



The Disciplined Body

1 Timothy 4:7-8

Part 5 • 6.3.18

Summary: Our lives are shaped by the dynamic interaction between our actions and our affections. These are mutually reinforcing, but actions are the real drivers. As one writer keenly observes:

“The gospel does not happen primarily between our ears but in all the movements of the body by which we are formed—and in turn, form the world.”

But in the same way, movements and habits that are less than “gospel” also form us and our world. Take scrolling. It has not only become a personal pastime but a deeply embedded “cultural liturgy,” a form of worship wherein we ascribe value to devices and the content they deliver us. The typical person goes no more than 12 waking minutes at a time without consulting their phone. This is forming who we are, how we interact, and what kind of world we live in. It’s not just what we scroll to—it’s that we scroll at all.

So 1 Timothy 4:7-8 comes to us with prophetic power, reminding us to evaluate the “story” we’re living in and the ends to which its narrative arc points. “Having nothing to do with godless myths”—the story-lines of the world that tell us who we are, where we’re going, and what matters in life. Rather, as gospel-informed people, “train yourself for godliness.”

The goal: God. God is the great Reality of our lives. He is our goal! We seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. As Paul said in Galatians 2:20, “The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Likewise in Philippians 3:10, Paul wrote, “I want to know Christ—the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so also attaining to the resurrection of the dead.” We want nothing less than to know God in the person of Christ, and to like him.

The means: Training. Training is not only how we gain abilities but how we grow affections. We love what we’re good at. So by pursuing God through spiritual disciplines, we’re not only gaining skill in knowing the Lord and living like him, we’re also growing hearts that love him more. We “taste and see that the Lord is good”—and keep eating at his table! So the point of Bible reading is not only to learn the Bible, but to learn to love the Bible. The point of praying is not only to create effects and make things happen, but to create connection and to love the God we pray to. The point of worship, serving, small group discipleship, financial giving—it’s not only produce the “goods” that come from each action but to become the “good” people who do those very things. It’s like scrolling—it’s not just what we scroll to, but the very fact that we scroll at all. The same is true of our training in godliness.

The reward: Forever. Paul says that godliness has value for all things, and not only in this life but in the life to come. So we could say the reward of our spiritual training is “Everything forever.” There’s no dimension of this life that goes untouched or unenhanced; and at the same time, we’re becoming more fit for heaven. We’re becoming the kind of people who will fully enjoy Christ and his kingdom when we get there.

Discussion:

1. In light of the opening illustration of scrolling, can you think of other behaviors—maybe seemingly innocuous ones—that are actually forming and shaping your life?
2. Read 1 Timothy 4:7-8, along with 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Do you find this kind of language naturally appealing, or naturally off-putting? How does talk of “spiritual discipline” land on your heart?
3. The goal is God, or godliness. What are some of the negative stereotypes of that word, “godliness”? What would you say to someone to help them see this goal as highly desirable? How would you describe or profile someone who was truly godly?
4. The means is training. Training was described as not only growing abilities but growing affections—because we typically love what we’re good at. If we get “good at” knowing Christ through spiritual discipline, we’re almost certain to love him more. In that light, consider these basic spiritual disciplines. What are some “best practices” associate with each? Which one or two are you strongest in? Where is your greatest growth area?
 - Prayer
 - Bible reading
 - Worship
 - Serving
 - Giving
5. There’s an idea typical in Christian circles that says, “You can be fastidious in these practices and still lack love and spiritual vitality.” What do you say to that? Is it true or is it just a projection?
6. The reward is “everything forever.” Paul says training in godliness is beneficial for all things, both now and forever. What’s one way in which you’ve seen a specifically Christian spiritual practice bring benefit to your life? On the other side of the coin, is there an area of life right now in which you’re experiencing perpetual frustration or disappointment? How could a spiritual practice bring a fresh new benefit there? (Paul says they “have value for all things.”)
7. Pray for grace and motivation to train yourselves for godliness.