



Trying or Training? The Nature Of Discipleship By Greg Ehler

When I was a young boy, I occasionally heard my dad talk about a marathon he ran before I was born. It was a real 26.2 mile race in Las Vegas, Nevada, and although it wasn't very mountainous, it was a significant challenge and achievement in his life. Being the first-born, type-A person I am, I vowed in my heart that I, too, would one day run a marathon.

In the late 1990's I was in luck. Fresno organized a marathon that started in Clovis and

ended downtown at the Metropolitan Museum. Of course, my goal was to actually finish the race with a respectable time and the only way I knew how to do this was to train my body well enough to accomplish this feat.

I needed a trainer or coach who could give me a plan of training. Since the Internet was available, I found Hal Higdon, senior editor of a running magazine, and e-mailed him. He wrote me back, wished me success, and sent a workout schedule booklet having circled the right level for me as an intermediate runner.

Needless to say, I stuck to the plan religiously, running five to six times per week the exact mileage listed, rested when prescribed and followed Higdon's advice. I stuck to the plan for over five months, running in rain, cold, and in the dark when necessary.

I'd like to say it was self-control, character and consistency that drove my efforts, but it was mostly fear. My wife told me one day that she was proud of my efforts in training and I responded by saying, "I'm so afraid of not finishing that I'm willing to do whatever it takes to ensure success."

A marathon is much too far a distance to attempt without training. It would be ridiculous to get to the starting line of a race with the attitude, "I'll give it a try,"

without having done the training necessary to be ready for the task.

Unfortunately, we can often approach growth in our relationship in Christ this way. Like weak-willed New Year's resolutions, we can seek to grow in faith by "trying" to pray, rest, read the Bible, etc. It's not that there's anything wrong with wanting to grow in critical spiritual disciplines, but they're spiritual disciplines. They require intentionality, accountability, focus, consistency, sacrifice, effort, perseverance and community to achieve—training!

The apostle Paul, in his first letter to the church in Corinth, explained the reality of training in spiritual growth. Corinth, the Hollywood or Las Vegas of the first century, was a place of incredible commerce, travel, diversity and sin. The church was struggling to remain pure in its focus and growth in Christ.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (NIV).

Notice the phrase "in such a way." The Greek term here literally means "in the same manner as." In the same way that an athlete submits herself to the regimen and sacrifice necessary to train her body for competition, so we must approach our discipleship in Christ with intentionality and focus.

Paul emphasizes this by saying that, like athletes, we must go into "strict training." The word here means to "exercise self-control in all things."

Athletes watch their diet, rest, and workout rhythm. They boundary and organize their lives in such

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Run to get the prize



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a way that the goal of athletic achievement is protected and kept as a top priority.

This is how we are to approach our growth in Christ. We don't "run aimlessly" but purposely. We don't want to be disqualified for the prize.

As we depend upon the Holy Spirit for growth in our relationship with God in Christ, we recognize that our power lies outside ourselves. Nonetheless, we submit ourselves, like an athlete, to the training that is necessary to grow. There is a helpful book available

just about anywhere called the *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, pastor of spiritual formation at Christ Church in Oak Brook, Illinois.

The workbook succinctly and clearly describes and "coaches" the reader in a host of spiritual disciplines including many forms of prayer, Sabbath keeping, scripture study, simplicity, journaling, serving, self-examination, etc. I recommend it to you as a significant resource for developing your own "training regimen" as you grow in Christ.

Thank-You Note

First Pres Church:

I am indescribably grateful for the opportunity I have had to be on staff here for the last five years. It was a transformational experience that blessed me and my family. The leadership in our church is second to none. I will never take the opportunity all of you have given me as anything less than a priceless gift.

*Humbly,
Corrie Sands*

Paul Armstrong By Jamie Evans



When I grow up I want to be like Paul Armstrong. I write this knowing that Paul and Louise are extraordinary people. His calling in retirement to serve us selflessly is magnificent.

In this season of his long life he could justifiably be in comfortable ease, yet he places himself intentionally in our pastoral ministries facing a host of rough issues as our church family enters times of illness and death.

Paul is one of the first ones there along with Susan Glover, Paul and Rosemary Avery, Lana Roberts and our deacons. These make up the most experienced

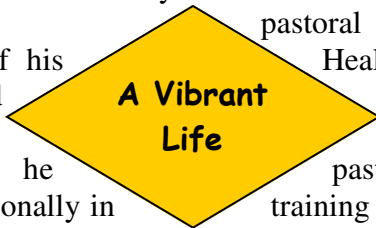
visitation team I have ever served with. It is a good thing too, for we have over 100 individuals on our visitation lists. God is in the process of calling home the World War II generation. This team ushers them into the Kingdom with grace and compassion.

Hospital calls and crisis counseling, funerals and seasons of transition for our people are all Paul's regular fare. He flinches at nothing. Paul is a humble servant, helping Lana Roberts lead our able deacons.

I call our deacons and our pastoral team the Wounded Healers. Many have had some great loss or brokenness in their past from which to draw training into compassion.

Paul is no exception to this. He knows suffering, and through his vibrant life in Christ he knows what it means to be crucified with Christ and thus to minister under the mantle of grace.

We are privileged to have Paul Armstrong in our ministerial ranks. I am deeply grateful.



Praise the Lord with Instruments By Marsha Wilson

Psalm 150 says this: *Praise the Lord. Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in his mighty heavens. Praise Him for His acts of power; praise Him for His surpassing greatness. Praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise Him with the harp and lyre. Praise Him with tambourine and dancing, praise Him with the strings and flute. Praise Him with the clash of cymbals, praise Him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.*

What a better way to be obedient to this psalm than to be in an orchestra. If God has blessed you with a gift in playing an instrument and you want to express praise and worship to Him we would love for you to join our newly-formed joint orchestra between First Presbyterian Church and University Presbyterian Church.

If you would like to be part of this exciting new group please give the church office a call.

Choir Season Is Here By Julie Carter

Singing is **WORSHIPFUL** because we sing praises to the Lord.

Singing is **HEALTHY**, because it keeps you mentally alert, and encourages good cardiovascular circulation.

Choir is **SERVICE ORIENTED**, because choir members serve the church body and our community.

Singing is WORSHIPFUL



Singing is WORSHIPFUL

REHEARSALS: Sundays at 9:45 a.m. in the Music Room. Contact Dr. Julie Carter for details. 432-2858 or jwlc@sbcglobal.net.

WE NEED YOU! Maybe you have not sung since high school, or you sang in previous years. Please don't assume that someone else will sing. Doug Rumford once said, "Do what you love to show others God's love."

Music **PROMOTES BIBLICAL LITERACY** since the words in many anthems are direct quotes from the Bible.

Music is **ORDAINED BY GOD'S HOLY WORD** — scripture says to sing to the Lord a new song.

October 2-4, Women's Fall Conference— It's All About Joy, Peace and Hope! By Jeanie Cooper

Register now!

In these uncertain times people are experiencing many new challenges in their lives, often experiencing a season that lacks in joy, peace or hope. This year's Women's Fall Conference will spotlight seven women who will share about how they have focused on choosing joy through adverse experiences and how they have received peace and hope in the process of trusting in the Holy Spirit.

Our theme verse comes from Romans 15:13 which says, "May the God of hope fill you with all

joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Please come and listen to Catherine Alkire, Gerre Brenne- man, Patsy Cooper, the Honorable Annette LaRue, Lori Meadors, Natalie Sells and Patricia Windle share their stories and experiences this weekend. Also, experience God's gift of taking time to commune privately with him. Whether it is the hour of silence or taking our power prayer hike, He wants time with you alone!

There will be ample time to spend in fellowship with each other as well. Of course, we will

have many fun activities such as the climbing wall and zip line, fantastic hiking opportunities and a table decorating contest on Saturday night!

The conference committee is excited to offer this fine spiritual weekend at the lowest cost in many years! Pricing varies depending where you want to lodge: Cedar Lodge \$110, Mountain View \$80, students (staying in Mountain View) only \$55 and Saturday only is \$35. Please feel free to contact Jeanie Cooper by phone 222-3223, or by e-mail at sjcoop@pacbell.net. **Mark your calendars for Oct. 2-4!** Registration will begin August 30 and end September 27.

Do You Know the Heaven Man? By Marcie York

One morning recently I opened my Bible to snatch a few moments of eternal perspective before the day exploded with activity. My grandchildren, tummies full of pancakes, were running around the backyard so I gratefully sank down to read.

My granddaughter Katherine saw me and said, "Look! Nana is reading her Bible!" She shot into the house and came up beside me, saying, "Nana, I have a song in my head about God." I said, "Sing it to me." I moved my Bible over and she nestled in beside me and sang;

*Do you know the Heaven Man looking down at you?
He is always with you, watching over you, having lots of love for you.*

She said, "Write it down, Nana" and so I did. She had more songs, so I wrote rapidly as she sang. I tucked the paper in my Bible and we went on to other things. Later, as I reflected on these words I realized the profound truth behind her simple song.

J e s u s promised to be with His own always, just as Katherine sang (Matthew 28:20). God our Father is looking down at us, and watching over us. In Psalm 121 the phrase "watch over" is used five times in eight verses to assure us that our feet will not slip and no harm will befall us. In fact God is watching over our lives so intently that He knows our comings and goings!

Look it up!

One of the joys of being immersed in the lives of children is enjoying the simplicity of their response to God and their world. The adult world is fraught with rapidly changing complexity and the grown-up response is often anxious, fear based stress. What, beside their uncluttered life experiences, allows young children to cut to the core of faith?

Children trust easily and rest easily in that they



From the Treasure Chest



know how to "let go" of things they cannot understand or change. They have the ability to move on to the next thing without carrying the unnecessary burden of worry. And when they lie down to sleep, their thoughts are uncluttered and their emotions are at peace.

As I face the uneasy times we live in, I long to rest and trust in God like a child. Don't you? I want to be ready to move forward with confidence and joy, knowing that God is with me, watching over me and "having lots of love" for me. Last Sunday in the elementary Treasure Chest, once again through the lips of children, God showed us adults

His path to rest and trust.

It was kindergarten promotion Sunday and there were several very timid little five year olds sitting in the front row as we gathered to sing. Their faces reflected fear and apprehension about the new life stage they were entering and I sensed a nudge from the Holy Spirit to pray for them.

I gently introduced them to the "big kids" and asked if anyone would like to come up and pray as they began elementary school. Two hands went up, and sec-

ond-grader John and third-grader D.J. came forward.

These two little guys prayed simply and deeply for our kindergartners in three ways; that they would have a *good* year in school, that they would be brave each day, and that they would get good grades.

As I reflect on their sweet, simple blessing and petition I realize how much I have been impacted by the power of their words. How well they know the "Heaven Man!" They trust Him to hear and answer, so last Sunday they could confidently bring their new little friends to His throne.

I have begun to pray in the same way as I daily pick up the complex issues of my adult life. I expectantly seek God's perspective that this would be a good year, according to His purpose. I ask Him to make me brave each day to face the future, knowing He does all things well. And I seek "good

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Indispensable Foundation for Living Whole and Redeemed Lives

By Terry Jaurena

Last year while Christmas shopping I bought a gift for myself. I was drawn for the first time to one of those “Through the Bible in One Year” Bibles. This one was *The Message* version, titled, you might have guessed, *The Daily Message*. Each day there are two readings: a couple of Old Testament chapters and then either a few New Testament chapters or Psalms or Proverbs. And the best part is there are days off for reflection.

I’ve done fairly well most of the year, but I got way off track during summer vacations and I found myself a month behind and discouraged. To make it more daunting, I had hit *Chronicles* and was having trouble getting motivated to read through all those names.

So I turned for help to the Introductions in the Appendix, and found myself encouraged again from Eugene Peterson’s writing.

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grades,” that I would serve Him daily out of a desire to hear His “well done good and faithful servant.”

How about you? Shall we face the future together with childlike faith and simplicity? The book of Isaiah, chapter 11, reminds us that our Savior will judge this world with righteousness and faith. God wins! Verses 6-9 describe a beau-

tiful picture of peaceful harmony amid God’s creation, and verse 6 tells us “and a little child will lead them.”

Children can point us to the way to trust and rest in these times. They know that God can give the people of First Pres Fresno a “good year.” They know God will help us be brave each day and do our best as we follow Him. Exciting times lie ahead. Are you ready for them? Do *you* know the Heaven Man?

Noting that there are many name lists in other parts of Scripture, *Chronicles* is “extravagantly copious.” It had seemed tedious and daunting, but Eugene was helping me to see it differently.

He goes on to say, “Holy history is not constructed from impersonal forces or abstract ideas; it is woven from names – persons, each one unique. *Chronicles* erects a solid defense against depersonalized religion.”

He writes that the story is being told to highlight the importance of worship in “nurturing and protecting our identity as a people of God ...” Something in that was refreshing after reading the wayward history of God’s people in *Kings* and hitting so many names!

We are a people of God and every generation gets the invitation to come and worship, to nurture and protect our identity as a people of God.

“The people of God are not primarily a political entity or a military force or an economic power; they are a holy congregation diligent in worship. To lose touch with the Davidic (and Moses-based) life of worship is to disintegrate as a holy people. To be seduced by the popular pagan worship of the surrounding culture is to be obliterated as a holy

people.”

We are to be a holy congregation diligent in worship. Otherwise, we are too easily seduced by the surrounding culture. All that I had read in *Samuel* and *Kings* made that oh so clear.

It doesn’t take much reading of scripture or looking at history to see how quickly and easily the people of God embrace the political entity, military force or economic power identities instead of the holy congregation diligent in worship identity.

And it happens just as easily and quickly today.

Eugene’s introduction to *Chronicles* ends with this:

“Christians have characteristically read and prayed themselves into *Chronicles* in order to stay alert to the irreducibly personal in all matters of faith and practice, and to maintain a critical awareness that the worship of God is the indispensable foundation for living whole and redeemed lives.”

I sure want to live a “whole and redeemed” life. And I want that for you, too. So we need to help each other to stay alert and to maintain a critical awareness of that “indispensable foundation” for our whole and redeemed lives. It’s to do what we were made to do—worship our Maker.

Deadline Information

The deadline for the October Challenger is Friday, September 25 at 5 p.m. It will be mailed out on October 7. Please contact Daphne Saul, 252-4064, or e-mail her at daphne4926@sbcglobal.net. You may also leave articles in the newsletter box in the church office.

The deadline for "A Place for You" is each Monday at 5 p.m. Please submit announcements to: Cheryl Eaker at 485-6460 or staff@fpcfresno.org and put Cheryl Eaker's name in the subject box.

First Pres Challenger

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Bob and Rosemary Avery *Chaplains*
Craig Blodgett, *Assistant Youth Director*
Dr. Julie L. Carter *Coordinator Worship & Music*
Sarah Crantz *Children's Director, Birth-Preschool*
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**Indicates Honorary Position*

Church Staff contact: staff@fpcfresno.org and include staff person's name in the subject box.

Newsletter Staff:

Editor: Daphne Saul
Editorial Board: Karin Cook, David Kimball, and Paula Lloyd

For Your Information

Cook- books Available:



The First Pres Cookbooks will be available for sale starting on September 13. Look for a table in the courtyard between services. Each cookbook costs \$15. Make checks payable to First Presbyterian Church. The proceeds will help the music and worship programs of our church.



Birth Announcement

Jesse Robyndronuth Williams

Born:

July 26

Parents:

James and Mary Anne Williams

Grandparents:

Walter and Daphne Saul

Return service requested
Fax: 559-485-1538
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