

Session 1: Growing in Godliness

Taught by Colin Smith

Leadership in the church is a high privilege and a great responsibility. The church belongs to Jesus Christ. He purchased it with His own precious blood. If you aspire to be a leader, the Bible says you aspire to a noble task.

Leaders in the church can do great good. They can also do great harm. That's why Paul urges Timothy, a young leader in the church, to pursue three priorities: watch your life, watch your doctrine, and stir up the gift that is in you.

In this module we are focused on the first of these: **Watch your life**. What does that mean and how can you do it? The place to begin is to pursue godliness.

What is Godliness?

The heart of godliness is that you are God's man, God's woman.

- ✦ *But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself.*
Psalm 4:3

The first calling of the disciples was to be with Jesus:

- ✦ *And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach, and have authority to cast out demons.*
Mark 3:14–15

Godliness is more than behaviour. It is the life of Christ in you by the power of the Holy Spirit:

- Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.
1 Timothy 3:16

Jerry Bridges says that “Godliness is an attitude towards God composed of three elements: fear of God, love for God and desire for God.”

I fear God. I love Him. I hunger and thirst for more of Him. That is the heartbeat of godliness. You are God’s man. God’s woman.

It is sad that many Christians do not have this aura of godliness about them. They may be very talented and personable, or very busy in the Lord’s work, or even apparently successful in some avenues of Christian service, and still not godly. Why?

Because they are not devoted to God. They may be devoted to a vision, or to a ministry or to their own reputation as a Christian, but not to God.
Jerry Bridges, The Practice of Godliness

Godliness in the New Testament

Depending on how you count, there are around fifteen references to godliness in the New Testament. Twelve of these are found in the letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus.

Godliness in the Pastoral Letters

- ...but with what is proper for women who profess **godliness**—with good works.
1 Timothy 2:10
- Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of **godliness**: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.
1 Timothy 3:16
- Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for **godliness**.
1 Timothy 4:7

- ✎ ...for while bodily training is of some value, **godliness** is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.
1 Timothy 4:8
- ✎ But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show **godliness** to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.
1 Timothy 5:4
- ✎ If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with **godliness**...
1 Timothy 6:3
- ✎ ...and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that **godliness** is a means of gain.
1 Timothy 6:5
- ✎ But **godliness** with contentment is great gain,
1 Timothy 6:6
- ✎ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, **godliness**, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.
1 Timothy 6:11
- ✎ ...having the appearance of **godliness** but denying its power. Avoid such people.
2 Timothy 3:5
- ✎ Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with **godliness**.
Titus 1:1
- ✎ ...training us to renounce **ungodliness** and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.
Titus 2:12

Fifteen references to godliness in the New Testament, and twelve of them are in the three short letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus. Why is that important? These are letters to Christian leaders. While godliness is the calling of all believers, it is of special importance in those who lead. If you are going to lead effectively, you have to be God's man, God's woman, you have to walk with God.

Godliness in 2 Peter

Then there are three references to godliness in 2 Peter.

- ✎ *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and **godliness**, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.*
2 Peter 1:3

Godliness is possible. God has given us everything we need to pursue it.

- ✎ *For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with **godliness**, and **godliness** with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.*
2 Peter 1:5–7

God calls us to cultivate godliness. We are to be proactive in this. Make every effort.

- ✎ *The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar... Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and **godliness**, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God...*
2 Peter 3:10–12

You are going to see God, so live for Him. Godliness is of supreme importance for all Christians and especially for Christian leaders.

The What, Why, How and When

a. What: Practical Expressions of Godliness

What does the pursuit of godliness look like?

- ✎ *Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.*
1 Timothy 4:12

Five Areas:

Speech:

- Let your speech always be gracious
Colossians 4:6
- Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up...that it may give grace to those who hear
Ephesians 4:29

Conduct:

Conduct is the way you behave, the pattern of your life. “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders” (Colossians 4:5). If you are a leader you can’t say ‘I don’t care what others think’. You are called to set an example in the way you conduct yourself.

Love:

As a leader you are called to be an example of love. The people you lead need to know that you love them. They need to see what a life of love looks like and your calling as a leader is that they will see it in you.

Faith:

Many people look out on the world with a sense of gloom and doom. As a leader, you are called to be an example of faith.

Purity:

The heart of purity is to will one thing. To have a single focus. The opposite of purity is to be double-minded, and James says that the double-minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:8).

Here is what godliness looks like: “set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

Your speech reflects what God says, because His Word is in you. Your conduct reflects the grace you have received. Your love for others reflects God’s love for you. Your faith lifts others to believe that all things are possible with God. And there is a steadiness about you because you are deeply committed to walk with God.

b. How: Pursue godliness intentionally

Notice the proactive language associated with godliness:

- ✎ *Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*

1 Timothy 4:7–8

Train yourself for godliness (v7), toil and strive (v10), devote yourself (v13), practice these things (v15), immerse yourself in them (v15), watch yourself (v16), and persist in these things (v16).

In justification our own works have no place at all, and simple faith in Christ is the one thing needful. In sanctification our own works are of vast importance and God bids us fight, and watch and pray, and strive and take pains, and labour.

J.C. Ryle, Holiness

We have seen what godliness looks like. We have seen that God calls us to be intentional in this pursuit. If that sounds overwhelming to you, here's some encouragement:

c. Why: We have set our hope on the Saviour

- ✎ *For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.*

1 Timothy 4:10

This is what I like to call 'gospel motivation.' The pursuit of godliness is not a massive effort to be something that you are not. When you pursue godliness, you are being who you are. Christ has made you His own. God has made you His man, His woman. That's who you are and He is with you in this: you toil and strive because you know that the living God, your Saviour, is at work in you.

d. When: Patience and Progress

- ✎ *Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.*

1 Timothy 4:15

Setting an *example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity* does not mean that you never fail. In this world, you will never be perfect. But you can make progress and you can make progress that others will see.

And as the people you lead see you growing in godliness, as they see it in your speech, your conduct, your love, your faith, and your purity, they will be encouraged to grow in godliness themselves.

That's what this module is all about. My purpose is to encourage you to the pursuit of godliness. There could be no greater privilege, and no greater joy because the heart of godliness is that you walk with God. That you are God's man, God's woman.

The church of Jesus Christ desperately needs leaders who are godly. My great desire is that through this module, you would say today, *"I want to be God's man, I want to be God's woman. I want to be godly, and by God's grace, this is the life that I will pursue."*

Next time we will look at how you can walk with God by feed on the Lord Jesus Christ through the Word and prayer. I hope you will join me for session #2 of Watch Your Life.

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