

# Training for Godliness

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'd like us this morning to turn back to the chapter that Neil read for us in 1 Timothy chapter 4 and in particular we're going to focus on the words of verses 6, 7 and 8.

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 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.

Contained in these verses is a topic that lies at the very heart of the Christian life it's mentioned in verse 6, in verse 7 and verse 8 and it's a topic that we're going to focus on today which of course is training.

I want you to start by just thinking about everything that you have done in the past week. So what were you doing? Maybe you were at school, maybe you were at work, maybe you were participating in a sport, maybe you were spending time on a hobby like a music or a craft or something artistic, maybe you cooked something, maybe you used a computer, maybe you drove a car, maybe you played a game.

Think of all of these things and ask the question, how many of these things required training? And the answer of course is all of them.

[ 1 : 30 ] And it's actually very, very hard to think of any part of life that doesn't require some sort of training. You take your phone out of your pocket and you want to use it, that relies on some sort of training.

You buy a newspaper and you want to read it, you need to be trained in order to do that. You want to travel somewhere, that requires training. Even being able to make sense of the noises that are coming out of my mouth requires some kind of training.

Maybe you sometimes think it requires a lot of training. But in every part of life we need training. It's a crucial part of every day.

Training is essential to help us engage in activities, but there's a deeper level to it in the sense that training is also required if we want to fulfill our potential. So whether that's at work or in sport or in music or whatever it may be, in order to fulfill our potential we need to train.

And in many ways there's a direct connection between how much we train and how much we can achieve in a particular area. So a brilliant example of this is sport. Many of us might train at a sport in order to participate or to enjoy it, but there are some people who train incredibly hard.

[ 2 : 48 ] And these are the people who are able to fully maximize the potential that they have. So when you look at great sports stars like Andy Murray or Laura Muir or Chris Froome, these people aren't just able to do all that they do by accident.

They train incredibly hard in order to be as good as they are. Same with a musician. If you want to be good at a musical instrument, it takes hours and hours of practice.

Same in any profession. If we want to fulfill our potential we need to train. And that's reminding us that training doesn't just enable us to participate in an activity.

It also enables us to be the best that we can be. So whether it's sport or music or art or medicine or engineering or whatever it may be, training will help you be the best that you can be in that particular area.

And I want to pause there for a moment because that's raising a very, very interesting question that we need to ask ourselves. If we're thinking about fulfilling potential, it raises the question, what is the very best that a person can aim to be?

[ 4 : 10 ] What's the very best that a human can achieve? So some people might be the best at a particular sport or the best at a musical instrument or the best in terms of their political leadership.

But overall of that, what is the pinnacle of human potential? And different people will maybe answer that in different ways and things might come to mind.

I've put four examples up on the screen. What's the best we could be? We could win the World Cup. Or we could have a number one song. We could be Prime Minister. We could win a Nobel Prize. Different people might answer that in different ways.

The answer, of course, is win the World Cup. That's the best, definitely. Only if you're Scottish though. But that would be the pinnacle, wouldn't it, surely? Well, what is the very best that humanity can be?

Well, the fascinating thing is that the human race always sets the bar too low. Yes, all of these things are great achievements.

[ 5 : 16 ] But really they're all temporary. So being Prime Minister is temporary. Having a number one song is temporary. These things are limited. So you might win a Nobel Prize, but that's going to be just in a very particular area.

And ultimately some of these things are not that important, because winning the World Cup is perhaps not really that important, is it?

And the crucial point is that all of these things, and everything else that humanity regards at the very best, is actually far, far less than what the Bible tells us is the best that humanity can be.

Because the Bible tells us that the pinnacle of human destiny is to bear the image of God himself. Now that's maybe a familiar phrase, and you only have to read a few verses into the Bible to hear that phrase coming up that humanity has made in the image of God.

It's easy to say, and yet we can so easily miss just the significance of what is being said. If you think of the great storyline of the Bible, at the beginning humanity is made in the image of God.

[ 6 : 29 ] But our sinfulness has spoiled that. The question we read from the New City Catechism emphasized that. Who in the human race since the fall can keep God's law the answer to nobody?

Because God's image in us has been broken. But the great destiny that the Bible presents to us through Jesus Christ is that once again we can be conformed to His image.

Again, that's the goal of the Gospel. So we start off in the image of God. We're broken now because of sin. But through faith in Jesus Christ, our destiny is to be restored so that we can conform to His image again.

So that means that we need to think about God if we're going to understand what the maximum potential for humanity is. So just think about God for a moment.

What is God like? Well, God is glorious. So that means that absolutely everything about Him is bursting with splendour. He's absolutely full of weight and substance and splendour and real worth.

[ 7 : 33 ] God is true, so He's never ever false. He's always dependable, always wise, always accurate. God is just. That means He is never, ever, ever unfair.

He's always reliable, always consistent. God is gracious. That means He's always kind, always patient, always generous, always merciful.

And greatest of all, God is loving. Everything that God is and does is grounded on His core attribute of love. He's a God of relationship, a God of abundant provision, a God of eternal faithfulness, a God of extraordinary, extraordinary goodness.

And according to the Bible, the best that humanity can be is to live in such a way so that when people look at you, they see that.

And just imagine how brilliant human life would be if that was the case. You could pick up a newspaper and know that everything in it was true, accurate and fair.

[ 8 : 43 ] You could have politicians who were nothing but honest, servant-hearted men and women of utter integrity. You could have employers who were consistently patient, encouraging and generous.

You could have a judicial system and an economy that was never, ever unjust. And you could have families that were always gentle, always joyful, always dependable and always loving.

And that, of course, is one of the brilliant things about the destiny that the Bible promises for all who trust in Jesus. That's described in Scripture as a new creation when the whole universe is going to be renewed and transformed.

And when we think about that new creation, often people just talk about it as heaven, but it's not just a kind of cloudy space in the sky.

It's a new creation where the whole universe will be renewed. There's going to be lots of brilliant things about that. One of the amazing things about it is that we will be able to see God's glory in a way that we've never done before.

[ 9 : 52 ] And you might think to yourself, well, yes, that's because we'll be able to see Jesus face to face, and in him we'll see his glory. And that's absolutely true, but that's not the only place where you will see the glory and splendor and wonder and goodness of God.

Because in the new creation, we will be able to look at each other. And as we look at each other, we will see an amazing reflection of the glory, beauty and goodness of God.

And that's the best that a human can be. Now, the ultimate fulfillment of that is in the future. New Testament speaks about how in Christ we're predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

It's our destiny. It's something that waits in the future. Right now, we are not there yet, but there's a work of transformation going on. In many ways, we're like an injured athlete.

You think of somebody like Andy Murray who, well, right now is injured. So he's not able to fulfill his potential. And for us, that's what we're like in terms of our destiny to bear the image of God.

[ 11 : 04 ] Sin has left us injured, broken, and a long, long way from where we want to be. And so if you think about an athlete, if he wants to return to his potential or her potential, what do they need to do?

They need to train. And exactly the same as true in the Christian life. And that's why Paul says to Timothy right in the middle of that passage, he says, train yourself for godliness.

All of this is reminding us that training is a key part of the Christian life. And for that reason, it's a key part of what we want to do as a congregation. It's one of the things that we prioritize.

And it's immensely important. I want to highlight a crucial point, though, before we go any further with this. And that is as follows. Christian training is not for the elite.

Now, that's one of the crucial differences between gospel training and the training that you see in the sports world. So you look at athletes, you often see that they're part of an elite program.

[ 12 : 15 ] A good example of that was the Nike Oregon project, which has been in the news for good reasons and bad reasons. But the idea that certain people are selected because they're elite and they get to train in a way that nobody else does.

There is no such thing in Christianity. Christian training is not for the elite. And that means two very important things. First, in Christianity, you do not train in order to get in.

So when we talk about training, we are absolutely not saying that you have to reach a certain level before you become a Christian. That's a huge mistake that so many people make. They think, if I want to become a Christian, I need to improve myself, get fitter, better, stronger, smarter, wiser, or whatever it is in order to become a Christian.

That is absolutely not true. The only qualification, the only requirement for being a Christian is faith in Jesus Christ. So in Christianity, you do not train in order to get in.

But secondly, and equally important, in Christianity, everyone gets a chance. How many of you were hoping to get into the football team or the basketball team or whatever team it was in school?

[ 13 : 32 ] And everyone else got picked and you got left behind. That does not happen in the Gospel. Everyone is on this training program. Everyone who is a follower of Jesus has a place on the team.

And that's one of the brilliant things about the Gospel. The standards are the highest, but the qualifications are the lowest. It's a great reminder that God is the greatest trainer of all.

In this chapter, Paul gives us three important lessons about Christian training. And I want to just focus on these for the next few minutes together.

Number one, training involves effort. That's emphasized by two words that Paul uses in verse 10. He says, for this end, we toil and strive.

So when Paul talks about training and godliness, he emphasizes that it's something that we need to work at. That means actively taking steps to grow in our faith. And it also means enduring the bruises and challenges and hardships that life will bring.

[ 14 : 42 ] And in every area of life, training has its ups and downs. And training for the Christian life is exactly the same. But we're being reminded that as Christians, we mustn't just sit back. We mustn't just think, oh, well, I'm sorted.

I'm fine. And I can just do what I like. We do not want to be lazy as Christians. We want to put effort in so that every day of our lives can be lived in a way that's working towards loving God more and loving one another more.

We want to put effort into what we call the spiritual disciplines. Things like Bible reading, prayer, time together as a church family, acts of kindness and mercy and love towards other people.

These are things that we want to work at and put effort into in our daily lives. And it's important to put effort in because like any other training area of life, it's always easier to not do it.

So it's always easier to not go for a run or for a walk or for a cycle. It's always easier to not practice piano. It's easier to not learn a new language or a new computer program.

[ 15 : 51 ] It's easier to not do it, but it's easier better. And exactly the same as to as a Christian, it's far easier to not pray. It's far easier to not read the Bible.

It's far easier to not forgive people who hurt us. It's far easier to not have our neighbors around for dinner. And it's far easier to not come to church.

But easier is not better. Training involves effort. And the interesting thing is that the word in verse seven for training basically means to go to the gym.

That's where we get the word gym from. And going to the gym involves effort. And I guess behind all of this lies a key question.

Are we serious about what we're doing in our Christian lives? Are we serious Christians? Now, when I say that, I don't mean are we grumpy.

[ 16 : 51 ] Grumpiness is utterly banned for Christians. I mean serious in terms of commitment and dedication. Because we're all serious about many things in life.

So some people are serious about golf, some people are serious about football, some people are serious about Brexit, some people are serious about not having Brexit, some people are serious about Sticklycome dancing, some people are serious about Harry Potter.

Some people have real serious dedication and commitment to a certain activity or interest. This is an incredibly important question to ask ourselves.

What are we serious about? And I remember being hugely challenged by this by a comment I heard in a sermon by Eric Alexander. As I always say, everyone else will give you Tim Keller.

I will give you Eric Alexander. And here is a great quote. Many of us will wake up on the day of judgment to discover that we have spent our lives being serious about trivial things and trivial about serious things.

[ 18 : 07 ] We want to make sure that we take our Christianity seriously. And for that reason, we want to train. Number two, training aims at knowledge and action.

When you think of training for a particular sport, it's very important to recognise that that involves both the mind and the body. And in many ways, one of the fascinating things is that when you hear sportsmen talk about the activities that they're involved in, you can see that they're incredibly capable physically and yet more often than not, they will say that the most important thing is their mental approach.

And so training involves both the mind and the body. There's a key balance between knowledge and action. And that's been presented before us here by Paul, and it's something that's emphasised across the whole of scripture, the fact that knowledge and action belong together.

If you read through 1 Timothy more widely, you'll see that Paul repeatedly makes mention of the need to think in terms of what we know. So in verse six, he talks about maintaining the words of faith and the good doctrine or teaching that you have followed.

That's all talking about knowledge. The same emphasis appears in other verses. He says, watch yourself and the teaching. He warns against people who teach a different doctrine. The teaching that accords with Godliness is to be preserved.

[ 19 : 35 ] And we have to watch that we don't depart from that. The person who does that understands nothing. We need to keep away from things that are falsely called knowledge. Paul is hugely concerned about what we know.

And that's reminding us that a key part of our training in the Christian life is in terms of growing in knowledge. And that actually makes perfect sense in terms of the recovery of humanity.

Because as we were saying at the start, you had created humanity in the image of God. And sin has left us broken. And a huge part of that injury that we've suffered is in terms of what we know.

Because sin has blinded us. It's distorted our understanding of reality. It's made us ignorant of crucial information. And it's made us believe a lot of foolish things.

In Romans chapter one, Paul summarizes the human condition. And he emphasizes again and again and again that one of the key problems is the effect that it's had on our minds.

[ 20 : 42 ] I'm going to read from verse 18, but you'll be able to pick it up when I reach verse 21 on the screen. Paul says, For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but became futile in their thinking.

Their foolish hearts were darkened, claiming to be wise. They became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and keeping things.

A huge part of our problem is a problem with what we know and what we think. So if you think back to Adam, he exchanged paradise for embarrassment, shame, isolation and toil.

And yet he thought he was being wise. And today people exchange personal purity for pornography. People go into debt in order to have a bigger TV.

People choose shallow relationships over the intimacy and security of marriage. People ground their identity in a football team or a political party or an ideology.

[ 22 : 18 ] And they think that they're being wise. And in all of that brokenness, what we really need is true, accurate knowledge.

And that's why Paul says, have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. In other words, Paul is saying, don't believe stuff that's just made up nonsense.

And we may read that, I think, well, yeah, absolutely, I don't believe silly myths. But in Scotland today and in the Western world today, a lot of people believe a whole lot of made up nonsense.

I remember being at a wedding and it was a great wedding and at the service, the best man gave a short speech. And in it he made reference to loved ones who were no longer with us.

And he said that these loved ones will be guardian angels over the married couple. And that sounds really nice, it was just made up.

[ 23 : 30 ] And we see this in lots of ways. Sometimes it can be a bit more subtle. I recently saw a really interesting discussion between a minister and a transgender individual.

And it was a very interesting debate. And I have to say both participants were very courteous and came across very well. And the transgender person who spoke very, very well with sincerity and clarity, at one point in the conversation said, no one can make a choice for someone else.

And that in many ways is a kind of foundational premise of that whole ideology. No one can make a choice for someone else. Now that sounds good, doesn't it?

But it's a complete myth. Imagine your child was in a car crash and they were rushed to hospital and the surgeon stands over this unconscious child urgently needing surgery and says, I can't operate, I can't make that choice for this person.

In the same way, the whole of Western democracy is based on the fact that a huge chunk of the population is to be governed by someone else's choice.

[ 24 : 48 ] Other people's choices are everywhere. The curriculum at school, the voltage of electricity, the speed limit, the level of tax we pay, the location you were born, the rules of football, these are all things, all choices that other people have made for us.

And yet I'm pretty sure that if you went out into the Royal Mile and asked people, do you agree that no one can make a choice for someone else, most people would probably say yes, because people believe irreverent, silly myths.

And that's because human knowledge is broken. And a key part of God's restoration work is to fix our minds and to give us knowledge that is true. That's why we need to train in terms of what we know.

That's why Paul says, command and teach these things as he instructs Timothy in verse 11. Now, you see these two words, command and teach, you automatically think, that sounds a bit heavy and it sounds a bit bossy.

But if you think in terms of training, it makes perfect sense. What does a good coach do? He tells you what to do. He commands and teaches.

[ 25 : 53 ] So Ole Gunnar Solskjaer just been appointed the permanent manager of Manchester United. He's done a fantastic job. The team has been transformed. He doesn't kick a ball when Manchester United play.

He stands at the side and he commands and teaches. And when he does his job well, the team thrives. That's why as Christians, a key part of our training is to be taught and instructed by other Christians.

That's a key part of an elder's role. You can just go back one chapter to 1 Timothy 3 to see that elders need to be able to teach others. In the same way, the New Testament speaks about the importance of mature Christian women teaching the younger women and guiding them.

Together, we are to learn from one another and grow in knowledge together. So alongside whatever fitness regime you may have, please think about how you can train in terms of your knowledge.

Read books, talk to friends, go to Bible studies, listen to podcasts or sermons online, and above all else, keep coming to church.

[ 27 : 01 ] Knowledge is really important. But alongside that knowledge, there's also this emphasis on action. In the Bible, knowledge can never ever be separated from the way that you live your life.

And Paul makes that clear in the next version, verse 12. He says to Timothy, set the believer an example in speech, in love, in faith, and in purity.

Example is a crucial part of training. So we learn by seeing the example of others. We then need to follow that example ourselves, and by doing that, we can then set an example to other people.

And look at the areas that Paul highlights. He highlights speech. So how many of us are training in terms of the way we speak?

How many of us have gotten into trouble because of things we've said? Such an important thing to think about. He talks about conduct, your daily life, the way you go about yourself.

[ 28 : 04 ] It's a great reminder that Christian training is not just for when the crowd is watching. Usain Bolt needed to be at his best for 9.8 seconds or so when the world was watching.

But as Christians, we need to be at our best 24-7. So when you're rushing to get the kids ready for school in the morning, when your computer locks up at work, when your colleagues let you down, when your plane is delayed, in all of these situations, we want to be trained in such a way that we are always a brilliant example.

And then thirdly, love, faith, purity, we'll just take these together. Aren't those brilliant things to attain too? So I look back over my sporting career. I was never that brilliant at football.

I would love to have been, and I would love it if people said, Thomas Davis is an outstanding footballer. It would be so cool if people had been able to say that. But if I stop and think about it, I would be far, far, far more satisfied with my life if people could look at me and say, there's a man who loved well.

There's a man who is an example of faith. There's a man who was a model of purity.

[ 29 : 17 ] I won't be any of those things if I don't train. And the key point in it all is that we need to know the gospel and we need to live the gospel.

So training involves effort. Training aims at knowledge and at action. And finally, training is of value. Paul makes that wonderful point in verses seven and eight.

Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather, train yourself for godliness, 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.

Paul makes this comparison between physical bodily training and training in godliness. The first is of some value that's absolutely true, but godliness is worth far more.

So training in godliness is of personal value to each of us. It'll do us good. It's not wasted effort. It's going to help us grow more and more into what God has made us to be.

[ 30 : 17 ] It's also of collective value. Paul makes it clear later in this letter in chapter six that godliness is not to be pursued as a means of personal gain.

So yes, it is personal training, but it's training for the benefit of others. That's different from the kind of personal training that we might do at the gym. It's just to make us fitter and stronger and better looking.

As a Christian, we are training personally, but not for our own benefit. It's for the benefit of others. A great reminder that we are not competing against each other in Christianity.

It's not a competition about who knows the most or who's involved in the most or who's done this or who's done that. We are not training for godliness as a means of gain, either in terms of finance or reputation or status or anything like that.

We do it for the good of one another. And that's why training is something that we want to invest in as a congregation. Those of you who've read the update will see that we're hoping to implement, well indeed we're going to implement an apprenticeship training program after the summer.

[ 31 : 29 ] And we are so thankful to be in the position to do this. But this is not just about the individuals who are going to be on that program. It's about our whole life as a congregation. And we want to be training to be something that we can all participate in and all benefit from.

It's something that should lie at the heart of the whole culture of our congregation. But it's worth investing in. And although it's going to come at a cost for us as a congregation, we believe that that cost is worthwhile.

And we hope that you as individuals also see it as worthwhile. And as we think about today as our giving Sunday, I would want to just ask that you would consider thinking about the fact that the development of training in our congregation is a good reason to think about how you could perhaps contribute as much as you can to the work of the congregation here.

It's something that should be at the heart of what we do as a church. Because we're all being trained and we're all training from each other. It's something we can all contribute to and it's something that we can all benefit from.

So it's of personal value. It's of collective value. But most importantly of all, training is of eternal value. And that's what Varsheet tells us.

[ 32 : 55 ] It holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. That takes us back to what we were saying about the ultimate destiny of humanity being in the new creation where there we will be the best that we can be.



And there we will see that all the toiling and striving is so worth it. And that's what makes training for God different to any other training at all. What other training can you do that is valuable for eternity?

Training has immense value for us. It's something that we want to invest in. And I guess that raises two important questions. And for anyone here who's not maybe not a Christian or not sure about where you stand, these are two questions that you have to ask yourself.

Where do you find value in your life? And where do you place value in your life? In other words, what makes you valuable and what do you value?

Now, I don't know what your answers to those questions will be. I don't know if you've ever even asked yourself those questions. Where do you place your value in life? Where do you find your value in life?

[ 34 : 13 ] For the Christian, the answer to both of these questions lies in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because the Gospel makes you incredibly valuable.

It makes you a crucial part of that team that is going to be the best that humanity can ever be. And it gives you something that is worth pouring your life into.

Because if you think about it, every other type of training is going to bring benefits that will fade.

Every single sports star has faded. Every single political leader has had to step down or will have to step down.

Every single achievement that worldly training brings is going to pass. But the Gospel is training you for a prize and a purpose that will last forever.

[ 35 : 25 ] So God wants us to be trained. Every Sunday is a training day for us as Christians. Every Wednesday is a training night, whether that's at city group or at engine room downstairs.

So I'm going to finish by asking you, what are your plans for this week? May God grant that every single one of us would answer that question by saying, this week I am training for God.

Let's pray. Dear God our Father, we thank you so much for your word and for all the training and instruction that it gives us.

And we acknowledge how much we need to be trained, how much we need to learn and how much we need to change. But we also acknowledge how much we want to train and how much we want to grow in Godliness to become more and more like our Saviour Jesus Christ.

We pray that in our speech and our conduct and our faith, our life, our love, our purity in all of these ways, that we would be the people that you want us to be and that we would put the effort in that's needed to turn away from the easy option of sin and selfishness and that we would be willing to invest and commit to following you and living in your way.

[ 36 : 58 ] Please forgive us for all the times that we've placed value in the wrong things or sought value for ourselves in things that are ultimately empty. And help us always just to find our value and to place our value in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We pray in His name. Amen.