

**Doctrinal Style – Thinking Correctly About God**  
**1 Timothy 4:1-16**

Brothers and sisters – Happy new year! Welcome to 2020!  
And not only is it the start of a new year... it's also the start of a new decade. And everywhere we look it seems people are making note of this as a matter of some importance.

You can hear it as we reflect on the events which occurred in the past year. You can see it in how we are making our plans, and setting our goals not only for the new year but also looking ahead into the coming decade as well.

We're not just talking about where we want to be in a year from now – we're talking about where we want to be in 10 years from now - and ironically... that got me thinking about what was going on 10 years ago at Valleyview.

So I thought a very short trip down memory lane might be just the thing to start us off this morning...

Back in 2010 Valleyview was still Valleyview Presbyterian Church, we hosting Inn from the Cold once a month. We held our 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Golf Tournament and Silent Auction Fundraiser, Amoriza was serving as our Worship Director, Claudette Leacock and Lois Wallace were active elders on Session, and James Eme and Mike Gill were in Club 1014 – 10 years ago...

But the nostalgia of where we were 10 years ago inevitably leads to a comparison with where we are right now doesn't it, and looking for whatever indicators of progress we might find.

Do we have more people attending worship now? Are we in a better financial position now? Those are the usual indicators that we look at – but is that really the best way to determine if we have made progress over the past 10 years as a church?

Shouldn't we be asking and reflecting on how we have grown spiritually instead? I think we would all agree – yes that is what we ought to be looking at... but - how do we track our progress in growing spiritually?

And more importantly how do we intentionally pursue progress in growing spiritually? So that in a year from now – in 10 years from now – we can clearly describe how we have grown as Christ’s disciples **and** as members of His Body.

So, brothers and sisters – this is why we are starting off this new year and this new decade focusing on Nine Ways to Grow Spiritually. It will help us evaluate our progress over the past ten years and prepare us for more growth in the next ten.

Now, as we begin all of this – we need to reaffirm that we believe Jesus **calls** us to be His disciples and He **intends** for us to be an active part of His Church - here at Valleyview.

And all of the nine ways to grow are meant to help us form our identity around belonging to Jesus as His disciples and seeing ourselves more and more as an important part of His Body – the Church – here at Valleyview.

There are many good things that pursuing spiritual growth can do for us brothers and sisters – but if it does not shape and

strengthen our identity in these two ways, then its not Christian spiritual growth.

So my prayer and hope is that you would be equipped by this series to grow spiritually and that by this time next year – and certainly within ten years – your relationship with Jesus and His Church would not just be one part of your identity and life – one slice of the pie so to speak...

But that it would become the pie-plate which holds and shapes the of your whole life. May we truly become conformed to the image of God’s Son (Romans 8:28) Amen.

Now brothers and sisters – when we think about being conformed to the image of God’s Son we all have our preconceived notions of what that looks like and someone who kind of personifies that for us - don’t we?

And if I were to ask you what sort of characteristics, traits, and behaviors make that person a spiritual inspiration for you – you might say things like; well they are always praying and

reading the bible, or they are very humble, they are not afraid to share their faith in Jesus, or they are very expressive and enthusiastic when they pray and sing to God, they are always helping others and giving away their possessions to those in need, they are in tune with the Holy Spirit and so on...

So, we all have our own definitions of what it means to be a spiritual person – and more than likely the spiritual traits that we admire in others, are those we find lacking in ourselves-right? Or for whatever reason we find them attractive.

And so we should also admit that our definitions are influenced by our personal preferences for certain types of spiritual traits over and against others. We may prefer bible reading over evangelism... or enthusiastic prayer to studying church doctrine – we may even think that some spiritual traits are more spiritual than others...

But just like spiritual gifts – spiritual traits or styles are neither better or worse than any others – they are just different. We need to remember what scripture teaches us about how

Christ has assembled His body and how God is at work in our lives. 1 Corinthians 12:6 says that in the church *“There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.”*

Now before we go any further, we need to define what we mean by “spirituality” because it’s a vague term that is over-used these days. So I would put forward the following definition as one that I believe resonates with scriptural teaching on the matter.

Spirituality is How we experience God working and respond to Him and express this relationship in our lives.

And we are able to experience, respond and express our spirituality in a variety of ways, all grounded in the fact that God reveals Himself to us as a three in one Triune God.

And that variety is also comes from how God as Creator made each of us unique and different from each other – in our being

male and female, our race, our personalities, our physical characteristics and our cultural backgrounds.

Now what this means brothers and sisters – and this is key – we will each tend to prefer one person of the Trinity over the others. We all have our favorite person of the Godhead.

For whatever reason we will feel more comfortable or natural in experiencing and responding and expressing our relationship to God as Creator than we will as Savior or Transformer – or it will feel more natural to view God as Savior than Creator or Transformer – you get the picture.

Now when we discover which person of the Godhead we are most comfortable in experiencing as part of a specific spiritual style– it is a very affirming experience for us.

We will discover we have a natural aptitude for the kinds of spiritual disciplines we can practice to grow in our natural spiritual style. Its actually kind of easy for us and we can

encourage our desire for such growth in this style with little difficulty. We call this Level A growth.

However... as we learned in our 3 Colors of Christmas series, we need to grow to know God in His Trinitarian fullness as He intended to reveal Himself to us. He wants us to know ALL of Him. So, we can't limit ourselves to the dominant person of the Trinity in our natural style, we will need to grow in our experience of the other two persons of the Trinity as well.

But this kind of growth is not natural for us- its not easy at all. It is out of our comfort zone; it will feel awkward and unpleasant and difficult and we will likely want to stop the experience. It is something that takes self-discipline and effort to achieve – It's like learning how to write with your non-dominant hand – this is what we call Level B growth.

And we pursue it because we remember what scripture says in Hebrews 12:11-12 *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of*

*righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.”*

We'll get to talking about our feeble arms and weak knees in a bit – but its important that we understand that this is the true paradigm of spiritual growth.

For many years, brothers and sisters, I have watched as people attempt to grow spiritually by trying to read more of the bible, pray more often, going to church more – only to see them plateau and get stuck in a rut.

Now don't get me wrong – these are all good disciplines to practice. We could all do with practicing daily bible reading and learning to spend more time in prayer and attending worship every Sunday.

But its much more effective to undertake these disciplines with a correct understanding of how our spiritual growth works and how it's connected to experiencing God as a Trinity.

And that is why the first spiritual style we are looking at is the Doctrinal style – which is all about experiencing God by thinking correctly about God.

Now pay attention to how you reacted to what I just said – if you felt a surge of excitement at the prospect of thinking correctly about God and learning more about that then there is a good chance this is your natural style and this morning is going to be Level A growth for you.

If you felt tempted to roll your eyes and groan because this sounds tedious and dry to you – then there's a very good chance this is not your natural style, it could be your opposite style and this is going to be more of a Level B kind of experience for you. But the good news is that your suffering will not be in vain – it will produce a harvest of righteousness and peace for you... eventually.

So, let's look at how the scripture commends the Doctrinal style to us – thinking correctly about God - for our spiritual growth by turning to 1 Timothy 4:1-14.

And the first thing we notice is why this style is so important. In vs. 1-2 we read that people will turn away from the faith and follow false teachings – lies and falsehoods, taught by hypocritical liars – false teachers deceived by demonic spirits.

Now with that kind of set-up you might expect the following verses to make reference to things like pagan rituals, satanic worship, or child-sacrifices – really terrible horrible practices.

But Paul's examples of demonic teachings and their consequences have to do with abstaining from marriage and avoiding certain foods – that hardly seems demonic...

Ah but that's the deceptive part of demonic lies and false teachings – a little deception can go a long way. In this case the incorrect teaching about God is that He was not the creator of the material world.

The material world was created by an evil being who enslaved our souls in these bodies and in this material world and the goal is to escape this material world and our physicality

through being more “spiritual” and less “physical” and that is why you would abstain from marriage ( a very bodily relationship) and certain foods that may be seen as more material than other kinds of foods.

So - thinking incorrectly about God has very practical consequences in your life.

I hope you are already realizing how this is not correct thinking about God – because you have been taught the truth about God his revelation of Himself to us as the Creator.

In fact, many of the issues that we face in our day to day lives are consequences of incorrect thinking about God as Creator - the most obvious right now is the confusion surrounding how God created us male and female and His created intentions and design for our human sexuality.

And there are also more minor issues like what we think is really “spiritual” - because we still tend to think (like they did in Paul's day) that the material creation isn't really “spiritual”

– its physical... “worldly” or at least certain parts of it are – like money, power, technology, or certain kinds of music and arts, or – the energy industry and pipelines.

But thinking these things are not spiritual is all a result of thinking incorrectly about God as Creator- and causes us to disregard these parts of the creation to our own detriment.

However by training ourselves to think correctly about God we will receive benefits in our lives – in vs. 7 we read that if we learn to think correctly about God we become godly! Which doesn’t mean that we detach ourselves from this world – rather we engage it and work for God’s mission in it, because in eternity – we will occupy the renewed heavens and **earth**. As Paul says in vs. 10 *“That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.”*

And those who have learned to think correctly about God are able to bless the church and help others avoid being deceived into thinking incorrectly about God – especially as Creator.

Paul provides some correct thinking about God as Creator in this passage in vs. 4-5 *“For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”*

And... we discover that what makes a good minister in the church is not necessarily someone who is overly “spiritual” but as Paul says *“If you point these things [about God as Creator and His Creation] out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed”*

So, if I may take a moment here – not to blow my own horn – but to have you take notice, and understand, that 1 Tim 4:4-7 is why I have us do the TALK Show and why we do it as our Sunday morning worship. It is to help us learn to think correctly about God as Creator and very explicitly show us how God created everything, and how everything God created is good and how we consecrate it by prayer and the Word (examining with our Bible glasses) as an act of worship.

Now – it just so happens that this scripture passage focused on thinking correctly about God as Creator, but there is much more to learning about God than just God as Creator – as you know by now – we also need to learn how to think correctly about God as Savior and God as Transformer.

And there are all sorts of resources available to help us learn how to think correctly and experience God in doing so – but... the vast majority of them are books. And the truth is that to start growing in the doctrinal style you need to read.

So start with reading the scriptures – not just bits and pieces of it here and there for how it speaks to your situation – but big chunks of it so that you start to get the overall sense of what it is saying about God and who He is.

And then its helpful to read books by good theologians who are called to teach the church and make sure our doctrine is sound and biblically based. If you are just getting started in this you can read and study the Heidelberg Catechism, Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis. or F.A.I.T.H Unfolded.

And when you are ready to dig deeper I would recommend Growing the Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit by Brad Long, The Christ of the Covenants by O Palmer Robertson, and my personal favorite Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics by Dr. Gordon Spykman.

Now if you are hearing all this and going – oh man, that is a bit of work! You’re right – it is.

Growth in any of the nine spiritual styles doesn’t come easy or cheap - and this is where we come back to Hebrews 12:12 and strengthening our feeble arms and weak knees.

That’s why Paul uses terms in this scripture passage like training (vs.7) devotion (vs.13) don’t neglect it (vs.14) diligence (vs. 15) watchfulness (vs.16) perseverance (vs. 16).

There are so many parallels between spiritual growth and physical training – working out – that it makes an excellent analogy to help us understand the process we will go through to grow.



It starts with the idea that you begin with lifting a light weight, running a short distance and then you do it again but you add a little more and see if you can go a bit longer and by doing this over and over again, with periods of recovery in between, you begin to grow.

The same applies to reading and learning to think correctly about God. Start small, add a bit more and keep on working at it, take time to recovery, do it again – and you will grow.

Now there is more I could say about the Doctrinal Style and spiritual growth in regards to each of these terms Paul uses here – but I’m just going pick out “watchfulness” in vs. 16 where Paul exhorts us to watch our lives and our doctrine closely.

Not only because error and incorrect thinking can be subtle and easily overlooked and sneak into our thinking to lead us astray... but because our sinful nature can twist this strength of the Doctrinal style into a weakness.

If we only focus on the comfortable and affirming level A growth of our spiritual style, and we neglect to engage in the unpleasant or painful level B growth with our opposite style - our strength will turn into our weakness.

Doctrinal Style people can become overly critical of everything, always analyzing if it is right, and start to correct everything people say. (Meme about Calvinist) Teaching and preaching can become dry and lifeless and Faith in the living triune God can be reduced to mental furniture – concepts and truths about God- and it becomes more important to simply agree with them than ensuring that they make a difference in how you are living. As Isaiah 28:13 warns *“the word of the Lord to them will become: Do this, do that, a rule for this, a rule for that...”*

These are some of the pitfalls of being a “Level A only” Doctrinal Style Christian. Thank God that we are not all Doctrinal Style people – thank God that other members of the Body of Christ have other styles!

And as they pursue their Level A growth – we can be a part of that to help us engage in our Level B growth.

So I am very thankful for those people who are my opposite spiritual style, and if you hadn't guessed already Doctrinal style is my natural style.

So I am very thankful for the Enthusiastic Style people in the Church who help me to engage in Level B growth and experience God as Transformer - the Holy Spirit, and so I have become more familiar and comfortable with my opposite style - and now I am less prone to inflicting the pitfalls and dangers of my natural style on others because of this.

Instead I can use the strengths of the Doctrinal style to continue to build up the body of the Christ and provide a solid foundation of thinking correctly about God for people to discover their own spiritual style and how they can grow in their experience of the Triune God – and be intentional about it – and they can be confident they are working with correct teaching.

So you see brothers and sisters our spiritual growth is not - and can not be - an individualistic and isolated endeavor – not if it is Christian spiritual growth that helps us to know and experience God more fully as the Triune God... because God in His very nature is communal – He is **three** in one, and so our growth happens by community and for community as well.

So I will emphasize once more that each of the nine styles we are going to learn about is not just for you to say “wow – so cool that I'm like this!” Its to shape your identity as someone who is a disciple of Jesus and a part of His church and teach you that as you grow spiritual you have a responsibility to help others grow spiritually as well.

So that in a year from now, in ten years from now we will be able to specifically point to the ways in which we have made progress – together – as Paul envisions us doing in Eph 4:13 where “*we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*” So let's start this process by thinking Correctly about God - Amen