Disciplined Sacrifice

Hebrews 12:1-29

Slide 2

Picture yourself next to me and James here at the summit of Mt. St. Helens. This was an awesome day! St Helens is the only Mountain I have hiked, but being on the summit I know why people love to climb. In the distance you can see Spirit Lake, as well as, even further away you can see Mount Rainier. Though Mt. St Helens took a lot of planning and was a difficult hike, Mt Rainier is a climb that cannot be taken as lightly.

Slide 3

This is a photo of Mt Rainier from the lesser Tolmie Peak.

Training to climb Mt. Rainier is no joke, and I probably only understand about ½ of what is involved. Here is what Alpine Ascents suggests your abilities must be before making an attempt at the Summit:

Slide 4(a)

* Be able to carry 30-45lb pack for 5 to 8 hours a day

Slide 4b

* Be able to ascend steadily for 5,000ft (a day) on slopes up to 40 degree slopes

Slide 4c

* Be able to descend 9,000ft (a day) on up to 40 degree slopes

Slide 4d

* Be able to recover from each of these days and repeat on consecutive days

If you are interested in the specifics of how to get to these points I have an 18 page document with a suggested 12 week exercise schedule. It includes a daily regimen of cardio, strength, and flexibility training.

I will read the last weeks’ cardio and strength schedule:

Sunday: 45 minute swim (cardio) and rest (strength)

Monday: Rest (cardio), 1 set of 20 reps (including…Arm circles, Russian twist, wall squat to press, wood choppers, rocky twists, toe crunches, 45 degree twists, suitcase crunch.

Tuesday: Run a mile warm up then run a mile 3 times as fast as you can, after each mile do 25 mt climbers, 25 burpees, 25 lunges, 10 long jumps. Then an ab work out.

Wednesday: 60 minute elliptical/bike turnover interval training. 6x8 bench press, back rows, shoulder press, leg curl, leg extension, leg press, 30 sec rest between each set.

Thursday: 45 minute run and ab work out.

Friday: 60 minute stairs and 30 minute run.

Saturday: Outdoor hike (camp Muir equivalent) with 30-45lb pack.

Approaching God is like approaching a Mountain. As Hebrews 12:18-24 records:

Slide 5(a)

“*For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.”*

Slide 6(a)

*Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*” (Hebrews 12:18–24, ESV)

Jesus has made a way for us because no one can touch, let alone, summit the mountain of God without Jesus as Mediator.

At the moment you believe on Jesus, the moment you throw yourself at His mercy, He gives you a view from the summit. It is this view that inspires you to become a life-long climber. Hebrews 12:1-2 says:

Slide 7(a)

“*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*” (Hebrews 12:1–2, ESV)

Jesus Himself did all the hard work necessary to bring you to the Holy Mountain of God. God is faithful and it is Jesus who is our Hope of eternal glory. This view could be considered our justification. Jesus has made us right with God, and He has equipped us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

As anyone who has been on top of a mountain would tell you, that mountain top experience motivates them to prepare for the next, this preparation is the very life blood of the climber. So, too, the Christian who has been saved by grace and has been given a vision of God’s goodness and faithfulness will desire to discipline their life according to the equipping Christ has given them. It isn’t easy, it isn’t about sitting back and letting go and letting God! It is hardcore disciplined living. The reason I am sharing this with you today, is because on Palm Sunday and on Easter we were talking about the Kingdom of God. And I wanted to share with you one last thing about our part in the growing of His Kingdom. .

At first, I wanted to title the sermon “No Pain, No Gain.” But I think it more appropriate to share that “No sacrifice, No gain.” It doesn’t rhyme, but it is more precise.

Deciding to live as a Christian, as you may know, will be the hardest thing you have ever done. In fact, it is a life of self-sacrifice, But it is the best thing you can ever do!

Think about the key components of showing Christ’s love to others…

Forgiveness, Forebearance, Love, Patience, Kindness, Gentleness, Faithfulness, self-control, Mercy, Grace…The key ingredient in all of these things is sacrifice. And when I say “sacrifice” I mean it in the way David described it in Psalm 51, when he said…

The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.

 You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

Psalm 51:17 NLT

What if I told you furthering God’s Kingdom is less about proving people wrong with apologetics, but instead it was about laying your life and your pride, down before God and others? Let’s just say you are tracking with me.

How can we be motivated to live a disciplined, sacrificial life?

Slide 8(a)

“*Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*

Slide 9(a)

*If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.*” (Hebrews 12:3–13, ESV)

Slide 9b

Jesus demonstrated a life of sacrifice. He disciplined Himself for His act of ultimate obedience which was His death on the cross.

Our perspective about difficult things may need to change. If it is our aim to squeak by as easily as possible than we are not in training for anything. If we are always fighting for our rights above all else, then we are failing to understand that sacrifice is the way God’s Kingdom grows.

Though we are not saved by works, works proceed from those who are saved!

And we love it! When we work hard at the spiritual disciplines like prayer, bible study, breaking bread together, fasting, giving, and serving, the pain in the sacrifice brings great joy! It is a blessing for us to participate in the sufferings of Christ. Racers, climbers, and athletes, don’t let pain, hardship, and falls defeat them. Like Seneca the Roman philosopher said:

Slide 10(a)

“The athlete who hath seen his own *blood, and who, though cast down by his opponent,* ***does not let his spirits*** *be cast down, who as often as he hath fallen hath risen the more determined, goes down to the encounter with great* ***hope****” [Seneca].*

I am challenging you, like Jesus, to do hard things, sacrificial things. Not because they will save you, but instead because you are among the saved, who Jesus sacrificed Himself for.

Our salvation means a new life, and that life is a life that is to be laid down for others.

Slide 11(a)

*“…we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”*

Slide 12(a)

*Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.*” (2 Corinthians 5:16–6:10, ESV)

This is up to us. There are consequences for us if we choose to lead undisciplined lives. As Hebrews 12:14-17 records:

Slide 13(a)

“*Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.*” (Hebrews 12:14–17, ESV)

As a racer would you choose to go in the opposite direction of the track? As a mountain climber would you descend when the goal is the summit? Time lost is time lost. It can never be retrieved. Our salvation may be guaranteed, but there are consequences for disobedient slothfulness in our lives.

Slide 13b

Disobedience has consequences that cannot be undone!

The Christian life is no picnic. Christ has given us peace, but it is an internal peace that is lived in the valley of the shadow of death. God is Holy and He command us to be Holy. It should be sobering to think of God as a Holy untouchable mountain and it should be even more sobering that Jesus has made a way for us to grow in His likeness and pursue righteousness. Are you living a life aimed at being spiritually disciplined? Does your spiritual exercise regimen show your gratefulness to Jesus for what He has done? Or are you just waiting for Him to come back and whisk you away to the summit again? What is God’s Spirit speaking to you through His Word? Whatever it is…

Slide 14(a)

“*See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*” (Hebrews 12:25–29, ESV)

Slide 14b

God says to “Be Holy because He is Holy,” and Jesus through His example has taken us to the mountain top and shown us what holy living looks like. In fact, He has even made us holy in God the Father’s sight. Practically speaking, however, Jesus challenges us to learn to live obediently, not on the summit but instead in the valley of the shadow of death. I know life is hard and I know that discipline and training seem difficult, but when faced with challenges…

“*Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*” (Hebrews 12:3–4, ESV)

Ask God, today, to give you a desire for sacrifice. It is our sacrifice, motivated by Christ’s sacrifice, that God is going to use to make His kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven.