

## The Pillar (Part 2 of 4)

Train Yourself for Godliness

1 Timothy 4:6-10

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*<sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. <sup>10</sup>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 Timothy 4:6-10).*

I'm sure that you, like me, have particular words of wisdom spoken to you that have remained lodged in your soul – little nuggets of truth that help you to think right and do what is right.

As a young pastor and during a significant season of controversy, a wise woman who was old enough to be my grandmother said, "Mark, you take care of your character and let God take care of your reputation." Her words were so helpful because they identify that the Christian life and ministry are intensely personal and not without significant challenges and struggles. And in the midst of those seasons, a person's godliness or character is extremely important.

In other words, godliness is not just the goal of the Christian life; it is the basis of Christian ministry. Godliness is not just what God wants to produce in you in the future; godliness is useful in the present. Godliness is not just the product of effective ministry; it is the means of effective ministry. Doing what is right and being godly are central to what spiritual development and spiritual leadership is all about.

### The Strategy of Godliness

Two weeks ago we began our study of 1 Timothy 4, a chapter that picked up again the theme of false teaching and Timothy's responsibility to refute it. We heard this theme in the first chapter where Paul challenged Timothy to "*charge to certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies...*" (1 Tim. 1:3-4). But refuting false doctrine is not only about the right message; it is also about having the right life. Just after telling Timothy what he is to do, Paul tells him how to live: "*The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*" (1 Tim. 1:5). Do you see the connection?

Christianity is about truth that leads to life. It is about believing in the gospel and having a life changed by the gospel. And this godliness, birthed by and continued through gospel, makes the

good news about Jesus believable. Godliness is not just the goal of ministry; it is also the means of ministry. Personal godliness is an important part of the strategy of making the gospel known and for refuting false teaching.

This is extremely important for us to understand because Christianity at any level really comes down to the personal godliness of the people involved. Whether it is your relationships with others, your family, our church, efforts in biblical justice or global evangelism, the real impact flows from our godliness.

I can look back on my own life and see this very clearly. The people who shaped my life did so based upon what they said and how they lived. Without their personal godliness, their message or their ministry would not have impacted me. Could that be said of you?

This passage invites us to embrace the kind of lifestyle that facilitates personal godliness. What does that look like? Paul lists three things: 1) feeding on the Word, 2) being intentional, and 3) hoping in God.

### **Feed on the Word (v 6)**

Paul begins by telling Timothy that *"if you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus"* (1 Tim. 4:6). He is commending Timothy and motivating him to say some important things to his people. To put things before them is a phrase connected to the building trade where something is built over time with one piece at a time. Timothy is commended for doing that in the spiritual realm. Do you remember what he told them?

Two weeks ago we talked about the scary reality of making a shipwreck of your faith through teaching that leads you astray. We heard Paul's warning about being in the last days, the deceitful teachings of demons, the hypocrisy of some teachers, and a conscience that can be seared (see 1 Tim. 4:1-5). This teaching led people to believe the wrong things and to live the wrong way. Whether it was lies of their making or lies purported by someone else, it led them down a self-destructive path. Some were led away by licentiousness. Others were taken captive by legalism. Both led to spiritual ruin.

Interestingly enough, I've had multiple people tell me gut-wrenching stories about people who they knew whose lives became a spiritual train-wreck. I even had someone with tears streaming down his face that his life is a ship-wreck. It is scary. And it is very common.

But it doesn't have to be this way! Verse six shows us that Timothy's concern for his people and his success in ministry was directly connected to his relationship with the Scriptures. Look at the second half of verse six: *"being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed."* Don't miss this point! Timothy's ability to put the right things in front of his people and the key to being a good servant of Jesus Christ was his feeding on the Word of God.

The most important word in this verse is the one translated at "trained" in the ESV. Honestly, I wish that the translators would have chosen a different word because the same English word ("train") is

used in the next verse but the words and their meanings are very different. That is why most of the other translations (NIV, NRSV, NASB, NKJV, and KJV) use the English word “nourish” instead of “train” in this verse.

Paul is talking about what has given Timothy spiritual strength. The Greek word here is “entrepho,” and its nuance is child rearing or the training of a young person. And it is a present participle which means that he anticipates this nourishing will continue even to the present. In other words, Timothy has been spiritually reared in such a way that it produced and is still producing spiritual vitality.

Upon what was Timothy “nourished?” According to verse six there are two things: 1) the words of faith, and 2) the good doctrine which he has followed. These are not like two separate things but one in the same. Timothy had been nourished in the Word of God, and it was out of that nourishment that he led others. The fuel for his ministry was his godliness, and the fuel for his godliness was feeding on the Word of God.

We get a great sense of this on a personal level in 2 Timothy.

*<sup>14</sup>But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:14-17).*

Apparently Timothy was raised in an environment where he was exposed, acquainted, and nourished in the sacred scriptures. This likely came through the influence of his mother and grandmother.

*<sup>5</sup>I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well (2 Tim. 1:5).*

Timothy’s mother was Jewish and without a personal copy of the Scriptures, Timothy must have learned to love the Word through his exposure to it in the synagogue. His home environment and the influence of his family created an appetite for spiritual nourishment through the Scriptures and it marked his entire life.

Just think of all the things that children must be taught how to do. There are physical things (e.g., brush your teeth, make your bed, take a bath). There are social things (e.g., say “thank you,” look people in the eye when you talk to them, wait to eat until everyone is served). There are athletic things (e.g., how to throw a ball, shoot a basket, ride a bike). Right now Savannah is learning to read, and it is so fun to watch Sarah not only teach her how to read but to also help Savannah love to read. A very important part of her education is not just the transmission of the skill of the reading; it is teaching her a passion for learning and reading in particular. I will never forget what D.A. Carson once said about his students: “My students will not remember everything I teach them, but they will remember everything that I’m passionate about.”

This is why we have a children's ministries, and why it is worth the extra effort that I hope your family takes to have a short family devotional time. This is why it is important that your kids participate with you in worship on Sunday. This is why it is important that you not give up or be discouraged when you wonder what is really sinking in. Those deposits of truth combined with passion (assuming it's there) are developing an appetite, a passion, and an affection for the Word of God. So don't give up. Keep pouring the Scriptures into their hearts. Keep talking with them about the gospel. And keep reminding your own heart that "<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16).

Do you want your children to be godly? Do you want to be godly? It starts with a feeding upon the Word of God. The fuel of godliness is the nourishment that comes from the Word. Just listen to how Psalm 119 captures this:

*Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart (Ps. 119:1-2)*

*How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you (Ps. 119:9-10)*

*I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word (Ps. 119:15-16)*

The Word of God contains the truth that leads to life. The fuel for godly living comes from feeding on the Word. No matter what our age or our role in the kingdom, godliness only comes from being nourished in the words of faith. Feeding on the Word is the fuel of godliness.

But there's more. The Word is a great and powerful resource but it has to be put into use. And that leads us to the second thing that facilitates godliness.

### **Be Intentional (vv 7-9)**

Paul now turns from having the right appetite toward having the right drive. The Word of God is the fuel for godliness, but personal discipline the framework. If I used the analogy of a vine as a model for godliness, the soil, nutrients, and water would be the fuel and the lattice would be the framework. It is the structure, stability, and the consistency of the lattice that gives the vine room to grow. The lattice should not be the first thing that people notice, but don't think it isn't important.

In the same way, godliness is the goal, and the intentional pursuit of spiritual disciplines, while not first in importance, are incredibly important. Personal godliness doesn't happen by accident. It requires intentionality. It happens on purpose. Let's see Paul lays this out for us.

First, notice that Timothy is called to not do something. In order for him to pursue the right thing, he has to avoid the wrong thing. A "yes" to one thing requires a "no" to another – the power of

“no” is in a stronger “yes.” Verse 7 says, “*Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths...*” We heard this in 1:4 where Paul talked about the danger of “myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations.” When we looked at chapter one, I gave you the following characteristics of this false teaching: 1) it was new – purporting to be a spiritual improvement on the gospel, 2) it was mystical – focusing less on the objective truth of the Scriptures, 3) it was intellectual – causing those who bought this to feel proud or superior that others, and 4) it brought confusion – it created less godliness not more. Timothy was to see this for what it was, and his best strategy in dealing with it was to ignore it. Intentional avoidance is a good strategy when it comes to sin and false teaching.

Secondly, he is told to “*train yourself for godliness.*” The term “godliness” (Greek: *eusebia*) refers to a life that is totally consecrated to God in specific and observable ways.<sup>1</sup> It is truth that leads to life. It is to be “god-like” in the sense that we are becoming holy. The pathway for this godliness to take place is “training.” The Greek word here is *gymnaze*, and you can hear the English word *gymnasium* in it. The word carries with it an athletic metaphor that would have been familiar to the people in Ephesus just as it is with you. Exceptional athletes are known for their exceptional training. They dedicate enormous amounts of time, energy, and effort to developing their skills. They plan their lives around their training, get up earlier than everyone else, work incredibly hard, and preserve. Their lives are marked by extreme intentionality. “No pain, no gain” is not just a motto; it is a way of life.

I’m sure that you know what he is talking about here. I remember very well the intentionality required for two-a-day basketball practices. The alarm would go off at 5:00 a.m., I would grab my school bag and clothes which I had packed the night before, pick up two double chocolate doughnuts at Sweetwater’s, guzzle a glass of orange juice, and be ready for practice at 6:00 a.m., go to school, practice again after school, and repeat this cycle for 2-3 weeks. It was intense. Even if you were not an athlete, you probably know what this is like in some other area. Whether in academics, business, politics, or the arts, intentionality is central.

Paul is telling Timothy that we ought to have the same perspective of intentionality when it comes to godliness. The reality is that just like everything else in life godliness doesn’t come naturally or automatically; it requires intentional and difficult training.<sup>2</sup> Godliness takes intentional effort, a decisive determination to say “no” to some things in order to say “yes” to others.

I’m referring to what is often called the spiritual disciplines – the means by which God conforms us to himself. Make no mistake about it, God is still the one doing the work in our lives, but through the spiritual disciplines, we put ourselves in position to receive his grace or to be changed. Think of your spiritual growth like a big river with a current. Once you are in the river you can paddle faster, explore, and travel downstream. But it is the current that carries you along. The spiritual disciplines put us into the river to be carried along by the current. The power is implicit in the river of sanctification, but you need to jump in.

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<sup>1</sup> William Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles – The Word Biblical Commentary*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 251.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Ryken, *1 Timothy – Reformed Expository Commentary*, (Phillipsburg: New Jersey, 2007), 172.

So what kind of disciplines am I talking about? The spiritual disciplines include Bible reading, memorization, prayer, fasting, corporate worship, the Lord's Supper, silence, journaling, giving, and acts of mercy. These are simply the means by which godliness is facilitated; they are the means by which the Spirit of God trains us to be godly. Without these disciplines and without intentional pursuit, godliness will not happen. This is stunningly simple: without intentionally putting yourself into a position to receive transforming grace, you will not become godly. The devil, your flesh, and the system of the world all work against it. Godliness is unnatural and therefore requires intentionality.

However, intentionality for intentionality's sake never works. Therefore, Paul identifies the reason why godliness is a great choice: *"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"* (1 Tim. 4:8). Paul wisely acknowledges that bodily training has some value. So it is not that bodily training is necessarily bad. However, training for godliness is far better because of its all-encompassing effects. In other words, physical training has value up to a particular point, but godliness is valuable in much more significant ways. Phillip Ryken captures this well:

*It is valuable in the home, the church, and the marketplace. It is valuable both in times of trouble and in times of prosperity. It helps a person deal with enemies as well as friends. Godliness is never superfluous. It guides the believer in every situation<sup>3</sup>.*

So it is valuable now in a way that physical training is not. But there's another reason: it has eternal implications. Godliness has a double blessing. It affects life right now but it also has implications for the future. Sanctification is connected to glorification. 1 Corinthians 15:25 puts it this way: *"Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."* Godliness has broader impact and greater longevity. It is far more valuable. In fact, verse nine treats this statement like it is proverb: *"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance."*

So let me just ask us some penetrating questions:

- Everyone is intentional about something. What are you passionate about? What do you spend time thinking about, planning, dreaming, and doing?
- Godliness begins by having a relationship with God through receiving Christ as your Savior and Lord. Have you made that commitment?
- The most basic discipline is Scripture reading and prayer. How is that going?
- Are you giving adequate time and priority to the disciplines of grace?
- Godliness requires work. However, are you making the disciplines a badge or an issue of pride?
- Which spiritual discipline should be a new priority for you?

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<sup>3</sup> Ryken, 175.

Calvin called godliness “the beginning, the middle, and the end of Christian living.” Godliness requires feeding on the Word and it demands intentionality. But there’s one more element.

### **Hope in God (v 10)**

Years ago I read a great book on the spiritual disciplines by Donald Whitney, and he made this profound statement: “discipline without direction leads to drudgery.” How true! Discipline is hard work, and it is not easy. Therefore, there must be a larger goal in mind than simply being disciplined for discipline’s sake. There must be another motivator, a goal, or something in which the person hopes.

Paul gives this to us very clearly in verse ten: *“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.”*

The pursuit of this godliness is not easy. We live in a threatening world, and there is a constant gravitation pull away from godliness. Paul acknowledges that this is tough: *“we toil and strive.”* But it is worthwhile because of the object of our hope.

Paul lays out for us here a grand and global vision of what God is doing. He identifies that the reason for godliness is because of our hope in the living God. This begins at conversion when a person admits that he or she is a sinner and needs a savior, receiving Christ based upon the promised hope that God will count Jesus’ death as sufficient. But it continues as the believer sees the myriad of ways in which his or her life changes. There is nothing more beautiful than seeing that God is alive – that he is alive in our lives! Regeneration is when you see the beauty of hoping in God rather than hoping in yourself; it is believing that God will welcome you into his kingdom not based upon what you’ve done but upon what Jesus has done for you. So the Christian life is essentially a life of hope in God!

What’s more, it is realizing that God invites us to join him in the global advancement of the spread of Christ-bought, Spirit-empowered godliness. Training for godliness is birthed from a belief that we have a purpose far beyond just what we do and live right now. We are here to fulfill Jesus’ prayer: *“On earth as it is in heaven”* (Matt. 6:10). The God-birthered godliness in our lives is part of a global vision.

With that lens and perspective, look at the last part of verse ten: *“who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”* Paul is not advocating some kind of universalism, a teaching that suggests that all people are saved. In fact to avoid that charge he specifically adds a qualifying statement. He wants you to have a global vision and a kingdom mindset without detracting from the call for belief. The floodgates of the gospel have now been opened to all peoples and nations. But the saving death of Jesus is only applied to those who actually believe in him. Jesus’ death, while sufficient for everyone, is only efficient for those who believe. In other words, God only saves those who hope in him.

Hoping in God is where Christianity begins, and it is where all godliness comes from. Training for godliness means that a person places more hope in God and his ways than what the world, the

flesh, and the devil want us to do. So putting your faith in God's promises is not only what you do when you receive Christ; it is what you do every time you embrace one of the spiritual disciplines or turn away from a path of sin that looks promising. Godliness means that while most of the people you know are putting their hopes in pleasure, pride, and prestige, you are putting your hope in God through godliness. It is what Rhea Miller wrote in 1922:

*I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause;  
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause;  
I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame;  
I'd rather be true to His holy name*

*Than to be the king of a vast domain  
And be held in sin's dread sway;  
I'd rather have Jesus than anything  
This world affords today.*

Feeding on the Word, being intentional, and hoping in God. These are the core ingredients for training yourself in godliness. "You take care of your character and let God take care of your reputation." Those were wise words because they reflect a valuable and time-tested way of living and thinking about godliness.

You see, godliness is not just the way that people who are in ministry should live. It is the way that all followers of Jesus should live. In fact, I would tell you that if you live for anything else besides godliness, I feel really sad for you. Don't you sense that there is something more to life? Don't you want to live for something more? Aren't you tired of cheap thrills, momentary pleasures, shallow experiences, and all the guilt that comes with them? Somewhere in your soul you know that there has to be more to life than what you are living for.

The Bible calls us to see, receive, and live by the truth that leads to life. Godliness and training for it is not something for a special class of people. Godliness – becoming more and more like God – is what it means to really live.

You train yourself for godliness not because you have to; you train yourself for godliness because there is no better way to live.

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