



The song “I Am Not My Own” emphasizes the sanctity of human life and the significance of our spiritual life. “I will honor Him, for this I know: I belong to the Lord, I am not my own.” In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul writes to believers, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? *You are not your own*, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.” Today’s text can help us do that. Please turn to 1 Timothy 4:6-10 (p. 933, pew Bible). The theme of this text is:

TRAIN YOURSELF FOR GODLINESS
1 Timothy 4:6-10

If you were with us last week, you’ll recall that in verses 1-5, Paul draws a stark contrast between bad doctrine and our benevolent God. Paul shows that *false teachers forbid good things that God created for our enjoyment*. Such restrictions might make a person feel more religious, more righteous, more holy, but they’re from the pit of hell. They are “teachings of demons” that misrepresent God, portraying him as stingy instead of super-gracious and kind. Such diabolical doctrine draws people away from Christ and kills their joy. Instead of prohibiting good things that God created for our enjoyment, we’re to take pleasure in them and thank God for them. Paul then tells Timothy in verses 6-10,

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.

Paul tells Timothy *what* to do and *why*:

***Train yourself for godliness because
it benefits you both today and forever.***

In verses 6-10 Paul lays out the measure of godliness, the mandate for godliness, and the motivation for godliness. If you’re in a spiritual slump, I pray that today’s message would rejuvenate you. If you’re feeling spiritually fit, I pray that today’s message would encourage you not to plateau but to push yourself and to pull others along with you.

The *Measure* of Godliness
(v. 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” (1 Tim. 4:6). Paul appeals directly to Timothy as the pastor of the church at Ephesus. “If *you* put these things before the brothers, *you* will be a good servant of Jesus Christ....”

What “things” is Paul referring to? The critical matters he’s raised in the previous verses: the confession regarding Christ in 3:16 and the denunciation of false doctrine in 4:1-5. “These things” are not to be put on the shelf or put on the back burner in the teaching ministry of the church. They are not a “one and done” kind of thing. “These things” must be put before believers to help them remain close to Christ and to resist false teaching.

Elsewhere in his pastoral letters, Paul says, “Remind them ... remind them ...” (2 Tim. 2:14; Titus 3:1), remind God’s people of “these things” they already know. Paul did this himself. He wrote to the church at Corinth, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you...” (1 Cor. 15:1). Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, “rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things is no trouble to me and is safe for you” (Phil. 3:1). Likewise, Peter wrote to believers, “I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder” (2 Pet. 1:13 NIV). The apostles did this because they wanted the church to “keep going in the gospel” and to “keep growing in the Scriptures.”¹

So, Paul tells Timothy, “If you put these things before the brothers” – exalting Jesus Christ and exposing false teaching – “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*” (1 Tim. 4:6). The Greek word for “trained” in verse 6 is an intensified form of the verb *trephó*, which means “to feed or nourish.” By putting “these things before the brothers,” Timothy will be “constantly nourished” (NASB) on the gospel and “good doctrine” himself.

We know from Paul’s second letter to Timothy that Timothy had known God’s word since childhood, having been nourished in the faith by his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (2 Tim. 1:5). Later in that same letter Paul exhorted Timothy,

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

- 2 Timothy 3:14-17

This past week I’ve been (re-)reading Kevin DeYoung’s book, *Taking God at His Word*. In the final chapter, Kevin emphasizes how important it is to stick with the Scriptures, to “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.” He says, “I remember on a conference panel someone asking John Piper, “Why did you conclude inerrancy is true?” The first thing out of his mouth surprised everyone: ‘Because my momma told me it’s true.’” Kevin writes,

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God At His Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), pp. 115-116.

that wasn't a throwaway line or a glib remark crafted for effect. Piper was capturing something deeply true in many of our lives, and deeply biblical. It's not necessarily a sign of growth to move past the faith of your childhood, and not necessarily a weakness to believe the same thing throughout your whole life. What an inestimable privilege to be acquainted from childhood with the sacred writings. The ultimate reason for Timothy to stick with Scripture goes far beyond Lois and Eunice. But at their feet is where he first learned to trust the word of God. Which is no small thing, and not to be tossed aside for anything in the world.

... The purpose of Holy Scripture is not ultimately to make you smart, or make you relevant, or make you rich, or get you a job, or get your married, or take all your problems away, or tell you where to live. The aim is that you might be wise enough to put your faith in Christ and be saved.

Nothing else in all the world has this ability.²

I thank God for Christian parents who nourished me with God's word, who brought me to a Bible-teaching church where I continued to feed on his word in a community of believers. Don't take that privilege for granted. Don't take God's word for granted. Believe it. Build your life on it. Put your faith in Jesus Christ. Look to him and be saved. Believe that he died and rose again for you. Recognize that you were bought with a price – the precious blood of God's own Son, who loved you and gave himself for you. Make your life count for God. Stick with Scripture. *Embrace God's truth* and never let it go.

That's what makes a "good servant of Christ Jesus" – one who *feeds* on God's word and *follows* it ... who *knows* it and *lives* it ... who *practices* what he *preaches* and "point[s] out these things to the brothers" (v. 6 LSB). That's the measure of godliness. John MacArthur wrote, "A pastor's heart ... is not measured by how good a man is at petting sheep, but by how well he protects them from wolves and feeds them so they grow to be mature and strong."³ This takes us to the next verse and the next point:

The *Mandate* for Godliness (v. 7)

"Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths Rather train yourself for godliness" (v. 7). The first half of the verse is the negative command, what *not* to do, and the second half is the positive command, what *to* do. New Testament scholar Robert Yarbrough says that the modern equivalent of "irreverent, silly myths [old wives' tales, NIV]" would be "conspiracy theories, so-called urband legends, and endless issue-oriented (and often polemical) blogs and websites from which most pastors find it wise to recuse themselves."⁴

I agree. That kind of stuff is a waste of time. Not just for pastors but for believers in general. That's why Paul says, "Have nothing to do with" such things. Put them away. Reject them. The mind is a terrible thing to waste. Don't muddle it with meaningless stuff.

² Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God At His Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), pp. 115-116.

³ John MacArthur, Jr., *1 Timothy*. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1995), p. 160.

⁴ Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary, gen. ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), p. 238.

“Rather train yourself for godliness” (v. 7b). That’s the positive command. The Greek word for “train” is *gumnazó*, from which we get our English word “gymnasium.” It literally means “to exercise naked.” Only men were allowed to enter the gym, and they would work out in the nude or in just a loin cloth to have maximum range of movement.

“Every Greek city had its gymnasium, and Ephesus was no exception.”⁵ The city wound up having four gymnasiums. The best-preserved one is the Theatre Gymnasium, which was built in the second century.



The palestra, or place of exercise, was an open field about three-quarters the size of a football field and surrounded on three sides by marble-covered columns. At the point where the palestra joined the main building, there were rows of seats for those who watched the exercises. In Greco-Roman culture, “there was a great emphasis on physical training and the glory of winning athletic events.”⁶

“No one succeeds at the highest level of sports without working out.”⁷ The Bills did not merely wish themselves into the NFL playoffs. They worked hard to get there, as did the other teams in the playoffs. In one sense, their victories were won months ago as they subjected themselves to rigorous training program designed to develop their strength, speed, and endurance, and to maximize their potential both individually and as a team.

The same is true in the spiritual realm when it comes to the word of God. It builds up our faith and strengthens our commitment to Christ. As Paul bade farewell to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20, he said, “I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, *which is able to build you up...*” (v. 32, italics mine). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul said that God’s word “equip[s] the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-16).

Do you want to get spiritually fit? Do you want to build yourselves up and build others up? Then “discipline yourself for godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7). This is something *you* must do. It is *your* responsibility. No one else can do it for you. As an act of your will, you must choose to engage the training process.

⁵ MacArthur, 164.

⁶ MacArthur, 164.

⁷ DeYoung, 121.

About a month ago I approached six young men in our church and challenged them to participate in the Gospel Leadership Cohort, an intense discipleship-training program I designed to help them pursue “godliness,” which is a “devotion to God which results in a life that is pleasing to him.”⁸ It’s loving God and becoming like him. This commitment involves twenty training sessions plus an additional commitment of five hours per week for memorizing Scripture, preparing and teaching devotionals, reading the Bible through and 18 other books on biblical theology, spiritual development, convictional leadership, church life and ministry. It’s not for the faint of heart, but all six men made the commitment.

You don’t have to enter a discipleship regimen that intense. Just as physical training programs like CrossFit have all different levels based on a person’s proficiency and is designed to help him progress to the next level, even so spiritually there are goals that we can set that are best geared to our stage of spiritual growth.

The other day my youngest son called me from Tennessee and told me about his fitness goals and workout program. Then he asked how I was doing. I told him that as a result of not working out for the last few months, I was naturally assuming a Grinch-like physique. I’ve noticed that I don’t have to work hard to get out of shape, but I do have to work hard to get into shape. The same is true spiritually. D. A. Carson wrote,

People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.⁹

Let’s stop making excuses and start putting the same effort into our spiritual life as we do in other areas. No one excels in sports without working out. No one becomes a good musician without lots of practice. No one excels in academic scholarship without years of study. And no one becomes godly without immersing themselves in the Scriptures, devoting themselves for prayer, stripping themselves of sin, exhausting themselves in service, and sacrificing themselves and their resources for the sake of the gospel.

Progress always comes at a price. But “training today means victory tomorrow.”¹⁰

The *Motivation* for Godliness (vv. 8-10)

In verses 8-10, Paul compares the benefits of physical fitness versus spiritual fitness, saying, “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.”

⁸ Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996), p. 16.

⁹ “Quotes about Godliness.” Grace Quotes [online]. <https://gracequotes.org/topic/godliness/>.

¹⁰ Steven J. Lawson, *Men Who Win: Pursuing the Ultimate Prize* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996), p 81.

The benefits of physical exercise are many. It helps you manage your weight, it boosts your mood, it sharpens your thinking, it reduces the risk of disease, it strengthens your bones and muscles, and it improves your ability to do everyday activities. It is certainly true that “bodily training is of some value.”

But “godliness is of value in every way.” It has unlimited benefits. It produces true joy, real contentment, a positive outlook, healthy relationships, spiritual guidance in every situation, a Godward confidence, and a whole lot more.

The best part is that godliness promises benefits not only in this life, but also in the life to come. “Christians have the best of both worlds,” Phil Ryken reminds us.¹¹ “When it comes to Christian character, you really *can* take it with you! Godliness ... lasts forever. This makes spiritual training much more valuable than physical training.”¹²

Paul used a similar analogy to convey the same point when he wrote to the Corinthians,

All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.

- 1 Corinthians 9:25 NLT

After asserting this point in 1 Timothy 4, Paul says, “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance” (v. 9 CSB). Paul repeats the expression that he used in 1:15, where he said, “The saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners....” Both statements have to do with Jesus saving sinners. In 1 Timothy 4:10, Paul says, “For to this end [or, ‘for this reason,’ CSB] 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.” The Greek word for “toil” is *kopiaó*, which means “to labor to the point of exhaustion.” The Greek word for “strive” is *agónizomai*, from which we get our English word “agonize.” It means “to engage in a struggle; to contend for a prize (as in an athletic contest or warfare).”

Years ago I solicited the help of a Christian consultant who had worked with John MacArthur, who has pastored Grace Community Church in Los Angeles for 55 years and has authored over 150 books, including the award-winning MacArthur Study Bible and the 34-volume MacArthur New Testament Commentary series. This colleague told me that John MacArthur is, without question, the most disciplined man he has ever met. In his comments on this particular verse, MacArthur writes, “Ministers are engaged in eternal work, with the destiny of men’s souls at stake. The urgency of that work drives them on, through weariness, loneliness, and struggle.”¹³ J. Oswald Sanders wrote,

If [a man] is unwilling to pay the price of fatigue for his leadership, it will always be mediocre.... True leadership always exacts a heavy toll on the whole man, and the more effective the leadership is, the higher the price to be paid.¹⁴

¹¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary, New Testament edited by Daniel M. Doriani, series editors Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 175.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ MacArthur, 166.

¹⁴ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, pp. 175, 169. Cited by MacArthur, 166.

Isn't Jesus Christ the ultimate example of this principle? Is he not the ultimate leader who paid the ultimate price? This is what propelled Paul forward. He says, "we toil and strive, because we have set our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe" (v. 10). There are a few key observations to note here:

1. Paul shifts from second person singular to first person plural, from "you" to "we." "Like any effective leader, Paul is not calling on Timothy to make any sacrifice that Paul himself is not making."¹⁵
2. "Such all-out effort is sustained by a firmly placed hope."¹⁶ Paul's confidence is in "the living God." Every believer has this same hope. We know that Christ Jesus has risen from the dead and reigns at God's right hand. We know that God will save us on the day of judgment, and having this assurance, we make every possible effort to share that message with everyone else. "We toil and strive" to see men, women, and children from every nation receive the gift of eternal life.
3. Jesus truly is the Savior of all people, especially believers. Unbelievers are saved in a temporal sense. God is the one who delivers them from death every day. God is the one who puts air in their lungs, clothes on their back, a roof over their heads, food on their table, and gladness in their hearts. "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). This is God's common grace, whether people thank God for it or not. But the salvation of unbelievers ends when this life is over. "Those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus ... will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed..." (2 Thes. 1:8b-10a). Our salvation as believers continue and culminate in "the life to come," where God will forever shower his grace and kindness on us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:7).

***Train yourself for godliness because
it benefits you both today and forever.***

Elders, lead by example. Go all out in your pursuit of godliness. It is hypocritical to call other Christians to a commitment that we ourselves are not willing to make. We should be able to say as Paul did, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

Christians, follow our example. Hebrews 13:7 says, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."

Non-Christians, believe in Jesus Christ. Put your hope in him. He will never disappoint you. Embrace Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and you will have everything you need to pursue and enjoy a God-pleasing life.

¹⁵ Yarbrough, 242.

¹⁶ Ibid.