

DISCIPLINE FOR GODLINESS

PAUL ON DISCIPLINE

This being so, the statement from Paul to Timothy regarding spiritual discipline in [1 Timothy 4:7](#) — “**train yourself to be godly**” — takes on not only transcending importance, but personal urgency.

[1 Timothy 4:7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷ But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;

[1 Timothy 4:7 \(AMP\)](#)

⁷ But refuse *and* avoid irreverent legends (profane and impure and godless fictions, mere grandmothers' tales) and silly myths, *and* express your disapproval of them. Train yourself toward godliness (piety), [keeping yourself spiritually fit].

[1 Timothy 4:7 \(NIV\)](#)

⁷ Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.

[1 Timothy 4:7 \(ESV\)](#)

⁷ Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness;

[1 Timothy 4:7 \(NKJV\)](#)

⁷ But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.

There are other passages which teach discipline, but this is the great classic text of Scripture. The word “**train**” comes from the word *gumnos*, which means “**naked**” and is the word from which we derive our English word *gymnasium*.

In traditional Greek athletic contests, the participants competed without clothing, so as not to be encumbered. Therefore, the word “**train**” originally carried the literal meaning, “**to exercise naked.**” By New Testament times it referred to exercise and training in general. But even then it was, and is, a word with the smell of the gym in it — the sweat of a good workout. “**Gymnasticize (exercise, work out, train) yourself for the purpose of godliness**” conveys the feel of what Paul is saying.

SPIRITUAL SWEAT

In a word, he is calling for some *spiritual sweat*! Just as the athletes discarded everything and competed *gymnos* — free from everything that could possibly burden them — so we must get rid of every encumbrance, every association, habit, and tendency which impedes godliness. If we are to excel, we must strip ourselves to a lean, spiritual nakedness.

The writer of [Hebrews](#) explains it like this: **“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”** ([Hebrews 12:1 \(NASB\)](#)). Men, we will never get anywhere spiritually without a conscious divestment of the things that are holding us back. What things are weighing you down? The call to discipline demands that you throw it off. Are you man enough?

The call to train ourselves for godliness also suggests directing all of our energy toward godliness. Paul pictures this elsewhere: **“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training... Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave”** ([1 Corinthians 9:25–27](#)).

Intense, energetic sweat! We should singularly note that a sentence later in the context of Paul’s command to **“train yourself to be godly,”** he comments on the command and the intervening words, saying **“for this we labor and strive.”** **“Labor”** means **“strenuous toil,”** and **“strive”** is the Greek word from which we get **“agonize.”** Toil and agony are called for if one is to be godly.

When one seriously trains, he willingly undergoes hours of discipline and even pain so as to win the prize — running 10,000 miles to run 100 yards at one’s best. The successful Christian life is a sweaty affair!

No manliness no maturity! No discipline no discipleship! No sweat no sainthood!