

# Starve the Flesh; Feed the Spirit

## Train Yourself for the Goal of Godliness

### I. Introduction

- A. Me: I have always been the kind of person who needs a goal or a deadline
  - 1. Growing up, If I had a deadline for a paper, I would be disciplined to get it done on time, doing my best effort, etc
  - 2. If I knew that I was going to run a race with friends, it was easy to be committed to preparing through it w/ training
  - 3. When I thought we were moving overseas, I had no problem giving books away, learning how to live with less stuff
  - 4. But when I don't have a clear goal, it's really hard for me to stay engaged
    - a) Story: Trumpet in HS, Mr Y getting frustrated at me
- B. We: Many people are like me, maybe most of us
  - 1. Some people are self-disciplined, but we secretly hate them. I think MOST of us need a clear goal to stay motivated.
  - 2. This is why some people keep going to school – without a goal, you might not be motivated to study (Props to Breton)
  - 3. This is why some people love STREAKS on YouVersion or DuoLingo
  - 4. This is why people “do it for the likes!”
  - 5. We are motivated by goals → whether those goals are good or not
  - 6. Goals keep us focused, keep us motivated, and help us say YES and NO to the right or wrong things that get in the way of those goals
- C. Donald Whitney, PhD in Spiritual Formation, stated that when you don't have a goal, *all discipline will feel like drudgery*
  - 1. E.G. If you don't know why you are doing something (or if you don't care about something), it feels like a burden
  - 2. E.G. If I say, “Read your Bible and pray; it's what Christians are supposed to do.” → that's not very motivating
  - 3. If I say, “You're going on a mission trip in two weeks. You need to get your heart in the right place before you leave.” → that's a clear goal
  - 4. But what if I explain it like this, “The goal of your faith is godliness → becoming CLOSE to Jesus and becoming LIKE Jesus. One day, you will be WITH him and LIKE him (when you die or he comes back). But until then, you need to pursue Him through things like reading the Word and praying in faith so that TODAY you can be close to him and be like him.”
  - 5. If you understand the goal → being close to Jesus and becoming like Jesus, the means to that goal (in this case reading the Bible) is more easily understood. It's easier to see the WHY and the RESULT

### II. The Tension of the Spiritual Disciplines

- A. The goal of your faith IS godliness → closeness to Jesus and becoming like Him

1. This is why he died on a cross to pay for our sins – to save sinners
  - a) He wants to be close to you...
2. God created us in his image, but that image was broken. He wants to remake us in the image of his son!
  - a) He wants us to be like him
3. All of this is a work of his grace, not your rule-following
  - a) *Phil 1:6*
  - b) *Phil 2:12-13, Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*
4. It is God's work – he does the new creation and sanctification – but we can either cooperate with him in the process, or we can get in the way
- B. To put it another way, his grace saves us, but we are called to holiness
  1. Eph 2:8–9 Affirms our salvation by grace alone through faith alone
    - a) Salvation is a gift, but godliness requires active growth
- C. The book of 1 Timothy is written to the young pastor by Paul, his mentor
  1. Timothy was left in the city of Ephesus to help the church get healthy
  2. They had some unhealthy teachers who were teaching that you became godly by obeying rules related to diet, festivals, sabbath, circumcision, etc
- D. Paul says, "That's bad doctrine. The gospel alone makes you godly, and it's only by focusing on the gospel more that you grow in godliness."
- E. This is how he explains all this in *1 Timothy 4:6–10, [6] If you put these things [gospel truth] before the [church], 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. [7] Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; [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. [9] The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. [10] For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. (ESV)*
  1. Paul tells Timothy that if he wants to be a good servant of Jesus, he needs to be trained in the words of the faith and good, gospel doctrine
  2. The opposite of gospel is myth, conspiracy, garbage, youtube, etc
  3. Paul says if you WANT to grow in godliness (literally for the purpose or the goal of godliness), then you need train yourself
    - a) Literally: vigorously exercise yourself towards the goal of godliness → spiritual exercise
  4. To explain this, Paul says that people train for physical goals all the time, and that's fine, but it fades
  5. Godliness, on the other hand, starts now and lasts into eternity

6. E.x.: It's great that you're doing 75 Hard or Dry January, but as soon as you stop (b/c of time or injury), so do the benefits. When you exercise spiritually, however, the results start now and never go away
7. YOU: How many physical goals, work goals, money goals do you have for this year? Do you have any spiritual goals? Paul would say, "Get some perspective..."

F. So, how, Paul? How do I spiritually exercise? How do I train for godliness?

III. Training for the goal of godliness, across the Bible and in Paul's writings as well, involves two things with one focal point: Starve the flesh (metaphor for the part of you that loves that which is passing away), and feed the Spirit (the eternal part of you)

A. By starving the flesh and feeding the Spirit, we say NO to the flesh and YES to the things of God so that we can focus on GOD and what he wants

B. Let's look at Galatians 5, highlighting a few key verses.

*1. v16 So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. 17 The sinful nature [the flesh] wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature [the flesh] desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.*

a) Your flesh is at war with your Spirit

*2. 19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, 21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

*22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*

*24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. 25 Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.*

a) Paul says that when you feed the flesh, give it what it wants, it craves MORE flesh, and the evidence of a flesh-driven life is all those things he mentioned → outbursts of anger, jealousy, division, greed, etc.

b) But when you feed the Spirit, it craves MORE spirit, and the evidence of a Spirit-filled life is also clear → love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc

(1) E.G. You don't necessarily say, "I am going to have peace."  
As you pursue the things of the Spirit, you gain peace

- C. Starving the Flesh
  - 1. Starving the flesh is intentionally denying sinful desires and habits
  - 2. A choice to engage in spiritual disciplines always starves the flesh on some level
    - a) Ex: You get up at 500am to read the Bible and I starve my desire to sleep in
    - b) Ex: Pause to PRAY when you could do something “productive”
    - c) Ex: Choose to be still instead of filling your mind/eyes with iPhone
- D. Simultaneously, if I starve the flesh and do something spiritual instead, I am Feeding the Spirit
  - 1. Feeding the Spirit is like constant spiritual intake → Bible reading, meditation, prayer, worship, fellowship
  - 2. As I starve the flesh and feed the Spirit, I experience transformational growth: I grow closer TO Jesus and become more LIKE Jesus
    - a) E.g. I grow in godliness
- IV. Common Misunderstandings
  - A. There’s a difference between legalism vs. Grace-Fueled Discipline
    - 1. Legalism says, “do this external action and you earn God’s favor”
    - 2. Spiritual disciplines are not legalistic rituals that earn us anything
    - 3. They help us to fix our eyes and mind on the gospel and God’s grace
    - 4. Disciplines don’t earn salvation, but they facilitate a deeper relationship with Jesus
      - a) E.g. talking to a girl doesn’t make you married, but you should probably talk to your wife if you want a good relationship
  - B. Misconception: “Spiritual Disciplines are Works-Based Righteousness”
    - 1. Rules can’t change you. That’s what Paul is arguing against
      - a) Dietary rules, sabbath rules, festivals → these have no power to transform you from the inside out
      - b) They have the appearance of wisdom, but lack no power to curb the flesh
    - 2. Disciplines point us back to the gospel, not away from it
    - 3. They help us fix our eyes where they need to be focused → Jesus
  - C. Spiritual Disciplines vs. Extrabiblical Practices
    - 1. There are lots of “worldly” ways to manage stress or calm your anxiety → like gardening or exercise. Those aren’t spiritual disciplines
    - 2. It doesn’t mean they aren’t valuable, but they aren’t “necessary”
    - 3. The disciplines we see in the Bible (prayer, the Word, fasting, stillness, biblical meditation, service, community, giving, etc) → these are sufficient and necessary to grow in godliness by his Spirit
- V. Summary, Conclusion, Call to Action
  - A. Recap Key Points
    - 1. Godliness is our ultimate goal, pursued through intentional spiritual disciplines
    - 2. We are saved by grace, but must actively participate in our sanctification

3. Starving the flesh and feeding the Spirit are daily practices that shape our character
- B. Chuck Harrison's comment on "15 min quiet times"
- C. If you have any heroes of church history in your mind, from George Mueller to Martin Luther, from Dietrich Bonhoeffer to CS Lewis, from St Augustine to Elisabeth Elliot, I can tell you with confidence that they were disciplined people
1. It is not as though the godliness of these brothers and sisters happened with some lightning bolt, microwaving them into godliness
  2. No, their godliness was formed in the crucible of suffering mixed with a heavy dose of spiritual discipline
    - a) You cannot control suffering, but you can control discipline
    - b) Suffering and life circumstances change us from the outside in, but disciplines change us from the inside out
- D. I have never known someone with whom I was spiritually impressed who did not have a vibrant life of spiritual discipline → I would bet it is the same for you
- E. But let's be honest, discipline is hard. All discipline takes work. Sometimes it feels like drudgery... like a chore... like a check box
- F. Here's my advice to you
1. If it feels like drudgery, you're forgetting the goal.
  2. The goal is to be closer to Jesus.
  3. The goal is to become more like Jesus.
  4. If you realize that THIS is the tangible goal, discipline becomes a little bit easier to manage
  5. If you commit yourself to embracing and enacting these disciplines in 2025, you WILL be closer to Jesus, you WILL become more like Jesus
- G. But if you don't embrace the disciplines, you are hoping that by haphazard chance or suffering you grow
- H. I'd prefer the suffering of discipline to the suffering of my own folly**
- I. Church, we are invited to draw closer to Jesus and to become like him, and one day we will be like him fully
1. But in the meantime, we need to embrace the work of discipline
  2. If you could only scratch at the end result // if you could see the goal with a little bit more clarity, I promise you that it won't feel like work, it will be your joy!
- J. Ask: "Will you commit to a disciplined walk with Christ today?"
1. Sign up for Victor's class
  2. Begin implementing what you learn each week