

There are many things we teach our children how to do when they are growing up. We teach them to put their toys away. We teach them to put their clean clothes in the drawer. I would stuff mine in. It took my mother many years to convince me to put them in the drawers carefully, folded, and in piles. Eventually I learned that if I did so I could fit them all in and it would be easier to find what I was looking for.

We teach our children to ride a bike, to make their bed. Maybe you taught your children to cook or wash dishes. When our sons became teenagers and complained about how and when we washed their clothes, we taught them how to wash their own clothes and gave them the responsibility.

There are many things we teach our children. But some things they just have to learn for themselves. Some things they have to train themselves to do. That is true all through life. There are some things that you have to train yourself to do. You come to realize you need to learn to do something and you train yourself to do so. You might ask others to tell you how they do it. You might read a book or magazine article. You might watch a YouTube video. But you take the initiative to learn how to do this thing.

You learn by doing. You take a guess and try it and if you succeed, you keep trying that, making small improvements. If something doesn't work, you try something else. You train yourself through personal experience.

There are many such things in life. In today's passage, Paul writes Timothy about one of these things.

1 Timothy 4:7 (NIV) Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.

This is not a slam on women or older women. The idea is that older folks in that day did not have much they could do, so they sat around telling stories. Some of these stories were real, personal experiences. Others were fun stories.

When our sons were small they would sometimes tell us a tale. And we would have to decide if it was a true story or what we called, in our family, a fun story. Fun stories were made up. They were fiction. The word 'tales' in verse 7 refers to fictions.

The Greek word translated as "godless myths" means things that are profane, things "not connected to religious matters"; "secular".

Paul has already written in this letter warning Timothy of false teachers and their false teachings. This is just another wording of the same warning.

Our focus this morning is not on the fun stories, but on the action he encourages Timothy to take. Paul is contrasting teachings that oppose living for God and those teachings that promote living for God. He is encouraging Timothy to live for God. That is a meaning of godliness. I take you back to the first sermon in this series where we looked at this important word.

Christian Godliness is seeking to live the will of our God in response to the Gospel.

This is something that can be taught to a degree. I seek to teach you to be godly. But much of it you have learn for yourself. Let me illustrate this by giving you the last part of verse seven from different English translations of the Bible.

- ... train yourself for godliness (ESV)
- ... keep yourself in training for a godly life. (GNT)
- ... teach yourself to be devoted to God. (ERV)
- ... teach yourself to serve God. (ICB)
- ... exercise thyself unto piety. (YLT)
- ... discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. (NASB)
- ... haunt thyself to piety. (WYC)

That last translation really hit me as I was not familiar with that use of the word haunt. **"haunt" = 'to visit (a place) often or continually; to frequent**

Note that train here has the idea of exercise, of self-discipline, of continuing to do something. This is not a one time event. This is ongoing. The word Paul used that is translated as **"training" = the Greek verb *gymnaze*, (from which comes the English "gymnasium")**

A gymnasium is a place of exercise and physical training. Train yourself. Discipline yourself. Set a course of self-improvement. You cannot change the world. You cannot change life. You cannot change others. But you can change yourself. You can train yourself in godliness with the help of the Holy Spirit. YOU have to figure out what contributes to success in godliness and do it consistently.

My first day in college I was excited. It was about a 12 mile drive to the school from my parent's home. I got there on time, attended my classes, and came back to my car to drive home. Unfortunately, I had left the keys in the ignition. I guess, when I parked I stopped and organized myself before I got out of the car to go to my first class. And in that process I neglected to take the key out of the ignition. My younger brother was home when I called and he drove down to the college with a spare key.

Thinking about that experience I did two things which have served me well over the course of my life. The first thing I did was get a spare key made for my car and put it in my wallet. I carried it with me always. The second thing I did was to get in the habit of taking the key out of the ignition whenever I turned off the car. And if I was going to be sitting in the car, I put the key in my pocket. That habit has also served me well over the years.

YOU have to figure out what contributes to success in godliness and do it consistently. The second thing you have to do is figure out what things distract you from success in godliness and avoid them.

This is not rocket science. It is simply observing life, your life and the lives of others, to see what works and what doesn't, what leads to success in godliness. So as Paul

encouraged Timothy to train himself to be godly, I encourage you to do the same. As one who has been training himself to be godly for many years, I offer you some guidance this morning. That guidance consists of three things. Seek God, listen to God, and obey God.

Seek God by prayer.

God is not a impersonal, inanimate force in the universe. God has a will. God makes decisions. God creates with a plan. God is absolutely free.

Yes, He must keep His promises, but He knew that before He made them and made them knowing He could keep them. But He need not grant any of our requests. He is sovereign.

In His sovereignty, He chooses, often, to respond to His creatures. He does not have to respond to us. He does not do so automatically or mechanically. Prayer doesn't work mechanically. There are no magic words to say to get God to do anything. He is free to listen to answer, to ignore. But often He chooses to respond.

But experience shows me that He chooses to respond to our needs and our prayers.

So seek God. Seek His will for you.

"I want to know You. I want to live Your plans for me. I want to desire the right things. Teach me. Direct me. Help me see the good habits to make a part of me and the bad habits to kill."

Again, these are not magic words. They must be your words, from your heart. And they must be consistent.

Listen to God in His Word, the Bible.

Ninety nine percent of God's will for all of us is already given to us in the Bible. Become a student of the Bible, not simply for information, but to know God. Look at a part of Paul's next letter to Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man (and woman) of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Last week I gave you a way of thinking about what to expect when you read the Bible. This is another way. Let me reword that first part another way to make it a bit clearer.

- **Teaching - what is right**
- **Rebuking - what is not right**
- **Correcting - how to get right with God**
- **Training in Righteousness – how to stay right with God**

Train yourself in godliness. Seek God by prayer. Listen to God in His Word. **And then obey God.**

Ninety nine percent of God's will for all of us is already given to us in the Bible. The other one percent you will learn as you live out the 99%. And this is where it becomes most personal. Every command in here is for every Christian. The particulars for your life, today, will be given when as you obey God in the rest.

One of the principles that Jesus teaches over and over in the gospels is that God gives more to those who seek Him, listen to Him, and obey Him. God reveals more of Himself to those who obey. He reveals His will to those who obey. He gives more responsibility to those who obey. He showers more grace and blessings on those who obey. Jesus says that to the person who is faithful in some, more will be given.

Many of you will identify this principle in the movie, "The Karate Kid". The young hero is taught repetitive moves of karate. He must be faithful in those basic moves before the master teaches him how to incorporate them into his life. He must be faithful with the elementary principles before he goes on to the advanced.

There are many Christians in the world who seek God to some degree, who study the Bible to learn God's will, but their obedience falls far short of what they could be living. You have to go to the spiritual gym and workout God's will for your life. And you have to do it daily, consistently. You have to make yourself go. You have to persevere in obedience.

There is more I could recommend, but this is enough for now. This will get you started if you are ready to train yourself in godliness. I can teach you elementary things. You must train yourself to incorporate them into your life with God. I cannot do it for you. No amount of listening to me will change anything if you don't choose to do so. Let's go back to our passage and wrap it up.

1 Timothy 4:7-8 (NIV) Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Physical exercise is of some value. It can increase the effectiveness of your heart and lungs. It can help you lose weight. It can increase muscle mass. It may add years to your life. But no amount of exercise will guarantee a certain number of years. You aren't going to live to be 150, even with the help of exercise and modern medicine. Exercise won't extend your life forever.

To live forever you must be in God's will. And the first of His will is that you believe in Jesus as your Savior and turn your life over to Him as your Lord.