

The Discipline of Time: “Rejecting Profane & Empty Living”

1 Timothy 4:7a

One of the greatest dangers we face each day as believers is slowly allowing God’s influence over our lives to wane. This condition makes God weightless in our lives. He no longer weighs upon every thought, every choice, and every action of our day.

I wonder how many of us this morning really think that this message is for us. Before we dive in, perhaps we should do a little test for what may be called:

The Great Disconnect

First we think, what is the title of today’s message? *The Discipline of Time: “Rejecting Profane & Empty Living” (1 Timothy 4:7a)*

“Hmmm”, we think, “not sure that I am involved in anything profane (whatever that is), or that I am living in any way that is empty”.

So, that means I don’t have to really think much about the next 45 minutes. Right?

That is the exercise that takes place, almost unconsciously across America in Bible teaching churches each week. People sit there, notice the topic, do a quick assessment, and tune to other thoughts while they sit through the message.

But now, we need to go on and do the test to determine whether God has become “weightless” in our lives. This test is simple:

*How much do God and His Word, directly challenge me,
into changing the way I think and act on a daily basis?*

Is God Weightless in Your Life?

A believer, not actively engaged in exercising *The Discipline of Time*, by “*Rejecting Profane & Empty Living*”: will slowly become amused, carried along, floating with the current of the world, and going away from God.

This doesn’t mean that a believer immediately goes against God; rather, it is a slow process of the Lord having less and less influence over the priorities of life.

Recently David Wells, a gifted theologian and one of the two founders of the current Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, expressed this condition well as he said:

It is one of the defining marks of our culture that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that God is ethereal, but rather that God has become unimportant.

He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable. He has lost his saliency for human life.

Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God's existence may nonetheless demonstrate by their habits and beliefs that:

- *God is **less interesting** than television,*
- *God's **commands are less authoritative** than their appetites for affluence and influence,*
- *God's **judgments are no more awe-inspiring** than the evening news; and*
- *God's **truth is less compelling** than the advertisers' sweet fog of flattery and lies.*

That is weightlessness. It is a condition we have assigned God to, after having nudged him out to the periphery of our secularized life.

Weightlessness tells us nothing about God but everything about ourselves, about our condition, about our psychological disposition to exclude God from our reality¹."

As we open to 1 Timothy, we are opening to a set of exercises prescribed by God to maintain the health of individual members of Christ's Church throughout all the ages: *from the Cross until His Return*. These are God's instructions for us in:

Battling Profane & Empty Living

Paul wrote down what God's Spirit moved him to write.

We have already seen the first two: the Discipline of Truth, and the Discipline of Devotion.

Now we come to the third in verse 7, but this one would have jumped off the page for everyone in the First Century; but not so much for us.

For a moment, let me show you a screen shot of this text God sent through Paul, but with the parts God wanted emphasized shown in a bright fluorescent orange so that we English speakers and readers can see what those who received Paul's letter in their native language would have instantly seen. Here is what the text looks like:

¹ David Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a world of fading dreams* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 88, 90.

A Good Servant of Jesus Christ

⁶ If you instruct the brethren in [these] things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, ⁷ nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine [which] you have carefully followed. ⁸ But **reject** profane and old wives' fables, and **exercise** [yourself] toward godliness. ⁹ For **foolishly** exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, ¹⁰ having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. ¹¹ This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. ¹² For to [his] and ¹³ we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, [who] is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. ¹⁴ [These] things **command** and **teach**.

Remember that the Greek language has a built in method of showing what is emphasized, by use of a grammatical form statements can be bolded and highlighted for emphasis. That emphasis is called the Imperative Mood. As we enter into v. 7 we bump right into the first of twelve in a row, of these emphasized truths, before we finish the chapter.

If the Lord wanted our attention, He could have used no greater method than to bunch together these dozen requests for us to decide upon, that we see in this chapter.

See how those two words “reject” and “exercise” just jump off the page? God designed it that way. Now what exactly does He want us to notice? The proximity suggests a contrast: reject distractions and pursue attractions is one way we could express this.

A quick study of definitions gives us this insight:

- **“Profane”** is associated with godless things that distract our minds; and
- **“Fables”** are just that: thoughts and activities that are untrue and unprofitable to invest our most precious resource of time and our most vital activity of thinking deeply.

God is explaining that to get the best results from our exercises, disciplines, or training (the second half of v. 7), we need to first respond to His call to reject, avoid, pass by anything that makes God “weightless”, which Paul writes are profane and foolish things.

Welcome to the next installment of:

Biblical Exercises for Spiritual Health & Fitness in 2014

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

1 Timothy 4:7 (NKJV) But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.

God is asking us to give our ***mind surrendered to His control.***

God is looking for godly, mature believers who will make it a life-long goal to resist the temptation of self-absorption in all the activities of life and instead begin to seek what God desires for their lives.

People of Paul's day were immersed in a self-seeking, lust-feeding culture.

When they came to Christ they had to go on living in that world. To make it through life without getting neutralized, defeated, and sidelined, Paul starts with the key to godly living, which is:

Avoiding what Displeases God

These exercises from God are to train ourselves in regularly seeking out what pleases Him. In the world that the New Testament was written, saints learned that they had to avoid the overpowering culture of amusements. Most Roman citizens were drawn into the gaming world of spectacles in the arenas.

A non-stop calendar of events began in the capital city of Rome and soon went to the furthest flung provinces, of ever increasingly exciting spectacles: live gladiatorial fights to the death; and men vs. ravenous beasts; and beasts vs. beasts fighting to the death; duels, bloody deaths, shocking sights, and intense visual stimulation. The roar of the crowds became intoxicating and no one wanted to miss the events that often ran all day long for days at a time.

That is why Paul the Apostle wrote to a church nearby Ephesus, where Timothy was serving. Just 100 miles from where 1 Timothy was sent, Colosse was also in the middle of the most Roman province of all. Paul wrote believers in Asia Minor where both Ephesus and Colosse were being doused with everything the Roman Empire had to offer.

Pointing Your Mind Towards God

Paul had a very simple command in chapter 3: *choose where you will park your mind, and you choose your destiny.* Listen to his sobering words breathed out by the Spirit of God through Paul God's faithful servant:

Colossians 3:1-4 (NKJV) If then you were raised with Christ, ***seek those things which are above***, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 ***Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*** 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

The overpowering Gladiatorial gaming culture of the 1st Century that troubled, tempted, and weakened the early church has morphed into an even more alluring

21st century, irresistible, and almost inescapable culture, that even the lost world is sitting up and sounding a warning cry about. We need to:

Beware of the Ultimate Temptation

The ultimate temptation is anything that can distract us from God. We are to love Him most, seek Him first, program Him as our destination in life, set Him as the start-up page of our day, and tune our minds to listen Him.

All of those choices come back to our minds. Anything that can even slightly pull our minds regularly away from God is a temptation. Today we live with seemingly the strongest and most universal temptation since the days of Noah.

Have you stepped back and seen where the entire culture of both America and the world are heading?

Almost four years ago, Adam J. Cox is a clinical psychologist wrote a journal article describing the effect on young people, of today's nearly universal contact with electronic stimuli. Here is a summary of his article in the New Atlantis Journal²:

“Fifty years ago, the onset of boredom might have followed a two-hour stretch of nothing to do. In contrast, boys today can feel bored after thirty seconds with nothing specific to do.”

The ubiquitous barrage of battery-powered stimuli delivered by phones, computers, and games makes “the chaos of constant connection” an addictive electronic narcotic.

As continuous stimulation becomes the new normal, “gaps between moments of heightened stimulation” are disappearing; amusement “has squeezed the boredom out of life.” For the hyper-stimulated, “the synaptic mindscape of daily life” becomes all peaks and no valleys.

Cox worries about the deficits in the communication abilities of young males for whom a “womb of all-encompassing stimulation” induces “a pleasant trance from which they do not care to be awakened.”

Self-absorption, particularly among young males, may be the greatest danger of immersion in the bath of digital amusement: “Not only does withdrawal into electronica enable them to bypass the confusion and pain of trying to give their emotions some coherence; it also helps them avoid the realities of being a flawed, vulnerable, ordinary human being.”

Cox doubts it is a mere coincidence that “the stratospheric increase in diagnosed learning and attention deficits” has correlated with “the advent of the electronic playground.” When so many Americans meet the diagnostic criteria for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, it “is arguably no longer a disorder at all—it’s just the way we are.”

² The costs of ‘the chaos of constant connection.’ George F. Will, August 14, 2010 <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/08/14/will-boredom-and-the-costs-of-constant-connection.html> [272 words]

Yes, “we.” Not just boys but adults of both sexes, too, seem insatiably hungry for handheld devices that deliver limitless distractions.

Neuroscience demonstrates that the brain is not a finished product; neural networks can be rewired by intense and prolonged experiences.”

The Discipline of Time: “Rejecting Profane & Empty Living”

To the culture so much like ours today, Paul wrote two thousand years ago. But unlike the unsaved and uninspired Adam J. Cox, Paul spoke the supra-cultural, timeless, and divinely empowered words of the Scriptures in Colossians 3 and 1 Timothy 4.

Paul says harness your wandering minds, look in your sights above, tune your souls to Heaven not Earth.

The universal application is that God wants all of us to be: serious about spiritual things; and God Wants all of us restoring others to serious spiritual living.

The Vital First Step

When Paul addressed the church of the first century, he was talking to a world so much like our own.

God wants believers who do not succumb to worldly influences that dull their mind. Any desire, unrestrained by God’s grace can become an intoxicating idol.

Things as harmless as: comfort, convenience, security, work, sports, and amusements—unrestrained by God’s grace, can become as deadly and powerful as addictions to alcohol, drugs, and sex. God becomes weightless because we are:

Drowning Out the Holy Spirit’s Voice

God speaks to us through His Word in what the Bible describes as a ‘still small voice’.

God doesn’t shout, nor does He push. He whispers and waits.

- **Avoid Shallowness.** Do you struggle to find time to think about God's Word long enough to apply it? Yet you have time for reading the news, emailing, checking financials, and sports? *That is the danger sign of God becoming weightless in our life.*
- **Avoid Forgetfulness.** Do you forget quickly what you read in the Word, and can’t think of a way to apply it in your life, yet you are able to describe

vacations, sports events, and your favorite movies? *That is the danger sign of God becoming weightless in our life.*

- **Avoid Indifference.** Is your job, your finances, finding a girl or boy friend, or doing well in school more important than the Lord? Do you go to work, do your homework and excel at everything but your spiritual life? *That is the danger sign of God becoming weightless in our life.*
- **Avoid Materialism.** Are you on a carefully devised financial stability and security plan, yet you always seem to never quite have enough time to let the Word into your life each day? *That is the danger sign of God becoming weightless in our life.*
- **Avoid Neglecting God.** *What do you do first each day: check the news, read your emails, check your FaceBook or get into the Word? If it's not God's Word first then that is the danger sign of a mind not surrendered to God, and He is becoming weightless.*

To Discipline my Time by Rejecting Profane & Empty Living I must: **Reverse the Erosion**

To be useful God wants a reverent mind and life. The only way to cultivate a reverent mind is to feel the weight of obedience to God's command that we first reset our minds Godward, as Colossians 3:1-2 exhorts us:

*If then you were raised with Christ, **seek those things which are above**, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 **Set your mind on things above**, not on things on the earth. (NKJV)*

Then with God as our homepage and target, we decide that it is our responsibility to throttle, weaken, and by God's grace: mortify our lusts, as Colossians 3:5, 8 tells us.

*Therefore **put to death** your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 8 But now you yourselves are to **put off** all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. (NKJV)*

To mortify means "to throttle sin and crush it in our lives, sapping it of its strength, rooting it out, and depriving it of its influence." Mortification involves the

cultivation of new habits of godliness, combined with the elimination of old sinful habits from our behavior.

The only way to recover from the irreverence of an eroded mind, a mind that has gotten neutralized, where evil seeps in a bit more each day, is to pursue personal sanctification:

To Discipline my Time by Rejecting Profane & Empty Living I must:
Starve My Flesh

Romans 13:14 But **put on the Lord Jesus Christ**, and **make no provision** for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. NKJV

Cut all supply routes.

If there are magazines, videos, games, social media, and so on, that are less than Christ-like, then I must disable them.

Do whatever it takes to starve the influences that make God weightless in your life, and in of your family.

Put on Christ & Starve my flesh!

To Discipline my Time by Rejecting Profane & Empty Living I must:
Saturate Myself With the Word

After you read and ponder, work on memorizing key Scriptures that can help you have greater victory over sin, and then regularly meditate upon those verses.

Meditate day and night!

Joshua 1:8 "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **meditate in it day and night**, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. NKJV

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ **dwell in you richly** in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. NKJV

Today, God asks for every believer in Christ's Church to make daily choices to regain and maintain a mind surrendered to God's gracious sanctifying power. Resist any weightlessness of God in your life.

How much do God and His Word directly challenge me: into changing the way I think and act on a daily basis. That is:

The Discipline of Time: “Rejecting Profane & Empty Living”

The choice is yours.

#390 May the Mind

May the mind of Christ, my Savior, Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling All I do and say.

May the Word of God dwell richly In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph Only through His power.

May the peace of God my Father Rule my life in everything,
That I may be calm to comfort Sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing, This is victory.

May I run the race before me, Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus As I onward go.

May His beauty rest upon me, As I seek the lost to win,
And may they forget the channel, Seeing only Him.