

Our Most Precious Possessions #6

Mrs. Joy in many ways reflected her name. She was kind, sympathetic, a good listener and neighbor. It was perhaps for all of those reasons that her next door neighbor came over one day to confide that they were having problems with their 15 year old son, Jack. The boy had never been physically well. He had always been plagued by a variety of maladies; boils, bad back, flat feet, poor eyesight. But lately, things had been going from bad to worse. Jack had been getting into trouble at school, more trouble than usual. He had been starting fights even though he had no hope of winning them. He had been coming home with black eyes and cut lips almost every day. He had also been complaining about headaches, severe, awful headaches. The headaches at times had driven him to become violent and uncontrollable. And of the greatest concern to his mother was the fact that Jack had been talking about suicide. Jack's mother was certain that he was going to do something drastic unless something changed in his life quickly. Why just the other day Jack had attacked Norman, his senior brother of 6 years, for no apparent reason and had chased him around the yard with an ax. What could she possibly do?

Now Mrs. Joy was not a trained counselor, but the advice that she gave to Jack's mother that day was still pretty good. Perhaps his problem was not just emotional, but perhaps Jack had some physical problems as well. Perhaps Jack should go to a doctor and a nutritional and physical fitness expert. Now remember this advice was given 3 quarters of a century ago, before physical fitness and health was the "in thing". Jack's mother was at the end of her rope, so she heeded Mrs. Joy's advice. She took Jack for a physical checkup and then to a seminar conducted by Paul Bragg.

Paul Bragg was an energetic gentleman who also seemed to picture his name as Mrs. Joy did. Bragg's lecture was simple and straightforward – natural foods, regular exercise, and disciple of mind and body. But it was his boundless energy and enthusiasm and grandiose self-confidence that captivated Jack. Finally, at the end of his lecture, Paul Bragg who was about 55 years old put an exclamation point on his speech by doing handsprings all the way across the platform.

Jack left that meeting with a commitment. He began to eat a very strict diet, and he began to subject his body to a rigorous schedule of exercise. In a short time, his physical problems began to go away and he felt so much better. This just encouraged Jack to become more and more obsessed with his exercise regimen.

One time during his life, Jack pulled 13 rowboats filled with 76 people while swimming a mile. At the age of 65, Jack did over a thousand pushups in 23 minutes. It's very possible that some of our senior saints have actually done some pushups with Jack. For many years Jack lead thousands of people with daily exercises from their T.V. screens. In fact, we owe much of our physical fitness emphasis today to Jack, for Jack LaLanne's name would

eventually become synonymous with physical fitness and his boundless enthusiasm would lead an entire generation into a realization of the importance of the proper care for our bodies.

Today, we take the value of physical fitness for granted. In fact, many have gone to the extreme where they are more concerned with their physical fitness and recreation than with their work or almost anything else in life. As Americans, we will spend more than 300 billion dollars (that's with a b) on physical fitness and recreation this year alone. Now to put this in some kind of perspective that we can more easily understand, we will spend more money this year on physical fitness and recreation in our country than we will spend on national defense fighting a war overseas. Recreation has become the biggest industry in our country today by far. So we must admit that Americans realize the value and necessity of physical fitness today. In fact, many times we hear that if you have your health, you have everything in life.

But, you know, as important as our health is to us – and I think we all would agree that it is vitally important – there is something else that should be more important to us. The Apostle Paul felt it necessary to remind a young church leader named Timothy of this so he might be able to maintain balance in his life.

⁸ Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. (1 Tim. 4:8)

Now a very literal rendering of the first half of this verse might read, *Physical training is of value for a little.*

This phrase has been interpreted in 2 major ways and both have truth to them. Some have said that Paul is saying that physical exercise while being a good thing in itself is of very small value when compared to spiritual training – physical exercise is little compared to the great profit of spiritual exercise. Others have said that Paul is trying to speak of the temporary nature of physical exercise. Physical exercise is profitable for just a little while – the benefits of physical exercise don't last that long compared to the eternal value of spiritual training.

Now both of these possibilities have merit to them and reveal truth that is supported by others portions of Scripture. Physical exercise is of value – nowhere does the Bible imply that being out of shape physically is a spiritual virtue. But in comparison to spiritual training, there is no comparison in importance, for spiritual training is both of far greater value and it is far more enduring.

The Greek word that is translated *exercise* here is very interesting to note. It is the word *gymnasia*. It, of course, is the word that has been transliterated into our English language as gymnasium. Now when we think of a gymnasium, we think of a place where physical training occurs, don't we? School gym classes are held there, basketball and volleyball practices are held there, wrestling workouts are held there. Now back in Biblical times, in the Greek and Roman cultures, the gymnasia was used in a similar way except the gymnasia was an outdoor arena

and the sports were more like those we would associate with track and field events today – more running and throwing and weight-lifting events.

But the Greek and Roman concepts of the gymnasia were much broader than ours is. In our school, the classrooms are separated from the gymnasium. The classrooms are recognized as the part of the school where the academic learning takes place while the gym is the place where the physical activity occurs. There is a dichotomy that has formed in our modern school system. Well, back in the Greek and Roman times, the gymnasia was not only a center of physical activities, but it was also a place where mental exercise took place as well. Philosophy, the arts, mathematic principles, these were all discussed at the gymnasia. So this popular arena became associated with the disciplining of the whole person. It became a center for both physical and mental training. But Paul's counsel to Timothy was that, as important as physical and mental exercises are, spiritual training is much more important. We should value spiritual training much more highly in our lives.

Now why should this be the case? Why should training in the spiritual areas of life be so much more valuable to us? The Apostle gives Timothy 2 reasons in this short verse. I would invite you to notice them with me.

1. First of all, Paul says that spiritual training should be a top priority to us because it alone prepares us in all areas to live life to its fullest today. Godliness holds promise **for this present life**.

The exaltation of physical exercise in our culture today is really an evidence to how shallow and narrow our culture has become. The fact that recreation is by far the largest industry in our country and that this focuses on just a tiny portion of who we really are as people just shows how unbalanced we have become as a culture.

Godliness, however, covers every single aspect of life. God created us as complete people. He formed the first human body and then breathed his spirit into it so that it became a living soul. God is concerned for our physical bodies. But he is even more concerned for our immaterial beings. Godliness deals with more than surface issues. It deals with our core, heart issues. Godliness nurtures the growth of love, gives direction to our life purposes, acts as a compass to direct our morality, builds and strengthens our character. By devoting ourselves to godliness, we are exposing ourselves to every facet of the complete and balanced life that God intended for us. Godliness sharpens our eyesight so that we can see life with a godly perspective. God has created everything that is in existence today. So everything, in the final analysis, must relate to God its creator in order to have meaning. Godliness is of great value to us because it helps for us to see a perspective that enables us to really put life together.

I was interested in reading the compared comments of a Texan and a person from Colorado who had swapped states because of business relocations. Both had purchased houses with large picture windows in their new states so that they might have picturesque views. But the man from Colorado was now complaining because there was

nothing to see outside of his window – just miles and miles of flat range land. And the Texan also was complaining because there was this big mountain outside his window that obscured his view so that he couldn't see for the miles that he was used to. As I read their compared comments, I was reminded of the importance of our perspectives in life. Our perspective is the filter through which we interpret life. If the lens of our filter is dirty or not in focus, then we won't have a proper view of life, we won't focus on what is most valuable in life. A pursuit of godliness helps us to maintain that proper perspective in life today. Godliness helps us to see what is really most important in the world all around us. It then allows us to live life to its fullest. In one of the purpose statements that our Savior gave as to why he had come to this earth, Jesus said, *I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full*. The picture that Jesus gave in this statement is that of a fountain that is overflowing with water. The container just can't hold all of the water that is being poured into it. So the water is just continuously flowing over the rim. That's the kind of life Jesus wants to give his children – a life that has so many blessings that they just can't be contained. The blessings naturally just flow out into the lives of other people. A pursuit of godliness leads to this kind of life right here and now on this earth.

2. But Paul goes on to give a 2nd reason for the priority of godliness to Timothy. Spiritual training also prepares a person for the life to come.

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Anybody who has ever been involved in any kind of athletic training is quickly impressed with the temporary nature of that training. A person could have been in good enough shape to run the Old Kent River Run a week or so ago but if that runner stops logging in the miles for a month or two, he is going to be huffing and puffing when he tries to jog around the block. A person could be hitting a golf ball long and straight in the fall after a summer's long playing, but the next spring after a few month winter layoff, she feels like she's holding a golf club in her hand for the first time again. You see, one of the unspoken axioms in athletics is that it takes a long, long time to get into shape but just a very short time to get back out of shape again. So while physical training is important and certainly does have its place, it doesn't last for a long time. But a pursuit of godliness, spiritual training is different. Any time and effort that we devote to our spiritual training will last forever because it will not only bring profit to us in this life but it will continue even into the life to come. Learning about God and growing in our relationship with Him will bring great profit into our lives for it will not only sustain us even in the more difficult times here on this earth but it will form the foundation for what we will be learning throughout all eternity. Memorizing Scripture will bring great profit into our lives for it will not only help us to overcome temptation in our life here and now but it will be of value to us forever for while heaven and earth are going to pass away some day, God's word will never pass away, it will endure forever. Building relationships with others around us and sharing our faith with them will bring great profit into our

lives now for we are certainly enriched through human relationships but it will also be of value to us forever for we will be investing our lives in others who will live on eternally. Giving to support God's work here on this earth will bring great profit into our lives for whereas whatever else we buy will one day perish, God's kingdom is going to last forever.

When our boys were young, I remember reading from this big book of nursery rhymes that we had. One of those nursery rhymes that I remember read:

Pussy cat, Pussy cat, where have you been? I've been to London to visit the queen. Pussy cat, Pussy cat, what did you there? I frightened a little mouse under the chair.

Can you imagine how shocked Pussy cat's friends must have been when she returned from her trip to London? The friends could hardly wait to see Pussy cat's slides of her visit to see the queen. How did the queen look? What was she wearing? Did the queen's crown really glisten from all the jewels as much as they imagined it would? But then as Pussy cat began to flick through her slides, the queen wasn't in them at all. There was just this mouse that was under a chair in the room. The cat had gone all the way to London to see the queen but had missed the whole point of the trip having been distracted by a mouse under a chair.

Many people are like that in life. They become so obsessed with interests or hobbies or recreational pursuits that they miss the whole point of living. The point of our journey here on this earth is to see the king – the creator of the Universe. That is the reason why God has created each of us. We see God more and more fully as we pursue godliness in our life.

Godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.