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Training for Reigning

1 Timothy 4.7-8

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Each summer, professional baseball and football hold their Hall of Fame induction ceremonies. Next Sunday July 24th, at the Baseball Hall of Fame ceremony in Cooperstown, N.Y. former Red Sox star David Ortiz will be honored along with Jim Kaat, Tony Oliva, and the late Bud Fowler, Gil Hodges, Minnie Miñoso and Buck O'Neil. The newest members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame are Tony Boselli, Cliff Branch, Leroy Butler, official Art McNally, Sam Mills, Richard Seymour, coach Dick Vermeil and Bryant Young. They'll be enshrined at football's Hall of Fame ceremonies in Canton, Ohio on August 6th. These men are part of two elite fraternities of professional athletes whose physical ability, disciplined training, and skill enabled them to accomplish incredible feats of strength, speed and coordination that made them worthy to receive the highest honor in their sport.

Yet to see them in their highlight films at the peak of their playing days and then to see what they look like today, we're reminded of how fleeting life is, how our bodies, even the best of them, age and change and nothing can stop the process. For most of us, old is something at least ten years older than we are. Last summer we hosted our first Brewster Whitecap who was born in this century!

Physical training and fitness is something that we all need to pay attention to – God created us with physical bodies that need proper nutrition, rest, exercise, and care. As important as physical training is, Paul writes in 1 Timothy that there's another kind of training that's even more important, even more vital, to your well-being. **1 Timothy 4:7b-8** says, *“Train yourself in **godliness**, for while physical training is of some value, **godliness** is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”*

Physical training is of some value – it helps you get the most out of your body, it increases your strength, flexibility, and endurance and helps you fight off illness, disease, recover faster from injuries, and the endorphins produced by exercise benefit your attitude and sense of self-confidence. When you're engaged in regular physical training – whether walking, running, swimming, biking, lifting weights, doing yoga, playing a sport - whatever it is. it often makes you feel better about yourself. When you

haven't been doing physical training on a regular basis – then it can be a little discouraging and challenging when you start up again and you need to be patient with yourself as you get going and set small goals that will enable you to mark your progress. The good news is if you stick with it for the long haul you'll see improvement. Physical training is of some value.

One of the interesting things about this scripture from 1 Timothy is that the Greek word translated as “Train,” is *Gumnazo* – that means “exercise.” It's the root from which we get the word “gymnasium.” It's also used in several other places in the New Testament in ways that show **we can be trained; we can exercise ourselves, either in godliness or in sin.** Like 1 Timothy 4, **2 Peter 2:14-15a** is also a warning about the influence of false teachers, *“They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts **trained** in greed. Accursed children! They have left the straight road and gone astray.”* It's unbelievable how relevant that description still is today. False teachers are still going astray in the same they did in the first century.

In **Hebrews 5:14** the author laments the spiritual immaturity of people who should know better who haven't trained or exercised themselves in godliness, *“You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant is unskilled in the word of righteousness. **But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.**”* Too many Christians seem to have great difficulty distinguishing good from evil even when it seems obvious. This reveals a lack of spiritual maturity and training. Physical and spiritual training involves effort, often strenuous effort.

Jesus as always is our example as we're reminded in **Hebrews 12:1-4**: *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and **let us run with perseverance the race** that is set before us, ² **looking to Jesus** the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, **so that you may not grow weary***

or lose heart. ⁴ *In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*” (You’ll hear a little more about this passage in August.)

Hebrews 12:11-13a speaks of the importance of discipline and training. *“Now discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands & strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet.”* Finally, **Titus 2:11-12** declares, *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly.”*

The Bible says train yourself in godliness because godliness is valuable in every way both in the present life and the life to come. This week I’ve communicated in person, on the phone, and in writing with folks who are dealing with physical crises, family and relational issues, disappointments, grief, loneliness, the challenges brought on by aging – all of these things can be met better and dealt with more successfully when you’re training yourself in godliness.

The book *The Art of Aging: A Doctor’s Prescription for Well Being*, by Dr. Sherwin Nuland makes the point that if you want to live well and age well, you must participate actively in your own life. His prescription for Aging includes four different kinds of exercise.

Exercise your mind – keep your mind active by reading frequently –the Bible, the newspaper, good works of literature, do crossword puzzles, visit museums, sign up for a class.

Exercise your body – Work out at home, join a gym, get yourself moving - walking, swimming, running, dancing.

Exercise your compassion – As we grow older, one of the good things is you may become more compassionate (although that’s not guaranteed by any means, some people get angrier and less empathetic). Share with others how much you care about them. Demonstrate that you’re interested in what other people have to say.

Stay connected – social networks like those you develop by being active in church really contribute to the quality of your life. Staying active in church and in your

community helps keep you connected to other people. You mean more to those who love you than you may realize.

One of the realities of life is that eventually your body weakens as you age but your spirit can grow stronger. Some people find it hard to do physical exercise as a matter of choice, self-discipline, or time and some of us are limited by what our body can do. The great thing about training ourselves in godliness is that while there are some things that take time – like reading the Bible, praying, serving others – much of your training can be done and should be done while you're simply living your life.

I was at the grocery store, which was packed with people, I made a game with myself that I was going to try and improve the attitude of people around me. I was standing in line at the deli counter getting a few items and there was a woman lamenting how long things were taking and I said to her, *"Isn't it great to live somewhere that so many people want to be?"* She replied that she lived in Connecticut and just spent the summer on the Cape. I proceeded to ask her questions and learned that her husband died 14 years ago, and we talked about a number of things that made the time pass and before you knew it she was being served. When she placed her order she didn't speak up very loudly and the young woman from Eastern Europe asked her to repeat her order. The woman did and then looked at me kind of exasperated and I said enthusiastically, *"Can you imagine going to Montenegro for the summer and working in a deli? I couldn't do that for anything. I really admire the attitude of these young folks who come here to work."* She said she couldn't imagine doing that either.

Then, she began to object to the young woman because she wanted roast beef at the price that was listed even though the store had put a different roast beef in that place that actually cost two dollars more. The young worker explained that was okay, but the woman was getting angry and missed that comment. I made eye contact with the deli worker and smiled at her. Then a friend of the CT woman came by with her shopping cart. The deli worker handed the roast beef across the counter as the woman began complaining to her friend and saying she was leaving the store because she *"Had enough,"* and launched into her complaint about the roast beef. The young woman behind the counter called out, *"You got it at the posted price. It's on your sticker."* I

looked at her and smiled again and said, “*You’re doing fine, don’t worry about it.*” And she looked back at me and just rolled her eyes as if to say, “*What can you do?*”

What you can do is train yourself in godliness. Every encounter you have with another human being, every experience of life, every joy and success, every sorrow and failure is an opportunity to train yourself in godliness, or a missed opportunity to do so. It all depends on how you look at things - you can be defensive and see something as a personal affront or attack and a chance to complain. You can see life through the lenses of self-pity. Or you can look at life through the eyes of faith and see everything that comes your way as an opportunity to train yourself in godliness, to develop your spirit and to become more like Jesus which is what we’re supposed to be doing.

When Hall of Fame New York Yankee outfielder Mickey Mantle was dying of diseases brought on by a life of heavy drinking, he said he would have taken better care of himself had he known how long he was going to live. How should you take care of yourself when the Bible teaches we are never ceasing spiritual beings with an eternal destiny in God’s great universe?

If you don’t have one, perhaps you can adopt an exercise program for holiness. You can be training for reigning. If you want to imitate Jesus, you can’t live like your old self. You need to live like Jesus did. Athletes train until they can perform without thought. People who want to get in top physical shape often pay a personal trainer to guide and motivate them. Jesus is our personal trainer in spiritual training. Jesus demonstrates that there are some spiritual exercises you can do through your own effort – (like prayer, study, and worship) that make it possible to do things you could never do by your own effort (being like Jesus). **You need to be engaged in an exercise program for godliness.** For those of you who love tennis, in the spirit of the Wimbledon Championship which finished last weekend, here you go:

1. **Study the Manual** – the practice of **studying the scripture** to get the ideas, thoughts, and images of scripture inside you. What training can you do with the Bible this week? Could you read or listen for 5, 10 or 15 minutes a day?
2. **Listen to the Coach** – how many players at Wimbledon do you think have a coach to help them be their best? The practice of **Silence** enables us to quiet the competing voices and noises so we can better listen to God’s voice. Schedule

one 15-minute period of silence this week (and sleeping doesn't count). This can even be done when you're driving in your car.

3. **Improve Your Serve** – this is the **discipline of service** and obedience, so you learn you're not the center of the universe. Find a way to be a servant to at least one other person this week. For those of you whose life consists of lots of serving, see this as a chance to grow in godliness.
4. **Play under control** – this is the **discipline of Fasting**. Fasting teaches you don't have to be controlled by the appetites of your body and you can discover a deeper craving for God. Fast from at least one meal in the coming week and use the time talking with God about your appetite for the Spirit's presence in your life. If there is a medical reason you can't do this, fast a little from technology if that is gaining too much of a hold on your time.
5. **Learn from every Match** – this is the **discipline of Journaling**. In journaling you learn to keep a record of your encounters with God – for the benefit of becoming more like Jesus. Start a notebook or journal and try writing briefly at the end or the beginning of the day about when you were aware of God's presence, of where you felt joy, or where you felt failure or weakness or temptation and what you feel and thought about what is happening.

For followers of Jesus, life is a contest in which the goal is godliness.

In **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**, Paul says, *“Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? **Run in such a way that you may win it.** Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, **but we an imperishable one.** So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.”*

We know all athletes do not exercise self-control in all things. Too many are in the news precisely because they're unable to exercise self-control when it comes to many areas of their lives and relationships. Paul's point, though is that athletes will sacrifice and discipline themselves through hard, punishing training in order to be able to win a medal, trophy, title, or championship and with it some fame and fortune, like the

trio of US men who swept the top three spots in the 100 meters at last night's World Championship in Eugene, Oregon.

Even more important than physical training, is spiritual training. Physical exercise is a crucial component of healthy living but growing in godliness is valuable not only in the present, but for eternity. I hope you will begin or continue to be training for reigning!

Blessing

"But as for you, people of God,
pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.
Fight the good fight of the faith;
take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called."

1 Timothy 6:11-12 (adapted)

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. If you follow sports, who is an athlete or player you enjoyed or enjoy watching perform?
2. What habits do you practice on a daily and weekly basis to try and maintain your physical health (for example, walk, bike, swim, work out, eat healthy food, get adequate sleep, etc.)?
3. What habits do you practice on a daily and weekly basis to try and maintain your spiritual health and train yourself in godliness (for example, attend worship, read, or listen to the Bible or other Christian literature, prayer, engage in acts of loving service, take time in solitude and silence, etc.)?
4. Read and review the passages quoted from the New Testament – 2 Peter 2:14-15a, Hebrews 5.14, 12.1-4, 11-13a and Titus 2.11-12. What do they say about two different ways you can train yourself?
5. How or why would you say godliness is valuable both in the present life and the life to come?
6. Review the suggestions in the sermon and decide for yourself - what will your regimen look like for "training for reigning?"