

STUDY 18 – THE FINISH LINE

PART 2B – HOW TO CHANGE

Let me ask you a dumb question. How would you like to run in a race, but they never told you where the finish line was? Sounds stupid, right? However, many believers live their Christian life with no finish line. Many people clearly know some things **ABOUT** God, but their life simply does not reflect that they actually **KNOW** God. They are willing to “**talk**” about God, but not willing to “**live**” for God. It is like they have a “**head knowledge**” of God, but not a “**heart knowledge**”. Until your head knowledge reaches your heart, your life will never make a spiritual difference. So, we need to think of this in a particular way. If you truly want to be a committed follower of Christ, then you must “**cultivate**” and “**embrace**” two habits that are critically important for your spiritual growth.

1. **You must develop spiritual goals FOR your life.**

If you have no spiritual goals for your life, then in essence you literally have nothing to live for in your life. You have no finish line, so you are running a race that you cannot win.¹ You have no way of knowing where you are going spiritually. A man without goals is a man without direction. Proverbs says that “**without a vision (without goals), the people perish**”. What that verse says in one way is that without spiritual goals that my spiritual life will eventually die. Why? It is because I have nothing of any value to live for. I am just filling each day up with things that have no spiritual value either for me, my family, or for anyone else for that matter.

2. **You must develop spiritual habits IN your life.**

You cannot by-pass this because spiritual habits are what help you achieve your spiritual goals. They put you on the right track, head you in the right direction, and keep you running the race so that you can cross the finish line. In your life, there may be a number of areas that are negatively impacting your spiritual growth – being grumpy, being lazy, having a critical spirit, unforgiveness, bitterness, a lack of kindness. I want you to think of each of these hindrances as being similar to a “**boat anchor**” that prevents your boat from going anywhere. These are the kind of areas in your life that literally prevent you from growing spiritually, and until you take care of your spiritual boat anchors, your spiritual life will always be a struggle. Building godly habits into your life will greatly help you.

Now, why is this so important? Well, it is because goals and habits do two things for you. First, **goals and habits CREATE direction**, and secondly, **goals and habits SUSTAIN direction**. You always want to know where the finish line is and how to get there, and making sure that you have the right goals and the right habits for your life helps ensure that happening in your life. Paul knew exactly where the finish line was. Listen to how he said this in [2 Timothy 4:7](#),

2Ti 4:7 (NKJV) **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**

So, if your life is going to be spiritually meaningful and successful, then you need to know where you are going and how to get there. You need to have a finish line for the most important areas of your life.

If you do not decide where God wants your life to go, then you will find that your life is gone.

¹ Groeschel, Power, 53.

It is like it vanishes. What we are talking about here is spiritual growth and what it takes to grow spiritually. Let me see if for just a moment that I can clarify “how” we grow spiritually. This is simple, and it should be. Always remember that **simplicity is the key to spiritual growth**. The Christian life is NEVER complicated. Here are three things that consistent spiritual growth requires.

1. **You must LEARN what is spiritually important.**

If you do not know what is important, then you will not do what is important. The best place to learn what is important is in the Word of God. It clearly identifies the finish line

2. **You must COMMIT to what is spiritually important.**

A life without spiritual commitment is an unsustainable spiritual life. You will become what [James 1:6](#) describes as a man that is “**like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind**”.

3. **You must DO what is spiritually important.**²

Until what you know actually becomes an integral part of your life, it has no value for your life. [2 Timothy 3:7](#) says that many people are “**always learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth**”. I.e., they know something, but they never apply that truth to their life. The truth that you are given in God’s Word is specifically provided to be fully integrated into your life. It is there to “**do**”, to accomplish, to achieve, to work out in your life.

Why is this third area so important to your life? It is because you are always “**doing**” something. You are either living for Christ, or you are not living for Christ. You are either growing spiritually, or you are not growing spiritually. You are either doing what God wants you to do, or you are not doing what God wants you to do. You are either learning or you are not learning. You are either committed to Christ or you are not committed to Christ. **YOU ARE ALWAYS DOING SOMETHING**, so always, always choose to do what God wants you to do.

Some critical areas to grow in involve the following - your relationship to God, your marriage, parenting your children, your spiritual health, your physical health, your relationship to God’s people and God’s church, and your relationship to the Word of God. These are very basic, but critical areas for reaching the finish line. So, take these basic areas of your life and learn what God wants you to do, commit your life to doing them, then begin to integrate God’s truth into your life. **LEARN, COMMIT, DO**.

If you are not willing to do what God wants you to do today, then you must accept the consequences of that choice tomorrow. You cannot blame God for what happens if you refuse to do what you know He clearly wants you to do. All of us are running out of days, running out of opportunities, running out of time to become what God wants us to become. I never get today back, and I have no idea what may happen tomorrow. If I waste my time being indifferent to applying God’s truth into my life, then I am simply wasting my life away. I do not know what matters the most in life. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day to choose God. Today is the day to do what God wants you to do. It is never tomorrow. It is never later. It is always today, always right now. God holds each one of us fully accountable for what we do each day, of how we live our life, and of the choices that we make. Please do not take God lightly because you will not like the consequences of that choice. [Galatians 6:7](#) that we have read so often, clearly says,

² Covey, 318.

Gal 6:7 (NKJV) **Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.**

Now, please turn to [1 Timothy 4:7](#). Paul is talking here to his protégé and he uses a very important word in this verse when he encouraged Timothy to “**exercise yourself towards godliness**”. The NASB uses the word “**discipline**” and the ESV, NIV, AMP, ISV, HCSB, NLT, and the Greek Interlinear all use the word “**train**”. It is the Greek word “*gumnazo*” from which we get our word “gymnasium”. In our vernacular, it simply means that you have to work at developing godliness in your life. One of the best ways to do that is by **developing strategic godly habits that equip you and help you to do the right thing, to help you do what matters the most in your life.**

You train today so you can do tomorrow what you cannot do today.³

Anyone who wants to be excellent in some area of their life MUST develop strategic habits and critical disciplines to get them to that place. Michael Phelps, who won more gold medals in the Olympic games than anyone else, had so many **strategic habits** and **critical disciplines** in his life that it would be difficult to keep up with them all. He ate a certain way, got a specific amount of rest, exercised in the water and out of the water in a specific way, had a specific routine before every race, and had a full-time trainer who traveled with him to help him stay focused and accountable just to mention a few. What was the result of his habits and disciplines? He became one of the greatest world class athletes ever.

In the same way, strategic godly habits are just as important in a believer’s life. You will never get A+’s on exams by just showing up to take the exam. That is a very stupid way to think – right? If you want to make good grades, then before you ever take the test, you must commit to strategic habits and processes in your life like attending class, taking notes, completing your assignments, and studying hard.⁴ So, if you really want to change your life, then you may need to change some bad habits in your life. Here is the principle and why we need to appreciate this.

WE BECOME WHAT WE REPEATEDLY DO.

This applies to either a good habit or a bad habit. The “habitual” side of a habit is what makes us who and what we are. If we repeatedly do the right things, we will repeatedly get good results. If we repeatedly do the wrong things, then we repeatedly get the wrong results. So, here is what God does when you do the right things over and over again.

God uses your godly habits to help you become more Christlike.

You always want to measure your life by your Christlikeness. Christlikeness is always the goal. Here is what I know and here is what you know. If you do godly things over and over, then you become a godly person. However, if you do ungodly things over and over, you become an ungodly person. Now, I want you to hear my heart on something that is very important to me. As your pastor, **I am not trying to get you to do more. My goal is help you to do more of what really matters the most in your life, to do more of what matters the most for your family.** If you ever want to be spiritually successful in your life, then **you must consistently take a lot of small steps in the right direction. Remember that doing small things makes a big difference in your life.** One author said it this way – “*Doing the small*

³ Groeschel, Power, 63-65.

⁴ Groeschel, Power, 66.

things that no one sees brings the results that everyone wants".⁵ The more that you do the right thing over and over and over, the more of a compounding effect it has on your life. For instance, the more you develop the simple habit of always being gracious and kind to people, the easier it becomes, and the more quickly you are able to recognize when you are not being gracious and kind to people and you can immediately change what you are doing or saying at that moment.

When I look at people who I believe are spiritually successful in their life, it becomes obvious that they have really good spiritual habits in their life. Their spiritual success is NEVER an accident. I guarantee you that they have developed very godly habits in their life. The constant repetition of those godly habits has become their way of life. One of the observations that I have seen in the lives of successful Christians is very simple, but is utterly profound to me. This is great.

When they succeed, they grow. When they fail, they learn and grow even more.

They never let some failure sabotage their spiritual life. Why does that happen in their life? It is because they are "**spiritually minded**". They have developed the spiritual habit of always seeing the sovereign hand of God in those times when they do fail. We all will fail. That is a given in life. However, **those who are "spiritually minded" understand and accept how God uses their failures to develop greater Christlikeness in their life.** It is normal to them to learn from their failures and to use those failures as a springboard to achieve a greater level of Christlikeness in their life. They actually see their failures as a great blessing because of how God uses those failures in their life. So, the real question we have to answer is "*What kind of spiritual habits have I developed in my life?*" "*Do I actually have any spiritual habits in my life?*" may be a better question.

Okay. I want to close with one final thought about habits. It is very simple, but very important.

God has designed the Christian life to be a process.

It is a process of repeatedly learning, then growing from what we learn. We learn, we grow. We learn, we grow. We learn, we grow. That is God's process in your life and you need to appreciate how He works. This is a spiritual process that cannot be avoided. If you avoid the learning, then you have nothing to help you grow and your spiritual life just dies on the vine and goes nowhere. Listen carefully.

God does not just arbitrarily, randomly, haphazardly ask you to do things.

That never happens. Whatever God asks you to do is simply a part of His divine process for helping you to become more and more Christlike every day of your life. That is always the goal – always. Even though as a Christian you have great freedom to enjoy your life and to grow spiritually and to fail, that does not mean that there is freedom to avoid and by-pass God's process. **You learn, you commit, you do.** What you learn will be very good, what you commit to will change your life, and when you do what you have learned and committed yourself to, you will find God's blessings chasing you wherever you go. That is God's process, so please accept it so that you can become all that God wants you to become.

⁵ Groeschel, Power, 107.

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