

September 8, 2024

WHAT DOES PASTORAL LEADERSHIP LOOK LIKE?

1 Timothy 4:11-16

*(11 of 15 in a series through 1 Timothy)*

As you know, one of the key ways we attempt to obey the Great Commission outside of our local church is by raising up, equipping, and sending out men who will serve as pastors and planters in North America and around the world. That's one of the reasons we're so excited about our upcoming conference where these guys and their wives come back to us, let us know how things are going, and give us a chance to encourage them. My hope is that in the future, the Lord continues to enable us to send more and more such laborers into the harvest. And it's on that very note that I want to start this morning.

Imagine sometime in the future we've got a young man who's ready to go pastor. Maybe he's in his late twenties or early thirties. And we know that the church he's going into is a hard situation. They've got some men who have seized leadership and teaching positions and are teaching falsehood, a number of unbiblical practices have just become standard in the church, and some who once professed faith and seemed like genuine followers of Christ are straying from him. And so, right before sending him out, imagine that we're gathered in this room, and one of our pastors is giving him a charge concerning his mission as he goes to this church.

And as you're sitting in this room, listening to this charge, imagine this is what you hear one of our pastors say to this young man. "I know there's a lot of wicked things going on at this church, but you've got to deal with them. That's why we're sending you there. And I know we often say things like, 'Take your time in addressing certain matters,' but you've got to go in and deal with some things head on. Here's what you need to do. Go in there and tell the men in the church to stop being so angry when they pray and to stop being concerned about being right more than they're concerned about being godly. Tell the ladies to quit caring more about what they look like and how they dress than how godly they are. Make sure the women know that they aren't allowed to teach or exercise authority over a man. Dismiss anyone who isn't qualified to be an elder or deacon, only allowing men who are qualified into those positions. When you hear people forbidding eating certain foods or getting married, tell them that they're spreading demonic teaching. And I know you're young, but don't let them dismiss you or what you're saying."

If you heard one of the pastors charging a young man that way as we sent him out into such a difficult church, you'd probably sit in your chair cringing, wouldn't you? I mean, who says to someone who's about to start pastoral ministry, "I know you're young, but right out of the gate, go into this church addressing men's anger, women's clothing, and remove unqualified people from teaching positions in the church"? That's crazy. That's how to get fired in the first month on the job, right? And yet that's exactly what we've read in this letter that Paul has instructed Timothy to do. Every one of the elements I've named in my imaginary scenario of asking a young pastor to address, Paul specifically writes for Timothy to address at this church in Ephesus.

So, how in the world did Paul expect Timothy to survive this task he'd given him, let alone succeed in it? The answer to that question is given to us in the text we're looking at this morning: 1 Timothy 4:11-16. And what we find Paul telling Timothy in these six verses is that the key to his success in this overwhelming task that's been given to him is to make sure his public ministry revolves around the Word of God and that he personally lives a life of holiness. That's broadly what Paul tells Timothy in these verses, and I want to walk through it under three statements which summarize in a bit more detail what Paul tells Timothy.

And my hope is that this will be helpful for three different groups of us in the church. First, it should be helpful for the five of us who serve as pastors here. After all, Paul is summing up for Timothy what is required for successful, biblical pastoral leadership. Certainly, that is something we need to be reminded of. Second, it should be helpful for any man who aspires to be a pastor someday. In fact, we might say that there is no better text for a young man who aspires to pastoral ministry to look at as Paul addresses specifically what is key for him to succeed as he goes into a difficult church when others might naturally look down on him because of his youth and inexperience. But, finally, I hope this text is greatly beneficial for all of us to hear, for two reasons. First, it's helpful because a congregation needs to know what is expected of pastors. One of the main reasons churches decline and die is because they fail to heed the qualifications Scripture gives for pastors and do not demand that their pastors walk according to biblical instruction. And when you put men in positions as pastors who aren't qualified and don't walk according to biblical instruction, the church will suffer and (eventually) die. But another reason this is beneficial for all of us to see is because Timothy is simply doing on a larger scale what all believers should do in some measure. In other words, all of us have responsibility, for example, to teach and command the Scriptures to others. It will not be from behind the pulpit for most, but it may be with your children, a spouse, or a fellow church member. Paul will speak of Timothy being an example in certain aspects of Christian living, and if Timothy is to be an example, this implies that other believers should follow that example. And so I think this text is greatly beneficial and instructive for all of us. With that established, then, what does Paul say Timothy should do? First, Timothy must make the Scriptures central in his ministry.

### **Timothy must make the Scriptures central in his ministry**

Paul makes this point at multiple places in our text. First, we see it in verse 11 as he writes to Timothy, "Command and teach these things." And by "these things," Paul means the very things that he's just written. He may have in mind especially those things that he's just written in 4:1-6, but he clearly expects Timothy to teach and command everything else he's written in this letter as well. We know that because in 3:15 Paul had noted that the things he'd written to that point in the letter, he'd written in order that Timothy might know "how one ought to behave in the household of God," and if Timothy's going to ensure that this behavior is followed in the church, it will require him commanding and teaching those things Paul had written to that point in the letter. Consequently, we can say that Paul wants Timothy to command and teach everything Paul has written in this letter.

Then, in verses 13, Paul writes, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” Now, we can say, in addition to commanding and teaching the content of the letter we’re studying (1 Timothy), Paul wants Timothy to ensure that as he leads the congregation at Ephesus, he’s publicly reading the Scripture, teaching what the Scripture says, and exhorting (or commanding) people to obey what the Scripture says. Therefore, we can say that Paul wants Timothy to make the Scripture central in his ministry at the church at Ephesus. He wants him to take time as they gather to read the Scripture publicly (after all, people wouldn’t have had their own copies of the Bible), explain what it means, and exhort the people to obey it.

And I think that Paul is confident that Timothy can do this because he’s been gifted by the Spirit to do so. I say that because right after telling him to read, teach, and exhort from the Scripture, Paul adds in verse 13, “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.” We noted this earlier in the letter, but this is probably a reference to something like an ordination service for Timothy when the elders gathered around him, laid hands on him, and were given words of prophecy that revolved around Timothy being a gifted teacher of the Bible. And Paul is now telling Timothy, “You’ve been gifted by the Spirit to do these things I’m telling you. Don’t neglect that gift. Labor in it.”

But the key is that Paul’s exhortation is to allow his ministry to revolve around the Word of God. And this is key for us as pastors here and for everyone we send out. People don’t need our great personalities or ability to cast a vision or great oratory skills. They need the Bible. They need you to read it, teach it, and exhort them from it. Let me say the same thing another way. If you have an amazing personality, great oratory skills, and the ability to provide the most attractive of visions but you don’t devote yourself to reading, teaching, and exhorting from the Bible, then you will not be a good shepherd of the Lord’s church.

So, with this overwhelming responsibility Timothy had, how did Paul expect him to succeed? First, Paul expected him to make the Bible the centerpiece of his ministry. After all, the authoritative word that Timothy had to give the people didn’t come from him but from God’s Word. We’ve said it repeatedly, but let’s make sure the Word is always central to everything we are and do as a church.

And let me add one more note before we move on to the second point. Some of you are just visiting us this morning and some of our members may one day move, looking for another church to join. And I’m grateful there are many good churches to join in our area and beyond. But when you’re looking for a church, make sure the church is centered around reading, teaching, and exhorting from the Scripture, as Paul tells Timothy here. Second, Timothy was to be an example of godly living.

**Timothy must be an example of godly living**

Between Paul's exhortation in verse 11 and 13 to make the Scripture the centerpiece of his ministry, Paul tells Timothy in verse 12, "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."

Now, this is one of those verses where we often attempt to quote and apply only the first half of the verse. We perhaps say to a young pastor, "Let no one despise you for your youth." Or, if you've been a young pastor who feels like everyone is not respecting you because you're young and inexperienced in most areas of life, you might have thought, "They shouldn't be disrespecting me because I'm young. Haven't they read Paul?"

But if you take the first half of verse 12 alone, it's really not that helpful. What do you do with a command: "Let no one despise you for your youth"? On its own, you might think that Paul is encouraging Timothy to go around and tell everyone who he thinks is despising him because he's young, "Quit looking down on me. Quit despising me because I'm young. Paul said so." But I assure you, this is not how Paul envisioned Timothy going about this. And I would discourage any young pastor from going around, asking people if they look down on him because he's young, and if they admit they do, telling them to quit it.

But Paul doesn't stop writing in the first half of verse 12. He actually tells Timothy *how* to keep people from despising him for being young. He is to earn their respect by being an example of godly living. Specifically, Paul gives him five areas where he must be an example of godliness: speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. So, let's take each of these one at a time.

First, in his speech, Timothy must be an example of godliness. My guess is that Paul isn't necessarily thinking of speech in his public teaching, though that would certainly apply. But mainly I'd imagine Paul is focusing on Timothy's speech in all of life. Brothers, we can undo much of what we say behind the pulpit by being careless with our speech when we aren't behind the pulpit. We know that Scripture says that we must not give ourselves to "filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking" (Eph 5:4) nor to let any "corrupting talk come out of [our] mouths, but only such as is good for building up" (Eph 4:29). We can't forget these commands. As pastors, we should model this, providing an example of the way a believer is to speak. And this is a convicting reminder that makes me want to watch how I speak more carefully, asking myself if what I'm saying is edifying and models how one ought to speak. But the list doesn't stop here.

Timothy is to be an example in conduct. Now, that's a broad category referring to how one lives his life. We often speak of conducting ourselves a certain way. But if we ask how Paul would have Timothy conduct himself, we can simply continue the list. He must demonstrate love, faith, and purity.

Timothy must love, which mandates that Timothy hopes and believes the best about people, bears attacks from others without retaliating, doesn't keep a record of wrongs committed against him, doesn't insist on his own way, and considers others as more significant than himself. And he must demonstrate faith in what he does. He must be one who not only knows what God's Word

says but trusts it to be true and walks in light of its promises. He must be faithful in all things unto the Lord.

And, finally, he must be an example in all purity. This can, of course, be a reference to all of life, but I think Paul has in mind particularly sexual purity because he will later exhort Timothy to treat younger women as sisters “in all purity” (5:2). Timothy must be an example to the congregation as to how to walk in sexual purity. He must not be one who gives into lustful temptation and pursues immorality.

Now, there were certain temptations in Timothy’s day that aren’t as common in ours. In Ephesus you could probably find temple prostitutes, just as you made your way to the market, and I doubt that you’ll find something similar on Union’s campus, for example. But we must also acknowledge that there are lustful temptations in our day that Timothy could not have dreamed of. The access to sexually explicit images that we can access on our phones or computers or in movies that are constantly available to us and can be viewed in the privacy of our own home, bedroom, or dorm room is a means Satan definitely uses to draw a believer away from his allegiance to Christ. But no believer must see these things as acceptable, and the pastor must see himself as someone who provides an example for other believers to follow in this area. That’s what Paul demanded of Timothy when he demands that he walk in purity.

And so if we ask, “How is it that Paul envisioned Timothy not letting anyone despise him for his youth?” it wasn’t by having Timothy run around to each person, saying, “Quit looking down on me.” Rather, it was in having Timothy live in such a way—in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity—that he served as an example to others. The idea would be that the congregation might say, “I know he’s young, but his life of godliness is undeniable and worthy of respect.” Timothy must be an example of godly living. And, finally, Timothy must grow and persevere in these things.

### **Timothy must grow and persevere in these things**

Godliness is not a static reality but a dynamic one. That is, you don’t just maintain godliness, but as you mature, more areas of need for godliness are exposed, and so you continue to grow in godliness. You’re always pushing forward. That’s why Paul speaks of Timothy’s *progress* in godliness. It’s why Paul speaks of his own life in terms of “straining forward” and “press[ing] on” (Phil 3:13-14). Even think about how he opens the letter of 2 Corinthians, talking about a struggle that he had where he despaired of life itself. Then he notes, “that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God” (2 Cor 1:9). Now, I’m going to assume Paul relied on the Lord before that particular event of suffering. But what he’s noting is that his life is one of continual growth and progression in godliness. And Paul expects the same of Timothy, which we see as he writes, “Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching” (vv. 15-16a).

Paul wants Timothy to be disciplined about his progress and growth in godliness. He doesn’t want Timothy to put life on cruise-control. As we’ve noted many times before, you don’t drift

toward godliness. He wants him to focus on these things, immerse himself in walking as a godly example and mastering the Scriptures, and continue to grow in this so that that others might see his growth and imitate him.

But Paul also wants Timothy to see that he must persevere in his godly living and commitment to the Scriptures. Godliness demands perseverance. When a man commits adultery after being faithfully married to his wife for twenty-five years, we don't respond to news of his adultery by saying, "Wow, that's great that he was faithful for twenty-five years." We respond by grieving over his unfaithfulness. It is with a moment of moral failure that we can ruin a reputation of holiness. Godliness demands that we persevere in it. And that's Paul's ending note.

He writes to Timothy at the end of verse 16, "Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." The "this" that Paul wants Timothy to persist in are the tasks given to him in verses 11-13—reading, teaching, and exhorting from the Word of God and being an example in godly living. It's what he wants Timothy to keep a close watch on, as referenced in 16a—his life of godliness and his task of upholding and teaching the Scripture.

As he does this, Paul tells him, this will be the means that the Lord will use for his own salvation as well as his hearers. In other words, as Timothy watches his own life of godliness and teaching God's word, making sure that he's persevering in these things, it'll not only mean he's living a life of persevering repentance and faith, but it'll also mean that he's helping those in his church live a life of persevering repentance and faith. In other words, one of the most loving things a pastor can do for those under his oversight and care is to model consistently what Christian living and godliness looks like and proclaim and teach the Bible. This is God's ordained means of preserving his children in this life.

As I mentioned at the start of this sermon, Timothy was sent out to do something that feels overwhelming to me. In fact, I can't imagine sending one of our young men into a similar place. And yet Paul trusted that he would handle the situation well if he centered all things in his ministry around God's Word, provided an example for the congregation of what godliness looks like in how he lived before them, and progressed and persisted in these things so that others might do the same.

And these are good things for us to focus on as well. As a church, let's make sure that the ministry always revolves around the Word of God—reading it, teaching it, and exhorting from it. Pastors, let's model godly living and seek to progress and persist in it. And, congregation, follow this example and may all of us reflect godliness in our speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, remembering that Christ has freed us from our slavery to sin through his life, death, and resurrection. Let's thank him for that now as we come to the table. Amen.