

# Coach House Church BEACONS

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## EXERCISE NAKED

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18TH SEPTEMBER 2020

### **1 Timothy 4:7 (NLT)**

***Do not waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives' tales. Instead, train yourself to be godly.***

This is the advice Paul gave to Timothy as he instructed him in his church leadership role. Now, here is an interesting thing. The word 'train' comes from the Greek word 'Gumnos', from which we derive the word gymnasium. Now that all sounds fine and dandy and something, we don't have too much of an issue with... work hard, get in the gym and do some training in getting godly! However, the word Gumnos actually means 'naked' – so now we have the unusual picture of people training by worked up a sweat in the gym whilst having no clothes on, because the original translation would be to 'exercise naked'!

It was not unusual in Greek games, for the participants to compete naked, so when the apostle Paul was writing to Timothy, a young leader in the city of Ephesus, lauded as one of the most important City in the Greek empire, it made perfect sense – do not be burdened by anything, put it off, do away with it and train unhindered. Focus on being godly.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament, also sharply portrayed the image of being unhindered:

### **Hebrews 12:2 (NLT)**

***Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.***

Basically, strip away everything that might get in the way of being able to run and slow us down.

Now perhaps, I wouldn't get very far if I entered a 100 metre sprint, given my dodgy knees and inability to run without looking like a wobbly penguin, but imagine if I turned up at the starting line in a wetsuit and flippers, with a lifejacket strapped around me and a snorkel ready to hit me in the face at every step! I think even the dodgy kneed original version of myself would fare better in any such race!

But here I think we can see the context of what the writer is urging us to do. If you desire to run the race, then run it as best you can, and give yourself the best chance of competing and finishing. Don't fail to finish because we are weighed down by things that we need not carry. – give yourself the best chance. These are wise words and are often quoted in Christian churches – but what does it actually mean for us?

The things that we are being urged to strip away in both instances, are the things that have nothing to do with godliness and have everything to do with self and sin. Now I don't want to be sermonising or coming across as heavy handed here, but I think the illustrations that Paul uses (and it is possible that Paul also wrote the book of Hebrews, so the analogies would match up!), make it very clear that Sin is going to hold us back, will weigh us down, will cause us to struggle – it will tie us up in useless argument and debate.

If we have to train ourselves to be godly as the instructions to Timothy states, then this implies that it is us that has to do something. We train, we strip off every weight – in order to run and compete at our fullest potential. In its truest sense, this is indeed most liberating, as it shows us that we are all have to do this – no-one is excused. We have to train or exercise, in order to maintain a righteous or Godly lifestyle and daily walk and in this, we cannot be superior to someone else, or even be judgemental of someone else, we are all in this together.

It is often said that a baby comes into this world naked and this is indeed true if the description was to do with our clothing or even innocence. But the truth of the matter is that even a baby is born of Adams seed and therefore is shaped and clothed in sin. As a consequence of this and due to the prevailing world view in which we grow up, we naturally take on more and more sin – we clothe ourselves daily with ungodliness. As Christians we receive the benefit of having our sins covered by Jesus righteousness, but our nature still attracts sin and it is this that we have to train hard to expel or restrain.

Sometimes we are better at it than other times - sometimes we are well inclined to Gods voice and guidance by the Holy Spirit, other times however, we have failed to hear Gods leading and are diverted by other voices and leadings and, by the very nature of this, we shun the clothing of righteousness and indulge our fallen natures - this is not good for us at all and is why Jesus, Paul and the other New Testament writers urge us to stand firm in what we first believed, for example:

***2 Thessalonians 2:15 (NLT)***

***With all these things in mind, dear brothers and sisters, stand firm and keep a strong grip on the teaching we passed on to you both in person and by letter.***

Notice that the instruction is for us to do it - we stand firm - new keep a strong grip - we train hard - we put off those things that would drag us down.

The mighty work of salvation God has done for us and given to us as a gift when we believe in Jesus sacrifice. That is a given, but it does not mean that we stand and wait for everything else. The battle has commenced once we step over the line and make our intentions known to live a life worthy of Gods calling. The bible tells us that our enemy is on the prowl, in fact in the apostle Peter describes it like this;

***1 Peter 5:8 (NLT)***

***Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith.***

So, let's be very serious for a minute or two and join all this together.

If I am in a race, I would do my best to compete to the best of my ability. This would mean training hard, and then making sure that I was in the best condition to run and was not burdened by unnecessary weight or clothing, as per the scriptures we started with. The problem is that most of us see this as a straight forward race, but it isn't. The race is the race in this life to cross the finish line and enter into eternal relationship with God the Father, where the reward is eternity, but more than this, eternity without the burdens that this world gives us. No more pain, no more suffering, no more sin. Period. In the presence of a Holy God, where no sin can abide.

Now let's link all of this with the warnings that in this life (before we reach the finishing line) the enemy, the devil is prowling around looking for those that he can devour. Now, if you have seen any wildlife programme you will know how a lion hunts... Splitting the pack, picking off the weak and the struggling, those that were finding it difficult to keep up with the safety of the herd .... I think you can picture where this is going?

If we choose to run the race of life and do nothing about the burden of sins that we carry and that hinder our ability to keep up, then surely, we are in danger of being picked off and as the scripture tells us – devoured.

I can choose to run the 100 metre sprint in my wetsuit and flippers, but I don't stand much chance of keeping up with those who have stripped off all the unnecessary stuff and have chosen to run 'naked' - To truly mix my metaphors, I would be in great danger of being picked off by the prowling lion chasing after us! I would have been a fool to think that I could compete.....and, the price for such foolishness .....?

Paul when he writes to the Churches in Galatia, has to ask them why they were being diverted from the truth by false teachings? They had put aside the truth of the Gospel they had heard from Paul initially and had replaced it with some restrictive teachings, but he puts it like this:

***Galatians 5:7 (NLT)***

***You were running the race so well. Who has held you back from following the truth? It certainly isn't God, for he is the one who called you to freedom.***

So, there you have it. The Gospel frees us, gives us the ability to run the race in the first place, but it is up to us how we decide to run the race set out before us. Do we train hard to keep in step and keep our eyes fixed in the finishing line, or do we allow ourselves to be held back, have our forward movement restricted – are we weighed down, dragging the burdens of guilt and shame that come from sin? Or, have we put off the things that burden us, decided to train hard, made ourselves naked except for the truth that spurs us on to an eternity with God? Jesus gave us everything we need to compete and complete – let's not make that a meaningless exercise.



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