

# Biblical Exercises for Spiritual Health & Fitness in 2014: The Discipline of Truth

1 Timothy 4:1-6a

Last week we began our opening series of the year: an examination of the Spiritual Exercises Paul was inspired to write to Timothy in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4.

As we turn there, think about the magnitude of what we are about to do. We are downstream twenty centuries from the first giving of these exercises, but they still work. These were the disciplines or training patterns that were invented by God to deepen and strengthen His hold upon my life. These are:

## Timeless & Powerful Disciplines

They are as powerful as they were in the glittering temptations of the Roman World, Century One. They have trained generation after generation of God's servants, and now, they are ours to use or neglect. This year, so fresh before us, can be used most effectively for the Lord by those believers who follow the words of v. 7:

Each of you should have one of these before you:

“and ***exercise yourself*** toward godliness.” (NKJV)

“ Rather ***train yourself*** for godliness;” (ESV)

“ On the other hand, ***discipline yourself*** for the purpose of godliness<sup>1</sup>,” (NASB)

“rather, ***train yourself*** to be godly.” (NIV)

Paul packages these spiritual truths in the form of present tense or ongoing athletic “exercises”, or “disciplines”, or “training sessions”, as the various translations of the Bible render the Greek work in v. 7. We can see the key idea of this passage through this word that God chose to use to describe what He expects from us. Remember this word can be translated as: “Gymnasticize (exercise, work out, train) yourself for the purpose of godliness”. That is our goal, start practicing the:

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<sup>1</sup> “godliness” is a key word in 1 Timothy, occurring seven times: 3:16; 4:7,8; 6:3, 5, 6, 11.

# Biblical Exercises for Spiritual Health & Fitness in 2014

Please stand and follow along in your Bibles as we hear God speaking through the Apostle Paul.

1 Timothy 4:1-6 (NKJV) Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; 5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. 6 If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.

## What was the First Exercise?

In Paul's systematic plan for Timothy to stay healthy and fit for God. Paul first instructed Timothy in these six verses, with an ongoing exercise. That first spiritual exercise is:

1. **Timothy:** Expose False Doctrines & Teachers (4:1-6a)

Now before we examine what the extent of this first exercise or discipline may be, why would we think in terms of v. 1-6 even as being an "exercise"? Where is that in the text? Look back at v. 7.

Each of these lessons Paul taught to Timothy in this chapter are built around, and surround the message of v. 7. In that verse, Paul teaches Timothy that he was writing to him a series of choices. These choices were then to become ongoing, not just single use. In fact, as we look more closely, the Spirit of God inspired Paul to use a word from the arena of sports as very graphic illustration.

So what is first in this list of disciplines, or exercises? The Discipline of Truth is the exercise God wants all of His children to be well practiced in.

Truth is such an amazingly vital starting place for this series of Disciplines that Paul set down for Timothy twenty centuries ago, and for us also today. Because:

## Exposing the False Means Knowing the Truth

If Timothy is to expose false teachers and teachings, that means that Timothy was to be well prepared in the Truth. The only way to expose what is false is to know what is truth.

Hence this exercise or discipline is the discipline of knowing, understanding, loving, and defending the Truth. This morning, go back with me to Christ's ministry, the living and breathing One who perfectly explains what God the Father desires, and shows us the invisible God in human flesh.

Have you ever thought about how often Jesus used the word "truth"? Turn back to the Gospel by John and look at John 1:14 (NKJV):

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus came filled with truth, and explained that worship was only possible through truth. Look at the pathway to God in worship that Jesus reveals in (John 4:23-24)

"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. <sup>24</sup> God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

This first discipline is foundational to everything. Everything we are as believers today is tied to the Truth. Think of the connection we all are to have to the Truth today:

**First, we know that the Truth is a person of incomprehensible importance.** Listen to a verse most of you already know by heart. Jesus said:

John 14:6 (NKJV) "I am the Way, **the Truth**, and the Life."

## **Jesus Christ is the Truth**

Jesus Christ is the Truth. He is the basis of life, truth, and all that matters. So the Discipline of Truth is all about a Person of immense importance to us. More than anything else, the Truth of Jesus Christ, who He is, what He has done, and what He wants is more important than anything else.

This first lesson of the Discipline of Truth is:

To know WHO Jesus Christ is.

To understand WHAT Jesus Christ has said.

To want to love Him by choosing to live HOW Jesus Christ has clearly instructed us to live.

So this first discipline is a check on the place that the Lord Jesus Christ has in our life as our source of Truth. Everything starts with Jesus Christ as Truth. Jesus tells us that further into the Gospel by John as He says:

John 17:3 (NKJV) “This is life eternal”

So first, the Discipline of Truth starts by knowing Jesus Christ as the most important Person of all. That starts everything. Knowing Him is salvation. But when we know Him, what happens?

**Second, we know that the Truth is a power that sets us free from the imprisonment of sin.** The Discipline of truth continues in the life of a believer by liberating us. We want to know the truth and live the truth. Before we can ever defend the truth we have to know it and live it. Listen to what else Jesus personally teaches us about this discipline of truth. When we apply His truth to our lives, something supernatural happens:

John 8:32 (NKJV) And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

## **Jesus Christ the Truth Liberates Us From Bondage**

How does sin imprison us? Fearfulness is a form of sin that imprisons believers. This type of fear is not from God. Paul told Timothy that “God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a strong mind”. Truth liberates us from the prison house of fear where we are captives, and liberates us to trust, follow, and walk in the newness of life in Christ.

Are you exercising yourself in the Discipline of Truth? The Discipline of Truth starts by personally meeting Jesus Christ by faith, bowing before Him as Lord and Savior. Receiving by faith His salvation. Then living each day asking Him to liberate us from the imprisoning power of sins like fear, impurity, bitterness, or jealousy.

The Discipline of Truth sets us free from living under the imprisoning power of fear. Fear imprisons us, but Christ the Truth liberates us.

Sin can also imprison us with impurity, with pride, with doubt, with jealousy, or with any other of the sins of the flesh. Sin imprisons, but the truth of Jesus Christ sets us free. How? By asking for freedom. It is that simple.

Believing God enough to walk before His Throne by faith and confess: “Almighty God, I believe what You say. I am a prisoner of fear, or impurity, or bitterness, or whatever. I ask you to set me free.”

That instant God responds. We are freed. That is the power of God, the supernatural work of God in us. But, why are we not then free from that particular sin, or even all sin from then on? Why do we go from the spiritual bliss of forgiveness and liberation to defeat and coldness towards God after a while? Simply stated, it is because we neglect God's Word.

Look back at John 17:17 with me, because there we find another dimension of the Truth. We have already seen:

- **First, we know the Truth is a person of incomprehensible importance.**
- **Second, we know the Truth is a power that sets us free from the imprisonment of sin.** But now:

**Third, we know the Truth is the Book God wrote that Sanctifies us.**

In John 17:17 Jesus Christ explains to us the heart of the Discipline of Truth:

John 17:17 (NKJV) “Sanctify them by Thy truth. Thy Word is Truth”.

Our growth in Christ, which is called sanctification, is based upon the Word of Truth the Bible. The Truth that saves, liberates, and keeps us is the Bible.

The Bible will keep us from sin; and sin will keep us from the Bible.

## **Jesus Christ Wants us Exercised by Feeding on Truth**

Jesus said that we can only live in a spiritually healthy and fit way, by daily feeding upon the sanctifying Word of Truth (Mat. 4:4). We have to eat His Word each day or we grow weaker that day.

How many days are going by between your feedings upon the liberating and sanctifying truth of God? That will measure how weak you are spiritually today.

But there is more. Jesus added another dimension to the Discipline of Truth. Truth is also the Spirit that guides us through life. Jesus shared with His disciples on that last night

before the Cross, that when He sent His Spirit to indwell each believer of the New Testament church, that He would come into us as the Spirit of Truth.

## **Biblical Illiteracy Leads to Defeated Believers**

The longer I live, the more alarmed I get at the growing trend of Biblical illiteracy and the lack of Biblical discipleship in today's church. Just as the decline in church attendance, Bible reading, and even Bible carrying can be seen in each new generation—the corresponding decline in even knowing the Bible (Biblical illiteracy), and obeying God's Word (Biblical discipleship) is showing up in the woefully powerless lives of so many believers<sup>2</sup>.

**Fourth, we know the Truth is surrendering to follow the Spirit of Truth.** To desire each day to know and follow the way of Truth, led by the Spirit of Truth, based on the Word of Truth, so that we are walking as the followers of the One who said He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

## **The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth**

Truth is a Person that brings Life, a Power that liberates us from sin's imprisonment, a Book that feeds and keeps our lives healthy and fit, and a Way that we follow that is guided by the Holy Spirit. Listen to John 16:13 (NKJV):

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth;”

How do we know the Truth? It is written down. The Word of Truth of the Bible is God's Word and it is central to everything.

The Holy Spirit of Truth has inspired and recorded the Word of Truth so that we as believers can exercise ourselves in the Discipline of Truth!

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<sup>2</sup> Research, that points to Biblical illiteracy and ineffective discipleship keeps getting published. Here is what Christian researcher and author George Barna reported, as he surveyed people who considered themselves to be “Christians”:

- Less than half of all adults can name the four gospels.
- A majority of professing Christians struggle to identify more than two or three of the disciples.
- 60 % of Americans cannot name even five of the Ten Commandments.
- 40% of Americans believe that when Jesus Christ was on earth He committed sins.
- 50% believe that anyone who is generally good or does enough good things for others during their life will earn a place in Heaven.
- 40% believe that the Bible, the Koran and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths.

Only by receiving this Word of God can we be saved because “faith comes by hearing” the Word of God (Romans 10:17); and by allowing God's Word to enter our being as the “implanted Word” (James 1:21).

That Word feeds our spiritual lives (Mt. 4:4), and lights our pathway so we know where to go (Ps. 119:105).

That Word is our only defensive weapon (Eph. 6:17) against the wiles of the attacks from the savage beast called the Devil that prowls around seeking to devour us as believers (1 Peter 5:9).

Now back to the Discipline of Truth. In 1 Timothy 1:10 Paul calls the truths contained in the Bible sound doctrine.

1 Tim. 1:10 (NKJV) for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine,

## The Exercise of Sound Doctrine

The word “sound” means healthy. When we know, and feed upon the true doctrines of God's Word we are healthy.

Look at how often here in 1 Timothy 4, Paul mentions proper, orthodox, or sound doctrine, and the imperative to know those true doctrines so that we can protect ourselves from false, deadly, unhealthy “false” doctrines.

1 Tim. 4:1, 6, 13, 16 (NKJV) Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will **depart from the faith**, giving heed to **deceiving** spirits and **doctrines of demons**,<sup>6</sup> If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the **good doctrine** which you have carefully followed.<sup>13</sup> Till I come, give attention to **reading**, to exhortation, to **doctrine**.<sup>16</sup> Take heed to yourself and to **the doctrine**. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

When we know and surrender to the Truth of God's Word we want to know, follow, live, and defend the truth.

## What are the Essential Truths?

Some of the most foundational truths that are most being abandoned in these last days are the truths Jesus Christ Himself held, taught, and defended. Here is their list of the seven essentials, and the guide to use to uncover when someone is a false-teacher and on a course of “falling away”.

1. **Jesus Believed & Taught the Doctrine of: INSPIRATION:** Jesus taught and affirmed the Inspiration and Reliable Historicity of the Bible (Jn. 10:35).
2. **Jesus Believed & Taught the Doctrine of: CREATION:** Jesus taught that Adam was the first human, and that He created Him and everything else that Genesis 1 says that He did (Mark 10:6-7).
3. **Jesus Believed & Taught the Doctrine of: PROPHECY:** Jesus taught that everything the Bible says about the future including Heaven, Hell, Israel, and the Church were true and going to happen exactly as the Scriptures say (Mat. 5:18).
4. **Jesus Believed & Taught the Doctrine of: DEPRAVITY:** Jesus taught the reality of sin and affirmed that mankind is fallen and not basically good, but we are all born as sinners (Jn. 8:44).
5. **Jesus Believed & Taught the Doctrine of: SUBSTITUTION:** Jesus taught that He was the only way of salvation for those who received by faith that He became sin for sinners to save them (Jn. 12:32).
6. **Jesus Believed & Taught the Doctrine of: IMPUTATION:** Jesus taught the damnable errors of every religion of human achievement and works righteousness (Lk. 16:15; 18:13).
7. **Jesus Believed & Taught the Doctrine of: DEITY:** Jesus taught that He was God the Son, the Creator of all, the Redeemer for sins, and the Judge before whom all would answer who die in their sins (Jn. 5:28-29; 10:30).

So how do we stay healthy minded, sound in our doctrine, and followers of Jesus Christ the Truth? By:

## Getting Started in a Weekly Plan of Exercises in Truth

Like physical exercise, spiritual exercise requires discipline, daily effort, and ongoing commitment. Just like daily exercise strengthens our muscles, so our daily spiritual disciplines can strengthen our “spiritual muscles.”

The five classic Biblical disciplines are exercises that ought to be part of every Christian’s life:

- **The Discipline of Bible Study:** Reading the Truth of God’s Word
- **The Discipline of Communication:** Praying the Truth of God’s Word



- **The Discipline of Memorization & Meditation:** Applying the Truth of God's Word
- **The Discipline of Worship:** Attending public worship built upon the Truth of God's Word
- **The Discipline of Surrender:** Giving time, money, and abilities to God's service based on obedience to the Truth of God's Word