

# Train yourself to be Godly

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Preacher: Benjamin Wilks

[ 0 : 0 0 ] So then we continue our series here in 1 Timothy as we consider this blueprint for church life that Paul sets out for Timothy and for the church in Ephesus and therefore for the church in New Mills as well. And the question that I want to ask you as we begin this evening is what is the best thing that you could do with your time? At any given moment what is the best possible thing that you could be doing? It depends of course on different circumstances. We can't do the same thing 100% of the time but at any given moment what is the very best thing that you could possibly be doing? In these verses, in verses 6 through to down to 16 really but looking at 6 to 10 this evening, in these verses having discussed the nature of the heresy Paul turns now to encourage

Timothy to stand firm. As he's done a few times through this letter he turns and gives Timothy advice on how he is to behave, how he is to withstand the false teaching and the false teachers and specifically here how he is to consider his own life, how he is to be godly. So this is how Timothy will fulfill his task as a minister of Christ Jesus. Now as Paul sets this before Timothy he doesn't do that by making it look like an easy task does it? He doesn't say everything is all going to be straightforward, it's all roses. He acknowledges down at the end of our section for this evening down in verse 10 he acknowledges that this is labor and strife, that ministry is not straightforward, it is not an easy task and the central image of this section, that of training for godliness, it is an image of hard work, it is the disciplined effort and ongoing training of an athlete who works hard to reach the pinnacle of their physical abilities. So Paul is not making it look easy.

No, Timothy should be encouraged because he can be a good minister of Christ Jesus, verse 6, and because his hope is in the living God, the Savior, verse 10. And with that confidence there is the central exhortation to godliness. And so our first heading this evening as we focus in really particularly on verses 8, verse 8 sorry, as we focus in on verse 8, our first heading is the infinite value of godliness.

What Paul sets out for Timothy here is that godliness is of eternal value. It is of unending significance and therefore of infinite value. The phrase there at the beginning of verse 8, some value, physical training has some value. That could equally be translated has value for a little while. Physical training has value for a little while, but training in godliness has value for eternity. Paul sets up this contrast here between that which is of some worth and that which is of infinite worth. That's the comparison, the here and now value of physical training and the forever value of spiritual training.

So the point that Paul makes here in verse 8 isn't really that physical training has value. That is true and there are other passages that would encourage us to take good care of the bodies that God has given us and some of us need to hear those passages. But this is not that. That is not the point Paul is making here. So let's not get sidetracked into that. He's using that as the basis of a comparison. He could just as easily make plenty of other comparisons to say here is something that is of some value, but in comparison godliness is of infinite value. He could just as much say piano practice is of some value, but training for godliness is of infinite value. Practicing your public speaking is of some value. Indeed would be of considerable value one would imagine for Timothy, but training for godliness is of infinite value. Working hard at maths is of some value. Training for godliness is of infinite value. The point is not what he's using as the base of the comparison, but rather what he is setting up as the infinite. Now this does not mean that it is the only thing of value. So as we consider what is the best possible thing to be doing at any moment, we're not saying it should be the same thing at every moment. Other things do have value. And again, the same holds true in other areas of life, doesn't it? If your objective is to be a concert pianist playing global venues, well you will need to devote a lot of your time to that goal, won't you? But that does not mean it will be the only thing that you do.

[ 5 : 27 ] The fact that you have considered it to have massive value does not mean nothing else has any value. Physical training does have some value. So don't hear me as saying that godliness is the only thing with any value. But Paul is setting it up as massively superior to anything else.

And I think that here, this section, this passage that we're looking at this evening, this is one place where we can take what Paul writes to Timothy in Ephesus and we can apply it directly to ourselves today. Timothy must train himself to be godly and so too must we. Why is that true? Because godliness has value for all things. It's right there in the middle of verse 8.

Godliness has value for all things. Paul doesn't say has value for you, Timothy, as a minister of the gospel. He does not say it has value for the situation that you are facing in Ephesus. No, he uses an all-encompassing word. Godliness has value for all things. Godliness has value for all time.

Godliness has value for eternity. So we're not saying nothing else has any value. But we are saying godliness is the greatest value. So if you know the Lord of the Rings universe, or you know the cast of Yes Minister, or you know the Harry Potter books, or you know the football league stats, or you know whatever your mastermind subject is going to be, there is value in these things.

But if you know those things better than you know God's word, then maybe something has gone awry. And so Paul says, train for godliness. Train yourself to be godly. End of verse 7.

[ 7 : 25 ] Because it is of great value. That is our second heading, train for godliness. The emphasis on the discipline, on the effort there. And as we say, train yourself for godliness, I think we need to be careful to be clear that this is not legalism. This is not an attempt to win God's favor by working hard.

This is not an attempt to put enough effort in to be good enough for God. The point is not to increase your moral ability so that you will be good enough. R. Kent Hughes, in his book *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, he makes this very clear comparison. The legalistic heart says, I will do this thing to gain merit with God. But the disciplined heart says, I will do this thing because I love God and want to please Him.

That has to be our motivation. As we seek to train ourselves to be godly, as we discipline ourselves towards godliness. The motivation has to be that we love God and want to please Him, not that we are trying to gain His acceptance. But secondly, we must train ourselves for godliness because it is not something which ever happens by accident. Nobody in their lives ever has drifted into being more godly.

You do not become accidentally godly. It is not something that happens without you noticing. It does not happen that way any more than you become an excellent trumpet player or you become an outstanding footballer or you become a fluent French speaker without you noticing. These things do not happen by accident. These things happen by diligent effort. They happen by practice, by training, by discipline, by discipline. The reality is that if you do not pay attention to your godliness, if you do not train yourself to be godly, then it is not only that you will stand still and not make progress, it is worse than that. If you do not pay attention, if you are not actively pursuing godliness, you will not stand still. You will drift away. You will drift slowly backwards and away from the god you love.

Nobody drifts into greater godliness. And so we discipline ourselves for godliness. God has set out for us the means of grace for a reason. God has set out in his wisdom a pattern whereby we gather together week by week and we hear from his word. He has set out for us that we gather around the lord's table and we share the lord's supper together. That is a means of god's grace to us. God has made provision for you. He has made provision for you to be trained in godliness, for you to discipline yourself in godliness in these ordinary ways that you are able to do, that you can come and hear from god's word, that you can come and sit at his table. And so our response to that is to prioritize these things. Part of the nature of training for godliness is that we choose to make use of what god has provided for us.

[ 11 : 03 ] So we have communion normally on the first Sunday of every second month. Maybe it would be worth putting that into your calendar and trying to make sure that you are actually here on those weeks. There is a reason God told us to observe these things and they have value to us. I suggest that there is also value in being conscious of how many Sundays you are away from church. It was only when I started working for our church in Derby that I started to pay any attention to it. You know, you look at your weekends and you make your plans and think, what would be fun to do this weekend, don't you? Or at least that's what I always used to do. That's what I've always done. You know, which friends shall we see? Who can we squeeze in this weekend? I've got a busy week, but what can I do with this weekend? And somebody invites you to come and stay and you look and the weekend's free and so you go, right? And suddenly I was told, right, you can have five Sundays a year that you're not in church. And it was only when that happened that I realized just how many Sundays we were away. Now, I am not saying to you all, you must be here every Sunday but five in a year. That is not what I'm saying. But I think it's worth noticing. I think it's worth being deliberate about how often you're away. And maybe it would be wise to kind of have your own house rules, if you like. You know, not something with never any exception at all, but saying I won't be away more than one Sunday a month wouldn't be a completely ridiculous thing to say. That's still 12 weekends away a year. It's not, I don't know. I know for many of us, even when we are away, we do go to church and make provision to do that while we're away. And that's good and we should do that. But I hope, I hope that now that you have a regular minister here and you are therefore hearing a consistent thing week by week, that one of the things that that is showing is that there is value in consistency. That there is value in hearing God's word consecutively explained and preached to you and that you lose something of that by being away too often.

That's one example of what I mean by saying discipline yourselves for godliness. To expect that this will happen by accident is unrealistic.

So train yourselves for godliness. Thirdly, the nature of training for godliness. Be nourished on the truths of the faith. We've started to speak about some of that already, but it is of course broader than gathering together on a Sunday to hear from God's word. All of our training for godliness has to be rooted in knowledge of God. It has to be rooted in what God has said himself. And that means that we need more of what God has said than a few verses week by week. Excuse me.

We must be nourished on the truths of the faith. And conversely, looking at verse 7, have nothing to do with godliness myths and old wives tales. Rather, train yourself to be godly.

So positively, we are nourished by God's word. Negatively, we need to avoid the infection, the cancer of idle myths and old wives tales. Sorry, godless myths. We need to avoid the cancer of false teaching. So that means that when you are away somewhere else and sitting in church, you need to be very aware of what it is that you are listening to. Because there are too many places up and down this land calling themselves churches where what you will get is godless myths.

[ 15 : 18 ] Paul talks about old wives tales, not that he's condemning women or condemning age. He has positive things to say about both of those things in other places. But this seems to be a kind of accepted idea at the time of limitless credulity, of just accepting whatever you are told. And of the kind of idle gossip and prattle and nothingness that seemed to characterize the idle old wives.

The point is, idle prattle is of no profit. It does not gain you anything to endlessly speculate about God. It does not gain you anything to hear somebody's musings about God. It does not gain anything to listen to the theoretical possibilities and the nothingness that pretends to be preaching so often. What you need is the word of God. What you need is to be nourished in the truths of the faith.

Godliness is not just up here. Godliness is not an accumulation of facts. I have always been quite good at learning facts and quite good at the kind of logic and the, you know, just putting things into my mind and then regurgitating them as required. It was that way for me at school. And there is a great danger for me, at least, of approaching God in the same way. Folks, it is easier to learn who wrote which books of the Bible and when they were written, and easier to learn the acronyms that supposedly help you to remember key doctrines, and easier to memorize the Westminster Shorter Catechism. It is easier to do those things than to actually change. It is easier to remember facts than to have your heart transformed.

Let me give you an example. Back in February, I went to a conference on the theme of anger. It was, what was it, three, four days, something like that. And I'd been there about 24 hours, nodding along to everything that was being said from the front and thinking, oh yes, this is good, this is helpful.

I agree with what they're saying to me. I'm kind of making my little notes of what I could bring back and incorporate into my preaching. I've been there 24 hours, enjoying that conference, growing in knowledge before it hit me. Far more important than any of those things was stopping and looking at me and seeing the ways that I am inclined towards anger.

[ 18 : 15 ] It is so easy to treat it as theoretical. So easy to look at God's word and think of everybody else who needs to hear about it. So easy to put in our heads facts about God and knowledge of Bible trivia.

It's so much easier to do that than to ever be changed. Godliness is related to knowledge about God. Godliness depends on being nourished in the truths of the faith. But godliness is not identical to knowledge.

To play the piano well, you need to learn some music theory, I imagine. The more music theory you learn, I imagine the better you are able to play the piano, at least up to a certain point. But sooner or later, you have to sit down in front of a piano and start playing it.

Knowledge is not the end goal. I think there are two reasons why making godliness, why pretending that godliness is about knowledge is very appealing. Number one, it is concrete. It is accessible. I can tell whether I know facts about God or not. And secondly, it is under my control. I can go and learn things.

I can choose to spend the time and put those things into my head. I can do that. And it makes it something that I can control, something that I can govern, and something that I can feel good about myself that I've done it. Pretending that knowledge is the same as godliness is an attractive thing. But it is not sufficient. And nor is going and ticking the box that says, I have read the Bible today. I have prayed today. We should do these things. Of course we should. To pretend that we will become more godly without reading God's word is to deceive ourselves. Some of us need to be much more ambitious in our reading. A couple of verses every day and then, what, an A6 page of somebody's thoughts on it? It's better than nothing. For sure it is.

[ 20 : 41 ] But maybe we need a bit more than that. Maybe we should be more ambitious in how much we're trying to read of God's word each day. But beyond that, I think almost all of us need to work harder not at reading more, but at applying what we have learned, applying what we have read. And the same, I'm sure, is probably true of listening to sermons on Sundays as well.

Friends, if you can't remember the last time something changed in your life, if you can't remember a significant new understanding or a change in your behavior as a result of God's word, as a result of something that you read in your Bible or heard in a sermon, then maybe you are not growing in godliness. Maybe you are not training yourself to be godly. Because it is about heart change, isn't it? It's about our hearts being transformed. Not about what we know, but about how we relate to God. Galatians 5.22, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Friends, are you growing in these things? Are you becoming more loving?

Are you becoming more peaceful? More joyful? Is your self-control better than it used to be? I saw this afternoon a quick review of a book called Five Things to Pray for Your Heart.

And I think it's part of a series, you know, so many things to pray for the world, so many things to pray for your church, so many things to pray for your family, five things to pray for your heart, five things to pray for yourself, five things that pray not about the circumstances that you're in, but about your response to them. Five things that pray that God will change you, not the world around you. Five things to pray to grow in godliness. I have no idea whether the book's any good or not, but the concept I like.

A couple of cautions. Firstly, it is gradual. I know I said, if you can't remember the last time something changed, that should worry you, and that's true.

[ 23 : 23 ] But it's also true that a fruit tree takes years and years of cultivation before you begin to see any apples on it. And once those apples are growing, they do so at a rate that you cannot really observe with the naked eye. You can come back tomorrow maybe, or in a week's time and see a change, but you can't just stand there and watch the apple grow, can you? And the same is true of our growth in godliness, of the fruit of the Spirit. We cannot expect it to happen overnight.

We cannot be discouraged when we can't see, oh, I am different right now than I was yesterday. But if you look back a year and you are no different, I'd be worried about that apple tree that hasn't grown any fruit in a year.

Second caveat, growth in godliness comes from God. There is a danger in all of this, isn't there, that we look at this and we think, here is everything that I must do. Here are all the things that I must achieve myself.

Here is all the effort that I must put in so that I will have done it. Philippians chapter 2, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

It's a parallel idea, isn't it? Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

[ 25 : 02 ] Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Even as we are instructed to work out our salvation, as we are instructed to discipline ourselves towards godliness, even as we hear these things, we are at one and the same time reminded that it is God who is at work in us.

Here in verse 10, it is God who is the Savior. It is God in whom we have our hope. So that's where we conclude this evening.

We discipline ourselves. We train towards godliness. We do so with effort, with sweat. Not in order to win God's acceptance.

No, we labor and we strive because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.

Let's pray. Lord, give us a holy passion for our own godliness.

[ 26 : 26 ] Give us a great desire to be growing, to be more like you. Give us that zeal to see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Lord, give us the self-discipline to be able to do these things. Help us to see the ways that we, in our better moments, can help our weaker selves tomorrow morning.

Lord, we long to be transformed more into your likeness. Lord, we know we cannot achieve that ourselves. We know we are dependent on you at every stage of that process.

And so, Lord, we come to you praying. Help us, please. Amen.