

Time for some Real Growth

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

Well friends, its 2016 and I'm sure that we all have some goals and resolutions that you hope to achieve in this New Year.

Maybe you've resolved to be more thankful, appreciative, positive person...

Or maybe you've resolved to read your bible, pray, and attend worship more regularly this year – maybe even join a Christ Care Group!

Or perhaps after a month of Christmas extravagance, your credit card bill and bathroom scale are forcing you to resolve to trim your budget, pay off debt, start eating healthier and... start working out at the gym.

And it's always interesting to watch the January rush of well-intentioned enthusiastic new gym members flocking to "do whatever it takes" to finally get in shape this year.

You see all these new faces show up in January, and they're walking on the treadmill and stair climbers, working the weight lifting machine and pumping iron, doing all their stretches and warm-ups, in their nice new lulu lemon workout clothes – and you wonder, how many of these people will still be here after Easter?

Because we all know that when it comes to New Year's resolutions - we always start out with good intentions and sky-high enthusiasm, but after a few weeks or a couple months, that enthusiasm fades and life starts to get in the way and our resolutions fall by the way-side, as they do every year.

Now – this wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't for the fact that many of the things we are resolving to do are important things; that we actually need to make progress on.

It is important to be in shape and eat right, our health and longevity and productivity, not to mention the level of burden we will place on our healthcare system, depends on it...

And it is important to reduce and pay off debt, our financial stability in uncertain times requires it – not to mention the moral implications of borrowing money from people and then not paying it back because you’ve gone bankrupt.

And it’s critical that we get to know the scriptures better, and improve our relationship with Christ and His body through times of prayer and worship and fellowship.

And the body of Christ depends on its members serving and fulfilling their functions by using their gifts in ministry positions.

And your own personal character improvements and sense of well-being go a long way towards contributing to the well-being and health of your family and work place.

So it’s no small matter that each year we consistently resolve that we will make improvements in our lives and then have them fall by the wayside with little to no real growth happening in us...

There are a lot of things riding on the potential that we have to make changes, and experience real growth in our lives.

Not the least of which is what the apostle Paul speaks of in Col 1:10 *“that 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...”*

So this morning I want to show you how a little creational wisdom, a.k.a green spirituality, gleaned from what it takes to achieve our goals at the gym can instruct us on how we can achieve our goals for growing in godliness, which in turn contributes to the changes in character that we want to see in ourselves - so let’s go back to the gym.

Now I’ve been going to the gym for about five 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 continue working-out for the rest of the year – you could say I was experiencing the gym revealing God’s Word for exercise to me.

Maybe you’ve experienced something similar results from working out or regular exercise.

Now let’s pause here for a moment to see how this creational truth we’ve experience helps reveal a scriptural truth, this is that co-illuminate we learned about back in October with regards to God’s “two books.”

So we read in 1 Timothy 4:7-9 *“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 benefit which being godly holds - depends on our ability to understand the benefit 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 between the experience of starting to work out and its benefits, and what we experience when we start training for godliness.

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 in godliness.

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 understanding more of the mysteries of the faith – and all of this motivates you to want to continue with what you started.

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

But on the off-chance that you haven't experienced this initial "type A" growth in your life as a Christian 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 believe, but have not yet seriously started to build godliness 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 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 doing the same exercises so they weren’t 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 real growth or weight loss, and the truth was my routine wasn’t good for my health.

Last spring my right knee began to feel stiff and sore, and in late summer I developed a pinched nerve in my lower neck.

And isn’t that often the way it can go with our training for godliness as well friends? The years go by and we slip into a training rut of bible reading, prayer and worship attendance.

And we expect that what helped us experience our initial growth is somehow going to continue to make us grow when in fact we’re just growing familiar with it and it’s not producing any further transformation or 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.

But the truth is friends that maturity only comes through awkward, uncomfortable, difficult – even painful experiences. 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.

By this time last year my injuries forced me to realize that I needed help in order to recover from them, and to starting working out in such a way that I would see results again.

So I signed up for personal training with a good trainer and through that experience over this past year God has both provided healing for my injuries... and 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 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 through type B growth we need to accept that it will involve feeling uncomfortable, awkward, inadequate and that it is hard and difficult.

Friends these feelings are not indicators that something is wrong- but that in fact, we are on the right path As Vinh often likes to say to me “enjoy your suffering!”

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 when you're feeling uncomfortable versus when you're feeling 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 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 in training for godliness identify pain is how we zone in on what needs some more work on in us.

Type B growth isn't about getting better at covering up our character flaws – it exposes them to us - so we can talk about them with our minister, Christ Care group leader, our fellow Christians - because something can be done about them.

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) Amen?

Now – I'm sure you all agree in theory with what Type B growth requires us to undergo...

But do you agree in experience – that's a whole different question because when we are experiencing this we often don't realize this is what is happening to us.

So in order to help bring home what we've reflected on this morning – and to help prepare us to encounter some real growth in this coming year, and not just stay in a godliness training rut...

This morning I'd like to open up for a time of debriefing on how your experience of the TALK Show may have either pushed us to unlearn or relearn basic truths about the Christian faith...

Or how it made us feel awkward, uncomfortable because it was difficult and hard for us to see God's Word in creation as opposed to in the scriptures.

Or if the experience caused us some pain and if you're brave enough to share what you think that might reveal about what Christ wants to work on in your life.