

WHAT WE LEARN

# FROM L.A. FITNESS



## INTRODUCTION

Our study begins in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus was just moments away from His arrest, marking the time of intense suffering now known as “The Passion of the Christ”. The passion of the Christ is usually used to describe His crucifixion, but it began before the cross, before being beaten and scourged; it began in the garden of Gethsemane. Gethsemane means “oil press”, suggesting that this garden was filled with olive trees. Pressing the olives produces olive oil, which is a picture of the Holy Spirit coming forth in the lives of believers who are under pressure. In fact, the Bible says that Jesus was under such pressure, that He was so troubled and overwhelmed with sorrow, that He sweat drops of blood through a process now known as hematidrosis, an extremely rare bursting of capillaries under intense pressure causing a person to literally sweat blood. Three times Jesus prayed, if it were possible, for the cup of suffering to be taken from Him, but it was the will of the Father that Jesus go to the cross for our sakes.

*“For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.”  
~ John 17:19*

In the context of where Jesus was and what He was enduring, He is essentially saying, “This decision to go to the cross determines the salvation of the world. I must, therefore, sanctify myself in this moment. I must submit my will to God the Father, so truth can also save others.

In some small way, our daily decisions to live a sanctified life, affects our world around us. Our decisions to discipline our thinking, our bodily impulses, our habits, our commitments, our words, they all affect other people. Our sanctification leads to others being sanctified in truth.

Paul wrote his godly, yet young, protege Timothy, knowing that he needed to pass on instructive words about the importance of order and discipline regarding the process of sanctification. "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness," (1 Timothy 4:7) is the way it is worded in the English language. "Gumnazo" is the word Paul used in the Greek language in which this was written, meaning "hit the gym". Exercise so rigorously, so strenuously, with sacrifice and constant training as an athlete preparing for the Olympics. Though Paul greatly emphasized the Holy Spirit within us, this does not mean we are to relax and let our sanctification happen by itself.

*Jesus "is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me."*

*~ Colossians 1:28-29*

It is a HOLY SWEAT that we are called to, a spiritual passion, and a sacred discipline. If we are to proclaim Jesus, we "strenuously" push forward "...with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in [us]." Even though this concept of spiritual disciplines is typically used to describe devotional activities such as prayer and reading scripture, Paul here applies it to Timothy's use of his free time and to what he listens to. "But have nothing to do with (that is, continually refuse, shun, reject) worldly fables (mythical writings) fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." This blows this whole subject up. We need discipline applied to devotional activities, but we also need discipline applied to how we use our free time. We need discipline applied to our entertainments, what we listen to, watch, etc. Consider this scripture that calls us to exert effort in our pursuit of godliness.

*"5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins."*

*~ 2 Peter 1:5-9*

- *Describe what you think "every effort" looks like? How can we do that in the Spirit vs. in our own fleshly effort?*
- *List out the seven areas in which we are told here to "make every effort".*
- *If we aren't growing as a Christian, what does verse 9 tell us is the issue? How does this relate to an earlier concept of "Moving Forward by Looking Back?"*

As previously discussed in The Gospel for Christians, we don't become believers by looking to the cross, then move beyond it. Remembering Christ crucified for us engages us in passionate pursuit of His will, and yet, with the energy of Christ within us. This study will focus on Godly Habits, The Forgotten Spiritual Disciplines, and the Sacred Pathways.

## PART 1: GODLY HABITS

When astronauts of Apollo 11 landed on the moon it was awesome! To fly to the moon, the astronauts had to break the tremendous gravity pull of the earth. More energy was spent in the first few minutes of lift off, the first few miles of travel, than was used over the next several days and half a million miles. At liftoff, 7.5 million pounds of thrust was required, propelling the Apollo 11 upward and reaching a speed of 17,432 mph, a mere 11 minutes and 39 seconds into flight. At this point, the engine cut, no longer being needed for the Apollo spacecraft to reach the moon. Habits are like this because we've built up patterns in our brain of doing the same thing, the same way for years and years. Taking the first step away from that habit is like the takeoff of the Apollo 11. Once we gain maximum velocity, the "pull" of our flesh isn't the same; it requires much less effort to just keep moving forward. Experts tell us it takes approximately 40 days to fully break many habits in our lives.



*7 Do not be deceived. God will not be made a fool. For a person will reap what he sows, 8 because the person who sows to his own flesh will reap corruption from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. 9 So we must not grow weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap, if we do not give up.”*

*~ Galatians 6:7-9*

It's been said, "Sow a thought, reap an action; Sow an action, reap a habit; Sow a habit, reap a character; Sow a character, reap a destiny." Paul describes what we call habits in the farming language of sowing. Whatever seed you sow into the earth is going to grow and produce fruit. In the same way, we can sow to our flesh with bad habits and reap corruption, or we can sow to the Spirit, godly habits, and reap life. Even here Paul speaks of the need for endurance, promising us "...in due time we will reap, if we do not give up."

- *Back to the gym. If we are the athlete and the Holy Spirit is our trainer, what is His goal? What are we disciplining ourselves to do?*
- *What do you want Christ to do in your life? (You might want to reflect on that one for a while)*
- *How does your answer to the previous question affect the intensity of your "training"?*
- *What one negative habit do you want to get rid of? What positive habit do you want to gain?*

God is committed to making us like His Son, Jesus. This is why He "...causes all things to work together for good to those that love God, to those that are called to His purpose... to become conformed to the image of His Son..." (Romans 8:28-29).

Passion is something that we often lack. Imagine the engagement with life we could have, the joy of every day, if we could see God's hand in our lives with the eyes of faith. In the same way that going to the gym requires an individual to set goals and get a firm grasp on what they want, it's important for us to establish a vision or goal to keep us powerfully motivated toward our deepest longings. Consider and comment on these quotes, and take your time.

*"The new testament has a lot to say about self-denial, but not self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly hope for it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion*

*has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are halfhearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”*

*~ C.S. Lewis*

*“To be hungry is not enough; I must be really starving to know what is in God’s heart toward me. When the prodigal son was hungry, he went to feed on the husks, but when he was starving, he turned to his father.”*

*~ John Eldredge*

*“I want deliberately to encourage this mighty longing after God. The lack of it has brought us to our present low estate. The stiff and wooden quality about our religious lives is a result of our lack of holy desire. Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth. Acute desire must be present or there will be no manifestation of Christ to His people. He waits to be wanted. Too bad that with many of us He waits so long, so very long, in vain.”*

*~ A.W. Tozer*

- *How do these quotes affect you?*
- *How would you rate your passion on a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest) in your desire for godliness? What prevents it from being higher?*
- *What can you do to cultivate a greater passion?*
- *How is this the essential first step, just like going to the gym?*

## **PART 2: THE FORGOTTEN SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES**

For 2,000 years the church has emphasized various spiritual disciplines that today, in our shallow and drive-thru culture, are less and less appreciated. This is not at all meant to be an exhaustive list.



### **Public gathering**

Gathering together with Christ followers is strongly encouraged in scripture. “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” -Hebrews 10:24-25. If you’ve not committed to weekly church attendance, this is a great place to start.

### **Reading scripture**

We live in a high-tech world, but a high-tech world cannot pull us away from a low-tech God. It doesn’t matter so much if we read the Bible or use the Bible app, we need to be fed daily by scripture. If you aren’t getting fed by scripture on a daily basis, what would that take in order to happen?

### **Giving thanks**

Giving thanks to God, for all He has done, who He is, and for the circumstances of our daily lives is right at the center of a Spirit-filled life. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 tells us to “Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

### **Meditation**

Meditation is a lost art of Christianity today. We have a McDonald’s mentality. We want spiritual maturity without having to work at it, but God simply doesn’t have a drive-thru window. Christians with lazy brains who never develop this discipline simply won’t become as spiritually mature precisely because applying scripture to your life requires meditation. Let this sink in: of all Christian activities or disciplines, meditation is the only one which promises success. “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” -Joshua 1:8-9.

Building discipline into our daily routine in order to make time to work out our bodies is something that many of us do. Making time to work out our spirits is very similar. We decide what we're going to do, when we're going to do it, where we're going to do it.

- *Which of these disciplines is the strongest in your life?*
- *Which one is the weakest?*
- *Which one do you desire to focus on growing in?*
- *Think through the what, when, and where.*

Consider and discuss the following quotes and how they relate to the forgotten sacred disciplines.

*“Human nature, if it is healthy, demands excitement. And if it does not obtain its thrilling excitement in the right way, it will seek it in the wrong. God never made bloodless stoics, but passionate saints.”*

*~ Oswald Chambers*

*“The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love.”*

*~ Henry Scongal*

*“I am persuaded that all of our problems are conceived and born in the sinful belief that something or someone other than Jesus Christ can quench the thirst of our souls.”*

*~ C. Samuel Storms*

*“The Christian is strong or weak depending on how closely he has cultivated the knowledge of God.”*

*~ Ann Tozer*

*“We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence.”*

*~ Mother Teresa*

*“Caring for your heart is an act of obedience. It is an act of love, an act of faith, an act of war.”*

*~ John Eldredge*

- *Which quote affects you the most?*
- *Why is it important to rely on the Holy Spirit in the pursuit of sacred disciplines? What does that look like?*

## PART 3: THE SACRED PATHWAYS



We are all different, not only in our personalities, but in what really feeds our souls and causes our hearts to come alive.

- **Naturalists love God outdoors.** They would much rather pray by a stream, walk a beach, or backpack near in some national park. They believe that nature clearly proclaims how great God is and when reading the Bible they strongly relate to the parables Christ used based on nature.
- **Sensates love God with their senses.** They are drawn to the liturgical, the majestic, and the grand. Incense, intricate architecture, classical music, and formal language send their hearts soaring.
- **Traditionalists love God through ritual and symbol.** They are fed by historic dimensions of faith: rituals, symbols, sacraments and sacrifice.
- **Ascetics love God in solitude and simplicity.** They want nothing more than to be left alone in prayer. Let there be nothing to distract them, no pictures, no loud music, and leave them alone to live in silence and simplicity.



- **Activists love God through confrontation.** They often view the church as a place to recharge their batteries so they can go back into the world to wage war against injustice. They are energized by interaction with others, even in conflict.
- **Caregivers love God by loving others.** They serve God by serving others. Often claiming to see Christ in those with great needs, their faith is built up by interacting with other people.
- **Enthusiasts love God with mystery and celebration.** They are cheerleaders for God and the Christian life. They don't want to just know concepts, but to experience them, to feel them, and to be moved by them.
- **Contemplatives love God through adoration.** They seek to love God with the purest, deepest and brightest love imaginable.
- **Intellectuals love God with their minds.** They might be skeptics or committed believers, but in either case they are likely to be studying doctrines, issues, or concepts.

Before proceeding on, go to "<http://common.northpoint.org/sacredpathway.html>," and take their "You've Got Style" survey, which will help you discern your sacred pathway.

- *Which of these categories are the main ones you relate to personally?*
- *Which of these seem totally foreign to you?*
- *How can recognizing our different wiring help us to become a community that loves better?*

If we are wired differently, then our disciplines will probably look different too. What we want to suggest to you is that you consider which of the following paths might be used by God to energize your heart and to creatively add this to your life.

**The Creation Pathway:** Naturalists, tree huggers, green believers. They relate to God best in nature and should probably find time to be outdoors in spaces where they get inspired.

**The Worship Pathway:** This person is always saying, "We need more worship!" They need to get some worship on iTunes and prioritize time alone in worship, no matter how they sound singing.

**The Relational Pathway:** This person feels like doing a devotional is "solitary confinement." Reading the Bible can feel /dry/ like homework, yet add people to the mix and this person lights up. This person needs more Bible study time with people.

**The Intellectual Pathway:** This person is the opposite of the relational pathway, often owning 3 different versions of Bible, two Bible commentaries & a Greek lexicon. Their hearts cannot engage until their mind is challenged. They need to carve out sufficient time in the Bible and read books that provoke them.

**The Serving Pathway:** doers, people who read, pray and worship, but when they serve, THEY COME ALIVE! These people need to not only find places to serve, but places to serve that energize them for Christ.

**The Contemplative Pathway:** Give them a Bible, a notebook, a jug of water and send them away. Their danger is thinking this is the way everyone should be! Their blessing is that they can have a deep spiritual sensitivity to God. To retain this sensitivity, they need to be careful to not get too busy!

**The Activist Pathway:** Opposite of the contemplative, they live at Mach speed. They have an enormous capacity for work, they feel alive when they have more to do in a day that the rest of us can do in a week. The danger is that being so focused on this, God can be left behind.

(Special thanks to Gary Thomas for developing this concept.)

- *Which 1 to 3 pathways do you think best describes you?*
- *How can you cultivate this in your life?*

## SUMMARY

We've talked about developing a holy sweat, forming godly habits, the forgotten spiritual disciplines and the sacred pathways, but there is a certain Jesus-centricity to what we learn from LA fitness, so we close again with Jesus' words, this time applied to us and our efforts for the sake of others.

*“For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.”*

*~ John 17:19*

## ACTION POINTS

1. If you haven't already done so, rearrange your schedule and your priorities in order to engage in spiritual disciplines.
2. In like manner, plan on when you can engage in the spiritual pathways.

Checkup: We've given action points meant to encourage you to develop your prayer life. How has it gone? Do you feel like your prayer life is growing? Why or why not?