Training for Transformation

5 Areas of needed training

May 15, 2011  Ephesians 4:25-32

Introduction: A few years ago I read a story by Chip Ingram that deeply impacted me. He shared about an interaction he had with his teenage son one day. His son was wrestling with a pattern of sin that continued to leave him with a sense of guilt and failure. One day after falling into this sin once again, he sat down with his father and opened up to him. In tears he said, “Dad, I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m trying dad. I’m trying as hard as I can! What else can I do? No matter how hard I try, I can’t seem to get victory in this area!” At that moment, chip realized that he had failed to teach his son one of the most important lessons of spiritual transformation.

He then set up a teaching moment with his son. He called a friend who owned a World Gym and told his son to meet him there after school. On the way in, both were impressed by all the equipment and these jacked guys who with sheer strength were causing bars to bow as they lifted the great amounts of weight placed on the ends of them, neck veins popping out and muscles ripping in power. He took his son to a weight bench and began to put weight on the bar, putting just enough that he knew his son could start to press but not fully get up. He lifted the bar off the cradle so that his son could begin the set. His son lowered the weight to his chest and then began to press it. A few inches above his chest the bar stopped, his arms began to shake, and beads of perspiration started to appear on his forehead. Chip began to shout encouragement to which his son replied, “I am trying dad. I’m trying” Chip yelled back “Try harder son. Try harder!” “I’m trying!” he whimpered as the weight began to fall to his neck. Chip pulled the weight up and joined his son on the weight bench. Chip asked him, “Did you try as hard as you could to lift that bar son?” “Yes, dad, I tried as hard as I could” he said. “Well then, why didn’t you lift the bar?” With anger and sadness his son responded, “Because I am not strong enough.” “Don’t you have muscles?” chip asked. “Sure I do, but I still couldn’t lift that bar.” With that chip began to explain to his son that there are certain things that we cannot do just by trying alone. Trying harder is not going to get the job done. He pointed to one of the hulks in the room and asked his son if he thought those guys could lift the weight they were lifting then the first day they walked into the gym. “How do you think they got there? It wasn’t through merely trying harder but through training harder. You have what it takes in you now, but it takes training in order to do those things.” The same is true with our spiritual lives. We cannot grow into the image of Christ just through merely trying. Paul lays out a clear path of training for transformation in Ephesians 4 and shows us 5 specific areas in which we must pursue transformation. The process begins with putting off. We must put off the garbage of the old man. We must put off the old habits, the weaknesses, and the weight that has been slowing us down. Put off the old traits inherited through Adam. We must renew our mind. We must begin seeing things the way God sees them which comes through understanding and filling our minds with the Words of God. Through that, we begin to put on the new man found in Christ and display the character traits, actions, and attitudes that come from Him. This morning I would like to take a walk through the spiritual gym
as we get an idea of the stations we need to train on and what it will take to bring about transformation there. Many of these ideas are taken from Chip Ingram’s book The Miracle of Life Change.

- **Training Station #1 – Honesty or Personal Integrity (Ephesians 4:25)**
  
  - **Explain:** It is imperative that we begin training in honesty, because our growth in anything, primarily in the church and spiritually, depends upon it. We will never see a need to grow if we cannot be honest with ourselves or with others. As long as we continue to lie to ourselves and lie to other people, we convince them and us that we are fine where we are. Dishonesty doesn’t require any action. You can say you have action without really having it, because you are not honest. Honesty helps us see the needs for transformation in our own lives so that we can do something about them. If I looked into the mirror and continued to tell myself that I was the most ripped individual I have ever seen even though I look like Olive Oil, I would not go to the gym. Why would I need to? I am already where I need to be and the gym would not make a difference. You see how honesty plays into our training? Until we are honest with the Lord and our relationship with Him, we will not grow in it. We need to take an honest assessment of our lives and be open with the Lord.

  - Paul also says that we need to be honest with one another. We are to put off speaking falsehood and put on truth. We are to speak truth to one another, why? Because we renew our minds to realize that we are united members of the same body, so to lie to one another is to lie to ourselves. Dishonesty destroys relationships, because relationships are built on trust. If personal integrity or honesty is not a character trait of your life, it can hinder you from relationships as you move forward. This means that we need to get rid of our masks, our pretenses, our hypocrisy, flat out lies, exaggerations, and not letting our yes be yes and no be no or in essence not following through on what we say.

  - The believer should be transformed in the area of honesty. Paul said earlier in verse 15 that we are to speak the truth to one another in love in order to produce growth. Honesty puts everything on the table allowing us to see the changes needed or growth needed. Notice however that speaking the truth is easy and speaking love is easy. One says whatever not caring what damage it will do to the person who needs to hear it. The other gives wishy-washy statements that lack what really needs to be said. We need to share with one another what truly needs to be shared with a general
concern for the spiritual well-being of that person. This will promote growth within the body that we are equal members of.

- **Illustrate**: Dishonesty when you think of it in terms of a relationship not only hinders growth, it usually reverses growth. When someone is dishonest, their trust is lost and usually has to be re-earned through doing many of the things they may have done in the past but moved beyond. I remember a time when I was in high school when my father had made some purchases and spent a substantial amount of money behind my mom’s back. He went so far as to have the bills sent to a neighbor’s house up the street so that she would never find out. Well she did find out and that dishonesty and deception almost led to separation.

- **Argue**: I don’t know about you, but lying usually made things worse for me as a kid. If I lied, eventually it would come out and the consequences would be even greater than if I had just came clean at the beginning. This may not be the experience with everyone, but for me when I was honest up front it usually lightened the consequence, because my mom or my teacher was proud of the honesty. Typically this is the response of most people, because it takes humility and repentance to come clean about something and accept whatever the consequences may be.

- **Apply**: How do we begin to train in honesty? Start small. Get rid of exaggerations. We as pastors can stop saying that we have 200 people at an event when we really only had 160. It doesn’t matter. When we begin to exaggerate, we begin to lean towards dishonesty. When we get up late and run into a little traffic making us late to work, we should stop saying that traffic was really heavy making us late and say that we got up a little late and ran into a little traffic making us late. Practice confession. When you make a mistake, own up to it and go the person that you need to go to. When you slip up and lie or exaggerate, go to that person you lied to and ask for forgiveness. This will hinder you from lying as much in the future (making prank phone calls at camp and the operator telling us to go tell our parents what we have been doing). Training for transformation means removing little white lies, deceptions, or partial truths. Students, honesty will be a key trait in your life in helping you find success. Now I understand that some have found worldly success through deception and dishonesty, but understand what real success is, and people admire honesty in another person.
• Training Station #2 – Emotional Control (Ephesians 4:26-27)

- **Explain:** Many times the Spirit of God is hindered in our lives by emotions that we have failed to place in submission to Him. Transformation and growth is hindered by lack of emotional control. I am not saying that we don’t have emotion. Jesus Christ had emotion and did so without ever sinning. The difference was that Jesus Christ was never controlled by His emotions. He controlled His emotions through the Spirit. James tells us that we must be slow to anger, because the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Paul says here that we are to be angry yet not to sin. The issue is that we fail to have righteous anger. We fail to have anger displayed appropriately and displayed for the things of God. Our anger is typically selfish anger and manifests itself in our lives in very evil destructive ways. Paul says, “Be angry and do not sin.” Even if we are angry about righteous things, we are not free to sin. If we are angry with the abortion of millions of babies, that does not free us to commit acts of crime against clinics or anyone else. Even If we are angry with the leadership of our nation, that does not all us to ignore God’s command to pray for them. He actually positively commands us to be angry. The anger is not the sin; what we do with it is. I can’t count how many times I have been angry while playing a sport and just started spouting off at the mouth or being so angry that I put a dent in the bathroom wall only to have to try and explain to my wife later. Anger can take hold of us and cause us to lose control if we fail to control it.

- Paul calls us to put off anger that leads to sin and to put on anger expressed appropriately. What is the renewed mindset that comes with this transformation? Anger can give Satan a foothold or open the door for him to come in and create destruction. How does Satan enter in a destroy relationships? He can do so through anger. When we go to sleep on our anger, it doesn’t just go away. That anger gets deep within us and starts to fester. It begins to create bitterness and resentment. Sometimes it begins to create evil plotting. The issue may subside for a time, but when the same thing comes up again in the future, it blows up even more and all those suppressed thoughts start springing up again. When we allow anger to go unresolved, we begin to develop anger vision. When there may only be 5% of that relationship that could be criticized, we find ways to criticize 25%. We even begin looking at the good things they do negatively by using it as an example of why they should be doing those things all the time. When we don’t deal with anger and control our emotions, we open the door for Satan to come in and start messing around.
- Most people don’t get up one morning and say, “What a beautiful day. Today would be a great day to destroy a relationship. Today would be a wonderful day to go have an affair.” Usually this is not how relationships are broken. They are broken because of unresolved anger and hurts that caused their hearts to be hardened and drove them away from one another. Lack of emotional control can push people towards isolation and can become a permanent condition. We cannot give Satan a foothold or literally a place or position within that relationship.

 Illustrate: You know how it works. Someone says or does something to you that really upset you, whether it is your spouse, a co-worker, or someone at school. You go lock yourself in a room somewhere and stew in your anger. Satan starts creeping in and says, “you should have said this.” Oh man! Why didn’t I think of that in the moment? He starts planting false ideas in your head. “Your wife doesn’t respect you” or “He doesn’t really care about your feelings.” Soon that little incident is escalated in your mind and you start doubting anything that they have ever said or done. Feelings of revenge and payback start flooding in. you might have even forgotten why you were angry in the first place, you just know that you are angry. Before you know it, you are sworn enemies with your spouse or your once best friend. There is no doubting that it is this foothold that opened the door to many school shootings and so called random acts of violence. God is saying what He once said to Cain, “Sin is crouching at the door and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

 Apply: What is the solution to this issue? How do we train? We tell the truth to one another in love. Honesty is the key! When we begin to tell the people the truth in love, we can begin to resolve these issues and handle our emotions appropriately. For those in a marriage relationship, I want to give you a simple tool that can help in doing this. Stop saying “you should” or “you ought to.” Stop blowing up in your anger or isolating yourself with the silent treatment. Begin saying “I feel…” “When you…” This puts the emotions out on the table and allows you to deal with them appropriately. It is also a little harder to argue with feelings. You may not understand why the person has those feelings, but you cannot deny that the other person has them. This opens the door for solutions and growth rather than opening the door for Satan. This means we are open with each other about our emotions, and it also means that if we are growing in honesty, we own up to our failures and take our responsibility in the issue.
- **Training Station #3 – Work Ethic (Ephesians 4:28)**
  
  - **Explain**: This is the one I really looked forward to. In part because of the lack of it I see in our world today, not only in the work force but in the church and the process of discipleship. A strong work ethic seems to have died off with my grandparent’s generation. I am not saying that some have not acquired it through the training of their parents and grandparents, but I would find it hard to say that it is a trait that characterizes this generation as a whole. Paul had to address this issue in his church. It amazes me that he had to tell them to stop stealing. This is not a hypothetical situation. There were actually people stealing within this church body, maybe even stealing from the church body. We are to put off stealing and put on work. Put off the mentality of going in as late as you can, leaving as soon as you can, doing the least amount of work you can, and getting paid the most you can. So many students today think they are beyond minimum wage even though they have never worked a day in their life and don’t have any specific training in a skill or career. Put off stealing and put on work so that you will have something to share with one who has a need. The renewed mind is no longer stealing by pursuing how he or she can give to others. It is not just about a paycheck. Working hard is not just to get money, but to have so that you can care for others.

  - For us, “stop stealing” may be better said, “stop seeking shortcuts.” We all want the product without the process. We want to have anything without putting in the work. We want to win the lotto. We want to win American Idol. We want people to pay us for doing a whole lot of nothing. Everyone wants to be a star but doesn’t want to put in the work to get there. We want to skip the hard work and the training. Give me a fit body without the workouts. Give me a great relationship with my spouse without actually having to talk to them and spend time with them. Give me Christ-likeness without the growth groups, without time spent in the Bible, and without discipleship. Just give me a secret verse or Sunday mornings message is enough for me. Weeds grow up fast, not oak trees. If we are not willing to put in the work, we will not see the results we want to see. In a world filled with miracle diet pills and get rich schemes and infomercials, we need to develop a work ethic that skips all the shortcuts.

  - **Illustrate**: Some of you might remember a workout tool that was put out a while back. Basically it was a large belt that you strapped around your waist and then turned on so that it would shock you into shape. “No, no, don’t get up. You can
just sit in your couch while we shock you, and in the end you will have washboard abs.” If that is all it takes to get in shape, I should just call all our brothers and sisters who work for the police force to come over and try out their tazers on me. “Ok guys, time for my 60 second workout. Turn up the juice.” This is the era we live in. Buy a work out chair that you can use while sitting at your desk in the office. Who wants to sit next to that guy? We don’t want to put any work for anything anymore, and we have created it. When I was young my mom and my grandfather put me to work. I remember doing work at my grandpa’s house since I was 9 or 10. When I wanted to drive, my mom said, “if you want a drivers license you better get a car because you are not driving mine. If you want a car then you better get a job.” I was working as many hours I could at a pizza shop when I was 15. At 16 I began working 30-35 hours a week while going to school and playing basketball. When I went to college I took 18 credit hours every semester and worked full time. When I graduated and my wife was still in school. I worked full-time for Eckerd drug store and then part time over night as a security guard at the mall. I did all this while maintain a 3.9 grade point average. Now we have a generation of students who will all be living in a van down by the river when it is all said and done.

Argue: Colossians 3:23-24 calls us to a renewed attitude towards work. Whatever we do, we do for the glory of God recognizing that it is Jesus Christ we are serving. This means that the monotony of every day now becomes multiple opportunities of personal worship of God. This means that changing diapers, cutting the grass, washing the car, vacuuming, and going to work obtain value because of Whom we are doing them for.

Apply: Understand that being a busy-body does not necessarily constitute having a strong work ethic. We can run around doing a million things while very few of those things have any value. The issue is that many believers are busy with the American Dream rather than God’s dream for their spiritual transformation. Who says that your kids have to be involved in four sports programs? Who says that your calendar has to be constantly booked with things? Who says you have to make as much money as can be possibly made? Ask a rich man how much is enough money to which he will respond, “just a little more.” Too many of us are living overextended. We are living under pressures rather than priorities. Speed, complexity, and shortcuts only create shallowness. We need to find people who model strong work ethic both physically and spiritually. Howard Hendricks once said this.
“The real issue is we’re not honest with ourselves or others. We say, “I want to be a man of God,” but what we really mean is, “I want to be a man of God as long as it doesn’t interfere with watching Sports Center, or the house I want, or one of my hobbies, or being involved in ninety-seven activities that make everybody like me.” I’ve got news for you. Those don’t go together. If you really make becoming a man or woman of God your target, that means that a whole lot of other good and bad activities will no longer even be on your radar screen. You will prioritize your life. If the target is to walk with God, you will come up with a specific plan for where you’re at in your life. With some coaching and some help, you will put it in your schedule, and then the difference will be discipline. It’s wanting it bad enough to stay on your schedule”

- **Training Station #4 – Communication (Ephesians 4:29-30)**

  - **Explain:** The fourth station we need to go to in order to train for transformation is that of our speech or communication. We need to transform the way we communicate. Paul says that we are to put off unwholesome speech. Literally we are to put off speech that rots or decays. Those things we say that pull a person down or eat at them. Instead, we are to put on communication that builds people up and encourages them to soar to greater heights. The renewed mind is bringing grace to people much like the grace we have received from God. God does not speak rot towards us. Rather, He no longer condemns us and calls us sons and daughters. The second renewal is recognizing that not only does our communication destroy other people; it breaks the heart of the Spirit of God. It saddens Him when we pull someone lower with our words. We sadden Him when we speak ill others in whom He also dwells. Have you ever thought that the things you say hurt God? Jesus said in Matthew 12:36 that on the Day of Judgment men will have to give an account for every careless word they have spoken.

  - According to Proverbs 18:21 our words literally have the power to make or break a person. In our words resides the power of life and death, especially when we speak those words to someone younger, someone who looks up to us. Jesus says that if you really want to know the heart of a man check his communication. Out of the treasure of his heart his mouth speaks. Controlling our speech is so powerful that James 3:2 says if we can figure out how to control our tongue, we can figure out how to control our whole body as well. We should be building our wives up, our children up, our fellow brothers up with the things we say and how we say them not rotting away at their souls so as to bring their destruction.
Illustrate: All of us can probably think back on something that someone said that just stayed with us for many years. Maybe those words still play over and over in your head today. Something a classmate said or a parent. They eat at you from within and cause a whole range of emotions from anger to sorrow to depression. I held on to words that people said when I was young about how I looked or about my economic state or intelligence. I guess this is why I often feel like I have to prove myself. Often I hear students say something that their parents said to them many years ago that is still rotting in their hearts. Once I had a young man who told me that his dad always told him he was a failure and would never amount to anything. Eventually that young man accepted that and began living in sin. It took a lot of new communication to show him that God says he is not a failure, that he is a saint, that he is a child of God completely righteous and justified through Jesus Christ. Our words can have a major impact especially as parents. We need to transform our communication. For many of us that will take training, because we have trained for so long in rotten communication.

Apply: We need to cease the sarcasm and flippant attitudes in our communication. Cease the gossip. We need to remove the angry tones that come through in our communication. We need to stop saying things that hurt people and destroy them and begin saying things that encourage them and push them to even greater growth in their lives. For some of us a very simple but difficult task may be to just practice silence. Some of us just don’t know when to keep our mouths shut. Proverbs 10:19 says, “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.” Proverbs 17:28 says, “Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent and discerning if he holds his tongue.” For some, we might need to journal our thoughts. This will allow us to say what we want to say on paper so that we can look at them without destroying other people. Notice I said journal not blog or Facebook. The point is to get the words out so you can see your own heart. We need to memorize the words of God so as they fill our hearts, they fill our communication.

Training Station #5 – Forgiveness (Ephesians 4:31-32)

Explain: The final area has to do with our attitudes towards people. This area may be a little bit more personal and private and may not be worn on our sleeve as much as the others; but believe me, it can be just as destructive to our spiritual health. To sum it up, Paul says that we are to put off hatred and put on love. The hatred and bitterness we might have against someone who wronged us needs to be put off. The love and forgiveness that we have experienced through Jesus Christ
needs to be put on. Can we be the first to say, “I am sorry, I was wrong”? Can we own up to our own mistakes and seek restored relationships? The renewed mind is reflecting on what Christ has done for us. Jesus told a parable about failing to forgive after He forgave us. Our response to the forgiveness given should be forgiveness extended.

- We are to put off bitterness or resentment. Put off rage or that blow up kind of anger. Put off anger that harbors resentment or negativity. Put off brawling or trying to start fights with people or being violent. Put off slander or what I like to call stealth anger where you defame other people behind their backs by saying untrue things. Put off malice or that attitude that devises evil; that attitude that sits at home and plots how you are going to get your revenge. These should not be the attitudes of the transformed child of God. Instead we are to put on kindness or seeking to do good for others. We are to put on compassion or a deep feeling of care for people residing in our guts. We are to put on forgiveness or more literally showing grace or giving freely as we have been shown grace or have been given freely.

- We all want justice 100% of the time unless it is us. If someone does something to us, we want to see justice come upon them. If they cut us off, we hope they get a flat tire or their car breaks down. If they use us financially, we hope they go completely broke. We wish badly upon those who hurt us. But when we fail the Lord, we expect him to continue to show kindness and grace. We want Him to continue to forgive. We hope to strike a deal with Him. He was not surprised by our sin. He saw it in our hearts and made provision for our sin through His Son. We should not be surprised either when men fail us. Instead, we should be ready to extend the forgiveness that God extended to us through Jesus Christ.

  - **Illustrate:** Some people fail to forgive for so long that just the mere mention of someone’s name stirs up all kinds of anger and bitterness. Just start talking to a Cleveland fan about Lebron or the Heat. If they are like me, they will immediately speak through bitterness and frustration. Sometimes I wonder if I have fully forgiven my father. Often times when my mom says that I do things just like my dad it bothers me and angers me. I become defensive and want to say that I am nothing like him. Failure to forgive destroys us more than the other person.

  - **Apply:** Jesus gives us a great principle to follow in Matthew 5:23-24. He says that if our brother has something against us, we should put our act of worship on
hold and go find restoration with that brother. We are not to sit around trying to figure who is to blame or how much blame belongs to each person. Even if the blame is 90% theirs, we are to go to them and confess the 10% in which we were wrong. When we take responsibility for our part rather than playing the blame game, restoration can be found and forgiveness can be given. It may not be fair, no fairer than the forgiveness God offered us by pouring His wrath on His sinless Son for our sins. Failure to forgive usually does not hurt the other person. Typically they have no idea you are bitter towards them. That bitterness rots us from within. Forgiveness becomes just as beneficial for our wellbeing as it is for the wellbeing of the relationship.

Conclusion: Training is not a negative word. We use training in all aspects of life in order to become the people we want to become. I believe as we begin training in these areas, we will transform into the spiritual men and women we want to be and God has called us to be. It is likely not to happen overnight and most likely will not be transformed through merely trying harder, but if we commit to training through discipline, God will transform us through the power of His Spirit more and more over time. Are you ready to begin your training? Have you recognized those things in your life that have been slowing you down, holding you back, or tripping you up. Put off the old, change your mind through the Words of God, and put on the new man or woman that is found in Jesus Christ.