

1 TIMOTHY

January 1, 2023

1 Timothy 4:11-16

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

“This is the Word of God” – “Thanks be to God.”

This has been, perhaps, the most used theme verse for evangelical youth groups for decades. The verse has become a logo for some. In the era where every ministry was named with numbers – there were many 412 youth groups. Trendy, certainly. Impactful...about as much as any other name emblazoned on a website or t-shirt.

Youth leaders and camp pastors would highlight the passage “Let no one despise you for your youth!” And if left there, often we unwittingly created a self-focused, youth-centered idol of youngness that celebrated generational differences without understanding the fullness of the inerrant Word, much less the rest of verse 12.

So as we continue to reconstruct within our church family that which pragmatism and church-growth mantras developed over the years, we recognize that while there is encouragement and instruction for teenagers in this verse, Paul was not looking for a tagline for the youth group in Ephesus.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Ti 4:11–16). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Paul, under the inspiration of the third person of the Trinity, penned these words to his young protégé, a pastor of a challenging church in a city known for paganism. A young pastor...but likely in his thirties, so too old for the youth group, but too young in many people's eyes to lead a congregation in the first century.

This may be hard for church members to understand today as so much has shifted. A thirty-year-old pastor is not considered too young nowadays in many circumstances. As the old joke goes, churches want thirty-year-old pastors with forty years of experience, not to mention the bonus ministry expected from his wife and children.

When we look at this passage and what is revealed about the young pastor, it becomes clear what Paul is instructing to Timothy...and to the church members who will eventually read the letter, or have it read to them, as well.

“What if they discover I don't know what I'm doing?” – the inner cry of many pastors I know, especially when first starting out. In this case, autobiographical. What does a young pastor who, in our Baptist world, is sought by committee members after a sorting of resumés has taken place, interviewed numerous times, brought before a congregation, and voted upon.

A pastor, called by God to shepherd the flock, make hard decisions, preach the Word well, hold to doctrinal fidelity, lead the church to discipline those who have failed, be impactful in the community, and be the spiritual leader...but also feeling that worldly tension of also being an employee of this church that just hired him.

It is hard enough in 2023. Now, as we look at the first century, we discover that the church in Ephesus is not Baptist because they did not vote on Timothy to be their pastor. At least, we have no indication of such. It seems that Paul appointed him to be the pastor of this church. The church followed Paul's lead and now had this young man,

comparative to the leaders in the synagogues and even the pagan gatherings, leading them. And based on Paul's words that I read at the beginning of the sermon, Timothy was feeling the pressure from the church.

There are certainly some who are frustrated that this young whippersnapper is telling them what to do. There were the heretics and asceticists within the body whom Paul instructed Timothy to kick out. There were things the pastor had to do that could not be done by a committee, or deacons, or any other individual.

So, as is the case for just about every pastor, the doubts creep in. The questions. The frustrations. The weight of doing church right because God expects so. The challenge of lasting longer. The likely writing and rewriting of a resignation letter from Timothy.

Seriously. Is this worth it?

Paul says yes. God says yes. And the saying is proven true once more "God will ALWAYS give you more than you can handle," which is totally opposite than what many have been taught by well-meaning friends and leaders.

Timothy CANNOT handle this. On his own, he DOES NOT have what it takes.

And thus...Paul's letter arrives and finally, at this point, the fuel of wisdom is offered that is much needed for Timothy – for his well-being, for his mental health, for his spiritual strength, for his physical healthy...and for the church as well.

God called a man to serve, to lead, to give, and to die to self for the sake of the gospel. And that is the same for every pastor called to serve throughout time. Thus...the inerrant Word of the Lord speaks.

¹¹ Command and teach these things.

What things? The things referenced in verse 6. The response to false teachers. The truth of the Word.

¹² Let no one despise you for your youth,

Young man, Paul says, people may despise you for many reasons, but you have control over much of this. You may not think you do, but you do. They may despise you because you're young. You cannot do much about your age, but as Paul says... "Let no one despise you for your youth." Great. But how?

That's the wisdom. Overwhelm others preconceived, sinful, ageism through that which you do control. And son...this is on you. It's a five-fold answer. It's not works theology (not doing things to be saved) but the expected works of a child of God. Not up for vote. Not up for debate, but necessary.

but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

1. **SPEECH** – The word rendered here speaks of the preaching of Timothy. Pastor, if you cannot preach you cannot pastor. If you cannot rightly divide the word of truth, get off the stage. If your sermons are more stories of recent events, a few jokes, and psychology wrapped in religious verbiage with Bible verses used to support what you already believe...STOP. To Timothy and to the pastor serving today, preach the Word. Set an example in your speech and trust God to speak through his Word. Don't apologize for hard verses. Don't skip challenging messages. Don't hop around the Bible looking for the "word of the day" but set the example in the inerrant, immutable, only fully true word available. Paul was clear in this. God is clear in this. The sermon matters.
2. **CONDUCT** – Sounds like a t-shirt slogan, but it's true, your walk must match your talk and your talk must be that of God's Word. Pastor, your character matters. Back in chapter 3 Paul gives the

qualifications for pastors. This statement here hearkens back to that and emphasizes that those are not just qualifiers for hiring a pastor, but for keeping a pastor. The rise of the celebrity pastor in our culture has proven that well-intentioned men often start well, but when the fall comes (and it comes all too often) it is because somewhere the compartmentalized gospel has replaced the truth. The persona behind the pulpit is not the persona in the living room, or in the bedroom, or online. To Timothy the message was clear – you may be young, but your character will win the day...or lose it. Work at this.

3. **LOVE** – Loving others is difficult. Love the flock you’ve been assigned Timothy. Sounds easy. But, loving those who do not want you as pastor? Yep. Those too. Those who look down on you because you’re young? Yep. Those who are working behind the scenes to get rid of you? Yes. Those who talk about you behind your back. Those too. Love is not passive. Love is not allowing everyone to walk all over you either. Love means kicking heretics out of the church. Why? Because you love the Lord, his truth, his plan, his church, and his people so very much you cannot stand to see it marred. With all the issues with denominations today – especially those who have abandoned doctrinal fidelity, biblical truth, and high moral character...it may be that too many pastors loved the position, the power, the prestige, and the paycheck more than the Lord.
4. **FAITH** – Do you still believe? Do you trust God? Do you still have faith in him? “But God has let me down!” some say. It may seem so at the time, but it is not so. People likely have let you down, people-led churches may have let you down. Friends or former friends may have let you down, but God? No. He hasn’t. If you think he has...it may be that the version of Christianity that you bought was like the fake Louis Vuitton bags sold out of the back of vans on the street corners. Looks good...but isn’t real. R. Kent Hughes says it well “What we believe about God determines how we live.” So, how does your faith in God reveal itself in how

you live? To Timothy the message is clear – your faith guides your walk.

5. **PURITY** – Paul is not giving Timothy a “True Love Waits” purity ring here and saying “Save yourself for marriage.” Somewhere in the 1980s and 1990s biblical purity became for many evangelicals nothing more than a sexual purity conversation. Now, I’m not minimizing that, but there is so much more here. How can Timothy love well? How can you and I love well? I mean, we’re instructed to do so. It’s not up for debate. In chapter 1, verse 5, it is clear that true, biblical love cannot exist apart from a pure heart. Purity motivates righteously. Pure hearts are not self-seeking. Pure hearts do not allow for grandstanding. Purity of heart is the motive of a godly leader...or the leader is not to lead. Plain and simple.

Don’t let them despise you because you’re young. You can’t change your age, but you can control your walk. Live above reproach. Not for the glory of man, but for the glory of God and the good of his church.

To Timothy and all the future Timothy’s out there, the call of God is not temporal and he equips the called, but you’ll forget that. So, read this often and be reminded of God’s grace and his guidance.

Paul continues...

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.

Timothy’s mentor is coming, but won’t be there for a while. In the meantime, here’s what he must do. Continue the practice of public reading of Scripture. In the synagogues the Jews would read the scripture aloud. The church borrowed this practice and did so as well, but in addition to the Old Testament, they would read the letters of Paul

as well. Reading the Scripture is essential for the body. Don't presume. Don't minimize it. Don't decontextualize it. Read it.

Timothy is to be devoted to this, meaning it's not up for debate. When the church gathers, the scripture is to be read. He is to devote to exhortation – the preaching of the word and to teaching – the doctrinal instruction. It's three-fold and of God.

Timothy has a gift. It's clear. Every Christian has a gift. Christmas has just happened so we need no illustration on what gifts are. Yet, Paul's instruction here is to not neglect the gift. Timothy's gift of pastoral leadership and prophetic teaching was given to him by the Holy Spirit and affirmed by the elders when the laying on of hands occurred. Simply put – **“Use it or lose it!”**

How has God gifted you? You have one (at least one) and he expects you to use it **WITHIN THE CHURCH**. As Calvin stated, buried gifts become rusty and degenerate.

Some hearing this sermon are being called to ministry. Some young man is being called to pastor. I pray you hear and respond. And do that which God instructed through Paul's writing.

For the rest of us, he is calling us to himself as well, to be part of the local church that is growing healthy, constructing good doctrine and faithful orthodoxy, in the midst of a pseudo-Christian world that highlights man-made adventure falsely believing that God is not enough.

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¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save (*ensure salvation not literally save*) both yourself and your hearers.