

God's Household, Part 11: "Train for Godliness"

1 Timothy 4:6-10

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[SERMON MANUSCRIPT]

Introduction

Hi church family and welcome friends! I'm excited to resume our series on the letter of 1 Timothy called *God's Household*. Today's sermon from 1 Timothy 4:6-10 is called "Train for Godliness."

What do you think about when you hear the word, "training"? I'll tell you what I think about: I think about Rocky Balboa. God bless you if you know who I'm talking about, but many of you might be asking yourself, "Who in the universe is Rocky Balboa?" Rocky Balboa is the main character of this series of movies that I watched when I was a kid- I've watched Rocky I, II, III, and IV probably one hundred times over my lifetime and I can definitely watch these movies another hundred times if I have the chance! Rocky was boxer- an underdog story of someone who came from nothing and became a champion...again and again and again!

The reason why I think of Rocky Balboa when I hear the word "training" is because in every one of these movies there is a turning point in the movie: Rocky would be down and out, but he would have a moment of inspiration that would light a fire inside him...and then the awesome training montages would start with a heart-pumping theme song (sing it) and then Rocky would do all sorts of crazy training exercises: running up a thousand stairs, squatting with logs on his shoulders, sprinting on the beach, doing upside down sit-ups, doing one-handed push-ups, and on and on. After I'd finish watching these training montages, I'd be so pumped up that I'd get delusional and want to get in the boxing ring myself!

The apostle Paul used this idea of "training" to describe an aspect of the life as a disciple of Jesus Christ, so I want us to think of a training montage or playlist that will put you in the right mindset as we learn about "training for godliness" from 1 Timothy 4:6-10 today.

Scripture Reading

Paul wrote this letter in the first century to his beloved disciple Timothy, whom he appointed to lead and serve the church in Ephesus. His letter goes back and forth dealing with false teachers in the church and dealing with conflicts in God's household. In 4:1-5, Paul warned Timothy that in the later times that they lived in, some people would depart from the faith that they professed. Then he wrote this in today's passage of Scripture...

1 Timothy 4:6-10 (ESV):

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.

Proposition

The "one thing" from 1 Timothy 4:6-10:

Let's train ourselves for true godliness!

Organizational Statement

There are three main parts in this passage that form the three parts of this sermon:

1. Part 1: Train Others to Discern Truth (vv. 6-7a)
2. Part 2: Train Yourself for Godliness (vv. 7b-9)
3. Part 3: Hope for All Who Train (v. 10)

Each part will have a main truth that I'm going to talk about as well.

Prayer

Let's pray and ask God for his anointing upon us as we receive his words for us today.

Heavenly Father, may our hearts be like good soil today, receiving your words with humility and teachability, and may it bear fruit in our lives by the power of your Holy Word and the power of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.

→ **Transition:** Let's start with looking at verses 6-7a and the first part...

Sermon Outline

I. Train Others to Discern Truth (vv. 6-7a)

A. Paul's desire for Timothy was that he'd be a good servant of Christ for the church.

1 Timothy 4:6-7a (ESV): *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. 7a Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.*

1. **This is the first truth: A goal of the church is to train disciples in the Word for discerning wisely.**
 - a) Continuing his train of thought from verses 1-5, Paul expressed that Timothy would be a "good servant of Christ Jesus" if he "put these things before the brothers." He wanted Timothy to confront the false teaching that was seriously damaging the health of the church. These issues of forbidding marriage and abstaining from food (from 4:3) were somehow undermining the core beliefs of salvation by God's grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone. He wanted Timothy to correct the teaching for the church that God created all things as "good" and that God's people could discern- through the Word and prayer- how to handle these areas of life with thanksgiving in light of Christ.
 - b) What did it mean to Paul to be a "good servant of Christ"? There are a couple answers directly from these verses. First, it meant to bring up these issues before the brothers- and sisters- or in other words, before the church. As a good servant of Christ, Timothy should confront and correct the false teaching that had infiltrated the church.
 - c) Paul said in verse 7a to, "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths." He characterized these teachings as "irreverent" and "silly." "Silly" sounds like this teaching was lightweight and harmless, but actually this kind of foolishness- as it often says in the book of Proverbs- can end in disaster. "Irreverent" can also be translated as "godless"- stuff that is profane and wicked. Paul talks deeply about the exact opposite- godliness- in the rest of this passage. So he wanted Timothy to

acknowledge and confront the false teachings that had arisen, but also to avoid getting entangled in them.

- d) Context: This is relevant for us today too. There is a lot of trouble and conflict arising today as significant numbers of Christians are getting swept up in conspiracy theories- trying to explain situations or events by creating a complex web of evil, secret groups of people. The problem with Christians getting involved (and sometimes spearheading them) is that they actually result in more ungodliness and foolishness rather than godliness and wisdom. And even worse, this feeds the proneness of human hearts to idolize information and politics. We trust in the information that we gather over God's words; we trust in the alliances and connects that we have over God's sovereign rule.
- e) Second, being a "good servant of Christ" meant to train the church "in the words of the faith and of good doctrine." I take the "words of the faith" to mean the biblical gospel- the truths on which well-founded faith is build upon. I see "good doctrine" as what the Bible says about God, his will and purpose, and areas of our lives. The specific word "train" here means to provide instruction- practical knowledge with the implication of acquiring skill too. It wasn't supposed to be theoretical or book smarts, but spiritual street smarts too. As a "good servant of Christ Jesus," Timothy was called to equip the church to reject false teachings and ideas and then also to embrace and live in line with the truth.
- f) Context: In the 1950s, William McGuire, professor at Yale University, developed a theory about how people come to embrace ideas they believe in- good or bad. He called it "inoculation theory": inoculation means to introduce the body to a weakened form of a disease that allows the body to develop immunity (this is relevant for us these days with the COVID-19 vaccine). So there were three possibilities:
- o First, there is *inoculation*, which is to introduce the bad idea along with the good idea (e.g. the good idea, "people should brush their teeth daily," and the bad idea, "brushing your teeth is bad for you").
 - o Second, there is *refutation*, which is to explain why the bad idea is bad and the good idea is good (e.g. "brushing your teeth is a bad for you is not true because of so-and-so reasons").
 - o Third, there is *preparation*, which is to equip people with thinking skills to discern bad and good (e.g. "this is how cavities and other dental problems form so you can figure out if brushing your teeth is good or bad").
- g) Context: McGuire found that the least effective strategy to prevent bad ideas taking over good ideas was "reinforcement of previous ideas only" (e.g. "just trust me: people should brush their teeth daily"). The most effective strategy was actually "inoculation + refutation + preparation" (e.g. "people should brush their teeth" and "brushing your teeth is bad for you is not true because of so-and-so reasons and let me explain how cavities actually form..."). For people to believe a claim, they must be prepared to defend it against its challengers. To summarize it in a different way, merely repeating a message over and over again- even with increasing passion and clever presentation- is actually counter-productive.
- h) Context: Timothy, in his calling as a pastor/elder of the church, was to SHEPHERD them in the midst of the reality that some would depart from the truth and influence the others to also do the same. He needed to prepare the church to defend themselves from false teaching; he needed to also teach and instill the biblical Gospel and doctrine into them. In a word, all believers need discernment; a goal of the church is to train disciples in the Word for discerning wisely.
- i) Context: It's like the responsibility of a parent in a family (for some of us who are parents, some who will become parents, and for all of us who have been parented well

or not). The calling of a parent is to raise up people who can discern wisely for themselves truth and falsehood and then live according to it. Babies need 100% supervision; children gradually increase their independence; and as they grow up into teenagers and young adults, parents cannot and should not make every decision for their children; they best parent by equipping them with the thinking skills to discern good and bad. A goal of the family is to train children to become adults who can discern wisely for themselves; a goal of the church is to train disciples in the Word for discerning wisely- this is the first truth here.

→ **Transition:** Let's now look at verses 7b-9 and the second part...

Sermon Outline (continued)

II. Train Yourself for Godliness (vv. 7b-9)

A. Paul's imperative for Timothy was to train himself for godliness as well.

1 Timothy 4:7b-9 (ESV): *7b 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.*

1. This is the second truth: Godliness is the content of what is promised in the Gospel of God's grace.

- a) Here, Paul seems to turn to Timothy, looking only at him in the eyes, and gives this imperative: "Rather, train yourself for godliness." In contrast to being caught up in irreverent and silly myths, Timothy was to train for godliness. And Paul provided imagery that his readers could understand in the highly Roman and Greek culture: the athletic competitions that marked that age. First-century audiences would have been familiar with the ideas of training for athletic matches, just as we are also probably familiar with today. And Paul says that this "bodily training is of some value"; fitness, strength, endurance, and mental toughness are always helpful for human beings whether in the first or twenty-first centuries.
- b) Illustration: So I guess physical training is clear, but what does this mean to "train for godliness" then? I'll tackle what it means to "train for godliness" actually in the third point because what I need to explain here is what training is NOT and what godliness exactly is. So first, let me clarify what training is not. Training is not the same as "trying harder." Here's the difference...
- c) Illustration: Let's say I register for an Ironman race (an Ironman race is a triathlon on steroids: swimming 3.86km, bicycling 180.25km, and running 42.2km all under 16 hours total). I can say that I'm going to try really hard- but if I do it tomorrow, I will fail dreadfully (I might even drown after the swimming part). I can even sincerely say that I will try harder the next time- but if I do it next month, I will also fail for sure. The reason? I just can't do it by trying harder! So you see, "training" is not just "trying harder." We'll get back to this illustration in the last part, but what I need to say here is that godliness cannot be achieved through trying harder either- because we have to understand what godliness is.
- d) Actually, the specific word "godliness" isn't used that much in the Bible, but the concept of "godliness" is certainly there. I think about the words of the prophet Micah as well- he gave a simple yet rich summary of what godliness can mean:

Micah 6:8 (ESV): *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

This would be a great verse to memorize to frame our idea of godliness! Godliness starts in the heart- it is to be devoted to God wholeheartedly- and then to live in a way that reflects that devotion. It's walking in relationship with God: humbly with a proper fear and reverence for him and an undivided loyalty and love for him. And then upholding his justice and treating people with kindness- these are the basic things that please God.

e) Context: But here's the problem if we think that this kind of godliness is achieved by "trying harder": we might start out well enough (like what happens with new year resolutions) in being just or kind to others, in reading our Bibles and praying, in not thinking too highly of ourselves. But inevitably we will fail- some of us will fail spectacularly, some will slip subtly- and we will have to come to realize that in our hearts we care about ourselves more than God or others. Maybe you saw glimpses of this as you fasted this last two weeks! You see, trying hard to be godly is impossible!

f) But how does a person become godly? We should interpret what "godliness" means most directly from this most immediate context in 1 Timothy. Paul actually mentions the word "godliness" ten times in the letter of 1 Timothy- it was obviously an important idea. In 3:16 Paul wrote this:

1 Timothy 3:16 (ESV): *Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.*

So Paul says that "godliness" is a mystery- something that was previously not known but has now been revealed. That mystery is Jesus Christ himself: the Word of God became flesh and lived on earth; he was rejected as a fraud but proved himself as the true King; angels and human beings witnessed his resurrection; he was proclaimed among all the nations and will return to take believers to eternal glory. The mystery is revealed to us in Christ, the center of God's salvation story; Jesus did perfectly what God the Father required of him- perfectly doing justice, perfectly loving kindness, perfectly walking with God in humility all the way to the cross. True godliness- a genuine devotion to God which results in a life that is pleasing to him- is now possible through Christ Jesus!

g) Going back to verse 8, this is why Paul said- in contrast to physical training being valuable in some ways- "godliness is valuable in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." This can be paraphrased as, "Godliness is valuable in every way, because *it is the content of what is promised* for the present life and for the life to come."

h) Listen carefully now: In this way, we can think about godliness in light of the gracious work of salvation in a person: God regenerates the heart and produces faith in that person and by faith he/she is justified (the legal status that the believer is righteous- they are credited Christ's righteousness actually). The Holy Spirit works in a person to change him/her to be more obedient, conformed, and pleasing to God- this is called sanctification. Believers will not experience final separation from their sinful nature in their earthly lives, but God works in believers to persevere until that final day when Jesus restores all things completely, including people's bodies and souls- this is called glorification.

i) In sum: Godliness is the result of God's work of calling, regenerating, and justifying a person. Godliness grows in God's work of sanctifying and helping him/her to persevere. Godliness will be perfected in a person in that final step of glorification. And it is all by God's grace! My point and the second truth is that *godliness is the content of what is promised in the Gospel of God's grace!*

→ **Transition:** Let's now look at verse 10 and the final part...

Sermon Outline (continued)

III. Hope for All Who Train (v. 10)

A. Paul's toil and striving- along with his fellow disciples- was set on hope in Christ.

1 Timothy 4:10 (ESV): *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.*

1. **This is the third truth: We can train for godliness by surrendering to God's words with hopeful purpose.**
 - a) Paul said here, "For to this end we toil and strive..." Paul now opened this up to the family of believers (for him and his team as well as for Timothy and his local church). They also trained for godliness- it included their "toiling" and "striving" towards this goal or purpose. So while there IS human effort expended, the order of how we think about this is critical. The reason that Paul and his fellow disciples of Jesus Christ could toil and strive was *because* their hope was "set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people." Hope in the biblical sense of the word is confidence that the certainties of the future will come about- that God's promises will be fulfilled. He didn't toil and strive because their success or failure at becoming godly was dependent on himself- in other words, it was not that he had to try harder!
 - b) Rather, Paul toiled and strived because he was motivated by God's grace at work in him: his godliness was promised and therefore certain! He could toil and strive with confident hope that the living God, the Savior of all people, Jesus Christ, had achieved godliness on his behalf! In the process of God's salvation in Paul, he rested assured in God's work of sanctifying him and in God's strength to enable him to persevere by faith in his earthly body. So we come back to the question: In what ways do we train for godliness then?
 - c) Illustration: Let's go back to that Ironman example I started in the last part. Let's say I have a goal to do one of those crazy Ironman races someday (this is an example- I am pretty sure I don't want to try this). If I did, then I'd have to dedicate myself to training. Let's just start with swimming: I'd have to get used to swimming 100m because I've never done that consistently before and I'm not going to be able to do it on my first go! Then I would build up to 200m straight through, then maybe try 500m, and so on. It would be hard, but I could build up my strength and endurance to go farther and faster...and at least in theory I could do the 3.86km swimming leg of an Ironman...eventually.
 - d) This is the idea of physical training. It's to develop your physical and mental stamina and muscle movements to the point of exhaustion or failure. Getting to your limit and going a bit farther is what makes someone stronger, faster, or more skilled in any sport or athletic training. This is the similarity to training for godliness: we develop godliness by intentional repetition and pushing ourselves.
 - e) Context: I think the "intentional repetition" part of training for godliness can pertain to continually growing in the words of the faith and in the words of good doctrine. In other words, we as disciples of Jesus train in the Word for discerning wisely. This is why we try to be Word-centered as a church. We listen to the Word through our preaching; we sing the Word through our worship; we pray the Word corporately and personally; we see the Word in the Lord's Supper; we study and practice the Word in LIFE groups. My exhortation is for us to never, ever just "go through the motions" of church activities; rather, let's engage intentionally together- toiling and striving- towards godliness!

- f) Context: I think the “pushing ourselves” part of training for godliness can pertain to our willingness and practice of actually living out God’s Word in our lives. The key concept for us here is “surrender.” I’ve been thinking a lot about this recently because during the One Desire Fast I committed to read a book called *Spirit Walk* by Steve Smith. He was a very faithful and fruitful missionary who recently passed away and his last message before he died were written in this book that exhorted and taught about how to walk with the Holy Spirit- in a sound and biblical way.
- g) Context: One of the things he wrote that convicted me greatly was how the biblical idea of “surrender” has largely disappeared from the vocabulary of today’s church- instead we often use the word “commitment.” Even though commitment is a good thing in many ways, it can also indicate being committed to something even if it’s not really God’s will and not being open to God’s leading and guidance. Training for godliness includes training in surrendering our own will, desire, and control by submitting to the words of Christ that are dwelling in us richly and being open to doing whatever he tells us to do. Without this surrendered heart to obey whatever God says, the intake of God’s Word turns into spiritual fat instead of spiritual muscle (godliness).
- h) Context: Let me give a quick example: When we read a narrative like Jesus loving Zacchaeus the tax collector, we can acknowledge that God loves people who are unsavory enemies. But maybe the Holy Spirit reminds you in a still, small voice to love those people you work with in the same way. Usually, we won’t even hear the Spirit; we might come up with excuses why we can’t- maybe because we don’t have time to build relationships with them because we’re committed to working out, meeting church friends, and the like (all good things). But a heart of surrender would be to do it: you initiate a meal together, patiently figure out a time and lovingly get to know him/her. This is tough- it may cause toil and strife. But this is how we train in godliness!
- i) Context: So we listen to the Holy Spirit along with the Word of God, we surrender to say, “Whatever, whenever, and to whomever, I will obey you, Lord!” The Spirit can use us as well, to sharpen each other and keep each other accountable to train for a life of surrender. I am hopeful that we will! I believe when we are surrendered in this way, God will make us truly godly- people who are wholly devoted to him and who please him by the way we live our lives! Remember that this is the END GOAL of training- training for godliness is not without a purpose, just like physical training is not without purpose. In the end, godliness is valuable because it is for the LIVING GOD himself! Paul wanted to KNOW GOD more and wanted to MAKE HIM KNOWN to the world. In the same way, the third truth is that *we can train for godliness by surrendering to God’s words with this hopeful purpose!*

→ **Transition**: As we conclude this sermon, let’s talk about the “next steps” to take...

Conclusion

IV. Life Application

A. Church family and friends: *Let’s train ourselves for true godliness! Let’s do it in two ways...*

1. Train by intentional repetition in Word-centered life and church.
 - a) I have a hope for you: that as you are a part of our church that tries to be Word-centered, you will develop great wisdom and discernment because the words of Christ dwell so abundantly and deeply in you. Don’t go through the motions! Take the

Word to heart as we listen, sing, pray, study, and practice living out God's Word in SC and LG.

- b) May you develop such a great love for God's Word, because by God's grace he has done his work of salvation in you. As you do Bible reading plans by yourself, with friends, or with your family members, may you grow in love with God and them with his Word.
2. Train by pushing yourself to surrender when God speaks to you.
- a) The ministry of the Word will lead us to an intimate, real relationship with the living God! And when he speaks, don't ignore the Holy Spirit but listen to him and obey! The purpose of God's Word isn't to just listen but to live it out- then you'll really KNOW God- this is of greatest value!
 - b) As Paul wanted to know God more and wanted to make him known to the world, may we discover that the end of all this training is to know God more and make him known. May we be people who are fully surrendered as Jesus' disciples, toiling and striving with the hope that he will finish his work in us and through us too!
- **Transition:** Church, let's train ourselves for true godliness! We'll go back to the live Zoom service to respond to God's Word together now.

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