



October 4 — Train for Godliness

Weekly Reading: 1 Timothy 3–6; 2 Timothy 1

Life Group Passage: 1 Timothy 4:7–16

Main Point

Godly character does not develop accidentally; believers train with purpose, practice what God has given them, and let their progress become visible.

Key Verse

“But train yourself in godliness. For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way.”

1 Timothy 4:7–8

Life Group — The Flow

- 15 minutes — Conversation and relationship-building
- 5 minutes — Looking Back
- 5 minutes — Introduction, Background, and Christ Connection
- 30 minutes — Study and Apply
- 5–7 minutes — Application Exercise
- 10 minutes — Pray Through the Passage and Prayer Requests
- 5 minutes — Conclusion

If Time Is Limited...

Focus on:

- Main Point and Key Verse
- Background and Christ Connection
- Read 1 Timothy 4:7–10
- Passage 1 questions 1 and 3
- Read 1 Timothy 4:11–16
- Passage 2 questions 1 and 4
- Application Exercise
- Pray Through the Passage

- Final Takeaway

Looking Back — 5 Minutes

Last week Paul widened our prayers toward all kinds of people because all kinds of people need the one Mediator, Jesus Christ. This week he turns to the disciplined life of a disciple who wants to represent that gospel faithfully.

Discuss one or more:

- Who or what did you add to your prayer life last week?
- Did praying for a leader or difficult person change your attitude toward them?
- Did a gospel prayer create an opportunity to serve or speak with someone?

Transition to Introduction

“Prayer shapes our concern for others. Paul now reminds Timothy that faithful ministry also requires attention to the kind of person we ourselves are becoming.”

Introduction — 5 Minutes

Ask

What skill have you improved at only because you practiced it consistently over time?

Examples may include sports, music, cooking, a trade, parenting skills, exercise, or professional development.

Follow-Up

Why do we sometimes expect spiritual growth to happen more automatically than growth in other areas of life?

Say

No one is surprised that an athlete, musician, or craftsman improves through repeated practice. Yet Christians can sometimes assume that years spent around church will automatically produce maturity.

Paul uses the language of training, practice, devotion, and progress. He is not telling Timothy to earn God’s favor. He is calling a man already saved by grace to take seriously the habits and responsibilities through which God forms a godly life.

Transition to Background

“Timothy’s situation helps explain why Paul cared so much about both his teaching and his visible growth.”

Background

Timothy was serving in Ephesus, where false teachers were confusing the church and promoting distorted ideas about godliness. Paul had charged him to protect sound doctrine while also becoming a trustworthy example.

Timothy was relatively young, which apparently gave some people a reason to dismiss him. Paul’s answer was not to demand respect based on position. He told Timothy to live in such a way that his speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity gave believers a pattern worth following.

The larger paragraph begins by contrasting godliness with irreverent myths and ends by telling Timothy to pay close attention to both his life and his teaching. Christian maturity is therefore neither mere information nor mere behavior. Truth shapes a life, and a faithful life gives credibility to truth.

Transition to Christ Connection

“Training in godliness only makes sense when we remember that grace comes before effort and that our hope is not ultimately in our discipline.”

Christ Connection

The gospel does not say, “Train hard enough and God will accept you.” Jesus has already done what no amount of spiritual discipline could accomplish. Through His perfect life, atoning death, and resurrection, He gives righteousness and life to those who trust Him.

Christian training is therefore a response to grace, not a payment for it. We practice prayer, Scripture, service, self-control, and obedience because we belong to Christ and want our lives to increasingly reflect Him.

Paul says his hope is set on “the living God.” That protects spiritual discipline from becoming self-reliance. Our habits matter, but they are means through which we seek and obey the God who is already at work. We train, practice, and persevere while depending on His grace.

Transition to Study and Apply

“Paul first gives Timothy the larger goal: not merely becoming more knowledgeable, but training for godliness.”

Study and Apply — 30 Minutes

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says and how we can apply it in our lives this week.

Passage 1 — 1 Timothy 4:7–10

Train with Purpose

Read the Passage – Have a volunteer read 1 Timothy 4:7–10.

[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)

Commentary

Use the following commentary to prepare ahead of time. As you lead, summarize the key insights rather than reading everything word-for-word.

Verse 7 tells Timothy to reject pointless, irreverent myths and instead “train yourself in godliness.” The verb Paul uses was associated with athletic training. Growth requires intention, repetition, and the willingness to say no to distractions that do not move us toward the goal.

Godliness means a life oriented toward God—reverence for Him expressed in faithful character and conduct. It is broader than a devotional routine. The goal of Christian training is a whole life increasingly shaped by love for God.

Verse 8 compares physical and spiritual training. Paul does not condemn bodily exercise; he says it has benefit. But its benefit is limited to this present life. Godliness matters now and in the life to come, so its value reaches farther.

Verse 9 emphasizes that this truth is trustworthy and worthy of full acceptance. Paul wants Timothy to take spiritual formation seriously rather than treating it as optional enrichment.

Verse 10 describes ministry as toil and striving, but Paul immediately anchors that effort in hope: “we have put our hope in the living God.” Christian discipline is demanding, but it is not hopeless self-improvement. We labor because the living God is worthy and dependable.

The description of God as “Savior of all people, especially of those who believe” has prompted different interpretations. It should not be used to teach universal salvation, which would contradict Paul’s repeated calls to faith. At minimum, it highlights God as the giver and preserver of life and the unique saving experience of those who believe.

Guide Discussion

You do not need to cover every question. Use those that best help your group engage with the passage.

- 1. Good for Students.** What comparison does Paul make between physical training and training in godliness?
- 2. Discuss.** Why do you think consistent spiritual growth usually requires habits rather than good intentions alone?
- 3. Deeper Dive.** How can spiritual disciplines become unhealthy self-reliance, and how does verse 10 keep our effort anchored in God?
- 4. Reflective — Index Card.** What area of godliness needs more intentional training in your life right now?

Teaching Insight

Say

“Grace does not make training unnecessary; grace gives training its proper foundation. We practice obedience not to become accepted by God, but because in Christ we already belong to Him.”

Transition to Passage 2

“Paul now moves from the image of training to the visible life of a disciple. Timothy’s progress should not remain hidden.”

Passage 2 — 1 Timothy 4:11–16

Let Them See Your Progress

Read the Passage - Have a volunteer read 1 Timothy 4:11–16.

[11] Command and teach these things.

[12] Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

[13] Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

[14] Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

[15] Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.

[16] Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (ESV)

Commentary

Verse 11 calls Timothy to command and teach these truths. Sound teaching is not merely personal enrichment; it is part of his responsibility to the church.

Verse 12 addresses Timothy's youth. Paul does not tell him to win arguments about his age. He tells him to "set an example" in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. Credibility grows when doctrine and life agree.

Verse 13 tells Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching. The Word must remain central in the gathered church. Spiritual maturity is not produced by personality or novelty but by sustained exposure and response to God's truth.

Verse 14 warns Timothy not to neglect the gift God had entrusted to him. Spiritual gifts are not trophies that prove importance; they are stewardships meant to serve God's people.

Verse 15 piles up language of intentionality: practice these things, be committed to them, and let your progress be evident. Paul expects growth to be visible over time. Maturity does not mean never failing; it means there is a discernible direction.

Verse 16 summarizes the responsibility: “Pay close attention to your life and your teaching; persevere in these things.” Neither character nor doctrine can be safely neglected. Paul’s final statement about “saving” himself and his hearers does not mean Timothy earns salvation. His persevering life and teaching are instruments God uses in the continuing work and witness of the gospel.

Consider This — The Repetition No One Sees

An athlete’s most impressive moment may happen in front of a crowd, but the performance is built through hundreds of ordinary repetitions no one applauds: early practices, corrected technique, boring drills, rest, and showing up again.

The same is true of much spiritual growth. Public moments reveal patterns that were usually formed in private long before anyone noticed.

Visible spiritual progress is usually the fruit of repeated, grace-dependent faithfulness when no one is watching.

Guide Discussion

- 1. Good for Students.** What areas of Timothy’s life did Paul say should become an example to others?
- 2. Discuss.** Why is visible progress a healthier expectation than either instant transformation or perfection?
- 3. Deeper Dive.** What can happen to a church leader—or any believer—when attention to teaching grows while attention to personal character shrinks?
- 4. Reflective — Index Card.** If someone watched the direction of your life for the next six months, where would you most want them to see progress?

Teaching Insight

Say

“Christian maturity is not measured merely by how long we have believed, how much we know, or what role we hold. It becomes visible as truth increasingly reshapes speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.”

Transition to Application Exercise

“Training becomes useful when it moves from a vague desire to a repeatable practice. Let’s choose one area where we can train on purpose.”

Application Exercise — 5–7 Minutes

Train • Practice • Progress

Supplies: Index cards and pens

Choose one realistic area. Small, repeatable obedience is usually more fruitful than an ambitious plan that disappears after three days.

1. Train

What area of godliness do you want to strengthen?

- Prayer
- Scripture intake
- Speech
- Purity
- Love and patience
- Serving
- Generosity
- Self-control

2. Practice

What specific practice will you repeat this week, and when will you do it?

- Make it concrete enough that you can tell whether you actually did it.

3. Progress

What would small but genuine progress look like one month from now? Who could encourage you without becoming your spiritual police?

Say

“Do not confuse a small practice with a small goal. God often forms deep character through ordinary faithfulness repeated over time.”

Transition to Pray Through the Passage

“Training is active, but our hope remains in the living God. Let’s ask Him to form the character our effort alone cannot produce.”

Pray Through the Passage — 10 Minutes

Led by the Prayer Champion

Read each verse and prayer prompt aloud. Allow a few moments between prompts for personal reflection and prayer.

If time is limited, use one or two prompts rather than all four. The goal is meaningful prayer through the passage, not completing every prompt.

Prompt 1 — Adoration (Who God Is)

God is living and worthy of our hope.

1 Timothy 4:10 — “We have put our hope in the living God.”

Praise God because He is living, present, and dependable—not an idea or technique on which we must rely.

Prompt 2 — Confession (Where We Need Him)

Our lives and teaching can drift apart.

1 Timothy 4:16 — “Pay close attention to your life and your teaching.”

Confess an area where you have known what is right but have not been practicing it consistently.

Prompt 3 — Gratitude (What He Has Done)

God entrusts gifts for service.

1 Timothy 4:14 — “Do not neglect the gift that is in you.”

Thank God for the abilities, opportunities, and people He has entrusted to you for the good of His church.

Prompt 4 — Response / Obedience (How We Will Obey)

Practice faithfully and pursue visible progress.

1 Timothy 4:15 — “Practice these things; be committed to them, so that your progress may be evident to all.”

Ask God for perseverance in the specific practice you identified and for progress that points others toward Christ.

Prayer Requests, Praises, and Follow-Up

- Ask the group for updates from the previous week's prayer requests and celebrate answered prayers.
- Invite members to share honestly at whatever level they are comfortable so the group can support one another through prayer and practical care.
- Invite prayer for specific areas of growth, discipline, or perseverance without requiring anyone to disclose a sensitive struggle publicly.
- Record requests and praises, share them with the group during the week, and follow up at the next gathering.

Transition to Conclusion

"Paul does not call Timothy to impress people. He calls him to become the kind of person whose progress makes the grace and truth of Christ believable."

Conclusion — 5 Minutes

Final Takeaway

Godliness is not accidental. Because our hope is in the living God, we train with purpose, practice what He has entrusted to us, and persevere until His work becomes visible in our lives.

This Week's Challenge

Respond — *What Will I Do?*

Use your Train • Practice • Progress plan for one week before you evaluate it.

- Schedule the practice rather than merely intending to do it.
- Keep the goal small enough to repeat faithfully.
- Ask one trusted believer to encourage you in the direction you chose.

Reflect — *What Is God Showing Me?*

Consider:

- Where have I expected maturity to happen automatically?
- Which practice most consistently helps me attend to God?
- Is there a gap between what I say I believe and the example my life gives?
- What gift or responsibility have I been tempted to neglect?

Review — *How Will I Keep God's Word Before Me?*

Review 1 Timothy 4:7–8 throughout the week:

“But train yourself in godliness. For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way.”

When discipline feels tedious, remember that godliness has value for both the present life and the life to come.

Read — *How Will I Prepare for Next Week?*

Continue with the church's Year of Prayer New Testament Reading Plan.

Next Week's Reading: 2 Timothy 2–4; Titus 1–2

As you read, notice how Paul connects endurance, sound teaching, Scripture, and the kind of life that adorns the gospel.

Closing Prayer

“Living God, our hope is in You. Thank You that we do not train for godliness in order to earn Your love, but because Christ has already made us Yours. Forgive our passivity, inconsistency, and neglect. Form our speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. Help us devote ourselves to Your Word, use our gifts faithfully, and practice obedience with patience until our progress points others to Jesus. Amen.”