

Train To Win

Disciplines Continued

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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If you want to get better at anything, you must exhibit humility. This is true if you want to be a better athlete, a better mother, a better friend, even a better pastor, a student, or even a Christ follower. It requires humility because you must first admit that you can be better. You must be willing to listen to the advice and the counsel of somebody else, suggestions that would come from them, and not just listen to them, but actually try to do what they tell you to do.

You must admit that you don't know it all. And that can be a hard thing for some of us to admit. Even the best athletes in the world understand the importance of coaches and trainers and others that will allow them to become better at what they do. I know that I have told you this before, but some athletes will spend upwards of \$1 million a year in order to keep their physical body in shape mentally, to stay in shape and emotionally to do what they need to do to the best of their ability.

Again, they understand the importance of allowing others to speak truth into their lives, to give them motivation and accountability. Every single one of us here can benefit from continued growth. We can all benefit from humbly listening to the wisdom of other people that God brings into our lives. We all should be able to humbly admit to one another that we don't have it all figured out.

We don't have all the answers. Over the last few weeks, we have been looking at this list of spiritual disciplines or habits or whatever name you want to put on them, that their goal is to help us take our next step toward Jesus. We all would hopefully admit every single person in here watching online, listening on the radio, there is every person in here saying we could do more in our relationship with Jesus.

We have a lot to learn, myself included. Thus far, we have discussed all four of the inward disciplines: prayer, meditation, fasting, and study. Last week, we started to get into the outward disciplines. We talked about simplicity, and then this idea of solitude and silence. And just so you know, if you are here today, on the back of your bulletin, I have all 12 of these listed out.

I saw some of you taking your phones out last week taking pictures, all right? So I put them in the bulletin for you. And one of the things that I suggested that you do as we go through these series, which we'll wrap up next week, was to give yourself a grade on these disciplines. Just be honest with yourself and say, "Hey, I'm really good at this," and give yourself an A, or say, "You know what? I'm miserable at this." And you give yourself an F and knowing that every single one of us is going to have a different report card on this.

And if anybody puts all A's next to them, I need you to come see me afterwards, all right? Because none of us really are going to have all A's. Now, I did warn you as we continue with these outward disciplines today that of all the spiritual disciplines, these outward disciplines carry with them the greatest risk of bringing up pride or failure.

We should use extreme caution when we talk about these disciplines that when we do evaluate ourselves, we don't use this as a way to puff ourselves up in a way that is unhealthy or self-righteous, nor should we look at

these and tear ourselves down. As a way of introduction, I want to keep reminding you, maybe you're new today or watching or listening for the first time, these disciplines or these habits are not in any way a way for us to earn our salvation.

But instead, these habits, these disciplines are a gift that has been given to us to allow us to take our next step toward Jesus. There is always danger in talking about spiritual disciplines because they can become Pharisaical in the sense that we have a list of all the things we do or don't do. And certainly because these disciplines can be used for manipulation.

And the first one we're going to talk about today has probably been the most abused of all the spiritual disciplines, not just in the church, but in the home as well. And so we are going to proceed with caution. And so I ask that you would join me in prayer before we jump back in. Heavenly Father, we do come before you asking that you would continue to pour your Spirit upon us. Father, that You would prepare our hearts and our minds to hear from You.

We pray that the enemy would be bound in Jesus' name. As we discuss some of these disciplines, some may be tempted to think of themselves more highly than they ought. Others may be tempted to think that they're too far gone. And so, Father, I pray that You would allow us to see Your grace and Your mercy in our lives, that we would be open to hear from You. So we ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Of all the spiritual disciplines that we are going to discuss, none have been more abused than the discipline of submission. This discipline, even before we talk about it, is not intended for one gender or one type of person, the discipline of submission is ideal for every single follower of Christ. You must remember that the goal of all of these disciplines is freedom.

It's about taking that next step towards Christ. And these disciplines give us the ability to lay down struggles and bad habits that we have in our lives. And so this habit of submission, this discipline of submission, gives us the ability to lay down the burden of always needing to get our own way. I didn't think I would hear any amends after I said that, right? I didn't get any in first service either because that's hard.

This discipline of submission, the goal is that we learn we don't have to get our own way. And so this discipline helps us fight one of mankind's greatest struggles, and that's the struggle of selfishness. We all struggle with selfishness. We believe that the world revolves around us, or at least it should. Selfishness then ends up becoming this chain that wraps itself around us and causes incredible bondage in our lives.

It's amazing to me, even in my own personal life, how quickly we revert to childish thinking if we don't get our own way. How instantly we begin playing these stories in our minds. We condemn other people because we don't get our own way. As I was thinking about how quickly we revert to childish ways, I was reminded of the story of the man named Haman in the book of Esther. Some of you may remember this story.

Haman in this story is the second most powerful man on the planet at the time. Second, only the King Xerxes of the Persian Empire. So much so that King Xerxes took off his signet ring and gave it to him and said, "Hey, whatever you want to do, whatever laws you want to make, you conceal it with my ring, and it can't be reversed. He was trusted. He was respected. People looked up to him.

And yet, as we read through this story in the book of Esther, Haman couldn't enjoy his life and all of the blessings that he had because there was one man, a Jewish man named Mordecai, who wouldn't bow before him. Everybody else, according to what we know, shows him respect, but one man won't, and so he can't enjoy life. How selfish and childish can we be? Everybody is doing that. One man doesn't. And so, of course, we know that ends up being his downfall, and God uses that to rescue the Jewish people from his evil plot.

But every single one of us has that inside of us. We can be so selfish, so self-centered that we forget about others. And this idea of submission liberates us from the anger and the bitterness that we can feel when we aren't treated how we think we should be. Again, no more amen, right?

Don't we all have that, that anger, that bitterness when somebody treats us some way and we instantly think to ourselves, "That's not fair, that's not right, how dare they?" All of these words that come into our minds, we forget that our happiness should not be dependent upon getting what we want. That's a struggle. Some of you may be wondering, "Pastor, because of how much this discipline has been abused, especially in marriage relationships throughout the years, are you and I still really called to submission?" The answer is yes.

Because this teaching comes from Jesus. It comes from his countercultural teaching. In Mark chapter 8:34, Jesus says, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Jesus' teaching on submission are difficult because it redefines greatness. It redefines what it means to be a leader.

It redefines what it means to be human. Philippians 2:8, we read that Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Richard Foster states that the cross life of Jesus undermined all social orders based on power and self-interest.

When Jesus defined leadership in what it meant to be observant to a holy, a righteous, a good God, this cross-life of Jesus totally undermined all of social orders that were simply based on power and self-interest. But because this discipline has been so abused in marriage relationships, let me make a quick statement before we move on and then we will get on to our next discipline. Here it is.

If a husband loves his wife, how Christ loves the church, which is what we are all called to do as husbands, if a husband loves his wife, how Christ loves the church, he will live in consideration of her needs. He will be willing to give in to her. He will not dominate the relationship. So I hope you hear that loud and clear. Submission is not meant to be abused in a marriage relationship.

It's not meant to be abused in business. It's not meant to be abused even in the church. We all are to submit to one another and to their needs and their desires. I didn't say it was easy. I just said that's what we're called to do. And it is for our blessing. So let's move on to the next discipline. The final outward discipline we have is the discipline of service, which flows very much from the discipline of submission.

For if the cross of Jesus spurs us onto submission and following his example, then the towel of Jesus leads us to service. What do I mean? We have a story shared multiple times in the Gospels. Each gospel shares the story that on the night Jesus was betrayed, the disciples had gathered together. They followed Jesus to Jerusalem. They're getting ready to celebrate the Passover. They're remembering God's great deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage.

And they meet together in this upper room in Jerusalem, and everything has been prepared for them to celebrate the Passover. And here at this meal, Jesus is going to give them this new command. He's going to give them this new covenant. They all show up. But as they walk into the room, there's one thing that's missing in that room in preparation to celebrate the Passover. Actually, not one thing, one person, a servant.

Usually, when you would go into somebody's home, the lowliest of all the servants would be standing at the door to wash the feet of those that were going in. And so as they walked into this room, one by one, they all begin walking in, and there is nobody there to wash their feet. And so what is going to happen? John tells us in chapter 13, verses 4 and 5 that Jesus got up from the supper, so they all decide to sit down.

We know just from that one line, Jesus got up from supper, and this hadn't happened yet, that not one of them took it upon themselves to say, "Okay, fine. I will wash everybody's feet." Not one of them did that. So Jesus got up from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and he wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he

poured water into a basin, and he began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel that was around him. Jesus served the disciples.

You see, most of us know that we will never be the greatest, but we think to ourselves, "Just don't let me be the least." I know I may not be the greatest God, and that's fine. I know I'm not going to be the greatest husband and father and pastor and whatever else, but please don't make me the least. And yet, here is the example of Jesus in a room of men, individuals, of which he is the greatest by far.

And yet, he takes on the role of a servant and became the least. Jesus said, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant." He led this truth by example in his own life. He redefined leadership. You and I need to remember as we talk about this idea of service that our service is not to be done so that we can be praised by men.

Our service is not to bring praise to us or for people to look at us and say, "Wow, look at how amazing that person is." Instead, our service is to bring glory and praise to God and to free us from pride. More than any other way, I have found this to be true. The grace of humility is worked into our lives through the discipline of service. When you serve other people, the spirit of humility comes over you.

One of the fears that people share with me as we talk about this idea of submission and service is this fear. They say, "But pastor, if I live my life that way in the world in which we live today, people are going to take advantage of me. People are going to take advantage of us. We can't live this lifestyle of submission and service like Jesus did because people are going to take advantage of us. What happens if they do? Well, I want to help you with that fear. You will be taken advantage of. You will.

People are going to step on you. They're going to take you for granted. You shouldn't have a fear of what if that happens, just go into it knowing it's going to happen. Isn't that the very meaning of being a servant? You are submitting yourself. You are serving somebody else. And so really, can you be taken advantage of if you decided to serve somebody else? But again, I fully understand this discipline of service and submission can always be taken advantage of and abused. And so we need to be cautious.

But we are called to live a servant lifestyle that would empty us of our pride. Service isn't necessarily also just a list of things we do. Instead, living this discipline of serving is a way of living. It's the small day-to-day ways that we live our life in our workplace and with our families so that we can love others and serve other people. So what are some practical acts of service?

Because it's not just a list we need to accomplish. How can we live a servant lifestyle in our day-to-day living? Let me give you four examples. First is the service of being courteous. We can serve others by just being kind. Being kind to others. Do you know how crazy it is? How much you stand out in this world if you're just simply kind to other people? Especially in the next six months. If you're just kind to somebody, trust me, people will notice. All right?

It makes a difference. You need to be courteous, meaning maybe you hold the door open for somebody. Maybe you smile at the person that's at the cash register. Maybe it means you don't get angry at the person behind the counter at the fast food restaurant because they don't know what they're doing, right? Be courteous. Be kind. Be gentle. That is one act of service. Another way we can serve others is by listening. In our culture and in our world today, it's very difficult for us to listen.

Now, I'm not saying we can't hear other people. That's not the problem, but actually listening to somebody else. One of the things that always stood out to me when I was a youth pastor, and I would go into the schools, and I would eat lunch with the students back when they allowed you to do that. And I would sit at the table, and one of the students at the table would share some dramatic story about their life. And then the next person would share another dramatic story that had to be a little better than the previous one. And then the next person had to share and top the last story.

And I always would talk to the teens, and I would say, "Can you be the person at the table that just listens to their story?" You don't have to have one that's bigger and better than that's about you. Maybe you could ask them questions about their story. So often in life, we think it's about us. And so we've got to share our story. We've got to share our two cents. What if we actually just listened? What if we just listened and asked questions? I think that's one way we can serve others. The third way we can serve others is by learning to bear one another's burdens, to bear one another's burdens.

We all have stuff we're going through in life. We'll talk about that here in a little bit. We all have struggles. We all have difficulties. What would it look like if we tried to carry each other's burdens? Maybe it does look like providing a meal or going to their house and listening or something like that. But in some ways, I think we can carry each other's burdens if we just will allow ourselves to recognize the person next to me might be having the worst day of their life. They might have just got the worst news they're ever going to hear. How do we carry their burden?

How do we help them and walk with them? Last thing, then we'll move on. What if you and I woke up every day and we asked God to bring us somebody we could serve? Man, that's a dangerous prayer. You know I could see myself praying that and then getting to the end of the day and going, "God, I didn't see anybody. I don't know what happened," right? But what if we actually prayed that and meant it? Like, "God, would you bring somebody into my life I can serve?" And I already know what God's going to do. He's going to bring the last person I want to serve, right?

There might be somebody I look at and go, "I would love to serve them, but then nobody's going to be this person." I'm like, "Really, God? Really? What would it look like if we truly prayed, "God, bring somebody into my life that I can serve today?" So this wraps up the outward discipline, simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. And so as we wrap up today, we're going to jump into what we call our corporate disciplines. These are things that we do collectively. So we're going to talk about the first one today, which is also a heavy one. I apologize. These are three heavy ones today.

These are hard. And then we're going to wrap up next week in the sanctuary with the final three. The first discipline of corporate disciplines that I want to talk about is this idea of confession. Now, for most of us, when we think about confession, whether you grew up Catholic or not, you get this image in your mind of somebody kneeling down before this wooden booth that you know the priest is sitting in. And so you go and you confess your sins anonymously as best you can. And then the priest gives you a list of our fathers and Hail Mary's so that you can be forgiven, right?

This is not the type of confession I'm talking about here. It's not the discipline I'm talking about. Confession is simply put, the idea of sharing your shortcomings or your sins with one another doesn't have to be the priest, all right? James said it in his letter this way, "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other." James 5:16. So let me ask you a question as we talk about this idea of confession. I know it's going to get quiet. I don't want you to raise your hand or anchovies.

This is rhetorical, all right? When is the last time you confessed a sin to someone? Think about it. When's the last time you confessed a sin to someone? If you are past the age of five, you are the average person. It's been quite a while, right? We don't have the habit of doing that. It's difficult. Why? Why is confessing our sins so difficult? Well, let me tell you one thing that I think makes confessing our sins one to another very difficult. It's this idea.

It's our belief that when we gather to church, we come together in Christian believing community. We believe that the church, as we look around at each other today, is a fellowship of saints instead of a fellowship of sinners that have been saved by grace. When we walk into the church and we see everybody that's dressed up and their hair is nice, and it looks like they have life altogether, the last thing we want to do is be the one person that stands out and goes, "Man, I am a mess."

I don't have it figured out." Most of us instead end the argument in the car in the church parking lot, so when we open the door, everybody's like, "Oh, wow, that's a loving family." Right? All of the things that took place the previous week, they disappear and we put on our best face and we come together. And so when we gather, we think, "I don't want to be the person to make everybody feel uncomfortable because my life is messed up. I don't want to be the person that is different from everybody else." We need to begin to recognize that the church is a fellowship of sinners that have been saved by grace.

May I reassure you today that not a single person in here, whether you're watching online, I don't even know you, or listening on the radio, not a single person is perfect and has it all together. You are not alone in your sin. If we continue to hold in our sins and not confess them, we are missing out on one of God's greatest blessings. If we don't practice this discipline of confession, we are bypassing God's plan of healing and forgiveness.

If you missed praise and testimony night last week here in the gym, you really missed out. This was not necessarily a time of confession. It was a time of sharing testimonies. But when you and I share our testimonies, they often sound like, "Man, I made a lot of bad mistakes, and I wasn't very smart, and God still loves me." Isn't that a testimony, right? That's all of our testimonies. That's a form of confession.

It's standing before everybody saying, "God is working in my heart and in my life, not because I have it all together, but because I've messed it up so much." And I submitted to Him. It was a time to share of God's goodness. And so I encourage you today, as you look around, you never know what the person sitting next to you is going through. It may look like they have it all together, but I promise they don't. You may look at the person on the stage and think, "Well, he's got it all together." I don't.

I don't have all the answers. I'm just like you. We all have struggles, and so we need to learn to confess to each other. Now, let me tell you what I am not suggesting. I am not suggesting that everyone call me this week and share their sins. Please don't do that. Please don't do that. I'm not suggesting that we have a service of confession, though that's not an awful idea, where everybody needs to come up to the microphone and on the stage and stand before everybody and reveal their deepest, darkest secrets.

I'm not telling you that's what we have to do. Although I will remind you, as many of you already know, as you study most of the revivals that have happened in our past, they start with confession. So just think about that. Here's what I am suggesting that we do. I'm suggesting that we follow the words of Jesus. In John chapter 20, Jesus appears before His disciples, after His resurrection, and He says, "Receive the Holy Spirit, for if you forgive anyone His sins, they are forgiven.

If you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld." Do we fully comprehend what Jesus is saying to us as His followers there? Do we truly understand how amazing that is that He is giving us the ability to offer forgiveness through the Spirit inside of us to those that would confess to us? It's amazing, but it's also terrifying, isn't it? We should use wisdom in how we practice this. Oftentimes, I will talk with people that are going through a difficult situation.

They'll say, "Pastor, I know that God is with me. I know that Jesus is with me." But sometimes I just need that physical person to give me a hug, to give me that touch of affirmation, to share words with me. I know God is with me, but I just need that person. The same is true in confessing our sins. Of course we can confess them to God. We should confess them to God. But do you know that God has established a system within the church, that you and I are called to confess our sins one to another so that we can receive that forgiveness from somebody else through the Spirit?

That's amazing to me. It's terrifying, but it's amazing. We need to use wisdom with the idea of confession because it is correct to say that every believer can receive the confession of another, but not every Christian believer will have sufficient empathy and understanding. I'm not saying you should share your sins with everybody, all right? It's one of our goals of our life groups. It's one of our goals if you're part of a Sunday school

class that you will find an individual organically through friendship, through relationship, that you can confess sins to.

They are the person you know I can go to and I can confess that and I can receive forgiveness of God through them. So let me give you some best characteristics of choosing a person or finding a person. Again, this is meant to be organically. The last thing you want me to do as the church pastor is to start pairing you up, right? Like, okay, you share your sins with them and you with them, right? This happens organically through natural relationships, so I can't make this happen.

But you want to look for somebody, of course, who is spiritually mature, somebody who's wise, somebody who has compassion, somebody who exhibits good common sense. Certainly, that you would find somebody that has the ability to keep a confidence, they can be trusted. And finally, somebody who has a wholesome sense of humor. Because this is messy. It's difficult. It's hard. You've got to be able to laugh still in life.

Not everyone can receive confession well. That's okay. We've not all been called to do that. Others have been gifted to do so. Find that person in the body of Christ that you can practice this discipline of confession because there is healing that comes. I can't tell you how many people have been in my office and maybe they shared with me or they're sharing the story of how they shared with somebody else this great big secret that they had and that secret went out and they were offered forgiveness and they said, "Pastor, it is like a ton of bricks were taken off my shoulders." This is a gift that God has given to us so that we can grow closer to Him and experience freedom.

We're going to wrap up. I know that these three disciplines were pretty heavy this week. I get that. You're thinking, I'm not going to do any of these three pastors. These are tough. I get it. They're hard. Submission, service, confession. These are difficult. I know that if you're like me, there's times as you go through these 12 disciplines, you feel like you're trying to drink from a fire hose, right? It's difficult to take it all in. And so let me encourage you. Take a deep breath. Give yourself a moment to take it all in. Don't feel panicked. Don't feel overwhelmed. Remember, we're going to have 12 total.

We've done nine. I'm going to do the final three next week. It's going to be a process in your life. It's going to take time. You're not going to get an A for every single discipline. That's okay. You're working towards that. But as you spend time with the Lord, ask him which one he wants you to focus on. Now, it's a dangerous prayer because he might say it's submission, service, or confession. It might be one of these difficult three. But say, "God, of these 12, what do I need to work on to grow in my relationship with you?" And then pick that one and work through it.

It will take time. It's okay. We're all at different spots. We'll have people up here. There's always a prayer team up here. I know it's kind of weird in the gym to have that. But if you feel the Lord calling you today, there's some confession you need to do. You just want prayer for something or whatever else, they'll be up here to pray with you. Just encourage you to do that. And know that we have chosen people that exhibit these characteristics, all right? We've specifically chosen people that have good common sense, spiritually mature, wise, have compassion, ability to keep confidence.

And I think most of them have a wholesome sense of humor. So I encourage you to come see them. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we come before you. And these are difficult topics to address. Father, I certainly do not stand up here as somebody that has it all figured out, knows all the answers, and gets a perfect A's on my scorecard. But yet you choose to speak these truths to all of us.

And so I pray that you would reveal to us those areas, maybe those weak points in our lives that we can grow in our understanding of who you are and our relationship with you, that we can take our next step towards you. Father, I certainly pray that as we talk about these spiritual disciplines and we do our best to incorporate them

in our lives, that this does not create some kind of hierarchical pecking order of who is the most spiritually mature and who's not.

That is not the point. But that we would fall more in love with you today than we were yesterday and that you would receive our praise and our worship. So it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.