

Train Yourself For Godliness

Action 1.2 Study Guide

Some people think that after they receive Jesus they can sit back and coast. Like God is going to change their lives and they don't have to do anything. But God has given us a much more active role. Today we're going to learn about how to train ourselves in godliness.

It's no secret that the Apostle Paul considered Timothy his child in the faith. When he writes his first letter to the church at Corinth he says:

1 Corinthians 4:17 That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

Like any loving father, Paul wants his son to grow up to be mature and healthy and effective. But spiritual growth is not achieved in the same way physical growth happens.

We all know that if a baby is healthy, well-fed and cared for, the baby will physically grow and develop. We don't have to do anything to make the arms longer and the legs stronger. We don't have to get the eyes to see or the ears to hear. Healthy babies grow naturally. It's automatic. Just feed them and wait. Their bodies will mature.

By contrast, spiritual growth does not happen automatically. Just because we wake up in the morning and eat good food and get some exercise and go to work and whatever - none of these things by themselves will mature us as disciples of Jesus Christ.

So it is extremely instructive to look at what the Apostle Paul tells Timothy as he disciplines Timothy. He wants Timothy to be mature in Christ. Here is his instruction:

1 Timothy 4:7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness;

Do you see that in the second half of the verse? Train yourself for godliness. Paul is telling Timothy that he's got to develop himself. Timothy's got to take responsibility for becoming a spiritually mature person. Train yourself. Insert structure. Develop new habits. Take action every day to put yourself on the path of spiritual growth.

Paul compares training yourself in godliness to working out ...

1 Timothy 4:8 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. **9** The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.

Training ourselves in godliness is good for today and good for eternity. But should we work for it? Listen to this:

10 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.

So rather than sitting back and declaring ourselves to be saved by the grace of God and then waiting for God to do something that will develop us, we are called to actively pursue godliness. Paul says he toils and strives to grow in Christ. Notice the pattern in the passages listed below. God's response to us is predicated on our pursuit of Him.

James 4:8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Psalm 63:1 O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Luke 11:10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

John 15:7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Here are seven steps that will get us started on the road to maturity in Jesus Christ. These are not meant to be exhaustive, but are basic steps that, if implemented faithfully, will push us to Jesus and to spiritual maturity.

7 Steps to training ourselves for godliness:

1) Show up every day –

Our love for God is total. He's everything to us. Therefore, we pursue Him every day. We commit ourselves to developing new habits and new patterns of living to facilitate our maturity in Christ. God's faithfulness to us never waivers. Our pursuit of knowing Him shouldn't either.

Lamentations 3:22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

2) Develop a consistent active prayer life

We strive to develop our prayer lives in two ways:

1. Private alone time with God. Make an appointment with God, put it on your calendar, and be there each and every day. He states clearly that He pays attention when we spend time alone with Him:

Matthew 6:6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

2. Constant conversation with God. Another part of an active prayer life is developing the habit of talking with the Lord throughout the day. In every circumstance and situation, we recognize His presence and seek Him for wisdom, discernment, direction and strength.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing,

3) Don't just read your Bible – study it

As we train ourselves in godliness, we once again look to what Paul instructs Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:6 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.

Paul tells Timothy to be trained in the words of faith and be trained in good doctrine. What does that mean?

Be trained in the words of faith refers to knowing what God's word says. This takes time and effort. We dedicate time to read God's word so that we know what it says.

Be trained in good doctrine refers to knowing what God's word means. You say, "God's word can mean many different things to many different people." And yes, while it's true that some people twist God's word to

justify their own behavior, their misuse of God's word does not indicate that God is confused about what He meant when He inspired His word to be written. God knows exactly what He said in His word. God knows exactly what He means by every passage. You and I may be confused and have our debates and disagreements about certain passages, but God is not confused about what He said and God is not confused about what He meant. Our job is to use every interpretive tool available so that we can be reasonably sure we are believing God's truth according to what He means in each passage. That's how we are to be trained in good doctrine. Study, time, effort, discussion all play their part in bringing us to understanding what God means in each passage of scripture.

4) Kill the sin in our lives

Modern life seems completely oblivious to what God has commanded regarding how He wants us to live. If you and I are going to actively train ourselves in godliness, we have to study the behaviors God has called us to adopt or stop and adjust our lives accordingly. Paul talks about killing sin in Romans 8:

Romans 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Peter talks about making every effort to adopt the behaviors that please God:

2 Peter 1:5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

James speaks of both yielding to God and resisting the devil. We are never to casually go through life without comparing our behavior to the truth of God's word.

James 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

5) Confess and repent when we fall –

Nobody's perfect. When we sin it is vital that we confess our sin, repent of our sin, and keep going. It may be easy to succumb to the notion that God can't use us anymore because of our disobedience. But remember, God knows we are like sheep who wander off. God knows we are weak from time to time or, perhaps even willfully disobedient. That's why He's provided a way for us to be restored. He doesn't throw us away when we fail Him. The critical point is that we get up and continue to pursue Him by faith.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Revelation 3:19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

6) Obey God's word

Jesus commands us to make disciples in Matthew 28. He also tells us how to make disciples.

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

For the purpose of this study guide, we'll focus on verse 20. "Teach disciples to obey all that I have commanded you."

There are two parts here:

- 1) to mature as disciples of Jesus we need to learn all that Jesus commands
- 2) to mature as disciples of Jesus we need to obey all that Jesus commands

Scripture is packed full of promises of God's response to the people who obey His word. Here's one:

John 14:21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

Obedience not only is the true expression of our love for Jesus, it is also key to training ourselves in godliness.

7) Serve others

John 13:15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Jesus washed feet. Dirty, dusty, smelly feet were cared for by the King of glory. Why? To teach us love. Love expressed through service is one of the most powerful tools in God's hands. You cannot imagine the impact a simple loving act of service may have on even the hardest of hearts. Jesus calls us to serve. Serving others is another incredible step in training ourselves in godliness.

If you join the gym and ask your trainer what you should do to get into shape, she may tell you, "Do squats and curls, and dead lifts and rows and burpees and pushups." The trainer would never tell you every exercise there is. You can develop and grow and try harder things once you've gotten used to the basics.

In the same way, the 7 things I've listed to put us on the path of being trained in godliness are certainly not to be viewed as all there is. But I can tell you from experience, if you implement these seven things into your daily life and stick with it, you will be well on your way to spiritual maturity.

We don't grow in Christ automatically – I encourage you to do what Paul told Timothy to do – train yourself in godliness.

Study Guide Questions:

- 1) Which of the seven steps listed are new to you? How will you implement them into your life?
- 2) Evaluate your prayer life. Are you training yourself to pray privately and without ceasing? If not, what can you do to develop new habits?
- 3) Do you hate evil? What behaviors in your life would convince an outsider of your answer?
- 4) What two basic steps to discipleship did Jesus teach in Matthew 28:20?
- 5) Are you serving others? Who? What are you doing? How can you improve in the area of service?