

Paraklēsis : Practice

A very close friend of mine used to say, “**Today is the day to practice being who you want to be.**” That bit of wisdom sticks with me today, after he has passed, and will continue to stick until I pass. There is a bit of irony in this; we don’t know when we will pass, but when we do, we will have reached a state of unchanging being. Hopefully we will have become that person that we were practicing to be. **Hopefully we were practicing and not procrastinating.**

We all know what practice is – I would define it as performing tasks repeatedly with a goal of performing them more easily, with more effectiveness, and better success. When we were very small, we practiced walking. Generally, we pretty much mastered that and unless we have an injury, or surgery or some other incident that forces us to relearn that task, we don’t really need to practice any more. If **the goal of practice is to become an expert**, then there must be a point at which we can stop practicing and just “be” the expert we’ve become, right?

No. Not really. **The best you can be at anything will always be in the future.** And you can only get there with practice. I think that is why the term is used for various experts and professionals in their business – an attorney practices law, a doctor might have a private practice, people practice yoga because there is no such thing as a “perfect pose.” A nurse practitioner has learned their skills well enough to be able to use them on a patient without guidance. The greatest athletes and musicians in the world probably practice more than anyone – but they are certainly considered experts. They practice because they want to get better, and they know that they can. There exists a higher level and they know that the only way to reach it is with practice. So, what about walking... I stated above that “we pretty much mastered that,” so we don’t practice it anymore. Well, when is the last time that you stumbled or tripped over something? Hmm... me too. Well, I guess if I practiced more, I would get better at walking and stumble less often. This is not a joke – **we walk a lot, but do we practice it?** I mean, do we walk with the intention of getting better? How is my posture? Are my abs always engaged to support my lower back? Are my eyes always scanning for wrinkled rugs and rogue Lego bricks? Even the semi-involuntary action of breathing, something that we “mastered” in the first seconds after being born, can be improved upon, to increase capacity, reduce stress, strengthen the immune system, etc. But, not without practice.

So, last month I asked if our goal was eternal life. I did receive a challenge to that idea... and understandably. I think **our goal could be stated in many ways, but they all lead to eternal life** with our Father. Our goal could be eternal life, or obedience, or becoming like the Messiah, or being perfect as our Father is perfect, or loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, or loving our neighbor as ourselves, or being led by the Spirit in all things, or doing justice loving kindness walking humbly with our God, etc... All of these are worthy goals to pursue. My argument is that regardless of how you identify your goal, you won’t reach it without practice. Last month’s letter ended with a command – a suggested command: **Get to know the Son of God.** Certainly, this is another worthy goal to pursue. And, as the tourist asked the NY taxi driver, “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” The reply, “Practice, practice, practice...”

Regardless of your stated goal, **your walk will benefit from practicing certain things.** Here is a short list of things to practice that I came up with, but I would love to hear from you some other ideas of things we can, and should, practice that will draw us to God and help us to reach our goals:

We should practice obeying His commands, listening for His voice, claiming His promises, trusting in Him, reading & praying & meditating & fasting, giving to others, cultivating the fruit of the spirit...

Last month's letter was called "Hearing" and this month I am writing about "Doing." Doing, as a lifestyle, is called practice.

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22-25)

I am intrigued with how, as I read these scriptures, the commands that we are given are to be implemented in our lives as a habit, as **a continual part of our lifestyle**. We are commanded to practice the commands!

The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:9)

Philippians 4 is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. Here in verse 9, we are given a promise. Remember that we need to **practice claiming His promises!**

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Whatever you do means how you live your life, every day, every hour, all the time. How often do we find ourselves living parts of our lives without giving Him glory? We should continually give thanks for all things... But, what does it even mean, to do something **to the glory of God**? Sounds like a good topic for a letter someday...

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock." (Matthew 7:24)

There's a goal we could pursue – become wise... seek wisdom. Be doers and not just hearers.

He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually. (1 Chronicles 16:11)

Practice seeking Him. I heard a message recently that made an interesting claim. I am not sure how accurate the claim is, but it is something that will surely benefit us if we do it. The claim was that "all we really need to do is 'hang out with Jesus.'" The idea is that if we are always 'hanging out' with our Savior, He will influence us on all fronts; our thoughts, words, behaviors, decisions, etc. In our walk with Him, **we need to practice walking!** Keep your abdominal muscles engaged and your sternum lifted, wear your armor every day, scan the floor for rogue Lego bricks, acknowledge Him in every step, practice, practice, practice...

Peace to you and Glory to God!

-Nate

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