

# **Biblical Exercises for Spiritual Health & Fitness in 2014**

1 Timothy 4:1-16

As we each stand at the doorway of a New Year, it is always a time of reflection, resolutions, and thoughts about what we really want to focus upon in the days ahead. This feeling is not new, it almost seems that God built into the seasons of both the Earth and of human life this element of pause, reflection, and renewal.

Just as the burst of life in Spring, and the flourishing of Summer into the harvest of Autumn, leads into the quietness and slowness of Winter to prepare and reflect upon the burst of Spring. So each New Year we pause to think about how to focus on what really matters. That is what this series is about:

## **Learning What Really Matters to God**

As we open to the New Testament epistle of 1 Timothy, we will find that God's Word has a guide for us. There are lessons about what really matters to God from the example of Christ's retreats for prayer and waiting upon His Father; and David's Psalms from the alone times of reflection in the caves and wilderness; but we can see God's priorities for us most clearly from Paul's instructions to the Church through his training of Timothy.

Paul actually lays down a plan for Timothy to train the church he served, as well as individual leaders he nurtured. This plan has specific chosen "exercises" (as the KJV and NKJV call them); or personal "disciplines" (as the NASB calls them); or individual "training" steps (as the ESV and NIV call them).

These truths are all placed in one very powerful, very useful, very strategic chapter in God's Word: 1 Timothy chapter 4. Today we begin a brief look at what we may call:

## **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 4:1-16 (NKJV) Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot

iron, 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; 5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. 6 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. 7 But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. 8 For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. 9 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. 10 For to this end 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. 11 These things command and teach. 12 Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. 13 Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. 14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. 15 Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. 16 Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

What is really amazing is that when we really examine these words God sent to us we find that we have:

## These are Spiritual Exercises from God Himself

Nestled right in the midst of those incredible 326 English words, translated from the 225 Greek words, into the 16 verses of this chapter: we have the demonstration of genuine spiritual life-coaching, poured out from the heart of Timothy's father-in-the-faith, Paul.

Look at the basic divisions of this chapter:

1. **Timothy:** Expose Evil Doctrines & Teachers (4:1-6a)
2. **Timothy:** Nourish your own Soul spiritually (4:6b)
3. **Timothy:** Reject all forms of profane & empty living (4:7a)
4. **Timothy:** Pursue personal Godliness (4:7b-10)
5. **Timothy:** Command and Teach others to Exercise themselves in Godliness (4:11)
6. **Timothy:** Live an Exemplary Life (4:12)
7. **Timothy:** Attend to Your personal Mastery of God's Word (4:13)
8. **Timothy:** Use the Giftedness God Gave to You (4:14)
9. **Timothy:** Devote Yourself to Christ (4:15)

## 10. **Timothy:** Never Stop Regularly Examining Your own Lifestyle (4:16)

But each of these lessons Paul taught to Timothy surround a sense that they were ongoing, not just single use. In fact, as we look more closely, the Spirit of God inspired Paul to use a word from the arena of sports as very graphic illustration.

Paul packages these spiritual truths in the form of athletic “exercises”, or “disciplines”, or “training sessions”: as the various translations of the Bible render the Greek work in v. 7. Look again with me at 1 Timothy 4:7b in your Bible. Each of you should have one of these before you:

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

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

“ On the other hand, **discipline yourself** for the purpose of godliness<sup>1</sup>;” (NASB)

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

What is so important to note here is that “train yourself to be godly” in its context primarily refers to training ourselves *in and by the Scriptures* for the purpose of godliness. Our *diet* is to be the Scriptures, and we are to *exercise* ourselves in them. We will become godly only through the most godly Book ever written—God’s own Word.<sup>92</sup>

Our *diet* is to be “every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God”, and we are to *exercise* ourselves in God's Word.

We can see the key idea of this passage through one of the words that God chose to use to describe what He expects from us.

### **The Word God Chose**

**γυμνάζω:** to control oneself by thorough discipline—‘to discipline oneself, to keep oneself disciplined.’ γύμναζε δὲ σεαυτὸν πρὸς εὐσέβειαν ‘keep yourself disciplined for a godly life’ 1 Tm 4:7. In a number of languages the equivalent of ‘to discipline oneself’ is literally ‘to make oneself obey.’ This may sometimes be expressed idiomatically as ‘to command one’s heart.’<sup>3</sup>

Kent Hughes, pastor of College Church in Wheaton said it this way: “Gymnasticize (exercise, work out, train) yourself for the purpose of godliness” conveys the feel of

---

<sup>1</sup> “godliness” is a key word in 1 Timothy, occurring seven times: 3:16; 4:7,8; 6:3, 5, 6, 11.

<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *Guard the Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, R. K., & Chapell, B. (2000). *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: to guard the deposit* (p. 108). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

<sup>4</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

what Paul is saying. Run until your feet are like lead, and then choose to sprint. Pump iron until your muscles burn, until another rep is impossible, then do more.<sup>4</sup>

## **This Exercise is God-Centered**

We know hard work is necessary in athletics, the arts, and sciences; but when it comes to our spiritual life, we hesitate. The words “*discipline, train, exercise*” sound so much like legalism. But this line of thinking is incorrect.

Legalism is always self-centered, whereas the disciplines are always God-centered. The heart of a legalist thinks: “Doing this will help me gain merit with God”. The heart of the follower of Christ thinks: “I want to do this because I love God and seek to please Him”.

Paul had great experience in knowing this difference, so he never would give an inch to legalists, while constantly challenging believers everywhere to “exercise, train, discipline yourself toward godliness”

Paul’s life is a legendary example of personal denial and sacrificial discipline, yet always he places the source of his strength as God’s grace. Listen to what Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:10 (NKJV): But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me.

## **Personal Daily Choices to Stay Spiritually Healthy & Fit**

Paul is laying out the survival guide for operating in less than ideal conditions. Timothy was more than anything else, “normal”. He was neither an apostle nor a prophet. He didn’t write Scripture, he just tried to understand it, live it, and teach it.

Timothy is probably more like each of us than most other New Testament personalities. If you had read his FB page back then you would have noticed a few things about Timothy. There are biographical notes that can be found in Acts and 1 & 2 Timothy: Timothy was from a less than perfect home; he struggled with fear, sorrows, and opposition. He frequently cried, and Paul had to keep encouraging him not to quit.

That is where many believers may find themselves at the dawn of this New Year called 2014: coming from a less than perfect home; facing struggles with fear, sorrows, and opposition; wanting not to quit.

---

<sup>4</sup> Hughes, R. K., & Chapell, B. (2000). *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: to guard the deposit* (p. 108). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

But, above all those challenges Timothy faced personally, there was also the horrible place that he had to live. Paul had urged Timothy to stay on and serve at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3).

## **Ephesus was a Very Distracting Place to Live**

Ephesus was a place of great materialism, sensuality, distractions, and amusements. With the words of Acts 19 we remember that there was a very real demonic influence there, plus a huge urban society filled with constant activities. With a huge, bustling seaport that connected Ephesus to the world, as well as all the overland trade routes: all that made this city almost never sleep. It was on the level of a New York City, Chicago, or LA.

So, how does a “normal” believer stay fit and useful for the Lord in that environment? How does an average believer stay spiritually exercised, and disciplined to not get marginalized by society, and not get spiritually neutralized by sin, our flesh, and the strong power of demons surrounding us each day? That is what Paul was addressing. That is what is tucked into this chapter.

These words surrounding 1 Timothy 4:7 may be some of the most timely words from God to each of us today. The same situation that Timothy faced, we also each face, whether we realize it or not.

## **USA in 2014 = Far More Distracting than Ephesus**

Living in Michigan in 2014 means that we each like Timothy are also living in a place and time that is immersed in American materialism. Each of us today live in a place and time overflowing with America’s inescapable sensuality, lusts, and temptations. We are living in a time when amusements and distractions are more available than any time in the history of humanity. There are mobile, digital devices in the hands of 88% of all adults (age 18 and up), and those under 18 are exponentially getting digitally enabled.

That means that right in our hands, right before our eyes, and right into our ears are almost endlessly available at any time of the day or night, and in almost any location: messages, calls, music, games, movies, and everything on the entire world wide web of over 13 billion Google scanned and cached web pages.

Never in human history has it been possible to be as amused as we are today.

So what is the answer God gives? It is found in v. 7: believers who want to stay fit for God’s use, spiritually healthy and strong must choose to “train”, “discipline” or “exercise” themselves for God.

## What are Those Exercises or Disciplines?

Over the centuries the Church has identified various disciplines, and in modern times these have been packaged into books<sup>5</sup>.

The most widely known book on disciplines a generation ago was Richard J. Foster who wrote as a Quaker in his 1988 book called, *Celebration of Discipline The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Where he identifies *twelve disciplines* in three groups of four. **Inward Disciplines:** Meditation; Prayer; Fasting; Study; **Outward Disciplines:** Simplicity; Solitude; Submission; Service; and **Corporate Disciplines:** Confession; Worship; Guidance; and Celebration.

A decade ago a book on disciplines swept the church, written by Rick Warren it was bought and read by tens of millions. *The Purpose Driven Life* organized the *forty spiritual disciplines* into five categories: Planned for God's Pleasure; Formed for God's Family; Created to Become Like Christ; Shaped for Serving God; Made for a Mission.

As you can see there are many books, many disciplines, and many descriptions of these disciplines. But:

## Which Disciplines Does God ask Paul to Command for Us?

What are the areas that Paul writes down for Timothy?

- Paul who knew the entire Old Testament better than any of us.
- Paul who knew from the Apostles and Christ Himself, what had been taught and written? Paul who spoke from a better vantage point than any of us.
- Paul who wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit, to the model of all future pastors (Timothy).

What did Paul say were “the disciplines” to practice?

---

<sup>5</sup> For example the noted President of Wheaton College, V. Raymond Edman, identifies *thirty-one disciplines* in his 1948 Scripture Press book called *Disciplines of Life*, in the form of daily devotionals for a month long focus. These include among others the Disciplines of: discipleship, disease, doubt, duty, disappointment and desire. Donald Whitney has identified *ten disciplines* in his 1991 Nav Press book called *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*: Bible Intake; Prayer; Worship; Evangelism; Serving; Stewardship; Fasting; Silence & Solitude; Journaling; and Learning. Pastor Kent Hughes also wrote in 1991 published by Crossway Books a book called *The Disciplines of a Godly Man* that identified *seventeen disciplines* arranged around four realms: **Relationships** – purity, marriage, parenting, friendship; **Soul** – mind, devotion, prayer, worship; **Character** – integrity, tongue, work, perseverance; **Ministry** – church, leadership, giving, witness, ministry. Jerry Bridges, in his 1994 Nav Press book *The Discipline of Grace, God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness*, identifies *five key disciplines*: Commitment, Convictions, Choices, Watching, and Adversity. Finally, in 2007 Moody Press published Patrick Morley's book called *A Man's Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines* which also lists *twelve disciplines*, arranged around four realms: **Works of God** in creation; **Word of God** in Bible; **Whisper of God** in prayer, worship, Sabbath, fellowship, counsel, fasting, spiritual warfare; **Witness for God** in stewardship, service, and evangelism.



1. **The Exercise of Truth:** Expose Evil Doctrines & Teachers (4:1-6a)
2. **The Exercise of Devotion:** Nourish your own Soul spiritually (6:6b)
3. **The Exercise of Time Investment:** Reject all forms of profane & empty living (4:7a)
4. **The Exercise of Integrity:** Pursue personal Godliness (4:7b-10)
5. **The Exercise of Discipleship:** Command and Teach others to Exercise themselves in Godliness (4:11)
6. **The Exercise of Example:** Live an Exemplary Life (4:12)
7. **The Exercise of Bible Study:** Attend to personal Mastery of God's Word (4:13)
8. **The Exercise of Ministry:** Use The Giftedness God Gave To You (4:14)
9. **The Exercise of Submission:** Devote Yourself to Christ (4:15)
10. **The Exercise of Personal Discipline:** Regularly Examine Your own Lifestyle & Never Step (4:16)

During each of the past twenty centuries of the Church's history believers have practiced the basic, or classic spiritual disciplines. Almost all of these disciplines can be misused, but they are all proven over the centuries as very useful when Biblically balanced.

What is your present spiritual training plan? Which "exercises" are you practicing, and how often do you do them? Over the past year, how is your spiritual training progressing? Like physical exercise, spiritual exercise requires discipline, daily effort, and ongoing commitment. Just like daily exercise strengthens our muscles, so our daily spiritual disciplines can strengthen our "spiritual muscles."

## Focus Upon the Classics

The five classic Biblical disciplines ought to be part of every Christian's life:

- **The Discipline of Bible Study:** Reading God's Word
- **The Discipline of Communication:** Praying
- **The Discipline of Memorization & Meditation:** Applying God's Word
- **The Discipline of Worship:** Attending public worship
- **The Discipline of Surrender:** Giving time, money, and abilities to God's service

## Biblical Exercises for Spiritual Health & Fitness in 2014

This morning, on the doorstep of the year before us, communion is when we stop, reflect, and renew our desire for pursuing God. Please stand with me and summarize our time in the Word with the words of this song: **Take My Life**

**Take my life:** and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

**Take my moments and my days:** let them flow in ceaseless praise.

**Take my hands:** and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.

**Take my feet:** and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.

**Take my voice:** and let me sing always, only, for my King.

**Take my lips:** and let them be filled with messages from Thee.

**Take my silver and my gold:** not a mite would I withhold.

**Take my intellect:** and use every power as Thou shalt choose.

**Take my will:** and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine.

**Take my heart:** it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne.

**Take my love:** my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.

**Take myself:** and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.

—Frances Ridley Havergal, 1874