

Training Ourselves to be Godly

1 Timothy 4:1-16
September 15, 2019



Please read 1 Timothy 4:1-16 before reading any further in this transcript.

Last week's sermon was all about one thing, one word: Discipleship. At the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, he left His followers with one, clear and vital mission, "The Great Commission." In Matthew 28, Jesus tells us, as His followers, that we are supposed to spend our lives making disciples. A disciple can be defined as a follower, a student who learns from Jesus. Therefore, as a church, we are "***Becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together.***" This is our mission; this is our purpose as a church. Even as we think about our purpose statement: "to promote the supremacy of Christ by celebrating His love, obeying His truth, and enlarging His Kingdom," all of that could fit under the umbrella of these 7 words: "Becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together." That 1st word, Becoming speaks to the fact that discipleship is a process; it's a journey. Fully devoted means that disciples are more than just fair-weather fans of Jesus. Followers of Jesus is just a synonym for disciples. It's a phrase that helps non-Christians understand what Christians are all about. Together makes it clear that everyone is invited to join us on this journey of becoming a fully devoted follower of Jesus. All of this is a great lead-in to our new 5-week Sermon Series on Spiritual Training. Today, our focus will be on HOW we, as "followers of Jesus," can train ourselves to be godly.

There is a TON packed into these 16 verses from 1 Timothy 4. We won't be able to dig into everything that's here, so we are going to focus mostly on Paul's personal advice to Timothy. **Let's begin with a quick overview of verses 1-16.** Paul begins in verses 1-7 by warning about the dangers of false teachers. Paul urges Timothy, in verse 6, "If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed." In light Paul's analogy with physical training, here we might say that Paul is urging Christ-followers to eat spiritually healthy food.¹ To make sure that we are being fed with soul-nourishing teaching from God's Word. In fact, Paul then warns Timothy in verse 7, "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales...."² In other words, don't ruin your appetite with spiritual junk food! That's what false teaching is. It might be attractive in certain ways, filled with all kinds of salt or sugary sweetness. But it's a trick; it's a lie. It has no nutritional value or spiritual benefit. (As Pastor Eric mentioned last week, we want to put better things on our plate.)

At the end of verse 7, Paul then gives some very direct, personal advice to Timothy. He specifically targets this young man whom he's been mentoring: "...rather, train yourself to be godly." "Train yourself" is a 2nd person SINGULAR. So Paul isn't writing this to a big group of people, as in "all ya'll train yourselves." He is telling Timothy, "YOU Timothy, you YOURSELF, need to specifically train YOURSELF." In other words, before you go out and preach and teach to other people, "train YOURSELF to be godly!" In verses 9-10, Paul continues to emphasize just how important this spiritual training in verses 7-8 truly is. We'll circle back around to these verses in a little while. In verse 11, Paul widens his target, urging Timothy to command and teach these things to those he leads. And then, verse 12 is a classic reminder to all of us, that youth and inexperience, are not an automatic disqualification for ministry.³ God equips those whom He calls. He then wraps up his thoughts for chapter 4, with an exhortation for Timothy to devote himself to God's work. To use the gifting that God has given him. Paul stresses diligent perseverance, giving oneself fully to that which God has called

¹ R. Kent Hughes & Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2012, p. 114.

² The teachings of asceticism in v. 3, like forbidding marriage and requiring people to abstain from certain foods, had no value in making people more godly. Nor do they really help people avoid sin. Colossians 2:20-23 talks even more about this. A key strategy in resisting sin and overcoming evil is embracing a steady regimen of spiritual disciplines. In other words, don't just resist the bad stuff, fill your life up with the good stuff. Fill your time initiating activities that spiritually nourish you and build you up in your faith. Then, you will become more and more the fully devoted follower of Jesus that you want to be. See pp. 4-6 of Richard Foster with Kathryn A. Halmers, *Celebration of Discipline, Study Guide Ed.*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 2008.

³ See Jeremiah 1:4-10 but also note 1 Timothy 3:6. *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1223.

us to. In these closing verses, we find Paul once again using this word “YOURSELF.”⁴ In verse 16, in particular, Paul drives his point home: “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” In other words, Paul wasn’t just giving Timothy advice about being a good preacher and teacher for the sake of the church. Paul was urging him to be a godly man, for his own sake. To watch his OWN life and his OWN doctrine closely. To save HIMSELF from the false teachers and the godless myths that were pressing in all around him. This points us right back around to verses 7-8. Here is the 1st of our 2 key main points:

1) Training ourselves requires sanctified sweat. There are 2 reasons why “training ourselves requires sanctified sweat.”⁵ First of all, this phrase...

1. “Train yourself” most commonly referred to physical exercise.⁶ The most immediate image that would have come to mind for Timothy, or for any 1st century reader, would have been physical training. They would have pictured someone working out at the gym. Someone lifting weights or running laps, someone working up a good sweat. Clearly, Paul is using this phrase as a word picture for spiritual training.⁷ In fact, he makes the connection abundantly clear in verse 8, “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things...” Therefore, figuratively speaking, training ourselves in godliness means that you and I are going to have to get sweaty. In fact, at times we’ll actually get REALLY sweaty.⁸ It shouldn’t surprise us, in our Christian lives, if God calls us to experience some blood/sweat/tears.⁹ In other words, we shouldn’t expect to grow in spiritual maturity while we are reclining at home on our spiritual couch. The 2nd reason that “training ourselves requires sanctified sweat” is even more important than the 1st:

2. “Train yourself” means that godliness takes work. You might be thinking, “Now, wait a minute Pastor Jerry, we are saved by grace, through faith. It’s not from ourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast! Our good works are as filthy rags! How can you say that becoming godly takes work?” Well, I’m saying it, because Paul said it. The inspired Word of God says it. So, if it sounds “unspiritual” to our doctrinal sensibilities, then we need to readjust our doctrinal understanding. Godliness takes work.¹⁰ It “requires self-discipline.”¹¹ So, even though we are INDEED saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, our faith is something that we work at. We read about this in places like Philippians 2:12-13, “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”¹² Just to be clear, there is NOTHING that we can do to earn our salvation. But, once we are saved, God’s energy works within us to work toward godliness. Last Sunday we talked about Colossians 1:28 and our Discipleship mission to, “present everyone fully mature in Christ.” And we found the power to accomplish this Great Commission in Colossians 1:29, “To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.”¹³ For Christ-followers, it’s never about living out our faith, on our own strength, but that doesn’t mean we give it no effort. An abundant Christian faith and a victorious Christian life calls us to exert ourselves with strenuous effort and hard

⁴ A form of the Greek word for “yourself” (σεαυτοῦ) is used twice in 1 Timothy 4:16.

⁵ Steven J. Lawson, *Tabletalk Magazine*, June 2019, p. 17.

⁶ γυμνάζω = “commonly in literature of gymnastic exercises in the nude: ‘exercise naked, train’; but also figurative of mental and spiritual powers: to train, undergo discipline.” Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 208). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. This would ensure that nothing would impede their movement or create a hinderance. This is the sentiment being expressed in Hebrews 12:1, “let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.”

⁷ However, “We should not underestimate the physical toughness of someone like Paul, who walked thousands of miles/kilometers on his journeys and endured extreme physical deprivation over decades (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). Timothy would have trekked his share of miles/kilometers alongside Paul.” *The Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2465.

⁸ This reminds me of a great song by Audio Adrenaline called “Dirty.”

⁹ Consider 1 Peter 4:12.

¹⁰ Consider James 2:14-26.

¹¹ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2042.

¹² See Psalm 2:11. Also, check out <https://www.gotquestions.org/fear-and-trembling.html> and <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-must-we-work-out-our-salvation>

¹³ Consider Jesus’ final words at the end of Matthew 28:20, “...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

work.¹⁴ One author explains it this way, “The legalistic heart says, ‘I will do this thing to gain merit with God.’ The disciplined heart says, ‘I will do this thing because I love God and want to please him.’”¹⁵

Consider Paul’s words in 1 Cor. 15:10, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” So God’s grace and our hard work go hand in hand. That’s why we call it “sanctified sweat.” That’s why Paul chooses this analogy of physical training, to help us understand our spiritual training. You don’t get physically fit by reading books about exercise or by watching other people work out. You go to the gym YOURSELF. You change into your athletic gear and you work up a good sweat. Or, you get off the couch and take a walk around your neighborhood. Or whatever else it might be that helps you become more physically fit. It’s no different with our spiritual fitness; godliness takes work! By the way, we should clarify what we mean by godliness.¹⁶ Godliness is simply being like God. It implies that we are living a good and holy life; a life that is based on a deep reverence for God.¹⁷ Put another way, Godliness is the work of Christ within His followers.¹⁸ True godliness comes from Jesus. That’s why 1 Timothy 3:16 says, “Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He (Jesus) appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.” In other words, Jesus is the source of our godliness. He came to this earth and lived a godly life. He preached God’s truth and many of us have put our faith in Him. We believe that He died for our sins, rose again, and ascended into heaven. He now continues to do His work in us by making us more and more godly. All of this sanctified sweat leads to stronger spiritual muscles.

2) Training ourselves builds up spiritual muscle. This is where the spiritual disciplines come into play. That word “discipline” gets a bad rap though. Discipline SOUNDS like a bad thing, but it’s really not. Paul goes on in 1 Timothy 4:8-10 to explain, “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. That is why we labor and strive...” There is a classic devotional book called, “Celebration of Discipline.”¹⁹ It was written by a guy named Richard Foster.²⁰ His idea of “celebrating discipline” seems like an oxymoron to many of us. But in his book, Foster makes a great case for the importance and the joy of spiritual disciplines. His subtitle is probably far more attractive to most of us: “The Path to Spiritual Growth.” That’s what we are excited about, not so much the hard work of discipline (although that’s part of it), but the path that leads to genuine spiritual growth and maturity. In his book, Foster highlights various spiritual disciplines including things like: prayer, fasting, and studying God’s Word. He also talks about disciplines like: simplicity, solitude, and service. We could add our own ideas as well. Things like church attendance, journaling, or financial giving. This is not an exhaustive list. In fact, making a list is DEFINITELY NOT the point. “The Path to Spiritual Growth” is the point. Trying various things that will help us effectively build up our spiritual muscles; that’s the point. We do have to be careful that we are not just creating a list of busy work. Or, even worse, that we are not approaching Spiritual Disciplines like some kind of a chore chart, where we mark off prayer and mark off Bible reading each morning, in order to receive a gold star from God. Don’t get me wrong, a daily quiet time is essential. It’s great to practice healthy spiritual habits. We just need to keep in mind the GOAL of these activities: training ourselves to be godly, building up our spiritual muscles.

If I could retitle Foster’s book, I think I’d call it “Celebration of Deeper.” The word “discipline” just isn’t all that inspiring. But going spiritually deeper, now that’s attractive; that appeals to me as a

¹⁴ Consider Philippians 3:12-16 and John 15:1-8.

¹⁵ R. Kent Hughes & Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2012, p. 116.

¹⁶ Interestingly, the theme of “godliness” is repeated throughout 1 & 2 Timothy, as well as Titus. But, it is not in any of Paul’s other New Testament books. *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2038.

¹⁷ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2038.

¹⁸ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2464.

¹⁹ Richard Foster with Kathryn A. Helmers, *Celebration of Discipline, Study Guide Ed.*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 2008.

²⁰ It was first released back in 1978 and it continues to be revised and reprinted.

Christ-follower.²¹ Foster actually talks about this: “The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people. The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths.”²² Foster goes on to say, “We must not be led to believe that the Disciplines are only for spiritual giants and hence beyond our reach.... God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns.... The primary requirement is longing after God.”^{23,24} Bros./Sis. in Christ, our God is deep; He is not shallow. So let’s embrace the spiritual disciplines and become more fully devoted followers of Jesus. Let’s choose to pursue opportunities where God can deepen us.

One of the best strategies for growing in spiritual maturity, is to practice the spiritual disciplines together. To practice them in community. That’s why it’s so important to get to church on Sunday mornings. Last week I challenged each of us to aim for “5 for 5.” To be here all 5 of the next 5 Sundays. 1 down, 4 to go! This is also why we offer Sunday School classes, Formation Groups, and Bible studies. In addition to our 65-minute church services, why not add on another 50 minutes between services? You might call it a “+50” workout plan. This strategy of spiritual growth in community is also why we are launching our new Life Groups. In fact, **check out the inserts that we scanned in at the end of this transcript.** One talks about the Blue Ox Marathon and some ways that you might like to be involved with that. The other one has the list of sermon-based discussion questions. Contact the church if you like to sign-up for a Life Group. We’d like to see the number of people in Life Groups grow. And here’s why: if our mission is “becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together,” then we need a strategy for how to do that. Small groups are one of the most effective means of spiritual training. There are particular relational connections that happen in small groups, that can then lead to deeper spiritual growth. This is why the Life Group t-shirts say “learning together, loving one another.”²⁵ The fact is, the early church often met in their homes together. There was an up-closeness and a sharing of daily life that is found wanting in the lives of many of us as Christians today. Paul talks about this idea in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, “...we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.”²⁶ So, I hope that you will prayerfully consider joining a Life Group or some other kind of small group.

But regardless of who does/doesn’t participate in whatever group, let’s press on in this mission of “becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together.” Wouldn’t it be great, if one day someone walked up to you and said, “Wow! You are becoming SO MUCH like Jesus!” And then, if that person went on to say, “**Wait a second, I bet I know your secret... you’ve must be working out!**”²⁷

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on September 15, 2019 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

²¹ We need a faith that deepens us, that thickens us, and beefs us up! Richard Foster w/ Kathryn A. Helmers, *Celebration of Discipline, Study Guide Ed.*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 2008, p. xv.

²² Richard Foster with Kathryn A. Helmers, *Celebration of Discipline, Study Guide Ed.*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 2008, p. 1.

²³ Richard Foster with Kathryn A. Helmers, *Celebration of Discipline, Study Guide Ed.*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 2008, p. 2.

²⁴ There is a powerful display of longing after God in Psalm 42. It begins, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” Brother or Sister in Christ, are we thirsty for God? He has living water for us to drink. In the words of 1 Timothy 4:6, let’s be, “nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching.”

²⁵ The Berean believers come to mind from Acts 17:11, “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” If the Bereans were eager to compare/contrast the Apostle Paul’s teachings with Scripture, then how great would it be for our Life Groups to dig into the sermons we hear at our church each week? What an amazing opportunity to talk things over together. To encourage one another and spur one another on toward greater godliness. (Consider Hebrews 10:24)

²⁶ Proverbs 27:17 reminds us, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” The example of a man named Apollos, reminds us in Acts 18:26, “He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.” Also see Acts 2:46-47, 20:20.

²⁷ R. Kent Hughes & Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2012, p. 119.

LIFE GROUPS

Learning together • loving one another

Sermon-based Discussion Questions¹

"Training Ourselves to be Godly" from 9/15/19

1 Timothy 4:1-16



SPOILER ALERT: You may not want to read these until AFTER you have heard the sermon.

1. Why did you decide to try a Life Group? Do you have any concerns or questions about what this group is all about? Are you considering the Blue Ox?
2. Comment on the discipleship mission of "becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together."
3. In what ways is the comparison between physical training and spiritual training helpful? Or unhelpful?
4. How is training ourselves to be godly connected to "sanctified sweat?" How would you explain the statement, "godliness takes work?" How does 1 Timothy 3:16 apply to this?
5. Why do you think the Apostle Paul might have written the words of 1 Timothy 4:7-8 to young Timothy? What other parts of the Bible relate to these verses?
6. Give some examples of a Spiritual Discipline. How can they deepen our faith? What particular Spiritual Discipline are you most interested in developing in your life? How could our Life Group encourage you or cheer you on with this?

¹ Sermon archive available at <https://efcbemidji.org/watch-read/sermons/sermon-list/>
Life Group Questions available at <https://efcbemidji.org/watch-read/resources/category/life-group-questions/>

Spiritual Training - Fall Sermon Series

¹ Timothy 4:7-8 says, "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, **train yourself to be godly**. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

Let's join together and consider how we can get more spiritually fit! As an engaging word picture, some of us are participating in the Bemidji Blue Ox on Friday and Saturday, October 11-12. *The Blue Ox is a great way for our church to engage with our Bemidji area neighbors.*

Some are participating in these ways:

Medical Team: Mark Carlson

Cheering others on:

Volunteering:

(You can email info@bemidjiblueoxmarathon.com with 'volunteer' in the subject line to learn about volunteer opportunities. Volunteers receive a free t-shirt!)

So far, on Friday, the following people have signed up:

½K or 1K:

5K: Russ Gysberg

10K: Pastor Jerry, Pastor Eric, Gerri Thorsgard

So far, on Saturday, the following people have signed up:

½ Marathon:

26K: Dan & Leanne Frost

Full Marathon:

Register soon as a part of "Team Efree" and let Pastor Jerry know at PastorJerry@efcbemidji.org to be listed with other people from our Church Family above. Registration, while space remains, is due no later than October 10 (no same day registration). <http://www.bemidjiblueoxmarathon.com>
>> Use promo code 'SEPTEMBER' to receive \$5 off!

