

# Spiritually Fit or Spiritually Fat?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, 1 Timothy chapter 4, 1 Timothy chapter 4, and we're going to read at verse 8.

1 Timothy chapter 4 at verse 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.

While bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way. You know, at the beginning of every year, I don't know about you, but many of us, we make New Year's resolutions, or even if we don't call it a New Year's resolution, we seek to make conscious changes to our life and sometimes to our lifestyle.

And one of the things we often want to change, speaking personally, is our weight. We want to get rid of some flab and get right into fitness, because after incessantly indulging over the Christmas period, that festive period, we become more aware of the saying, you are what you eat.

You are what you eat. And so at the beginning of a new year, many people, they go on a diet or they join the gym or they take up walking or running or cycling. But you know, it's actually said that only 20% of people stick to their New Year's resolution.

[ 1 : 46 ] After only about three weeks into the new year, about 80% of people give up altogether. And you know, that can often be what we're like when it comes to our spiritual health.

Because the question we're being challenged and confronted with this evening is quite a stark question. Are you spiritually fit and focused, or are you spiritually fat and flabby?

Are you spiritually fit and focused, or are you spiritually fat and flabby? And it's a stark question because the image and illustration that Paul is using throughout this section in 1 Timothy chapter 4, it's one of energy and exercise.

He's talking about training and toiling. He's talking about discipline and devotion. Paul is explaining and emphasizing to Timothy and to the church members at Ephesus that as believers, they need to be spiritually healthy.

They need to be spiritually fit and focused, not spiritually fat and flabby. And so I'd like us just to consider this challenging section under two headings this evening.

[ 3 : 06 ] The godly gym and the godly goal. The godly gym and the godly goal. So first of all, the godly gym.

The godly gym. Look at verse 6. Paul writes, 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 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.

Now, as we know from our study, Paul wrote this personal and pastoral letter to gently guide Timothy through some of the pastoral problems that he was facing. But Timothy's pastoral problems, as we said before, they were actually positional problems because there were erroneous elders and disobedient deacons who were in positions of leadership in the church at Ephesus. And their position in the church was a problem. And it was a problem because they were soft on sin. They were loose on the law. And they were just, as leaders, they were just glossing over the gospel.

[ 4 : 25 ] To the point that their false teaching or their demonic deception and their demonic doctrine, it had had this impact and this influence upon the congregation.

But as we learned in chapter 3, when we have effective elders, when we have devoted deacons in positions of leadership, it will encourage and enable the congregation as a whole to be mission-minded members.

Which is why in chapter 4, Paul emphasizes and exhorts to Timothy, he exhorts him directly to deal with these erroneous elders and these disobedient deacons.

Timothy is told by Paul that his biblical mandate is to criticize and condemn all demonic doctrine and all demonic deception.

And Paul says, if you don't, if you don't, it will only get worse. Satan will silently and subtly get a foothold and open the floodgates.

[ 5 : 31 ] And there will be other Christian casualties. There will be more alarming apostasy. And as we saw last Wednesday, Paul warned that the church in Ephesus will become like their neighbor, which is the church in Smyrna.

Smyrna was only about 40 miles north of the seaport city of Ephesus. But as Jesus said in the book of Revelation, they had become a synagogue of Satan.

They had succumbed to Satan's demonic deception and demonic doctrine. Therefore, says Paul, your biblical mandate is to criticize and condemn all this demonic deception, all this demonic doctrine.

You need to confront and challenge these erroneous elders and these disobedient deacons.

Because as Paul says in verse 6, if you do, 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.

And Paul's point here is that if, as the pastor of the congregation, if Timothy chooses to avoid the conflict and the confrontation, rather than address all this demonic deception and demonic doctrine, Paul says, well, you will be failing.

[ 6 : 54 ] You will be falling short of your role and responsibility as a minister of the gospel. But as Paul says, a good servant will seek to be taught and seek to be trained in the word of God and good doctrine.

And he will seek to be taught and trained so that in turn, he will teach and train others. And it's with that that Paul then issues this imperative to Timothy in verse 7.

He says, 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.

And we see that in verse 7, that Paul sarcastically refers to this demonic deception and this demonic doctrine in Ephesus. He refers to the erroneous elders of Ephesus.

He refers to them as, and their doctrine as irreverent silly myths. Don't listen to it. Literally, when you read it in its original language, he calls them old wives' tales.

[ 8 : 03 ] That's how he describes their demonic doctrine. And Paul says, they will have no benefit. They will have no blessing in your congregation. They will have no benefit to your growth in grace and your growth in godliness.

Which is why you need to go to the godly gym. You need to go to the godly gym. Because as we said, that's the image and illustration that Paul is using throughout this section.

He's using the image and illustration of the godly gym. And we can see that even from the number of times he uses the word train. If you follow verses 6 to 8, he uses the word train three times.

He says, What's interesting though, is that this word train or training?

It's an important word. It's the Greek word gymnasio. Gymnasio. Which, as you can guess, is where we would get the word gymnasium, or gymnastics.

[ 9 : 31 ] Therefore, what Paul is explaining and emphasizing to the minister and the members at Ephesus, and also the minister and members at Barvis, is that as believers, we need to be spiritually healthy.

We need to be spiritually fit and focused. Not spiritually fat and flabby. We need to be training and toiling in God's word.

We need discipleship, discipline, and devotion to God's word. We need exercise and energy in God's word. Because as Paul highlights, bodily exercise is of some value.

So we all know that exercise is good for us. It's good for our physical health. It's also good for our mental health to have exercise. And it's a known fact that at any age, the more bodily exercise we do, the more energy we will have.

Because if we don't exercise, if we don't exercise our body, we won't have energy. And we'll become lazy and lethargic.

[ 10 : 42 ] And as we're told by many medical people, we'll become low in our mind. And the same is true spiritually.

That's why Paul says that godliness is of value in every way. Godliness is profitable for all things because it holds out for us the promise of this life and also the life to come.

Therefore, in the godly gym of God's word, Paul says, train yourself for godliness. Train yourself for godliness. Which, of course, raises the question, well, how do we do that?

How do we train ourselves for godliness? Well, Paul uses the same image and illustration of this godly gym. He uses that image and illustration when writing to the Philippians.

Because when Paul wrote to the Philippians in Philippians chapter 2, he said to them, Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

[ 11 : 50 ] For it is God who works in you, both to will and to do, for his own good pleasure. Work out your own salvation because it is God who has worked in you.

Paul says that as Christians, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to work out what God has worked in. We are to work out what God has worked into our life.

Because through the word of God and through the work of God the Holy Spirit, salvation has been worked into our lives. And God has graciously worked into our lives by his Spirit, effectual calling, regeneration, faith, repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, and the promise of glorification.

God has begun that good work in us. And he promises to bring it all on to completion. But in the process of our sanctification, as we all know, we're being made more holy and more godly and more Christ-like.

So God has worked salvation and sanctification into our lives. Therefore, our role and our responsibility is to work out our salvation and sanctification in our lives.

[ 13 : 13 ] Because as the Bible reminds us again and again, we're to die to sin. We're to die to self. We're to mortify the deeds of the body. We're to put off the old self.

We're to put on Christ. We're to take up our cross daily. And we're to strive to enter through the narrow gate. So my friend, God has worked salvation and sanctification into our lives.

Therefore, our role and our responsibility is to work out our salvation and sanctification in our lives. But in order to work out our salvation and our sanctification, the workout is a workout.

That's the point Paul is making. In order to work out, it must be a work out. It's a work out in the godly gym.

And as you know, like physical exercise, spiritual exercise requires energy. It requires effort. It requires training and toiling.

[ 14 : 21 ] It requires discipline and dedication. It requires desire and devotion. It requires consecration and commitment.

Which, as you know, isn't easy. But it is necessary for godliness. We need to work out in the godly gym.

God has worked in. Therefore, we need to work out. And I want to say that there are five types of exercise apparatus in the godly gym.

There isn't a treadmill or a rowing machine or weights. But the five types of exercise apparatus in the godly gym, we know what they are. Because they are the means of grace.

They are the means of grace. The five types of exercise apparatus in the godly gym are Bible reading, private prayer, public worship, the Lord's Day, and the Lord's Supper.

[ 15 : 25 ] The five types of exercise apparatus in the godly gym, Bible reading, private prayer, public worship, the Lord's Day, and the Lord's Supper.

They are the means of grace. They are the means by which we grow in grace. And they are the means we must use and utilize in order to teach and train ourselves for godliness.

And you know, like it is when we exercise physically, when we work out or, as some people say, they pump iron. You know, like it is physically, we use resistance and we use weights in order to burn fat and build muscle.

So we use resistance and weights to burn fat and to build muscle. And the same is true spiritually because there will always be resistance.

There will always be weights when it comes to using and utilizing the means of grace. There will always be the need to resist the desires and the distractions of the devil when it comes to the means of grace.

[ 16 : 34 ] There will always be the need to resist the temptations and the tiredness of the flesh when it comes to the means of grace. There will always be the weights of sin and sickness and suffering and sorrow.

But you know, it's when we overcome that resistance, when we lay aside us, as the writer to the Hebrews says, lay aside those weights which so easily beset us.

And it's then that we will burn fat and build muscle. But my friend, if we don't use and utilize our exercise apparatus in the godly gym, if we don't use and utilize Bible reading and private prayer and public worship and the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper, if we don't burn fat and build spiritual muscle, then we will become spiritually fat and spiritually flabby rather than spiritually fit and spiritually focused.

And you know, this is why James reminds us in his New Testament letter that we become spiritually fat and flabby when we are hearers of God's Word but not doers of God's Word.

We become spiritually fat and flabby when we hear God's Word but do nothing with it. We become spiritually fat and flabby when we receive plenty information but don't convert that information to application.

[ 18 : 11 ] We become spiritually fat and flabby when we read lots of books and listen to lots of sermons online and in church but we don't live it out in our lives.

And my friend, when we become spiritually fat and flabby rather than spiritually fit and focused, we're not growing in grace and we're not growing in godliness.

And this is why Paul says to us, he says, you must use the godly gym. You must use the godly gym to keep your eye upon the godly goal. You must use the godly gym to keep your eye upon the godly goal.

And the godly goal is what we see secondly. So the godly gym and the godly goal. Look at verse 9. Paul says, the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.

For to this end we toil and strive because we have our hope set on the living God who is the saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.

[ 19 : 21 ] You know, when it comes to speaking about being fat and flabby or fit and focused, I hate talking about these things. But God's word is presenting it to us.

I hate talking about these things because I was badly bullied in school for being fat and flabby. But as Paul says here, we need to talk about these things.

We need to speak about whether or not we're spiritually fit and focused or spiritually fat and flabby. And yes, it's a bit invasive, but as Paul reminds us, it's important.

Because if we're spiritually fat and flabby, then something needs to change. We need to undergo the fat test. We need to undergo the fat test.

I remember this from Christianity Explored. I think it was in session three when it was talking about sin. The fat test is when your fat content is measured by a contraption that pinches all your flesh all over your body.

[ 20 : 25 ] And it works out the percentage of your body fat. And as you can imagine, the fat test would be very invasive of everyone. But it would also be important because it would tell us if we're overweight, it would tell us how much fat and flab we need to burn and build in the godly gym until we are fit and focused upon the godly goal.

And that's why Paul says here, verse 9, the saying is trustworthy and true. The saying is trustworthy and true. Train yourself for godliness in the godly gym because godliness is the godly goal.

Train yourself for godliness in the godly gym because godliness is the godly goal. And you know, reading Paul's letters, I believe that Paul was someone who either enjoyed exercise himself or he admired athletes that he saw.

Because when you read through Paul's letters, he's always using the athlete as this image and illustration of the Christian life. He's always talking about the athlete. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul writes, he says, do you not know that in a race all the runners run but only one receives the prize?

So run, he says, that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath but we an imperishable one.

[ 22 : 00 ] So I do not run aimlessly. I do not box as one beating the air but I discipline my body and keep it under control lest after preaching to others. I myself should be disqualified.

He then writes in Philippians chapter 3, after telling us to work out what God has worked in, Paul writes in Philippians 3, one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus. And then in the well-known words of Hebrews 12 where we're exhorted and encouraged to focus upon Jesus, we're told there, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and sin that so easily besets us and let us run with endurance.

The race set before us looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith. You know, Paul uses the image and the illustration of the athlete always to encourage us and to exhort us to be spiritually fit and spiritually focused in our Christian lives.

And that's what Paul is saying here. He's saying this to Timothy as a minister and also to the members in the church. He's saying, the saying is trustworthy and true. Train yourself for godliness in the godly gym because godliness is the godly goal.

[ 23 : 37 ] Train yourself for godliness in the godly gym because godliness is the godly goal. You know, my friend, Paul is exhorting and encouraging us to be spiritually fit and spiritually focused rather than spiritually fat and spiritually flabby.

He says, God has worked in, but you need to work out. You need to get into the gym. You need to get a sweat on, as it were.

You need to get onto the apparatus in the godly gym and you need to burn fat and you need to build muscle. You need to find energy through your exercise. You need to be training and toiling in these things.

You need discipline and devotion in your life. You need to keep an eye on the gospel and the goal and the gains of the Christian life because if you don't, you'll become spiritually fat and spiritually flabby.

And you know, I want to be blunt with you because, you know, I believe that many of our congregations in the Western Isles, we are spiritually fat and spiritually flabby and we are no exception because, you know, we have grown up with a wonderful gospel heritage.

[ 25 : 03 ] We've grown up with great preachers and great preaching. We have sermons as much as we could ever want online.

We have sermons three times a week. We have communion seasons with anything up to ten sermons. But, you know, when you think about it, as the saying is, too much of a good thing is sometimes bad for you.

Too much of a good thing is sometimes bad for you. Too much of chocolate and too many sweets is definitely bad for you. But spiritually speaking, too much of a good thing is bad for you. Because the danger is, and I speak for myself saying this, the danger of too much of a good thing is that it makes us lazy.

It makes us lethargic. It makes us lackadaisical. It can make us disinterested, maybe even disconnected from our community because we just stay in our holy huddle.

It can also make us apathetic about our Christian commitment, character, conduct, and conversation. We need to be spiritually fit and spiritually focused.

[ 26 : 19 ] In order to be a healthy Christian church, we need a balanced diet. That's what Paul is reminding us here. We need a balanced diet. We not only need the milk and the meat and the wine and the water of God's word, but we also have to love it and live it out by the fruit, the fruit of the Spirit.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But you know, the thing is, when Paul wrote this to Timothy, he knew that the spiritual health of a congregation will never rise higher than its minister because the minister is to be, as he says in this passage, a model of spiritual fitness and focus.

That's why Paul sets before Timothy, he says, the godly goal of the minister and the members of the congregation is to be spiritually fit and spiritually focused.

And you know, Paul does this in the second half of this section from verse 11 down to verse 16. He does it with nine imperatives. There are nine imperatives from verse 11 to 16.

Nine exhortations to the minister and its members to be spiritually fit and focused rather than spiritually fat and flabby. Look at verse 11.

[ 27 : 46 ] He says, command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

Practice these things. Immerse yourself in them so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this for by doing so you will save both yourself and your hearers.

You know, by using these nine exhortations, one after the other after the other, Paul sets before Timothy that the godly goal of the minister and its members is to be spiritually fit and spiritually focused.

And needless to say, it applies to us too. The godly goal of the minister and its members is to be spiritually fit and spiritually focused, not spiritually fat and spiritually flabby.

[ 29 : 02 ] Therefore, whether we are here this evening or watching at home, we're being reminded that we need to renew our membership in the godly gym. We need to be reminded that the gym is open and we need to use it.

We need to renew our membership and remember the godly goal. The godly goal is grow in grace and grow in godliness.

Grow in grace and grow in godliness. Go to the godly gym and set your eyes upon the godly goal because as Paul says here, in this challenging section, godliness is of value in every way as it holds promise for this life and also the life to come.

The godly gym and the godly goal. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for Thy Word.

Thy Word that challenges us and confronts us with what we ought to be and what we realize we are not. But help us, we pray, to use the godly gym that we might build our spiritual muscle and burn our fat that is so easily besetting us.

[ 30 : 35 ] O Lord, we pray that we will be fit and focused upon what is the purpose of the kingdom of God. It is to lift up the name of Jesus.

It is to make Jesus known. And Lord, we pray that we would be focused and fit for the task, for the furtherance of Thy kingdom and ultimately for the glory of Thy name.

Lord, remember us then, we pray. Bless Thy truth to us. Teach us, we ask, that we would be trained and taught in godliness, that we would be more like Jesus, to die to sin and die to self and to be more like Christ every day.

Lord, forgive us then, we pray, for our sin. Go before us, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen. Well, we're going to sing again, this time in Psalm 63.

Psalm 63, it's in the Scottish Psalter. And we're singing from verse 3 down to the verse marked 8. It's on page 295.

[ 31 : 46 ] Psalm 63, from verse 3. Since better is Thy love than life, my lips The praise shall give. I in Thy name will lift my hands and bless Thee while I live.

Even as with marrow and with fat my soul shall filled be, then shall my mouth with joyful lips sing praises unto Thee. We'll sing Psalm 63, verse 3 to 8 to God's praise.

verse 3 to 9 verse 3 to 9 since better is thy love than life, my mercy grace shall give.

I in thy name will lift my heart uninveste and bless mind sight of ■■■ and love and love and nada and ■■■■ it shall fear and evil may perish Let thee.

Then shout my heart with joyfulness, Sing greatness unto thee.

[ 33 : 17 ] When I do thee love on my bed, Remember with delight.

And when of thee I meditate, In waters of the night, This shadow of thy wings I'll join, For thou my help hast been.

My soul, thee follows, Pardon thee, Thy right and justice stay.

Amen.