

Train Yourself

This 'N' That by Arlene Yothers

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In 1 Timothy 4:7-8, Paul tells a young leader, "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

Godliness requires training. When we train, sometimes it is difficult to see the results. It is easy to get side-tracked with things that seem more fun. But when we consistently put the time in over months and years, we become stronger and healthier.

When we look at Christian mentors and champions, it can feel intimidating. We hear stories of people who read through the entire Bible every year. Or people who go on spiritual retreats. Or people who pray for an hour or more every day. And we think, "I could never do that..." So we never start.

However, just as my minute every day of fake pushups led to better and better exercise, the most important thing in your spiritual journey is starting.

What is one, small, simple practice of prayer that you could add to your life today? Why not start?

Souderton Home will be having a Holiday Bazaar on Friday and Saturday, November 10 and 11. Come out and shop. The Apple Orchard Cafe will be selling oyster stew. Come and dine as well. If you are willing to bake some treats to sell at the Bake Sale, please let me know. The proceeds will go to the Agape Fund of the home. If you can't come either of those days, be sure to stop in at the Corner Store another day, they have many nice gift ideas.

The Care and Share Thrift Shoppes in Souderton needs your prayers for all the workers and volunteers and shoppers who come there. Decisions need to be made on a daily basis. Please pray for the shoppers that they will not be

tempted to shoplift. As I volunteer there a few hours each month, I see firsthand that shoplifting happens.

The 50th annual Apple Butter Frolic happened at the Heritage Center in the beginning of last month. While the weather was not cooperative, people came out to enjoy the event. There are activities that happen at the Heritage Center year round, come and learn more.

The Worm Project Fundraising Banquet happened in October, too. Thank you to all who came out for the event. Thank you to all the contributors to that great cause. Many children are impacted by your dollars.



Trustees Update

The porch in front of the office has been replaced. We did find some foundation issues that contributed to the settling of the porch and the cracks that resulted from the settling. We resolved those issues as best we could, and the new porch should stay solid for many years to come.

We also had an issue with the septic system recently. The pipe between the grease trap tank and

the staging tank that pumps over into the septic tank rusted through and broke. Rittenhouse Plumbing dug up the old line and replaced it with a new PVC pipe, so we should not have any issues going forward.

Please let a Trustee (Ken Longacre, Terry Landis, Brian Rush, Will Sadler) know if you see anything that needs attention.



Train Yourself To Be Godly by Pastor Nathan

We call a Lead Pastor for a four year term. Near the end of every term, our LEADership Minister from Conference leads a congregational review. We look at the ministry of the Lead Pastor as well as the health and direction of the church as a whole.

In my time at Swamp, we have done similar congregational review processes for our Associate Pastors. The feedback I have received has shaped me as a person and as a pastor. It is greatly appreciated.

Typically, the feedback is not surprising. We hear things we are already aware of as leaders. But filling in the details, finding places of common ground, and discovering priorities and distractions helps to bring clarity and focus.

The last congregational review we engaged in was in 2020. I received helpful feedback on my social media posting and my attempts to address divisive topics. This led to a positive conversation between me and Church Board that impacted how we have led and taught over the past 3 years.

I was also able to share some of the pressures of ministry. We reviewed the shape of my daily and weekly ministry in light of my gifting and calling. Without realizing it at the time, this planted seeds for our shift in staffing and calling of Pastor Tracy.

At the end of the last review process, the team who led the listening process sat with me to share the "results". We walked

through a report that Mike Clemmer, our LEADership Minister, had compiled. We discussed each point and I was able to ask clarifying questions.

After everything had been discussed and we were finishing up, Mike leaned forward on the table and said, "This feedback is good. These are important things, and I hope that they help shape your ministry moving forward. But there is one thing that didn't come up in the review that I think is really important."

I leaned forward in anticipation. What could this one thing possibly be? Perhaps I was missing something in my preaching. Perhaps there was a relationship that I had left untended. I like to do well, so when someone I respect tells me I'm missing something, I pay attention.

Mike continued, "I'm concerned that you don't have any regular exercise in your life."

I sat back. That was it? Exercise?! As I remember, my response was dodging and defending. "Well, I split my own firewood and run after my kids." But Mike's comment didn't leave my head. It kept nagging at me.

I was expecting something super spiritual or focused on leadership or to improve my ministry. Why was I so disappointed when he told me that I needed to focus on my own personal health?

It took a year for me to take him seriously. As the comment kept rolling around in my head, I realized how inconsistently I moved my body, especially in the

winter months. The following year, in August of 2021, I decided to make one small change in my routine. I couldn't imagine making time each day for a 30 minute run or hour workout. So, each morning before showering, I would do as many pushups as I could in one set, to fail.

For anyone who knows anything about working out, that is not an effective exercise routine. But it was a starting point.

Over the next two years, this small beginning grew into more. A month after starting this routine, I learned from my brother that I wasn't doing real pushups. My form was awful. This led to research and discovering that I was not able to do a single, real pushup.

My workout routine changed. I started using an app that is all bodyweight exercises. It helps you slowly progress in different movements, reducing the risk of injury.

We signed up for a YMCA membership for a year, so the kids could get swim lessons. I started using the gym once or twice a week while continuing with the bodyweight exercises.

Progress is slow. But small, incremental changes, over the course of two years, add up.

This August, I finally leveled up in the app and moved on to doing normal pushups. After two years, I was doing what I had set out to do. If I had known it would take that long, I may never have started.

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Church Board Highlights

Church Board and Ministry Team met together for the first hour. Katie Gehman offered a devotional about Elijah followed by 5 minutes of silence and an opening prayer.

Quincy and Pastor Nathan summarized the yearlong process for reviewing our leadership structure. The first recommendation was to act on the powers given to Church Board in by-law 4.1 to reshape the composition of Ministry Team. The proposal was to eliminate additional ministers so that, as of January 1, 2024, Pastor Tracy would be the sole minister on Ministry Team. The Board and Ministry Team discussed this change. Pastor Tracy was asked for his input, to ensure he was on board. The Church Board approved this proposal. As of January 1, 2024, our Ministry Team is composed of one position.

In light of this, there were several by-law changes proposed:

- 1) Create a "Membership Team" to maintain the active and inactive membership lists. This addresses the long-term concern from Ministers regarding their role in the membership process. This also protects the congregation and

pastors from only having paid staff responsible for the membership list.

- 2) Fix an inconsistency in the by-laws. Church Board was given the power to reshape the composition of Ministry Team, but the Minister of Community Life was mentioned by name in the Church Board Discernment process. The recommended by-law change would remedy this inconsistency and protect the congregation from placing too much control in the hands of paid staff.

- 3) Fix a typo in the bylaws.

- 4) Create a flexible number of Church Board Members-at-Large. This also requires updating the definition of a quorum.

These changes were discussed, edited, and approved by Church Board. They will be announced to the congregation on October 29 and voted on at the December 7 Member Meeting.

It was also mentioned that the Mosaic Conference is asking for prayer and fasting times on Wednesdays until the annual assembly. Church Board encouraged delegates to have a Q&A time during Sunday School

one Sunday in October.

At this time, the combined portion of the meeting concluded with Ministry Team moving into the remainder of their meeting.

A letter will be sent to Mosaic Conference recommending Pastor Tracy for ordination. Ministry Team's recommended changes to the membership lists were reviewed and approved.

Chapters 6 and 7 of the book "Discipleship that Fits" were reviewed. Comments included: working hard to make time for quiet, God knows us, the need to take time, and intentional focus. There was a review of what was learned from Covenant Community process and how Ministry Team should shape community life in the next 2-5 years. We will continue to support those who want to meet in small group settings. There will not be an intentional effort to form new groups or push everyone into a group. The focus will be more on the 20-70 individual group size range, hoping this encourages relationship development and individuals will naturally form smaller communities.

Mission Outreach at Swamp

How do we do mission outreach at Swamp? Through our mission outreach fund, we support missionaries abroad, like Garry and Ruth Denlinger in Israel. We also support local organizations to help those who are incarcerated or struggling with everyday needs, organizations like Code Blue, Ripple Community, Liberty Ministries, and Allentown Rescue Mission. The mission outreach fund also supports individuals in

crisis when they call the church needing food, lodging, or other assistance. If you use the church envelope system for your tithes and offerings, you can designate some of your offerings for the Mission Outreach Fund. If you utilize the on-line giving platform you can also designate for Mission Outreach. If you don't use the giving envelopes or the online platform, you can mark your check for Mission Outreach if you would

like to designate for these purposes. These Mission Outreach items are not in the church budget, and gifts to the church that are not designated go into the General Fund that supports the church budget. Mission Outreach Committee members are Wendell Gehman, Shirley Geissinger, Bill Longacre, Marc Rush, and Will Sadler, and you can ask any one of them if you have questions.

Calling All Kingdom Dreamers by Tracy Commons

One of the former presidents of my college alma mater wrote a book entitled "Where Have All the Dreamers Gone?". I have not read the book, and this article is not about the book, but the title of the book came to mind recently as I have been sensing something stirring for the past several months. I believe there are dreamers among us here at Swamp. I have had conversations with some of you recently, and I have heard your passions, your holy unrest, your desire for more, and I believe the Holy Spirit wants to fan that flame.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, one of the first things he taught them to pray for was that God's kingdom would come and that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. Years ago someone encouraged me to be much more specific in the way I prayed that prayer, focusing on a

certain place which would then connect my heart with the heart of God for that place, the people there, the brokenness, and yet the beauty that could come when God's kingdom would break through. Kingdom dreams are often sparked from those prayers.

What if we began praying "... your kingdom come, your will be done, at Swamp as it is in heaven..." or "... your kingdom come, your will be done, in Quakertown as it is in heaven..." or on your street, or in your school, or in your home, or in your workplace? What if we opened our ears, our eyes, and our hearts to receive the kingdom dreams that God wants to give us? In *The Tangible Kingdom Primer* it says "God's Kingdom doesn't usually unfold in a nice, neat package or linear progression. In fact, he is much more likely to surprise us, to show up in unexpected places and

in unique experiences that only he can orchestrate."

Are you ready to be surprised?

God loves to give us glimpses of His kingdom. Even this morning as I am writing this article, He did that for me in the form of a passage of Scripture that came through a daily email I receive. The passage was this—"Jesus told them still another parable, "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough." (Matthew 13:33) The kingdom of heaven is working its way all through the dough of our lives, our experiences, our relationships, our communities... if you have a desire to pay attention to the Spirit, take risks for the sake of God's kingdom, and join in the work of making earth a little bit more like heaven, let's talk!

Ministry Team Highlights

Ministers began by meeting with Church Board to discuss the Leadership Structure Review and the timeline/process of transitioning into the new structure, which will be to end their time as ministers effective the end of 2023, and for Pastor Tracy to take on the role of Ministry Team effective January 1, 2024.

Ministers then had a time of reflection on what has been good/encouraging or challenging/difficult in their life, ministry, and/or our congregation. Shannon mentioned that it has been good to update the list of child safety clearances for nursery workers and SS teachers, and that she is encouraged by the potential of the new nursery schedule. She also

mentioned that the church picnic went well. Dan was bummed that we couldn't have the outdoor service, and that there has been a bit of a struggle in everyone feeling comfortable running the new sound system. He is wondering about the need for more training, and possibly the benefit of reconfiguring the livestream setup in the booth so it

is less complicated for the person running it. Will mentioned that he is in a very significant season of discerning his personal mission and what that might look like.

Ministers spent the remainder of the meeting having a spirited discussion regarding what church is all about, and wondering how God might want to teach us, stretch us, and show us His heart.

