Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Qualities of an Excellent Servant, Part 4
Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:13 14
Code: 54-33

Take your Bible now, if you will, I hope you have it with you. I not, you might find one there in the pew. But take one and look to 1 Timothy chapter 4. We are in a series in 1 Timothy 4:6 to 16. It's part of our ongoing series in this entire epistle. We find ourselves in the fourth chapter, looking at this one section from verses 6 to 16 which deals with the qualities of an excellent minister of Jesus Christ. And as I said at the very beginning, this is particularly preached to the preacher. This is to my own heart and all those who serve the Lord Jesus Christ in a preaching/teaching ministry because primarily it is Paul's instruction to Timothy about his ministry.

But, it has tremendous secondary implications to every believer because whatever it is that the preacher of God's Word is to be, he is to be that in order that he might be a model of what every believer is to be. And so no one is really off the hook in this passage. It's just that we have the greater responsibility to live out these principles in order to set the pattern for everyone else.

Now we've said a lot of things in an introductory way and I don't want to beg the issue, I want to move on to the next couple of points in our look at the text. But let me just review the basic structure that we're working with in this section.

In every passage of Scripture, there is usually a major emphasis. There's usually a major theme around which that paragraph or that section is built. And this is no different. If you look at verse 6, you'll be reminded that in the middle of verse 6 is this little phrase "Thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ." You can underline that, put a little asterisk by it. That is the significant phrase in this whole text because the text is built around that phrase. What does it mean to be an excellent minister of Jesus Christ? What are the marks, the qualities, the characteristics of someone who ministers in behalf of Christ with excellence? This, as I said, is for those who are in the role of a Timothy, teaching and preaching and leading in the church. And also filters down secondarily to everyone who names the name of Christ and who serves him in any way at all.

But let me remind you for a moment, we've looked at seven of eleven principles that I found in this passage that relate to being a good minister of Jesus Christ. Just by way of review, the first one in verse 6 was that an excellent minister warns his people of error. He warns his people of error. "If you put the brethren in remembrance of these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ." What things? The things referred to in verses 1 to 5, having to do with false teaching. So an excellent minister warns his people of error.

Secondly, an excellent minister is a student of Scripture. The end of verse 6, "You are to be nourished up in the words of the faith," that's the Scripture, "and of the good doctrine," that's what the Scripture teaches. So we are then not only to be warning of error, but we are to be feeding ourselves on the Word of God. We are to be nourishing ourselves up in the faith and the good doctrine.

Thirdly, an excellent minister avoids the influence of unholy teaching. He stays away from error and those things that only confuse. It says in verse 7, "Refuse profane and old women's fables." Stay away from lies and heresies and things that deviate from the truth that only bring questions and do not edify. An excellent minister avoids the influence of unholy teaching.

Then in verse 7 through 9, an excellent minister is disciplined in personal godliness. "Exercise yourself unto godliness." Verse 8 says bodily exercise only has a little profit for a little time. Godliness has profit for the time that now is and promise for the future eternal life. And this is a faithful or a true saying and worthy of all acceptance. Everybody would agree with this that that which pertains to eternity is far more significant than that which pertains to time. Therefore spend your hours in godly pursuit rather than in bodily exercise. So, an excellent minister warns his people of error, is a student of Scripture, stays away from the influence of unholy teaching and is disciplined in personal godliness.

Fifthly, an excellent minister is committed to hard work. Verse 10, "We both labor and agonize, strive. We do it because we trust in the living God, the one who is alive, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those that believe." Because of God's saving work, because it is an eternally impactful work, we work with eternity in view and with eternity in view we work hard. An excellent minister works hard. He is committed to hard work because he knows what he does has eternal consequences.

Number six, an excellent minister teaches with a practical authority. Verse 11, "These things command and teach." Teaching has to do with the passing on of truth. Commanding has to do with the mode in which you do it. We pass on divine truth not as if it was that which you could select to do or not to do, but as obligatory and commanded. So, instruction comes in a command mode. We are telling you this is the law of God. So we must have authority, there must be a power in preaching and teaching that brings it to bear on the heart with great sense of obligation.

Then number seven, we noted last time, that an excellent minister is to be a model of spiritual virtue. Because Timothy was young by the standards of spiritual leadership in his time, Paul says don't let anyone look down on you because of your youth, gain their respect by being a tupos, a model, an example, a type of the believer in word--that's speech, conduct--that's life style, love--that has to do with your spirit and your attitude, faith--that has to do with being trustworthy and loyal, and purity--that has to do with being morally clean. You are to be an example to the believers in every dimension of

life.

These then are the qualities of an excellent minister of Jesus Christ. We could sum those first seven up in seven single words. Let me give them to you. First of all, when it says an excellent minister warns his people of error, we would say that is the quality of discernment...that is the quality of discernment. We are to have discernment regarding truth and error. An excellent minister is a student of Scripture, that is scholarship, or knowledge. We are to have a knowledge of the Word of God. Thirdly, avoiding unholy teaching, we could put the word separate. We are to be separate. We are to be apart from associations which with those things which would influence us toward unholiness. And then conversely, the fourth word, pursuing godliness, we are to be holy...holy. We are to have discernment, knowledge, separation, and holiness.

In the matter of hard work, the word diligence. In the matter of authority, teaching with authority, power. And in the matter of example, the word is integrity. So if you want seven words for those seven points: discernment, scholarship, separation, holiness, diligence, power and integrity. Those are the kind of characteristics that are to mark the man who serves in excellence in the service of Jesus Christ. They also are to be the kind of thing that mark all of our lives as well.

Now let's go on to number eight and nine for this time, and next Lord's day we'll finish up with ten and eleven. Numbers eight and nine...

An excellent minister has a thoroughly biblical ministry. An excellent minister has a thoroughly biblical ministry. Notice verse 13, I love this verse, I have been reading this verse. In fact, if you want to know, I have tried my best to build my own preaching ministry on this verse for all the years that I've been at Grace Community Church. This has really been behind the scenes, the verse most crucial to my own understanding of my preaching ministry.

It says in verse 13, "Till I come, give your attention to the reading, to the exhortation, to the teaching." Now you must understand what this means. It is so very important. The little phrase "till I come" implies that Paul was going to return to Ephesus and meet Timothy there again. In chapter 3 verse 14, he said that, "These things write I unto you, hoping to come unto you shortly. But if I have to tarry long," and he goes on to say then you need to know what to do.

So, here he says, "Until I come," until you receive any further orders, this is what I want you to do. I want you to give your attention to the reading, the exhortation, the doctrine, or the teaching. Now this is most important.

The verb "give attendance," prosecho is a present active imperative, that means it is a continuing command. I command you to continually be giving your attention to. This is to become your way of life. Guthrie, helping us to understand the indication of this verb, says, "The verb implies all that is

bound up in the previous preparation necessary to these things." It isn't just "till I come read, exhort and teach," it is "until I come, give your whole attention to the reading, the exhortation, and the teaching." In other words, it isn't just the act itself, but the verb embodies all that is behind it. It assumes all of the commitment and all of the necessary preparation. In fact, the same verb is used in Hebrews chapter 7 verse 13 of the priest who goes to the altar and is fully absorbed at the altar, all of his thought and all of his energy is devoted to the work of the altar. And that's what he is saying here. Your whole attention, center and circumference of ministry, is to be involved in the reading, the exhortation and the teaching. That is the embodiment of your ministry.

Now what do these words mean? Let's look at them a little more closely, you'll find them interesting. First of all, he says give your attention continually to the reading. There's a definite article there in the Greek, it's not there in the English, it should be there, "to the reading." Now what does he mean by that? Well, that's a reference to the reading of Scripture. But it's more than that. The definite article isolates this out. This isn't just reading the Scripture, this is "the reading," quote/unquote.

What was "the reading?" During every service in the early church there was a time for the reading. And the reading was a reading of Scripture with an attendant exposition. In other words, it embodied a reading and an explanation of the Scripture. That was the reading. It implies when it's used with the verb "give your attention to" that if you're going to give your attention to the reading that means you are going to be very careful in the text you select. You're going to be very very careful in the correctness of your exposition. You're going to be very very cautious in all the matters regarding your preparation. You're going to give your whole attention to the matter of reading and explaining the Scripture.

To show you a little bit of an idea of how it worked in the early church, go back with me to the pattern which the church basically drew from, Luke chapter 4 is a good illustration...the pattern of the synagogue. In the synagogue, the Scripture would be read and then the Scripture would be explained. And here you have a perfect illustration of that in Luke 4:16. Jesus had been teaching in the synagogues, and it says in verse 15 that was what He typically did. He would go in, read the Scripture and then exposit or teach it. In verse 16 it says He came to Nazareth. And this was His ordinary custom, according to verse 15, He'd been doing it everywhere. He customarily would go to the synagogue on the sabbath day and so He did. And He stood up to read. He as a visiting rabbi was invited to read the Scripture.

So He stood up. Always they stood up to read. And that went all the way back to what we read last time about Nehemiah chapter 8, you'll remember, when they found the book of the law after rebuilding the wall of the city of Jerusalem. The people were excited. The book was taken out to be read and the whole congregation of the people of Israel stood all day long to hear the reading of the Word of God. And so typically, they would stand for the reading. And so Jesus stood up and He read.

"And the book was delivered unto Him from the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit," this is Isaiah 61, "of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel of the poor, He has sent Me to deal...to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord," and that's a Messianic passage. So there He stood and He read the Scripture.

Every synagogue service had the reading, the time for the reading of God's Word. Verse 20, note this, "And He closed the book, gave it back to the servant and sat down." Why did He sit down? Because the teaching posture in all synagogues was a sitting position. He stood to read. He sat down to exposit what He had just read. This was the typical manner of expressing the truth of God sabbath after sabbath in the synagogue. He was the guest expositor. He sat down. "And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him and He began to say unto them..." So He began to exposit what He had read from Isaiah. And the sum of it was, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Now that's something that not every preacher has the privilege of saying. We preach a lot about future prophecy, never have I said, "This day is this prophecy fulfilled in your ears." That was a jolt to these people because what He was saying was I'm the Messiah. Now He said more than that, that was the sum of it. You say, "How do you know He said more?" Well, because in verse 22, they all bore Him witness and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. So He must have said more than that. He gave an exposition of that particular portion of Isaiah 61:1 and 2, and the sum of the exposition was it's Me...it's Me. Now that's a typical format for the place of "the teaching."

Now go with me to the fifteenth chapter of Acts for a moment and let me give you another illustration of this kind of expository model which was used in the synagogue and also in the early church. In Acts 15, remember the Jerusalem Council was meeting and they were discussing how they could be sure not to offend Jews in their evangelism to Gentiles as they go out into the Gentile world, they want to be cautious not to cause the Jews to stumble and they would be offended by things offered to idols, and fornication, things strangled, and blood and so forth. Be cautious about that. Verse 21 then says, "Because Moses of old time has in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day."

Now what did they do in the synagogue? They met together. They took out the Old Testament, the book of Moses, they read it and then they preached it. They proclaimed it. They exposited it. They explained it. As I said, this basically goes all the way back to the eighth chapter of Nehemiah where you have the beginning of a model of expository preaching. It says in Nehemiah 8:8, "They read in the book of the law of God distinctly and they gave the meaning and caused them to

understand...watch this...the reading." There's that phrase...they caused them to understand the reading, the exposition, the explanation of Scripture.

So now we go back to 1 Timothy chapter 4, and when we hear Paul say to Timothy, "Give your attention to the reading," we know what he has in mind is the reading and the exposition of the Word of God. It is the reading and the exposition.

You say, "What do you mean by exposition?" Simply, explanation, explanation. Now the New Testament epistles were certainly to be included also in such exposition. You will remember Acts 2:42, it says when the church was founded on the day of Pentecost, they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' what? Doctrine. So there would be an exposition of Old Testament passages, there would perhaps be an exposition of New Testament passages, the teaching of the Apostles. That, too, was obviously understood to be the Word of God and needed to be exposited.

In Colossians 4:16, Paul says, "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans and that you also read the epistle from Laodicea." There was a time and a place for the reading of Old Testament, New Testament and even an Apostle's letter of importance to the church. In reference to Scripture, it would then need to be explained so the people would have the sense of it. Obviously the further we get culturally, geographically, linguistically, philosophically, historically away from the original text of Scripture, the more necessary it is to recreate the dynamics of language, history, culture that were around the Scripture when it was written so that we can understand it. And that's the challenge of Bible teaching. It is to take the Scripture, read it and then to explain it.

And that's where the effort comes. If you're going to give your attention to that, you're going to give a great portion of your life to reconstructing language, philosophy, theology, geography, culture, context, all of that in order to make the Word of God understandable. Paul says to Timothy, "Give your attention to that." And so I say again, our point is an excellent minister has a ministry that is thoroughly biblical. I really believe that that is the center and circumference of what we are all about.

Secondly, notice what he says. If the exposition or the reading is to tell what Scripture means by what it says, then what is the exhortation? That is to call people to apply it. So he says, first dimension, explain it, second dimension, apply it...apply it. The third one, by the way, exhortation simply means that, it means to warn people to obey with a view toward judgment if they don't...that kind of idea. And come alongside, encourage those people to respond properly and tell them about the blessing if they do and the consequence if they don't. So you explain the Bible and then you press it home with an application to their hearts and bind their consciences to respond...exhortation. Sometimes exhortation is counsel, sometimes it's comfort, but it always is a binding of the conscience.

When I teach/preach in class, which I'm doing now at the seminary, one of the things that I stress so much with the students and will always stress is that you always preach with a view to a decision or a verdict. You don't want anybody walking out saying, "I don't understand what he was saying." See, anybody can be hard to understand, it's very easy to be difficult to understand. You just don't know what you're talking about and no one will understand. If you have no idea what you're saying or where you're going, they're not going to know either. It's very easy, just do nothing but show up and nobody will have any idea. It's very difficult to be easy to understand because in order to be easy to understand you have to have mastered your subject. And so you've mastered it enough to digest it and put it back out in manageable proportions so people can understand it.

But it is even....it is not even enough to be understood. I am not content that you should walk out and say, "I understood that." I don't want you to leave and say, "I didn't understand that." I don't want you to leave and say, "I did understand that." I want you to leave and say, "I am going to make sure my life changes to conform to that," you understand? You're always trying to pin people to the wall where they say, "I will do that," or "I won't do that," but they know which one they said. So if I try to put you on the hook, you think I'm trying to get you on the hook, you think I'm trying to put you on the griddle, you've got it right. That's exhortation.

Then he says, thirdly, and here he broadens a little bit his concept, "Give yourself continually to the reading and to the encouragement of people committing themselves to what the reading demands, and also to the teaching." And here he really wraps his arms around a big word, didaskalia, which basically means "teaching." The idea of it here is give yourself to the whole process of systematically teaching the Word of God. Not just in an expository sermon but in every dimension of ministry. This could embody the idea of theology, developing a system of theology.

It embodies the idea of systematically teaching individual people, one on one, small groups. It's really a mandate for what the church is all about. And as I said, this is where I've lived and breathed and had my being, if you will, for many years, that the church is very simply defined in terms of its ministry. I am to read and explain and apply the Word of God and to give my whole life to the whole process of the teaching of God's Word so that at every level of the church, in every dimension of the church's life, at every point of the church's contact we are ever and always ministering the Word of God. That's it...that's it. We are to disseminate sound teaching to all people at all times through all means...through all means. And that's the ministry. The church gets diverted from that into all kinds of other things, but this is the heart and soul of the ministry where the church must concentrate itself.

By the way, the term "teaching," or "doctrine," appears 15 times in the pastoral epistles. And that ought to give us some idea of its importance to the life of the church...15 times. No wonder the pastor above all things, chapter 3 verse 2, must be apt to teach. How could you ever hope to lead the church if you're not a skilled teacher when the whole of the church's ministry revolves around the teaching of the Word of God, the preaching of the Word of God? Scripture read, Scripture explained, Scripture

applied, and Scripture taken out to the grass roots level in the teaching process at every level...turned into doctrine that people can live by.

You know, from its earliest years, the church has been committed to this. It's only, I guess, in more modern times that the church tends to drift further and further away into all kinds of other extraneous things. And the Word of God begins to get lower and lower on the priority list. Justin Martyr, taking you all the way back to the middle of the second century, a hundred years after the church was born, Justin Martyr has written for us a typical early worship service a hundred years after the church was born, and this is what he says, "On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place. And the writings of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. Then when the reader has ceased, the presider verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things." That was it. They all got together and somebody read either the Apostles' New Testament or the writings of the prophets, Old Testament, and they were read as long as time permitted. And when the reader was done, a man came up verbally explained what they meant and exhorted everybody to do what they said. That was it. It was the exposition of the Word of God.

Then Justin Martyr wrote, this is recorded in Volume 1 of the Antinicene(?) Fathers, "Then we all rise together and pray. And when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought and the presider in like manner offers prayers and thanksgiving according to his ability and the people assent saying, Amen." They had a sort of an "amen" service afterwards. But the center of everything was the exposition of God's Word.

You move a little further ahead in church history to John Chrysostom, called The Golden Mouth Order, recognized by most people to be the finest orator and preacher of ancient times, he preached for 12 years at the cathedral in Antioch, and then in 398 A.D. became bishop of Constantinople for which he is well known, presiding over the church there. His biographer writes about him that he is a model to this day for preachers. And here's why. Four characteristics of his preaching must be mentioned. First,...this is 398 A.D...."He was biblical. Not only did he preach systematically through books, but his sermons are full of biblical quotations and allusions. Secondly, his interpretation of the Scripture was always simple and direct. He followed the Antiochine(?) school of literal exegesis in contrast to the fanciful Alexandrian allegorizations. Thirdly, his moral applications were down to earth. In fact, reading his sermons today, one can imagine without difficulty the pomp of the imperial court, the luxuries of the aristocracy, the wild races of the hippodrome. In fact, the whole life of an oriental city at the end of the fourth century. And, fourthly, he was fearless in his condemnations. In fact, he was a martyr of the pulpit. It was his faithful preaching that brought him to exile."

Going all the way back to 398 and looking at the kind of preaching they did, it was biblical, it was simple and direct explanation of Scripture with no mystical fantasy allegorical approach. It was down to earth and had moral application and it was without compromise and fearless. And that's the model

that should still be maintained. That's the way it was, that's the way it ought to be.

You come up to The Reformation, for example, and you find that when you get into The Reformation, the great preachers of The Reformation, the great ministers of The Reformation were all deeply into the exposition of the Word of God. Luther exposited the Word of God through all of his ministry. He spoke often four times on Sunday. Every quarter of the year he would take a two- week series and go through the week teaching doctrine with the use of a catechism. The sum of his existing sermons which are so rich in biblical information is presently, I think, about 2,300. We have extant about 2,300 of Luther's biblical expositions.

John Calvin whopreached in Geneva, Switzerland, preached twice every Sunday. And then every other week he would preach every night of the week. He dealt with the Old Testament through the week. He dealt with the New Testament and Psalms on the Lord's day. And a paid stenographer took down his sermons as he preached them through all those years. And they became his writings. But until the death of John Calvin, he did expositions on Genesis, Deuteronomy, Judges, Job, Psalms,all the prophets major and minor, and in the New Testament, Harmony of the Gospels, Acts, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. He spent the life of his ministry expositing the Word of God.

Joseph Parker pastored the City Temple in London for 33 years and is remembered as a great great man of God starting in about 1869 or so. He preached every Lord's day to about 3,000 people. He preached two times on Sunday and he preached once at midday. And he preached there for 33 years and in those 33 years, he went through the entire Bible, expositing Scripture seven times. Now he was a lot faster than me. But he took a little different approach. And the product of those 33 years is a set of books called The People's Bible which is Joseph Parker's expositions of Scripture, it numbers 25 volumes...a lasting contribution.

Alexander MacClaren(?) from 1858 to 1903, he was ministering effectively in the height of his ministry at the Baptist Union Chapel in Manchester, England, preached through the whole Bible. As a result, he left expositions of holy Scripture numbering 32 volumes...32 volumes of expositions.

Some of the expositors of ancient times were...of old times, I shouldn't say ancient...of older times were very deep. I read this week about one German expositor who after lecturing on the book of Isaiah for more than 20 years had finally reached the middle of the second chapter. So you have no reason to complain.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was in Romans for 12 years and didn't finish chapter 14. And he was in Ephesians for four volumes and Sermon on the Mount for years and years and years.

Now these are the greats of the past. I mean, these are the men who leave a mark on history. And Bible students through all the years go back to all their material because they did what I believe is the highest duty of every minister of God and that is to exposit the Word of God. This means a life of study.

John Huxtable(?) wrote, "A man does not qualify to be a preacher of the Word by making weekly sallies into the good book to discover some peg on which to hang some scattered observations about men and affairs," end quote. If I may borrow from his words, a man does qualify to be a preacher of the Word by comprehensive objective exegesis and exposition of Scripture.

Joseph Parker who rose early every morning of his life to study the Word of God was asked one time why he wasn't more available to people. And he said, "If I talked all week I couldn't preach on Sunday. That's all. If I had attended committee meetings, immersed myself in politics, my strength would have been consumed. That's all. Mystery? There is none," end quote. There is no mystery. Our sphere of labor is identified to be within the confines of the revealed Word of God.

Look at chapter 5 verse 17. "Let the pastors, elders, overseers, those in spiritual leadership, that rule well be counted worthy of double honor." We're going to get into that, that means double pay, in a sense, worthy men should receive, those elders who rule well, "especially the ones who work hard in the Word and the teaching." The harder a man works in the Word and teaching, the more honorable he is. That's what it says.

Preaching and teaching God's Word is the calling of life. It's a sad thing to think that many men in the ministry have diverted themselves into other nice things, but not needful things.

Let me just give you a little thought. We need to be, in a sense, relentless teachers. You just can't let up. I learned that from John Flavil(?), much of whom I have read. He also was a Puritan. He said this, "It is not so with us as with other laborers," speaking of ministers. "It's not so with us ministers as with other laborers, they find their work as they leave it." In other words, if you're making a cabinet, at five o'clock you go home, you come back the next day, the cabinet's where you left it. That's the way it is with other laborers, they find their work as they leave it. Not so with us, he said.

"Sin and Satan unravel almost all we do. The impressions we make on our people's souls in one sermon vanish before the next." We are facing an unraveling process, we are fighting against it all the time. That's why there has to be a certain relentlessness in the ministry. And that's why you have to repeat things. I have to repeat them for my benefit. I forget.

Every good expositor and teacher and pastor remembers that people forget, you don't like to admit it but they forget. So you have to repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat. But you have to remember something else, too. You remember forgetfulness and the second thing you remember is

familiarity. You have to repeat, repeat, repeat, but you can't say it the same way or they think they've heard it, think they've known it and they're bored by it. So what you have to do is repeat the same things over in ways that people don't think it's the same thing and they think they're getting something new. That is the challenge. The challenge is to go back over the Word of God and the same truths in a way that people say, "Wow, I never knew that before." Yes you did, you just forgot, but it came fresh to you because it came in a new package. That's the challenge of ministry.

It would be very easy to pack up a couple of hundred sermons and just go on the road and give the same ones over. The challenge to stay in the same place, say the same stuff over and over and over and yet have people think you're saying something they never heard because it comes in a fresh way. If you study the Bible, you'll find that's what Scripture does, it repeats the same principles over and over and over in different contexts and through different narratives and in different ways.

So, verse 13 is so vital. The circumference of the ministry and the core of the ministry is to give ourselves to the reading and the exhortation and to the matter of teaching. That's what we're all about...preaching, teaching, implementing the Scripture in what we do. Nothing more, nothing less.

And then number nine, for this morning. We'll end up with this one. And we won't fully complete this one, I'll pick it up there next time. But number nine is this, and this is really a very, very wonderful point he makes in verse 14. An excellent minister fulfills his calling...an excellent minister fulfills his calling. Now this is difficult. There are people who go into the ministry and bail out...maybe because they weren't called there in the first place, and that's understandable. But there are people who were called into the ministry who bail out and that is a defection from where God had intended them to be.

Notice please verse 14 as we see how an excellent minister is to fulfill his calling. Paul says to Timothy, "Neglect not," or it could well be translated "Stop neglecting the gift that is in you which was given you by..or through the means of prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the elders."

Now let me give you a little background here. The fact that Paul says "don't neglect the gift," or "stop neglecting the gift" indicates that either Timothy was about to neglect the gift, or had already begun to neglect the gift. Either way, Timothy is in a dangerous spot. Timothy is where a lot of people in the ministry have been, a point of departure, the place where you say, "That's enough, I'm getting out, I can't handle the pressure externally, I can't handle the pressure internally, I don't need this, I'm not cutting it, it's not happening, it's not fulfilling me, it's not what I want." And there is Timothy on the edge of that kind of thing, whether he's actually begun to neglect, or about to neglect, he's close to that therefore comes the warning.

Let me give you a little bit of an idea of what Timothy was going through. If you look at 2 Timothy chapter 1...Paul in verse 3 says, "Without ceasing I have remembrance of you in my prayers night and day." Now he knew Timothy was in a very difficult ministry. He was in a hostile environment. The

Ephesian church had defected doctrinally and they had defected in behavior. They were both immoral and they were aberrant in theology. Timothy is dropped down into that church and told by Paul to set things right in that church, get that church set right. That's a very difficult task. Timothy is young. Timothy is struggling in his own heart with his own spiritual development. He's got a formidable bunch of foes in the Ephesian errorists who have high-powered sophisticated quasi theology that's really philosophy. Timothy can't handle it, he can't argue with it. He's not very good in apologetics, maybe. He's up against some real battles. People don't want to hear what he says. There are errorists in leadership there. And so Paul says, "I'm praying for you day and night. I want to see you," verse 4, "I'm mindful of your tears."

Timothy is...is he weeping? Does Paul have word that Timothy's heart is broken? That the grief is overwhelming him, that it's more than he can handle. And I remember, he says, your true faith with no hypocrisy, I remember it. So verse 6, "I remind you, stir up the gift of God." Now what does that say? Could it be that the gift which God had given to Timothy has fallen into disuse? Is Timothy backing out of his ministry? And Paul says, "Stir it up, that gift which is in you by the putting on of my hands." You compare that with the Scripture we just read in 1 Timothy 4:14 and you'll know that Paul was one of those elders whose hands were placed on Timothy. "Hey, we were there when it was all begun. We were there when the Spirit of God by revelation through prophecy confirmed your ministry, your gift. We put our hands on you. Did you forget that? Stir up that gift."

I mean, it was so difficult for Timothy and the pressure was so great and the antagonism so great and, let's face it, what ultimately happened to the church at Ephesus? It left its first love and what? It went out of existence. So whatever effort Timothy made here was a very short lived effort. The opposition was formidable. And he's...he's like a guy in a church that's dying and he says, "I'm trying and I'm giving it everything I've got." And he was the best man there was available. But the thing was going to die. And he was fighting it every way he could. And finally, was he just beginning to say I can't handle it, I've got to give up, I can't make it, I can't fight it? And he became timid, fearful. He lost his courage. Verse 7, "God hasn't given us the spirit of timidity." You didn't get that from God. "But power." Timothy, where's your power?

Verse 8, "Do not be therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord." You mean to tell me Timothy has come to the place where he's ashamed to be identified with Christ and of me as prisoner, of Paul? He doesn't even want to be associated with Paul and the with Lord? Timothy? He really wants out that badly. He says, "Look, you have to be a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel." You've got to expect hostility. You have to.

Verse 12, Paul says, "I suffer and I'm not ashamed, Timothy. I'm not ashamed. Why are you?" Verse 13, "Hold on, Timothy, hold on to the form of sound words, hold on to the good thing, that's truth, that's doctrine, the good thing committed to you, keep it through the power of the Spirit that dwells in us." And then he says in 15, "Please don't turn away. Everybody else has turned away, don't you turn

away." Everybody else has abandoned me.

You get the picture? The pressure was on on the outside. The ministry was difficult and Timothy said, "I don't need this. I can't handle this. It's not going anywhere. They're not listening to me. The church isn't changing. It's not making it."

And then add to that the fact that in chapter 2 verse 1 he says, "Be strong in the grace," and you know that Timothy's being very weak. He's trying to strengthen him.

In verse 2 he says, "You must...you must teach faithful men who shall be able to teach others also. You've got to do it like a soldier who is in the battle." Verse 5, "Like an athlete who's in the race." Verse 6, "Like a farmer who is planting the field." You can't quit.

And then Timothy probably had some pressure indicated in chapter 2 verse 22. "Flee youthful lusts." Here's Timothy, he's being battered and beaten to the pulp on the outside. People aren't listening to what he's saying. He's fighting and it seems like a losing battle. The church is disintegrating. And he's trying his best to get it up on its feet. And then he's looking to the inside of himself and he sees youthful lusts and desires and longings in his heart and he's probably in a situation where he may be saying to himself, "Who am I to minister for the cause of Christ? Maybe the reason this can't come about is because I have so many spiritual battles in my own life. And what right do I have to do this?" And he's fighting those lusts and Paul says to him, "Run from those things, run from those things, separate yourself from lust, separate yourself from false teaching, false doctrine that eats like a gangrene, get away from that garbage and pursue righteousness, faith and love and peace. Get with people who call on God out of a pure heart. Stay away from foolish and unlearned questions." He's really trying to get Timothy reoriented...reoriented.

Now with that in mind, let's go back to chapter 4 and try to understand better what this exhortation means. Verse 14, "Neglect not the gift that is in you." This is so important. What is Paul saying to Timothy? Listen to this carefully. He's saying, "Timothy, this ministry in which you are engaged is not by your choice, you understand that? You were gifted for this by the Holy Spirit. You were gifted for it by the Holy Spirit. You didn't choose this."

So in trying to call Timothy to fulfill his calling, he starts by saying you have received a spiritual gift for this. That's why you can't...that's why you can't give credit to a man for his gift because it isn't his by choice or by pursuit, it is his by sovereign grace. Don't neglect the gift that's in you. Stop neglecting the thing the Spirit of God has given you. "Stop neglecting," by the way, is present active imperative, it's a command and it's a continual idea which leads us to say that it could well be "stop neglecting" because he's already in the process of neglecting it.

The gift, charisma, what is that? That's the grace gift. What is that? We know that, we've studied it many times. Every believer is given a gift. What is that gift? It's simply a means or a channel by which the Spirit of God ministers through you to others. For me it's the gift of teaching or preaching. For you it may be the gift of helps or giving, a prayer, a gift of leadership, whatever. We know those gifts are listed in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 refers to them and so does 1 Peter 4:10 and 11. So we're all given gifts. I like to call them divine enablements through which the Spirit ministers. They're given sovereignly. The Spirit of God gives those gifts to us as He sovereignly designs them.

The church, all this plurality of people is like a body, every part of the body like a human body has a function. Some are fingers and some are toes and some are legs and some are arms and eyes and ears and so forth and so on. Every body fits into the body and we all have gifts to blend together to make a body that can properly grow and nourish and reach others.

So, Paul says to Timothy, first reason you must fulfill your calling is you were gifted for this...you were gifted for this. Timothy's gift was a gift for the direct propagation of the Word. That's why the Lord is so clear in enjoining him through Paul, teach the Word, preach the Word, command and teach, command and exhort. He says it over and over. First Timothy, 2 Timothy, continually telling Timothy to teach, teach, teach, teach, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry. He was given gifts in the area of evangelism, preaching, teaching, leadership, all blended together to be the gift that he had received.

Every one of us has one gift and that gift is the blending of all these areas that the Spirit puts together and gives to us. It's like a painter who has ten colors on a palette and he wants to paint a picture and he can paint an infinite number of colors on his palette with only ten different...on his canvas with only ten colors on his palette because he mixes and blends. So the Spirit of God dips into a little of this gift and a little of that gift and a little of this gift and paints you the way He wants you with that perfect combination so you fit into the body to do what you and no one else can do.

So, Timothy, you've been given this gift for direct ministry of the Word of God and you must do that. I understand that. No one has ever had to tell me what my gift is. I never even ask that question. I've known since I was young and committed my life to Christ what God wanted me to do. I believe you receive your gift at salvation. That gift may be a while latent before it really flourishes. And I can look back at my life and know that God had called me to preach and teach, that was always in my heart, always on my mind. I didn't know how I was going to do it. I didn't know if I'd ever be able to do it effectively. But I knew that's what my heart's desire was, to teach and preach the Word.

That, I'm sure, was Timothy's desire as well. And when he first met Paul as recorded in Acts 16, he was probably so excited about the possibility of traveling with this the greatest of all living preachers that he could hardly contain himself because he had the heart desire to do the same thing. I believe when God gives the gift, coming with it is the measure of faith to operate the gift, that's the heart

desire.

So, subjectively he says, "Timothy, you're gifted for this." Objectively look what he says..."Objectively, Timothy, that gift was given you publicly by a prophecy." I don't believe he received the gift through the prophecy, but I believe there was a public affirmation of that gift by direct revelation from God.

When did that happen? Well, in the sixteenth chapter of Acts, Paul was traveling through Lystra, Iconium and Derbe in the Galatia area and he came to this area, he met this wonderful young man named Timothy who was well spoken of by everyone for his faith in the Lord, a very gifted young man. He had wonderful heritage with his mother and grandmother being stalwart Christians. He came from a Jew-Gentile background which made him able to reach into both cultures. He was an ideal young man for Paul to take. And I believe that it was at that time, though it doesn't say so in Acts 16, it says so here, that there was a prophecy given, a direct prophecy from God came and the Spirit of God spoke that Timothy was set aside for the preaching and teaching of the Word.

It would be very much like what happened in Acts 13 when the Holy Spirit said, "Separate unto me, Saul and Barnabas, for the work that I have for them." And there was direct revelation to the church in Antioch that Barnabas and Saul were sent apart for ministry. I think Timothy went through the same kind of a situation. There when Paul met him in Acts 16, very likely the church came together and the Spirit of God spoke through one of the prophets a direct prophecy, a direct revelation saying this man has the gift. So he had a subjective confirmation, the internal gift and the desire of his heart. He had an objective confirmation, the voice of God speaking directly a prophecy that this was his to do.

Now let me say that is not normative. I'm not in the ministry today because God gave me a revelation. This is extraordinary. This is in the Apostolic era...area and this is not normative. Today, that objective external confirmation would come from providence, not direct revelation. In other words, how God arranges your circumstances, how He arranges your opportunities, how He arranges your situation, how He leads and directs and the people that you meet and the opportunity you have. I said to a young man, he said, "I don't...should I go to seminary?" He said, "I feel so compelled to preach, but I don't know whether I ought to go to seminary."

I said to him, "Do you have an opportunity to go to seminary?"

"I really do."

"Can you afford to go to seminary?"

"Yes."

"Do you have a seminary you can go to?"

"Yes I do."

I said, "Well, what does that sound like to you? The Lord may be arranging the circumstances providentially."

And he said, "Oh, that might be right."

So what you do is if the compelling is there, and the subjective connects with the objective because the opportunity is there, then you know that may well be the voice of God.

The third thing comes at the end of verse 14, this also mentioned...not only was he compelled to minister from the gift that was in him and compelled to minister from the revelation that was outside him, but also with the laying on of the hands of the elders. Here is the church confirmation. If the first is subjective and the second is objective, the third is collective.

The church affirms it and says yes. And that happened in Acts 16 surely. The church said yes, he is a fine young man. The Holy Spirit said yes through the voice of a prophet, this is the young man. The heart of Timothy said yes, this is what I want. And that's the way it still is, I believe. I believe there is the heart of the one who desires the ministry. There is the confirmation of the providence of God in the circumstances around in an ordinary way, not an extraordinary way like Timothy. And thirdly, there is the affirmation of a collective assembly of spiritual leaders who put their hand on and say this is a qualified man.

Now what he's saying to Timothy is, "Look, Timothy, I don't care how hard it is, you can't bail out or you're going cross grain to your gift, to the direct call of God and the confirmation of the church. I mean, this isn't whimsical, you are there because of all of these spiritual dynamics. Now fulfill it. Don't neglect it. Carry it out to the very end."

Now we're going to talk a little more next time on this whole idea of laying on of hands and that, but I just want you to catch the general feel. You know, there are so many people in the ministry who go for a while and they're sort of like shooting stars...pshew-pshew...and they're gone, short candles, you know. I am really in awe of people...I guess there are more than I think but sometimes I think there are only a few...I am really in awe of people who are faithful to minister the Word of God right out through their whole life to the end. They're the spiritual marathon ministers. They may have a small congregation. They may be unknown. But they stay there and they're faithful and they fulfill it right out to the very end. You know, in the spiritual sense, they die with their boots on. They're still at it.

I'm in awe of people like that because I've seen so many get diverted, so many bail out. Some should because they weren't called in the first place. Maybe they had good intentions, maybe they thought they were going to serve the Lord and maybe they did serve for a while well, but the Lord wanted them in another area. I'm not arguing that. But the ones who were called to be there, gifted to be there, confirmed to be there, they need to stay there. Paul says in Acts 20, "Don't bother me with bonds and imprisonments, I have to finish my ministry. Don't tell me to avoid that, I've got to do what I've got to do." And he says, "My biggest fear is that in preaching to others," 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I myself will be disqualified. That's my biggest fear, that having done all I won't stand," Ephesians 6:11. "I want to be there when the end comes."

You'll never be able to evaluate the ministry of John MacArthur until John MacArthur's in heaven. Never be able to evaluate my faithfulness to God until...until you're looking at my casket because the true mark of the excellent servant of Jesus Christ is that he fulfills his calling to the end. Because he's bound subjectively by the driving passion of his heart because that's his gift, he's compelled externally because God has given him the opportunity, the privilege and laid the ministry out and he's also compelled because there is the affirmation and confirmation of the godly men who put their hands on him and said, "Go do the work, my brother, God suited you for it."

I can look back to all of those things in my own life. I can remember very well the day that I knelt and men put their hands on me to set me apart for the ministry. I can remember all of that affirmation. I have a certificate in my office right now with all the names of all those men who said it's for you to do the work of the ministry until Jesus comes or until you see Him. And I'm bound to that.

So, fulfilling the calling is a very vital part of ministry. That's part of being the kind of servant God wants you to be.

Well, what have we said to you today? Let me just close by saying this. Two main points, the ministry is to be biblical and the minister is to be a marathon runner all the way to the end faithful. Why? Beloved, the whole point is this, we want to set an example for the kind of life we're all to live. We're all to live a biblical life. We're all to be students of the Word of God. And listen to this, we're all, everyone of us, each and everyone of us to fulfill whatever our giftedness and calling is, right?

And there's so many people in the church who are not into the study of the Word of God. They're just very superficial. And who are not into the serving of God. They don't know what their gift is because they've never had occasion to do the kind of service that might reveal that gift. I hope that you realize that when you come here on the Lord's day it's really fuel so you can go out and minister, right? This is not the end, this is the means to the end.

So, you have to ask yourself: where's my ministry, what's my calling and am I doing it...am I doing it? Well, let's bow together in prayer.

Lord, we know that You desire that everything we do reflect Your Word and so we thank You for this wonderful truth about being biblical in our ministry. And how thrilling it is to see what happens in people's lives when they come to grips with your precious Word. Lord, we would never have anything but a biblical ministry because we've seen its power and impact. We pray that You'll raise up more and more men who can spend their life in the Word. More and more men and women who will obey that Word. And we thank You, too, for the calling You've given each of us, not better or worse, not higher or lower, just different. Some of us are called to preach and teach, some to serve and lead, some to help and give and pray. Whatever it is, Lord, help us to do it. Help us to ask the honest question: am I using my gifts and what is my ministry?

And, Lord, if we don't know the answer, help us to get involved in doing the calling You've given us. And to know the joy of a life of service.

While your heads are bowed for just a moment. I feel like in a way we're getting this passage in bits and pieces and yet it's so very very important. This morning perhaps you...you may be dealing with the fact that you have not been serving the Lord and you've kind of been a taker and not a giver...a receiver, not a sender...a hearer, not a doer. So maybe you just need to ask God to help you to get a ministry going, use your gifts. It doesn't have to be a formal one, just start seeing yourself as a minister, as somebody called to use a gift that God has endowed them with and get on about using it.

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