

## "Words For Pastor and People" (Part 7)

I'm continuing to preach from the New Testament letter of 1 Timothy throughout the summer. Today we'll look at the Apostle Paul's words to the young pastor Timothy, found in 1 Timothy 4:6-16. If I'd give today's sermon a title I'd borrow a phrase from verse 7, and call the sermon, "Train yourself in godliness". Timothy is to *train* for *godliness*. The Greek word translated "train" is the word *gumnazo* (*γυμναζο*), from which we get "gymnasium". Timothy, you want to achieve godliness? You'll need to be *in training*. You need a *fitness program*!

Physical fitness is big today! (Do I need to tell you?). You drive in your car and see joggers along the road. Go to the mall before the stores open and people are walking in the corridors for exercise. Fitness centers seem to be doing a booming business. There's one near us in Ephrata that always seems to be busy. I sometimes pass one in Lancaster, on Oregon Pike, and their huge parking lot is just filled with automotive vehicles. There was a parishioner in one the churches I served who was 90 years old, and he went to a nearby health spa every day. He wanted me to join, but he said he was afraid of what I might see there – the women working out!

"Pumping iron" is big today! Lift those weights; turn fat into muscle! I don't bother to lift weights. I just pray for muscles! (You can laugh!). I did lift weights when I was a teenager. Five of us guys sort of had this weight-lifting club. Four out of the five of us really got muscular.....one didn't. (You can guess who that was).

Along with exercise there's an emphasis today on better eating habits - eating *healthy food*! This craze today in physical fitness, taking care of our bodies, is good! The Bible says we are to be "stewards" or caretakers of our physical bodies, which are a gift of God. It can make us healthier and add years onto our life.

But as beneficial as a physical fitness program can be, *there is another type of training even more worthwhile!* Those words in verse 7 describe it: "Train yourself in *godliness*". What is godliness? The word in Greek can be translated "piety". It means the kind of living that reflects our being in a right relationship with God. It means to live right, to live in God's will. To be *spiritually fit and healthy*.

Verse 8 says, "For, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." Physical fitness has value for our life here in earth, but *spiritual fitness* and training for godliness is beneficial for both our *present life* and *the life to come*!

Notice, godliness has value *even in the here and now!* Plenty of people have ruined their lives with ungodly and sinful living. I don't know of any who've destroyed themselves and others by living close to God and doing His will! I've never met anyone who had a miserable hangover by being *godly* the night before! Godliness has value both for our life here on earth and our life beyond the grave!

"Train yourself in godliness" (verse 7). In what specific ways are you and I training ourselves in godly living?

*Spiritual fitness is much more likely to be achieved when we commit to some regiment or program of fitness* If we only work out a couple of times a month, or when we feel like it, it isn't going to do much for us, is it? Imagine if professional baseball, basketball, or football teams had no training camps - players just show up prior to the season opener, don their uniforms, and play. Nowadays, professional athletes train all year long. Imagine those in the Olympics just showing up for the events with no training. Some Olympic hopefuls train *for years!* Some people have membership in a fitness club or gym and never go!

On other hand, some people are so serious about fitness that they have a personal fitness trainer who will design a workout regiment just for that individual. Couldn't that be a model for the church! The church is our *spiritual fitness center*. Mature Christians serve as fitness coaches, working one-on-one with members to help that individual grow in the Lord!

While each of us is different, in terms of what we need to grow into godliness, there are some common elements in a good spiritual fitness program, and I think we can see some of them in Paul's instructions to Timothy .

*First, nourishment on the words of faith and sound teaching.* "If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching that you have followed" (verse 6).

*Intake* is important. We need to be nourished on the words of our faith and sound teaching! What's our nourishment? Hours watching TV? The internet? Facebook? Blogs? Hours with our head in our cell phones? Imagine someone who jogged regularly, or rode an exercise bike, in order to be physically fit, but ate nothing but ice cream, candy, potato chips and fatty foods! Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). We need time to *ingest* and *digest* God's Word and truth, through the Bible, sermons, sound teaching, Christian books and articles, Christian conversation. Without a healthy intake of Christian teaching our souls will starve

*Second, it's important to avoid hurtful things.* Verse 7 begins, "Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales." Paul tells Timothy to have nothing to do with silly, godless stories. What are the things you specifically need *to avoid* in order to grow spiritually? Things, we know, we should have "nothing to do with"? A bank robber in Minneapolis, when caught, told police that he was converted at a Billy Graham Crusade, and that's why he didn't use a weapon during the holdup! Well, this guy was on the right track (giving up certain things), but needed to go further!

*Next, in our spiritual fitness plan, we need to be willing to work!* Paul writes, "For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially those who believe" (verse 10). Most people who are physically fit and healthy work at it. I don't know of anyone who is an effective Christian without *working hard at it*. In most things of life, if we're going to be good at something, have to work at it! A pastor got

out of her car, and walked toward the home of one of her parishioners. As she got to the door, she heard the sound of a piano - the not so melodious sound of a struggling beginner. When she knocked on the front door, and no one answered, she walked over to a big picture window and saw the family's young son, seated at piano, his face pinched in misery. The pastor tapped lightly on the window, and the child flew off the piano bench and raced to the door, apparently ecstatic at an excuse to take a break. "Hi, Matthew", the pastor said. "What are you doing?" "I'm practicing my piano lesson" the young boy said, with obvious displeasure. "Well, I really came by to talk to your Mom. Is she home by any chance?" With that, the boy heaved a great sigh, rolled his eyes and said, "Now what do you think?" Translated, that meant: Would I be practicing if she *weren't* at home?!) We don't become a skilled pianist without hard work. We don't become a skilled disciple of Jesus without hard work.

I love sports and played sports when I was younger. But I hated just to exercise, or run for the sake of running. Some of the years when I played ice hockey, we only had a game once or twice a week. I had to train by doing wind sprints. Otherwise, I'd be too winded during games to be able to play. So, I'd get up early, or run late at night. I hated it, but I knew it was necessary if I were to reach my goal of playing effectively. Spiritual disciplines are not always pleasant and fun - but training in godliness takes a concerted effort and hard work.

A fourth ingredient in our training to be spiritually fit is this: *Don't be distracted by others*. Paul instructs Timothy: "Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity (verse 12). One of the difficulties Timothy faced was that he was *young*. Some in the church in Ephesus might have held that against him. Paul's advice to Timothy: don't worry about what others are saying - work hard at being the best example you can be.

Do you realize, if you get serious about spiritual disciplines and growing in Christ, some people around you may not be too sympathetic, because it's not important to them. Maybe your husband or wife or your parents or children couldn't care less about spiritual development, so you won't get much support at home. Coworkers, acquaintances are into other things, and they may chide you if you read the Bible or go to church, or won't join in their unchristian behavior. Well....so what? Don't let other peoples' opinions curtail your efforts to be a spiritually fit person! Don't give them that power over you!

A fifth part of a spiritual fitness program is this: *Do your ministry and use your spiritual gifts*. 1 Timothy 4:13-14 says this: "Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders."

For Timothy, training himself in godliness included being diligent in his *pastoral ministry*: public reading of Scriptures (people didn't have Bibles then), teaching, exhorting/encouraging – putting those things into practice, devoting himself to them. Nobody becomes *physically fit* just reading a book on fitness or watching videotapes of other people working out! You have to *do it yourself*. No Christian gets fit just by listening to Sunday School lessons and sermons and

watching other Christians in action! A big part of Timothy's ministry was exercising the spiritual gift God gave him. We can't be sure what his spiritual gift was, but Paul says don't neglect it! This is important for us too! *To identify, and put into use, our spiritual gift or gifts!* I haven't talked about spiritual gifts much lately. Some of you may remember I had a series of sermons on this a few years back. Maybe it's time to revisit the subject of gifts of the Spirit. If we ignore this whole area of our spiritual gifts, we will lack something important in our training to be the follower of Jesus God wants us to be.

Paul says, "Put these things into practice" (verse 15). Mother Theresa once visited Australia. A young man, a new recruit to the Franciscan Order, was assigned to be her guide and her go-pher. He was thrilled and excited that he'd be close to her and have a chance to talk with her and learn from her. But after a while he was frustrated, because though he was constantly near her, the friar never had a chance to say one word to her - there were always other people for Mother Theresa to meet. Finally, her tour was over and she was due to fly to New Guinea. In desperation, the young man finally got a word with her. He said, "If I pay my own fare to New Guinea, can I sit next to you on the plane so I can talk to you and learn from you?" "You have enough money to pay airfare to New Guinea?" she asked. "Yes!" he eagerly replied. "Then give that money to the poor. You'll learn more from that than anything I can tell you."

*We get built up spiritually when we exercise our faith and put into practice what we say we believe!*

One more ingredient of a spiritual fitness program: *Expect progress!* Verse 15 says, "Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress." Note, "so that all may see your progress." Practice produces progress!

Finally, verse 16: "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers." Here's a promise that the hard work of a spiritual training program pays dividends! Not just for you, but God uses you to impact others.

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