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THE BENEFIT OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

I Timothy 4:1-10

People will discipline themselves to cut back on their spending and save money if there is something they especially want or need. An athlete will practice strict discipline measures and train hard if he wants to make the Olympic team. In both cases there is a benefit - a reward that is gained. Believers who practice spiritual disciplines discover a great benefit for their efforts, and that benefit is godliness.

Spiritual disciplines are those habits that produce beneficial results in daily living. Without the proper spiritual disciplines in your life, your growth in Christ can be stunted. Instead of becoming more like Jesus, believers who neglect spiritual disciplines will find themselves looking more like the world around them. Paul knew the importance of spiritual disciplines. He wrote to Timothy at the church in Ephesus to encourage Timothy to train in spiritual disciplines to combat serious attacks on the believers there. Paul wrote to mentor and to support Timothy. He warned Timothy (in I Timothy) about some people who were teaching a false gospel (vv.3-11). He reminded Timothy of the true gospel (vv. 12-20) and encouraged him to pray for all (2:1-15). In the third chapter of I Timothy, Paul wrote qualifications for pastors and deacons and ended this chapter with a human Christ centered life.

In chapter 4 of I Timothy, Paul addressed a growing problem in the church. That problem concerned those who were walking away from the faith. Paul gave Timothy instructions regarding order and structure in the church. Paul addressed the issue of false teachers and the need for stronger leadership. He encouraged Timothy to be a faithful minister for Christ. There was great concern for some who were responding to a growing threat of persecution by walking away from the faith and embracing a different gospel that really wasn't a gospel at all.

In I Timothy 4:1-3, Paul indicates that the world seeks to distort the good things of God. Paul says that **some will depart from the faith paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons**. The deceitful spirits were most likely false teachers. The source of the false teachings was evil spirits or **demons**. Paul wrote that the Holy Spirit explicitly warned that during **later times** some will depart from faith. Paul called the forces that led some believers away **deceitful**

spirits and the teachings of demons. In verse two, Paul exposed the motives of these false teachers. Some will speak lies in hypocrisy, having their own **consciences seared with a hot iron.** Verse 3 indicates that the false teachers were making their erroneous spiritual disciplines into law by advocating a type of legalism forbidding marriage and demanding abstinence from certain foods. Godly spiritual disciplines are vital practices that promote spiritual growth in the life of the believer, but they are not meant to be the standard by which people are judged. The hypocrites and liars Paul described in vv. 1-3 were deceitfully teaching the people not to accept good gifts from the hands of God. Marriage and food are wonderful gifts God created for us and we should receive them with gratitude.

In I Timothy 4:4-7a, we are reminded to focus on and lift up the truth of God. Paul tells us that **everything created by God is good.** Since God declared that all He created was good, it would follow that people may eat all that God has given us for food. (This does not give approval to gluttony or drunkenness.) Paul tells us that God's good gifts should not be rejected or cast aside because false teachers say they are evil. The good food God created was sanctified by **the Word of God and by prayer.** In verse 6, Paul tells Timothy that as a pastor in Ephesus, Timothy's role was to serve the church, and by exposing false doctrine and teaching correct doctrine he was serving the church. Paul tells Timothy to **have nothing to do with pointless and silly myths.** Timothy was not to allow himself to be drawn into discussions or debates about such worthless issues.

In vv. 7b-10, Paul emphasizes to focus on those things that are true and eternal. Paul encouraged him to **train** himself in godliness. Such training requires the investment of time, dedication, and discipline.

In our personal study guide (p.104 – 105) there are six strategic areas of spiritual disciplines:

1. To avoid silly myths and falling prey to gospel counterfeits, believers study their Bibles.
2. To fight temptation, believers pray for strength, enter into accountability relationships, and memorize Scripture.
3. To increase their intimacy with God, believers meditate on Scriptures and practice heartfelt prayer.
4. To maintain their focus on Jesus, believers practice fasting and confession of their sins.

5. To form connections with other believers and build up the church, believers fellowship with other believers, worship God and serve one another.
6. To make a difference in the world, believers prioritize God's work in the church and the world, resulting in God's glory.

Discipline and training in godliness are rigorous, however that is the life God calls every believer to strive for. As believers, we are to daily live out our faith, growing spiritually in godliness and being witnesses for the gospel to a watching world.

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