

Podcast: The Three Laws of Excellence Applied to Godliness

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[0 : 00] Welcome.

Welcome to the Providence Community Podcast. My name is Chris Oswald, Senior Pastor at Providence Community Church. Welcome to the Providence Community Church.

I've thought a lot about this. This is something I began to first think about when I began to travel in the third world extensively. And I saw the massive gap between the way of life I enjoy here in the United States and the way of life in so many other parts of the world.

All of the other explanations that were handed to me to explain this gap seemed insufficient. And so I began to return to first principles and ask myself, where does excellence really come from?

Excellence is, in fact, the cushy padding around our entire modern way of life. It's what makes our life relatively easy.

[1 : 33] The existence of antibiotics and couch cushions and airbags and the rule of law and so on and so forth all come about because individuals start making stuff better and better and better.

So when I ask, where does excellence come from? That's what I'm asking. Where does that kind of thing come from? Well, there are a number of factors. But the first one, I think, is that there is some kind of shift that takes place in an individual where that individual begins to realize that time in, time invested, leads to favorable outcomes on the other end.

Another way to say this is that people begin to understand, people begin to relate to the idea that if you sow in tears, you'll reap with joy. Whenever someone's really excellent at something, it is really because they have probably some natural capacities combined with, at least in this area, at least in the area of their specialty, a comfort with discomfort.

Excellence comes from an extreme time under load. It comes from an extreme time of effort. It's the outcome of a lot of effort.

And so one of the things that you start to see when you look at a culture of excellence is that the people who are causing or creating a culture of excellence have all come to expect, have come to understand that, generally speaking, a certain law is at work in the world, a certain law is at work in reality.

[3 : 16] And that is, is that if you really, really apply yourself to something, you'll get better at it. If you sow in tears, you'll reap in joy. Secondary to that, and not really a part of this conversation exactly, but just want to help you see the train of thought that I went through, was that that law has to then be reinforced by or protected by the government.

What do I mean by that? Well, there has to be a rule of law sufficient so that the individual who's spending a great deal of time making effort to improve something knows that at the end, he will be rewarded and not someone else.

The idea being that he will receive a reward for his labors. So there has to be, first, some recognition of the law of sowing and reaping, and secondly, some protection of that law from thieves, more or less.

And so one of the things that the government must do, according to Romans 13, is that the government must punish the lawbreaker. And a lot of that comes down to punishing people who would take what is not theirs.

So there seem to be two major breakdowns so far in worlds that don't work versus worlds that work relatively well.

[4 : 40] And one of them is that individuals must believe in an input-output type law governing the universe. That generally speaking, if you invest time and effort, you'll get an outcome that is

favorable, commiserate to your investment.

This is just the law of the farmer, right? Sow in tears, reap in joys. Reap in joy. The second thing is that there must be some sense that there is a rule of law that is going to protect you, the investor of time and energy, and keep your possessions safe from those who would rather steal from you than invest their own time and effort.

And so we've got two things now. We've got a belief in a kind of invisible law, the law of sowing and reaping, coupled with a belief in the rule of law enforced by the government.

And in my travels, I'd seen that these two things were non-existent. The rule of law was gone. Institutions were highly corrupt.

Law enforcement was highly corrupt. They might be the ones to actually steal from you, let alone protect you from the thieves. Random acts of violence were not investigated and were not prosecuted.

[6 : 15] The government itself might become highly... It might become a kleptocracy. It might essentially get its whole existence by extreme taxation so that you invest all this time in order to do something remarkable.

And then the government swoops in and says, Hi, we want 50% or you go to jail. So you see in degenerating cultures the rule of law breaking down.

And then even deeper than that, perhaps because of that to some degree, you see people who no longer believe in a kind of cosmically ordered reality in which investment and returns are correlated. They start believing in a more chaotic world. A world where even if you invest a serious amount of effort, nothing may come of it because those two things, effort and outcome, are not necessarily tied in the way that successful cultures believe they are.

And this really just gets down to sort of a superstitious view of reality. A sense of a sort of chaotic world rather than a world governed by God and so on and so forth.

[7 : 43] So those are two of the big kind of causes of excellence. Believing generally that over time, sowing leads to reaping and believing that someone's watching out for you to keep you from being stolen from after you've pulled in your harvest.

Believing generally that you've got to be a part of the way that you've got to be a part of the way that you've got to be. There's a third cause of excellence. And that is some sense of preference for a better life.

This would just be some sort of desire. You know, it'd be great. It's great if you believe in the kind of universal law of sowing and reaping. And it's great if you believe in the rule of law that exists.

But even if those two things are present, if you're not dissatisfied to some degree with your present circumstances and wanting something better, either for you or yours, you'll never invest the amount of time you need to under load to kind of secure this better outcome.

Again, excellence happens when people spend significant amounts of time feeling uncomfortable.

[9 : 08] And they, in some ways, get used to the, they grow comfortable with discomfort. And so the main thing, you know, rule of law is important.

Understanding the law of sowing and reaping is important. But probably the main thing that Proverbs is concerned about is the guy who just is lazy or the girl who's just lazy. They don't really want to spend significant amounts of time in discomfort.

And they just don't have a big why, a big enough why to warrant the extra effort.

So I say all that because I think it's important to help people to understand kind of where we've come from as a culture and where we're going. We came from a group of people who had all three of those things.

They had belief in the cosmic law of sowing and reaping. They had some sense of a rule of law that kept their things their things. And they also had a big why.

[10 : 12] They had a big reason. And that reason was sometimes greed. That reason was sometimes fame. That reason was sometimes wanting power. But by and large, most of the time, for most people, the reason was a desire to make their families' lives better.

The reason was love, in essence. Our church is located on the very property that was used as one of the first stops on the Santa Fe Trail.

And I think it was the first stop out of Westport, actually. Your first day was traversing all the distance between Westport and our church.

And you rested there along the creek there at our church. It wasn't that many years ago, really, speaking in terms of the history of the world. It wasn't that many years ago that a very large number of people abandoned relative comfort elsewhere to engage in prolonged discomfort to make a better world for their family.

So you need that why. And when I look at the world today and I look at young people today, I'm not sure. The thing that most concerns me isn't work ethic or anything like that.

[11 : 40] The thing that most concerns me is I'm not sure this youngest generation as a whole understands love. I'm not sure there are particularly loving people.

And it's very frightening to me. And I hope I'm wrong. But it seems to me that love is really in short supply.

And by love, I mean the willingness to lay down your life for others. The willingness to pour out yourself to care for others. Now, the one thing I'll say is that it's too soon to judge.

Because almost all adults learn how to love like that when they have kids. But needless to say, it is a concern.

It's a concern. And I hope that I'm proven wrong to have been concerned. Anytime you pursue excellence, you need a why. And pursuing godliness, which is what our text has to say to us, is just like every other kind of pursuit.

[12 : 52] It requires a sufficient amount of time in the state of discomfort.

It's growing comfortable with discomfort. If you will not go beyond yourself, beyond your current situation, beyond your current comfort levels, you won't grow in godliness.

Godliness, just like anything else, is a pursuit of a kind of excellence that requires a significant amount of time feeling uncomfortable.

And I want to go back through my three rules here that I first kind of thought about as I was traveling into the third world.

The first thing about pursuing godliness is that you've got to believe that if you pursue godliness, you'll get godly. You've got to believe there's some general relationship between sowing and reaping.

[14 : 00] And I would just say that there are many texts that tell you that is exactly the case. There are many Bible verses that tell you that no one who calls upon the Lord will be put to shame.

No one who seeks him diligently will fail to find him. Galatians, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

There are plenty of verses that tell us that of all fields of human endeavor, the one that has the most absolute, most rock-solid promise of sowing and reaping actually working is in the pursuit of godliness.

It will happen. If you pursue godliness, God will bless you. He will give you godliness. One of the times that Jesus talks about his father being a good father, he says, which of you will give your kid a snake when he asks for a fish?

And then he says, if you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more so will the father give you? And there's a split here between the two gospel accounts.

[15 : 15] One says good gifts when you ask, and the other says the Holy Spirit when you ask. And let's just say that it's the Holy Spirit when we're talking about godliness.

If you want to be godly and if you're willing to do the work necessary to grow in godliness, you will grow in godliness. The devil can come in at this stage and make that more confusing than it is and suggest to you that it's a matter of motives and God blessing and this and that, but don't get it twisted.

Every person who has, you know, sort of decided not to sow diligently in any area of life, sometimes the people that do that decide like, well, the world is unfair and the world is under bad stewardship and so on and so forth.

And so how do I know if I invest X, Y, and Z that I'll get a return? Well, because God has programmed the world that way. Specifically related to godliness, we have many promises that that is the case.

Think of it this way. God is really eager to give you godliness, obviously. We see that throughout the scriptures. You can be assured that if you pursue him, you will find him if you pursue him with all of your heart.

[16 : 43] The second thing was something about the rule of law. So that in a third world context, if you don't have any assurance that what you build won't be taken by someone else, then it's kind of like, why should I do the effort?

Like, I don't even know if this harvest that I'm working so hard for won't be stolen by someone else. Here again, when we talk about godliness, let's make sure we understand that God has promised to keep our inheritance.

At the end of Paul's letters to Timothy, he says, I know whom I have believed and I have entrusted him and he is able to keep what I have entrusted to him for me and against the day.

God will keep you and God will keep what you lay up. Jesus says, don't store up treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal, but store up treasures in heaven where those things don't happen.

So if you pursue godliness, you'll get godliness. And that godliness will be yours. Christ will guard it for you.

[18 : 02] But the biggest reason I think people fail to pursue godliness is that it's just not clear to them that there's any preferable benefit to it beyond what they have right now in their current life.

And this is because people, by and large, have viewed the gospel as a kind of fire insurance and sort of absolution from guilt, rather than an introduction to a person who you get to love and be loved by.

So you need a why for godliness. And the main why should be, I love God. God is super patient with us and super understanding and kind and compassionate.

And so he has furnished us with really, I guess you could say, unlimited reasons why godliness should be pursued. Unlimited reasons why the pursuit of godliness is worth the effort.

And this is what we see in our text. We see that in verse 7, it says in 1 Timothy 4, have nothing to do with irreverent silly myths.

[19 : 16] 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.

For this saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. To this end we toil and strive. To this end we toil and strive.

Because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the savior of all people, especially of those who believe. So what we've got here is the big why, which is sort of, it's pretty simple.

Godliness is of value in every way. Godliness is of value in every way. So now we have three things that we can kind of lock onto in the pursuit of godliness.

Number one, if you pursue godliness, you'll get godliness. Number two, that godliness won't be taken from you because of a lack of divine law enforcement.

[20 : 18] God will protect you. He will protect it. He will protect your character. He will cause your character to continue to exist and continue to grow in compounding interest, so to speak.

And then we come to, well, why should I engage in the discomfort at all? Well, Paul would say that one way to tell you why is that godliness is of value in every way, both in this life and in the life to come.

So that's sort of, I was thinking about that with Dove Sermon. I was thinking about like, you know, you're asking people to do something that is going to require effort.

And I was thinking about how like, there were people who, and I talked to afterward, everybody I talked to afterward said it was a great sermon, but there were people who I talked to afterward who just already knew that they wanted to pursue godliness.

They knew that they should. They knew that it was a worthy aim. And so what you were seeing there was, in many respects, people who were like fully convinced of the why.

[21 : 38] But I wonder if some of you were maybe not convinced of the why. Maybe not sure what the point would be in doing this. What would the point be?

What's the why? Well, the why is, is that it's valuable in every way. So, Dove shared some very helpful suggestions.

And the idea here is, is that you really need to look for constant opportunities to grow in godliness. Now, again, some of you are like, absolutely, amen.

I want to grow in godliness. And some of you are like, I'm not, to be honest with you, I'm not sure I do. My life is really comfortable right now. What benefit would come to me by growing in godliness?

Well, it's not enough, I suppose, to just take God's word as God's word. I know how the heart who is questioning whether he or she should make the effort to grow in godliness is probably also thinking, well, I don't know, I mean, 1 Timothy 4, 7, godliness is of great value in every way.

[22 : 51] What does that mean? Well, let's go to the analogy that Paul uses when he says, physical training is of some value.

Training in godliness is of great value in every way. Physical training has essentially two benefits. Everything is like this. It has benefits to keep you from bad things and benefits to give you good things.

Physical training could keep you from aging too quickly. Physical training could keep you from getting sick or getting type 2 diabetes or so on and so forth.

It can keep you from things. And it can also give you things. And what I've found in my own life, and I think that I've found this in lots of people that I've talked to, is not everybody can, not every person can kind of engage in discomfort for something to get something positive that they don't have now. Ideally, we would all be like, I am going to exercise so that I can be healthier than I am now. And if I'm healthier than I am now, then I can serve people better, and I can enjoy time with people better, and so on and so forth.

[24 : 14] That'd be great if we could always engage in suffering, voluntary suffering, for the sake of getting something we don't have now. But people are often not motivated to do physical exercise just for that.

But there's usually a moment in people's lives when they get scared. And they get scared because if they don't fix this or that health problem, they're going to have real issues.

And I want to convey something to you that I heard, that Angela and I heard on the radio, driving from Revo Cup to Aldi right down there on West 87th Street.

The man was talking about Jesus' words, where Jesus says, whoever hears my words and does not obey them is like a man building his house on sand.

The storm will come, and great will be the destruction of that house. And the man was talking about flood canyons in the Middle East, and he was just talking about how, you know, first of all, it doesn't storm very often in the Middle East.

[25 : 28] And he said that Jesus was most likely referring to these kind of floodplains in the Middle East, where, you know, it wouldn't happen very often.

But every once in a while, rain would pour, especially in the mountains, and the water would just shoot down one of these canyons in through the desert sand and just, you know, absolutely, you know, geographically rearrange things.

You know what I mean? Like, topographically, like, things are different now. The water would displace the sand. It would, you know, it would wash tons of things away. And he made the point, he's like, you know, if you don't follow Jesus like you should, and you don't obey God's words like you should, you're building your house in a flood zone.

And it may not rain or flood this year. It may not flood for another five years. But one day, the flood comes.

And you are unable to withstand the great difficulties, the great storm that came. You were building your house in a flood zone.

[26 : 47] And so we're talking about the whys of godliness. And it would be great if you were motivated by a desire for eternal reward, if you're motivated by a love for God, if you're motivated by a love for others.

And all those things are there for you. But sometimes it just needs to be fear. And so mark my words and mark them well.

A desire to grow in godliness should be at least, the why should be at the very least, because the day's coming when all of your insolence and neglect and could-haves and should-haves and spiritual laziness, like the day's coming when you will regret it.

The storm will come. You're building your life on a flood zone. So why does someone exercise?

Well, some people exercise for really amazingly ambitious reasons, to win races.

And Paul wants you to think that way too. He says so elsewhere. But other people just start exercising when they finally realize, if I don't do this, I'm kind of toast.

[28 : 00] And that can be a good reason too. In fact, a lot of people start there, choosing a healthier lifestyle to avoid serious disease, and then move from there into more positive reasons

later on.

So that's what I would commend to you, is you really do need to, and I really do need to, engage in that sense of, I'm going to grow comfortable feeling uncomfortable in my pursuit of godliness.

And I'm going to practice and immerse myself in the pursuit of god. And I'm going to trust that when I do that, god will bless it, and god will keep it.

And as for the why, well, I would love for you to have a highly positive why. But maybe there's just the negative why right now.

The negative why seems to be coming through later on in 1 Timothy 4. Verse 6. If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of faith and the good doctrine that you have followed.

[29 : 13] 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.

This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

Practice these things. Immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

[30 : 23] It seems to be a negative reason there. We know that save doesn't here mean salvation.

Timothy's persistence in his life and doctrine will not save him, will not save his hearers. So what's the save?

Well, the save seems to tie in with Jesus's words about building your house on a rock or on sand.

The save seems to be a sort of, there's stuff coming.

There's hard stuff coming. There's temptation coming. There's sustained marital strife coming.

There's disease coming.

The hard things are coming and your present level of godliness may not be sufficient for the moment. And so, grow.

[31 : 31] Grow now while the sun shines. Take the time now to insulate yourself from future difficulties.

But you do see a positive there too, I suppose. And that is, is that Timothy is told that his carefulness and his own growth in godliness will not only save himself but others.

And so we see love here as well. Here's another good reason to grow in godliness. You are a sinner. You're not that fun to be around without Christ.

You are a sinner whom people love, whom people are cheering for, whom people are relying on.

Sometimes a good reason to grow in godliness is just to realize that people are counting on me.

people need me to be as much like Christ as I can be today. People need me to grow in godliness.

There are people depending on me.

[32 : 43] And so there we go. There's a summary of this passage. We're going to post Dove's notes along with the podcast so that you're able to go through a number of his highly specific examples and really specific encouragements.

I want to end with something that's just a celebration. Over the last few weeks, I've really been genuinely humbled and blessed to see a number of people at Providence who are serving and serving well and serving without any expectation of recognition and so on and so forth.

There are so many of them that I couldn't dare mention them right now. I would certainly exclude a few folks. But I want to just celebrate what I see and not just celebrate like so that you celebrate, but I just want to give you a glimpse into my heart and just say, boy, I'm just, I'll say it this way.

I've met a man who is kind of a national figure within evangelicalism the other night and he and I were talking and we were talking about ministry and we were both celebrating how there's just a season in both of our respective churches churches where the saints are serving and the saints are

leading the saints are investing their lives for the sake of others and we were both commenting or both about the same age we're both commenting about how much fun it is to not be in the spotlight and to see others serve in so many ways and so in many respects Dove Preaching on Sunday was sort of the capstone of that for me something that I had been noticing for the past few weeks so I'm so grateful for his message and I'm so grateful for the thoughts that his message kind of led me to think have led me to think over the past few days and so in addition to this podcast I want to point you to his sermon audio which will be you know like on Spotify or on the website it'll be just before this podcast and then also his sermon notes which you'll be provided with.

Alright well that's enough for today thank you so much for listening may God bless you and keep you and may his face shine upon you and if there's anything I can be doing to pray for you to encourage you would you please reach out and let me know God bless.