

# Train yourself to be Godly

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 09 September 2018

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Timothy 4, as you do, you'll remember that we're all the way into this series, and so we're not at the beginning anymore. We're partway in, and that means we have to remember what has come before. And one of the things that has come before is this very simple principle, that just because we can all agree that we're looking at the same mountain on the top of the hill in the distance, or the same mountain on the horizon in the distance, it does not mean that we are in agreement on how to get to that hill on the ground. And this is an important distinction, because Christians often want to claim that they're all looking at the same thing, Jesus Christ, that we're all focusing on Jesus Christ, which may be true, but what can't be explained is why those Christians down on the ground are deciding to go left when they should go right. As I said last week, of me and my wife going to a wedding all the way down in Lancashire, we both agreed where we were going. There was no disagreement as to where the church was, but when we actually came to a junction, okay, who's going to have the headship, okay, of whether we should turn right here or left? Well, no longer was that about who gets to say, the issue is, well, which way is it? Okay, the important thing is which way is it? So it's one thing for a church to say, oh, we're all here to worship God, we're all here to put Jesus first, we're all here to focus on Jesus like we focus on the mountain on the horizon. And that's good, that's good. But somebody has to get us from there, from here to there, and that means we have to take many less and many rights. And so conflict within Christianity doesn't occur at the horizon level, where we're all looking at the same thing, that it occurs on the ground between people who are turning left when they should be turning right, or turning right when they should be turning left. So confession of Jesus is not enough. It is enough in the sense that you're confessing Jesus, but it's what that confession looks like. It's what that belief looks like. So to really believe God is to be directed by him. This is why Jesus creates followers, he doesn't create believers. You say, well, they do believe, yes, but they believe because they follow. They believe because they follow. Okay, and we tend to think that, well, no, belief comes before following. Well, yeah, okay, perhaps belief does come before following. But the issue is, is that they're to be understood together.

They cannot be understood separately, as if someone can believe and not follow. Okay, well, someone could do that, but then that's not the same type of belief that Jesus is speaking about. Okay, it is a belief because we're believing it, but it's not belief identified in the same way Jesus identifies it. In the same way, there are four types of love within scripture. It's not sufficient to simply say that you love someone.

Because now you have to explain, well, in what way do you love someone? The way a husband loves a wife is entirely different than the way that they love their neighbor, like God tells them to. And these differences are important differences, especially when you're using the same word for everything. So when you say that you're a believer, what does that mean? What does that actually mean? When you say that you're a follower, what does that mean? Are you just agreeing that the mountain is on the hill where everyone else says it is? Or are you turning left with them when they turn left? Are you turning right with them when they turn right?

So the issue here is about the direction that the Christian life takes if you truly believe that Jesus is Lord. Okay, if you truly believe that Jesus is Lord, your whole life is going to take directions that get you to know that Jesus is Lord in every area of life. As we come to these words in Timothy, we are meant to understand that there is a way to godliness. Okay, there is a way to godliness. We are to train ourselves for godliness, which means there is a way to get there. The other thing to notice here is that you're to do it yourself. Okay, train yourself for godliness. Now, as a pastor in a church, you know, I try and make sure that there are plenty of opportunities with Bible study and prayer and courses and so forth for the necessary gym equipment, let's say, to be presented to a church for people to be able to come to this gym and work out for godliness. Now, whether or not, you know, there's no paid membership and, you know, whether or not anybody turns up is another issue. But train yourself for godliness.

Do it yourself. And this is something that the teacher understands about the people that he's trying to train, that he can set everything up for them, just like a gym owner can get out all the weights.

[ 5 : 25 ] But people are still going to have to walk through the door and start lifting and start running and start drinking water and do all of those other kind of things which seem painful. Okay?

So train yourself to be godly is not one of these things where, well, it doesn't matter, I don't need to be, I'm quite happy the way that I am. Well, okay. The other thing to notice here is that it's clearly difficult.

It's clearly difficult to train yourself in godliness, which is why one of the reasons why we don't do it. Because it is difficult. Okay? And there are many examples of what happens when things get difficult.

One of the favorite authors that I like listening to is a lady by the name of Barbara Cohen, I think her last name is. And she writes about how people learn.

And she writes about this from the point of view of going through school, not really learning anything, joining the Navy and becoming quite good, and then coming out and studying mathematics and all of these other type of things.

[ 6 : 31 ] And she explains quite clearly that in every single human brain, that when the moment it becomes difficult, only at that point are you learning. Only at that point are you learning.

Because everything up to that point is a bit like riding a bike. Once you've got over the difficulty, it then becomes easy. Okay? When you have to ride up a hill, well, then your fitness is being tested.

And at that point, you need to work on it. And it's the same thing with scripture. The reason why people turn off when they get to difficult passages is because at that point, they're only beginning to learn, but then they substitute it for something else.

Imagine it like this. A man, I've used this illustration before, but a man getting a letter through the post saying that he has been accepted into the Royal Marines training. What sense would it make for him to say to his parents, well, I hope it's not difficult.

Okay? I hope it's not difficult. No. We all know that it's difficult because it's worth it. We all know instinctively that it's difficult because it's worth it.

[ 7 : 32 ] Or a young girl that gets a letter through the door and says, well, you've been accepted for medical training in order to become a doctor. And she turns to her parents and says, well, this is great, but I hope it's not difficult.

No. You understand immediately that there are some things which are difficult precisely because they're worth it. Precisely because they're worth it. Now, there are other things in life which are difficult and they're not worth the difficulty.

There's lots of them. But there are many things in the Christian life that are difficult and they're worth it. Okay? The reason why the Christian life is difficult, the reason why training yourself for godliness is difficult is because it's worth it.

Okay? Things that are easy come and go easy. And so you need to understand that right at the beginning. The difficulty, I think, that most believers experience is not whether or not it can be accomplished.

That's not the difficulty. Okay? There are plenty of Royal Marines and it was difficult to become one. And there are plenty of doctors and no doubt it was difficult to become a doctor.

[ 8 : 39 ] So the issue cannot be it cannot be accomplished. It clearly can be accomplished because there are people out there doing it. And it's the same with training yourself for godliness. The issue cannot be it cannot be done because there are people in the church doing it.

The issue, therefore, must be the undisciplined nature of the person. That must be the real difficulty. The difficulty is not the issue of whether or not it can be accomplished, but whether or not I can overcome my level of undisciplined activity.

That's the issue. So the call here is to train yourself to be godly. Here's the summary. Paul has just been explaining that if false teaching occurs in the church, then false directions will follow.

False teaching also always leads to false directions. People will turn left when they should turn right. They will even depart from the faith. Okay? People don't just depart from the faith because they have fallen in love with the world.

They can depart from the faith because they have adopted silly myths, false teaching, false ideas, and they just accumulate. They're forever learning, but never arriving at any conclusion.

[ 9 : 56 ] Okay? They're like a mouth that is constantly open. Well, as C.S. Lewis said, at some point, they have to shut. Okay? If you have an open mind, an open mind needs to be like an open mouth.

At some point, you need to bite down. At some point, you need to close. Or it should just constantly going to be this gateway of things coming in and out, in and out. There has to be a sense of foundation.

There has to be a sense at which you say, here I stand. This is what I believe, rather than just adopting everything. And those people who say, which is the classic line, isn't it?

Well, all religions lead to God, clearly aren't listening to any of them. Those people who say all religions lead to God, clearly aren't listening to any of the religions, because none of the religions themselves say that all of us lead to God.

So, a person who wants to affirm a generality can't even get there, because all they're exposing is they're not listening. So, the issue here is that false teaching leads to false direction.

[ 11 : 00 ] Not just false belief, but false directions. Falling in love with the wrong thing can cause people to depart from the faith. That could be like Demas, who fell in love with the world.

It could be like, it could be like a young girl, or a young boy marrying the wrong person. It could be a number of different things, where that type of love can then lead you away from the faith.

But there are other ways that you can be led away from the faith, and that could be like working in a care home, like serving in the church, like concentrating on your own family, like serving the poor.

And you say, well, how can they be ways of departing the faith? Well, there's plenty of people in the world who serve the poor that are not Christians. There are plenty of people who work in care homes throughout the world who are not Christians.

And there are plenty of people who do the best for their family, right? But sometimes these things get in the way of faith in God. Now, they're not sinful.

[ 12 : 04 ] They're not even wrong. They're not even things that shouldn't take place. They should all take place. But the moment they begin to take the place of God, then that person begins to depart from the faith, okay?

So it's not that they shouldn't take place. It's rather a case of what place should they take, okay? It's not that they shouldn't take place, but what place should they take? Or actually, Daniel says, we shouldn't serve in the church because it'll cause me to depart from the faith.

Now, what I'm saying is, is that there are people who can serve in the church so as not to come to the conviction of the faith. And there are people who can simply just attend a meeting and escape the meeting at the end of it by having general conversations which are not about faith in God so as to avoid those type of things.

So these type of things, which are not wrong or not even sinful, are the very things that, if not handled carefully or not prioritized in the right order, are the very things that have taken God's place and now you begin to depart from the faith.

And the danger is you don't even see it. You don't even see it. The point here is that Christians can depart from the faith by doing good things as well as doing bad things.

[ 13 : 22 ] Okay? Okay? People can depart from the faith by doing good things as well as doing bad things because both of those things have taken the place of God and that's how the departure happens.

Okay? So it's not a case of what is good and what is bad. It's not a case of what is right and what is wrong anymore. The issue is what place do they take? And if they're taking God's place, then that's when the departure from the faith kicks in.

Very, very simple. Paul is concerned then that Timothy understands this and he's concerned that Timothy understands this because Timothy is going to have to start teaching this to everybody else. So Paul says, follow me as I follow Christ.

Make sure you understand it, Timothy, because I understand it. I'm teaching to you. Set in the direction, right? But now I know you're going to have to go ahead and teach a church. So get this clear.

Here then is the first thing to consider in light of all of this. The source of growth or the source of strength. Now, like all training, there has to be a source of energy.

[ 14 : 26 ] You know, you can't, you know, when you're tired, you're tired. You know, when you haven't got that energy to do anything, you just don't do anything. And so the source of energy here and the source of training just so happens to be the same thing, which is the word of God.

Notice what he says. Verse six, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus being trained in the words of faith. There, there's the difficulty. Being trained in the words of faith.

Mortimer Adler, who you may not be aware of, wrote a book called How to Read a Book. And it's a thick book. So 300, 400 pages, small writing.

How to read a book. I actually thought it was a joke when I first saw it because I thought he was going to write a book on how to read a book. And then I read it. And I began to realize that at that point, this was a long time ago, even before I began my sort of biblical, main biblical training, that I began to realize that I couldn't actually read.

I could recognize every word on the page and I could even read them out aloud. But I couldn't actually read. He said, what do you mean? That's what you're doing.

[ 15 : 38 ] You're recognizing words and you're reading them out loud. Therefore, you're reading. And Mortimer Adler says, that's not reading. That's simply word recognition. That's simply recognizing the words in their place and being able to speak them.

You will know whether or not you're able to read the moment you are asked the question, and what was that chapter about? What did it mean? What did it say?

And suddenly you begin to realize that you were simply recognizing words, not really reading. Not reading in the sense for meaning. And so the idea that Paul has here to Timothy is that this isn't about word recognition.

This isn't about how many times you've made it through the Bible. And did you know, if you read one chapter a day, or if you read for like five minutes a day, the average chapter can be read in five minutes. You get through the Bible in sort of three or so years.

That means if you start at the age of 12, by the age of 21, you've read the Bible three times. It's not difficult, is it? Simply to recognize words and follow them through. Now, how long would it take you to actually understand those?

[ 16 : 43 ] Well, much, much longer. Because that's a much more difficult exercise to understand the meaning of those words. But it starts with reading, as in recognizing the words.

But then you have to know the meaning of those words, and that's where the training kicks in. You have to know what it means. Because we follow meaning, we don't just follow words.

We follow what they mean. Because meaning matters. So we're to read the Bible and not stop until we've got to the point of, now I know what it means.

But too often, and I've said this time and time again, Bible reading often takes the form of little booklets like, I won't mention any by name just in case you use them.

And someone else has written a whole couple of paragraphs, a five page full. And at the top or at the bottom, there's like one Bible verse. You know, I've done my Bible readings for the day.

[ 17 : 41 ] And what's even worse is the Christians who treat those Bible readings is horoscopes, where they don't like the reading for the day. So they read tomorrows. Or they read next week.

And you say, well, we wouldn't do that. Listen, you all do it. You all do it because you are built to feed on stuff which is enjoyable. In the same way, children don't eat certain things on their plate because they don't like them.

If you don't grow out of that, if you don't grow out of that type of mentality, you do the same thing with Christianity. You avoid the Bible. How many of you have read Lamentations recently? What about Jeremiah?

No. And the reason being is because they're difficult books. They're difficult books. But that difficulty offers value that other books don't because the other books are offering a different kind of value.

So this kind of training and the difficulty that you have in it is valuable. And that's what it means to train in the words of God or rather that being the source of energy for the training.

[ 18 : 43 ] Here's the next thing then to deal with. that the training itself, the actual motions that you go through to actually train. Paul is saying here that training in godliness or training for godliness through training in the words of faith means that we're not just doing something day in, day out, but we're going through a transformation.

In other words, it's not just what's going on in our head that matters, but there becomes a change within our whole character. We begin to transform as we consider these words of God.

And notice, verse 7, that this has to be done in a world full of distractions. It just so happens to be here that the distractions are silly myths, you know, false ideas that can take you away.

You know, buy this energy drink and it's the equivalent of running a 5K. You know, I bought one of those and I thought, I feel great. You know, I can remember there's one Christian author who wrote a book called *Your Best Life Now*, which is, I think, neither he's a Christian or the book's Christian because this clearly cannot be your best life now.

If it is, then you're only going one place after this and it's not heaven. It's hell because heaven has to be better than this life. Okay, so your best life now cannot be this one. And he said, stand in the mirror every day and tell yourself things like you're great and you're wonderful and you're an achiever and you're an overcomer.

[ 20 : 11 ] So I thought, give it a go. I've heard that other pastors have done the same thing. I'll just give it a go, see if it works. And I'm stood there in front of the mirror just inside the front door. You're an achiever. You're great.

You're wonderful. My wife comes down the stairs and says, who do you think you're kidding? Just, just, just, who do you, okay? Distractions. Distractions. We all think we would all like the crown at the top of the hill without having to climb the hill.

We would all like the medal around our neck at the end of the finish line without having to run the race. And people who are built in the way that they are for work, but then their lives are occupied by sin are always going to look for the shortcuts.

We're always going to look for the same result in a much easier way. And you can't do that with godliness. You can't do that with the Christian life. You just cannot get there.

The training has to be orderly. The training has to be consistent with the word of God. And we know that we deal with people and we live with people and we know what it's like when people, you know, in a conversation, you're having a conversation with someone and someone changes the subject.

[ 21 : 29 ] Why do they change the subject? Because they don't want to talk about the real issue. Why? Because the real issue is difficult. And that same process that you've all experienced when you've had conversations with people is the same process that you have with God when it comes to training in godliness.

That here you are, God saying this, you go, can we change the subject to singing? Or can we change the subject to how much I give in the offering? Or, right, like the woman at the well, the moment Jesus confronts her, she wants to change the subject.

She wants to change the subject. Why? Because nobody wants to go through something that is difficult. But the Christian life is difficult because it's worth it.

And that's something to remember. You might remember this yourself whenever you say to someone and if they turn around and say, well, I hope it's not difficult. Well, remind them that it's difficult because it's worth it.

And then remind yourself that the Christian life is difficult because it's worth it. Training and godliness is difficult. Really difficult.

[ 22 : 35 ] But I think the main difficulty when it comes to training doesn't come with buying the gym membership. It doesn't come with buying the gym clothes. It comes with, am I going to go out the door and go?

Okay? The issue is not the pre-commitments we make. And I've made plenty of those when it's come to running and stuff like that.

Yeah, I could do it and I never do it. Three birds sitting on a telegraph wire deciding to fly south for summer. How many actually fly south for summer?

Well, none of them. Because we all know that deciding to do something is a far cry from actually doing it. But the trouble is that Christians throughout time seem to get it into their head that if they have decided to do something they've made the first step.

Well, you've only made the first step when you've actually made the first step. Up until that point it's only a thought. The decision is only a thought.

[ 23 : 39 ] The decision is a real decision when you've taken the first step. And this is what Paul has in mind with godliness. You have to train yourself for godliness. You have to take those steps.

You have to overcome your undisciplined nature. Of which the Holy Spirit of course will encourage us to be so. Godliness then is the goal for our training.

The word of God is the means, the food and the source. But godliness is where God wants us to be. Godliness is where we obey God in thought, word and deed and godliness though perhaps on your way to godliness you may be tempted to look for substitutions that godliness cannot be achieved at or arrived at through any type of substitution.

Okay? You cannot get fit simply by eating well. It may be part of becoming fit but exercise is required.

So when it comes to training yourself in godliness you can't simply get there by attending a few prayer meetings or by attending a few Bible studies.

[ 24 : 52 ] No, you're going to have to break a sweat at some point over the word of God. You're going to have to get down into it and say right if real change is going to come that it's only going to come through training in God's word and that is not easy.

The reason why substitutions exist is not because they are actually a substitution. When you think about it, if you look around the house, there are no substitutions but you imagine a teenager, the age of 12 or whatever, 13, and suddenly they're doing their homework and then all of a sudden they're looking for the computer or they're looking for the TV remote.

What do you think that happens? Well, it happens normally at the point where boredom kicks in or their homework becomes difficult and now they're looking for something easy.

The TV becomes the substitute not that it ever was before but it becomes the substitute because it's easy. It's taking the place of what I should be doing but it's never going to achieve the same results.

It's taking the place of what it should be doing but it's never going to achieve the same results. What happens in Christian living is that we, especially in the church, and I think this is the crucial one, is that training in godliness is substituted for service in the church and then the claim of godliness is attached to it.

[ 26 : 16 ] But the truth is you can never ever arrive at godliness through serving in the church. You just can't get there. You just cannot get there. Okay? Godly people will serve in the church.

Okay? That is true. But you can't get to godliness through serving in the church. And so those who want to sort of barter with God is to say, yeah, I may not read my bible that much, but look how much that I've done.

Okay? That's not what God is requiring. Yeah, God wants us to serve the body, but he doesn't want us to serve in the body at the expense of all of these other things. And we tend to think, well, we've all got different gifts.

No, train yourself to be godly is for everyone. That's not a gift, that's a command for every Christian life. Now, you may have a particular gift which helps you to serve in the church, like caring or visitation or serving in Sunday school or a number of other things.

You may have those particular gifts, but they're not a substitute for godliness. But if we think, as long as I have my name down on a couple of rotas, then, okay, it's visible, isn't it?

[ 27 : 27 ] Training in godliness is personal, done on your own. It doesn't always turn up for people to see. But boy, if I can do a few different things in the church, then, right, we tend to look at these people if we're not careful and think that they're spiritually secure, that they're spiritually strong.

But what if they're not? What if they're covering up weaknesses through attaching themselves to service? I mean, how many people, even in marriages, do you see this happening where the marriage isn't strong, but the only reason they're together is for the sake of the children?

Well, it looks like a strong marriage. Well, hang on a minute, we all understand the distinction, that you can have two people together and children, and it looks like a family unit, when actually the marriage has gone a long time ago.

But the reason it continues to show face is because of a concern for something else, not actually because the marriage itself is particularly strong. Same thing in the church when it comes to service.

Sometimes, is it right to keep myself serving God so is to not get distracted? Yeah, maybe I need a little bit of structure to keep me where my desire for God is not good enough.

[ 28 : 44 ] Maybe I need to keep a routine in order to get my desire back again. But sometimes that routine can be a means of hiding the fact that I have no desire.

So when we talk about godliness, we're not talking about these visible things that are seen in the actions that are done in the church. Serving. Okay? Godly people serve, but so do ungodly people as a means to avoid the hard work.

Okay? This is a bit like a person saying, well, I was in the Royal Marines for 20 years. And what he means by that is that he brushed the floor of the barracks.

Okay? Well, you and I know that that person was not in the Royal Marines in the way that you may be led to believe. And that kind of thing happens all the time.

We know how to use our words so as to give an impression of a reality that people will assume I mean this when actually I know it to be quite different. That type of thing are substitutes for trying to look the same.

[ 29 : 54 ] But godliness is difficult. Here's the exhortation as we close. Paul says, train yourself and your commitment is being questioned.

Train yourself for godliness. Is it easy? No, it is difficult. But it is of incredible value, says Paul. And we do this because of the promise that we have in God.

the reason why we put ourselves through these things is because of the promise and life that we have in God. Being trained in godliness is always going to be difficult.

And here's the thing, I'll lay this out for you this morning as we close. I've offered, since we've been, it's a little bit more difficult now that we have five children living in the manse, but back in the day when we only had two and one on the way, it was a little bit easier.

But if you don't think that Christianity makes any difference, or if you don't think that pursuing these type of things, this type of direction makes any difference, you come and live with me and my wife and my children for a whole month.

[ 31 : 03 ] And then say at the end of it, it doesn't make any difference. You're going to have to sleep on the floor, because I'm not giving up my bed. And then tell me it doesn't make any difference. But here's the thing, I can promise you this, that you'll make your way to godliness, but you will not be like the hare, you'll be like the tortoise.

So if you're asking, if you're already asked, well how long will it take? How long is the course? That's too long. Okay? You're not even ready to begin. Not even ready to begin.



You want it to be over even before you started. And the challenge is here that training in godliness only finishes when Christ appears. Because when Christ appears, when we see him as he is, we will be like him.

And only at that point does our training end. Amen.