

## **PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT**

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Series: ReFocus  
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Discipleship, Vision,  
Matthew 7:24-27

So if you weren't here last weekend, let me catch you up. We talked more about transformation; entering into the life of the Kingdom of God. And I tried to make us see that it takes our participation in God to get there. Without God, we can do nothing, without us he won't. That is just the mystery of God's love.

So we need to intentionally partner with God in 3 areas: the stories we have believed or the narratives we live by, our habits, and relationships. Because over time through our experiences these are the things that form us. So we partner with God to replace these things.

In the place of the stories, we have believed we put proper teachings. Teachings of the Kingdom of God. That is why Jesus was keen to teach and teach with God's authority.

This is also why Jesus warns those who are teachers to be careful. Good teachings give you a vision of life, not just new interesting ideas. Jesus called his vision of life, the Kingdom of God.

In place of our habits, we replace them with the practices of Jesus; what is sometimes called spiritual disciplines. The point being our habits shape our loves and our desires. And then we want to do them more. What we do habitually does something to us in return.

So in place of those destructive habits or even some neutral ones that are just not wise for you, we look at Jesus and see what practices he had to keep being with the father. It is these practices that bear the fruits we see in Jesus that we too want and need in our lives.

These practices also help us learn how to access the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then being aware that our relationships are so powerful in our formation, we then have to intentionally see that we are in a community that helps us journey into what Jesus is forming us into.

Transformation never happens in isolation. You need a community that will love you, encourage you, confront you and celebrate you and with you. Be in an intentional community just like Jesus himself was.

Then I want us to note that all the transformation we see and will see is really the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

God does all the heavy lifting. So as we partner with him, over time through the power of the Holy Spirit, we begin to see the transformation.

Now I want us to go back a bit to the parable of Jesus we read last week because we are picking up from there.

***He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they, not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.***

Luke 6:39-40

Because the invitation is to apprentice under Jesus and be his disciples I am inviting each of you to orient your lives around being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus and doing what Jesus did. This is the work of a disciple or student.

Jesus here notes that discipleship is about training. I want us to see our lives as believers in this light too: It is about training.

If you enter a school of trade and you do not train, you will just be a registered student who never gets formed. If you drop out before your training is complete you will be a half-formed person in that trade. Which makes you dangerous in some fields like medicine and electricity for example. If you finish your training, you become what you have been training for not different. If you finish medical training school you become a medical practitioner, not an electrician.

So if you train under the world you become just like the world. If you train under rabbi Jesus, if you finish your training you become like Jesus. And that is the transformation God is inviting us to.

I want us to also be aware of what choice we have in the matter. You are being formed into something. The only choice you get is who. And not choosing anything is a choice to be

formed into our culture. It is the product of unintentional formation. Formation is a human thing.

Sadly, we never see the tragedy of unintentional formation or formation under the wrong rabbis in the world until it's too late; Until people hit rock bottom. Until marriages break one after the other. Until relationships are super toxic. Until the cost of your addiction is weighing down even on your health.

We often do not realize what we have been formed into until we hit rock bottom. Or put differently, by the time you realize you are lost you are way down the wrong path.

So Jesus is saying, "Do not wait to fall into a pit to realize your rabbi was blind, instead choose one that knows the way and can see. Choose to intentionally train under him".

Because you do have a choice in that.

And that word training definitely implies practice. Training of any kind involves practising hard. And that is what we will talk about today a bit.

Let's pray.

I wanna start with the good news. The good news is that God has done the heavy lifting. That your transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit and he is committed to it. Everywhere he starts good work he is faithful to complete it. The father looks at you and sees who you are in Jesus, already a new creation. That's the good news.

Now the invitation then is to train yourself into this life. You do not become a fully-formed disciple by trying really hard but by training really hard.

We are talking about 3 things. Being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus and doing what Jesus Did. You do not do these things by trying really hard but by training really hard.

Being with Jesus is about intentionally carving out space and time to be in God's presence. Jesus would spend a lot of time in his father's presence by such things as; prayer, fasting, silence and solitude, worship, sabbath, reading scripture.

These practices are not an end to themselves. Neither are they a measure of how good a disciple you are. Rather, they are aimed at carving out time and space to spend time with Jesus, teaching us to abide in him.

And guess what, these practices take practice. You remember the disciples saying "teach us how to pray"? Why do they need to be taught? Because they need to start doing it as Jesus does it and it will take being taught and then practice.

If prayer is not enjoyable or is a lot of work for you, keep practising. Because soon you will start enjoying just being with the father.

To become like Jesus is to see his character formed in us. It is to see the same fruits he bore, borne in us. It is to see the life of Jesus. You see the life of Jesus in how he was emotionally mature and non-anxious. He was gentle, patient, full of joy, faithful and full of self-control. Jesus had compassion and was generous. We see these things in Jesus' life and we want them in our lives or at least we want to see our children grow up with them

But the life of Jesus is borne out of his lifestyle. And that takes practising things that produce the life of Jesus.

Well, it will take practice. It takes the practice of dealing with our past. To find things that may need healing or gems that we may have forgotten. Intentionally practice the things that help us journey into our identity and calling. We must practice forgiving and receiving forgiveness, being in a community, simple living as opposed to the greed of our culture, learning to properly embrace grief and loss. These and other things are the same practices we see in Jesus life and ministry that could produce the same life we see in Jesus that we want.

This takes practice. A doing over and over and over again for us to see the fruits borne in us. This is the training.

Then of course doing what Jesus Did. We must declare and demonstrate the good news of the Kingdom of God. Another way to say this: we must talk about the good news of the Kingdom and then do the good works of the Kingdom.

So what did Jesus do?

1. Proclaimed the good news, teaching and preaching
2. Good news to the poor has to be
3. Healed the sick - the blind, lame and skin sickness etc
4. Freedom to prisoners - forgiveness of sin
5. Setting the oppressed free - demonic oppression
6. Teaching that God has come to his people
7. He ate and drank especially with the lost
8. Works of Justice

This is what Jesus did and this is what he trained his disciples to do. These things were a sign that the Kingdom of God was breaking through. As part of their training, they were expected to do these things. At some point, he sent out his disciples to do these things in the streets and the villages. Almost like an assessment exam. And guess what, as part of our training, we are expected to do these things.

And it was a key last instruction.

Look at it here when Jesus was being taken up before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit

*He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name, they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues;*

**Mark 16:15-16**

But these things aren't things we know how to do or often have the confidence to. We have to practice them. I love how Joy talked about them. We have been given the authority to do them and now we must practice.

Doing it over and over again does not mean we learn to make it happen. We become more confident. We learn better to hear what God is doing and trust me we begin to see it more and more. Practice.

You see practice is about doing in small bits what you cannot do now so that in time you will be able. All the things Jesus has called us to be can often seem heavy and for some outright impossible but practice is what gets us there.

You do not become all the things God has called you to be by trying really hard. You just cannot. But you practice and over time you can do it.

For example, you want to like Jesus to be a non-anxious presence: In this troubled world, you would want to be the presence that calms things. You can separate your emotions from that of others and just bring peace into your engagements in the day.

You do not become a non-anxious presence by trying really hard in those moments of anxiety, which are like every moment of our culture. But you can practice being a non-anxious presence and over time this is the fruit that will be borne in you.

If you are praying for joy, you do not get there by trying really hard to be a joyful person in very trying situations. But you can practice gratitude and over time, see joy borne in your life despite the circumstances.

I think often of Jesus' famous sermon called the sermon on the mount. And this is one great picture of the vision of life Jesus offers that is so different from that of the world. He calls the poor blessed. He calls the meek happy. He calls the peacemakers blessed.

You do not wake up one morning and you are a peacemaker. Even as God has made his children that, we must practice the way of peace over and over again as we are presented with different conflicts in our lives. Then over time, we will be formed into this. We will look back with others and say, surely we have become peacemakers.

If there is a conflict in my life, maybe in the family or at work, I do not become a peacemaker by trying really hard but it is through practice. If I pray and it happens that I bring peace (which really is where I should start) and it happens, this is called a miracle. The reason we have the word miracle is that they do not happen every moment.

Michael Jordan, the greatest basketball player of all time, no? Anyway, he started out and was being rejected for his height. When he started out, Michael could not do any of the things he is known for today and because of his height, he had to work extra hard. He does not get to be good by trying really hard but by practising really hard. Same to the things of faith.

Cristiano Ronaldo, the most sensational football player, no? And for all the Americans I mean like proper football, the one you actually play with your feet. He always felt there was something special about him as a football player he had talent from a young age. He always wanted to be and always knew he would be an amazing professional athlete. Still, he had to practice, really hard too.

You do not win 32 major trophies by trying really hard, but by practising really hard and then when the tournaments come you find that you can do it.

Our very own GOAT. Eliud Kipchoge. At one time it was believed that no human being could run a full marathon in under 2 minutes. If you ask Eliud, you do not do that kind of marathon by trying really hard but by practising really hard.

Of course, you need good shoes from Nike and very good capable pace setters. Yet the point is the same, even the best marathoner in the world needs a ton of practice throughout many months just to run under 2 minutes. And I like that the Eliud example also demonstrates that you do not do extraordinary things alone. You need your community.

Okay, not holy enough? I alluded to the story of my friend whose grandma was such a prayerful woman. One day he was outside her house as she prayed and he got scared by a praying mantis, not that it is significant. He let out a loud scream, and she kept on praying. Later came out to ask what was happening. Nothing could get her off her knees.

But she did not become a prayerful woman right after accepting to follow Jesus. It took her time and practice. Over and over again and then in her old age, her grandkids could see that she had been transformed and they called her a prayerful woman.

As if finish, let us read a few words of Jesus himself. One of those will be his finishing of the sermon I talked about earlier, that famous sermon on the mount.

*Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

**Matthew 5:19**

Not too long after that he tells this teaching, he said this

*“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 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. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

***Matthew 7:24-27***

It seems that for Jesus and later the apostles it is never enough to just believe. Practice is an integral part of discipleship and transformation.

A house conveyed the meaning of a person life. Because that is where one is found. So when Jesus is talking about someone building a house, they are hearing him talk about the way someone lives out their life. The way they do their marriage or singleness. The way one lives out any important part of life. Jesus says the one who hears the teaching and then practices.

This is good news. It says that everything God has called us to be we can see in our lives. The invitation is that as we partner with him, we keep practising over and over again. Maybe as Jesus said, be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect, he knew that practice makes perfect.