

Message #9

Kurt Hedlund

1 Timothy

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## GODLINESS

1 TIMOTHY 4:6-16

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Several years ago a *Psychology Today* magazine article told about a young couple named Mark and Abby Williams. Their story seems to be symptomatic of the challenges faced by many younger couples in our day who have a college education and/or modest financial resources. Abby was the assistant editor of a magazine. She had been married for six years but was still putting off having children. She told her interviewer that she hated to take a long break from work just when her career seemed to be blossoming. There were also some tensions in her marriage. She was almost certain that Mark was having an affair. She confessed that she, too, had been involved in brief relationships with men other than her husband. She claimed that she didn't see anything morally wrong with that but admitted that she felt guilty about it at times. She still liked many of the benefits of marriage and eventually wanted a child.

Abby said that she liked her job a lot. But she also told the interviewer that she wanted to travel more, spend more time with friends, read more, listen to music, and relax and enjoy life more than she had been doing.

Abby's husband Mark also had a lot of things going on in his life. He was a lawyer who worked for a legal aid firm. He made a third less than his wife and found his clients to be frustrating characters. **"You help people one day, and they are in trouble the next,"** he said. He was staying with the job, though, because he said that he didn't like the idea of making the rich richer.

Mark was hoping to hold on to his marriage, but he confessed that he had a strong attraction to one of his clients. He said that he needed the freedom to be with other women. He also said that he was walking around in a constant state of anger. He told the interviewer, **"I value my freedom and independence more than almost anything I can think of. It is true, I'm asking for a lot. But I don't think it's too much. Sometimes I think everything is [worthless]. Everybody is out for himself. Maybe I'll give it all up and live in Maine."**

Psychologist and pollster Daniel Yankelovich summarized the dilemma facing the Williams family and many other Americans. He said, “...**they find themselves presented with an abundance of choices about what to do with their lives without, however, knowing how to make the right choices.**”  
(*Psychology Today*, April, 1981)

We live in a unique time and place in history where we are faced with choices from the cradle to the grave which were unavailable to people in earlier generations. Can't have children? Now there is not only adoption, but there is in vitro fertilization and surrogate parenting. Want to choose the gender of a prospective child? Fertility clinics offer that option. You already are pregnant? You can check the genetic health of the child in the womb. Surgery can even be done on the little tike. Or you can decide to have an abortion.

Once the kiddos show themselves, there are choices to be made about child care. Then there are decisions to be made about education: public school, charter school, private school, or homeschooling. Kids in school have choices about the classes that they take. Then there are choices to be made about sports and music and hobbies and friends. So it goes all the way to the grave in our day.

How are we to make these choices? Timothy was faced with certain choices in his situation in the first century. He had been sent by the Apostle Paul to lead the church at Ephesus in Asia Minor. There he found a fair set of problems. There was a lot conflict in the church. Timothy seems to have had a quieter disposition, and he didn't relish the prospect of conflict. So he could move on to another place, he could just try to get along with everybody, or he could confront the people causing trouble in the church.

Paul assures Timothy that he is the right man for the job. He needs to hang in there and address the problems, which primarily relate to false teachers. In the first part of our passage Paul also gives him important instruction about priorities. It is from this instruction that we can learn lessons about making wise choices in life.

I.

In vv. 6-10 of 1 Timothy #4 (which is located on p. 992 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs) we learn that A CHRISTIAN'S PRIORITY SHOULD BE GODLINESS. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. A CHRISTIAN'S PRIORITY SHOULD...) Having discussed the false teachers who would have people abstain from marriage and from certain foods, the apostle tells his representative at Ephesus to point out these doctrinal errors

to the brothers. Conflict may result, but sometimes conflict is necessary. Timothy needs to keep in mind truth which he has learned and practiced and taught. It is right to tell and promote the truth.

A.

In vv. 6 & 7 Paul writes, **“If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness...”** Thus he describes ITS PURSUIT. (I. A. ITS PURSUIT) Every Christian should be in the pursuit of godliness. That is supposed to be Timothy’s priority. It should be our priority as well.

The original word for “godliness” could also be translated as “reverence” or “devoutness.” It is used fifteen times in the New Testament and eight times here in 1 Timothy. In #3 v. 16 Paul says, **“Great... Is the mystery of godliness.”** He then proceeds to describe the gospel.

In #6 v. 5 he speaks about sinners who think that **“godliness is a means of gain.”** In the context he is speaking about financial gain. This is a warning to the prosperity preachers of our day. In v. 11 of the same chapter he tells Timothy to **“pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.”** Godliness is there associated with other Christian virtues.

In 2 Timothy #3 v. 5 Paul speaks of sinners in the last days who have **“the appearance of godliness, but [deny] its power.”** So the term “godliness” appears to refer to our general Christian commitment. Actions and service are part of godliness, but the real focus is upon character. A godly person is one who reflects the character of God. For us humans this will always be done imperfectly.

True godliness has a certain attractiveness to it. Jesus was the most godly person who ever lived. He was God in human form. The religious leaders of His day thought that they were the godly ones. But they were only religious. The reality was that they were evil. Religiosity is not the same thing as godliness. Sometimes religious people are evil. The people who are part of Al-Qaida and the Taliban and Iran’s Revolutionary Guard are religious.

Jesus was not just religious; He was godly. This godliness held a certain appeal to the poor and to the outcasts of His day. The people who were attracted to Him were fishermen and farmers and tax

collectors and prostitutes. The religious leaders felt threatened by Him. Real godliness has a certain attractiveness to those who are searching for truth and for God.

If godliness is to be our priority, and if our obligation is to pursue it, how is that to be achieved? Godliness involves a divine element. Transformation involves the work of God's Holy Spirit. Here Paul stresses the human responsibility. He speaks of discipline. He writes in v. 7, **"...train yourselves for godliness."** Some translations use the word "discipline" instead of "train."

The Greek word for "train," or "discipline," is *gumnaze*. (*GUMNAZE, GUMNOS, GUMNAZO, GUMNAZIA*) Originally, the related Greek word *gumnos* meant "naked." The Greek athletes practiced, and sometimes competed, without wearing any clothes. The word *gumnazo* came to be used for their training. The place in which they practiced was a *gymnasia*, or a gymnasium. (*GYMNASIUM*)

In the New Testament the Greek term is used only in a spiritual sense. Peter speaks of sinners whose hearts are trained in greed. (1 Peter 2:14) The author of Hebrews speaks of Christians who are trained, or disciplined, to discern between good and evil. (Hebrews 5:14) The background for the whole concept is athletics. (PROJECTOR OFF) The results of discipline and training are illustrated in that realm. A runner develops speed and distance by running a lot. A weight lifter develops strength by lifting weights. Tennis players develop skill by hours of practice. If our goal is athletic accomplishment, physical training and discipline are essential. So it is in the spiritual realm.

Joseph Duveen was a famous British art dealer in the early 1900s. In 1915 he asked a young art expert to come to England to examine some ancient pottery. Then Duveen learned from the German embassy that the German government was threatening to torpedo any British ship found near British waters. Duveen discouraged the young man from making the trip. But he replied, **"Don't worry. I'm a strong swimmer, and when I read what was happening in the Atlantic, I began hardening myself by spending time every day in a tub of ice water. At first I could sit only a few minutes, but this morning I stayed in that tub nearly two hours."**

Duveen laughed, but did not further object to the young man making the trip. The ship on which the young man sailed was the *Lusitania*. It, of course, was torpedoed, and the art expert was dumped into the ocean. After almost five hours in the water, he was rescued. He survived, and he was in good condition. His training and discipline paid off.

If we want to survive and flourish as Christians, if godliness is really going to be a priority in our lives, we must exercise discipline. Life can be hard. We encounter trials and tests of our faith. We may experience broken homes, broken marriages, health problems, job losses, romantic disappointments, health challenges, coronavirus pandemics, and the loss of loved ones. The test of godliness is how we handle situations like this. We don't usually do well unless we have exercised spiritual discipline and training.

The false teachers at Ephesus who were ascetics--- who opposed marriage and the eating of certain foods--- practiced a certain kind of discipline. But Paul was talking about a different variety of discipline. He was talking about spiritual discipline. He doesn't spell out in detail here what that means. But from what we know about the rest of the Bible, we can get a pretty good idea. It means things like regular prayer and Bible study. It means reading Christian books. It means going to Bible studies or Sunday school classes. It means serving others. It means fellowship with other Christians. It means worship and accountability and service. It means putting God first, family second, and other responsibilities after that.

All of this takes discipline. It takes time. It takes energy. Sometimes it takes money. It means looking at things in our lives that we may not like. It may require difficult changes in our way of being. Dallas Willard reminds us in his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (1991, p. 138), **"...the activities constituting the disciplines have no value in themselves. The aim and substance of spiritual life is not fasting, prayer, hymn singing, frugal living and so forth. Rather, it is the effective and full enjoyment of active love of God and humankind in all the daily rounds of normal existence where we are placed."**

Thus Paul tells us in vv. 8 & 9, **"... 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. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance."** Paul does not say that physical training is a bad thing. It has some value. But he says that godliness has a longer value. It has value in the present. It makes us better people. It enables us to love other people more effectively.

But whereas our bodies eventually wear out in spite of physical training, godliness has eternal value. It produces eternal dividends. It means greater rewards in heaven and more glory to God. It means that people will be there with us because of our example and witness and decision to pursue godliness.

In v. 10 Paul recognizes that this pursuit of godliness means laboring and striving. He says, **"For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all**

**people, especially of those who believe.”** Our motivation and hope and trust is centered on the living God.

Is Paul saying in v. 10 that everyone is going to heaven in the end? No. That would contradict much that Paul said elsewhere about eternal salvation and what Jesus said about the broad road that leads to eternal destruction. The exact interpretation of this verse is much debated. Some say that Paul is saying that God is the Savior of all kinds of people, in particular, those who believe. Some say that he is saying that God is the Savior of all people, that is, those who believe. Some say that Paul is talking about common grace. In other words, God graciously provides physical deliverance and food and shelter to all people, especially for those who are truly Christians. Some argue that Paul was making an attack upon Romans who claimed that the emperors were the saviors of people in the Roman Empire. Paul is saying that the living God, not dead emperors, is the Savior of the Romans, especially of believers.

I am inclined to think that we should remember what Paul said in #2 v. 6 that Christ has given His life as a ransom for all men. He paid the penalty for the sins of everyone in dying upon the cross. He is in that sense the Savior of all men. But that ransom becomes effective only for those who receive the gift of salvation that Christ offers. That salvation becomes effectual only for those who recognize their sinfulness and need for salvation and who trust in Jesus as their Savior from sin. That ransom and that salvation have special meaning for those who have truly put their trust in Christ.

B.

The Christian's top priority in life, then, ought to be the pursuit of godliness. That means recognizing its value and demonstrating that recognition in discipline and training. It also involves THE NEED TO REJECT THE WORTHLESS. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. A. B. THE NEED TO REJECT...) At the beginning of v. 7 he says, **“Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.”**

We saw back in #1 that Paul spoke against false teaching that dabbled in myths and genealogies. By virtue of Paul's reference to the story of creation early in Genesis and our knowledge of early Jewish speculation about minor characters mentioned in Genesis genealogies, the suspicion of many Bible students is that Paul is attacking speculations that involve those things. The apostle sees no value in that.

The application to us is that if we are really going to make the pursuit of godliness a priority, we are going to have to reject a lot of the choices available to us about what we do with our time and money.

We need to begin by rejecting the worthless choices--- those options in life that are harmful and counterproductive and just time wasters. Our judgment of what is worthless to us may vary from person to person. It might mean cutting back on our time spent in front of the TV. It might mean cutting down on the time that we spend surfing the Web. It might mean rejecting things that take a lot of money. It might mean cutting out bad habits.

C.

The pursuit of godliness also involves THE NEED TO SUBORDINATE THE LESS IMPORTANT. (I A. B. C. THE NEED TO SUBORDINATE...) It means subordinating those time commitments that are of lesser value. In v. 8 Paul says that physical training has some value. It is not inherently a bad thing. A lot of people around here get exercise by walking their dog. I like to run. Others of you work out at the gym. All of these are good things.

But the sad thing is to see a Christian who will rarely miss his daily jog or her regular workout but who complains that he just doesn't have time for a few minutes of daily devotions. That is an indication of misplaced priorities. Pursuing godliness means rejecting the worthless and subordinating the less important.

II.

After describing a Christian's priority in vv. 6-10, the author goes on to say that A CHRISTIAN LEADER'S FOCUS SHOULD BE MINISTRY. (II. A CHRISTIAN LEADER'S FOCUS SHOULD BE MINISTRY.) This section describes the outworking of a Christian leader's pursuit of godliness. We also have to keep in mind that Timothy was a single guy who did not have a wife or kids.

A.

In vv. 11 & 12 Paul speaks about AVOIDING SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS. (II. A. AVOIDING SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS) He writes, **“Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”**

In #1 v. 7 of 2 Timothy Paul encouraged his protégé not to be timid. The word for “youth” here in v. 12 was used of anyone of military age, which in the Roman Empire could be as old as forty. Timothy had been involved with Paul for about fifteen years. Perhaps he was in his early to mid-thirties. Many of the elders of the church in Ephesus and probably most of the false teachers were older than that. One of the

criticisms that they may have had for Timothy was his youthfulness. He was just a kid. What did he know? Why should these more experienced men listen to him?

They should listen to him because Timothy spoke the truth, and he was the personal representative of the Apostle Paul. Furthermore his demonstration of speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity proved his godliness.

There are a variety of other factors which can adversely affect our confidence in ministry. It may be our ethnic background, or a fear of speaking in public, or a stutter in our speech, or our personal appearance, or our lack of a formal educational background. If we know and have experienced the gospel and its effects upon our lives, we can have a certain confidence in our approach to others.

B.

In v. 13 the apostle speaks about PROMOTING THE READING OF THE BIBLE. (II. A. B. PROMOTING THE READING OF THE BIBLE) The text says, **“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture...”** That was a tradition that was observed in the Jewish synagogues. Typically someone would be asked to stand up and read from a portion of an Old Testament scroll. Then he would sit down and give an explanation and application from that text. We still do something similar in our churches today.

Public reading of the Scriptures had special value in those days because there were many who could not read. A classical scholar by the name of William Harris estimates that about 10% of Greeks and Romans in that ancient era could read and write. (*Ancient Literacy*, 1991, p. 272) So there was a special need for public reading of the Scriptures for those who could not read.

Many also would not have had scrolls of the Old Testament in their own homes, or at least not many of the scrolls of the Old Testament. It was very expensive to make copies of the sacred writings. It was also important then, as it is today, to make a distinction between the inspired word of God and the fallible words of human preachers and interpreters.

Reading of the Hebrew Scriptures also took work. (HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS) Often there was no separation between words and sentences. The earliest Hebrew manuscripts had no vowels. So it took work and familiarity with the text to read the Scriptures fluently.

C.

In vv. 13 & 14 Paul speaks about the importance of EXERCISING ONE'S SPIRITUAL GIFT. (II. A. B. C. EXERCISING ONE'S SPIRITUAL GIFT) He writes, **"Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you."** In the public meeting of the church there was to be an explanation of the meaning of the Bible and application from it, just as we preachers try to do today.

Teaching apparently differs from exhortation in Paul's mind in that it lacks the element of appeal, emotion, and drama. It seeks to inform more than to move the will. Noticeably absent is the mention of evangelism as being an important part of the meetings of the church. That is because the primary purpose of church meetings is building up and encouraging Christians as well as worship of God. That does not mean that it is wrong to present the gospel, or to invite unchurched people to services. But Paul seems to indicate that the primary focus of regular worship services is worship and the building up of Christians.

It appears that Timothy's spiritual gift was that of a pastor, or pastor-teacher. That is why Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus. He knew that the Christians there needed the teaching of correct doctrine. Thus it is that Paul in v. 14 tells Timothy not to neglect the gift which he has. He is to practice it and develop it and use it.

The second part of v. 14 is difficult to interpret. In places like 1 Corinthians #12 the New Testament makes it clear that spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit. That chapter also provides a basis for thinking that spiritual gifts are given at the time of salvation. My suspicion is that Paul recognized Timothy's giftedness during his second missionary journey when he stopped at Lystra, as is described in Acts #16. Before Timothy ever got to Ephesus, we know from the other epistles that he was doing preaching and teaching. Perhaps there was prophecy made that Timothy was equipped to be a teacher, and perhaps even specifically a pastor-teacher at Ephesus. Perhaps his mission was confirmed by the elders at Ephesus in some kind of commissioning service.

First Corinthians #12 indicates that every Christian has received some kind of spiritual gift. So the application is that we need to be faithful to determine our giftedness and to look for opportunities to exercise that gift, whatever it may be: helps, teaching, faith, giving, exhortation, etc. It is an extra challenge in this coronavirus environment, but we all have access to phones, and most of us have access to other electronic media.

D.

We find finally in vv. 15 & 16 that a Christian leader's ministry focus also means DEMONSTRATING PERSEVERANCE AND DISCIPLINE. (II.A.B.C.D. DEMONSTRATING PERSEVERANCE AND DISCIPLINE) Paul writes, **"Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers."**

As a Christian leader, or any Christian, uses the spiritual gift which he or she has been given, spiritual progress should be evident. For Timothy that meant faithful attention to his teaching. Modern education often conveys the idea that teaching primarily involves the communication of skills and information. Whether a public school teacher is heterosexual or homosexual or transgender or a political liberal or a political conservative should not matter.

But lifestyle does matter. People, especially children, pick up values and morals and ideas about life from their teachers. The Bible says that the Christian teacher ought to present his or her life as a model that is worthy of being followed. That is why Christian education ought to have an advantage over secular education.

Thus it is that Paul says that Timothy should keep a close watch on both himself and his teaching. Both aspects are important to Christian education. Both aspects require discipline. Paul adds that his protégé is to persist, or persevere, in these things.

Tom Landry, former coach of the Dallas Cowboys, was once asked what the difference is between a pro and an all-pro. He replied, **"Not that much. They have about the same ability. The difference is in how they apply themselves."** Paul might describe that as discipline and perseverance.

The last sentence of v. 16 speaks of Timothy saving himself and his listeners by virtue of his perseverance. As I mentioned earlier, the term "salvation" has different meanings in the New Testament. Here it seems to refer to present deliverance from the power and effects of sin. If Timothy was to mess up in his personal life, or in his teaching, he might get himself or his listeners involved in sin. They might choose to get involved with the false teachers at Ephesus.

So we have many choices available to us about what we will do with our lives. We do choose. Sometimes we choose consciously and deliberately. Sometimes we choose to follow what others tell us to choose. Sometimes we choose to be lazy.

The Bible says that we cannot make a better choice than to pursue godliness. But a genuine decision to follow this path also means a choice of discipline. For the pursuit of godliness means hard work. It means perseverance. It may mean a reordering of priorities. It means rejecting the worthless. It means subordinating the less important. It means a commitment to spiritual disciplines--- to regular devotions and Bible study.

Mark and Abby Williams thought that they would find meaning and purpose in life through having a career and having a marriage and raising kids and having sexual freedom and insisting on social justice and having money and enjoying city life and enjoying country living and reading and traveling and spending time with friends and on and on. Yet meaning and purpose eluded their grasp. They found only frustration.

Psychiatrist Scott Peck says, **“The person with a secular mentality feels himself to be the center of the universe. Yet he is likely to suffer from a sense of meaninglessness and insignificance because he knows he’s but one human among five billion others--- all feeling themselves to be the center of things--- scratching out an existence on the surface of a medium-sized planet circling a small star among countless stars in a galaxy lost among countless galaxies. The person with a sacred mentality, on the other hand, does not feel herself to be the center of the universe. She considers the Center to be elsewhere and other. Yet she is unlikely to feel lost or insignificant precisely because she draws her significance and meaning from her relationship, her connection, with that center, that Other.”** (*World Waiting to Be Born*, p. 46)

Jesus said, **“For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel’s shall save it.”** (Mark 8:35)