

*Train Yourself for Godliness: 1 Timothy 4:6-10*  
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This morning we're going to talk about training for godliness. This is the main exhortation that Paul gives to Timothy in the passage we come to today. He says in 1 Timothy 4:7, "train yourself for godliness." And that's the exhortation that I hope will ring in our ears as we leave this place today, and as we enter a new week. And my hope is that it will not only ring in our ears but that it will resonate in our hearts and spark a deep passion and desire to really train for godliness. It may sound daunting. It may sound difficult. But I want us all to see that it is more than worth it. The sacrifices you will make in training yourself for godliness will pale in comparison to the rewards you will receive. In fact, at some point in your life you'll look back and recognize that the things that seemed like such a sacrifice at the time were really no sacrifice at all. Because you're really just trading lesser pleasures for greater pleasures.

My desire for myself and for all of us is that the Holy Spirit would come and ignite in each of our hearts an intense and lasting desire to train ourselves for godliness. We're going to see in this passage that this training will yield amazing rewards. It is of value in every way. It holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. It gives us hope. So let's pray that God would give hearts to pursue this training. Let's pray that God will truly revive us so that we're no longer content with the shallow and fleeting enjoyments of this life, but that we want to train ourselves and discipline ourselves to pursue the highest pleasure of all, which is to know and behold Christ, our Savior. That's my hope for us as we look into these verses together.

There are two imperatives (two commands) in these verses, and they are both found in verse 7. One is negative and one is positive. The first is negative: Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Then the second, in contrast, is positive: Rather train yourself for godliness. That second exhortation in verse 7, I think, is the main point of this paragraph. Everything else in these verses somehow describes or supports that command. So I want to begin by talking about a description of training for godliness, and then we'll look at the value of training for godliness, which is a support for why we should want to obey this command.

**A Description of Training for Godliness (verses 6-7)**

The description of a good servant in verse 6 I take to be essentially the same as what Paul is going to exhort in verse 7: "Train yourself for godliness." A good servant is a godly servant.

Therefore to train for godliness is what a good servant does and what a good servant must continually do. So what we see in verse 6 is a description of training for godliness, as it describes some characteristics of a good servant. And though this is particularly directed at Timothy and is particularly relevant to men like Timothy who are in leadership positions in the church, it also applies to each and every one of us as Christians. We should all be striving to be good servants of Christ Jesus. We should all be training ourselves for godliness.

Paul begins verse 6 by referring to “these things,” referring back to the warning against false teaching in the previous verses. Remember our study last week of verses 1-5. Some will depart from the faith, and that departure will come about as individuals devote themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, which will happen through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared and who impose legalistic ascetic measures like forbidding marriage and forbidding certain foods. This is at least one form of false teaching that was present in the church of Ephesus, and Paul confronts it by asserting the biblical truth of God’s good creation. “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (verse 4). In verse 6 Paul is now encouraging Timothy to put these things before the brothers. He needs to pass along these truths. He needs to warn the brothers of false teaching and speak out against the false teaching. And if he does so, Paul says he will be a good servant of Christ Jesus.

The word for servant there is the same word that we saw in chapter 3 that is translated, “deacon.” It can be used in a technical sense to refer to the office of deacon, as it did in chapter 3. Or it can refer generally to one who is a servant, one who ministers to others in some way. Paul called himself a servant of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:1), a minister of the gospel (Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 1:23, 25). He wants Timothy, also, to mature into a good servant of Christ Jesus, and a piece of that is going to be instructing and warning those in the church concerning false teaching.

Another facet of being a good servant of Christ Jesus is being trained in the words of the faith and of good doctrine. Timothy was being trained, and at the same time it was incumbent upon him to instruct and exhort and train others. He had to receive in order to give. He needed to learn in order to teach. He needed to know the words of the faith in order to pass it along to others. He needed to know good doctrine in order to refute bad doctrine.

There are a couple things to mention about this word in verse 6 that is translated “trained” in the ESV. The word for “train” and “training” in verses 7-8 is a different word—there it is

the word from which we get the word “gymnasium” and “gymnastics.” It’s the metaphor of the physical training of an athlete. But in verse 6 a different word is used, which could also be translated “brought up in” or “reared” or “nourished.” In other words, it is spiritual instruction and nourishment that Timothy is receiving. He is a learner. He is a student. And the other thing to notice about this word is that it is in the present tense, indicating a continuous action. The NASB rendering of this verse brings this out well: “constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.” The point is, this isn’t some training that Timothy received in the past and he’s now done with. It isn’t a nourishment that he needed when he was first starting out, but doesn’t need anymore. It’s not something that happens in seminary and then is no longer necessary. There is an ongoing, never ending training and nourishment that every good servant of Christ Jesus desperately needs. In order to be a teacher, one must be a learner. In order to feed, one must be fed. In order to set others ablaze with a passion for God, one must himself be set ablaze with that passion.

This applies to me very clearly, as the primary preacher in this congregation. I need to be a lifelong learner. I need to be nourished by the Word of God continually. I need to be feasting on God’s Word week after week, digging into the richness of passage after passage, applying it to my own life and finding hope for my own soul, and then I can share with others the great encouragement I’ve found so that you, too, might be nourished. For the other elders, as well, we all need to be growing in our knowledge of the Word, growing in wisdom, growing in courage, growing in humility, growing in love. And for others who teach and lead in the ministries of the church, we must all persevere in this training and nourishment that Paul mentions here, for it is a necessary characteristic of a good servant of Christ Jesus. So we’ve seen in verse 6 that being a good and godly servant, involves exhorting and warning others and also continually being trained in good doctrine. It involves defending the truth and continually growing in the truth. These are characteristics of a good servant, and thus give us a picture of what it looks like to train oneself for godliness.

Another description of training for godliness comes in the first part of verse 7. This is the negative imperative that comes right before the main command of the paragraph. Paul writes, “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.” Literally, godless myths that are characteristic of old women, also known as “old wives’ tales.” And he’s not intending to demean older women in any way. He says in the next chapter that we should treat older women as mothers, and we should honor widows. What he’s

doing here is using a phrase that has been around for a very long time that refers to speculative, unwarranted ideas. And he's telling Timothy, and us, don't wander down that path. Don't become like the false teachers who are so caught up in all kinds of silly things. Don't stray from the Gospel, Timothy! Don't miss the point! Stay as far away as possible from all of those irreverent, silly myths. In chapter 1 Paul told Timothy to "charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith." There are all kinds of things that church leaders can get caught up in that do not constitute training for godliness. Things that are not focused on the Gospel and do not promote godliness, but rather promote speculations. So if we are to train for godliness, one thing we must do is avoid irreverent, silly myths.

There are many forms that these myths can take, and they can creep in very subtly. I think the best way to guard against this is to regularly ask oneself, Am I growing more and more in love with Jesus Christ? Am I more amazed by His grace? Am I more in awe of who He is and what He has done? Through my personal Bible study, and through the books I'm reading and through the preaching and teaching I listen to, am I growing in these ways? Or is my Bible study and reading and the teaching I absorb all leading me toward something other than Jesus Christ? Let's be on guard so that we can avoid irreverent, silly myths.

As we avoid these myths and have nothing to do with them, the positive instruction of what we *should* be pursuing is then stated in the second command of verse 7. "Rather train yourself for godliness." As I already mentioned, this word for "train" is a word that refers to the physical training of athletes. Paul uses this kind of analogy in other places as well. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 he writes, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 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." Paul puts these images in our minds of rigorous athletic training in order to give us a sense of how we ought to think about the Christian life. Training for godliness is more than showing up at a church service once a week, just like training to be an Olympian is far more than showing up at a gym once a week. It involves a daily regimen of effort and focused training. It involves discipline to continually strive for growth and improvement.

I've been convicted by this as I've studied it this week, and I hope we will all be spurred on by this exhortation. In what ways are we being lazy and undisciplined in our spiritual lives? Is there a lack of Bible study? Lack of prayer? Lack of accountability? Are you undisciplined in attending church? Undisciplined in family devotions? Don't think that you can coast through the Christian life! Don't think that you can attend Sunday services every couple of weeks, and read your Bible occasionally, and grow in your Christian walk. To grow in godliness requires training. It requires personal discipline and perseverance.

We might wonder at times why we feel so weak in the faith, why life seems so hard, why we're so worried about the future, why we don't have much hope. And the question we must ask ourselves at those points is: Am I training myself for godliness? Am I yearning and striving and laboring to know Christ more? Sometimes we have so little hope and therefore we're so easily enticed by sin, and it's because we've neglected the spiritual disciplines. If you're not spending time in God's Word, if you're not setting aside time for focused prayer, if you're not regularly spending time with other believers and sitting under the preaching of the Word, then of course you're not going to be hopeful and happy in the Lord. If you're feeling distant from the Lord and feeling especially allured by the things of the world, please take a serious look at your training regimen. If it's nonexistent, then talk to a Christian brother or sister and ask for some help and some accountability in establishing a Bible reading plan and a personal prayer time. Be faithful in attending Sunday School and these Sunday worship services. Be committed to a small group. Wherever you are in your walk with the Lord, let us all take a serious and humble look at our spiritual lives and ask the Lord how we need to grow. In what areas do we need to be more disciplined in our training? We have to train ourselves for godliness.

Someone might object at this point and say that this training sounds like it could very easily become legalistic. And this is a good question for us to raise, especially in light of the previous paragraph. What's the difference between a legalistic mentality, like the false teachers who said you can't marry and you can't eat certain foods, and the exhortation to train yourself for godliness? In some respects, the two may look the same based on outward appearances. There may be two individuals who both read the Bible regularly, attend church faithfully, are involved in the lives of others in the church and are serving in various ministries of the church, and yet one of them is doing these things with a legalistic mindset and the other is training for godliness. What's the difference?

I think one way to distinguish the two is to recognize that legalism is man-centered and self-centered, whereas training for godliness is God-centered. Legalism is about following a list of rules in one's own strength in order to impress God and impress others. It's all about me. Training for godliness, on the other hand, is about following Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit in order to enjoy the eternal pleasure of being in God's presence. And in this way, it's not about us. We don't get the attention or the praise or the glory. Instead, God is the One who is shown to be great. He gets all the attention and praise and glory.

So as we're training for godliness, the goal is not that others would see me. The goal is not that others would stop and look at us and say, Wow, look at how religious these folks are. Look at how disciplined they are. If that's what we're seeking, then we've probably fallen into some form of legalism and have absorbed the prideful attitude that comes with it. The goal is not that others would see me, but that I would see God. It's not a self-centered aim, but a God-centered aim. The motivation is that I would be able to get free from the entanglements and distractions and hindrances of the flesh so that I can behold God and enjoy being in His presence. With that mindset the discipline of rigorous training will not become legalistic. Instead it will be a passionate pursuit of God.

### **The Value of Training for Godliness (verses 8-10)**

Paul has described what it looks like to be a good servant in verse 6 and has exhorted us to avoid irreverent, silly myths and to train ourselves for godliness in verse 7. And now he provides a basis and motivation for why we should train ourselves for godliness. He says, "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." In comparing spiritual training to physical training, both here and in other places, Paul wants us to understand that training for godliness will be no less rigorous than training for athletic competition. But then he goes beyond that in the comparison, because he wants us also to recognize that the rewards for godliness far outweigh any benefit of bodily training.

First, think of the benefits of bodily training, whether it's the Olympian training for competition or the person who is just trying to live a healthy and balanced life. There *is* value to bodily training. There is value in the enjoyment of being able to compete in various sports. There's value in terms of one's health and one's overall well-being. Being physically fit *is* of some value. We shouldn't underestimate its value, but neither should we overestimate its value. It is "of some value," as God's Word says

here. But godliness is on a whole different plane. It is not “of *some* value.” It is “of value in every way.” It is infinitely more valuable than physical training.

Think now of the benefits of training for godliness. Think of the discernment that you long for when you are facing a difficult decision. Think of the hope you wish you had in the midst of a severe trial. Think of the encouragement you crave when you are feeling down and depressed. Think of the holy passion that will enable you to resist temptation. And think of the eternal pleasure of being with Christ in heaven—the freedom from sin and evil and pain and sickness and sadness. This is the infinite value of godliness. It holds promise in this life. Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). And it also holds promise for the life to come, for “whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (John 3:36). In both of these ways, training for godliness is far more valuable than bodily training. It gives us the joy and hope and peace of walking with Christ in this life, and it gives us the eternal reward of heaven.

Verse 9 is probably referring back to this statement in verse 8. Some scholars think that the trustworthy saying is verse 10, and others think it is verse 8. I don’t think it makes a whole lot of difference for our understanding of the passage, but it does seem more likely that the proverbial statement of verse 8 is what Paul has in mind. This is a trustworthy saying and deserving of full acceptance. Don’t forget this truth! Don’t doubt this truth! When you’re tempted to neglect your spiritual training because you’re too busy with bodily training or professional training or whatever other training or tasks that may be pressing for your time, remember that godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Finally, in verse 10 Paul alludes to the value of this training again by referring to the hope we have in the living God. He’s referring back to verse 8 when he says, “For to this end we toil and strive.” He’s referring to the value of godliness and the promise that it holds. This is worth toiling and striving for. And the toil of training for godliness is not ultimately a sacrifice because of the hope we have in the living God.

Notice the forward-looking aspect of training for godliness. There is value in godliness. It holds promise. It is worthy of toil and striving. It is motivated by hope in the living God. This is what should spur us on in the pursuit of godliness. Not a legalistic set of rules that we feel like we have to keep in order to impress God or impress other people. Training for godliness is the toil and the striving that is motivated by the infinite value of godliness. We’re motivated to holy living because we recognize the beauty of who God is, and we want to be with Him. We want to be near

Him. We don't want to be encumbered by sin that separates us from Him. We want to moving closer to Him, so we can enjoy Him more.

The last phrase here can be perplexing. Paul describes the living God as "the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe." We have already studied the phrase in 2:3-5 which referred to "God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." I think Paul has a very similar idea in mind here as he extols God as "the Savior of all people." As I tried to demonstrate in chapter 2, I think "all people" means all kinds of people. The God of the Bible, the living God, is the only true God and the only Savior. He is not a tribal deity, but the One true and living God of the universe. And He has promised to save His chosen ones from every people group in the world. In heaven every ethnicity on the face of the earth will be represented, by God's design. In this way, He is the Savior of all people, because He will save individuals from every tribe and language and people and nation (see Revelation 5:9).

But what does it mean that He is the Savior of all people, *especially of those who believe*? Let me give you three different ways that this has been interpreted. First, there are some who take Savior in this verse in the sense of Preserver and Giver of life. God *saves* all in the sense that He causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on everyone, including those who do not believe. But then He is the Savior of those who believe in a special sense, in a spiritual sense. It's possible that this is what Paul means. However, it's unlikely that the word Savior would mean that in this context. There has just been a reference to "the life to come," and the word Savior is used throughout the Pastoral letters in the sense of spiritual salvation.

Another interpretation is that God is the Savior of all in the sense that salvation is offered to all, but only those who believe actually receive that salvation. It is certainly true that God is powerful enough to save all, and Christ's death was sufficient to atone for the sins of all. But as I explained in the sermon on chapter 2, Christ died specifically for the elect. He did not die in order to make salvation possible for all. He died to make salvation definite for the elect.

There's a third interpretation that I find compelling, and it has to do with the word translated "especially." This word is found 12 times in the New Testament, and it certainly has this meaning of "especially" in several places. But there are also some verses, as well as some uses of the word in other Greek literature, where the word means "that is" or "namely." For example, it

possibly has that sense in Titus 1:10, “For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.” It has been argued that this should be translated, “empty talkers and deceivers, namely, those of the circumcision party” (see George Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 203; he cites Skeat, “Especially the Parchments”; see also 2 Timothy 4:13). If that is the meaning here in 1 Timothy 4:10, then the statement would be that God is the Savior of all people, that is, of those who believe. The point would be that God is the one and only Savior, and He will save all kinds of people, from every ethnic group and from every walk of life, and then the added qualification and emphasis that he tags on the end is that the means by which God saves these individuals is faith. He’s the Savior of all kinds of people, namely, all who believe. Individuals come into a saving relationship with Him through faith. Those who believe are those who experience God as their Savior.

I want to close by exhorting each and every one of us to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and to set your hope on the living God. This is a clear message and a true message that we all need to hear. If you have been a believer for years, and you’re steadily growing in your walk with the Lord, you need to be encouraged again this morning, and every week, to hope in God and to continue trusting in the forgiveness that we have in Christ. And you need to be motivated and encouraged by this passage to train yourself for godliness.

Others of you here this morning profess to know Christ and yet you are merely going through the motions. You claim to be a Christian, but you can sense that there’s really nothing there. It’s just words that you say and certain things that you do, but you haven’t been transformed by the saving grace of God. I invite you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Set your hope on the living God, who is the only Savior. Don’t hope in yourself. Don’t hope in your good works. You’re not a good person, and neither am I. We are all sinners, who have fallen far short of God’s perfect standard. And therefore our only hope is Jesus Christ, who lived a sinless life on this earth and then died on the cross for sin and rose on the third day. Call out to Him in repentance and faith. Turn away from your sin and run to Jesus, and begin a life of godliness. Recognize the value of godliness. Look to the eternal reward of heaven. Hope in God.

Lastly, if you find yourself listening to this message and you don’t believe any of it, I challenge you to ask yourself the question, “What am I hoping in?” If you’re ultimate hope is not in the one true and living God, then where is it that you find hope? Maybe it’s in some other religion or ideology. Maybe it’s in having a successful career, or a fulfilling family life, or being a

“good” person, or getting as many toys as you can, or avoiding pain, or impressing others. What is it that you’re hoping in? Try to identify it, and then seriously consider whether that set of beliefs or that pursuit is really going to deliver on what it promises. Please realize that it won’t. It may provide short term benefits, but it will lead to everlasting agony. Consider Jesus. Read the Gospels of the New Testament which recount the life of Jesus. And discover the indestructible hope that is found only in Him.