

Five-Star Athletes – God’s Process for Building Men (Learning to “Trust the Process”)

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Athletes – God’s Process for Building Men

Learning to “Trust the Process”

“...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” (Hebrews 12: 1)

Out of the gate, I may lose part of my audience due to comments on what has become, in the last decade or so, a time-consuming area for men in the months leading up to the next major sport season, especially football, the draft. The amount of hyperbole surrounding star ratings of young men for their athletic prowess is (in my humble opinion) over the top. In some circles (not all), there is more concern for ***developing performance over the person—competitiveness over character.***

That said, do not think for one second God is not interested in ***building high-performance men.*** He absolutely is! He just defines them differently. On the surface, His process (compared to those above) seems doomed to fail. God does not care how fast we run the 40, how many reps we bench press 225 lbs, or how high we jump. We will not run through cones, but we may run through fire!

Biblical and modern history have demonstrated God’s process can be widely successful. But many find it troubling. The reason is simple. His methods are not natural—they are ***supernatural.*** They do not build on the physical man, but the ***spiritual*** one. God builds His men ***inside-out.***

God does not care what we look like or the physical attributes we bring to the field when we join His team. I hope this has piqued your curiosity. Throughout this study, you will be given the opportunity to peak into His playbook. But first, **The Process.**

Following are five facets of God's process for building biblical Christian men. This overview is neither exhaustive nor original—just a humble attempt to call attention to another aspect of our Father's love for you and me. He invests heavily in His boys with hope that we become godly, young men, and, ultimately, maturing men after His own heart—soldiers of the Cross fit for our King. I chose present participles because God never stops the process this side of Heaven.

★ **Providing**

The first, and best, provision is obvious—Jesus our Savior, Who redeemed us from our sins because He alone could, and did, satisfy the mandatory death penalty that accompanied them. Neither our fathers nor we, ourselves, had any chance of doing that. Neither can we do it for our children. The best Old Testament foreshadowing of this provision is the very familiar story of Abraham and Isaac.

*“Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham said, “**God will provide for Himself the Lamb** for the burnt offering, my son.” (Genesis 22: 7-8 NASB)*

Jesus often spoke in parables to His disciples. As His crucifixion drew nearer, He spoke directly that He was God's provision (the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world as John the Baptist called Him).

“From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, be killed, and be raised up on the third day.” (Matthew 16: 21)

That satisfies the most important provision, but God did not stop there. He knows all our needs and delights to make provision for them throughout His process. These two verses give me great assurance of that—one from David; the other the Apostle Paul.

“I have been young and now I am old, Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken Or his descendants begging bread.” (Psalm 37: 25)

*“And my God will supply **all** your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4: 19 NASB)*

★ **Protecting**

God is not about to let our enemies, especially Satan, score early victories over His men in process. We are safe under His wings, the sanctuary of His Word, and fellowship with other brothers also in the process and older men of God, mostly on the other side of it. Consider two verses citing God’s protection. Many believe Moses wrote Psalm 91, as he did Psalm 90, though it is not confirmed. King Solomon wrote the second. God does not want us to think He bails on us when the going gets tough (which we know it does). He reminds and reassures He is our Protector Who goes before and after us.

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!” For it is He who delivers you...He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.” (Psalm 91: 1-4)

“The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man

runs into it and is safe.” (Proverbs 18: 10)

★ **Purifying**

Now the process gets harder and hotter!

“Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.” (Isaiah 48: 10 ESV)

I chose the following powerful verse from the Apostle Peter because he went through as visible a purification process as any man in the Bible. Boastfully zealous and outspoken at times. Swore to his willingness to die for or with Jesus. Slept on His command in the garden. Ran away when the soldiers came. Denied Him three times. Somewhere weeping and hiding as Jesus was crucified. Wow!

But Jesus, loving, forgiving Lord that He is, restored Peter. On the other side of his intense purification process fell out a man useful for Christ’s service—one of the key leaders of the early church.

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” (1 Peter 4: 12 ESV)

So take heart, brothers. For we have in our own ways slept on Jesus’ commands to us in Scripture, run away during tough times, denied Him with our words, and, more so, our lives for which we have wept bitterly in the shadows hoping no one would see us.

But there is great news and encouragement! The same loving, forgiving Jesus meets us where we are and restores us to Himself to put us back in His service—a more purified and useful vessel.

★ **Pruning**

Late Winter or early Spring (depending on where you live) is a time many prune trees and shrubs to prepare them for the new growth of Spring and Summer and fruit in late Summer or Fall . Cutting back select branches on a fruit tree to make them more fruitful is not painful to the tree, but it sure is for men. Horticulturists tell us pruning directs more of the trees energy into producing fruit. So does God's pruning!

God prunes the tree (man) to see who is a genuine disciple of Christ, grafted into the vine, versus those simply holding onto it (like kudzu) for the sake of convenience and appearance. Jesus' words:

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." (John 15: 2 ESV)

He also prunes the forest (the church) as well—again to separate out the real from the pretender.

"Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire..." (Matthew 3: 10-11 ESV)

(I feel it is important to interject a quick note on these verses. These verses can be misinterpreted to mean one can lose his salvation if you are not bearing fruit. The reality is Jesus is calling men out to examine our hearts to see if we are born-again in the first place.

The issue is not losing your salvation. The compelling issue is whether you ever had it! Jesus made perfectly clear the consequences. So be sure to examine your hearts, brothers!

★ Perfecting

Most are familiar with the adage, *"Practice makes perfect."* That was *one-upped* by someone else who said, *"Perfect practice makes perfect."* Perhaps the most glaring difference between

this athletic analogy and real life is this. There is no practice field in the Kingdom walk.

If you have been born-again into the army of the Lord, you are in the fray. You do not get to sit on the sidelines and wait your turn or sit behind a veteran to learn the ropes. It could be argued our churches and discipleship ministries serve that end for “rookie” Christians. They can/should serve that purpose,

but at no time is the Christian man not in the battle—it is not a game.

“Trust the Process.” I attempted to trace the origin of this oft used expression in sports. It has been used by winning schools and organizations that took a very process-oriented approach to all aspects of building their respective programs. One recent use that is now deemed “successful” is a pro team that lost for years so they could get the best draft picks—the most five-star athletes. Interesting, but painful and expensive for the season tickets holders to watch during those years. I thought the object was to compete as hard as one can to win; not lose to get better the next year. Silly me!

I do have the answer to the question, *“Who first said that?”* The most important thing to note is this. It was the *second* phrase spoken because it paled in comparison to the first.

The Lord God said to man in the beginning and throughout His-story. “Trust Me.”

From Adam to Noah to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons, Moses, all the subsequent judges, prophets, kings, and the rest of the boys in the band, God kept saying, “TRUST ME! Good things happen when you do. Bad things happen when you do not.”

God’s process is about perfecting you and me. I know that

sounds crazy to some, but if you will not believe me, believe Jesus. **He commanded us to be perfect.** The following was not a suggestion.

“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5: 48)

That is as impossible an assignment for us as obeying all those laws was for the Israelites in the OT. God is always giving His men impossible assignments. Is He setting us up to fail? Of course not. He does that so that we come to the end of ourselves (my definition of a *desperate man*) and have no choice but to turn to Him in complete dependence. Then, and only then, can Holy Spirit power, wisdom, and guidance take control of our lives and this seemingly ridiculous assignment.

One key to success was given to us by James, the half-brother of Jesus, and leader of the new and very fragile Christian church.

*“And let **endurance** have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”* (James 1: 4)

If we trust God first and best, then we can learn to “trust His process” and stay the course. On the other side, you will look in the mirror and see a man who looks more like Christ than we ever thought possible—more fit for war than we ever imagined or hoped.

Performing

My dear brothers, if we endure God’s “five-star” process, we are ready to perform for Christ’s sake and His glory. The Apostle Paul must have had some athletic skill and experience as he used numerous analogies to things like I discussed above and the Christian life. Consider these two passages.

“...Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable

(one). So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." (1 Corinthians 9: 24-27 ESV)

"But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. **Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus...that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ**" (1 Timothy 6: 11-14 NASB)

The only stars you and I should be concerned with are those that will bejewel our crowns when we have kept the faith, fought the good fight, and finished the race He assigned to us. Our race does not end at a finish line. It ends at the Beginning Line we call the entrance to Heaven—finally Home. Hallelujah!

Walter