



## Faithwalking Becoming a Master

As the Faithwalking experience has unfolded, a conversation about *mastery* has emerged. As we have engaged the *core content* on deeper levels, we have recognized that a fundamental aspect of our learning is the pursuit of mastery. We seek more than just knowledge of the key concepts and ideas in our work. We seek mastery!

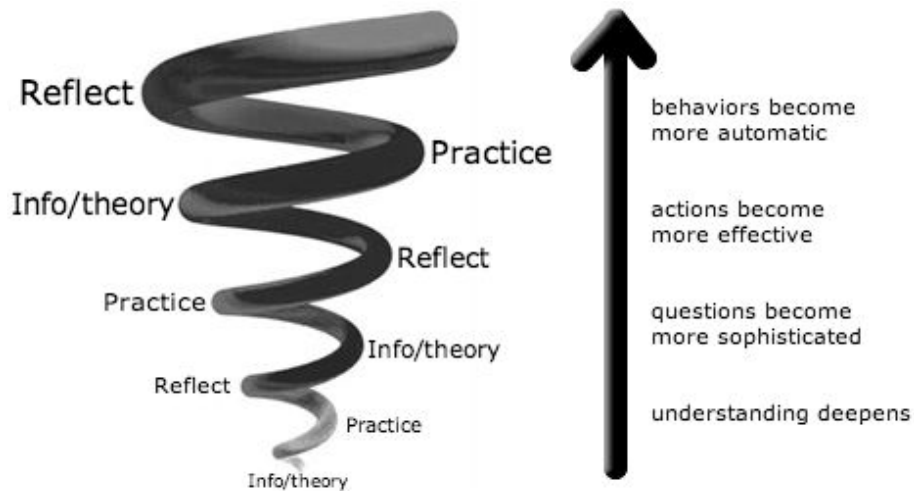
What is mastery and why might it be important?

**First**, mastery is the natural end result of the Transformational Learning Model (information/practice/reflection ... repeat) that undergirds all of our work. This model ensures a growing internalization of the core content such that we come to “own” it. The opposite might be called “transfer of information” or “reception of knowledge,” but, neither information nor knowledge transform. Experience transforms! That’s why transformational learning involves practice that gets us into action and purposeful reflection via dialogue. We must experience the information in an active manner rather than simply receive it in a passive manner.

This is the difference between the modern, Western way of learning and the Hebrew way. In our traditional learning environments, the student is passive and absorbs information. In the Hebrew way, the learner follows the master around, doing what the master does and learning along the way, as a disciple does with a rabbi. This is how God uses masters to transform people and reproduce other masters.

This is also seen in the Hebrew idea of how we ‘know’ something. In Genesis 4:1, it says that Adam ‘knew’ his wife Eve. That is, he experienced her sexually. In the Hebrew way of thinking, we ‘know’ something (or someone) when we experience it (or them). Having information about something is not enough, and in fact, is quite dangerous. Mastery of information tricks us into thinking we are true masters. Experience, on the other hand, is the thing that wakes us up from this illusion. True masters have not only internalized concepts, but have also practiced applying them in a wide variety of settings. As a result of this practice and reflection, learned skills and acquired values naturally flow from the person’s very way of being (i.e., they are masters).

So, the Transformational Learning Model is not just a cycle. It is an upward spiral of increasing mastery:



It is also important to note that in the Transformational Learning Model, as in any other kind of learning, repetition is not redundancy. Every time that we are exposed again to the information, practice, or reflection of our learning, we are in a different place than before, so we receive and integrate what we learned in a deeper and more comprehensive way.

**Second**, mastery also seems to be the natural end result of the Integrity conversation.

Integrity is an English word derived from the Latin *integer*, meaning ‘whole’ or ‘complete.’ It is an idea that Jesus stresses in the Sermon on the Mount when he says: “Be perfect as my heavenly Father is perfect.”

When he says, “be perfect,” he is using the Greek word *teleios*. Even though we might think of being “perfect” as being ‘flawless,’ *teleios* is calling upon another definition of perfect—‘lacking no essential detail,’ as in: “Can I get you something?” “No, I’m perfectly content.”

Look up *teleios* in a your standard Bible dictionary and here’s what you would find:

- wanting nothing necessary to completeness
- full grown, adult, of full age, mature (as in Eph. 4:13)
- consummate human integrity

Jesus is talking about integrity. He is assuming that we are partly human—partly living in our full potential as a human being—and need to become fully human.

Take a moment to ponder what Jesus said prior to this statement about being ‘perfect’:

You have heard that it was said, “do not murder”, but I say to you, “do not even be angry with another person”.

You have heard that it was said, “do not commit adultery,” I say to you, “anyone who even looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

You have heard that it was said, ... but I say to you ...

In each case, it is as though Christ is saying, “don’t just fulfill the bare minimum of the law; instead, live into God’s full intention, which is to make you mature, complete and whole.”

To refrain from killing is not enough; the full intention is to be free of destructive anger altogether. To refrain from cheating on your spouse is not enough; the full intention is to keep your heart completely pure. Live into the full design rather than the bare minimum.

This is exactly why Jesus starts that section by saying, “do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come, not to abolish, but to fulfill.” Thirty one verses later, Matthew 5:48 serves as a sort of summary ... “Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.” Be whole. Be complete. Be mature. Have full human integrity. Be fully human, the way God created you to be. Live into your full design.

Integrating the two: If we take the integrity conversation seriously, we can’t settle for a little bit of transformation in our learning. We want to live into the full design of who God made us to be. We want the whole thing. The language we’re using for this pursuit is that of mastery.

In fact, a master ceases to pursue wholeness and instead, becomes that wholeness. Another way of saying it is that masters are consistently enlarging the realm of unconscious competence:

CONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE → ↑ You are <i>aware</i> of the skill but not yet proficient	→ CONSCIOUS COMPETENCE ↓ You are <i>able</i> to use the skill, but only with effort
UNCONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE ↑ You are <i>unaware</i> of the skill and your lack of proficiency	UNCONSCIOUS COMPETENCE ↓ Performing the skill becomes automatic

We want to get to the point that we have learned something so well that it becomes a fluid outflow of our inner selves. Actions that once required keen awareness and artless mechanics, no longer require conscious attention, but become automatic. It’s about a level of transformational learning so full of integrity that we actually become who God created us to be.

For some of us, the only things we have truly mastered are the unhelpful stories we tell ourselves. They are deeply ingrained parts of our autopilot way of being. True mastery requires us to see reality more and more as it is, rather than as we wish it was, as we remember it from childhood, or as we pretend that it is. We must see, with absolute clarity, the illusions we have about our current level of competence. As long as we delude ourselves about that reality, we cannot proceed toward a God-designed future separate from that reality.

In this vein, we want to suggest that mastery is a discipline—an activity to be integrated into our lives. The discipline is made up of *two primary movements*.

- The first movement is continually clarifying what is important to us—i.e., what we want based on God’s expressed desires for our lives. In the Faithwalking community we have affirmed that our end game is the fully human, fully alive life that is found in living missionally in community. Missional living is the kind of living where the natural response of our heart - when things are easy and when they are really challenging is to love God, neighbor, self, stranger and enemy as a way of life. Is that what you truly want for your life?
- The second movement is continually learning how to see current reality more clearly—i.e., *where we are* in relationship to *what we want*. This means that we practice the core content and when we fail, we are rigorous in revising our view of current reality - telling ourselves and others the truth about our current level of mastery.

Working on these two movements simultaneously creates tension, but it’s only in the tension that transformational potential exists. We agree with Peter Senge who wrote, “*The essence of personal mastery is learning how to generate and sustain creative tension in our lives*” (p. 142 of *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*). Notice, *learning* in this context does not mean acquiring more information, but expanding the ability to produce the results we truly want in life. It is lifelong, generative learning, where we increasingly become subject to God’s transformational desires.

**That leads us to the final question.** We’ve described where the mastery conversation came from and we’ve expressed the basis - practically and biblically - for mastery. That then leads us to the question, “**What are we mastering?**”

In Faithwalking we are calling those in our community to become masters of the *core content*.

*So, how would we describe the core content?* It is a specialized and precise language that contains mental models, values, complex concepts and terms that are networked together in a variety of ways. We suggest that the core content includes:

- **Mental models**
  - For discipleship that includes radical obedience that leads to a missional life; a reflective life in which our word increasingly co-creates the world with

God; and an authentic community that forms around and is sustained by a shared vision;

- For seeing and managing anxiety, growing our level of differentiation, defining our guiding principles and closing integrity gaps that exist;
- For generating and sustaining creative tension that results in growth and progress toward God's preferred future.

### ● **Values**

- Expressing the most mature form of love for God, self, neighbor, stranger, and enemy
- Increasing integrity that is defined as workability and as keeping and honoring our word.
- Growing in our capacity to engage God and each other from a stance of authenticity
- Facing our fears and living lives of courage.

### ● **Complex Concepts**

- Integrating the public/private/secret self into one coherent whole;
- Making empowering meaning as life happens to you;
- Identifying negative vows, placing them in our past, and giving our word to new vows that align our lives with the God's purposes.
- Defining oneself by identifying one's guiding principles and giving one's word to living by these principles; honoring one's word when he/she fails to keep his/her word.
- Engaging life from the stance of ongoing transformation conversations that keep transformation alive and help create openness to the work of the Spirit in others.
- Mastering the art of dialogue, the creative act of creating a shared pool of meaning among folks who share a common purpose.

### ● **Terms**

- *Fully human, fully alive* – a phrase that captures the vision of a transformed life that gives itself away for the sake of the restoration of others to wholeness, standing in contrast to the consumer life, the religious life, the fearful life, the self-centered life.
- *The space* - an acknowledgment that we are all part of one whole and that our shared experience creates a shared space for developing common meaning that leads to powerful action.
- *What are you present to?* - a call to being fully human where our thoughts, feelings, and our will come together and interact with our word in the presence of God's Spirit and in the presence of other human beings.
- *What I don't know that I don't know* – a call to a stance of humility that creates the possibility of continuous learning that flourishes in a posture of prayer and dialogue.

Each of these components of the core content has specific definitions and practices. One begins the journey to mastery by simply being clear about the definitions. Once clear about the definitions and clear about one's current practice, the context is set for taking on the task of generating and sustaining creative tension. That responsibility for generating and sustaining creative tension is the responsibility of the individual. In other words, "You are responsible for this work in your life." Taking responsibility includes forming or joining a community of people who are on this journey with you. It is a lifelong journey that will require self-discipline, self-care and persistence.

Mastery is not reserved for a certain chosen few who are more talented or more spiritual than the rest of us. Anyone who maintains the two-fold movements described above will experience increasing levels of mastery and maturity in their lives. It is our heartfelt conviction that virtually everyone can become a master, if he/she is willing to do the work.

A final work about mastery. For those who are engaging in this process it is important to recognize that mastery is more a journey than a destination. In this journey learning is always happening, it is always transforming and transcending what we know, how we know it, and even who is doing the knowing. Mastery requires that we develop an open and curious attitude towards ambiguity, paradox, and experiment.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. As you read this paper, what got stirred up in you? What attracted you and drew you in? At what points did you find yourself feeling resistant or wanting more information?
2. How much clarity do you have about the core content?
3. In what ways are you taking responsibility for your learning?
4. Since you can't work on everything at once, what are you currently working on, or what do you see the most pressing need to work on in order to increase your mastery?
5. What stops you from generating and sustaining tension in your life around the components of the core content?
6. What conversations would you like to have about mastery with the important people in your life?