

Take Heed to Yourself

by J. Oswald Sanders

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the leader's personal walk with God and the need for self-discipline in order to be effective in ministry.

Duration: 35:36

Scripture: Romans 12:11, 1 Timothy 4:7, 1 Timothy 4:12-16

Topics: "Take Heed"

Description

In this sermon, Billy Graham reflects on the life of a man who dedicated himself to one thing rather than dabbling in many things. He emphasizes the importance of finding the one thing that unifies and integrates our lives, and giving the best of ourselves to God. Graham references Paul's instructions to Timothy, urging him to train himself to be godly and to watch his life and teaching closely. He encourages leaders to be diligent and enthusiastic in their service to God, setting an example for others to follow.

Transcript

Now tonight I want to speak on the subject, Take Heed to Yourself. And we'll read together from 1 Timothy, Paul's first letter to Timothy, chapter 4. 1 Timothy 4, chapter 4, and verse 7, the latter part of it, Train yourself to be godly, for 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. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance, and for this we labor and strive, that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.

Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, and to teaching.

Do not neglect your gift which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters. Give yourself wholly to them so that everyone may see your progress.

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. My theme centers around Paul's three injunctions to Timothy in this passage.

In verse 7 he says, Train yourself to be godly. In verse 15 he says, Watch your life and teaching closely. In verse 16 he says, So that everyone may see your progress.

You'll notice that Paul's emphasis here is on young Timothy as a leader. And the emphasis is not on leadership, but on the leader himself. And it may sound trite, but I believe it's true that the most important factor in leadership is the leader himself.

It's what we are that determines the effectiveness and value of what we do. Not everyone is qualified or is called to prominent positions of leadership. Some of you will be called to that in coming days.

Some of you won't, because it's not God's plan for your life. But every one of us, in a sense, is a leader, because leadership is influence. Leadership is the ability to influence other people to do something which otherwise they would be unlikely to do.

And we are leaders to the extent that we influence others. And which of us has no influence? You know, every one of us is unique. And you have a sphere of influence with people that no one else in this world has.

God has given you a certain sphere in which you can influence others toward him. And in that sphere you are a leader. You are able to influence others.

You notice that Paul said to Timothy, train yourself to be godly. Timothy was to train others to be godly, but Paul is not emphasizing that. He said, train yourself to be godly.

He says, watch your life closely. Well, Timothy was going to watch over the life of his congregation. But Paul says, you watch your life closely.

Timothy was going to look for the progress in maturity of the congregation he was going to. But Paul said, you give yourself to these things so that everyone may see your progress. You see what he's doing? He is placing the emphasis on the leader himself.

And that's the emphasis I wish to make tonight. You see, like his master, Paul puts character before service. He puts character before teaching.

Watch your life first and your teaching afterwards. The life is more important than the teaching because we couldn't live a kind of life that would negate our teaching. If I'm not exemplifying my teaching, then I'm doing harm, my teaching.

I'm not helping at all. This is something that we have to do. Watch your life.

Train yourself. God won't do that for us. A coach can train the people, the sportsmen he's training, but they have to go out and put into practice what he says.

He can do only so much, and God can show us the way. He can make provision for it, but we've got to go out and work it out in our own daily experience. The leader's first responsibility is to himself.

I mean, after his responsibility to God, his first responsibility is to himself, and only then to the people he's leading. Because if he is not walking with God, and if he is not in touch with him, if he is not controlled by the Holy Spirit, then his teaching will be ineffective. And so the emphasis that Paul makes is upon the leader himself living the kind of life that will demonstrate the truth that he teaches.

You see, our personal walk with God is of the utmost importance. If I look back over my life, if I were to draw a graph, it wouldn't all be going upwards. There are dips in it.

And you know, those dips are the places where my walk with God was not consistent, where my communion with God was not steady. Then there was the slump in Christian experience, and also the slump in effectiveness in service. Water can rise no higher than its own level, and we can't lift people higher than we are ourselves.

That's why it's so important that our Christian lives are steadily growing in likeness to Christ. We belong to an activist generation, don't we, and to an activist race. The world today is a frenetic place, isn't it? You stand up one of your big highways and watch the people shuttling backwards and forwards.

What's it all about? We're always under pressure. We think that the more we do and the faster we go, the more we achieve. But I wonder if that's true.

I wonder if we couldn't perhaps do more by doing less. We might have more time to get our roots down deeper, and that is a very important thing. The reverse of that idea is very often true.

And because we are rushing about so much, the work we do is wood, hay, and stubble, not gold, silver, and precious stones. And yet that should be what we are working for, that our work will stand the test of time and stand the test of the fire. Our Lord stressed the fact that quality of life was more important than quantity of activity.

And yet, judging by the kind of life we live today, that is not generally recognized. Do you yourself really feel that the quality of your life is the most important thing, or the quantity of your activity? What we are determines the value of what we say or what we do. And our devotional life is the soil for an anointed ministry.

How is your devotional life? Did you have a quiet time this morning when you met with God and had communion with Him? Are you really having times when you take the Word of God and allow it to sink into your heart and allow the Lord to speak to you? Or is the pace of life such that your devotional life is very thin? This is the point at which the adversary will constantly attack. He hasn't given up on me yet. He keeps at it.

And he'll do anything in his power to prevent you from daily having real and deep and close communion with God. Dr. Alexander McLaren, who was a great preacher, said this, he said, I have always found that the greatest comfort and effectiveness in my ministry is in direct proportion to the depth and reality of my communion with God. And that's true.

He didn't say the length of my communion with God. He said the depth and reality of my communion with God. We can't always have long times.

There should be times when we do have long times. We can't always have long times. But are we having deep times, real times, when we really get in touch with God? The real influence that we exert will be dependent upon the closeness of our touch with God so that he can work through us.

Paul said, train yourself to be godly. And the word train there is the word from which we get our gymnasium. Now you know what a gymnasium is for.

In the gymnasium you harden your muscle, you prolong your wind, you maintain flexibility, and it means that you're able to work effectively. And Paul takes that very word and he says, train yourself, gymnasticize yourself, do in the spiritual realm what the gymnast does in the physical realm. Train yourself.

It needs strenuous, persevering exercise, doesn't it, if you're going to be effective in the gymnasium. Now is there anything like that, anything parallel to that in your experience? Are you exercising yourself, gymnasticizing yourself in your Christian experience? I believe that if we were as much in earnest as the athlete is, we would get a long way further in our Christian life. But so seldom are we prepared to put in the self-discipline and self-denial that the athlete does.

I was looking at a TV program in my own country, New Zealand, a while ago, and a young man named Piper had just completed a very grueling cycle race, a very long one over a very rough course, and he'd made a new record. And after the race was over, the commentator was quizzing him, as they do, and asked all kinds of silly questions. But this commentator asked a very good question.

He said, and what do you aim at for the future? Piper answered, I aim to be one of the best riders in the world. Well, that was good. What are you aiming to be the best at? Are you aiming to be the best you can be for God? There's a new hymn that we used to sing in our country, Just as I am, young, strong, and free, to be the best that I can be, for truth and righteousness in thee, Lord of my life, I come.

To be the best that I can be. To be the best physically. To be the best intellectually.

To be the best spiritually that I can be for God. Have you got that ambition? Paul said, this one thing I do. Now, that wasn't true, of course.

He did a hundred things. But there was one thing that to him was of supreme importance. And he did that one thing superbly well.

Many of you know the Navigators. Dawson Trotman, who founded the Navigators, was a man who had a vision. And he was very narrow in his work.

He saw only one thing, and that was Navigators. And he gave himself to it. When he was killed accidentally, Billy Graham gave the address at the funeral.

And among other things, this is what Billy said. He said, here was a man who did not say, these forty things I dabble in. He said, this one thing I do.

What is the one thing you do? Is there any one thing that is supremely important in your life, or are you a dabbler? Dabbling in many things, but yet no one thing that unifies and integrates the whole of your life. God wants us to give the best of our life to him. To be the best that I can be.

Then Paul said, watch your life and teaching closely. Our lifestyle can negate our teaching. I was preaching in a church in Sydney many years ago, and at the close of the meeting, an archdeacon of the Church of England, who was very well known, rose.

And he said, may I say something? And I said, yes, certainly. And he said, I have been a street angel and a home devil. He said, when I'm out among you and I'm out in the street, I'm always full of fun and jokes and I'm the life of the party.

But he said, at home I'm quite a different man. I give my wife and family a bad time. And he said, God has been speaking to me about this and I want to confess my sin and ask God to make me in private what I would like people to think I am in public.

There he was, well known, public ministry, and yet his private life negating what he said in public. And in leadership, this is a real danger. Am I in private what I like people to think I am in public? And I look back and I can see places where that is not so with me.

I haven't always been in private what I seemed like in public. Is that so with you? Well, it's something that you can confess and deal with and put right. Our lifestyle is to be in keeping with our teaching.

Now, Timothy was a young, comparatively young man, and he was going to a very important church, the church at Ephesus. And they were a very mature people. And in the East, young men are not listened to very much by the old fellows.

Well, maybe so here too, but more so there. And Paul knew that Timothy would be at a disadvantage. So he said to him, Timothy, don't be discouraged by the fact that you're young.

Time will look after that. That will fix it up. You'll get older.

But he said, you can compensate for your youth by the quality of your life. And then he said, set an example to the flock. He said, if you live the kind of life that is godly, the people will listen to you.

And Paul specified five areas in which he was to set an example. He was to set an example in speech. He set an example in life, in love, in faithfulness, and in purity.

And those are areas in which when you're young, you are sometimes deficient. Isn't it true that sometimes when we're young, our tongue is rather undisciplined and gets us into trouble? Isn't it true that our lifestyle is more like that of our worldly peers than of our Lord Jesus Christ? Isn't it true that sometimes instead of being unselfishly loving, we are selfish in our lives? Selfish in the home? Selfish in our attitude? Isn't it true that sometimes we are not faithful in the discharge of our responsibilities? Are we faithful in our own personal life? Am I faithful to my Lord in my inner life? Am I faithful in my service? Am I faithful in my work for my boss? Well, Paul says, set an example in faith, and then purity. We're in a world that reeks with impurity.

We're surrounded by it, and Paul said, you're living in a world that is impure. Now you set an example of purity, and you watch your life in these five areas, and you'll find that you can compensate for your youth by the quality of your life. And that's something that, as if we're going to be leaders for the Lord, these are areas in which we need to be diligent.

You'll notice the words Paul says. He says, now be diligent in these things. Give yourself wholly to them.

We've got to be enthusiastic. Throw ourselves right into it. Abandon ourselves.

So often we're lukewarm. He wants us to be red hot. There's a verse in Romans 12, 11, that one translation says, not slothful in business, kept at boiling point by the Holy Spirit, doing bond service for the Master.

And that's the kind of life that the leader needs to live. If you're not enthusiastic in your leadership, you'll never have enthusiastic followers. And if you're not enthusiastic at your age, what do you think you'll be

like when you get to my age? No, this is something, if we're going to really count for God, we need to allow the Holy Spirit to keep us at boiling point.

Then the third thing Paul said, he said, give yourself diligently to these things so that everyone may see your progress. No, he didn't say to Paul, you give yourself diligently to that so that you can see the way in which the people you're working with progress. He said, no, you give yourself diligently to this so that they may see your progress.

And that's a horse of a different color. You're a leader in a group, are you? Are the people in your group seeing your progress? Are you growing in your spiritual life or are you stuck? Is your growth in grace and in likeness to Christ visible to others? My wife died many years ago of cancer. And about ten days before she died, I was attending to her and trying to make things comfortable for her.

She turned to me. She said, dear, don't make things too easy for me. She said, I don't want to get fussy at this stage.

I must keep on growing. My, that was a challenge to me. She was in great pain.

She knew she had only a few days to live, and yet there was in her heart that ambition. I must keep on growing. I want to grow right to the very end.

Well, so often we get stuck in our Christian life. But the Lord wants us to continually progress toward maturity, as it says in Hebrews 6 and 1. Well, when I read that verse a while ago, it kicked back at me. And I thought, well now, you do a lot of talking to other people and telling them the kind of life they ought to live.

What about yourself? Are you growing? Is your progress in spirituality visible to other people? And that was a tremendous challenge. Am I growing, or have I got stuck? And I brought my life alongside the measuring stick of Galatians 5, 22, 23, the fruit of the Spirit. And after all, if you think of the fruit of the Spirit, it's just really a picture of Christ.

All those things that are in the fruit of the Spirit are just manifestations of the life of Christ. But I asked myself this. Are you a more loving man than you were three months ago? Has there been any progress? Who has seen it? Has it been visible to anybody? Do those you live with see that you are a more loving person than you were three months ago? Joy.

Are you a more joyous person than you were? Are you a happier person? Are you better to live with? Do other people see it? Can they see the joy of the Lord more than they used to? Peace. Are you enjoying more of the peace of the Lord, or are you just the same old worrier as you used to be? You're just as anxious as ever? Do you still borrow tomorrow's trouble today so that you can get double value out of it? Do you manifest the peace of God more than you used to? Patience. Are you a more patient man than you used to be? Or are you just the same, or have you gone back a bit? Gentleness.

Are you a gentler man than you were? Or can you still be pretty abrasive? Goodness. Are you a better man all around than you used to be? Has there been real progress? Can people see it? Faithfulness. Are you more faithful than you used to be in the discharge of your responsibilities? Meekness.

Are you meeker under the disciplining hand of God, or do you resent and rebel against God's dealing with you? And then the last one, the one that is most challenging of all. Are you a more disciplined man than you used to be three months ago? Because discipline is the fruit of the Spirit. We think of discipline largely

as something we do, and of course it is something we do.

But here the encouragement comes that we can depend on the Holy Spirit. If we realize an area in our lives which we need to discipline, we form the resolution that we will discipline it, but you know how often your will has let you down when you've tried to discipline yourself along certain lines. But this verse gives the assurance that when I, in order to bring my life in line with the life of Christ, I purpose in my heart to discipline myself in this matter, I can count on the Holy Spirit working in my life.

The fruit of the Spirit which is discipline. You know, the fruit of the Spirit, nine manifestations can be divided into three triads. The first three have to do with my personal walk with God.

Love, joy, peace. The second three deal with my public walk with others. Patience, gentleness, goodness.

The last three have to do with my private walk with myself. Faithfulness, meekness, discipline. And these are the things which are the manifestation of the Holy Spirit working in my life.

You know, the clearest evidence that the Holy Spirit is working in our lives is not merely the evidence of thrills and excitement. It's not merely the exercise of spiritual gifts, although that is part of it. The clearest proof that God is at work in our lives is when the fruit of the Spirit is being produced in luxuriance.

You know, you can counterfeit the gifts of the Spirit, but you can't counterfeit the fruit of the Spirit. That's something that can't be counterfeited. From what Paul has been saying here, it is clear that the leader is intended to be a visual aid to the people that he or she is leading.

We use visual aids, our overhead projectors and so on, but the leader whose life is walked in close fellowship with God is a visual aid that is more valuable than anything else. Isn't it true that in our day, people are longing for models? There are so many broken homes, so many broken marriages, so many broken hearts, so many young people have got no father model, they've got no mother model, they've got no grandparent model. And we as Christians, in our position, if we're seeking to lead others, we need to be able to be a visual aid to people.

This is the kind of life that God wants you to live. Paul says, imitate me. What a thing to say.

Imitate me, but he didn't stop there. He said, imitate me as I imitate Christ. People want not only to hear truth worth hearing, but they want to see lives worth emulating.

And so Paul said to Timothy, watch your life and teaching, but your life first and your teaching next. And you can, by your life, demonstrate as a visual aid of the thing you are teaching. Paul said to Titus, another younger man, that we are to adorn and ornament our teaching and make it attractive.

Listen to what he said, so that in every way they may adorn the teaching about God our Savior. We are to make Christianity attractive. When people get in close contact with us, do they think that our lives are really attractive? Do they say, I want to be like that man, I want to be like that girl? Well, we're to adorn it.

We're to ornament it. Make it really winsome and attractive, so that they will want to be like Christ. There was an Anglican evangelist came across to my country many years ago, when we traveled by ship.

And after breakfast, we used to walk around the deck. Six times around the deck would be a mile, and you'd walk your breakfast down a bit. Well, he was going down around the deck this morning, and he was smiling at everybody.

He was six foot three, a very attractive man. He came to a mother with a little child, and when they drew near, he just bent down and talked to the little girl, and talked to the mother, and then walked on. And as they went past, the little girl said, Mommy, was that Jesus? My, imagine being taken for Jesus.

Here was someone who was a visual aid of his religion. That little girl had her idea of what Jesus was like, and he came up to her expectations. Do we come up to people's expectations? Do people see Christ in us? Why, that's what we long for, isn't it? My wife's sister was a missionary in China.

And she went to, when she went there, she was in a language school with seventy other girls. And she told me that one day, the lady in charge of the school came in to the door. She went up one aisle, and down another, and up another, and down another, and then went out, and never said a word.

And the girls were looking at each other. Well, what was that all about anyway? And they waited a while, and then the lady came back again. She said, Did you notice anything when I passed through the room? Nobody had noticed anything.

She said, Then one girl said, Well, I did notice that you were wearing a very lovely perfume. She said, Yes, I was. Did I say anything? No.

And yet, without saying a word, as I walked up and down among you, I left behind me a very beautiful perfume. She said, You girls came to China to take the gospel to the Chinese women, and you can't say a word. You're dumb.

And you're going to be dumb for a good while. But as you move out, in and out among them in the ordinary course of daily life, although you can't say a word, you can leave behind you the fragrance of Christ. And you know, that's the highest kind of leadership.

That's influence, unconscious influence. We can move out, and without saying a word, by our demeanor and by our expression, we can leave behind us the fragrance of Christ. Are we doing that? Are we fragrant in the home? Are we fragrant in the place of business? Are we fragrant in the church? And the fragrance that Paul was speaking about is the fragrance of the knowledge of Him.

And he says, By us. God spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. When those men had spent their three years with the Lord Jesus, the heathen took note of them that they had been with Jesus.

You see, they had gone into the perfumer's shop, and they'd stayed there a while, and when they came out of the perfumer's shop, they carried with them the fragrance of the place. And that's when we spend time in the presence of God, allowing Him to speak to us through His word, communing with Him. As we come out of His presence, we will carry with us something of the fragrance of the place.

May it indeed be so. May our leadership be such that we will be visual aids of the gospel we preach.

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