

Training for Healthy Ministry

1 Timothy 4:6-9

"Rather, train yourself for godliness..."

Introduction: Sometimes we throw terms around that we really do not know the meaning of. That's what happens in church circles, when we use terms and nomenclature that we kind of know what we mean, but lack clarity. **Discipleship is one of those terms.** We talk about it, believe in it, have experienced it, but have a hard time explaining or defining it.

If you are a follower and learner of Jesus, you are a **disciple**. A disciple has been made new through the work of Jesus on the cross, being born again and given new life. There is now a **new agenda**, new **goals** to bring God glory, new **desires**, a new mission, and a new Lord. Life no longer is lived for the here and now alone, no longer trying to seek comfort and security in this life, but seeking to glorify God in all things, to magnify Jesus Christ and make Him known. A **learner** means that a disciple, BY NATURE, **grows** and **matures** to become more like Jesus. There is EXPECTED growth in *love, holiness, obedience, joy, humility, and all the other fruit produced by the Spirit.*

Part of discipleship is actually **discipling**, meaning that by definition following Jesus means that we help others follow Jesus. Mark Dever, in his appropriately named book "Discipling", defines this as **"Deliberately doing spiritual good so that someone else will be more like Jesus."** We understand this clarity both in the Great Commission, where disciples are taught all that Christ commanded, and baptized as a symbol of new life in Christ. **Colossians 1:28-29** reminds us that this process includes **warning and teaching**, with the goal being **maturity in Christ**, and what it takes is *toil, or sweaty effort to make it happen.*

Disciples of Jesus seek to disciple others, helping them to become more like Jesus. This happens in the home and church, begins with evangelism and conversion, and carries on throughout life. It provides a **perpetuating model** of health and growth, getting passed down from generation to generation and transcending any one of us individually.

CONTEXT:

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus

As we come back to **1 Timothy 4**, we are introduced to the phrase **"you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus"**. The word Paul uses here is the word *diakonos*, which means servant or minister, and is used broadly in terms of "ministry". Previously in chapter 3 this was used in terms of a specific office in the church, but here it is used much more broadly of those who would minister in the church. Now, implicationally this would have bearing on those who would be teachers of God's Word as pastors/teachers, since it is addressed specifically to Timothy. However, it has broad application to *all* who would teach God's Word, which includes every **disciple in the church**, which includes YOU if you are a disciple of Jesus.

Notice that he refers to **"If you put these things before the brothers"**, which points to what we've covered the last few weeks. Remember that the mystery of godliness, how one becomes right with God and thus can please and obey Him, comes from the person and work of Jesus Christ alone. He is the one

who became a man, lived, died on the cross, was resurrected (and thus vindicated), proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world and ascended into heaven, preparing a place for us and waiting for His return. When we trust Him by faith for the work He's done, ask for forgiveness, and turn from our sin to follow Him we are able to pursue God fully in a reconciled relationship, and in that pursuit make sure that we are honoring, obeying, and delighting in Him in godliness.

The problem is that this good news of salvation in the gospel goes counter to every other religion and even our own built in fleshly drift. False teaching will always teach that we can **be right with God through something WE DO or DON'T DO**. This means that when people believe in Jesus but also believe they need to add something to salvation through their own effort, they are believing and teaching a false gospel. This is exactly what a good servant of Jesus must be aware of and teach to those they disciple or help become more like Jesus.

So for the next few weeks we will look at what it means to be prepared to be a **good disciple**, a minister of the gospel, and one that deliberately helps others follow and become more like Jesus. These are not framed **negatively but positively**, not lining up who or what we are against, but **what we are FOR!** We are much more interested (and is much more appealing) to remember what and WHO we are about instead of railing against those we oppose. In these first few verses, it is framed by the word **"training" in the ESV** (vv. 6 & 7), but the meaning of each is nuanced in the Greek. The first has to do with **nourishment** and the second has to do with **athletic training**. To put it another way, the idea of training here has to do with the **DIET & EXERCISE of a minister of the gospel**, what we put in and how we exercise out what we know to be true.

A Biblically Healthy Diet:

When I went away to college, we talked about adding the dreaded "freshman 15", the often practiced rite of passage of students eating at a buffet every day. Now, some people have experienced the Covid 19, adding some extra weight during this time of shutdown! If anyone ever desires to lose weight or get into shape, they know it starts with a healthy, portioned, sensible diet. What you take in should not only fuel workouts but it should NOT add up to more than you burned. The same is true for a **minister of the gospel**. What does this type of intake look like?

...being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. ⁷ Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.

- **Constant nourishment on the words of faith** - The "words of faith" is the same idea as those would depart from the faith in verse 1. It is the **body of Christian truth contained in Scripture**, which is living and active, transforming the minds and hearts of the redeemed. This means that for a disciple of Jesus Christ there is a **growing, ongoing, progressive** understanding of the *gospel and all of its implications*. As we dig into God's Word and commune with Him in prayer, we are strengthened with the **glories of Jesus Christ, the holiness of God, and the leading of the Spirit**. We seek to pursue God through Christ, desiring to KNOW Him fully, not just about Him. This leads us to continue to repent of our sin, depend on His grace, and revel in His forgiveness (which allows us to be gracious and forgiving to others). One of the foundations, then, of discipling others is our own constant growth and sharing from the outflow of our relationship with Christ. Too often we think of ministry with people in sterile

terms, or we are not sure *what* to do. But when we are **constantly nourished by the words of faith**, we always have something to share from our own experience and learning. It will be evident to those that we minister to (including our kids) whether we truly believe what we teach, whether we are learning for ourselves or merely parroting someone else's words, and whether we ourselves are changing.

If you want to disciple well, be a growing learner of the words of faith, deeply drinking of the excellencies of Christ and the glories of God the Father.

- **Constant feeding on good teaching** - Closely tied to this is our nourishment in *teaching that is rooted in and comes from a proper interpretation of Scripture*. Again, the idea here is a disciplined approach to our intake of Scripture, to **study** to know what it says rather than having a cursory knowledge of a few scattered verses. There are two immense results of feeding on good teaching and proper doctrine:

1) **Discernment** - The ability to judge well, differentiating what is good and evil, wise and unwise. This is always needed, but in our day of information inundation, the ability to discern is paramount. Discernment grows as our understanding of the truth grows. Life is full of thousands of decisions, and the process by which we make them sets a course and trajectory for our life. This is why we need to feed on good teaching constantly and put it into practice.

Hebrews 5:14 "But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of **discernment** trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."

2) **Conviction** - If you asked me what is needed for the future of the church, especially among our young people and burgeoning leaders, it would be a growth in **Biblical conviction**. Conviction is not merely knowledge but grows out of proper knowledge. Conviction grows out of a personal, committed, continual study of transforming truth and allows us to hold fast to that truth in the midst of all waves of doubt, storms of persecution, and the winds of **cultural changes**. This moves **nice people to fiercely effective ones**. Nice people will serve, but have a hard time risking. Nice people stay safe, don't say the hard thing, and rarely share the good news of the gospel. **Convinced** people see the seriousness of life and death, the reality of the call to follow Jesus, and embrace the potentiality of rejection. Living by conviction is hard because it will set you at odds with people, but will also free you to know exactly what you should be doing because God has made it clear! **Conviction** cannot be manufactured by a program or even given in a training course. It must come from a personal commitment and understanding of Gods' Word and desire to glorify God.

- **Constant keeping away from junk food** - Any healthy diet limits the intake of junk food and snacking. Paul instructed ministers of the gospel to stay away from silly myths, or anything that trivialized Scripture or tries to moralize life. We should be people who read or listen broadly and grow in discernment with what is untrue. I read things that I disagree with and keep up with certain trends in the theological world that are wrong. But what Paul is emphasizing is that we must be wise in **what we take in**, fueling ourselves what is true rather than trite or pithy.

Disciplined Training in Godliness:

*Rather **train yourself for godliness**; 8 for while bodily training is of **some value**, **godliness is of value in every way**, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. 9 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.*

The city of Ephesus, like many Greek influenced cities, put a high emphasis on the body. Major cities would have **gymnasiums** where physical exertion and activity would be highly valued. From Paul's writing to the Corinthians, this also would have included athletic events and competition. Since the Ephesian church would have completely understood the comparison, he leveraged the idea of physical exertion in the ministers life of godliness and pursuit of others.

- **Godliness Does NOT Happen Easily** (or magically) – Salvation changes our heart, mind, and desires, but we still live in a broken world and battle our flesh. Godliness, having the right attitude and response from the heart in obedience to God, does not just magically happen. It means we must be proactive and disciplined, to exert effort, but not earning. Notice here he says one must **train yourself**, meaning no one can do this for you nor can you grow in godliness merely by being around others who do (much like you can't get in shape merely by hanging out at the gym but never lifting weight yourself).
- **Disciplined Training from Good to Great** – Paul does not denigrate physical training, since he said it **had some value**. It's valuable to train our bodies, knowing that these vessels are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit and want to maximize the time we have. But physical training has limitations, since it can leave us quickly and cannot extend beyond our lives. **Training our selves for godliness** has value both now and forever, since it is preparing us for effectiveness and to be pleasing to God. **Discipline** is that which kicks in when we have a greater desire, but in the moment lack the lesser desire. We engage in healthy activity even when we don't **feel like it**, knowing that it will pay off in the end.

1 Corinthians 9:27 *"But I discipline (buffet in the old NASB) my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."*

This is categorically different from asceticism because we are not trying to gain or earn anything with God through our training in godliness, but recognize that we are freed up in Christ to pursue His pleasure in all things. It's more like a God-gifted, stud athlete who disciplines himself to maximize what was gifted to him. That is a believer when we realize that God has transformed us and now we discipline ourselves, by the grace of God (1 Cor. 15:10) we work harder than anyone so that God is glorified in all things.

- **Disciplined Training knows what's needed** - Good diets fuel good exercise. As ministers of the gospel and disciples of Jesus Christ, we are committed to the fuel of God's Word that directs our hearts, grows our discernment and strengthens our convictions. It is out of this that we train ourselves in the means of grace God gives us to grow. This is why we participate in **corporate worship consistently**, including being there for baptism and communion, to engage in service, in evangelism, in fellowship, and in counseling. This keeps us away from the **consumeristic approach to life and the church**, and seeks to honor God rather than ask, "what's in it for me?"

Paul then reminds us that all of this is trustworthy, deserving of full acceptance, which means it was a commonly held belief in the church at the time and in the church for all time.

So this morning, we ask ourselves about our diet and exercise. We have an immense and serious opportunity to learn and grow as disciples of Jesus, and call others to follow and grow in him. We need serious fuel and endurance, so we must discipline ourselves properly to get there.

Questions to Answer:

- Who has influenced and impacted your relationship with the Lord? Who has modeled what it looks like to follow Jesus?
- Who do you intentionally and deliberately seek to do spiritual good to so that he or she will be more like Jesus? If the answer is "no one", what do you think needs to change to see that happen?
- In terms of the nourishment of your mind and heart with the words of faith and good doctrine, what is your plan continue to deepen that type of diet? How does this help you grow in discernment and conviction?
- What are areas of your life that you need to train yourself for the purpose of godliness?

Ways to Pray:

- Spend some time praising God and reflecting on the excellencies of Jesus Christ and the goodness of God
- Pray for those that you influence regularly (kids, co-workers, neighbors, family members) and ask God to make it clear as to how you can pursue and help them follow Jesus
- Pray that God would give you deep convictions concerning His Word
- Pray for our church that we would be more effective in being and making disciples