

## The Discipline of Devotion” “Nourishing Our Souls in the Word”

1 Timothy 4:6

Today we come to the second exercise Paul assigns to Timothy. We first saw that Paul’s hope for the future growth and health of Christ’s church rested with individuals who could guard against false doctrines and false teachers.

But now, in 1 Timothy 4:6 Paul explains what a good servant “minister” looks like. A servant that God can use, that is one of those “good and faithful” servants that He rewards is a person like Timothy. In this verse we see what makes us good, useful servants of the Lord: it is keeping up our spiritual health by nourishing our souls in God’s Word.

This is now the second of the spiritual exercises or disciplines that God gives to us through Paul’s letter to Timothy. Do you remember how each of these ten exercises is framed? They come to us as:

### Timeless & Powerful Disciplines

They are as powerful as they were in the glittering temptations of the Roman World, Century One. They have trained generation after generation of God’s servants, and now, they are ours to use or neglect. This year, we will be most useful for the Lord when we follow the words of v. 7:

**“exercise yourself** toward godliness.” (NKJV)

**“train yourself** for godliness;” (ESV)

**“discipline yourself** for the purpose of godliness;” (NASB)

**“train yourself** to be godly.” (NIV)

Paul packages these spiritual truths in the form of present tense, or ongoing athletic “exercises”, or “disciplines”, or “training sessions”, as the various translations of the Bible render v. 7. So now as we read the Scriptures, listen and then ask God to speak to each of our hearts, and help us to listen and respond to:

# The Discipline of Devotion: Nourishing Our Souls in the Word

Please stand and follow along in your Bibles as we hear God speaking through the Apostle Paul.

1 Timothy 4:6 (NKJV) If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, **nourished in the words of faith** and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.

The heart of v. 6 is found in those words “nourished in the words”. That leads us to one simple question we should ask ourselves today: “Am I nourished by God's Word on a daily basis?”

## Dangers of Spiritual Malnutrition

Spiritual malnutrition is one of the great dangers of 21<sup>st</sup> Century life. A malnourished life is a weak, aimless, and often defeated spiritual life. The vital byproducts of a nourished soul are absent.

If we are not disciplining, training, and exercising ourselves in good spiritual nutrition, so much of what God has offered us is missed.

Nurturing our lives on God's Word produces strong, healthy, and focused lives!

**Ezra says that daily CLEANSING is lost by neglect of the Word:** “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.” (Psalm 119:9, NKJV)

**Ezra also says that GUIDANCE is lost by neglect of the Word,** so we walk in the dark through life without regular times in God's Word: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Ps. 119:105, NKJV)

**Jeremiah says JOY is lost by neglect of the Word:** “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.” (Jeremiah 15:16, NKJV)

By the time we get to the New Testament we find that nearly every element of the life of a believer flows from allowing God into our lives through His living, Spirit-empowered Word.

**Jesus starts by saying that spiritual LIFE is fed by God's Word:** “But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:4, NKJV)

Then our Lord Jesus Christ models the nourished life. Remember, hard as it may be, that Jesus Christ was 100% human. He came and lived among us to show us how completely He understood and felt all of our struggles.

## Jesus Was Completely Human

Turn back to the book of Hebrews to see the great lengths God has gone to assure us that Jesus felt what we feel, struggled as we struggled, and had to endure what we endure.

Hebrews 2:14-18 (NKJV) Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise **shared in the same**, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and **release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage**. 16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. 17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For in that **He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted**.

Hebrews 4:15-16 (NKJV) For **we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses**, but was in **all points tempted as we are**, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore **come boldly** to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and **find grace to help in time of need**.

Jesus Christ, lived out before us to see, in the Gospels, the life we can each have: a life that is nourished by spending time alone with God through His Word,

## The Example of Christ's Nurtured Human Life

Jesus lived the perfect human life.

He lived in a whirlwind of activity.

He was constantly eating, walking, talking, and sleeping with twelve men who never seemed to leave Him alone.

Vast crowds, and desperate individuals sought him out.

He was chided, rebuked, and even scoffed at by His own family.

He was the personal target of Satan who tempted Him, Satan who tried to derail Him, and Satan entering people to drive them to destroy Jesus.

He was attacked by every demon that could be rounded up to scream at Him, thrash around in front of Him, and seek to bother Him.

Civil and religious authorities always plotting to catch Him, and take Him off for punishment and execution hounded him.

His life was so full of people and ministry he didn't even have a moment to stop and eat.

Yet in the midst of all that, what was He?

*Peaceful, calm, focused, and confidently following God's will.*

How did He do that?

If we follow Him, we can find His secret. Though we can never be sinless, we can learn and follow His pattern for a life in step with God's will.

So Jesus lived a super full, ultra busy, demanding life. But every time He was seen in the Scriptures He is quiet, composed and led by the Spirit.

He was God, yet as man was living human life the way wants it lived. What did that perfect life on earth have to keep it so strong? What was the secret? The secret is the times Jesus spent alone nurturing His soul with God, time in secret away from everything and everyone else.

## **We are Nourished When we Meet with God**

Jesus had to be alone with God, and Jesus wanted to be alone with God; and Jesus found **times** no matter what was going on and **places** no matter where He was, to be nourished by time alone with God His Father.

Mark 1:35 "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."

Jesus had cultivated the discipline of getting alone with God. He had learned the secret of waiting on God. And as our perfect example, He calls each of us to do the same. We must learn to seek and find a solitary place in our life to regularly get alone with God.

Was this regular in Christ's life? Yes, from start to finish. Notice with me:

Matthew 14:23 And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself **to pray**. Now when evening came, **He was alone there**.

Mark 6:46 And when He had **sent them away**, He departed to the mountain **to pray**.

Luke 6:12 Now it came to pass in those days that He went out **to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God**.

John 6:15 Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, **He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone**.

Jesus Christ, who lived out the life we can each have, nourished by spending time alone with God through His Word, goes on to teach us that a life NOURISHED by God has the:

## **Listening to God's Voice Brings Security**

John 10:27 (NKJV) My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

Do you sometimes feel far away from the Lord? To get right back into that closeness He designed a way for us to hear His voice and get reassured. Like a mother's voice to a troubled child, or a dad's voice to a struggling son: we can hear our Good Shepherd's voice any time we want to. We just open our heart by faith, go to His Word in obedience, and listen.

## **Listening to God's Voice Brings Victory**

John 8:32 (NKJV) And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Each of our struggles, that can slowly enslave us, are defeated by the powerful Word of Christ. Fear, despair, doubt, and confusion each can be surrounded and disarmed by the truth of God's Word.

For example, take a struggling believer who is going through a storm of emotions, fears, and doubts because of three quick blows to their life.

**One:** they just lost their job;

**Two:** they had a car accident that totaled their car on the way home from their last day of work;

**Three:** when they finally made it home, they opened a letter from the hospital, in the pile of mail, that reports that their biopsy was malignant, and they do indeed have cancer.

## Listening to God's Voice Means Trusting God

So, how would a life nourished on the Word of God handle that series of terrible events? By trusting God. What does that mean?

First, **God is Good:** that means everything He does is good, kind, and helpful.

Second, **God is Wise:** that means that He chooses the best way, the right timing, and the best means to accomplish everything in our lives.

Third, **God is All-Powerful:** that means nothing can stop, hinder, thwart, or disrupt His plan.

Finally, **God is Everywhere-Present:** that means He is totally everywhere we are at all times.

So what does it mean to trust a Good, Wise, All-Powerful, and Everywhere-Present God in the situation above, just described?

To help us apply the truths of God to everyday life, just use these four truths to make a box, or a containing wall around those three disasters:

E v e r y o n e s e e r n s e t	God is Good	
	JOB LOSS  <i>Car Wreck</i>  <b>Cancer</b>	G o d  i s  W i s e
God is All-Powerful		

## Putting Problems into Perspective

So we can conclude each time our nourished souls apply the Doctrines of God to life:

**God is either Good** or bad;

**God is either Wise** or dumb;

**God is either All-Powerful** or weak;

**God is either Everywhere-Present** or absent.

The way we respond to trials, troubles, and disasters is a testimony to all who see us about what we believe about God.

## Listening to God's Voice Invites Him to Change Us

John 17:17 (NKJV) Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

Spiritual growth takes place as we spend time alone with God and confess our fears, and ask for Him to make us feel His Presence. God most often explains that when we fear we just need to remember that He is with us.

Spiritual growth takes place as we spend time alone with God and confess our doubts, and ask Him to increase our faith. Like Thomas who doubted, Jesus Christ knows that we are struggling. Instead of rebuking Thomas for doubting and telling him that he should have paid attention better for those three plus years of walking around with Jesus as one of His disciples, look instead at Christ's compassion:

And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

Thomas was not present on the first occasion when Jesus appeared to His disciples after His Resurrection. The others told him about it afterward, but he replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it" (John 20:25 NIV).

Thomas is our pattern; he reflects a part of us because we also struggle and doubt. Yet Christ understands and will meet us at that point of struggle: as He did for Thomas by appearing again a week later when he was present.

Although Jesus offered to fulfill the conditions of Thomas' test, the mere sight of Him was enough; he fell at Christ's feet and worshiped.

Today the hand of a gracious God the Son offers the assurance we can trust Him with all our troubles. He asks each of us to look closely at His hand, for it is a wounded hand, one bearing the print of the nail received when He died for our salvation. By faith you may put out your hand and touch that wound, which is irrefutable evidence of God's great love for you.

The One extending that hand died for you. Allow Him to enclose your hand, to enclose you, and to bring you into that great company of those who possess eternal life and who shall never perish<sup>1</sup>.

Nourishing our souls is getting into God's Presence, believing His Word, and inviting Him to be at work in our lives!

Bring your lack of faith and your doubts to Him.

With the hand of faith, reach out and touch Him today!

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from James Montgomery Boice, *John Volume 3: Those Who Received Him, John 9-12* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), pp. 785ff.



For wherever you are, God is there.

## Nourish Your Soul in God

This morning you can revitalize your walk in this old world by starting or restarting a habit of cultivating time alone with God. Time in the Word and time in prayer, alone with God. The songwriter captures this solitude in secret with God:

*There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God, a place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.*

*There is a place of comfort sweet, near to the heart of God, a place where we our Savior meet, near to the heart of God.*

*There is a place of full release, near to the heart of God, a place where all is joy and peace, near to the heart of God.*

**Chorus:** *O Jesus, blest Redeemer, sent from the heart of God, hold us who wait before Thee near to the heart of God.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Near to the Heart of God, Hymn #497, Cleland B. McAfee, 1903