

**The Basics of Basic Training**  
**Col 1:6-14**

Brothers and sisters, if you've spent time around children, you know how they love to role play what they want to be when they grow up. Maybe they saw some firefighters in their truck on the way to put out a fire... maybe they heard people talking about how important doctors and nurses are... maybe they got to interact with the police at a community event...?

However it occurs, impressionable young kids see adults doing jobs that look brave, exciting, important, attractive and they express this admiration through role playing at being a doctor, a nurse, a fireman, a policeman, and so on... and you can buy them little play sets with a vest or a helmet or a stethoscope and they can really get into their role playing – it's pretty cute.

And its good that kids like to role play like this, it's a healthy part of development and it allows us as parents to begin to see how our kids are wired and what interests them, and as we see some consistency in their interests, we can encourage that as part of their creational calling.

However, it would be quite ridiculous to encourage a child to go and be a firefighter without getting the requisite training. Or to tell a teenage who wants to be a police officer; *“you don't need to go to police academy, you can simply go out and start enforcing the law and catch criminals and arrest them.”*

Its fine for kids to pretend and role play these professions when they are little, but when they grow up and want to be a firefighter or a policeman or a doctor, its quite obvious they need to receive specific training for job. If they tried to do this work without training, they would risk their lives and others.

And brothers and sisters, it works the same way in becoming a Christian. We may find Christianity attractive because of its emphasis on God's love, we may find it appealing because coming to church and participating in worship is fun and inspiring – and the church has a great band, or a good kid's program, and they serve gourmet hipster coffee.

We find Jesus attractive because we read how He met the people, healed them, fed them and hung out with them.

He wasn't pretentious or judgmental, He was kind, merciful!

And maybe Jesus has done a miracle your life... you were going through a rough time; you needed money, you were sick, you had a problem and didn't know where else to turn, you needed forgiveness and mercy in your life and somehow Jesus showed up and helped you out! Amen!

Whatever the reason brothers and sisters, we are attracted to the Christ, to the Christian faith, to the Church, and just like young children we express that admiration and enthusiasm though role-playing being a Christian.

That is to say we look at what we see other Christians doing and we do that as well. Maybe that's attending a worship service every so often, maybe we start listening to SHINE FM on the radio – we even sing along to it, maybe we offer to help out around the church in some way, we give a little bit to the offering, maybe we start saying Christian phrases “*Amen brother!*” or “*Praise the Lord!*” or we start praying before we

eat or reading the bible a little bit... we start doing things that we see other Christians doing.

And for newcomers to the faith, baby believers, young Christians, there's nothing wrong with this. It's part of how we learn and become a part of something. We imitate and emulate what we admire and want to become, just like kids role-playing being a fire fighter.

The problem comes when we are no longer new comers to the faith, when we've been around for a while, when we have become long time believers, older Christians – but we are *still* only role-playing and imitating, then it becomes an issue.

Because becoming a Christian is like a profession – it's a calling. In fact, last week we learned all about how Christ gives us a three-fold calling as our purpose in life; our Creational calling, our Kingdom calling and our Church calling.

So, while we might start out by role playing and imitating what it looks like to be a Christian, it is absolutely critical that we

get the proper training - in order for us to become professing Christians, pursuing their 3-fold calling in following Christ.

Without this basic training we put our spiritual lives, and the spiritual lives of others, at risk. So, I need to emphasize and illustrate this in a way that we can understand.

Because if we are not convinced of the need to receive basic training for being a Christian... if we don't understand why its so important, then we'll just continue to play at being a Christian and contrary to what we read this morning in Colossian 1:6 the gospel message won't bear fruit in our lives and we won't truly understand God's grace.

You see brothers and sisters, getting basic training for Christian living is how we make sure that people *truly* understand what it means to be a Christian, they really *get it*.

Have you ever seen someone who looks like they are into something... but, you can tell that they don't really get it? You see a young high-school girl wearing an Iron Maiden t-shirt

because it's a fashion trend but she doesn't know who Iron Maiden is, she's never heard their music or know any of their songs. She's got the t-shirt but she doesn't really get it. We don't want to be that kind of Christian... wearing the cross as jewelry but not truly understanding God's grace.

Or have you ever seen someone who gets off to a terrific start in something... but just finishes terribly? They are first off the starting line at sound of the starting pistol, taking an early lead way out in front... but they trip over that second hurdle and aren't even able to finish the race.

Reminds me of what the Apostle Paul says in Galatians 5:7 *"you were running a good race, who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?"* Don't want to be that kind of Christian who starts well... but finishes badly.

So, what does the word of God have to say to us this morning about the basics of our basic training? Let's take a closer look at the passage we read from Colossians this morning and find

out - so that we can grow from being fans of Jesus, to becoming His followers.

So, this passage from Colossians tells us there are three important ingredients for our training to occur. In vs. 7 Paul mentions Epaphras who taught the Colossians about the fruit of the gospel and helped them truly understand God's grace, and in vs. 9 we see references to prayer, and to knowledge, wisdom and understanding - all from the Holy Spirit.

So, our training needs a trainer, prayer, and the Holy Spirit to fill us with the knowledge and understanding of God's will.

Now brothers and sisters we need to understand that God's will is not some sort of mysterious unknown vague thing that we are trying to figure out, no! God has very specifically revealed His will to us when He gave His law to His covenant people Israel, through Moses.

And it was carefully recorded and written down so it could be passed on from one generation to the next, and God's people

would always be able to know His will and how to obey so that we could be faithful covenant partners with Him.

The reason we need to have the Holy Spirit fill us with the knowledge and wisdom of God's will is so that we can understand how God's Law is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and how to continue to obey it when Jesus has fulfilled it. There are some changes that have occurred – most notably that we no longer need to offer sacrifices to pay for our sins because Jesus Christ paid that for us, one time for all, with His sacrifice on the cross, that Circumcision - the sign of belonging to God's people has been replaced by baptism in the Holy Spirit, and the Passover feast has become the Lord's Supper.

But what about all the rest of it? What about the Ten Commandments? What about the dietary laws? What about purity laws? What about the really weird laws like not mixing fabrics or disturbing laws about having to put an unrepentant disobedient son to death? What do we do with those expressions of God's will?

This is where we need the Holy Spirit to give us the knowledge and understanding of how the various norms of God's will in the Mosaic Law take new forms in Jesus' fulfillment of them.

And this was the greatest challenge for the early Gentile Christians, this is why Paul writes to them that he is praying for them in this regard and it's also why Paul notes that Epaphras was a qualified trainer for them – he was a fellow servant to the gentiles along with Paul, who had been commissioned by Jesus as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

And Epaphras was a faithful minister of Christ, which means he knew how to help train these new Gentile Christians to follow God's Law - as it had been fulfilled in Christ.

So brothers and sisters, if you are going to start to be intentional about doing your basic training for being a Christian you need to make sure that you have a good trainer who is a faithful minister of Jesus Christ and qualified to train you to follow God's Law as it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and who regularly prays for the Holy Spirit to work in you that way.

So if you come across a minister or a teacher who says things like *"we're a New Testament church, because it's all about a loving God in Jesus Christ, not like the angry, vengeful God of the Old Testament."* or *"Jesus came to save us from having to obey all those rules in the Old Testament"* Run away!

Do not listen to them or pay any attention to their teaching or training... they are not being faithful ministers of Jesus Christ, and Paul would not recognize them as fellow servants.

Nor would Paul recognize those teachers who try to make the Old Testament relevant and applicable to us with teachings like *"the Daniel diet;"* advising that God's will for a diet strategy is to eat veggies and drink water because of how it benefited Daniel, or those who for some strange reason still believe we should avoid eating pork because the pig was unclean in the Old Testament. Do not listen to them either.

Neither will help you achieve the central and most important goal of what basic training for Christian living is all about.

And while I've already mentioned that basic training helps us truly grasp God's grace, and finish well in what we've started, these are just contributing factors to the main goal that is expressed in Col 1:10 where Paul writes *"so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way."*

That's our motivation and purpose brothers and sisters, that we are so focused on Jesus and so full of gratitude for what He's done for us that we just want to be found worthy of Him and to know that He would be pleased with how we are living our lives – lives that He has purchased and paid for with His blood, sweat and tears and gone through hell and back for...

Remember 1 Cor 6:19-20 tells us *"You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."* Brothers and sisters let us train to live a life that is pleasing to Jesus and honors Him in every way.

Now what does that look like – what specific things do we need to get some training in to help us do this? Again, we get some direction from our passage this morning in vs. 10

through 12, a bit of a picture if you will. And pictures can be helpful when you are training right?

If you've ever done any physical training, working out at the gym to get fit you know how this works. Maybe you had a picture of Arnold up on the wall somewhere, or Serena Williams on your phone – to constantly remind you of what you were training to look like. So, here's your aspirational picture of what we're training to become like as Christians brothers and sisters.

It's a picture of us where we are *"bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might - so that you may have great endurance and patience, and we are giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light."*

What a great picture, if you can imagine it this is what it looks like to be pumped up, or totally ripped in Godliness and Christian living.

So, let's imagine what our lives would be like if we were bearing fruit in every good work, don't imagine being perfect - because that's a cop-out on this, but imagine how your everyday actions... as you pursue your creational calling, your kingdom calling and your church calling would bear fruit.

Imagine your actions producing all sorts material and physical benefits for yourself and others. Like the Wise woman of Prov 31 in vs. 20-22 *"She opens her arms to the poor, extends her hands to the needy. When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple."*

Imagine your actions resulting in people giving praise to Jesus, and putting their faith and trust in Him as their savior. As 1 Peter 2:12 says *"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."*

Imagine your actions resulting in more fruit of the Spirit in your life and in others, more peace, patience, kindness,

gentleness, self-control, and of course more agape – self sacrificing love. Remember what Jesus himself said in John 15:16 *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last..."*

That's a pretty awesome picture of what we can train to become like isn't it! And you know what – over the many years that the Church has been helping to train people in this, we have developed "spiritual disciplines" that help our good works produce fruit.

Spiritual disciplines like contemplative prayer, studying and meditating on scripture, confession, fasting, giving, tithing, and serving others. Learning and practicing these disciplines in a consistent manner will help to train you in such a way that your good works will bear much fruit.

And imagine yourself growing in the knowledge of God brothers and sisters! Not just getting to know God as a God who is merciful and forgiving and gracious as we come to know Him in Jesus Christ, which is still kind of focused on us –

but specifically learning about who God is as reveals Himself to be in the scriptures and all His amazing attributes that make Him God for God's sake.

Delving deeper into His infinite eternal self-existence that stands outside of time, His holiness, His perfection and purity His omniscience – He has all knowledge of all things, His omnipresence – He is always everywhere at all times, and of course His omnipotence – He is all powerful, powerful beyond anything we could ever imagine. Brothers and sisters, it is an amazing, awesome, mind blowing, and humbling experience to grow in the knowledge of God.

And that makes it especially amazing when we see how this picture anticipates us becoming strong... strengthened by the very power of the almighty God. Imagine what we could do with such power?!

Maybe go around to intimidate the devil and his demons and open up a can of kick-butt on them to beat back the powers of darkness? Tempting... but no brothers and sisters.

As Paul better explains in Phil 3:10-11 *“I want to know Christ— yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”* So, this is why Paul qualifies in Col 1:11 that we are strengthened with God's power... so we have great endurance and patience.

Brothers and sisters we are equipped to participate in the sufferings of Christ because the truth of the way God works, as we have seen in the crucifixion - is that life comes through death, greatness through lowliness, the first become last and the last become first, and in our weakness... we receive God's strength. To endure and wait patiently...

But the question is for what? Well to go back to Phil 3:11 Paul explains there that if we participate with Christ in his sufferings in death, then we shall also participate in His resurrection from the dead.

So, although we have to go through the dreaded “leg day” or “cardio time” of sufferings in our basic training for Christian



living we can not only endure it but rejoice in it and give thanks to the Father for it - because its leading to something amazing – the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting as we state in the Apostle’s Creed. In our passage from Colossians Paul refers to it in vs. 12 as *“the inheritance of God’s holy people in the Kingdom of Light”*

But its such a great reward that even in the midst of the tough times and the trials and challenges that come and we have to endure them and be patient, we are able to be filled with thanksgiving and joy. Because we have been trained not to let our external circumstances control our internal disposition since we know something far better is coming.

So that’s the amazing picture of what our basic training helps us to become as Christians brothers and sisters. And it’s pretty awesome and inspiring picture isn’t it – as I said this is like a picture of Arnold, or being totally ripped in godliness – and it will be quite a transformation for us from where we are now – starting off as baby believers just role playing being a

Christian, or as long-term believers who need to get back into spiritual shape.

However, we need to end on a note of encouraging caution brothers and sisters. There many temptations, character flaws, and sinful bad habits that our basic training for Christian living can help us overcome – and that’s encouraging!

But ironically as we improve as a result of our training it can lead to the sin of spiritual pride and self-righteousness.

Even though it was made clear to us that our training requires a trainer, prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit in us, the deceitfulness of our sinful nature deceives us into thinking its the result of all our hard work and effort and suddenly, even though we’re looking really good from all the training, there’s a stink of pride and self-righteousness about us like we’ve been wearing the same workout clothes for a month without washing them.

So, an encouraging note of caution for us brothers and sisters as we start training,

Our selection of scripture this morning ends with a poignant reminder that its not our efforts and hard work that bring us to maturity and effectiveness in being Christians and living a life that is worthy of Jesus Christ and pleasing to Him in every way.

It is the grace of God who, as Paul reminds us in vs. 13, rescued us from the dominion of darkness and who brought us into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. And He did so not because we showed good potential if we just got some basic training in - no... in vs. 12 Paul informs us that we are getting the reward of our basic training because God himself qualified us to share in that inheritance, it wasn't our potential or that we would be worth it in the end, it was simply God's grace.

We need this cautionary encouragement often brothers and sisters, as often as we need to wash our gym clothes, so we

stay humble and thankful and continue to work hard at our training out of gratitude for what Jesus Christ has done for us.

You've come to Jesus and he has given you rest – now let's pick up His yoke that is easy and His burden that is light and train for what He is calling us to.

So brothers and sisters, are you ready to move on from role playing and start training in the basics of being a Christian?

I pray you answer with an enthusiastic yes! Amen?