

According to a British survey... 40 percent of moms have received an unwanted Mother's Day gift... but most of them were too polite to complain. Here's a partial list of the 30 worst Mother's Day gifts (according to moms who actually received these gifts):

- Deodorant
- Fire extinguisher
- Cleaning supplies
- A stick of French bread
- Salad dressing
- Popcorn
- Ants (perhaps an ant farm for Mom)
- Hair dye
- Screwdriver
- Toilet roll
- Calculator
- Car parts

But I don't think these gifts are as bad as the gift my brother (Harry) gave to his wife for her birthday one year. He generously bought her a lawnmower.

Another British newspaper ran an article titled "*20 awful Mother's Day cards that you absolutely should not buy*." The article is clear: Do **NOT** buy these cards. ... But just in case you're curious... here are a few examples:

- Mom, thanks for always checking up on me (with a picture of a cell phone with 24 unanswered calls from "Mom").
- Well I guess this Mother's Day card is late. Looks like someone wasn't raised properly.
- I'm awesome. You're welcome. To the luckiest Mom ever.
- Mom I love you loads. (A picture of a laundry basket overflowing with clothes.) Speaking of loads ... can you do my laundry?

Mothers have had to endure quite a bit from their children – even under the pretext of honoring them. ... But it is not just mothers. ... I think that it would be safe for me to say that none of us will get off this planet... without

facing some huge disappointments in our life. ... Life throws us a curve that we were not expecting... and certainly don't feel we deserve.

Let me ask you to consider a particular area of your life (for just a moment.) ... When you first got serious about your relationship with the Lord... what expectations came with it? ... What did you think your life would be like...?

Did you expect a life that is free of the personal challenges you are facing right now? - (Relational problems with the people in your life.) ... Did you envision how God would use you in ministering to others... maybe leading certain friends and family members into having their own personal relationship with Jesus? ... Did you expect to know God's Word... and have people come to you for help with their problems? (And be so grateful and receiving of your help) ... Have you ever become involved in a ministry... thinking that nothing but wonderful times were ahead... only to discover a massive amount of heart-ache... confusion... disappointment... and burn-out...?

That is what this message is about... as 1 Timothy 4:6-10... reveals Paul's wisdom to his young protégé (Timothy)... who must have been facing enormous disappointment and burn-out. ... It is ministerial advice.

So much of what I studied this week concerning our passage... was in the context of encouraging pastors. ... And the beauty of a small church (like Living Water) is that we have so many ministers! Every one of you are ministers! As a small church you don't get to come here and hide. There is no large staff of hired professionals – allowing you to simply sit in a pew – while a paid staff does the work of ministry. And I am so thankful that so many of you understand this.

This makes our passage today so relevant. You need to know how to overcome ministry disappointment and burnout. Please know that this is something I am very concerned about! We have a lot of men and women (here) who take their responsibility as ministers very seriously. I pray a lot for you... and as we study this passage today... let's pray for each other... (oh how I yearn for you to pray for me) – that these principles will be lived by us. (Let's not just know them. Let's live them.)

... [P A U S E] ...

Timothy was serving as pastor in the church at Ephesus. He had been given this temporary assignment by the Apostle Paul... about two years prior to getting this letter of encouragement from Paul. This young minister was surrounded by waves of problems within the church that were threatening to submerge him. ... Here are a few things that we can surmise... from what we have already seen in our study of this letter.

- He had unqualified elders and deacons.
- He had aggressive women who were overstepping their bounds in ministry in the church.
- The church had neglect in caring for its widows.
- There was a growing heresy called “Gnosticism” offering a false way of earning God’s attention through diet restrictions and not getting married.

Layer upon layer of carnality was threatening to suffocate Timothy as he found himself in this challenging ministry situation... for over two years. And what’s more... (we will see a little later in this letter) that Timothy was being disrespected... because of his young age. He needed respect in

order to make the corrections that he was left there to make. ...

Furthermore... amassing even MORE discouragement... Paul has just told him that he might be delayed (for who knows how long...) in coming to him... to provide Timothy with some relief. ... That is the back-story to our passage today. ... Now let's get to it... in order to find out how to handle ministry disappoint and burn-out.

We will see three strategies for protecting ourselves:

1. Nourishment from God's Word (verse 6)
2. Training for Godliness (Verses 7-9)
3. A Purpose which will Motivate Us (verse 10)

1 Tim 4:6

From his warning of the apostasy that will come into the church (which was what our passage last week was about)... Paul (now) turned to Timothy... and exhorted him to pass along these same warnings to others in the church. ... One of the works of a good minister of Christ Jesus is that he is a faithful conduit of the truth to other Christians. ... To do this (however)... Timothy first had to keep himself "nourished" ... The "good minister" preaches the Word that he himself feeds on day by day.

He nourishes himself on the words of the faith. ... Notice that the verse uses the definite article (the faith ... tes pisteos). ... This means the teachings of the Word of God. ... True doctrines are doctrines which are based upon the Scriptures. ... No doctrine is true (or Christian) that is not based upon the Scriptures.

So the first strategy for handling ministry disappointment and burn-out is: Stay nourished by God's Word. ... The implication is clear: the Christian leader must be one who has habitually taken nourishment from God's Word and continues to do so. ... Yet reports from an alarming percentage of pastors and missionaries... among church ministry leaders... show that (under the weight of ministry responsibilities and life responsibilities) time spent in the Word of God (and in prayer) becomes irregular and haphazard.

Is your ministry disappointment due to this?

Please consider the example of Lt. General William K. Harrison... who was the most decorated soldier in the 30th Infantry Division (rated by General Eisenhower as the number one infantry division in World War II.)

General Harrison was the first American to enter Belgium during that war... which he did at the head of the Allied forces. ... He received nearly every decoration for valor —being honored with the Distinguished Service Cross... the Silver Star... the Bronze Star for Valor... and the Purple Heart (he was one of the few generals to be wounded in action). ... When the Korean War began... he served as Chief of Staff in the United Nations Command and because of his character and calm self-control was ultimately President Eisenhower's choice to head the long and tedious negotiations to end the war.

General Harrison was a soldier's soldier who led a busy... ultra-kinetic life... but he was also an amazing man of the Word. ... When he was a twenty-year-old West Point cadet... he began reading the Old Testament through once ... and the New Testament four times annually. ... General Harrison did this until the end of his life. Even in the thick of war he

maintained his commitment by catching up during the two- and three-day breaks for replacement and refitting that followed battles... When at the age of ninety his failing eyesight no longer permitted this discipline... he had read the Old Testament seventy times and the New Testament 280 times! ... No wonder his godliness and wisdom were so legendary.

General Harrison's story tells us that it is possible... even for the busiest of us... to systematically train ourselves in God's Word. His life also remains a demonstration of the benefits of a godly mind's programming itself with Scripture. His closest associates say that every area of his life (domestic, spiritual, and professional) and each of the great problems he faced was informed by the Scriptures. People marveled at his godliness and his ability to bring the Word's light to every area of life.

The call to saturate ourself in God's Word is not a call to engage in legalism. ... We will not in this way gain standing before God. But we must for the right reason (which we will get to in the next verses)... train yourself in God's Word. ... Train yourself to listen to its preaching... take notes... check cross-references... read the Bible regularly (the *One Year Bible* is an immense help)... Download onto your cell-phone the Old and New Testaments and listen to it while commuting or exercising... (There are so many free versions that you can get online.)

Our passage presents three strategies for protecting ourselves from ministry disappointment and burn-out:

1. Is nourishment from God's Word (seen in verse 6) and
2. Is training for Godliness (shown in verses 7-9)

1 Tim 4:7

Last week... after I finished preaching on the first five verses of 1 Timothy... chapter 4... which tells us about the certainty of false teachers (or apostates) and how to deal with them... I had one of our members come up to me and ask about a friend of his. He wanted to know if I thought his friend might be an apostate. This friend had been telling our church member that the way to get close to God is through a particular way of preparing and eating mushrooms. Although he repeatedly claimed his method was in the Bible... he had never been able to show where. (I assure you that it is **NOT**.) ... But this would be an example of an irreverent silly myth.

Anything that teaches that there is something you can do... to get closer to God... is an irreverent silly myth. In the first part of 1 Timothy chapter 4... Paul cited food restrictions and the forbidding of marriage. Those are irreverent silly myths... just like this “mushroom theology.” HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THEM! Anytime someone wants to tell you about something you can do that earns an increase of God’s favor toward you – do not even listen. (“*Oh! This will REALLY put you in better touch with God...*”) Walk away. HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THEM!

Rather than being side-tracked by irreverent legends... which often provides you with an easy formula... aim at godliness in your life... as taught by God’s Word... and can only come from rigorous training. (Eating mushrooms... and legalistic efforts such as staying away from certain foods... and marriage... are ineffective short-cuts.)

Paul pointedly writes, “discipline yourself.” Advancement in the Christian life requires self-discipline. Nowhere is this more important than in the life of a minister. In fact... all successful ministry starts with his/her spiritual life.

A Scottish pastor from the late 1800’s (Robert Murray M’Cheyne) said:

“The greatest need of my people is my personal holiness.” He also added:

“It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is a powerful weapon in the hand of God.” ... And I love the

way M’Cheyne prayed for himself: *“Lord, make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be.”* ... Would you ever consider praying like that for yourself...?

That is a dangerous prayer! But maybe what we are missing is this kind of holy recklessness! ... M’Cheyne adds even further: *“Your whole usefulness depends on this.”* This must be our prayer and this must be our passion.

Do you remember... as we began today... that I asked that we pray for each other...? Can we pray that God will make us as holy as a pardoned sinner can possibly be...?

Spiritual formation is a personal (not a professional) issue. ... Being in FULLTIME ministry does not necessarily equate to spiritual maturity. Many people are hired to pastoral roles... based on giftedness and personality... but they have no interest in developing their maturity in Christ. ... Having a theological education does not guarantee maturity in Christ. ... Spiritual formation is not about the kind of knowledge gained in formal education. It’s possible to be a brilliant theologian and be an infant in spiritual life. I need you to pray for me! (And here is even more reason.)

The verb translated “discipline yourself” is drawn from an athletic background and drips with athletic imagery. ... The Greek term (*gymnaso*)

comes into our English language as *gymnasium*... and means to exercise or to train. (Literally... the word conveys the idea of being naked... because an athlete would go into a gymnasium and strip down. He would remove anything that would restrict the full movement of his body... so that he could expend himself in training and build himself up.) ... Paul is saying to Timothy, “*You need to look at the athlete, and learn from him. You need to be just like the athlete in your spiritual discipline.*”

As a person who wants to minister without disappointment or burn-out... (whatever our age or how long we have ministered in the church)... we must be like athletes - who are disciplining ourselves for the purpose of godliness. ... Just as any athlete who is serious about getting in shape... and goes to the gymnasium... strips down... and goes through the workouts... those who minister effectively must do the same spiritually. Run until your feet are like lead... and then break into a sprint. ... Pump iron until your muscles burn (until another rep is impossible)... then do more.

We cannot be passive about this. We must take charge of our spiritual life.

It is absolutely necessary for every person who ministers (man or woman) to discipline themselves spiritually. We must get in shape for the pursuit of holiness. We must work up a spiritual sweat. We must lose excess weight. We must tone our spiritual muscles. We must monitor our heart rate for God. We must do the heavy lifting of confessing our sins. We must beat down our fleshly desires. We must restrict our spiritual liberties to only that which is expedient. We must build up our endurance. No matter if you have been called into the ministry long ago or if you are new in God's service...

whether you are a pastor... a KIDS church teacher... an elder... a deacon... or deaconess. You must get in shape.

There is a great and glorious goal for this self-discipline. The chief aim of our discipline... Paul says... is “for the purpose of godliness.” The word “godliness” (*eusebia*) comes from a Greek root word that indicates reverence and awe. It refers to the inner condition of the heart... the inner attitude of the soul... the inner life of the human spirit.

Godliness involves cultivating an inner life that is God-centered... God-focused... and God-honoring. ... It is the antithesis of being casual toward God. It is the opposite of being kicked back and laid back toward God. ... Is there any wonder why ministry disappointment and burn-out is so common...?

Paul is saying to young Timothy... and to every spiritual leader today... what we **are** is more important than what we **do**. ... (LISTEN!) Our **godliness** is more important than our **giftedness**. ... What we **are** before God takes precedence over what we **do** before men. ... Our **private** life takes priority over our **public** life. ... **How we live** is more important than **where we labor**. ... Our **walk** with God is more important than our **work** for God. ... The size of our **hearts** is more important than the size of our **church**. ... Our **maturity** is more important than our **knowledge**. ... Our **purity** is more important than our **programs**. ... Our **integrity** is more important than our **ministry**. ... (And) ... our **soul** is more important than our **success**. ... Can we pray that we keep these as our priorities?

When it comes to a call for rigorous discipline (to train hard) for holiness... many Christians believe their loophole (their means of opting out) is “Well...

*I don't want to be legalistic. (And) **rigorous discipline** (to me) sounds like legalism..." ... But such thinking is mistaken. Legalism is self-centered... but discipline is God-centered. The **legalistic** heart says, "I will do this thing to make God obligated to me. (He will have to give me a better standing with Him)." ... But the **disciplined** heart says, "I will do this thing because I love God and I already have as good of a standing with Him because of what Christ has done. Now... I want to be used by Him for His kingdom glory..."*

But there are also benefits to spiritual discipline... that far out-weigh the benefits to any rigorous physical discipline.

1 Tim 4:8

Physical exercise does have "some value." ... It pays off health-wise. For this reason I do cardio-vascular exercise and lift weights several times a week at the gym... and minimize my intake of carbohydrates and sugar. But the value of these physical disciplines is limited. ... Arnold Schwarzenegger will not take his massive biceps or cannonball deltoids into eternity — or probably even to the grave. (The last time I saw a picture of him... his physique was looking a lot more normal.) ... But there is no doubt that physical exercise has profited him. ... However training for godliness has *unlimited* benefits (both in this world... and in the coming world.)

It is truly worth it to be disciplined spiritually. For the present life... it brings joy... happiness... spiritual power... and blessing. ... But Paul wrote: "*And also for the life to come.*" ... Think about that moment. ... After having run

the race that He has set before us... we are going to stand at the judgment seat of Christ. ... If we have paid the price to give ourselves to spiritual disciplines... it will lead on that last day to an exponential increase of joy. To the degree one advances in godliness... to that same degree there will be greater enjoyment of God and a fuller manifestation of His glory in us... MUCH LONGER than an average lifespan of 70 years here on earth. (The joy will be FOREVER!) ... Yes... spiritual exercise has a much greater return... than physical exercise!

Can we pray that we will WANT to exercise to be as holy as a pardoned sinner can possibly be...?

1 Tim 4:9

Paul underscores the absolute certainty of what he has just stated. There must be no doubt in our mind regarding the truthfulness that there is more profit for us... with spiritual discipline... than all of our preoccupation with our physical body's welfare. ... (We must do more than merely agree with it mentally. We must whole-heartedly embrace it.)

To drive this home to every one of us — Paul writes what he does in verse 9. ... His aim is to drive the stake down and to punctuate what he has just said. Verse 9 states, "*It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance.*" This is the same as Jesus saying, "*Truly, truly, I say unto you.*"

Certainly... everything that Jesus said was inerrant and infallible. But some words He spoke rise to a higher level of importance. So it is with Paul here. In the Greek... what Paul wrote is: "*Everyone (!) I want you to take out your*

yellow highlight Bible markers and designate what I just said as vitally important. ... This phrase is an affirming statement that the apostle uses throughout his three pastoral epistles to highlight what is extremely significant. ... “A trustworthy statement” means it is both important and certain. The statement must be accepted and received. *“Spiritual discipline brings far greater benefit than all the attention you put toward your physical body!”* (LISTEN-UP Grace-oriented Evangelicals! ... Reject your thoughts of this stuff being useless *legalism*.)

Of all the truth that Paul puts forth in his letters – he wants us to highlight **THIS**. ... So (lets pause long enough for me to ask!) ... Do you have a disciplined routine of taking medications for your body’s health... (and if so) how often do you miss a day? (Are you dedicated?) ... Are you more dedicated to **IT**... than your spiritual discipline? ... Do you make sure that you clean your body... (take a shower or bath)... every day... but are NOT as diligent with your soul? ... [P A U S E] ...

Our passage presents *three* strategies for protecting ourselves from ministry disappointment and burn-out:

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2. Is training for Godliness (shown in verses 7-9)
3. A Purpose which will Motivate Us (verse 10)

What would motivate us to engage in rigorous... disciplined... spiritual exercise (the kind described here as agonizing in a pursuit of holiness)...? Why would anyone willingly labor in such strenuous work... and even when it involves being ridiculed... reproached... and persecuted by the world.

1 Tim 4:10

Because God is the living God. Our work and message are based upon the truth. ... What we are doing is truth. It is all for the living God... and His plan to redeem those who will believe.

Christians should be willing to endure this anguish “*because we have fixed our hope **on the living God***”. ... The concept of “*hope*” in the New Testament is not wishful thinking... but a certainty that is yet to come to full fruition. We can have complete assurance that the Lord will come through on all of His promises. That assurance would not be rational if God were not real... (but He is in fact “the living God.”)

Our future hope should generate spiritual energy within us. ... At the end of life’s race... every believer will find his place before the judgment seat of Christ (where the Judge will be seated upon His throne.)

No matter where any minister finished in the race (whether last or first)... he will come and take his stand before the Judge’s seat. ... Those who have trained and built up their muscles and expanded their lungs for greater ministry endurance... and who have competed according to the rules... will be recognized by the Judge. ... He will call out their individual names and put the crown upon their heads. ... Every minister must push themselves... knowing that one day they will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ... and that He will reward those who have faithfully pursued godliness... ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Godly character and conduct are far more important than a Superbowl ring... or home-run records... (though it is possible for a person to have both.) ... 1 Timothy 4:6-10 challenges us to be as devoted to godliness as an athlete is to his sport. ... We are living and laboring for eternity.