

Life: The practice of Godliness

February 7, 2013

• *This LifeWay Bible Study for Life lesson for Feb. 17 focuses on 1 Timothy 4:7-10; Titus 3:1-9*

One day, I noticed my grandmother's old Singer foot-peddled sewing machine was missing from her room. It easily was as old as the turn of the 20th century. I asked her about it. My grandmother said she had thrown it away. I was appalled and inquired further. I couldn't believe she'd thrown away something that not only had great sentimental value but also worth as a genuine antique. I don't remember what my grandmother said in response to my inquiry. What I do remember was that she threw something very valuable away because she didn't know what it was worth.

In 1 Timothy 4:4, the Apostle Paul establishes the basis for everything else he says in the text that is the focus of our study for this week: "Everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving." It is the goodness of God's gift to us, in creation, through the gospel and God's gift within us, acknowledged as the work of God by giving thanks, that helps us focus on what it truly means to be a godly person.

At a minimum, godliness is born in a spirit of thanksgiving, a spirit that acknowledges the lordship of Christ over all. Without that spirit, we eventually make other things or even our own opinions more important than the teachings of Scripture. It is in constant focus on the goodness of God in the world and in us that we never throw away our lives on lesser things because we didn't know what they were worth.

One of the reasons the Christian community fails to reach more people with the gospel is because the world we are trying to reach cannot see any

difference in the lives of Christians. In other words, why pay the cost of following Christ when they see us seeking the same things, living the same way and sacrificing our very lives to acquire the same superficial assets?

“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. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe” (1 Timothy 4:7-10). These words of the Apostle are worth the focus of the entire lesson alone.

Godliness requires effort. The spirit of godliness is the gift of God. We must participate with God in working out that spirit in our daily lives.

Watching figure skaters on television recently, I was stunned to learn many of these young athletes work out several hours each day, six or even seven days per week, in addition to their school studies and homework. They may be naturally gifted athletes, but it is their willingness to work out their athleticism that makes them champions in their sport.

Godliness has value for this life and the life beyond, we are told. What a marvelous word of encouragement. When we do something in this world that is good or godly, even the simplest act of Christ-like kindness, that effort pays dividends now and in the next life. We are in the process now of building part of what will be our eternal existence with Christ.

We make this effort because of the hope of Christ that is in us. It is hope, that what we are doing now matters beyond ourselves and this moment, that Christ is redeeming us even now and that no act of godliness goes unnoticed by God. Hope is the fuel of our souls for the hard work of godliness.

A ministry colleague once told me someone asked what his Christmas tree

looked like that year. My friend went on to explain in great detail about the lights and ornaments. Upon further consideration, my friend told me if he were ever asked again to describe his Christmas tree he would simply say it had a trunk and branches and everything else was just decoration.

Being godly means learning the difference between what is mere religious decoration and what is substantive and life giving. We sometimes must stop and reconsider how closely we live our lives out of the spirit of the simple and basic gospel or allow ourselves to be distracted by superficiality.

In everything we do, in our bodies, our minds, in our daily actions and especially in our relationships with others, we constantly should focus on being grateful to God for his presence and gift in our lives. Only then can we be people who live by hope. It will be the hope that exudes from us that points others to the God of hope.