

Working Out in the Gym of Godliness

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Date: 21 May 2023

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[0 : 00] Well, you've heard the saying, use it or lose it. Use it or lose it. It's a principle in medicine, both for physical and mental ability, but also in everyday life.

If you've ever been sick or immobile, it's amazing, isn't it, how quickly your muscles deteriorate. If you've broken your ankle and you've got to spend a couple of weeks not walking, you can have the shapeliest calf muscle.

And, you know, well, never mind. And when you finish, it looks like a finger. All right. Well, you know, and for those of us who are, I don't know, let's say over 40, we certainly know the principle about use it or lose it.

We learn this lesson quicker than 20-year-olds. A friend of mine was busy fixing his electrical gate, and he's down there, and he had to reach over and do something, and he just reached over and cracked two of his ribs.

And, I mean, that's what happens. And he's actually fit. But the same goes for maths or learning or language. If you don't exercise a certain part of your body or your mind or practice a particular move, think of some sports that you play, you will have your ability will drop off over time.

[1 : 29] Use it or lose it. Well, today we're going to look at that same principle that applies to our walk with God. We're going to learn that we need to work at staying saved.

That should perk your ears up a little bit because you don't normally hear that from our churches. We need to work at staying saved. And what's more, if you don't put the effort in, you could easily find yourself outside the faith sooner than you think.

Some dire warnings that Paul gives us in this passage, you want to kind of give the full force to it. So you need to listen well because you don't want to be on the outside of God's kingdom.

Now, I've said that on purpose. We've got to work at staying saved. And I know it's provocative, especially in our church circles, because we use the word work to mean you don't have to work to being saved.

You don't have to work to earn your salvation. Of course, that's true. Of course, that's true. You don't have to work to earn your salvation. I'm using the word work to mean you have to do certain things, and Paul spells them out here.

[2 : 34] There's things you've got to do if you want to stay being a Christian, and there's things you've got to avoid if you want to stay being a Christian as well. There's things you've got to do and things you mustn't do if you want to stay what he says in the faith, if you want to stay a Christian.

If you want to be effective for the kingdom, you have to work at being godly. You have to work at being godly. All right, so let's look at the first thing, the things we've got to stay away from if you want to be fit for the kingdom, if you want to be effective for the kingdom.

That's really what I mean by work to staying saved. You've got to do stuff. You've got to be effective. You can't just glide along the path and hope you're going to reach the end.

And the first thing that Paul spells out in this passage is the deadly nature of false teaching. The deadly nature of false teaching.

So the whole letter of Paul to Timothy is to, he sent him to Ephesus, the church in Ephesus, specifically to stop false teachers from getting stuck into the church and worrying it and causing problems.

[3 : 41] And he's really worried about the church in Ephesus. And the main thing is that he's worried about is that the people will fall away, especially fall away from the faith because of these false teachers.

So if you've got your Bibles, just stay there in 1 Timothy, chapter 4. I'm just going to read those first few verses again. The Spirit clearly says that in later times, some will abandon the faith and follow

deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

Such teachings come through hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. And then he goes on to tell you what they teach. So it's a stark, stark, stark warning that Paul is giving here.

So what we've got to realize is that false teaching is deadly. It's not just a matter of opinion, of believing in the wrong thing, because believing in the wrong thing can have seriously disastrous consequences.

Paul doesn't believe what we believe in the modern world, that everyone's got a right to their own opinion. Within a certain gambit, yes.

[4 : 51] But when it comes to believing in the right things about God and about Jesus, Paul is very clear. There's certain things that are true and certain things that are not true. And if you believe the wrong thing, you're going to find yourself outside of the faith.

So notice what he says there. So I just want to make a point that spirit clearly says that in later times, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Now, that's not later times, millennia into the future for Paul.

The later times are the things that Paul is talking about. Those people have already come in. The later times is everything that's happened after Jesus. It's been happening for 2,000 years. It wasn't to think that false teachings are only going to start now.

The church has been combating false teachings ever since day one. There can be disastrous consequences for believing the wrong thing and listening to the wrong thing about Jesus and about God.

Paul says it's deadly and poisonous. And what he does is he puts the poison label on so that we know what it looks like. Remember, oh gosh, is it scouts? I remember doing scouts.

[5 : 59] And one of the things, you know, those little badges you used to get, you had to label the correct thing in the fridge. So, you know, if you put water or milk that's not in the milk or water container, it's just an unlabeled container.

Let me see if I can... This unlabeled container in the fridge. But what if it's vinegar or... What is a poisonous substance? Benzene.

What happens if it's benzene? Gives you cancer. Okay, so you would want... You know that thing where the... This is poisonous, don't drink it label? Okay, so Paul is saying, guys, there's stuff that's happening.

Let me put the poison label on it so that you know there's a problem with it. And of course, the reason he's got to do this is that when false teaching comes in, they don't go, hey guys, hey guys, I'm going to teach you stuff that's going to kill you.

Okay. You know, they're like, hey, listen to this. This is really going to help you. Do you remember how Satan sold it to Eve? Hey, come on. This is going to be awesome.

[7 : 03] Try this. Okay, so that's the problem with false teaching is it looks and sounds good. Meanwhile, it's like a cancer. Benzene eats you up from the inside and kills you. So, the first thing Paul wants us to notice is that false teaching causes people to fall away from the faith.

That's how dangerous it is. False teaching causes people to fall away from the faith. Some will abandon the faith, depending on your translation, fall away from the faith.

We get the word apostatize and apostate from the Greek word. Someone is apostate. It literally means to go away from. It means they've walked away from the faith, from being a Christian.

Now, the thing that we've got to wrestle with is that, and what's really scary, is Paul isn't talking about non-Christians who leave the faith. He's talking about Christians who leave the faith.

Because you can't leave the faith if you don't have the faith. Does that make sense? He doesn't say they're not Christians who have left. These are people who have the faith, have faith, trust in God, trust in Christ, but believe the wrong thing.

[8 : 10] Listen to the false teaching that's coming in and go, oh, that sounds amazing. I'm going to follow that. Rather than what Paul or Timothy have been saying. And they wreck their faith.

It's not a warning for people who aren't really Christians, but for people who are. Remember the warning that Jesus gave in the parable of the sower.

I'm just going to read it. Parable of the sower with the seed is the word of God falling on different soils. You remember that? Some of it grows up.

Some of it doesn't grow up. He says this about the seed that falls on rocky soil. Those seed that falls on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it. But they have no root. They believe for a while. But in the time of testing, they fade away. Or fall away. So some people believe.

[9 : 12] But when their trust in God is tested, when it's put to the test, when it requires something from them. Ah, yeah. They're there, but they're not there. They'd rather just leave it. Here in Timothy, they fall away from the faith because they prefer to listen to lies and nonsense.

Later on in the chapter, it talks about old wives' tales. Silly things. They listen to lies and nonsense instead of listening to solid biblical truth about Jesus, about God, and staying devoted to him. They become devoted to new things, things they haven't been taught. And then Paul unpacks what these deceitful lying spirits are teaching. So that's the second thing in this first part of the first few verses of Timothy chapter 4.

False teachings are silly because they major on minor things. False teachings are silly because they major on minor things.

And that makes it maybe a little bit difficult to detect because you'd think if it's really that bad, it would be totally opposite of what's being taught.

[10 : 27] But so have a look at verse 3 and 4. So here's the things that's causing all this trouble that could cause people to drift away. And in fact, the source of this teaching, notice in verse 1, these are things taught by demons.

In some translations, these are doctrines of demons. Okay, what's so bad? Well, verse 3. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods.

Those are the bad things. That's going to get you chucked out of the kingdom if you believe it. You say, okay, it doesn't look demonic. What's the big deal?

I mean, against the idea of marriage, against eating certain foods. Yep, so certain foods is a helpful translation.

It's not just all food, it's certain foods. Very likely it was a Judaizing group that had come in. Similar to Galatians saying, hey, you guys have joined the kingdom. Welcome.

[11 : 33] You can't eat pork anymore. And they're like, whoa, whoa, whoa. What's that about? Okay. Or you're forbidding to marry. Oh, you've got to marry within the faith. Meaning possibly they've got to marry Jews.

What's the big deal? Sounds like modern vegan types. Watch out for those foods. Well, the thing is that teachers are making minor things into major things.

They've come with this message. They've come all the way from Jerusalem or sort of the motherland. And they've got this huge message. It's an important message.

They call people to listen to them. Similar like what Paul was doing. And then what is this message? What is this gospel? What is this thing that they're going to tell you about God and the world and the universe?

You're not allowed to eat pork. And you're like, whoa, okay. Is that okay?

[12 : 36] That's not an uplifting message. That's like a neither here nor there message. Oh, and you're not allowed to. Be careful you marry. Probably better not get married at all. Stay single. Or certainly don't get married to those people over there.

You've got to stay married within this circle, within this group. So what's going on here? What's the problem? Well, notice what these false teachers are focused on.

Are they focused on teaching you about God? Let's assume that they are Jews. They know about Jesus. They won't say that Jesus doesn't exist. They believe. They trust in Jesus. Just like the Judaizers did in other parts of the New Testament.

But instead of focusing on God and focusing on the amazing thing that Jesus does, don't eat certain types of meat.

I mean, what's the point of that? When you've got something, all this cool stuff about Jesus, but now you want me to listen about who I can marry. And then they go on and on in the minutiae of the things that you can and can't eat.

[13 : 43] These are, so they're focused on minor things. They're essentially focused on the things of this world. How you can get on with God by doing certain things in this world.

Eating and marrying. Now those things aren't not important. Eating, marrying, you've got to do those things. But if week in and week out, Nick and me or the teachers of this church, week in,

week out, and the main thing you get, the main thing you get is you're not allowed to eat pork. Okay. How's that really going to help you know more about God? How's it going to help you relate to each other better?

We saw in our first weeks that that's not helpful because we've got to learn how to relate better, how to let go, how to forgive, how to love. We need to know more about God.

Those are the things that make our heart burn and our souls lift up and our feelings sing out. Yeah. Things of this world, food, marrying, yeah, they're important.

[14:57] But they're nothing, what Paul is saying, is compared to the gospel message. Nothing. Compared to the forgiveness of your sins, let's hear about that. That you can conquer the fear of death because Christ has risen from the grave and is seated up at God's right hand, surrounded by the angels in glory.

And you, as a Christian, have joined that. That's where you belong. That's where you are. You've got that kind of power in your life. You get the Holy Spirit. This risen Lord has sent down to you to live a life here on earth, knowing that your past is over, that you're free, and that you've got a future and a hope.

Those are cool things to listen to. I need to hear that. Christians need to hear that. We don't need to hear again and again about the stuff of this world. The gospel, in a sense, offers you a Maserati. It's a cool car. Just take my word. It's a cool car. Ferrari. Whatever your cool car. That's the gospel. These teachers, these liars, are trying to trap you or interest you in the wrapping and make it sound like that's a thing that counts.

You know when you get a cool gift? Maybe at Christmastime. Kids, you get a PlayStation. Yes, thank you. And then your parents have given it to you.

[16:14] It's a thing you've wanted. They rip it apart. And there they put the PlayStation to one side and they're interested in the wrapping. He's like, no, no, no. Get the PlayStation. So the problem with these false teachers is they're focusing on the wrong thing.

They're not focusing on the right thing. Christ and God and the gospel and the stuff that it gives you. Just the everyday stuff of life. Paul writes a similar, writing about a similar thing.

A problem in the Roman church says, in Romans 14, he says, For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy.

In the Holy Spirit. All right. So we've got to take these warnings seriously. We've got to take these warnings against falling away seriously.

Too many Christians don't take these warnings seriously enough because they think you can't fall away from Christ. You might have heard this thing, once saved, always saved. It sounds like the right thing, but it's not actually taught in the Bible.

[17:18] What is taught is what's called perseverance of the saints. That is to say, if you're a Christian, if you stay a Christian. Not if you start being a Christian and then stop being a Christian.

Now that should make you go, it does to me. And I'm a pretty sturdy Christian. I'm like, ooh, okay. Well. So friends, make sure you're not a start, stop Christian. You know the one that sort of believes, sort of comes along, sort of stops, then comes back, then sort of believes, then disappears, then comes back again.

We've got lots of those that come through our doors and come back for various reasons and leave for various reasons. Man, you need to take this warning seriously.

You could wreck your faith just because you're not spending time listening to good teaching. I'm not saying we're the only church that teaches the truth. There's other churches that do. But you want to be attached to a church and to God's people regularly so you can get good food all the time.

[18:29] to make sure that you're in the faith and you're not going to abandon your faith by just believing whatever is out there. So that's the first thing I want us to do.

Take seriously these warnings. Secondly, I think watch out for those teachers who focus on the stuff of this world, the stuff of blessing, not on the source of blessing. I think we've covered this before, but just to, I mean, if Paul's here reminding us about it, then it's something we need to take note of.

Watch out for teachers who focus on the stuff that God can give you, the blessing, the stuff of blessing, not the source of blessing. So someone is constantly, if a teacher or someone that you listen to is constantly focused on what God wants for you here and now, but not in godliness, not in, well, being blessed with money, receiving your healing, getting that business that you've desired,

having the best possible marriage.

So if their teaching is constantly pushing for you, for that stuff that's here in this time and space, I guess you need to know that they're probably teaching demonic doctrines because they're not focused on Christ.

They'll mention Christ. They'll use him, but they don't give you this, they don't teach on him. He's used as a delivery mechanism for stuff that you want in this world because what we need is Jesus.

[20 : 02] We need him first. We need to learn about him, not about the stuff that he can give us. In the gospel, in the scriptures, God calls us to think of Jesus and how amazing he is and to think of God and how amazing he is and that's the thing that gives us power in the Christian life and motivation to be godly on earth.

So that's the first point. The second point is, well then, if thinking about God, thinking about Jesus, is the thing that's going to keep us in the faith, let's look at that for a bit because that's going to help us.

We want to stay there. We don't want to be, you want to be on shaky ground here. You want to be on solid ground. So Paul then goes on to talk about training in godliness.

Training in godliness. Let's have a look at verse 7 and 8. Verse 7 and 8. Actually, I'll start at verse 6. So Paul is writing to Timothy and he says, Timothy, if you point these things out to the brothers, this danger that they could be in if they listened to these false teachers, if you point these things out to the brothers, you'll be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching you have followed.

[21 : 29] So it makes sense. If something's poisonous, as a parent, you're going to tell your child, careful, watch out for that. Don't drink that. It's going to hurt you. Part of our jobs as God's ministers is to say, hey, careful for the bad stuff.

It's going to hurt you if you follow it too long. Rather, stay safe. Stay away from that. Come and get the good stuff. And he goes on to say, have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales. Train yourself to be godly. 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. I want you to notice the verb, the thing that Paul is telling Timothy to do and therefore he's telling Christians to do. Don't stay away from this nonsense theology, stuff that doesn't help, stuff that's going to kill you.

Rather, end of verse 7, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things.

[22 : 37] Okay, so, we've got to train ourselves over here. Train yourself in godliness. So Paul's antidote for the poison of false teaching is for Christians to go to the gym. Okay, is that what?

Well, that's because the Greek word behind the word train is gym. Gymnazi. I went to a gym once. It was my high school.

Gymnasium. So a gym in the ancient, it's a place where you train to go to get physically fit. Mentally fit at the school. It sort of worked. The Greek word behind this word is gymnasium.

It's the place of training and the practice of training. And it's an interesting word because, look, Paul is writing to the people in Ephesus. They're Greek, predominantly Greek.

And everyone knows that the Greeks were the best athletes in the ancient world because they're the one that started the Olympics and marathon running and those kinds of things. And their training methods were legendary.

[23 : 41] So Paul is saying, listen, if you want to be safe, if you want to be secure, if you want to be effective in the kingdom, you've got to train like the Greeks trained.

You say, okay, well, how do the Greeks train? Well, their training was extremely rigorous. Sparse food, sleeping on the floor, dedicated to their athletic, whatever pursuit they were doing for the Olympics.

They'd give up everything and just train for that kind of thing. There were some of their exercises, running after horses, well, not, yeah, racing horses.

And of course, if you didn't win, you got beaten. Shifting logs, splitting logs, sorry, splitting logs, wrestling lions, apparently. That's what it is.

Okay, so Paul is taking this image and saying Christians have to take the same work ethic, the same attitude, striving for the same excellence, and instead of pouring it into our energies, into the things of this world, what we can get now, the stuff that God offers, don't focus on that.

[24 : 56] We must pour our energies, our work, our effort, into our relationship with God, into living a life of godly devotion to God and Jesus. What does Paul mean by godliness?

Well, it literally means to be devoted to someone who you owe it to, to be devoted to someone who you owe devotion to. We think of devotion, so there's another word, the old translation has piety, and you know, it's an old-fashioned word, we don't really use that anymore.

The church has used this word for centuries and it's one of the, not the graces of God, but it's one of the things that we want to pursue as Christians.

Devotion to someone who you owe it to. You could be, they would expect, so they would expect you to be pious, you would have piety towards your father, if you were a child.

They would expect you to be devoted and look after him, make sure you think about him and provide for him. You would be pious towards your king because he's done stuff for you. So you're devoted and you make sure that he's, whatever he asks you, you do.

[26 : 06] You don't just take his law for granted. So it's an old-fashioned word, but actually we all know what it means to be godly, steadfast in prayer.

If we say someone is godly, you say, okay, we know what we're talking about. It's not actually ever really defined, you know, these are the godly things, but it's this kind of thing, steadfast in prayer. Thankful to God in all things. In fact, it's in our text. Have a look at verse 3. They forbid people to marry, order them to abstain from certain foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and to know the truth.

Okay, so being thankful to God in all things, this deep sense of joy, untroubled by not having the stuff that you want, that you think you need, that these guys are offering.

Happy to respond to the call of service and go beyond. Generous, especially to those in need.

That's really what being godly is all about. And Paul says we need to train ourselves in these things.

[27 : 17] These are things that we can learn and do and grow better in. That's the whole point of training, to get better at something, isn't it?

And we've all trained for something in our lives because we've all done some sort of sport activity. The higher your goal, the more you have to train. Andre Agassi, for the younger people, he's a tennis player.

And he wrote an autobiography and he's talked about how his dad explained to him how he needs to, how he's going to get good.

He says, if you hit two and a half thousand balls each day, you'll hit seventeen thousand five hundred balls each week and at the end of one year, you'll have hit nearly one million tennis balls.

He says, numbers don't lie, a child who hits one million balls each year will be unbeatable. And that's what Andre Agassi did and he was champion for many years. Christians are called to the highest goals of mankind, far beyond what any athlete can achieve because we're called to emulate eternal realities.

[28 : 31] For example, just look at the object of our godliness. And we saw that earlier this week when we looked at the ascension, if you were here, but if not, just at the end of chapter three and Paul is talking again about godliness.

The end of chapter three, verse 16, he says, beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great. So it's something we don't know but he's going to tell us what it's about now. And he doesn't mention a name but look who he's talking about.

He appeared in the body, 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. To be godly, you need to focus on this person who's got all these amazing things that's happened to him and that he's done and that he is doing in the world.

It's a revelation of Christ, both in his human form and in his sort of heavenly existence and it's an amazing thing that's happened to Christ. Amazing. The angels know about him. He's taken up in glory to heaven.

He died and was raised by the Holy Spirit. And the whole world preached among the nations now knows about this guy, Jesus, and who he is and what he's done.

[29 : 47] If Jesus is the mystery of godliness, then my training in godliness has got to link me closer and closer to him so that the more I train to be like him, the more we're going to be like him, if that makes sense.

You know when you go to the gym? Every kid, when they go to the gym, who do they want to look like? Oh, this is, I'm, any boy that goes to the gym? Eh?

Arnold Schwarzenegger? Oh, yes. Yeah, okay, for those who don't know. All right? So, we want to train in godliness, you've got to think, okay, well then, that's the guy that I want to be like.

That's the guy. Okay? The thing is, we don't often think about putting effort or work or energy into our relationship with Jesus. We kind of just drift along a little bit often, I find that.

We don't aim at godliness. We don't strive for it like the same way that we train for sports. But we should. Because Paul says, unlike bodily training, which has some value, it actually says, it doesn't actually have really any value.

[30 : 53] It's very puny. It's very weak. It doesn't actually do a lot. It does a lot. You know, it does something for you in this life. But Paul's like, well, I don't care about that. Don't you want to live forever? You can go to the gym all you like.

This training, if you train in godliness, in the things that make people godly, hey man, you've got a future ahead of you.

It'll stop you from falling away and confirm your inner faith and get rid of any doubts about God's love for you and his power for you to live a changed life. So some questions for us then about this training.

How hard are you training for godliness versus training and getting things of this world? How's your training? How's your gym? How's your godly gym working out for you?

Well, take note of the things that you're devoted to. The things that you spend your time on will tell you what you're devoted to. We spend our times, our lives, in devotion to something. Okay, so many of us train really hard for getting the stuff of this world, for the stuff our bodies want.

[32 : 07] I'm just going to say be careful that you focus, don't focus too much on that stuff, on what your body needs, and on sport. I mean, this is Cape Town. Yeah, people love their sport in Cape Town.

On a Sunday, they'd much rather be up in a mountain than in a church. If that's you, and every now and then you're like, oh man, I want to, church, God, I'd rather be running, I'd rather be cycling.

Careful. Careful. If your devotion to bodily exercise, takes you away from being trained in devotion to Jesus, then you need to know that you're in danger of falling away.

That's the whole point of this passage that Paul is saying. Training for the things of this world, success, health, happiness, that's puny, man, compared to the power. So Jesus is there, he's got this power, but we tend to think, oh, it just happens, I just get showered with it, and oh, it's okay.

But we don't think about the effort we've got to put in to make that relationship work, not often.

Okay, so how hard is your training? Secondly, maybe say, okay, but training is not that great in the Christian life.

[33 : 29] Okay, how do I do that? What do I do? Well, I would say get a trainer. Get a trainer. If you've never trained before, the first thing you need is a trainer. Someone who's done the training stuff before and can show you.

You know when you go to the gym and you're like, you have no idea how some of that stuff works. And you do it all wrong, gym fails on YouTube. A trainer requires a coach.

You need help. Someone who knows more than you. So don't go through Christian life by yourself. Don't go through the Christian life by yourself. It's not meant to be done by yourself. You won't be effective. Rather, hook up with people who've done it before.

At St. Mark's, we've got these awesome growth groups. And I think, I think I venture to say that those growth groups, the way we're running them now, have made a difference. Would you agree? I think so. And I think we've all been training a little bit more in godliness, haven't we?

Helping each other pray, sort things out, mention things we wouldn't have mentioned before, relating a little bit better. It's actually really cool. It's really helpful. You know, when you go to the gym, what do trainers do?

[34 : 34] They're there to spot you, a spotter. Hey man, I want one more rep. I can't. And you're crying, you're tears, you just can't. And the guy's shouting at you, come on!

And you always get one more rep out of yourself. You just always go one extra step further. It's the same with the Christian life with trainers. Just by the way, Nick and me are not the only trainers.

We're not meant to be the only trainers in the church going, hey, come on guys. We're supposed to be helping each other. I'll make my last point about that. Come and do it.

