

For to this End We Toil and Strive

Two Ways to Train as a
Good Servant of God

1 Timothy 4:6-10

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Introduction

Where should you start if you want to serve God? How should you prepare to be helpful to the Lord? How can you get ready to be a good workman? Many of you are making plans to serve this summer. I think this is a good thing. But we should serve with a strategy in mind. God's Word actually gives us instructions on what it means to serve well.

This sermon is going to be a mini-theology on serving. As you listen, be on the lookout for the answers as to how we are to serve, who we are to serve, why we serve, and when we are to serve. Notice I didn't mention *what* we are to do when we serve - and that's because serving can look different for all of us. But I'll also explain that serving, in a sense, should not be confined to a single activity - but something you do over your entire life.

The last time I preached, I talked about being a leader. Leaders are still servants. This is the answer as to who we are to serve. We all follow Christ's example of gladly serving God and each other, "Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

Context

The context of our passage today is that Paul has been telling Timothy about the false teachers and how to combat them. Paul has presented Timothy with the orthodox, pure Gospel - and warning Timothy not to wander from it. If he puts this true Christian faith in front of his fellow Christians, he will be a good servant of Jesus:

*If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a **good servant** of Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 4:6)*

Paul is talking about being a minister of the Gospel. Timothy is to set an example for all believers to follow as we all strive to serve God.

Sermon Preview

Our sermon will show two ways to train as a good servant of God. This is *how* we are to serve.

I use the word train because that is the word that gets repeated in the text. The word train means to be reared, brought up, or educated in. We're not talking about training you do for a season – we're talking about training you partake in over your entire life. Serving is not something we do over the summer. Serving God is a lifestyle calling for all Christians.

I will also take an extended look at verse 8 in our text, that tells us to prioritize the spiritual over the physical. I label this as Christ-like character. Let's get started.



1. Good Teaching

First, a good servant trains in good teaching:

*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.** Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. (1 Timothy 4:6-7)*

Doctrine means what is *taught* in the church. Good *teaching*. The false teachers were previously said to have focused on endless genealogies, which promote speculations, instead of stewarding the straightforward truths of the gospel (1 Timothy 1:4). They gave their attention to the absurd, easily overtaken by old wives tales. They were stuck on silly stories. Paul tells Timothy to follow his teaching, the teachings that he was persecuted and suffered for (2 Timothy 3:10). Paul was serious about staying true to good teaching. He emphasized the saving knowledge of God before serving him.

So, will you value sitting, listening, and learning before serving? When I'm talking about sitting, I'm referring to sitting at the feet of Jesus. To listen. To learn. Abide in Christ before you act for Christ. I don't think it's an accident that Paul places this point first. We need to know the God who we are serving, and we need to know how we are to serve him. We do this by letting Christ be the root of our service before we try to see the fruit of our service. Consider the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. These were two sisters who welcomed Jesus into their home. While Martha was distracted with much *servicing*, Mary sat at the Lord's feet and *listened* to his *teaching*. These are the specific words in the text and the connection is incredible. Jesus commended Mary for choosing to fellowship with him first, to sit, listen and learn.

I want to talk about Sunday School. I love Sunday School. For some of you, Sunday School might be your least favorite part of church in general. But I'm very grateful that our church values the time we have in Sunday School. Preaching from the pulpit presents a different dynamic than teaching a class. And while small groups are good, our church uses small groups for more relational fellowship. We are privileged to have a place where we can sit under good teaching, to learn doctrine and be guided in Scripture. Our learning should fuel our serving. People burnout in ministry when prioritizing breadth over depth – trying to go farther for God without first going deeper in God. If you think that your serving in youth worship is more valuable than



Sunday School, I think you may be mistaken. It is infinitely more important to say that you know God. I'm not stretching when I say that knowing God is to know his word. You cannot love, obey, or worship God correctly without the proper knowledge of him. And he wants us to grow him in.

It's true that "knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up." (1 Corinthians 8:1) But many forget the next part of this passage that says "if anyone loves God, he is known by God (1 Corinthians 8:3). And Matthew 7:22-23 has Jesus saying: "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" Real sheep recognize the voice of the Shepherd because they hear his Word.

The first way to train as a good servant of God is to train in good teaching.

2. Godly Living

Second, a good servant trains in godly living:

*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. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. (1 Timothy 4:7-9)*

Godliness is godly living. It means piety. It means being holy. When you train for godliness, you're discerning good from evil and choosing what is good - and it's a mark of a mature Christian (Hebrews 5:14). Godliness is valuable in this life and for the life to come - meaning it has an everlasting effect. The false teachers may have been promoting a type of ascetic lifestyle, like forbidding marriage and abstinence from foods (1 Timothy 4:3). Unlike our physical bodies that are wasting away, our spiritual strength has eternal significance. In my own words, this verse says that if you want to be a good servant of God, you must train yourself to have a godly lifestyle of serving him.

So, will you value a lifestyle of serving? Notice the connection between living and serving. This is an important concept. Serving is not confined to a single activity. I used to think that serving in a very specific, narrow sense. I served on the worship team. I served in VBS. It was something I could pinpoint and mark down on my college apps. My view of service was distorted. Servanthood as Worship is a book by Nate Palmer that helped

change my thinking. He equates serving and worship as the same thing. And it's a constant activity. We are either serving ourselves or someone else. This is a very helpful way to think, because you can always ask yourself: Who am I serving? When I'm preaching, is my motivation to serve myself by looking smart? When I'm leading worship, is my motivation to serve myself by looking skilled? In the end, God must take the priority. Being a servant isn't what you do, but it's who you are.

Even more, training for godliness means that you don't act as a hypocrite. Serving is not something you do at church and forget about when you go home. Serving is not to just stay on the stage. Training for godliness, training for godly living, takes place in your everyday life as you dedicate and give everything to God. I don't want to give you the wrong impression: A lifestyle of serving Jesus is filled with joy. Psalm 100:2 says to "Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing." God wants our hearts to be happy in him. And this happiness overflows into our actions as we serve and worship him. Not just at church, but in our homes and schools. With our family and friends. Even as we learn to love and serve our enemies.

The second way to train as a good servant of God is to train in godly living.

Christ-like Character

I want to take some time and zoom in on a small section of our passage:

*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.** (1 Timothy 4:8)*

The verse talks about bodily training, and I want us to think about our preoccupation with our physical appearance in general. We live in a visual world. With photo filters and editing apps, it's easy to focus on our physical features.

For the Christian, I want you to remember how God and the Bible defines beauty. To have the character of Christ is special in the sight of God. Here's a specific Scripture for the men: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature... For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7) And a specific Scripture for the women: "Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you

wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.” (1 Peter 3:3-4)

So, will you value the spiritual over the physical? It might be worthwhile to think about how a lot of service sometimes goes unseen. Physical training shapes and sculpts the body, but spiritual exercise shapes and sculpts your heart. To help others who are younger or weaker. To minister in meekness. Character is built in the quiet moments. It’s being consistent in private so you can be confident in public. This is the type of service that Paul is talking about in our passage today. A life of serving others with Christ-like character is beautiful. It is hard work that requires constant training and practice, but it is joyfully rendered for the sake of the Gospel in order to save and shepherd souls.

God esteems the spiritual over the physical. We would be wise to desire the same. Good servants of God know that true beauty is defined by Christ-like character.



The Gospel

The Gospel is found in our next section, but I need to clarify the text:

*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.** (1 Timothy 4:10)*

Savior of all people actually refers to the universal mission. Jesus came to bring Jews and Gentiles into the family of God. It is a universal, world-wide mission to call others to Christ. This is different from Universalism, a belief that all people no matter what will go to Heaven. The Bible is very clear that our sin separates us from God and only Jesus can save. And so when we're talking about Jesus being the Savior of all people, Paul is telling Timothy that we are called to serve everyone for the sake of the Gospel. In fact, Paul reminds Timothy, and all Christians for that matter, that we have our hope set on Christ. This is the answer as to why we serve. This is why we are even willing to suffer reproach. We toil and strive in serving God and others because Jesus is good and glorious, and he is the Good News of God.

There's a story that shows Jesus as our beautiful model of service. It's the story about Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Jesus teaches at least two things with this act of service. He's giving them an example of how they are to serve each other with humility, how even Jesus as their leader was not hesitant to serve them. But he's also presenting them a picture of the Gospel.

*Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "**If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.**" Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" (John 13:5-9)*

Simon Peter didn't know it, but Jesus really did wash his feet, hands, and head. Simon Peter would be baptized in Jesus' blood. Jesus was saying, in a symbolic way, that he was going to wash their sins away. Christians do not serve because we think that our service, our good works, will get us into Heaven. No. We believe that our works are like filthy rags because we are stained by our sin. We are rebels against God, and we fall short of his glory. Admit that you are a sinner, and believe that Jesus is the Son of God, our Suffering Servant, who lived a perfect life and died on the cross on your behalf. Confess him as the resurrected King over your life and you will be saved. Follow him here on Earth and you will follow him into Heaven. You will be adopted into God's family, and find peace, joy, contentment, and love.



We follow our Savior's example of giving all of ourselves in the service of God and others. Your life will become a living sacrifice, and your service to God will be acceptable because of Christ.

Big Idea

A good servant of God trains in good teaching and godly living for the sake of the Gospel.

Conclusion

Let's go to the beginning again for our conclusion: I asked you: Where should you start if you want to serve God? Paul tells Timothy what it takes to be a minister: Good teaching and godly living. I think it's fitting that we end with another question: How does a servant of God want his ministry to end? What does he want to hear God say?

There's a famous parable of Jesus, where he describes a servant who has served well:

*His master said to him, '**Well done, good and faithful servant.** You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'* (Matthew 25:21)

This is what we want to hear God say to us at the end of our lives. This is meant to motivate and encourage. Notice that the master does not say the servant can stop serving. Instead, he says he will set him over much. He will make him in charge of much more as he continues to serve and steward what he has been given. For those of you here today, God might be teaching you to be faithful in small areas of service this summer. My prayer is that God will continue to grow your heart to not just serve him for a season, but that you will give him the entirety of your life. And this answers *when* we serve. For the Christian, our service on earth continues in heaven along with the rest of the saints - where we will enter into the joy of our master.



Wash

This prayer poem is about how the blood of Jesus makes our service acceptable while doing the will of God and not our own.

Wash my hands.

Wash my feet.

Wash my head.

Wash my knees.

So I can come
Before you Lord
And say I am
Forever yours.

I want to live
A godly life,
And learn to be
A sacrifice.

For from the lips
Of Jesus Christ
He said, “Your will
Be done, not mine.”

And on the cross
His blood made clean –
And from the grave
He set me free!

I raise my hands.
I rest my feet.
I lift my head.
I bow my knees.

References

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Special thanks: Hanley Liu, Kevin Quan, and Jessica Lee