SESSION 4
STAYING ON COURSE

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-13

1 Now the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared. They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods that God created to be received with gratitude by those who believe and know the truth.

2 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, since it is sanctified by the word of God and by prayer.

3 If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished by the words of the faith and the good teaching that you have followed.

4 But have nothing to do with pointless and silly myths. Rather, train yourself in godliness.

5 For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

6 This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance.

7 But for this reason we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

8 Command and teach these things. Don’t let anyone despise your youth, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity. Until I come, give your attention to public reading, exhortation, and teaching.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A The time between the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and His return

B Demonic influences would tell them lies and fool them.

C The word for “seared” in the original language calls to mind a hot iron branding the skin, leaving it numb and insensitive. The liars would feel nothing at all for the people they were deceiving.

D They “teach that it is wrong to marry” (GNT).

E Hearts full of “gratitude” (NASB).

F “Acceptable to God” (GNT); “made holy” (ESV). Paul also used the word “sanctified” to describe the purity of an offering (Rom. 15:16), believers (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 5:23), and the church (Eph. 5:26).

G “Feed yourself spiritually” (GNT); “trained” (ESV).

H Getting the body physically fit.

I Seeking to live in the center of God’s will, Paul prioritized godliness often in his letters to Timothy and Titus (1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7-8; 6:3,5-6; 2 Tim. 3:5, Titus 1:1). Growing in godliness requires believers to engage in daily spiritual exercise.

J Paul affirmed that God is our Deliverer (1 Tim. 1:1, 2:3; Titus 1:3, 2:10, 2:17, 3:4; Eph. 5:23). John also used the same reference for God (1 John 4:14-15).

K Embrace godliness and instruct believers about it.

L Of the Scriptures when they gathered for worship.

M “Encouraging the believers” (NLT); “strengthen them” (NCV).
1. BE AWARE (1 Tim. 4:1-5)
   - Paul explained that false teachers will rise in the last days and will cause some to fall away from the faith.
   - Paul reminded Timothy that the things forbidden by the false teachers are things created by God with a God-honoring purpose.
   - Affirm the security of believers.

2. BE DISCIPLINED (1 Tim. 4:6-10)
   - Paul called on Timothy to be disciplined in his life and challenged other believers to do the same.
   - Instead of turning to speculative teachings, believers are to focus on godliness and the gospel.

3. BE AN EXAMPLE (1 Tim. 4:11-13)
   - Paul instructed Timothy to focus on teaching the gospel, gaining a hearing for it by the godly life he lived.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Believers must be nourished on God’s Word so they will know the truth.
   - Believers must be aware that false teachers will try to lead them astray.
   - Believers must be disciplined in their lives, seeking to honor God through living out the gospel.
   - Believers must remain focused on God’s Word to be an example of godly living.
FOCUS ATTENTION
How does a diet of fruits, vegetables, and lean meats compare to a steady diet of fried or fatty junk foods? How does it compare to spiritual food?
• Junk foods are often more tempting, but they offer little nutritional benefit and may put us at risk for such problems as high cholesterol, diabetes, strokes, heart damage, and so on.
• Some foods appear healthy at first glance but may be full of preservatives that have their own detrimental effects.
• A healthy diet of fresh foods provides energy, strength, and preserves physical lives in the same way that God’s pure Word energizes, strengthens, and preserves our spiritual lives.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE
1 TIMOTHY 4:1-5
When we consider people who promote false teachings, why should we take their misdirection very seriously?
• Paul uses harsh words to warn us to examine false teachers carefully, looking beyond ideas to intentions.
• The desire to pervert God’s teachings stems from something much more sinister than simple confusion or doubt; it is the byproduct of those who have rejected the faith and been led astray by the demonic.

How can we distinguish false teachings from truth?
• False doctrines often apply additional, unnecessary burdens to God’s laws.
• At their heart they contradict God by compelling the rejection of God’s good gifts, beginning with the commonplace, such as certain foods, but ending with matters of eternal consequence—salvation.

Why is the reminder that God gives us good things tied to warnings about false teachers?
• Evoking guilt and fear are common tactics used by false teachers to first coerce and then control their followers.
• Because God is good, He dispenses good things from His hands.
• Instead of being controlled by fear, we control things as we accept God’s gifts with thanksgiving and prayer.

1 TIMOTHY 4:6-10
What practical steps should we take to counter false teaching?
• Methodical, regular study of God’s Word trains us to deftly identify and discard false teachings as we encounter them.
• Instead of entertaining foolish ideas that masquerade as the newest spiritual truths, we should studiously avoid them.

What makes the spiritual comparison to body building such an apt analogy for contemporary life?
• Applying the same “no pain, no gain” philosophy to living out the gospel means setting long-term goals for spiritual health.
• Like a regular regimen of exercise, godliness requires daily application of God’s Word.

1 TIMOTHY 4:11-13
How should we measure our spiritual progress?
• Youth have the advantage of fresh, strong voices; the more mature resonate with life experience—but all may share in the gospel. Just as Timothy was set apart, God has anointed each of us for purposes He expects us to fulfill.
• Beyond checking off a daily to-do list of godliness, pay attention to feedback from others. Asking for your counsel or thanking you for encouraging words indicates that they have observed your life and been impacted by it.

Why is the reminder that God gives us good things tied to warnings about false teachers?
• Silence isn’t acceptable; we’ve been tasked with publicly displaying the promotion of truth.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE
What can you do to promote God’s Word as nourishment for the soul?
• Faithfulness to God’s Word is both a personal and corporate challenge for Christians.
• Thorough, regular study of God’s Word is important, including memorizing and meditating on Scripture.
• Dive deep into Scripture by absorbing the teaching of other godly Christians as well as sharing yourself. Teachers often testify that they learn more than they share.
• Keep in mind your responsibility to be a good example by approaching the Christian life with the single-minded focus of a distance runner. You have a race to run—and run well.

Personal Challenge: What goals have you set for the next step in achieving godliness? Prayerfully consider whether you have adopted a “no pain, no gain” approach to spiritual training or been aimlessly jogging through life. Going deeper may entail getting up earlier, staying up later, or giving up a pastime to spend more time in God’s Word. Assess yourself and then consider asking a spiritual mentor to help you set specific goals for yourself, as Paul did for Timothy.
MASTERPIECES BY FAMOUS ARTISTS

To prepare, research and print copies of one or two well-known, valuable paintings by famous artists. Prepare brief summaries of the history of the paintings/artists to share interesting tidbits with the group. If possible, make the prints large enough to display on easels, or make printed copies to pass around the room as you discuss. Invite the group to share their opinions on what makes the painting(s) so appealing and therefore so valuable. Remind them that people who haven’t studied art may not fully appreciate the artistry.

Introduce the topic of counterfeit artwork: Forgers certainly have some artistic talent, but they usually resort to forgery because they never achieve the respect or following of the original artist. Point out that authenticating original artwork often requires thorough examinations with sophisticated ultraviolet and infrared analysis.

Say: Art forgers remind us of false teachers who promote a counterfeit gospel. Forged artwork contains flaws and never quite lives up to the original while swindling those who are duped by it.

Explain: When it comes to doctrine, contemporary Christians are not creating the masterpiece, God’s Word, but we’ve been tasked to help the world validate authentic Christian teaching and reject counterfeit messages from false teachers.

Say: Like recognizing a famous painting for what it’s worth, knowing the Bible requires the expertise of Christians who have diligently studied it and tried to replicate its teaching—not the masterpiece but the Master.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Paul encouraged Timothy to lead God’s people back to Him. Apparently, the folks in the Ephesian church had drifted far away from the Lord, thanks to teachers who had led them astray. Getting them on the right path would be difficult. In order to do so, Timothy would need to guide them to restore their devotion to Christ. Accomplishing such a critical yet difficult initiative would require Paul to use the best tools available to him. Paul pointed Timothy to one of the most effective tools when he instructed him to “set an example” of a growing believer (1 Tim. 4:12). Being an example for others to follow would provide Timothy with what he needed so he could lead Christians toward spiritual renewal.

In Paul’s personal work with the Corinthian church, he demonstrated that he knew the value of a good example. When he wrote his epistle to the Christians there, he reminded them of the model of Christlike behavior he had established. Then he challenged them to “imitate” (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1) the example he had set for them.

In the same way, Paul directed the believers at Thessalonica to remember the model he had given them of his own relationship with Christ and to apply it as they grew in Him:

For you yourselves know how you should imitate us: We were not idle among you; we did not eat anyone’s food free of charge; instead, we labored and toiled, working night and day, so that we would not be a burden to any of you. It is not that we don’t have the right to support, but we did it to make ourselves an example to you so that you would imitate us (2 Thess. 3:7-9).

The tool that Paul used with Christians in the first century continues to be effective for followers of Christ in the twenty-first century. When we use it well, we can help other believers grow toward spiritual maturity. For that reason, we’re wise when we take seriously the model of discipleship that the Lord has established for us.