

Keeping Fit for the Sake of Others

Lesson Scripture: Daniel 1:8-20; 1 Corinthians 9:19-27; 1 Timothy 4:7-12; 2 Timothy 2:1-5

Focus Scripture: Daniel 1:8-17; 1 Timothy 4:7-8

Key Verses: Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is one of value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present and the life to come. 1 Timothy 4:7b-8

DANIEL 1:8-17; 1 TIMOTHY 4:7-8 (NRSV UE)

Daniel 1:8-17

8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine, so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself.

9 Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion from the palace master.

10 The palace master said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king; he has appointed your food and your drink. If he should see you in poorer condition than the other young men of your age, you would endanger my head with the king."

11 Then Daniel asked the guard whom the palace master had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:

12 "Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink.

13 You can then compare our appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations and deal with your servants according to what you observe."

14 So he agreed to this proposal and tested them for ten days.

15 At the end of ten days it was observed that they appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations.

16 So the guard continued to withdraw their royal rations and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables.

17 To these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams.

DANIEL 1:8-17; 1 TIMOTHY 4:7-8 (KJV)

Daniel 1:8-17

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.

13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.

15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.

16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

1 Timothy 4:7-8

7 Have nothing to do with profane and foolish tales. Train yourself in godliness,
8 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.

1 Timothy 4:7-8

7 But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.
8 For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

KEY TERMS

- **Assimilation** – A process where individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds adopt the norms, values, behaviors, and social practices of a dominant or host society, ultimately minimizing or eliminating cultural differences.
- **Kosher** – A term from Jewish dietary laws (*kashrut*) that means fit, proper, or permissible to eat.

INTRODUCTION

Being physically and spiritually healthy is crucial for fulfilling our responsibilities to others. As cultural and political pressures are increasingly influential in daily life, how confident are you in your ability to withstand these pressures while showing grace and humility? The books of Daniel and 1 Timothy both highlight the importance of living holistically by encouraging disciples to develop healthy bodies, minds, and spirits. Although Paul recognizes the significance of all three, he uses athleticism as a metaphor to emphasize spiritual fitness as the most important

to God and the most beneficial to others. Additionally, according to the books of Daniel and 1 Timothy, spiritual discernment is crucial for understanding how God guides us through life's difficulties, including opposition to our faith.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Expanding on this unit's theme, "Fulfilling Our Obligations to Neighbors," today's lesson begins with an incident from the early life of the prophet Daniel. Daniel and three of his young friends, along with other Israelites, were forced into captivity in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar chose to have Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah trained to serve in his palace. To prepare for service, Daniel and his

friends became reliant on the king's court and had to complete a three-year "forced assimilation" into Babylonian culture. This process involved carefully planned efforts to strip them of their religious and cultural identities. As a result, they were given names associated with Babylonian deities to replace their original Israelite names, which were linked to their God. Dan-

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iel was renamed Belteshazzar, Hananiah was called Shadrach, Mishael was given the name Meshach, and Azariah was called Abednego. Daniel and his friends were expected to eat food and drink wine from the king's royal provisions, which, according to Jewish culture and tradition, involved "unclean" foods. Daniel graciously disagreed.

Daniel Negotiates With Ashpenaz – Daniel 1:8-16

Because of his respectful attitude and calm nature, Daniel impressed Ashpenaz, the king's palace master. Knowing that his life depended on faithfully following Nebuchadnezzar's orders, Daniel asked Ashpenaz to allow him and his friends to engage in a ten-day test to see if the king's expectations could be met with a kosher diet instead. The plan was that Daniel and his friends would eat only vegetables and drink water during the test. After ten days, if they appeared healthier, they could continue the diet. Ten days later, the success of Daniel's plan was clear as he and his friends showed no signs of malnutrition! Instead, they looked healthier and better nourished than the other captives. So, Ashpenaz allowed them to keep eating vegetables and drinking water.

Faithfulness Is Rewarded – Daniel 1:17

Although Daniel was the one who initiated ev-

erything, he and his friends were richly rewarded for their faithfulness to God. As a result, God granted Daniel and his three friends "knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams" (Daniel 1:17). After completing their three-year training, King Nebuchadnezzar found them to be ten times wiser and more understanding than all the magicians and astrologers in his kingdom. Consequently, they all received roles in the king's court.

The Benefits of Spiritual Discipline – 1 Timothy 4:7-8

Although Daniel was the one who initiated everything, he and his friends were richly rewarded for their faithfulness to God.

Through Timothy and Paul's mentorship experiences, we see why spiritual discipline is the most vital of all disciplines. Timothy, a young man leading the church in Ephesus – a city where pagan worship thrived alongside competing ideas and internal conflicts within the Christian community – faced many challenges. This was a growing church, but like the surrounding community, it was also filled with

conflicts. False teachings, moral and ethical uncertainties, as well as social and cultural clashes, hindered the spiritual growth the church desperately needed. Fortunately, Timothy could rely on Paul for support.

Paul's advice is straightforward but challenging! He told Timothy to ignore distractions and to "train himself in godliness" (4:7). Naturally,

Timothy, who was of Greek descent (Acts 16:1-3), would quickly connect Paul's instruction with athletics. Essentially, Paul was urging Timothy to be more intentional about developing spiritual discipline. This would require whole-hearted commitment to praying, studying, and living a godly life. Paul made it clear that spiritual fitness (or godliness) is more important than physical fitness because it affects both this life and the life to come.

SANKOFA

As we examine the interconnected relationships among healthy minds, bodies, and spirits, the path to strengthening our discipleship becomes clearer. Correlations between our faith and historical African American dietary habits are indeterminate. However, the predominance of chronic illnesses and diseases, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease should be taken seriously, and vigorous efforts should be made toward ameliorating or eliminating them.

Food deserts are significant contributors to chronic illnesses and higher death rates among African Americans. The term "food desert" refers to areas where residents have limited or no access to fresh, healthy foods. Instead of full-service grocery stores, fast food and convenience stores are the dominant food suppliers. Food deserts proliferate in predominantly black or minority communities.

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We may not be personally affected. However, learning more about the origins and causes of food deserts, as well as the steps that can be taken to help alleviate their prevalence in black communities, is a compassionate goal for all to pursue. More information is available at: <https://www.elevateblackhealth.com/food-deserts-andhealth-inequailty-in-our-communities/>.

CASE STUDY

The scriptures are full of reminders that we are all gifted by God for his purposes. Dr. Helen Octavia Dickens is remembered for faithfully

using her gifts to serve others. She was born in 1909 to a former slave who taught himself to read and a mother with little or no formal education. However, both of her parents instilled in her a strong desire for education and perseverance, which empowered her to succeed academically and professionally.

Despite the challenges she faced, Dr. Dickens, who died in 2001, achieved unprecedented success.

For example, she was the first African American woman admitted to the American College of Surgeons and accomplished many other milestones in the medical field. Dr. Dickens is also recognized for her wisdom in learning from other successful African American women in the field of medicine. She is highly praised for her work in obstetrics and gynecology, as well as her compassionate approach to serving the

underserved and impoverished, especially African American women. Dr. Dickens' impact on reducing cervical cancer rates is her most notable achievement. Because of her work, the pap smear became more acceptable to African American women and positively impacted early detection and survival rates for cervical cancer patients. By the 1950s, Dr. Dickens was also the first African American Board-Certified OB/GYN in Philadelphia. More information is available at https://cfmedicine.nim.nih.gov/physicians/biography_82.html.

LIFE APPLICATION

As pastors, church leaders, and disciples, we must be prepared to face challenges similar to those Timothy faced in Ephesus (1 Timothy 4:7-8). In a world flooded with misinformation – from media, technology, and even within religious groups – we see false teachings that distort key biblical truths, such as salvation through faith in Christ, the prosperity Gospel, and the mixing of Christianity with other religions and cultural practices. These issues aren't new, and the scriptures warn us to expect them. As 2 Timothy 4:3-4 tells us, people will reject sound doctrine and pursue myths. Colossians 2:8 also warns against being misled by

deceptive philosophies.

Questions:

- 1 Peter 3:15 urges disciples to "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." How prepared are you?
- What actions are you taking to avoid being misled by misinformation, gaslighting, and other forms of communication intended to deceive you and others?



As 2 Timothy 4:3-4 tells us, people will reject sound doctrine and pursue myths.

- Do you believe Daniel's negotiation techniques might help resolve disputes or disagreements in your church? Explain why!

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Song: "I Am Thine, O Lord," *AME Hymnal* #283

Closing Prayer: Father God, we thank you for your grace and mercy, and for teaching us how to be your disciples. Although we face adversity, we will neither

live in fear nor dread because Jesus told us that he will never leave us nor forsake us. As we close today's study, please bless us with stronger commitments and determinations to love as Jesus taught and to serve you with all our hearts, souls, and minds. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

March 9-15

Monday	Psalm 12 (God Will Defend the Needy)
Tuesday	Luke 12:13-21, 33-34 (Do Not Be Afraid to Give)
Wednesday	Leviticus 19:11-18 (Treat the Neighbor With Justice)
Thursday	James 2:8-13 (The Royal Law of Love)
Friday	Luke 10:25-37 (Everyone is Our Neighbor)
Saturday	Deuteronomy 15:4-11 (Compassion for Those in Need)
Sunday	Matthew 25:41-45 (Seeing Christ in Those Around Us)