

OPEN in prayer

BEGIN

There are three essential characteristics for us to grow spiritually or in Christ-likeness: We must be **intentional, structured, and dedicated**. Teacher and author Frank Stranger reminds us, “The spiritual life, like all life, is never static; it either progresses or regresses. Spiritual growth is never automatic; it does not just happen. While it is true that God takes the initiative in offering us the possibility of spiritual growth, we must respond by participating in the process to make it happen.” *(Spiritual Formation in the Local Church, pg.55)*

BE INTENTIONAL: Train Yourself!

Read I Timothy 4:7

(Look at these various translations for the end of verse 7)

The NAS version says: *“Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness”*
The Good News Translation says: *“Keep yourself in training for a godly life”*
The NKJV version says: *“Exercise yourself toward godliness”*
The Message says: *“Exercise daily in God – no spiritual flabbiness, please”*
The NET version says: *“Train yourself for godliness”*
The NIV says: *“Train yourself to be godly”*
The NLT version says: *“Spend your time and energy in training yourself for spiritual fitness”*
The Philips Paraphrase says: *“Take the time and trouble to keep yourselves spiritually fit”*

- What does this idea of “train yourself” mean to you personally?
- Why do you think being intentional is so important to our spiritual growth?
- What are some consequences for not being intentional in our spiritual growth? Can you think of a time in your own life that you neglected to “train yourself,” and what were the results?

BE STRUCTURED: Have a Plan!

- 1) Study, Meditate, and Apply the Bible
- 2) Worship (Read John 4:23-24)
- 3) Prayer, Solitude, and Silence
- 4) Fasting
- 5) Service (Read Romans 12:4)
- 6) Witness (Read I John 1:1)
- 7) Community (Read Acts 2:42-47)

- Which of these comes easiest to you and why? Which are the most difficult and why?
- From the list above, what is one discipline that you could focus on (or engage in) for the next few weeks?
- How could you develop a “plan” for implementing one of these disciplines in your life?

BE DEDICATED: You Can Do It!

Thomas Merton wrote, "It is not complicated to lead the spiritual life but it is difficult!" Spiritual growth takes commitment and dedication. It involves the handing over of one's self totally to the will and Spirit of God. That's hard to do, but its also why small groups are so important. The encouragement and support from others is essential for us to remain dedicated and committed to spiritual growth.

- How can your small group better support one another in growing spiritually? How can your small group hold one another more accountable for spiritual growth?

"The Bible says that true fellowship (koinonia) has the power to revolutionize lives. Masks come off, conversations get deep, hearts get vulnerable, lives are shared, accountability is invited, and tenderness flows. People really do become like brothers and sisters. They shoulder each other's burdens and are there for each other no matter what is going on in their life.

(Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian)

CLOSE IN A TIME OF PRAYER