

1 Timothy 4:6-10

Instructions to Timothy

Fight, Keep Fighting, Finish!

Real Value!



We have an American tradition of struggling for prosperity. Back when people began filling European ships to come to America, they came because they had no prospects in Europe. The system was still the “feudal system” where the King and the aristocracy owned all the land. It was a rigged system, intended to maintain the outlandish wealth and opulent lifestyles of the wealthy, while keeping the peasants poor, and subjugated. The general populace were, to the aristocracy, like milk cows. They “rented” them land upon which to till and grow crops, and then took from them all their profits *and then some* - leaving them not enough, or barely enough money to feed their families on. So these people were more than eager to board overcrowded ships to cross a dangerous ocean to get to America where they were promised small land grants as a reward. They could own their own land! To these people, the ownership of land meant an impossible dream had been fulfilled! They felt fabulously wealthy by European standards because they owned their own land! They were taking the lands in the face of some formidably dangerous opposition from the natives here, but were willing to take the gamble, because they had been living on almost a starvation level in Europe! So the prospect of profit through land ownership and pure hard work appealed to them as no other dream could! A new social system was born in which there was still aristocracy but there was a much more content “middle class”. Eventually there were the gold and silver rushes in the 1800s where news of a big gold strike brought men flooding in from everywhere. Whole towns and even cities sprang up overnight to accommodate these huge influxes of fortune seekers. They were trying to find a shortcut to prosperity, to avoid all the grindingly hard work of farming. They felt lucky – hoping to somehow find the mother lode and get rich quick! They too were willing to risk their lives to dig for these precious metals! The natives, of course, did not take kindly to these trespassers and they killed the Europeans in terrible ways to deter others from trespassing. But, trying to get ahead, to increase wealth, to live an easier, more affluent life, has been the goal of most Americans ever since! We are obsessed with it! But this is not an appropriate focus for human beings! It usually works better for us than poverty, for certain, but it does not deliver what it promises. The Creator purposefully intended for prosperity to **NOT** take His place!



So, wealth certainly has value. It can fill bigger and bigger homes with more and more stuff, and make life easier at some level, but it comes with a whole new set of problems, from spoiled kids, to failed investments, to finding tax loopholes and off-shore bank accounts! And it certainly cannot not fill that God-created hole in the human heart where only He fits! Most people who pursue wealth think they can plug that hole with possessions! Not even close! All that privilege and all the trappings of wealth can only give off the false impression of being insulated from the need of God! By the time they are old, infirm and can even (maybe) see the error of their ways, they are hardened, intractable, locked in. Sadly they are destined to **eternal** separation from the God in the next life – the same God that they thought they didn't need in this life! It is why Jesus said that ***"It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven"*** (Matt. 19:24).



There are different types of wealth, not always calculated by money value. There can be wealth in one's physicality – in youth, and good health, and strength, perhaps beauty. Paul takes a little time with **physical wealth** here – saying that physical training is ***"of some value"***. When a person trains their body, they are working at making it move faster, or more skillfully, or getting quicker, and increasing their endurance! They run – they exercise - they stretch – they do drills – all so that they can compete with others and win! It can be an exhilarating process once the muscles start responding with more strength and endurance and coordination. Some people devote themselves to the process of strengthening their bodies, like it is the greatest thing there is! But take a look in the nursing homes! Old age takes everything from us physically and mentally, if we live long enough! The body builder or the football, basketball, or baseball star of today will be in a wheelchair between 40 - 70 years from now – and that is a much shorter time than you think it is when you are young. Having lived it, I would agree with every old person I have ever know in my life, that the years and then the **decades**, indeed, do go by in a flash! And then you lose all that you have spent a lifetime gaining physically and mentally! I'm not trying to be a pessimist. But this is our God-intended reality on earth. Paul's point here is that physicality is nice, a pleasant thing while it lasts and not a bad idea to take care of your physical and mental self. But know that it comes with a disclaimer. It does not last! Neither does anything else! Therefore, it cannot supplant God in terms of lasting satisfaction.

Can there be any doubt that God intended this when He cursed us not only with death as He promised He would if we disobeyed Him, but with the process of death, of our bodies withering and the millions of moving parts failing one by one! Is this not to drive home the Creator's point that we are not God, no matter how much we would wish to be, and we are not, ultimately, and are not equipped to be, the masters of our own fate, or the captain of our own ship! Sure, we can do it our way, but doing it the wrong way (what we always do) only increases our physical, mental, and emotional deterioration and suffering in the end. Physical training – the attempt to look and feel indestructible/unbeatable - can be the attempt of a human to be their own God! People do this all the time! *The DC Comics god-like character, **Superman**, was played by actor Christopher Reeves in four Superman movies made from 1978 – 1987. He initially had to go into a crash course in body building so he could play the part of the indestructible, all-powerful Superman! The movies were wildly successful and launched Reeves into Hollywood stardom! But in a strange and tragic twist of fate, just seven years after His last superman role, he fell off of his horse and broke his neck, paralyzing him from the neck down! Superman is pure fantasy, but our culture loves that fantasy and keeps struggling to be powerful, even resorting to steroids and hormones to add to the illusion!



But training in godliness is learning to be like the real God! Training to be like Jesus is admitting that we are inadequate and always will be! We don't believe in ourselves! But we do believe in Him! **He** isn't like us! He is **enough**! He is **more than enough**! In fact, He is **WAY more than enough** for us! If He is ours when we are young and strong, and vital, He will still be ours when we are old, and weak, and infirm! **Everything fails**, but not Him! What we learn from Him now will still be relevant 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, and 80 years from now! If we have a true and robust walk with Jesus when we are young, that will only grow stronger when we are old! He will certainly be a **TOWER** of strength when we lie on our deathbed! What we learn from Him now is, in fact, the only thing we can take with us when we die! You have heard it said that "you can't take it with you" and indeed you can't. **"Naked we enter this world and naked we depart from it"** – lamented **Job [1:21,22]**. But what we can take with us is our personal history with Jesus! If we believe in Him, receive Him, and follow Him, He will know us when He sees us, and will accept us! Our place in heaven is already being prepared – [**John 14:1,2**]⁴! On the other hand, if we do **not** follow Him, He will remember that too! [**Matt. 7:21-23**].

But it is not just the benefits of the next life that reward us for following Jesus, it is the benefits of this life also that reward us for following Him. When we are following Him, we are learning to obey Him. He is the one person we can trust implicitly. Absolute power in the hands of a human being corrupts that person absolutely! Absolute power in the hands of God does not change Him in the least! He has had absolute power from eternity past, and all indications are that He has not abused His power and it has not altered His personhood in the least! But we have to trust Him! To believe in Jesus is to trust Him to have the seat of power in our lives. We trust Him enough to obey Him – to do what He wants even if we would prefer to do it our own way! This differentiates us from all other people who do not care what God wants. We do this because we know He’s right and we aren’t! We learn to trust Him instead of trusting ourselves and our own instincts and desires. This is the application of the Gospel! This is what true belief in Christ looks like. Obey Him in ALL things! Don’t get distracted or go off-trail on wild goose chases, and stupid ideas. cleverly disguised to look smart! Stick to the Gospel as set out by the eye-witnesses and disciples of Jesus - who then became His apostles! They knew what they are talking about and were guided by God’s Spirit! So Paul encourages Timothy, as a young pastor, to keep teaching the fundamentals of what it means to follow Jesus. If he continues as He is going, he will continue to be **“good minister of Jesus Christ”**. If he stays focused on the important things of God, his focus will remain fixed upon the plan and the purpose of God who desires to offer His love, salvation, purpose, and ultimately His own home to whoever is willing! God the Father so loved the world that He offered up His Son as a sacrifice for the sins and of the world! Crime has to be paid for in God’s world, **and Jesus paid it on that horrible, cruel cross!** All we are required to do is to look upon the cross, admit that we ARE sinners, and ask Him to apply his work on the cross to **our** sins. Anyone anywhere in the world can believe in Jesus and ask for **His** payment for sins to be applied to **their** sins. His blood shed for human rebellion and wrongdoing (sin) is efficacious enough to save **every man, woman, and child on earth!** But like Jesus said, men loved darkness rather than light. Most people prefer to distrust God, and play at being their own god. They will never believe, and even if they believe they will not trust. It is a stark reminder to every pastor and every Christian to stay on track. Obey Christ in all things, but especially obey His last instructions that by all means we will win to Jesus whoever is willing. **[Matt. 28:18-20]** Jesus said that He came to seek and to save those who are lost. We are His “boots on the ground” to find those who will be willing to trust Jesus!

