

Heart Exercises

“...and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.” (1 Timothy 4:7)

Introduction:

Just as Greek or Roman athletes had to refuse certain things, eat the right foods, and do the right exercises, so a Christian should practice “spiritual exercise.” If a Christian puts as much energy and discipline into his spiritual life as an athlete does into his game, the Christian grows faster and accomplishes much more for God. Exercising our physical body is critical; exercising our spiritual life is essential! Paul gave three admonitions to keeping your heart exercised.

3 Heartfelt Exercises:

1. Reject the **bad** – “*profane and old wives’ fables*” (1 Timothy 4:7a)

These are, of course, the false teachings and **traditions** of the apostates. These doctrines have no basis in Scripture; in fact, they contradict the Word of God. No doubt these teachings involved the false doctrines just named in 1 Timothy 4:2-3. Paul also warned Titus about “Jewish fables” (Titus 1:14). Paul warned Timothy about these same “fables” in his second letter (2 Timothy 4:4). Paul admonished Timothy to remain true to “the good doctrine which you have closely followed up to now” (1 Timothy 4:6b). Tradition should never overrule teachings of Scripture. A chemist may handle and study poisons, but he does not permit them to get into his system.

2. Practice the **temporary** – “*bodily exercise*” (1 Timothy 4:7-8)

Again, this is an athletic image. Certainly we ought to care for our bodies, and exercise is part of that care. Our bodies are God’s **temples**, to be used for His glory (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), and His **tools** for His service (Romans 12:1-2). But bodily exercise benefits us only during this life; godly exercise is profitable now and for eternity. Paul did not ask Timothy to choose between the two; I think God expects us to practice both. A healthy body can be used of God, but we must focus on holiness and heart focused exercises.

3. Strive for the **eternal** – “*godliness*” (1 Timothy 4:7-12).

Spiritual exercise is not easy; we must “labor and strive” (1 Timothy 4:10a, NIV). The word translated “strive” is an athletic word from which we get our English word *agonize*. It is the picture of an athlete straining and giving his best to win. Phillips Brooks said, “The great purpose of life – the shaping of character by truth.” Godly character and conduct are far more important than golf trophies or home-run records, though it is possible for a person to have both. Paul challenged Timothy to be as devoted to godliness as an athlete is to his sport. We are living and laboring for eternity. A Christian who wants to excel must really work at it, by the **grace** of God and to the glory of God.

To keep growing – exercise your physical & **spiritual heart!**