

SERMON NOTES

Sunday, March 2, 2024

Rhythms: Spiritual Training for Everyday Life

Secrecy

Train yourself to be godly. "Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come." 1 Timothy 4:7-8 (NLT)

There is a three step pattern to follow to be transformed into Christlikeness: vision, intention and means.

1. Vision: the vision, no matter how hazy, that life in the kingdom of God - where God's will is done - is possible and we are invited to participate in kingdom life.
2. Intention: the decision to pursue the kingdom of God, trusting that Jesus is who he said he is and he will do what he said he will do.
3. Means: the resources available that enable us to be transformed in our inner being from a lost soul to the character of Jesus.

Training is putting into action the vision and intention to be transformed to the likeness of Jesus through the means available to us. There are two types of training to consider that develop spiritual muscle: engagement and abstinence. Engagement involves adding some activity or exercise into your life to develop spiritual muscle. Abstinence is eliminating some activity or exercise for the same purpose.

Secrecy is a discipline of abstinence - a person gives up something in order to build muscle in a certain area.

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

"Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. *Give your gifts in private*, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. "When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is



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all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you..."And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

Jesus is giving a call to authenticity and teaches about consequences. Human praise and heavenly reward are mutually exclusive - you can't have both. Human praise is fleeting and dissolves like early morning fog in the warmth of the sun. Rewards from the Father are long lasting, life giving and sustaining. His rewards change us from a lost soul to a soul that is holy and whole.

"¹⁹How great is the goodness you have stored up for those who fear you. You lavish it on those who come to you for protection, blessing them before the watching world. ²⁰You hide them in the shelter of your presence, safe from those who conspire against them. You shelter them in your presence, far from accusing tongues." Psalm 31:19-20 NLT

Daily Practices of secrecy - try one or more of the following ideas and don't tell anyone what you are doing:

- Pray for someone anonymously (it would really be powerful if this person was someone you struggle with. Perhaps someone with whom you feel a great deal of competition.)
- Spend 10 minutes a day "wasting time" with God
- Make a large contribution (time, money, goods, intellectual donation)
- Send a sacrificial gift
- Memorize a scripture that addresses a core need, value or struggle
- Perform a random act of kindness
- If you have a need in your life, don't tell anyone; just pray about it
- Resign from impression management - cut out the qualifiers and just say it like it is.
- Set a guard in your mind - take captive any thoughts that cause you to compare yourself with another or question your value as a person. Consider the four step pattern we learned in our Soundtrack series: Recognize (the negative thought),



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Refute (argue against the lies), Replace (with truth), Repeat (until the thought becomes automatic)

- Pull away from the noise of your surroundings and ask Jesus what he thinks about your particular situation

Thomas a` Kempis says: (Bev's paraphrase) we aren't holier because we are praised and we aren't more vile because we are blamed or criticized. We are what we are and God knows what that is and no one can make us greater or smaller. It is good for a man to do well and think of himself with humility. To live without the need to be comforted by another is a sign of being holy and whole. To live free from outward praise is to be wholly turned to God.

Questions for thought and discussion:

1. How would you rate yourself when it comes to the spiritual practice of secrecy?
2. How does our culture use secrecy to their advantage? Is that the type of secrecy Jesus is talking about in Matthew 6?
3. Jesus says in Matthew 6 that human praise and heavenly reward are mutually exclusive. What does that mean to you? How have you longed for or sought after human praise? Was the reward worth it?
4. Considering heavenly reward and human praise - which one is more immediate? Which one has a longer lasting effect?
5. Review the list of spiritual practices related to secrecy. Which ones stand out to you as areas where you may need practice?
- 6.

