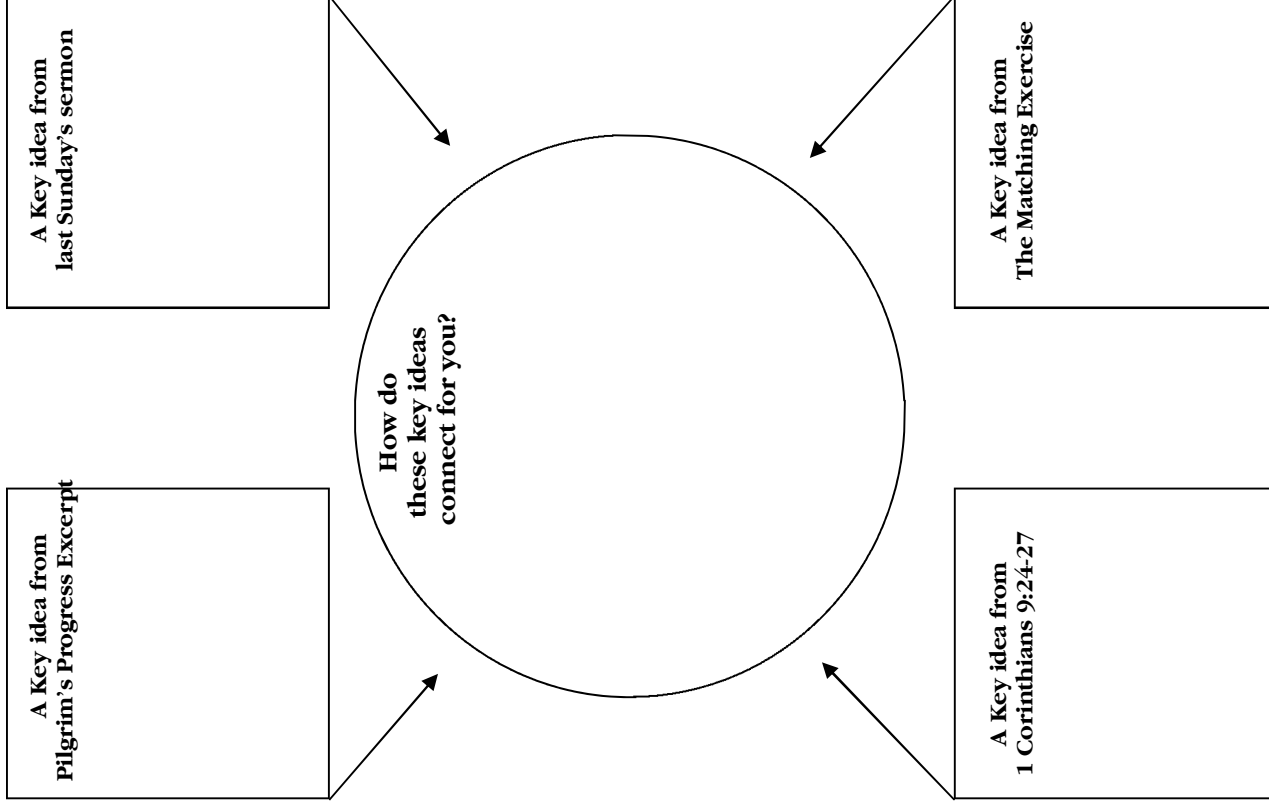


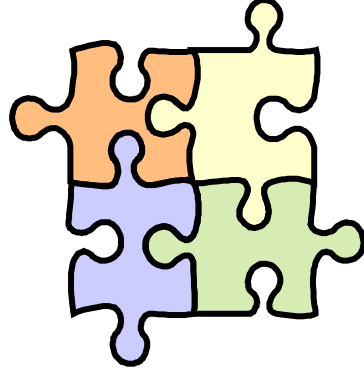
Connections: Putting the Key Ideas To-



The DNA of Spiritual Growth

DISCIPLINE

Part Four: The **Way** of Spiritual Growth



A 6-Week Small Group Study Unpacking These Questions:

- What is spiritual growth?
- How does spiritual growth actually occur?
- What is the point of spiritual growth?
- How can I take responsibility for my part of spiritual growth?

Plan for Part Four

BIG IDEA: Because growing is a result of a cooperation between my will and God's Spirit within me, I must choose a course of action consistent with growth. The way of the SOLDIER is choosing to say "No" to those things that detract from spiritual growth. The way of the ATHLETE is choosing to say "Yes" to those things that catalyze spiritual growth. And the way of the FARMER is to keep saying "No" and "Yes" over and over again throughout the ordinary rhythms of life in an intentional and persevering manner.

- Review the Short Answers (2 minutes)
- Read the selection from *Pilgrim's Progress* (10 minutes)
- Review *Main Sermon Points* from last Sunday (15 minutes)
- Read the *Going Deeper* text (5 minutes)
- Discuss the *Going Deeper* questions (30 minutes)
- Do the short *Responding* exercise (15 minutes)
- Review the *Connections* homework for next week (3 minutes)

Short Answers to the Key Questions

- **What is spiritual growth? (weeks 1-3)**
A gradual transforming of the whole self into the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29)
- **How does spiritual growth actually occur? (week 4)**
Through a synergy of God's shaping power and cooperating discipline (Phil 2:12,13)
- **What is the point of spiritual growth? (week 5)**
To become fit to partner with God in His Kingdom (Rev 5)
- **How can I take responsibility for my part of spiritual growth? (week 6)**

Responding Exercise

MATCH A PROBLEM WITH A DISCIPLINE

Look at the problems on the left. Decide which discipline on the right might be best suited to address the problem. Be prepared to defend your answers.

PROBLEM

I am judgmental of people who are on welfare
I cannot concentrate on God when others are praying out loud
I am addicted to food when I am stressed
I keep succumbing to internet pornography
I am in debt up to my eyeballs, and still I want more things
It is very important to me that people know I am a hard-worker
I can't remember Bible passages that I read
I always read the Bible clinically, like I am trying to dissect a frog
I am so stressed out: super busy without any time to let my hair down
If God spoke to me, I doubt I would recognize His voice
I am bored with the idea of God

HELPFUL DISCIPLINE

Meditation: slow devotional, prayerful reading of the Bible
Fasting: voluntarily abstaining from food to lean into God's power
Memorization: locking Bible passages into memory
Serving the poor and underprivileged
Silence: getting away from all noise for awhile to hear God in the quiet
Giving: choosing to give money and things away in the name of Jesus
Prayer: practicing various forms of talking to and listening to God
Accountability Partner: submitted to a relationship which can speak into my weaknesses
Solitude: taking time out to be with God by myself
Secrecy: intentionally keeping certain good deeds out of the eyes of others
Corporate Worship: choosing to enter into words and actions that truly reflect God's worth

Digging Deeper Questions

ATTITUDE

Exactly what attitude is Paul calling us to embrace by telling us to make sure we are the ones that win the race?

SELF-CONTROL

Describe typical ways athletes exercise self-control. Discuss these in terms of pain and gain. The greater perception of gain, the greater willingness to endure pain. How does one elevate one's perspective of gain in the spiritual arena?

THE IMPERISHABLE REWARDS

Paul says we are going after imperishable rewards. Name some of them.

DISQUALIFIED?

Is Paul serious here? Could he really be disqualified? What about "once saved, always saved"? Is Paul suggesting that our participation is required to confirm our salvation? See Paul's words in Phil 2:12 and 13.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Think back to your own athletic experiences. What can you transfer from your athletic participation to your present participation in the spiritual race that is called the kingdom of God?

THE METAPHOR OF BOXING

Who or what is our opponent in the boxing ring of spiritual growth? Review insights from last week's lesson.

GETTING PERSONAL

What currently needs development in your character? Name one thing. Now, brainstorm some possible exercises that you could intentionally embrace that could help shape that improvement in you.

WHAT IS GOING WELL?

In what area are you experiencing good momentum? What behind-the-scenes practices can you attribute to helping this success, if any?

Pilgrim's Progress: In Vanity Fair

Then I saw in my dream that when they were got out of the wilderness they presently saw a town before them, and the name of that town is Vanity; and at the town there is a fair kept, called Vanity Fair. It is kept all year long. Now, as I said, the way to the Celestial City lies just through this town where this lusty fair is kept. Now these pilgrims must needs go through this fair. Well, so they did; but behold, even as they entered into the fair, all the people in the fair were moved, and the town itself, as it were, in a hubbub about them, and that for several reasons: for

First, the pilgrims were clothed with such kind of raiment as was diverse from the raiment of any that traded in that fair. The people, therefore of the fair made a great gazing upon them. Some said they were fools: some, they were bedlams; and some they were outlandish men (Job 12:4; 1 Cor 4:9). Second, and as they wondered at their apparel, so did they likewise at their speech; for few could understand what they said. They naturally spoke the language of Canaan; but they that kept the fair were men of the world. So that from one end of the fair to the other, they seemed barbarians each to the other (1 Cor 2:7,8). Third, but that which did not a little amuse the merchandisers was that these pilgrims set very light by all their wares. They cared not so much to look upon them; and if they called upon them to buy, they would put their fingers in their ears, and cry, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity" (Ps 119:37), and look upward, signifying that their trade and traffic was in Heaven (Phil 3:20,21).

One chanced mockingly, beholding the carriage of the men, to say unto them, What will ye buy? But they, looking gravely upon him, said, "We buy truth" (Prov 23:23). At that there was an occasion taken to despise the men the more, some mocking, some taunting, some speaking reproachfully, and some calling upon others to smite them. So the men were brought to examination; and they that sat upon them asked whence they came, whither they went, and what they did there in such an unusual garb. The men told them that they were pilgrims and strangers in the world, and that they were going to their own country, which was the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 11:13-16); and that they had given no

Main Sermon Points from Last Sunday

THE SOLDIER

One facet of discipline is the work of “laying aside,” using the language of Hebrews 12:1. Included in this kind of work is stopping, refraining, resisting, saying ‘no’, holding back, letting go of. The focus of this work is to “put to death the flesh” (Col 3:5). The embedded patterns, values, and commitments deeply engrained in us from birth need to be extracted and thrown away. This is not so easily done, and requires intentionality and perseverance. There are disciplines that Christians through the ages have used to do this “putting off” kind of work. Some of these disciplines are solitude, silence, fasting, simplicity, giving, humbly serving, chastity, secrecy, vigils.

THE ATHLETE

The complimentary facet of discipline is the work of “putting on.” In Colossians 3 Paul tells us to put on the new self, to put on various Christ-like characteristics, to put on love (3:10-14). Our new life in Christ is not immediately mature. It needs to grow. It needs to mature. It needs to be shaped and trained, and this takes intentionality and perseverance. The athlete gains expertise by long-term adherence to basic drills and exercises that form abilities and ingrain them deep into their bodily system so that in the moment of need they will be able to perform them instinctively and with great skill. The classic disciplines that help us “put on” are things like study, meditation, memorization, prayer, service, community, witness, worship, and celebration.

THE FARMER

Farmers work amazingly hard, in that their work never ends. They are at the mercy of the cycles of nature. And nature never goes on vacation. We learn from farmers that attending to the “putting off” and the “putting on” is a life-time effort that can never be put on hold. It cannot be done in short spurts and then left alone. It must be continually nurtured in on-going rhythms that weave in and out of everyday ordinary life. There are no quick-fixes or miracle pills in the pursuit of spiritual maturity: only getting up before dawn yet again to milk the waiting cows.

Digging Deeper: The Athlete

24 Do you not know that **1**
in a race all the runners
compete, but only one
receives the prize? So
run that you may obtain it. **25** Every athlete exer-
cises self-control in all things. They do it to re-
ceive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.
26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one
beating the air. **27** But I discipline my body and
keep it under control, lest after preaching to others

NOTES ON THE TEXT

The footrace preceded the other four athletic contests of the pentathlon in the Panhellenic Games. The clause “but only one receives the prize” (a wreath for the head, which would eventually rot) emphasizes how hard one had to work to win the race. (A long period of intense discipline was mandatory for any who planned to participate in the events. For instance, participants for the Olympic games had to swear by Zeus to follow ten months of strict training beforehand.)

Corinth itself hosted major games for all Greece every two years on the isthmus; these were the best-attended Greek festivals next to the Olympic games, which were held every four years. The pine garland was awarded at these Isthmian games (wild olive at the Olympic, parsley at the Nemean, etc.).

Boxing was one of the major competitions at Greek games; boxers wore leather gloves covering most of the forearm except the fingers, and boxing was a violent sport. Shadowboxing or “beating the air” was insufficient preparation for a boxing competition; a boxer had to discipline his body better than that to win.

Keener, Craig, *The IVP Background Bible Commentary*, InterVarsity Press, Downer’s Grove, IL, 1993