

“‘Work Out’ For Godliness,” Part One”

Every four years people all over the world enjoy sitting down around their television sets and watching top athletes compete in the summer Olympic games. If these competitors clothed themselves as those of the ancient Greek public games, there would be scores of parents blocking those channels. This is true because the ancient Greeks competed and worked out nude (Greek: *gymnos*). This is why the place where athletes trained in Greek was called the *gymnasium* and the act of working out or training was communicated through the verb *gymnazo*. Over time the verb dropped any connotation of nudity and simply spoke of the action of working out or preparing for competition.

This is important because in 1 Timothy 4:7, as Paul gives instructions to his protégé, Timothy, he tells him, “train (*gymnazo*) yourself for godliness.” In other words, the Apostle instructs, “work out in such a way that you have reverence toward God and live out His commands.” Paul, who enjoyed sports metaphors (1 Cor. 9:24-27; 2 Tim. 4:7-8), tells Timothy and us to apply the same focused commitment, discipline, hard work, and continual practice to loving and following God as an athlete does toward the goal of winning a competition. The rationale he gives (4:8) is that though bodily exercise (*gymnasia*) is somewhat profitable, “godliness is of value in every way as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” Paul in no way belittles the benefit of physical well-being. He is simply showing that godliness promises a much greater and longer lasting benefit. This reasoning sounds much like the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-20: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

To pursue godliness is nothing less than engaging in a life that contains and is shaped by a biblical worldview. In other words, it is living out the worldview and the salvation we have been learning about in our previous readings.

Since Paul instructs us to pursue godliness and likens the process to that of working out as an athlete, we need to ask the question, “How does a Christian work out so that he can live a godly life?”

1 Tim. 4:7-8: “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. 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.”

As we answer this question, we each need to see that we truly can live a godly life.

(1) Godliness is obeying God's commands.

Later on in 1 Timothy (6:3, 5, 6, 11) Paul uses the word godliness (*eusebeia*) to refer to a lifestyle that is consistent with righteousness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness. It is antithetical to conceit, envy, dissension, slander, and evil. Godliness, then, is not something that is reserved for the super spiritual. By the grace of God (cf. Titus 2:11-12), it is attainable by all Christians. In fact, Peter teaches us that in Christ God has given to each believer all the resources he needs for a godly life (2 Peter 1:3)

As we turn our attention to talking about the means of growing in godliness, we must never forget that these means, by themselves, will never make us godly. They must flow into love of God and others, they must end in faith-fueled obedience. This seems to be one of the implications arising out of Jesus' teaching in Luke 8:19-21 where the Savior affirms that His true family is comprised of those who hear and do the Word of God. On this text, New Testament scholar Walter Liefeld (Luke, vol. 8 in Expositor's Bible Commentary, p. 910) writes:

Most Christians would probably say that we come closest to him through prayer and reading the Bible. But with searching practicality Jesus says that the way to be close to him—even as close as his own family—is through being receptive to God's word and then doing it. Hours of praying and Bible reading will not bring disobedient Christians as close to the Lord as doing his truth brings even the simplest believer.

So, pursue this holy life. It is part of God's plan for us (Heb. 12:14).

(2) Godliness comes through Bible intake.

One of the frequent exhortations Paul gives to Timothy is to take in, as well as build his life and ministry on, the scriptures.

Consider:

- Paul tells Timothy to teach biblical truths carefully to the Church (1 Tim. 4:6, 11, 13; 2 Tim. 4:2)

“One way to define spiritual life is getting so tired and fed up with yourself you go on to something better, which is following Jesus.”
-Eugene Peterson
“Spirituality For All The Wrong Reasons,” Christianity Today, March 2005

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 88. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?
A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

WSC, Q. 90. How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?
A. That the Word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.

- Paul tells Timothy that God uses the truth of the scriptures to save and to equip Christians (1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 3:16)
- The manner in which Timothy will be approved of God is to handle accurately the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

This is consistent with the rest of the New Testament which teaches that salvation (Rom. 1:16; James 1:18) and growth or sanctification (John 17:17) come by God's Spirit working in us through His Word.

One of the major ways that we must work out for godliness is by reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating upon the Bible.

(3) Godliness comes through prayer.

Paul tells Timothy that people are changed through prayer (1 Tim. 2:1-7) and in fact that prayer should under gird all we are and do—to the point that we are anxious about nothing and have a peace which surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:6-7).

Prayer is one of the chief means whereby we exercise our faith and put into practice the resources we have in Jesus Christ! (cf. Matthew 6:9-13)

WSC, Q. 98. What is prayer?
A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.

Family Discussion:

1. Have each family member share what he or she does for Bible intake and prayer. (Parents, if your youth struggle in this area, offer to help them figure out how to read, study, learn, and obey the Bible)
2. Parents, make sure you share with your youth various methods you have used for Bible intake and prayer through the years to give your teens some ideas about how they can engage in these disciplines.