

<b>Series:</b> New Mercies	<b>Reference:</b> 1 Timothy 4:6-9	<b>Title:</b> Good Habits	<b>Date:</b> 01.30.2022
<b>Website Writeup:</b> Cultivating spiritual habits fuels change & growth. Though Christian growth isn't <i>just</i> about self-discipline, habits are a powerful part of our change as believers. We strive as the Scriptures teach to cultivate habits which bring spiritual change.			

## COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Turn with me to p811 in your pew Bibles to 1 Timothy 4:6-9. This is our last sermon in the New Mercies Series, I hope it's been beneficial to you! I've enjoyed preparing & delivering these, and God's speaking to me through this process as well.

1 Timothy 4:6-9 says...*If you point these things out to the brothers & sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith & of the good teaching that you have followed. 7Have nothing to do with godless myths & old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 8For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life & the life to come. 9This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.*

Paul desires Timothy to be a good discipler & leader. To do that, he must first be a good disciple & follower of Jesus himself. And Paul gives him some direction here which we benefit from as well. He encourages him to stay centered on Christ, not to be distracted, which happens so easily, and to cultivate strong good spiritual habits.

Because cultivating spiritual habits fuels change & growth. Though Christian growth isn't *just* about self-discipline, habits are a powerful part of our change as believers. We strive as the Scriptures teach to cultivate good habits which bring spiritual change.

How do we change? Is it only supernaturally? What part do we play in our own change? One area which needs to be stressed when discussing change is the power of habits & decisions.

If you've ever played baseball, you had a coach who taught you how to hold a bat. As you stepped up to the plate, he'd say, "Hold your bat like this," or "Turn your head this way, bend your knees. Face the pitch & follow through." A coach guides you in the nuance of the sport, training you in the right way to play & positioning your body in the correct stance.

God's Word trains us in right living. We aren't told only what *not* to do, but also what we *should* do. And maybe even more so of what to do than not. Paul says for Christians to '*train yourself to be godly.*' (1 Timothy 4:7). Adding that, "*physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things*" (v. 8). Remember, as we said a few weeks ago looking at Romans 12, that when we strive not to conform to the patterns of this

world allowing ourselves to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, the physical body follows suit. As our minds begin to desire the things of Christ, our bodies begin to also desire that which is healthy & good for it. Healthy good activities instead of destructive hurtful ones. Our choices of what we do in the body become better as our minds are taken up in Christ.

Sometimes it helps to break down the words we use daily. Such as 'history' can be broken down as His-Story, or God's story. Another is 'responsible'. We could break that down to being 'able to respond', response-able. God calls us to become people able to respond to life's demands. Not overcome, procrastinate, or lacking in integrity, but responsible, virtuous, godly, holy people since godliness & holiness are synonyms.

Virtue simply comes from a long Greek philosophical tradition meaning 'to function well'. So to be virtuous is to value & practice those things in life which enable one to function best in all areas.

Holiness is becoming Godly in character. Describing a holy or godly life, theologian Richard Foster emphasizes virtues & habit, saying, "Virtue is good habits we can rely upon to make our life work. Conversely, vice is bad habits we can rely upon to make our life not work, to make it dysfunctional, as we say. So a holy life simply is a life that works."<sup>1</sup> Holiness is not a positive word any longer, it's been tainted with the concept of arrogance, judgement & pride, three things it has nothing to do with in actuality.

No one wants to be considered arrogantly 'holier than thou'. But holiness simply means, as Foster said, a life that works. It's actually the opposite of arrogance, judgment & pride, it is humility, reliance & love. God's life & ways work.

As Ecclesiastes & basically all other Scripture teaches, without God life is meaningless descending into chaos & disorder. And as we said a few weeks back, the only thing holding that back in this time of in-between of the kingdom come but not fully come is the remnant of God's likeness in humankind, and the salt & light of Christ's Body, the church in society. Humbly I say, we are to a great extent the living conscience of God in community with non-Believers which holds back further decay.

Sometimes, the life that works is wrongly categorized as arrogant just by the nature of the person making the criticism since their life doesn't work. Jealousy of a life well lived in one makes people like crabs in a bucket, when one tries to get out, the others seek to pull it back down.

Foster also defines what holiness is & is not. He says... "Holiness is *not* rules & regulations. Elaborate lists of dos & don'ts miss the point of a life hidden with God in Christ. No single standard of behavior is dictated by the word *holy*. All external legalisms fail to capture the heart of holy living & holy dying.

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<sup>1</sup> (Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water* [1998; repr., New York: HarperCollins, 1998], excerpted in Richard Foster, "Defining the Holiness Tradition: The Virtuous Life," *Renovaré*, <https://renovare.org/articles/defining-the-holiness-tradition-virtuous-life>)

Holiness is sustained attention to the heart, the source of all action. It concerns itself with the core of the personality, the well-spring of behavior, the quintessence (the most perfect example) of the soul. It focuses upon the formation & transformation of this center.

Holiness is *not* otherworldliness. Its life isn't found by developing logic-tight compartments of things sacred & things secular. We do not come into it by studiously avoiding contact with our manifestly evil & broken world.

Holiness is world-affirming. The holy life is found smack in the middle of everyday life. We discover it while being freely & joyfully in the world without ever being of the world. Holiness sees the sacred in all things. It is integrative, synoptic, incarnational (as we say here, 'Everything is spiritual & our goal isn't to become simply 'weird').

Holiness is *not* a consuming asceticism (severe self-discipline & the avoidance of all forms of indulgence). It's not punishment for the sake of punishment. It neither despises nor depreciates the human body. And it never locates virtue or merit in ascetical exercises themselves (although it may be about healthy self-denial when needed).

Holiness is a bodily spirituality. It affirms the goodness of the human body & seeks to bring it into working harmony with the spirit. It utilizes appropriate Spiritual Disciplines for training the body & mind in right living. It's, in this sense, ascetical but never for the sake of the asceticism, always for the sake of the training (healthy self-discipline).

Holiness is *not* "works-righteousness." We can't muster up our willpower to do good deeds & thereby become righteous. Sanctifying grace, just like justifying grace, is utterly & completely a work of...grace. It's unearned & unearnable. It's a God-initiated & God-sustained reality; we can't do it, conjure it up, or make it happen.

Holiness is a "striving to enter in," as Jesus tells us. *Effort* isn't the opposite of grace; *works* is. Works has to do with merit or earning, and the effort we're called to undertake has nothing whatever to do with meriting or earning anything. In fact, the classical Disciplines - fasting & prayer, for example - have no virtue or merit whatsoever in & of themselves. They merely place us before God in such a way that He can begin building the kingdom-righteousness within us. Foster says "merely" because he wants to underscore that the virtue is all of God, and not to give the impression that our effort is nothing. In the economy of God it's a very important something. (I would add, as Dallas Willard says, "God isn't against effort, but is against earning.")

Holiness is *not* perfectionism. We don't, by some act of divine fiat, become sinless creatures incapable of any wrong action. As holy persons we can still make mistakes - and we do, with sorrowful regularity. We fail. We fall. Even so...

Holiness is progress in purity & sanctity. We're set apart for divine purposes. Holy habits deepen into fixed patterns of life. We experience a growing preponderance of right actions flowing from a right heart. We're ever in the process of becoming holy.

Holiness is *not* absorption into God. It doesn't mean the loss of our identity, or personhood. Through holy living we don't become less real, less whole, less human. Quite the opposite.

Holiness is loving unity with God. It's an ever-expanding openness to the divine Center. It's a growing, maturing, freely given conformity to the will & ways of God. Holiness gives us our truest, fullest, humanity. In holiness we become the persons we were created to be.”<sup>2</sup>

So, holiness or godliness is cultivating spiritual habits which fuel change & growth. Christian growth isn't *just* about self-discipline, habits are a powerful part of our change as believers. We strive as the Scriptures teach to cultivate habits which bring spiritual change. The practice of the spiritual disciplines of life both individually & corporately are the means by which we can enter more deeply into the process of spiritual formation to which 1 Timothy refers & thereby making our lives to glorify Jesus before others.

And it's vital to remember, spiritual formation is firstly a response to the Great Commission in Mt 28:18-20 to go & make disciples of all nations. It's to make ourselves more like Christ in order to glorify Him with our whole lives, becoming living sacrifices to the glory of His name among the nations. It's not spiritual navel gazing, where we just selfishly soak up Jesus constantly in search of a good feeling. That attitude has no room for suffering & the painful change necessary which comes with being a living sacrifice.

Spiritual navel gazers lack the depth & courage it takes to withstand the knocks true discipleship brings. Since in that light everything always has to work to my favor. If not, then I'm just not close enough to Jesus. It's the opposite of true holiness we've outlined today. True disciples realize Jesus promised not only blessing, but suffering & persecution in His name as well. Sometimes things don't work out to 'our favor', but if we're consistently obedience through difficulty, they work out to 'God's favor' & the living sacrifice has done its work which is to lay down its life in service to God.

In thinking of developing good spiritual habits consider someone who's talented in an area of life: the athlete who can catch a ball with one hand, or a musician who seems to play an instrument like it's an extension of their body. Is that just natural talent, or is there a habit behind their success? The constant practice of catching the ball or the hours spent repeating the same scale on the instrument show the power of habit.

We're creatures of habit. In fact, our habits tell us more about ourselves than what we tell people we believe. **Philosopher James Smith explains, “Our wants, longings & desires are at the core of our identity, the wellspring from which our actions & behavior**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://renovare.org/articles/defining-the-holiness-tradition-virtuous-life>

flow.”<sup>3</sup> Our daily habits must be shaped by spiritual disciplines that recalibrate our hearts to the things that God desires. Prayer, meditation, reading Scripture, praise & other disciplines shape our habits & train our lives for godliness.

In the 2014 season, New York Giants wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr. seemed to do the impossible by catching a football with one hand. It’s been called the defining moment of his career: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxbz3DDQzHU>.

Beckham’s amazing talent wasn’t luck, however - it was something he’d practiced over & over. You can see his practice here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8-oZiAc2-s>. The catch that seemed natural came from practice which made it habit.

Good habits which cultivate spiritual formation bring about change. They don’t generally do this overnight or change us into completely perfect people, but over time, habits become second nature, and we begin to see the change in our lives from the inside out.

We’re nourished through the good habits of focusing on the truths of the faith & the good teaching provided in the Scriptures. Thinking aware Christians, turning away from godless myths & old wives’ tales, not conforming to the patterns of this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our minds. In other words we don’t swallow hook line & sinker all the ideologies & worldviews fed to us by society, we think through them discarding that which is not congruent with Scripture, always guided by the Word & Spirit of God.

Since we also have to remember it’s easy to be deceived as Paul warned Timothy in vv1 & 2...*The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith & follow deceiving spirits & things taught by demons. <sup>2</sup>Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.*

We don’t want that! So we train ourselves to be godly, which has value for all things, holding promise for both this present life & the life to come. Utilizing the means of grace available to us: corporate & private worship, corporate teaching, corporate & private prayer, private study & memorization of God’s Word, seeking to be filled with the Spirit, fasting, self-denial when appropriate, etc...

We don’t do anything without desire. So, the question is, do you desire holiness & godliness? Maybe you don’t. But you’d like to, but it’s just not in you. If so, you’re not lost. Often my prayer has been for an increased desire in these areas.

It’s Davids prayer in Psalm 51:10-13...*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. [a spirit of integrity] <sup>11</sup>Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. <sup>12</sup>Restore to me the joy of your salvation & grant me a*

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<sup>3</sup> (James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* [Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016], 1)

*willing spirit, to sustain me. <sup>13</sup>Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.*

Notice, his goal is that he would be brought close to God in order to bring others close to God - the Great Commission! Maybe we need to pray that prayer.

Or to simply pray, “Holy Spirit come, fill me once again. Increase my desire for You above all distractions. Renew a spirit of integrity within me in order that I will be used for Your glory in the lives of others!”

Why don't we take a minute & end our series by doing that quietly now...