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SERIES: CHARACTER OVER COMPROMISE

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: Conquering the Rat Race Pt. 1

According to Greek mythology, there lived a character named King Sisyphus. King Sisyphus was the founder of Corinth. He was known as a practical joker always looking for a good laugh. At the end of his life, Hades or Death, came to take him to hell. His life of mischievous joking didn't fare well with the gods, so hell was his eternal destiny. After entering hell, Hades displayed a pair of handcuffs, which would be used to chain Sisyphus to the underworld. But Sisyphus was too clever for Death. He convinced Death to demonstrate the cuffs on himself. The next thing you know, Death was chained up in hell and off went Sisyphus back to Earth.

While Sisyphus was roaming the Earth, people were engaged in their normal activities of fighting and war. People were getting slashed and hacked to pieces, but no one was dying. Death was chained up, unable to escort people to their eternal destiny. Finally, the gods took notice of the mutilation on Earth. They checked Death's vacation calendar and he was scheduled to work. They traveled to hell and found Death chained up. They released Death and were informed Sisyphus had tricked him and now he was running free.

The gods found Sisyphus and escorted him personally back to the underworld. They gave him one simple task: move a giant boulder up to the top of a mountain. Once resting on top, Sisyphus could roam free, apart from laboring. "Too easy" he thought. So the next day, he began. He pushed. He heaved. He pushed. All day long he toiled, pushing the boulder up the mountain. Finally, after a long hard day, he made it. He gave one final push to the top. He bent over to rest and then he heard it. The boulder rolled all the way back to the bottom of the mountain. It was in that moment, he realized, his destiny would be an eternity of hard labor with no end in sight: Truly futile.

From my years in leadership development, I've noticed that most people today are suffering from the Sisyphus effect. They get up each day believing they will have to push their boulder up a hill, only to have to do it all over again. But what if there was a better way? What if you could stop living a life of futility? The good news is you can. There is a better way. And that's what we're going to talk about today.

Today we want to discover a way to conquer the rat race, so the rat race doesn't conquer you. And I do believe this is possible. It is possible to conquer the rat race, but only when we follow 3 powerful steps from Scripture.

So let's get back to the Bible to see what God says about this topic. So let's turn to 1 Timothy 4. The book of 1 Timothy was written by the apostle Paul to a young pastor named Timothy. Paul

wrote this from Macedonia and likely from Philippi. At this time, Timothy was likely stationed at Ephesus. And he was in need of some encouragement and guidance to eradicate false doctrines that were penetrating the church, to protect public worship, and to develop leadership. In the first 5 verses of Chapter 4, Paul has laid out some of the false teaching that needed to be addressed. And now we'll pick it up at verse 6:

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. ⁷ Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. ⁹ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. ¹⁰ For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. ¹

Paul begins by saying that Timothy will be a worthy servant of Christ. Your version might use the term minister. Paul used the Greek word *diakonos*. *Diakonos* is where we get the word Deacon. It is a servant – a hired hand: One who does what their employer or their master tells them to do. You may not realize this, but we, as Christians, are all called to be servants – ministers of Christ. Some might come to this passage and say “I’m not a pastor, so I’ll skip this section.”

If this is you, STOP. You are a servant of Christ. There may be elements you are not responsible for as laid out in this passage, but trust me, every follower of Christ is to be a servant. What does being a servant of Christ have to do with conquering the rat race? I’m glad you asked. The answer is in these 5 verses. In verse 7, we find the first step to conquering the rat race: **You need to train for godliness.**

Paul says, as a servant of Christ, you are doing the will of your master – Jesus. But if you are going to serve anywhere, what do you need? Proper training and conditioning. Paul says train yourself to be godly. In other words, this doesn’t happen automatically. It doesn’t come naturally. It takes intentionality and hard work.

Paul then addressed a ready objection, “Wait a minute. Why train so hard for the godly, when the physical is here and now? Eternity can wait.” Paul answers with “Hey. Physical training is good and is beneficial, but spiritual discipline pays dividends here and for eternity.” Paul isn’t saying that activities of this world: working out, sports, leadership development, cooking classes, etc. should be eliminated. Physical training is important to living a long life, but too many people give the physical realm too much attention. I know too many people who spend 2 hours a day, 4-6 days a week in the gym, but only spend 2 minutes a week in a devotion, containing one verse of Scripture. And they wonder why they are running in a rat race they can’t win. It’s because they’ve spent too much time training for the temporary rather than the godly.

I knew a woman who was a professed believer, but would go to church on a rare occasion, and openly admitted to never reading her Bible. But she was wholly committed to running during

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Tim 4:6–10). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

every break and every lunch hour. She would teach classes at the YMCA. When she told me that her marriage was ending and her children were engaging in all sorts of bad habits, I was not surprised. She had put all her training in physical exercise, which will not save a marriage or train up godly children. If she only would have picked up her Bible and trained there, maybe she'd still be married and joyful.

DISCUSSION:

N: Well, I've just shared an example of the type of thing that happens far too often. So let me turn for a moment to Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney and talk a little more about this concept of spiritual training. Arnie, through research, you discovered what you might call a spiritual training tool. Tell us about the Power of 4!

A: Yeah. It's actually a spiritual practice, which is reading the Bible or engaging the Bible, which means read, reflect, and respond. And what we found is, that if people will do that four more times a week, their life looks radically different than anyone else. And it's kind of like, if a doctor said that people that eat every day, they're much healthier than people that eat once a week, you know? And well, when it's a physical thing, it's like, "Well, duh, of course. You're not strong. You're weak. You get sick." Well it's the same thing in the spiritual world. Those people that feed themselves on a daily basis, that is, get engaged in God's Word, their life radically changes.

N: Yeah. That constant feeding of yourself, especially of the Word, will have a dramatic impact on what you think, what you believe, and how you live. And that's why I'm so thankful for what we've done here at Back to the Bible. You want to talk just a moment about goTandem, and how that Power of Four has manifested?

A: Yeah. It's designed to meet you exactly where you are spiritually. We have you take an assessment, and then it pushes out, based on your struggles and your head knowledge, content that helps you grow spiritually on a daily basis. Our goal is to help you move closer to Jesus today than you were yesterday, in a way that leads to life transformation.

N: Speaking of life transformation, one of the key characteristics of a growing Christian, is their desire to do outreach. Cara, you are very focused on reaching out to others. Once a person has Christ in their life, what do you do to help them become spiritually fit?

C: Well, you have to make sure they're getting spiritually fed in some way. So in order to do that, I stay connected with them. Of course, the more people that you witness to and are discipling, that group gets bigger and bigger. So you are very busy with being a friend, really, to people. They have questions. I have questions. And it's really cool when you can sit and have a discussion, and find the answer to those questions together. You know, when you look at Hebrews 12, one through three, and you're all running this race towards the finish line; all of our races look completely different, but we're all heading towards that same finish line. So it's always good to reach out to people, to build up other believers, as they're running their race. So you don't get discouraged, and if you get discouraged, I think you're extremely helpful to people,

especially if you've already been through something. So just make sure you stay connected to people.

N: I think you brought up such an important part of our growing in Christ, is the community aspect; that we are called to call people into a relationship with Christ, and we help them walk and grow. And then over time, your outreach will continue, but their outreach will continue. And there's a great community that is called the church, and we get to strengthen each other, encourage each other, challenge each other. And when we do, we continue that spiritual growth and that spiritual training increases.

How do we train to be godly? Paul told Timothy to be nourished by the message of faith and the good teaching he has followed. That's how we train to be godly. We get into the Bible and embrace the Gospel, which is our hope. We get into reading Scripture, and let Scripture interpret Scripture, so we understand the good teaching. Just like an athlete hits the gym every day to ready for a competition, we need to be in the Word daily, so we are ready for the competition of life: the bullying at school, the marital arguments, the illness, the job loss, and the competing world views. Only when we study and filter life through the grid of Scripture, are we trained for this life and the life to come.

Now, notice two caveats to this godliness training. First, it depends on nourishing ourselves in good doctrine. The NASB calls it "sound doctrine." What does that mean? I love what Pastor John MacArthur says about this. "Sound doctrine is that teaching which is firmly rooted in and yielded from the proper interpretation of Scripture, not human systems of theological or philosophical speculations. Exegetical theology must be the foundation of biblical and systematic theology" (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1 Timothy).

Simply put: Sound doctrine, or good doctrine, is theology based on rightly interpreted Scripture. There's a lot of bad theology out there. Here's the truth of Scripture. There's only one meaning to a passage. Have you ever been to a Bible study and someone asks the question: "What does this verse mean to you?" That is the wrong question. Never ask that question. There is just one meaning. Our goal as Christians is to interpret the verse rightly, to get the original meaning. We then find principles and many applications from the passage. So a better question might be, how can you or I apply this verse?

So sound doctrine is theology rightly interpreted. It's the positive element of training for godliness. It's like eating for muscle gain. You need to nourish your muscles with the right kind of foods and supplements. You can put on weight if you eat Big Macs and French Fries. But if you want lean muscle mass, you need to eat lean proteins and a lot of them. Proper nourishment is defined. That's the first caveat: *do consume good doctrine*.

The second caveat is: do not consume [irreverent, silly myths](#). The NASB calls it "worldly fables." The Greek could be translated as "unholy," so the opposite of sound doctrine. It's taking in what the culture offers as good advice. We are called to reject silly myths and worldly influence. Instead of picking up the Bible for counsel, you pick up *Cosmopolitan* magazine or *Maxim*. Instead of engaging in a Bible study, you opt for your answers in YouTube or Facebook.

The problem, as you know, is the majority of advice and counsel is unholy, and not beneficial for godliness. It's like eating the double decker pepperoni pizza with a chocolate shake, instead of that lean meat.

So we are called to train for godliness by consuming sound doctrine and rejecting worldly advice. So the first step to conquering the rat race is through training for godliness.

The second step we'll see as Paul continues his letter.

¹¹ Teach these things and insist that everyone learn them. ¹² Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity. ¹³ Until I get there, focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them. (1 Tim. 4:11-13)

Verse 12 is a familiar passage and one that young adults and adolescents have learned by heart. Paul tells Timothy to not let his age impact his ministry – his servanthood. What I find humorous, and honestly, awesome, is to the culture at the time of Paul's writing, young would have meant up to age 40. And Timothy was likely around 35, so I'm still young! That's awesome!

Paul addresses a concern that we all have, in that we doubt our abilities to influence based on age. But Paul encourages Timothy and us today that age doesn't matter. For that matter, economic status, race, sex, or anything related, should not hold us back in our ability to influence others for Christ. What it comes down to, is how we live and what we live for.

This is the second step to conquering the rat race is: **You need to live for the things that matter.** Why are so many people struggling in the rat race? First, they are mostly training for the temporary – the things of this world. But second, they are spending their remaining time focusing on things that simply don't matter long-term.

Sometimes, I like to ask the question: "What is on your agenda today?" I get the list of things related to being too busy with no time to breathe. At that point, I like to ask, "Would that change, if you knew today were your last? What would you do differently?" Inevitably people would change their priorities.

So, we are called to live for the things that matter. But I think this is only possible when we live for God and not men. Think about what Paul said to households in Colossians 3. Listen to his counsel, "Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ" (3:22-24).

So, as you look at your schedule and your business, are you living for God or for men? That's a question we all must consider.

N: So, Cara and Arnie, let's look at this question, "Are you living for God or for men?" I'd like to hear from each of you how living for God, rather than men, changed your perspective on one

of your “bad days”.

C: Well, I'm living for God. I mean, He's really the only one that I care about His view of me, His opinion of me. So I don't really care what men think, when it comes to what I believe or what Jesus, you know, I follow Jesus. So I care what Jesus thinks. I don't really care what anybody else thinks.

N: How did you get to that point? Because a lot of people, they say that, but that takes some time to get to the place where you can actually live it out, in my perspective.

C: Well, just like we had just discussed really, is just being in the Word, knowing what the truth is. It's true, you know, all the warnings in the Bible that point to, people are going to disagree with you, you're going to get, people are going to shun you. You may lose friends over it, or even family members. There's nothing that hasn't been unexpected in it. But I would say, that at this point in time, even with all this unrest and craziness going on, I've actually had more spiritual connections with people than people who oppose. You know, I have to go out looking for trouble right now - and I don't do that, I'm not out looking for arguments - I'm just going out and looking for ways to spread the Gospel. You know, I'll always come back to, what are your intentions? So if you're on social media and you're evangelizing for Christ, but you're looking for arguments, then your heart's not in the right place. And God doesn't want that. You're going to turn more people off. But if you're looking for ways to just put some Christ into a situation, you know. But I'm ready, I live for God. I don't really live for the opinions of men. I mean, what can men do to me? Just like the Bible says, the worst thing that can happen to us is the best thing that can happen to us. So I don't really, I guess I just don't really care, as long as what I believe is true. And it is.

N: Arnie, what about you? Because obviously as the CEO of Back to the Bible, you're a person of influence. And so that's got to be at times kind of a tension between living for God and living for men. I mean, how has your spiritual growth changed that perspective, on living for God fully?

A: Oh, it's had a tremendous change in my perspective that influences everything you do. And being on fire for Christ, even in business, and even at a ministry, there's still challenges and temptations, and there's all that kind of stuff that is there. And it's all what you focus on.

N: Well, Arnie, I want to stick with you. Paul talked to Timothy about being a good example to all believers. A lot of times, older Christians think that the younger ones don't take an interest in them and that they aren't really watching them. Do you think that's true?

A: Oh my goodness. Don't get me started. So when I became a Christ follower at 47, when I went to church, I was shocked because there were drums, electric guitars, and all of this stuff. And I thought, “Oh, wow, that’s pretty cool. I wonder what old people are thinking” - old people - you know, 60, that age - here I am one; I'm almost 70. And I'm watching church on Sunday, and the preacher has a T shirt on, okay. And if you look over time, I think a lot of seniors feel like they're being neglected in their opinions, in just about their taste in music, and even the way

church is done. Well my point isn't my point, if you will. When you're young, you want to be young, and appeal to the young; there needs to be a balance. And I knew of a church where the worship team came in barefooted, you know, and the Joe Cool. My idea is to be more inclusive of all, even the old folks who oftentimes are the backbone of the church.

N: Well, I think we have to remember that the church is supposed to be made up of people of all different ages and races, and male and female, and each one is necessary. But I do think we have lost the art of cross-generational discipleship, which makes me really sad, because there is so much wisdom in the generations that came before us. And I don't know what came first, if it was the younger generation saying, "No, I'm going to do it my way," or whether the older generation said, "You guys just don't listen" and pushed away, or if it was both, but I know in my life, God has blessed me with mentors at the right time, and in the right places. And so even here at Back to the Bible, great opportunity, but I was blessed to have you as a mentor now for this new calling. And I really value that insight and wisdom from someone who's older than me. And I hope that people listening will value that as well, and will look for opportunities, either to mentor and disciple those below you, or look for someone who can coach you in your own life as well. Well, you and your wife seem to be pretty involved with younger people. I think that's very evident and true. How do you build those relationships and get them involved in godly training?

A: We have the funnest job ever at our equestrian ministry that is run out of our home. And what's been a tremendous blessing to me is, we come into contact, not only with non-believers, but with young people. And there are young people who I have conversations with, and more importantly, my wife has many more, who don't know the Lord, who come to us for advice, who look for us to see Jesus. And it's an everyday occurrence. So just when we're getting bugged about something, it's like, wow, what a tremendous blessing; how many people, that are almost 70 years old, have 30 to 40 kids, and between [age] 8 to 18, that know you by name, and will talk to you and come into contact? And it's just a tremendous opportunity that God's really granted His favor in, if that makes sense.

N: Yeah. And I think what you've done is you've taken an everyday natural opportunity, and you've opened the doors to people who would benefit from it. And I think we can all do that. It probably won't be an equestrian ministry for some of our listeners. I know it definitely won't be for me, but again, you took an everyday thing that you were passionate about, and that you could do, and you opened the doors. And I think that is what God is calling us to do as well. Well, Cara, training for godliness depends on true doctrine. In a world so full of lies, how do you spot true doctrine?

C: Well, I would say it needs to be run under the light of God. So when you hear something, you ask yourself, is it true? And then you take it to Scripture; take it to the Bible. You know, you hear so much of Scripture being mishandled right now. A lot of it has been taken out of context. So a lot of people right now paint Jesus as a social justice warrior, and they can sort of spin the Scripture too. Jesus came to save, period. So anything outside of that, you have to know the context of the Scripture. So if you hear someone saying that, and you're like, is that true? Go to the Bible. One thing about Scripture in the Bible is, it will never contradict. Scripture will never

contradict Scripture and context is king. So take the Scripture, take the portion of it, and ask yourself the who, what, why, where and when. So you're going to want to read what's going on around it. You're going to want to know who wrote the book, those things, and just really dive into it, because a lot of times the Scripture is just being taken out of context.

N: Well, and I think it's part of that too is, as you said, the who, what, why and where process, but it's really, it's the tactics, isn't it? Right? So when someone says, "Well, here's what I believe". Well, we can use our tactics and say, "Well, why do you believe that?" You know, and get in deeper. Because if they're not getting it from the Bible, an accurate interpretation of the Bible, then we're able to spot maybe where their faulty thinking or where their beliefs come from.

C: Well, you know, when you're getting into a conversation with someone, and they're getting off track in their theology, or you hear that, if you have a good means to have the time to have a discussion, a lot of times, I just want to ask them questions: "Oh, really, I've never heard that before. Where is that in the Bible?" And I've oftentimes found it's just easier to ask. It's way more effective than to accuse someone. So ask over accuse; just ask questions, because they don't know they're wrong, and who knows? They might want to know what's right.

N: It's a loving way to disarm them with a bad theology. And I think that's very conversational as well. And so I think we would encourage any of our listeners, as you engage with people, ask them questions, see what they believe, and see why they believe it, and help them come to terms with their own faulty thinking and beliefs. And then they'll be ready to ask you the question, "Okay, well then what do you think? Or what does the Bible say?" And then you will be prepared to go in and help them get clear understanding, and believe sound doctrine. Well, last but not least, give our listeners some encouragement to help them step out of the rat race today, and join God on a purposeful path of spiritual growth.

C: I would say read - and I know it's paraphrased - and sometimes you get some heat for suggesting that someone reads The Message version of anything, but if you're a mature believer, or you're confident in the Word of God, you want to read the paraphrased Message version of Hebrews 12, one through three. I think it's an awesome passage that describes this race that we're running. The worldly rat race is a smoke screen. I think it's a distraction to what is really going on, and you've got to get in your lane and run as hard as you can towards Christ, because that's the only thing that matters.

A: Amen. Well said. Nothing more needs to be said about that. That was great Cara.

N: Great insight, Cara.

