful servant!"

May that be said of us – Amen.