

# **Bible Studies for Life Series for October 8: Take hold of godliness in action and attitude**

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## **Bible Studies for Life Series for October 8**

### **Take hold of godliness in action and attitude**

- 1 Timothy 4:6-16

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A little over a year ago, my then 15-year-old-son, Walker, suffered an injury to his left shoulder while playing football. Four weeks earlier he had suffered the same injury to his right shoulder. After the first injury, he spent four weeks in physical therapy rehabbing his right shoulder. He spent hours exercising and reconditioning his right shoulder. After four weeks, the doctor said he was OK to play.

On the first day back to practice, Walker suffered the same injury to his left shoulder. This time the shoulder required surgery. The surgery and subsequent rehab effectively ended Walker's football season.

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Walker went into off-season workouts with a renewed enthusiasm to be ready for the next football season. He ran, lifted weights, participated in agility training, ate the right foods, drank the right shakes and by all accounts seemed ready for the fall.

On the third day of pre-season workouts, Walker twisted his knee during a drill and strained his anterior cruciate ligament. Not a tear, but enough to keep him out of practice for several weeks. After much thought, Walker made the decision not to play football.

Walker's story provides an apt athletic metaphor about the relative value of being prepared physically. No matter how much a person trains for the athletic event, there still is the possibility of failure and injury.

In 1 Timothy 4:6-16, Paul centers his encouragement to Timothy on an athletic metaphor in order to draw a powerful and necessary distinction between physical preparedness and spiritual preparedness. Paul does not dismiss the need for physical exercise, but he urges Timothy to engage in the kind of training regime that leads to an evident and admirable godliness. The lesson bids us to "Take Hold of Godliness," by developing and demonstrating godly lifestyles.

The background passages for this lesson are instructive. Paul spends a great deal of time in chapters 2 and 3 describing a vision of life within the church. Paul offers advice about the nature of prayer (2:1-15), proper dress and deportment (3:9-10), and the qualifications for bishops (3:1-7) and

deacons (3:8-13).

At the end of this section, Paul offers a word of explanation to Timothy: “Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:14-15). Clearly, Paul demonstrates a primary concern for what the church, the household of God, should not just look like, but what it should act like.

In that context, Paul sets out to describe to Timothy what his role should be within the household of God. In last week’s focal passage, Paul encouraged Timothy to “Take Hold of Truth.” Here, Paul continues that thought with a further description of the kind of false teaching Timothy might face.

Paul tells Timothy that, “If you point these things out ... you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed” (4:6). The preceding verses provide the content of the “these things” of verse 6.

Paul describes a belief system which disparages marriage and forbids the eating of certain foods. Paul describes the adherents and dispensers of these teachings as “hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron (4:2).

While specific identification of these “false teachers” is not possible, it seems likely they represent a gnostic tendency within the church that drew strong distinctions between the body and the spirit, and often misplaced emphasis on either ascetic or libertine practices. Here the focus of the false teachers seems to be on what a person must give up in order to achieve super spiritual status.

Paul rebuts the erroneous conclusions of these false teachers and offers a clever counter argument and substitute regime. Paul reminds Timothy that

“everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving ... (4:4). Paul essentially argues it is not food or marriage that should be avoided, but rather the “godless myths and old wives tales” (4:7) which are the source of poor spiritual nutrition.

Paul not only argues for proper spiritual nourishment; he also prescribes a regime of spiritual training. Paul adapts a proverbial saying about the relative value of physical training, which in its original context would have supported the intellectual life over the athletic life.

It is important to note that Paul does not here disparage physical exercise in favor of the spiritual disciplines. His point is that “godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (4:8). Physical exercise is beneficial and provides benefits visible in this life—likewise the disciplines of prayer, Bible study and worship. Paul also wants Timothy to grasp the eternal and abundant benefits of a godly life.

Chapter 4 concludes with a call for Timothy to demonstrate godliness in both internal and external ways. Paul reminds Timothy of the gift of God’s grace that needs to be demonstrated “in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (v. 12); but he also encourages Timothy to practice “public reading of scripture ... preaching ... and teaching” (v. 13). It is important to acknowledge that Paul does not just encourage displays of godliness as an end; rather, Paul recognizes power of a godly life to make disciples (vv. 15-16). Paul wants to make clear Timothy’s role in the household of God. Timothy, by his very life, is to demonstrate a winsome godliness that benefits those around him.

### **Discussion questions**

- What kinds of behaviors are usually held up as examples in the life of the church? What kinds should be?

- Are there “godless myths and old wives tales” that get too much attention in church?
- How do we balance the need for internal expression of spiritual discipline with the requirement for and external demonstration of godliness?



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