

How to Develop and Maintain Spiritual Fitness

I. God intends for us to be godly. There is no option about this. Godliness is the goal toward which every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ should strive each day. We must strive to please God by **being, thinking, doing, saying, and feeling** in the ways that God wants us to. “Godliness” comes from the word *EUSEBEIA* and means “to be devout, denotes that piety which, characterized by a Godward attitude, does that which is well-pleasing to Him.” There is a good quote from the book *Synonyms of the New Testament* by R. C. Trench concerning piety. He says: “If we keep in mind that, in that mingled **fear and love** which constitute the piety of man toward God, the Old Testament placed its emphasis on the fear, the New places it on the love (though there was love in fear of God’s saints then, as there must be fear in their love now). . .” Trench goes on to describe godliness as “scrupulously performing that which is prescribed, with the consciousness of the danger of slipping into a careless and negligent performance of God’s service, and of the need therefore of anxiously watching against the adding to diminishing from, or in any other way altering, that which has been by Him commanded...”

II. Godliness should be sought with **great effort**. Paul exhorted the young preacher in 1 Timothy 6:11 “But thou, O man of God, **flee** these things; and **follow** after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.” These are strong words which indicate strenuous exertions. **Negatively**, Timothy was to flee from what would keep him from being godly. **Positively**, he was to follow (pursue) the things which would lead to godliness. Another Scripture concerning this pursuit of a godly life is 2 Timothy 2:22 “**Flee** also youthful lusts: but **follow** righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Notice that this verse has the negative and positive elements of the above verse, but there is an added factor. That is we pursue this life style “**with them** that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” In other words, we do not do this by ourselves. There is strength in constant fellowship with other Christians. God never intended for us to constantly fight this battle alone. Look at Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

A very strong motivation toward the pursuit of godliness is concerned with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:11 says “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness...”

We are not left to ourselves in our pursuit of godliness. God has given us everything we need. We just need to become aware of the provisions He has made and to vigorously implement them in our daily lives. 2 Peter 1:3 “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue...” Godliness is one of our **greatest treasures** and should be carefully sought after. Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:6 that “godliness with contentment is great gain.”

II.

A. Scripture proof:

1. Matthew 5:48 "Be ye therefore **perfect**, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."
2. 1 Peter 1:16 "Because it is written, Be ye **holy**; for I am holy."
3. 1 John 2:1 "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye **sin not...**"
4. Ephesians 5:3 "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it **not be once named** among you, as becometh saints..."
5. Hebrews 12:14 "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord..." The word translated "follow" here is *DIOKO* and means to "**pursue**" or to "press on: figuratively of one who in a race runs swiftly to reach the goal."
6. In light of all these Scriptures we should be driven to our knees to pray the following prayer from Psalm 19:12-14 "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."
Another good prayer is found in Psalm 119:133 "Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

B. The path to godliness is **discipline**. There is no such thing as instant practical godliness. Our entire lives should be disciplined (structured, organized) and planned with the goal of godliness in mind. A haphazard life will not be a godly life. Even if you mean well an undisciplined life will eventually defeat you. **The Devil can easily penetrate the life of one who does not live according to godly structure!** A disciplined life will be one in which we are aiming at achieving goals in daily living. Discipline means work. Hard work for God is good for us. When we are working diligently for Him, we won't have time to get in trouble by listening to the suggestions of Satan.

When we are born from above that makes us oriented toward God and holiness, but it does not automatically make us godly in our daily lives in a practical way. Many of our daily practices are not yet oriented toward godliness.

1. 2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."
2. Ephesians 4:24 "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."
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C. One of our Scripture themes for this boot camp is 1 Timothy 4:7 "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness."

C. Here we have the picture of an **athlete in training**. The word translated "exercise" is *GUMNAZO*. It means "to train the body or mind." The English words "gymnastics" and "gymnasium" are derived from it. A person may be very talented, but no one becomes

an accomplished athlete except by years of hard, systematic practice. There are no instant athletes. Let us draw some helpful analogies from the world of athletics.

1. Athletes must practice **regularly**. They must practice until what they do seems like **second nature** to them. It would do little good for an athlete to learn intricate skills or to get in shape by practicing one day a week.
 - a) Luke 9:23 “And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross **daily**, and follow me.”- Daily self-denial.
 - b) Acts 17:11 “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures **daily**, whether those things were so.”
 - b)-Daily Bible reading and study.
 - c) Psalm 86:3 “Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee **daily**.”-Daily prayer.
 - d) Proverbs 8:34 “Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching **daily** at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.”-Daily obedience.
 - e) God only gives us strength for each day. We must learn to live life one day at a time. Deuteronomy 33:25 says “...as thy **days**, so shall thy strength be.”

2. This daily practice, which results in the desired action ingrained as second nature, is learned by constant practice until it becomes **habitual**. Hebrews 5:14 says “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of **full age**, even those who by **reason of use** have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” The word translated “use” is *HEXIS* and means “habit, experience.” The individual has practiced something until he becomes comfortable with it. He is trained to react automatically when confronted with a particular situation. This can be either good or bad. Many of us have developed bad habits of reacting in the wrong ways in certain circumstances. For example, some people have trained themselves to become angry when cut off in heavy traffic. Others have cultivated the habit of using curse words. They sometimes do this without even thinking of what they are saying. Many other examples of habits, both good and bad, could be given. 2 Peter 2:14 sadly speaks of those “Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have **exercised** with covetous practices; cursed children...” Here is our word *GUMNAZO* again. This is a sad description of someone who has practiced greed so that his habitual reaction is to be greedy whenever a situation arises where greed may be practiced. He has become so comfortable in his sin that he sins without consciously thinking about it.

This is like a baseball player who has developed a faulty swing when he comes to bat. He seldom hits the ball, but he does not understand why. He must get someone to evaluate his swing and show him where he is wrong. Then he must practice the new swing until he becomes thoroughly comfortable with it.

It would be good to occasionally take the time to **consciously evaluate** your behavior. Take time to **think** and **reflect** on areas where you know you are not performing as you should. Write these things down and search the Scriptures for passages which teach the proper behavior. Then devise a practical program to help implement the desired behavior.

- a) 1 Corinthians 11:28 “But let a man **examine** himself...”
- b) 2 Corinthians 13:5 “**Examine** yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves...”

Others can often see our faults and shortcomings better than we can. It would be a good practice to periodically ask someone who is close to us to give us an evaluation of our behavior. The very best ones to do this are normally our **parents**. Having the proper learner’s spirit toward parents, who are the ones God has ordained to rear us, is a vital step on the road to godliness. Proverbs 1:8 says “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother...” Proverbs 10:1 “A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.” Proverbs 15:5 “A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.” Proverbs 20:20 “Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.”

We must remember that we live in a time when rebellion against all authority is very prevalent. Do not listen to the world. Listen to God’s Word. Proverbs 30:11 “There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.”

- c) Proverbs 24:6 “For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.”
- d) Proverbs 27:17 “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.”

After we have become aware of unbiblical behavior, we can obtain advice from pastors or other experienced Christians on how to properly order our lives.

- e) Romans 15:14 “And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.” The word translated “admonish” means to “counsel”
- f) Titus 2:4 “That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children...”
- f)

3. Athletes can learn from coaches and other, successful athletes.

- a) Proverbs 13:20 “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.”

- b) 1 Corinthians 11:1 “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.”
 - c) Philippians 4:9 “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and **seen in me**, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”
4. Athletes must wear the appropriate gear, and must not wear anything that unduly hinders them.
- a) Colossians 3:12 “**Put on** therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering...”
 - b) Hebrews 12:1 “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us **lay aside** every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us...”
5. Athletes must be **focused** and **determined**.
- a) Hebrews 12:2 “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
 - b) Philippians 3:13,14 “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

III. Practical Applications-Let us look at very practical ways to help us in our pursuit of godly living.

- A. There is no easier path to godliness than the prayerful study of and obedience to the Word of God. It is impossible to be godly if are not regularly reading the Bible and trying to put it into practice. In 1 Peter 2:2 we are commanded to “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby...” The word translated “desire” means “to pursue with love, to long after.” The mood is the **imperative** one. This means that God commands us to love His word to this degree. How do we do this? By praying and by being obedient. We may not feel like reading the Bible. We must not go by our feelings. We must remember that the **power often comes in the doing**.
- B. One of the most important Scriptures that tells what God’s Word will do for us is 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” The word “doctrine” refers to teaching. The Bible teaches what God requires. The word “reproof” means “conviction.” The Word shows us how far we have fallen short of God’s teachings. The word “correction” means “to set up straight again.” After the Word shows us where we are wrong, it then shows us how to get back on the right path. The concept of “instruction in righteousness” means that the Bible gives us structured training in living righteous lives.

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- C. We need to be structured and live our lives each day according to godly habit patterns. When does a train run the best- off the track or on the track?. When does a piano player play the best- when he has disciplined himself by daily practice or when he just sits down and plays? When do we live with the most spiritual freedom-when we live as we please each day or when we discipline ourselves with the Word of God?
- D. We need to learn to read Proverbs through each month for awhile and keep a notebook on what we are learning from it. We need to commit some verses to memory from it on a regular basis.
- E. We need to learn to obtain God's forgiveness on a daily basis, using 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
- F. We need to constantly pray to God for strength remembering Ephesians 3:16 "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man..."