



Amen. What a great God we serve! And the lyrics of that song [“O Great God”] link the theme of last week’s sermon, “Train Yourself for Godliness,” with the theme of today’s sermon, “Perseverance Pays Off.”

PERSEVERANCE PAYS OFF
1 Timothy 4:11-16

In 1 Timothy 4:11-16 (p. 933, pew Bible), Paul continues his exhortation to Timothy that began in the previous paragraph (vv. 6-10). Beginning in verse 11, Paul says,

¹¹ Command and teach these things. 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. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ 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.

- 1 Timothy 4:11-16

These punchy imperatives from Paul to Timothy comprise what could be called a Holy Spirit-inspired motivational speech for a man of God, for a minister of the gospel – and by extension to all believers. If you’ve played on a sports team or been part of a sales force, you’ve probably heard a motivational speech from time to time. One leadership consultant writes, “A good motivational speech does exactly that – it motivates. It engages the minds and hearts of people in such a way that motivates them to think more clearly, see opportunities, and move forward with action.”

That’s the effect this text has on me, and I trust that it will have the same effect on you. Because this is no empty rhetoric on Paul’s part – a lot of hype with little substance. He’s not speaking as a coach but as an apostle of Christ. And his aim is not to win a game or improve sales. It’s to save souls. People’s eternal destinies are at stake. Timothy has the opportunity to change lives – to save lives – including his own, and to make the most of the life he now has. To capitalize on the resources and opportunities that God has given him. If we could sum up the central point of this passage as it relates to pastors and by extension to all believers, it would be this:

***Go all out for God,
and you’ll be forever glad you did.***

Paul’s challenge to Timothy, which consists of multiple exhortations and directives, can be distilled into four-point plan.

1. Make God's word your manual for life (v. 11).

In verse 11 Paul writes, "Command and teach these things." Paul used the same phrase at the beginning of verse 6. "These things" refer to the doctrinal issues Paul raised previously – the beautiful truths about Jesus Christ (3:16) and the bad teachings that lure people away from Christ. If a pastor is faithful in exalting the Lord Jesus and exposing false doctrine, then he "will be a good servant of Christ Jesus," as Paul says in verse 6.

Now in verse 11, Paul reinforces the pastor's responsibility with a forthright directive. Previously, Paul said, "If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus" (v. 6). Now he says, "Command and teach these things" (v. 11).

The word "command" translates the Greek verb *paraggellō* (par-ang-gel'-lo). The prefix, *para-*, means "with" or "close beside." The main verb, *aggellō*, sounds like *angelos*, the Greek word for angel or messenger, and rightly so, for it means "to transmit a message." Thus, *paraggellō* means to "give a command that is *fully authorized* because it has gone through all the *proper* (necessary) channels."¹ Paul begins his letter by saying, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope" (1:1). God commands Paul who commands Timothy who is to command the church, his brothers and sisters in Christ.

If a sister tells her brother, "Clean up your room," he will most likely ignore her or tell her to mind her own business or say, "You can't tell me what to do." But if she tells her brother, "*Mom said*, 'Clean up your room,'" well, those two words change everything, because the sister's words now carry the weight of the parent's authority. The same is true of a pastor who preaches and teaches God's word. He is delivering God's message to the church, of which "Christ is the head" (Eph. 5:23). Therefore, believers are obligated to obey.

Timothy might have naturally been a bit timid and hesitant to tell people what to do. But Paul reminds him that God's word is not a suggestion. It's not a piece of advice. It's not any FYI – a message that might interest people but doesn't require any action. No, God's word demands a personal response! So, Paul says, "Command and teach these things" (v. 11). By combining the words "command" and "teach," Paul is reminding Timothy that he must not only impart biblical knowledge but also issue ethical imperatives to people in light of the truth they have received. And Timothy is to do this continually because "command and teach" are present imperatives, indicating ongoing activity.

As a servant of Christ Jesus, "it is [Timothy's] responsibility to teach – even to command, in God's name – his congregation to trust and obey the doctrine he has received from the apostles."² God's word is the ultimate authority. "Command and teach" it. Trust and obey it. Do so without reservation, without qualification, and without hesitation. This is what it means to *go all out for God*. Make his word your manual for life.

¹ HELPS Word-studies © 2021 by Discovery Bible [online]. Retrieved on 27 January 2024 from <https://biblehub.com/greek/3853.htm>.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary, New Testament edited by Daniel M. Doriani, series editors Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 181.

2. Set an example for believers to follow (v. 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” (1 Tim. 4:12). Here Paul emphasizes the importance and power of personal example. Matthew Henry commented, “Those who teach by their doctrine must teach by their life, [or] else they pull down with one hand what they build up with the other.”³ Jesus criticized the religious leaders of his day, saying to the crowds and to his disciples, “Do what they tell you, but don’t follow their example. For they don’t practice what they preach” (Matt. 23:3 paraphrased). Scripture is our ultimate authority, so we should obey it even if our teachers don’t. But that same authoritative word of God commands pastors/elders in 1 Peter 5, “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, ... not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (vv. 2-3).

This is how a younger pastor or elder overcomes the natural disadvantage of his youth. If Timothy was a teenager when he joined Paul in his missional work in the early AD 50s (Acts 16:1-5), and if Paul’s letter to Timothy was written in the mid-60s, then at this point Timothy would have been in his late twenties. At most he was in his early- to mid-30s. Regardless of his precise age at this point, Timothy was still considered a youth.

That was a natural disadvantage that Timothy had to overcome. I remember feeling that way when I became the lead pastor of my previous church at the ripe old age of 31. My predecessor, who happened to be my uncle, was 25 years older than I was. When I was being interviewed as a pastoral candidate, I told the elders that I would give my best effort with the Holy Spirit’s help, but I couldn’t give them twenty-five years of experience that I didn’t have. Some of the elders were old enough to be my father. It would be natural for them to look down on me, to discriminate against me because of my age. That’s what is meant by the word “despise.” In this context, it doesn’t mean to hate someone but to think little of him, to look down on him, to disregard him because of his age.

It’s not right for a church to do that. A man should be judged on the basis of his spiritual maturity and character, not his age. Paul seems to be addressing this same concern in his first letter to the church at Corinth, where he had sent Timothy as his representative before sending him to Ephesus. Paul tells the Corinthians,

When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.

- 1 Corinthians 16:10-11

Why might Timothy feel uneasy among the Corinthians? Why might they look down on him and make things difficult for him? Perhaps because of his youth? Paul wanted to be sure that such was not the case. One commentator wrote, “Despite the young man’s inexperience, they needed to treat him like a ‘Timothy,’ not like a ‘Timmy.’”⁴

³ “1 Timothy 4 Bible Commentary,” Matthew Henry Bible Commentary (complete), *Christianity.com* [online]. Retrieved on 27 January 2024 from <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary/matthew-henry-complete/1-timothy/4>.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

Paul tells the church, “Let no one despise him.” That was their responsibility. But Timothy also had a responsibility. Paul tells Timothy, “Let no one despise you for your youth.” Don’t give them a reason to look down on you, to think little of you, to disregard you. “But set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). “People would not despise Timothy’s youth if they could admire his example.”⁵

Paul lists five areas in which Timothy is to set an example for believers. The first two areas concern his outward, public life – what other people can see. The last three areas have to do primarily with Timothy’s inward, private life – which God alone can see.

“In speech”: Speech is the barometer of the heart. “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” So said Jesus in Matthew 12:34. Paul expounds on that principle in Ephesians 4, saying, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification, according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear” (v. 29). If we are to set an example for the believers in speech, we must avoid sinful speech like gossip, slander, lying, complaining, arguing, words that are hateful and harsh. Positively, we must speak words that are loving, truthful, helpful, constructive, and thoughtful – words that build up rather than tear down. Do you want to be a godly example to others? Then watch the way your talk. Don’t let any sinful word escape your lips. Instead, “say only what helps, each word a gift” (Eph. 4:29 MSG).

“In conduct”: The Puritan pastor Richard Baxter warned pastors, “[Watch how you live], lest you unsay with your lives that which you say with your tongues.”⁶ Right after saying, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks,” Jesus asked, “why do you keep calling me ‘Lord, Lord!’ when you don’t do what I say” (Luke 6:46). Conduct and speech go hand-in-hand. As one pastor put it, “a minister’s life ought to say ... that he is God’s man all the time: at home, at church, at the grocery store, on the freeway, on the playground, on the barber shop ... everywhere.” Such is to be the case with all believers, which is why ministers must set an example.

“In love”: Love is the supreme virtue. Jesus said the first and great commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength, and the second commandment is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37-38). Jesus said, “These two commands are like pegs; everything in God’s Law and the Prophets hangs from them” (Matt. 22:40 MSG). Of course, no one has ever fully obeyed these commandments, except Jesus, the holy and sinless Son of God. He became a man and kept God’s law perfectly on our behalf, while suffering the penalty we deserved for our sins, so that he could make us right with God. Scripture says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). The moment we trust in Christ as our Savior, God declares us to be righteous – not on the basis of our good works, but on the basis of Jesus’ perfect work for us, as our Substitute. That’s what it means to be justified. We have a right standing with God. That is our status, that is our position.

⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*. The Bible Speaks Today, NT series editor John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 120.

⁶ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 67, as cited in Ryken, 183.

Now, as believers, God wants us to become increasingly in practice what we are in position. For this reason, Paul writes in Colossians 3,

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. *And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

- Colossians 3:12-14

“In faith”: “In Christ Jesus ... the only thing that matters is faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6 NET). An exemplary pastor believes that nothing is too difficult for the Lord (Jer. 32:27) – that he has the power to save any sinner, solve any situation, overcome any obstacle. Jesus declared, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). I can't tell you how many times I've thought of that verse and changed one word to make it more personal, saying, “With *Matt* this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” Yet too often I'm like the man who came to Jesus for help and cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). Perhaps you, like me, can relate to the apostles who said, “Lord, increase our faith.”

But we can be encouraged by Jesus' response to the disciples' plea. He says, in essence, “If you have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, ‘Go jump in the lake,’ and it would do it” (Luke 17:6 MSG). Jesus' point is that the power is not in our faith but in the God in whom our faith relies. So, “have faith in God” (Mark 11:22)! A pastor is to set an example in this regard.

“In purity”: This particular Greek term for “purity,” *hagneia*, often referred to sexual purity. Such an exhortation would be especially appropriate for a young man like Timothy. A few verses later (5:2), Paul tells Timothy to “encourage ... younger women as sisters, *in all purity*.” Various surveys have shown that 37% of pastors admit to having inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church.⁷ In his book, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, Kent Hughes addresses seventeen areas of discipline. The first one he tackles is the “Discipline of Purity.” He talks about the need to put “disciplined hedges around your life.”⁸ He warns about the danger of “verbal intimacy,” saying, “many affairs begin this way.”⁹ He issues a caution about showing casual affection, saying, “You may even have to run the risk of being wrongly considered ‘distant’ or ‘cold’ by some women.”¹⁰ I think it is best if women can say about their pastor, or any brother in Christ, “He genuinely cares. He's truly compassionate, but he's also cautious. He encourages his sisters in Christ “in all purity.”

⁷ David Ross and Rick Blackmon's “Soul Care for Servants” workshop reported the results of their Fuller Institute of Church Growth research study in 1991 and other surveys in 2005 and 2006. Retrieved on 27 January 2024 from <https://www.soulshpherd.org/pastors-under-stress/>.

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, 10th anniversary edition, revised edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001, original edition, 1991), 30. Hughes notes that the four hedges were suggested by Jerry B. Jenkins in his article, “How to Love Your Marriage Enough to Protect It,” *Marriage Partnership*, Summer 1990, pp. 16-17. See also his book *Hedges* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1989), 75-130. While I (Matt) don't fully endorse every suggestion without qualification, I agree that it's critically important to set up safeguards that ensure that men relate to their sisters in Christ “in all purity” (1 Timothy 5:2).

⁹ Hughes, 30.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Paul says, “set *the* believers an example,” indicating the specific believers among whom you live, those who hear your words and see how you behave. To go all out for God, make *his word your manual for life and set an example for believers to follow*.

3. Stay the course, showing others the way (vv. 13-15).

This has to do with persistence, or perseverance. This quality has already been implied in the previous verses, given that Paul’s instructions to Timothy to “command and teach these things” (v. 10) and “set the believers an example” (v. 12) are in the present tense, thus indicating an action that is ongoing. But as Paul expands his instructions in verses 13-15, he emphasizes not only *what* Timothy is to do but also “the attitude and intensity *with which* Timothy needs to approach” such matters.¹¹ Paul says,

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.

- 1 Timothy 4:13-15

In verse 13, Paul issues three ministry commands, all based on the single imperative, “devote yourself to.”¹² The Greek word for “devote” (*prosechó*) literally means “to have toward.” The idea is “to give [something your] full attention; to set a course *and keep to it*.”¹³ Paul tells Timothy to focus on three things: the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching.” This was nothing new, for all three of these practices had been part of corporate worship in the Old Testament era. In Nehemiah 8 we find a great example of this. It says,

All the people gathered as one man [and] told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. So Ezra ... brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard.... And he read from it ... in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. And Ezra ... stood on a wooden platform that they had made for [this] purpose.

- Nehemiah 8:1-4a

Furthermore, we’re told that there were several men with Ezra who “helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places” (Neh. 8:7).

They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading.

- Nehemiah 8:8

¹¹ Robert W. Yarborough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary, gen. ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 252.

¹² Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament, gen. ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 316.

¹³ HELPS Word-studies © 2021 by Discovery Bible [online]. Retrieved on 27 January 2024 from <https://biblehub.com/greek/4337.htm>.

Paul tells Timothy, *that's what you're to do*. “Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim. 4:12). This would include both the Old Testament as well as the writings of the apostles, “who spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-21). Their writings were as authoritative as the rest of Scripture, which is why Paul commanded that his letters be read in all the churches (1 Thess. 5:27).

Paul “does not lay out new guidelines or propose innovative ministry strategies for Timothy at Ephesus....”¹⁴ Instead, Paul wants Timothy to stick to “the long-established means of grace that over the centuries have earned Christians the appellation ‘people of the Book.’”¹⁵

This was Timothy’s calling as a minister of the gospel, as Paul reminds him in verse 14. This calling had been confirmed by the testimony of the elders, who had heard Timothy’s teaching, had observed his character, and had endorsed his ministry by laying their hands on him to strengthen him for the work to which God had called him. Paul’s reminder was surely meant to encourage and embolden Timothy in his present situation. Timothy is not on his own but is part of the church. Fellow ministers are in the trenches with him, fighting the good fight of faith. Paul fully supports Timothy and hopes to come to him soon. Meanwhile, the Spirit of Christ is with Timothy and will never leave him nor forsake him (Heb. 13:5).

So, Paul says, “practice these things, immerse yourself in them” (v. 15a). The Greek word for “practice” (*meletaó*) can also mean “to ponder.” It implies careful reflection on the matter at hand. The words “immerse yourself in them” literally read in the Greek, “be in them.” – “Be all in, Timothy!” The Revised English Bible says, “Make these matters your business, make them your absorbing interest.” Donald Guthrie explains the thrust of Paul’s words, saying, “The mind is to be immersed in these pursuits as the body in the air it breathes.”¹⁶

Why? “So that all may see your progress” (v. 15b). This clause conveys some key points. First, it shows that *pastors aren’t perfect*. To make progress means that one has “arrived” but is moving forward in the right direction. Second, it reinforces the principle that *motives matter*. Timothy isn’t supposed to progress so that so that people will applaud him, but so that they’ll follow him as he follows Christ. He is to *stay the course, showing others the way*.

Paul concludes his compelling charge to Timothy with one final, all-encapsulating directive: “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” (1 Tim. 4:16). In this final verse he tells Timothy,

4. Remain vigilant, in view of the glorious outcome (v. 16).

The word “persist” translates a Greek term that is used eight times in Paul’s other letters. The word is used negatively in Romans 6:1, where Paul says, “Shall we *continue* [persist] in sin, that grace may abound?” Positively, in Colossians 1:22-23 he tells believers, “[God] has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ ... to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before him – if indeed you *continue* [persist] in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel you have heard...” (NLT, ESV).

¹⁴ Yarbrough, 250.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 14, gen. ed. Leon Morris (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 112.

Paul makes a similar point here. He wants Timothy to go all in with God and to go all out for God, and not give up when the going gets tough. Paul wants Timothy to see what's at stake. Phil Ryken sums it up well, saying, "Souls perish for the lack of sound ministry. On the other hand, ministers who continue in God's grace have the assurance of their own salvation and the joy of leading others to Christ."¹⁷ It may sound weird or even wrong for Paul to say, "by doing so, you will save both yourself and your hearers." We might say, "It is God alone who saves." Paul wouldn't argue that point, but he would add that God does so through human instruments. And John Stott is careful to point out, "Perseverance is not the meritorious cause, but rather the ultimate evidence, of our salvation."¹⁸

Yes, perseverance pays off. So, go all out for God, and you'll forever be glad you did.

I'll close today's message with the same illustration from history that Phil Ryken did in his commentary on this passage. He writes,

When it comes to persevering to the very end, it is hard to think of a better example than Thomas Boston. In the last months of his life, that faithful Scottish minister from the eighteenth century was confined to his bed by a serious illness. Yet Boston continued to preach. His little congregation would gather around the window of the manse [parsonage], from which he would read, preach, and teach God's Word on the Lord's Day. Boston's last sermon was called "The Necessity of Self-Examination."¹⁹ In it he challenged his beloved congregation to remain in the faith. He begged them to make sure of their eternal salvation, to "bend all their endeavors and attention to gain a blessed and happy eternity."²⁰ Every pastor who fits the biblical portrait begs his people to do the same thing: to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation.²¹

¹⁷ Ryken, 191.

¹⁸ Stott, 124.

¹⁹ Thomas Boston, *the Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston, Ettrick* (London, 1853; repr. Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), 2:497-510, as cited in Ryken, 192.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:503, as cited in Ryken, 192.

²¹ Ryken, 192.