

Helps to Godliness

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[0 : 00] Good to be with you this morning. Godliness is the sacred impression and workmanship of God in a man or a woman, whereby from being made, from being carnal, they are made spiritual.

It's a work of God that changes an earthly person into a heavenly person. And this is what Thomas Watson begins his book with.

It's a definition. And as we're nearing the conclusion of Watson's book on the godly person, it's probably a good idea to look back at the beginning and review some of the definitions and principles that he starts out with.

First of all, godliness is a real thing. The psalmist calls it the way of truth. Godliness is an intrinsic thing.

Romans 2.29 calls it circumcision of the heart. So it's not external as much as it's internal.

Godliness is a supernatural thing.

[1 : 16] James calls it wisdom from above, not wisdom that has its source on this earth. Godliness is an extensive thing.

When Paul writes to the Colossians, he calls grace the new man, not the new tongue or the new head or the new arms or the new legs, but the whole man is affected by this grace.

Godliness is an intense thing. It stirs a fire within us. Paul calls the Romans to be fervent in spirit, to let that fire burn within them.

Then godliness is a glorious thing. Watson calls godliness glory in the seed, and glory is godliness in the flower.

We were happy this spring to see our lilacs blooming for once, and that beautiful, glorious color coming out.

[2 : 24] And it's like that with godliness. It's glory that's planted in our lives that can be worked out. Peter says that by it we partake of the divine nature, so it's glorious.

Godliness is a permanent thing, Watson writes. John writes that those born of God cannot go on sinning. They cannot make a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in them.

It's there to stay. It remains, and it never rots away. So we've been examining the drawings of Watson's scripture pencil as it showed us the many characteristics of the godly man.

And all along the way, he's been instructing us that these traits are to be found in the life of every believer, every true Christian. Knowledge, faith, love, humility, prayer, sincerity, patience, purity. And Watson has been careful to remind us that these things must be pursued and cultivated as Christians mature and grow in Christ's likeness.

[3 : 39] For Jesus alone fully is characterized by these qualities. He's the only pure example of godliness that we have.

In chapter 6, Watson exhorted us to desire godliness for several reasons. One of them was the misery of ungodliness.

How rare and admirable godly people are. How rational the pursuit of godliness is. The excellence of godliness.

And how few and privileged the godly are. And even the vanity and contemptibility of other pursuits. He encourages us for these reasons to pursue godliness.

So now he's asking the rhetorical question, but what shall we do that we may be godly? Okay? If we've been inspired to pursue godliness with all our hearts, what are the things we actually should do?

[4 : 48] Well, he gives us in the next chapter, he entitles it, prescribing some helps to godliness. And if you're like me, you need help to be spurred on in this pursuit.

This chapter puts me in mind of John's recent message from Philippians 2 about working out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to do according to his good pleasure.

Even though godliness is an impression and workmanship of God, with which he changes us from carnal to spiritual people, we are called to work out those fruits of the Spirit so they come to mark us as godly people, godly men and women.

Well, Watson gives us some valuable helps here. Some of them are offensive and some of them are defensive. So let's look at them together.

His first rule, or help as he calls it, is be diligent in the use of all means that may promote godliness.

[6 : 04] The word means puts me in mind of what we're used to calling the means of grace.

Somebody help me out, what are some of the means of grace? What's that?

Being in Sunday school. Reading your Bible. Okay. Hearing the word. Hearing it preached.

Obedying the word. The Lord's Supper. The ordinances of the church. Are means of grace. Teach us the gospel.

Go ahead. Prayer. Prayer is a means of grace. Well, all of these things, I don't have to mention, are activities that promote godly thinking and godly conduct.

But Watson uses the word diligent. What does diligent mean? It suggests an earnest, eager, conscientious, industrious, persistent pursuit.

[7 : 16] He puts the question to us, what good is a purpose without a pursuit? That made me think of good years, or new year's resolutions.

The way we usually approach those is we're really big on purpose, but we're kind of weak on pursuit. Jesus tells us, strive to enter in at the narrow gate.

In Luke 13, 24. The straight gate. And his word strive can be translated into English by the word agonize.

Agonize. To pursue it to the point of pain. To pursue it in a way that challenges us. So we should be diligent in the use of these normal means of grace.

Don't neglect them. Go at them with diligence. Help number two from Watson is to take heed of the world. Take heed of the world.

[8 : 28] The translation of J.B. Phillips in Romans 12, 2 is don't let the world squeeze you into its mold.

So this is more of a defensive posture. We're to take heed of what the world is doing, what the world is tempting us to do.

In Luke 16, Jesus is teaching on the topic of money and the wise use of earthly riches. And down in verse 13, no servant can serve two masters.

Either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. And then he goes on in verse 14, the Pharisees who loved money heard all this and they sneered at Jesus.

There was a worldly love in their hearts for the very money that Jesus was trying to warn them about. And he said to them, you are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men.

[9 : 43] But God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight. So the ways and values of this present age do nothing to promote godly thinking or godly conduct.

1 John 2 warns us, do not love the world or the things that are in the world. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

These things come not from the Father, but from the world. And the world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

Watson tells his audience, if the world fills both head and heart, there is no room for Christ. So we need to defend ourselves against the world, against its influence.

Here's help number three. Accustom yourselves to holy thoughts. Accustom yourselves to holy thoughts. This is where we go on the offensive.

[10 : 53] It needs to begin internally. A lot of Christians look at the world and they take heed of what the world's doing and they lash out against the world. They try to change things by passing laws and so on.

And some of those things are good, but really the work begins inside. It begins in the heart. We need to take the offensive when it comes to what we're thinking about.

The psalmist writes, I thought on my ways and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. Notice that it was his change of thinking that affected his change of walk.

Paul begs his readers in Rome, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. Part of his boasting, part of Paul's boasting in 2 Corinthians 10, is that he and his companions were taking every thought captive and making it obedient to Christ.

And I didn't look up this passage, but Paul writes later, whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, noble, of good report.

[12:15] Think on these things. What I'm responsible for is what I let my mind dwell on and focus on.

The devil, the world, and my own sinful flesh all seek to lead my conduct astray, and how do they do that?

By first leading my thoughts astray. If I take every opportunity to dwell on those things that are holy, my holy God, his holy word, his holy people, my holy savior, holy worship and song, holy duties, I can train my mind to take those straying thoughts and make them captives, make them obedient to Christ.

Help number four is a very similar one to the one before. It's watch your hearts, watch your hearts. I know we have a lot of seamstresses out here who make your own clothes.

When you're making a new article of clothing and stitching it together, what is it that keeps the bottom of that fabric from coming apart, from fraying, and getting all messed up?

[13:37] What do you have to do to that? You have to hem it and what's that? You have to finish it.

You have to put an edging on there. Well, according to Thomas Watson, watchfulness is the edging that keeps one's religion from fraying.

You have to keep a watch on your heart. What does the Bible say about the human heart? It's wicked. Desperately wicked.

Other translations say it's sick. It's desperately sick. Nobody can understand it. It's deceitful.

Deceitful things and people tell us lies. They lead us astray with false promises and subtle suggestions like Satan did to Eve.

[14:38] They are creative and they're bent on mischief. They must be watched. They must be watched. What does there's there's a famous fictional story about an evil ruler who created a magical ring ring that was very beautiful.

He allowed a lot of his own power and his malice, his evil, to go into this ring so that anyone who had it would gain tremendous power but would be led into evil like the ring's maker.

This evil ruler was defeated finally by some good and mighty armies and his ring was taken from it. but the conquering king kept the ring because it was so beautiful.

His heart went out to the beauty in this ring. Well you and I have hearts that can appreciate the beauty of Christ and his kingdom but our hearts are also capable of branching out toward other things in other directions.

They might even be good directions but if we love them too much they become idols in the place of Christ if we're not watchful. We have to watch the direction of our desires, the amount of love that we're giving to things that are not Christ.

[16:07] I can ask myself can Christ who indwells me desire and love this thing through me? Is it possible that Jesus can share that desire with me?

And if I can't imagine him doing that then I need to put that thing away. Well help number five, make spending your time a matter of conscience.

The apostle Paul mentions redeeming the time several times in his epistles. When we redeem some commodity we're cashing it in so to speak.

We're exchanging it for something that we value. Watson says that time in itself might seem very unimportant but salvation is to be worked out in it in the context of time.

When an employer hires a worker they're entering into a contract, right Stan? that worker agrees to exchange his honest effort for a certain length of time for the payment that the employer offers him or her.

[17:26] In that contract, what takes place within that length of time has a set value, both to the worker and to the employer.

when you and I believed in Christ, our justification happened in how long? What's that?

Immediately, in a moment of time. And that was the most valuable thing in the universe, was our justification, our standing before God. We were counted righteous the moment saving faith was found in our hearts.

But the work of sanctification, even though it begins right away in the new Christian, is worked out in the context of time. It takes time.

And Paul reminded us along with the Corinthian believers that you are not your own. You've been bought with a price. When I think of that, when I think that I am not just a follower of Christ, but I am his possession, then my use of time becomes a matter of conscience.

[18 : 39] Because it's not really my time, is it? It's God's time. It's Christ's time. So how am I spending it?

That's a matter of conscience. We need to ask ourselves, how are we spending those golden hours? Watson asks, what are our golden hours for, but to attend to our souls?

Time misspent is not time lived, but time lost. Help number six, think of your short stay in the world. When King David gathered the materials to build Solomon's temple, he sang a song of praise to the Lord. And in humility, he said, here we are for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land, as our ancestors were before us.

Our days on earth are like a passing shadow, gone so soon without a trace. 2 Chronicles 29-27.

God gives every person the same 24 hours each day, but no one knows how many days his life will last.

[19 : 52] Watson says, when God is about to do a short work, he will not do a long work. Every moment, God gives you has a purpose.

For all I know, my life will be much shorter than I'm hoping. And once I'm gone from this life, there's no returning to finish something I started, or to undo something I did.

Just as Christ came to do his saving work only once. And after that, face the Father's judgment on the cross for our sins.

You and I are also appointed to be born, to live, and then to die. God has a will and a plan for every life, including how much time that life will span.

And every moment of his plan for you and me has a purpose. Those who never take the time to think of the brevity of life, how short their life is, are likely misjudging the way they're spending it.

[21 : 05] So think of your short stay in the world. Help number seven, make this maxim your own, that godliness is the purpose of your creation.

Watson said, God made the world only as a dressing room to dress our souls in. He sent us here on the grand errand of godliness. Zacharias in Luke 1 sang, we have been rescued from our enemies so that we can serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness all our days.

The catechism teaches that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. So godliness is really the purpose that we're here.

Again, God has a purpose for everything he does. He does nothing frivolously or whimsically. But I expect that you, like me, have your discouraging days now and then when you think, why am I even here?

I seem to be spinning my wheels and going nowhere and accomplishing very little. Well, those especially are the days we need to contemplate this maxim of why we're here, why we were created to pursue godliness, to reach that state where our minds are focused on these things.

[22 : 42] things. So let's ask these questions. Am I being diligent in using the means that promote godliness? Am I taking heed of the world and resisting its allurement?

Am I accustoming my mind to holy thoughts? Am I watchful over my heart and its affections? Am I making the way I spend time a matter of conscience?

Am I considering the shortness of my life? Am I remembering that godliness is the purpose of my creation? And then finally, Watson adds another valuable help.

Number eight, be often among the godly. They are the salt of the earth, he writes, and will help to season you.

Their counsel may direct their prayers enliven you. Such holy sparks may be thrown into your breasts that may kindle devotion in you.

[23 : 48] It is good to be among the saints to learn the trade of godliness. He that walketh with the wise shall be wise. Proverbs 13.20 Well, Pastor John's messages on Philipians have reminded all of us of how important it is to have humility in the church, both in maintaining our own unity and

for fulfilling the church's mission.

God is concerned not only with what we are doing, but what we are becoming. So being concerned not only about your own interests, but also the interests of others, certainly means caring about each other's souls.

souls. Be prepared to share with each other not just what's going on in your family or business or recreation, but soul wise as well.

Looking out for one another's souls, striving for godliness, both for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters. Be often among the godly and you will become more godly.

Another helpful discussion that Watson presents is what he calls an exhortation to persevere in godliness. This is actually the following chapter.

[25 : 20] It's aimed primarily at those who are regarded as examples of godliness already, and it is a warning to them and an encouragement to them.

Watson warns that even in his day, the devil's agents are abroad, those whose whole work is to unsettle people and make them fall away from that former strictness of religion which they profess. To him, many Christians seem to be wavering, not fully grounded in the principles of godliness. They wish to be godly, but when difficulty or persecution come, they tend to waver and are blown like wreaths and feathers in the wind.

Others were falling away, falling from that godliness which they once seemed to possess. They turned to wantonness and worldliness, he says.

In other words, they failed to persevere or were at least backslidden from their profession. Again, Paul warned the Corinthians in his first letter, let the one who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

[26 : 42] No one's immune from temptation and it's likely the most godly Christian who will face the most powerful onslaught from the enemy. Jesus himself faced Satan's most diabolical temptations and yet he never fell from his profession or his calling.

But there are certainly apostate believers who had the form of godliness but denied the power thereof.

Their professions seemed so genuine but their conduct showed them to be false. They fell away from their profession.

Let that never be said of us. Paul calls his brothers to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 15-58 To be steadfast is to be firmly resolved, rock steady, unshakable. In other words, to persevere.

[27 : 49] Godliness We certainly can't do that in our own strength. But Watson gives some recommendations to help us to persevere in godliness.

First, he recommends that we take heed of those things that can little by little, by degrees, make us fall away from our profession.

things like, and he names three of them, one, covetousness. Little by little, sincere followers of Christ can give in to covetous desires.

Watson read of a Christian during Emperor Valens Day, who denied the faith to prevent the confiscation of his property. And never forget that the greed for silver caused even one of the twelve apostles to betray his trust.

So, watch out for covetousness. Secondly, watch out for unbelief. The author of Hebrews warned, take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

[29 : 04] Hebrews 3.12. Notice he says, take heed, brethren. He's talking to fellow Christians that they might have an evil heart of unbelief.

Unbelief can come in small doses. Doubting if the Lord can really be trusted in this or that situation. Perhaps questioning whether my sins are fully cleansed when I've confessed them and I've repented.

Cowardice is the third thing we should beware of. doubt and unbelief can creep in gradually and they're closely related to fear. If I'm doubtful that Christ can be fully trusted, I become fearful of making him known to others.

Fearful of losing my liberty if I fight against sin. Watson writes, they who fear danger more than sin will commit sin to avoid danger.

So let's take that to heart as well. Covetousness, unbelief, cowardice, they can creep in. Next, Watson lists for us the means of perseverance in godliness.

[30 : 27] I'll go over these quickly. Number one is strive for a real work of grace in your heart. True grace is both a heart humbling work and a heart changing work.

And he said people fall away not from grace but for lack of grace. They fall away because they didn't have true saving faith, true saving grace in their souls.

So strive for that. Examine yourselves. Make sure that you're truly in the faith. Number two, be deliberate and judicious.

In other words, be realistic in your thinking. Realize what it will cost to really pursue godliness. Count the cost, Jesus said.

If you're building a tower or if you're at the head of an army and you're facing invaders, you're counting the cost, seeing if you have what it takes to do this pursuit, to go out and build this tower.

[31 : 38] Jesus warned again and again that following him would be costly. We need to be realistic and judicious in our choices. Number three, get a clear and distinct knowledge of God.

God. If your basic knowledge of God, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit are faulty, then you could by degrees renounce your confession.

You need to have accurate information, accurate knowledge of who God is and what he offers and what he has done, what he has provided for you.

get a clear and distinct knowledge of God. And then number four, enter into the desire into the godly path purely by choice.

What he means by this is watch out for what your motive is. Make your choice a truly religious choice. Don't enter into it for worldly gain, for instance.

[32 : 47] Don't enter into the pursuit of godliness out of fear. Enter into it because this is a choice that you're making for its own priceless worth, for God's own glory, for its own sake.

Number five, strive for integrity. Strive for integrity. Watson holds up Job's example of this.

Job stood fast because he stood upright. My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live, said Job in chapter 27 of his book.

Number six, hold up the life and the fervor of duty. Again, the godliness God uses in our hearts is like a flame, it's like a fire that needs to be stoked.

we need to remind ourselves of how important it is and how Watson warns that Christians sometimes grow to a dull formality in their duties.

[34 : 06] So be aware of that. Keep the fire of your zeal alive and hot. Think of what a privilege it is to be charged with a duty by God himself.

So hold up the life and fervor of duty. Number seven, exercise great self-denial. Jesus in Matthew 16, 25, let him deny himself.

Self is always the greatest snare and obstacle to the effort perseverance requires. So get past it. Get past that self will, that self love.

Exercise self-denial. Number eight, preserve a holy jealousy over your heart. The deceits and the lusts of the heart both require us to guard them jealously.

Even Peter gave into hypocrisy and needed to be corrected. As we examine ourselves, we'll always find chinks that need to be repaired.

[35 : 19] So don't be, don't be afraid to face those weaknesses and have a holy jealousy over your hearts.

Don't let those weaknesses remain, but attend to them. And strive for assurance, he says. Number nine, give diligence, wrote Peter, to making your calling and election sure.

Second Peter 1. 10. Are you sure Christ died for you? If you have that assurance, then you will be willing to die for Christ if he calls you to do that.

And number ten, lay hold of God's strength. None of us can do this on our own. In the long run, it is not you holding God, but God holding you, that preserves you in godliness to the end.

Our anchor holds as it grips the rock who is Christ, the rock of ages. Finally, let me share some motives.

[36 : 30] Why persevere? This is another chapter. Some motives that Watson suggests for us to persevere in godliness. First, it is the glory and crown of the Christian to be gray-headed in godliness.

To be gray-headed in godliness. To come to the end of life, whether peacefully or as a martyr, even if stained red with blood, but with conscience, pure white, and with graces green and flourishing. What a glorious testimony that is to the church and before the unbelieving world. Second, what a shame it would be for the world to be more constant in the devil's service than we are in Christ's. How eagerly sinners persevere in their sins unless and until God does a changing work in their hearts. The wicked pursue their sins tirelessly and without shame.

Should we be doing less when we are pursuing righteousness? Thirdly, our perseverance in godliness may be a means of confirming others.

[37 : 50] Think of Paul's example to the Philippians when he wrote to them from the jail cell in Rome about his continual joy. because of my chains, he wrote, most of the brethren have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

Think of the heroes of faith in your own life, either that you know in the flesh or you've read about, who have inspired you to be more fearless in your walk with Christ.

Christ. Finally, Watson writes, we shall lose nothing if we persevere in godliness. To illustrate this point, he mentions eight wondrous promises Christ holds out for those who persevere in godliness to the end, as laid out in the messages Christ gave to the seven churches.

I'll go over them quickly. Jesus promises those who overcome, those who persevere. He promises them the crown of life, the fruit from the tree of life, the hidden manna and white stone with new name written upon it, to be clothed in white and be confessed before the father and his angels, to be made a pillar in the temple of the Lord with the name of God and his city written on him.

power over the nations to sit with Christ on his throne. And he promises him the morning star, a radiance related to the glory of Christ himself.

[39 : 39] Watson says, whoever is not affected by these soul-ravishing promises is either a stone or a brute. We would all do good by reading and rereading.

those precious assurances from our Savior and King. That no one who perseveres in godliness shall suffer loss. Jesus promised his disciples in Matthew 19, everyone who has left houses, sisters, brothers, fathers, mothers, children, wives, or lands for my sake, my namesake, shall receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the encouragement you give us to persevere, Lord, to pursue godliness, to take it seriously, to take your word seriously.

Help us, Lord, to look to you for your strength, and to keep a watch, to keep a guard over our hearts and minds as we look into your word today.

Lord, convict us, convince us anew each moment and through this service to come as we commit ourselves to this pursuit.

[41 : 03] We thank you for this book, for the encouragement of Brother Watson, and we pray that you would help us to remember these lessons. In Christ's name we pray.

Amen.