

## **The Discipline of Integrity: “Pursuing Personal Godliness”**

1 Timothy 4:7-10

This morning God wants to know how serious we are about following Him, as we open to 1 Timothy 4:7-10. God's Word is explaining to us that we have an appointment for a workout in the gym. God Himself wants to train us in how to live, walk, and grow in Christ. The Discipline of Integrity means we choose to do what God's Word says we are supposed to do.

As Paul continues to relay God's message to each of us, remember from last time it is at the highest level of emphasis that is possible to convey in the Greek language. Remember those bright colored words that stand for the emphasis God placed on them grammatically?

We are each invited by The Lord to spend time each day: working out. This workout is illustrated by Paul, with scenes from the culture of his day. Guided by the Spirit of God, Paul uses the examples of the three most well known sports from the gymnasium, and applies them to the life of every believer.

Just as our world has recently witnessed a modern form of the re-born Ancient Olympics, in the Russians hosting the Winter Olympics, so Paul's world also had witnessed the ancient and original Olympics for hundreds of years. Paul was so focused upon God that he could even see spiritual illustrations in those huge sports events.

### **Healthy Believers are Spiritual Athletes**

In the Greek world there were three great sports events. There were the great Isthmian Games at Corinth; and the great Pan-Ionian Games at Ephesus. These led to what was the greatest of all the games, the Olympics held every four years.

After three years of ministry in Ephesus and one and a half years of ministry in Corinth, we can see the impact Paul's exposure to these games had on his ministry. So, using athletic metaphors, Paul explains the pathway to long-term spiritual health for believers. Once we are saved, God wants us to be growing in Christ-likeness, that is what spiritual health is all about: reflecting Christ from more and more areas of my life.

Paul now explains these disciplines in a way that ties together elements from many of his other letters. Paul uses the pictures from every day life around the first century believers: The world of the gymnasium.

From the gym, Paul applies spiritual truths in a way that deepens our understanding. Please stand and follow along in your Bibles as we hear God speaking through the Apostle Paul.

1 Timothy 4:7-10 (NKJV) But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. 8 For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. 9 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. 10 For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

## Eternally Beneficial Training Tips from God

Nestled right here in this chapter: we have genuine, spiritual, life-coaching, poured out from the heart of Paul. What did Paul say were “the disciplines” to practice?

1. **The Discipline of Truth:** Expose False Doctrines & Teachers (4:1-6a)
2. **The Discipline of Devotion:** Nourish your own Soul spiritually (6:6b)
3. **The Discipline of Time:** Reject all forms of profane & empty living (4:7a)
4. **The Discipline of Integrity:** Pursuing personal Godliness (4:7b-10)

Paul fills his writings with metaphors, images, and illustrations pulled right off from the front pages of his life. He talks about believers as “temples”, giving our bodies back to God like “slaves”, and that we wear “armor”, enduring hardness as “good soldiers”, all the while running the “race” of life. Right there we see just a small sampling of the culturally vivid communication Paul displayed as he was guided to record the Word of God.

But above nearly every other image, illustration, and metaphor, it was the whole realm of the athletic competition of the Roman world, that Paul most loved to use. Even to his last words he reminded us that to him life was a racecourse that he was finishing, and that God Himself was the trainer, referee, and judge for every event of life.

## Living Life in the Arena of Eternity

Paul always shined the light of eternity across all the temporary diversions of human life. He was so aware that life was brief, and eternity was not. Paul's priorities were rooted deeply in the place where he was headed, and he wanted ours to be also. The Discipline of Integrity means we choose to do what God's Word says we are supposed to do.

Most likely Paul was sharing the Gospel when the crowds filled these cities; but there was something else about these athletic contests, which found a place in the heart of Paul. He saw a picture God could use to help believers understand daily life. From the

gymnasium Paul chose to use three sports to illustrate disciplines in our lives as followers of Christ.

- Paul used elements from the sport of **boxing** (1 Corinthians 9:26), to describe how we deal with our flesh.
- Paul used elements from the sport of **wrestling** (Eph. 6:12) to describe the constant threat of spiritual warfare.
- Paul used elements from the sport of **footraces** (1 Cor. 9:24-27), to describe how we live the Christian life. He used the most famous of all the competitions, referring to the herald that summoned racers to the starting line (1 Corinthians 9:27), and describing runners straining towards the finish line (Philippians 3:14).

Then, Paul captures the scenes of judges awarding prizes at the end of the games (2 Timothy 4:8). Paul refers to the laurel crown of the winner (1 Corinthians 9:24; Philippians 4:1). Paul uses the focused training every athlete had to choose, and the strict rules that had to be observed (1 Timothy 4:7, 8; 2 Timothy 2:5).

That whole process of training and staying in the race is called sanctification. Paul lays down the elements of personal sanctification in 1 Timothy 4. These elements are each what we can see as a set of disciplines:

The Discipline of **Truth** (finding God's Word is our source) leads us to >  
The Discipline of **Devotion** (loving God is our desire) leads us to >  
The Discipline of **Time** (pleasing God is our goal) leads us to >  
The Discipline of **Integrity** (pursuing personal godliness as our choice)

## The Discipline of Integrity is Personal Sanctification

As we were saved only by the accomplishment of Christ's sacrifice on the cross—so we live each day 'by faith' (the same faith by which we were saved). We are always dependent upon Christ's gracious death upon the cross that saves and keeps us!

There are two sides of the coin of salvation. We could call those two sides faith and works as James does. Another way would be to use Paul's words from Romans—justification and sanctification. To best understand what Paul is asking us to do here in 1 Timothy is to contrast and explain justification and sanctification.

- **Justification** is what Christ did for me on the cross--**sanctification** is what Christ is doing in me because of the cross.
- **Justification** is immediate and was completely finished in me the instant I was

saved—**sanctification** is an ongoing process never completed on earth until I meet Jesus face to face at death or His coming.

- **Justification** is activated the moment I trust in the Person of Christ Jesus and His finished sacrifice of the cross—**sanctification** grows with each obedient choice I make empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- **Justification** is my position declared right in God's sight—**sanctification** is my practice made right by becoming more conformed to His image.

## The Doctrine of Sanctification is Our Walk

Again, Paul speaks of salvation in two parts: receiving Christ & walking in Christ.

Receiving Christ is Justification by faith. Walking in Christ is Sanctification by faith. The words “as you received Christ, so walk in Him” of Col. 2:6, joins these two doctrines as the two sides of one coin. The justified ones go on towards becoming the sanctified ones.

As we were saved only by the accomplishment of Christ's sacrifice on the cross—so we live each day ‘by faith’ (the same faith by which we were saved). We are always dependent upon Christ's gracious death upon the cross that saves and keeps us! But, sanctification from our perspective is described by God as a:

## Chosen Daily Spiritual Workout

*“**Sanctification** is a process—the process of becoming more like Christ, of growing in holiness. This process begins the **instant you** are converted and will not end until **you** meet Jesus face-to-face.*

*Through the work of His Spirit, through the power of His word and fellowship with other believers, God peels away **our** desires for sin, renews **our** minds, and changes **our** lives. Sanctification is **about our own choices and behavior**. It involves work. Empowered by God's Spirit, we strive. **We fight sin. We study Scripture and pray, even when we don't feel like it. We flee temptation. We press on; we run hard in the pursuit of holiness.**<sup>1</sup>*

As we look at the words of 1 Tim. 4:8, Paul first declares:

## The Temporal Benefits of Physical Exercise

First, Paul describes the discipline of integrity by comparing it to the effective but temporal—“bodily exercise” (vv. 7–8). Paul is agreeing that we need to care for our bodies,

---

<sup>1</sup> C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2002, p. 31-34.

and exercise is a part of that care. As God's Temple, we care for our bodies, so they can be used for His glory (1 Cor. 6:19–20). We also want our bodies fit when we present them as instruments God can use in His service (Rom. 12:1–2).

The key issue Paul brings up is that bodily exercise can only benefit us during our earthly life; but every godly discipline is both profitable for daily life as well as eternal life. Paul is not advocating “either-or”, but “both”; and he underscores that our greater emphasis should be on pursuing godliness.

As we have seen from the start of this series, the English word **Discipline** in our Bibles comes from the Gk. *gumnazō*, from which also we get the English words “gymnasium” and “gymnastics”. The Greek dictionary defines *gumnazo* as: the rigorous, strenuous, self-sacrificing training an athlete undergoes.

Every Greek city had its gymnasium, and young people spent much of their time from ages sixteen to eighteen in physical training. Roman culture emphasized physical training and the glory of winning athletic events.

By guiding Paul to use *gumnazō*, God's Spirit was illustrating from Greek culture the truths of the spiritual realm. Greek culture strongly emphasized personal athletic exercises, so Paul called Timothy to **discipline** his life for personal exercises in godliness.

By using a verb in the present tense, God was guiding Paul to tell Timothy that this was to be a constant, daily routine that stimulated a godly lifestyle.

Paul used athletic images in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:24–27), also emphasizing the discipline God prescribes for godly living. Just as athletes train their body to obey the rules, so believers must make their bodies submit to pleasing God. Each time we see any athlete, we can be reminded that there are spiritual exercises that we should be doing (Heb. 5:14). These exercises are the basics: praying, meditating, fellowshiping, serving, sacrificing, submitting, witnessing—all of these, assisted by the Spirit, shape us into godly people.

Spiritual exercises are never easy; and believers must “labor and suffer reproach” (1 Tim. 4:10a, NKJV). In other translations that say: “For this we labor and strive” (NIV), we see the sense of the athletic imagery, as “strive” comes from the Gk. word that sounds exactly like the English word agonize. Paul was explaining that to excel as a believer, God calls us to labor by His grace, and to strive for His glory. Like athletes that struggle and strain in the training and competition (called *agonidzomai*), so the normal life of following Christ is likewise to be an agonizing struggle of faith, empowered by grace.

Physical exercise has great benefits, but only for a very limited time. Spiritual exercise has an even greater benefit both for daily living, and for all eternity. This truth of the present and eternal benefit of spiritual disciplines or exercises is so important, Paul says in v. 9 it **a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance**. Paul is saying that believers, diligent about their spiritual exercises, reap such eternal value, that everyone recognizes that truth.

# The Eternal Benefits of Spiritual Exercise

Next in v. 8 Paul contrasts the benefits that are only temporary with those that can be eternal. He says the eternal benefit we should exercise for is godliness in v. 8b. Godly living and Christ-like character is vastly more important than golf trophies or home-run records. True believers can have both. But, Paul here challenged Timothy, and us today, to be as devoted to seeking godliness: as an athlete is to his sport. We are to be living each day aware that we are laboring for eternity.

The Gk. Word *eusebeia* is translated **godliness**, and it expresses life when reverence for God fills our lives. As we saw last time, we feel the weight of God upon every part of life. We need to ask God to train us in how to respond to Him as our true Creator. We need the sacred reality that we are temples where God actually lives. That means there is a respect from us that is due to God. That is our highest calling in life.

A life of respect for God, is: a life of godliness. This word is repeated three times in 1 Tim. 6, and teaches us that: **godliness** is the heart of truth (6:3); and **godliness** must be pursued by believers (6:11); and **godliness** with contentment brings great gain (6:6). Peter adds that when we live for Heaven, we live for **godliness** (2 Pet. 3:11).

The lack of cultivating these spiritual disciplines that promote godliness is the primary reason so many believers fall into sin. If we neglect the time investment needed, we don't cultivate the very means of grace God has provided to nurture our lives.

God has chosen to dispense His grace by means of: time in the Word, time in prayer, and time in self-sacrificial ministry to others. Believers who choose to pursue these disciplines of godliness, instead of worldly success (1 Tim. 1:5; 2:8; 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:1, 21-22), will one day hear the Lord say to them, "Well done, good and faithful slave" (Matt. 25:21).

## Three Workouts for Life

Of the different games the New Testament mentions three: racing, boxing, and wrestling. The race is mentioned most frequently. In each of the three pictures of athletic life as employed in the New Testament there is prominent a special view-point of the spiritual life and effort.

### Workout-1: Learning to Run means Looking Ahead towards the Bema Seat of Christ.

The verb "reaching forth" in Philippians 3:13 literally means "stretching as in a race." The Gk. *trecho*, lit. run) translated as the race looks forward to the heavenly goal, our "high calling" from God in Christ, to live for the realm above (Phil. 3:14). This is the

meaning of Philippians 2:12–13: “Work out your own salvation... for it is God which works in you.” God gives each Christian a lane to run down during the race of our human life. We each were designed by God (Eph. 2:10) with a goal to achieve for God (His will for us). If we reach that goal, we receive His reward. If we fail, we lose His reward (1 Cor. 3:15), but we do not lose our citizenship in Heaven (salvation).

Paul says in Philippians 3:13 “forgetting those things which are behind”. It is an impossible<sup>2</sup> feat of mental and psychological gymnastics to try to erase the sins and mistakes of the past. That is not what Paul asks; rather he explains that **we break the power of the past by living for the future**. Apart from senility, hypnosis, or a brain malfunction, no mature person can forget what has happened in the past. We may wish that we could erase certain bad memories, but we cannot.

“To forget” in the Bible means “no longer to be influenced by or affected by.” When God promises, “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 10:17), He is not suggesting that He will conveniently have a bad memory! This is impossible with God. What God is saying is, “I will no longer hold their sins against them. Their sins can no longer affect their standing with Me or influence My attitude toward them.”

## **Workout-2: Learning to Box means Looking Within at our disloyal flesh wanting to hinder us in the race.**

Follow along in 1 Cor. 9:24-27 as I point out the all the Roman cultural metaphors in these verses: “Do you not know that those **running in a race-course** (*stadion*) all run indeed, but one attains the prize. Run thus, that you may win. Everyone who contends (*agonidzomenos*) is self-disciplined in everything, that they indeed might win a perishable victor’s crown (*stephanos*), but we an imperishable. Therefore **I run** (*trecho*) thus, not as if uncertainly; **I box** (*pukteuon*) thus, not as if shadow-boxing; but I punch (*hupopiadzon*) my body and I enslave it (*dulagogeo*), **lest perhaps having proclaimed to others, I myself should become a failure** (*adokimos*)” (1 Cor. 9:24–27). This Gk. word *adokimos* meant “disapproved, disqualified.” The disqualified Greek athlete did not lose his citizenship, only his opportunity to win a prize. The whole emphasis is on rewards, and Paul did not want to lose his reward”<sup>3</sup>.

Any contestant found breaking the training rules was automatically disqualified. In recent years, Evangelical Christians have rediscovered the relationship between a disciplined body and a Spirit-filled life. We must, of course, avoid extremes. On the one hand, religious asceticism is unhealthy and of no value spiritually (Col. 2:18–23). But on the other hand, there is something to be said for disciplined eating, exercising, and resting, and a Spirit-directed balanced life. The Discipline of Integrity means we choose to do what

---

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Philippians*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe.

God's Word says we are supposed to do.

1. We smugly congratulate ourselves that we do not smoke or abuse alcohol, but what about our overeating and being overweight?
2. We loudly proclaim our liberty in Christ and yet we are so bound by our stress overloaded lives that many Christians cannot discipline their time so as to have a consistent devotional life or Bible-study program<sup>4</sup>.

### **Workout-3: Wrestling means struggling against the powers of darkness by learning we always need Christ's armor.**

This refers to our fight with the powers of darkness around and beneath us. Thus Paul says: "Our wrestling (Gk. *pale*) is against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness: (Eph. 6:12). Only wearing the armor of being clothed in Christ protects us from those snares.

### **The Result is Spiritual Strength**

The New Testament epistles call us to personal purity or holiness, and are built around dozens of imperatives (or requests). Remember that **God never asks me to do what He hasn't already given me the grace to accomplish by faith through His Spirit!**

*"Our participation in the process of **sanctification** comes only after we've been totally accepted and made right before God through faith in Jesus. **So yes:***

- *We **work** hard at obeying God's word.*
- *We **read** our Bibles.*
- *We **pray**.*
- *We **memorize and meditate** on Scripture.*
- *We **share** the gospel.*
- *We **serve** in our church.*
- *We **fast**.*

***God commands us in His Word to do many things; and our obedience is both pleasing to Him and brings His blessing to our lives. But not one adds to our justification, our standing before God, our eternal life. Only grace sustains lasting change and **sanctification**. Through the cross we overcome not only the guilt of sin, but the power of sin as well<sup>5</sup>.***

---

<sup>4</sup> These paragraphs quoted, adapted, and paraphrased from Wiersbe, Philippians 3 Commentary.

<sup>5</sup> C. J. Mahaney, The Cross Centered Life, Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2002, p. 31-34.

## Make Your Choice Today

Sanctification is like being healthy spiritually. Just like our body needs proper nutrients combined with exercise, so our souls need regular intake of the Word mixed with choices to obey.

These two elements: the Word and active obedience to the Word is how the Holy Spirit works. He uses the power of His Word and fellowship with other believers, to peel away our desires for sin, renews our minds, and changes our lives.

Each day Christ calls us to renew our desire to respond with these 4 choices to renew our sanctifying habits:

1. **I want to:** Listen to God DAILY through His Word.
2. **I want to:** Respond to God throughout the day in prayer.
3. **I want to:** Make sacred vows to obey His plan for my life.
4. **I want to:** Share my burdens with another believer so they can encourage me.

The Discipline of Integrity means we choose to do what God's Word says we are supposed to do. Make those your offerings of obedience to God today!