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

12 Marks of Excellent Pastoral Ministry
Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:6-16
Code: 80-307

In endeavoring to say a word of challenge to the men tonight and also to all of you who are here to give you a perspective of what lies before them and to put you in a position of accountability to hold them to it, I am drawn to a passage, not far away from one read earlier in the same neighborhood. 1 Timothy 4, and it seems to me that in this text from verses 6 to 16, there is a wonderful summary of what ministries should look like. These are not things that the men do not know. They are things they know very well. They are certainly truths that most of you know very well. But they seem to be rarely displayed today. In fact, as I was thinking through this text, I was drawn to the fact that there are basically twelve things that the apostle Paul says to Timothy, twelve things, twelve essential features or elements of effective ministry. And so, I thought this is kind of a twelve step program. This would rival AA and all other twelve step programs which are very popular today.

Such programs have been developed for all kinds of human malfunctions and become very popular in the world and even very popular in the church. In many churches you can find a plethora of twelve step programs. But in many churches, the one who really needs a twelve step recovery program is the pastor because he has lost sight of what he should be doing and become addicted to marketing cultural relevance, politics, social reform and other substitutes for the real thing.

So this is a twelve step recovery program for pastors that we hope none of you will ever have to enter because you'll never be in a position to defect from it. The key phrase in 1 Timothy 4:6 is the phrase, "You will be a good servant of Christ Jesus. You will be a good servant." Diacanas - a good minister. Good - callas. And noble, admirable, excellent minister of Christ Jesus. Timothy is not like the diacanas in chapter 3. He is rather a pastor, which is also a form of service and a form of ministry, but different from a servant in the church who serves under the elders. He has one of the elders serves in a unique way. He is an apostolic delegate under Paul but still a servant as we all are - as Paul himself was a diacanas and even referred to himself as a doulas, a bond slave.

Both letters written to Timothy are concerned with how to behave in the church and that involves how to understand pastoral ministry which gives direction to every other kind of behavior in the church. Paul's instruction here is not just for Timothy. It is normative. It is normative. And what he says to Timothy is what the spirit of God wants said to all of us who minister. The passage, starting in verse 6 and running down to the end of the chapter, provides a rich summary of all of the apostles inspired instruction for those who serve the church as ministers, as pastors. And it all begins with the statement, a noble minister, an excellent minister, a good servant of Christ Jesus.

How do you define such a man? What is it that marks that man? Well, here are the twelve steps. They are, for the most part, commands. Number one, and excellent minister warns his people of error. In verse 6, we read, "In pointing out these things to the brethren," the Greek verb means to remind, literally to place under, to lay down, in the middle voice to bring to attention, but to remind. "In reminding the brethren of these things, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus." Of what things? What has gone before that in the later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons propagated by hypocritical liars who are unconscionable in their deception, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. Seems a minor detail, but any defection from what God allows and blesses is not minor.

When you point out error, you are a noble servant of Jesus Christ. This goes back even to the beginning of this epistle. I urge you, in verse 3, to remain on an emphasis in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines nor pay attention to myths and endless genealogies which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration or stewardship of God, which is by faith. Some men have strayed from these things. Turned aside to fruitless discussions, wanting to be teachers of the law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. We must instruct men not to teach strange doctrines.

In verse 18 he commands Timothy again, he commands him to keep the faith, fight the good fight of faith, maintain a good conscience. And if you hold on to the faith, you will be different than those who have rejected it and suffered shipwreck such as Hymenaeus and Alexander who've been delivered to Satan to learn not to blaspheme. And so it goes, we get the same kind of direction in Titus. We get the same kind of direction in the sixth chapter of 1 Timothy. We get it all through 2 Timothy. We hear it in 2 John, 3 John, Jude. WE hear it in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. The noble minister of Jesus Christ warns his people of error. He understands the devastating potential of lies.

The second thing that the apostle Paul points to and in the same verse, verse 6, is that an excellent minister is a faithful student of Scripture. He says in verse 6, "The good servant of Jesus Christ constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following." Constantly nourished, a continual process awaits you men. A continual process of self-feeding on the Word of God. The words of the faith, I believe, refers to Scripture. And the sound doctrine refers to that which Scripture affirms, the propositions that come from Scripture. We believe the Scripture to be the word of God when accurately interpreted and when represented in propositions that are statements of fact.

You will spend your whole life mastering one book - one book, the only book that God has inspired in which he has places all of his truth. The Bible becomes the sole content of your ministry, the sole

theme of your preaching and it must saturate your mind and your soul. You make a radical commitment to the Bible and to Bible study and to ____ Jesus. That is being lost rapidly today in ministry.

Talking recently to people at Thomas Nelson Publishing, they were telling me that Bible sales are going down. At the same time that supposedly 85 percent of Americans say they are evangelical Christians, Bible sales are diminishing. And according to exit polls, 50 percent of the people who go to a Christian bookstore to buy a Bible, leave without one. They aren't really sure just how important it is. For may of them, the only Bible they ever see is a verse, usually taken out of context, and slapped on a PowerPoint screen. Many of them sit in an auditorium where it's too dark to read a Bible if they had one. And if they had one, they would wonder why. The Bible is, to many people who call themselves Christians, a book like a lot of other books, with some good suggestions about how to live your life that can be manipulated and twisted a dozen different ways to make them meaningful to you.

And so the publishers are saying, if we're gonna sell Bibles, we're gonna have to appeal to felt need rather than the revelation of God. We can't any longer talk about this is God's revealed truth. We can't any longer talk about this is inspired by God. This is the word from heaven. We can't do that. We have to call the Bible, not the Word of God, but a message that will fix you. We have to sell Bibles and they presented a full video presentation. Are you lonely? Are you unfulfilled? Are you happy? Here's a book that can change all that. A man-centered approach to selling Bibles. And, in fact, I was warned that a study Bible is an anachronism because people today don't even connect the two words "study" and "Bible".

But we understand what we are called to do. We are to saturate ourselves with the teaching of Scripture, the content, the words of the faith and the dedoscalia, that which Scripture affirms propositionally. I think of William Tyndale, one of my heroes, in prison shortly before being martyred, 1536, wrote the Governor in Chief asking for some consideration because he was suffering so greatly in prison. This is what he asked for. "Please sir, Send me a warmer cap, a candle, a piece of cloth to patch my leggings, but above all I beseech and entreat your clemency to be urgent with the procurer that he may kindly permit me to have my Hebrew Bible - my Hebrew grammar, my Hebrew dictionary that I may spend time with them in study." A man lost when he was separated from the word of God, faithful pastor, warns his people of error, is expert in handling Scripture.

Thirdly, an excellent minister avoids the influence of unholy teaching. In verse 7 he says have nothing to do with worldly fables stead only for old women. Have nothing to do with them. Peritaomi - refuse them, very strong, to excuse yourself, to decline, to avoid, to shun is the very word used back in chapter 1, profane, radically separate from what is holy. The word is exactly that - non-sacred, unhallowed, profane muthas, myths, fables, the opposite of truth, refused. Excuse yourself from it's environment. Decline receiving it.

Now we have to explain an little comment at the end. Have nothing to do with worldly fables ____ only for old women, lest we think the apostle Paul has a slur here toward older women. This was, however, a sarcastic epithet used in philosophical circles to indicate a lack of credulity. Old women are picked on because they lived longer and old men were dead. As old women get older, they lose their ability to process information and Paul refers to that only to express the fact that this is unreasonable, irrational that you would listen to any of this. Many young men who started out in ministry have been ruined, not by learning error as error, but by sitting under someone teaching error as truth. Being seduced with error from someone who believed that that error was true.

It's amazing one of the things I loved about going to the lands of Russia Commonwealth and former Soviet Union is because it was very hard to find people who had liberalized an understanding of the Bible. Because you can't become a liberal by reading the Bible. You have to go to school for that. Nobody ever became a liberal by reading the Bible. It's impossible. You have to sit under someone who damns the truth. Psalm 1 puts it this way. "Now blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners nor sit in the seat of scoffers." Takes his place in the classroom of a scoffer - all that diluted conviction regarding truth. SO a faithful, noble, minister of Christ Jesus warns his people, becomes expert in Scripture and theology and avoids the corrupting influence of unholy teachers.

Number four, an excellent minister is disciplined in personal godliness. This is obvious. The bottom half of verse 4, on the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness for bodily discipline is only of little profit. But, godliness is profitable for all things since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. Discipline yourself, gumnadzo, exercise, gymnastics, gymnasium comes from this root. It implies rigor, it implies strenuous training, self-abnegating, self-denying discipline in the direction of godliness - pulling up the loose ends, girding up the loins of your mind, as Peter would say it, beating your body into submission, lest in preaching to others, you become a documas, disqualified. Maintaining a pure, unaccusing conscience so that when you are accused of evil or a hidden life of shame like the apostle Paul, you can say, "My conscience is clear."

Discipline yourself for godliness using the means of grace that have been given to you in the word and by the spirit. Discipline yourself that way rather than for the physical because godliness is profitable for all thing. It holds promise not only for the present life but for the life to come. Physical exercise holds some promise for this life, none for the life to come.

And this, in face, verse 9 says, "Is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance?" Without going into a full explanation, I believe that verse clearly goes with what goes before rather than what comes after. This is another of several such - at least five trustworthy statements in the pastoral epistles that had become probably axiomatic kind of bywords, things that the Christians said to one another because they were reflective of truth in a given culture. They lived in a culture that was obsessed with

body worship despite stoic protests, society in which the people in Timothy's ministry lived had developed a priority of physical exercise. And the churches and the Christians needed to develop a priority of spiritual exercise. An excellent minister, while being responsible for his physical health, is far more consumed with his godliness and the disciplines that produce godliness.

Number five, an excellent minister is committed to hard work. In verse 10, "It is for this we labor and strive." Copiaou, to work to the point of exhaustion. Agonidzmi, to agonize in a struggle. Those are words that are associated with ministry. It is sweating labor. It is agonizing struggle. There's no other way to define it. It is relentless. Until you have done it, you do not understand what it is to preach every single week of your life. Sunday morning, to open the word of God, Sunday night to come back and do it again. One time during the week or two or three, to do it again. To go here, to go there and to be clear and to be accurate and to be powerful and to be insightful and to be fresh is a relentless life. It is a bondage to be sure.

It is maybe 3:00 on Monday when I begin to think about what I have to prepare for the following Sunday. So I basically can rest from about 9:00 on Sunday until about 3:00 on Monday. Then it all begins again, month after month after month and year after year after year for a lifetime. It is a labor, nothing less than a labor. The heroes of our history understood that. The ones that worked the hardest are the ones that left the greatest imprint.

We talk about John Calvin who wrote the Institutes, who wrote tracts, who wrote commentaries on almost every book of the Bible, who gave sermons and lectures - ten sermons every two weeks all of them Scripture exposition, and worked in the original languages. We talk about Luther, between 1510 and 1546 preaching 3,000 sermons, many day a week - sometimes three different sermons, sometimes four different sermons on the Lord's day, always studying, always preaching. Add to that family responsibility, ministry responsibility, the care of souls, physical illness.

The fact is, we don't always feel the same every week. We aren't always as clear minded every week. But we have to show up every week. Add to that the death of children, the death of wives. Add to that persecution. Add to that disappointment. Add to that a non-appreciative congregation and the workload can be staggering. But the men who are able to overcome it and leave a body of work that is memorable had immense powers of spiritual concentration. If a man is willing to pay the price of fatigue and weariness, his ministry will not be mediocre. True shepherding at its highest level, and what other level is there, is exhausting. But that's really okay because we have a perspective that lends itself to that kind of devotion.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, "We have this in earthen vessels that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves. We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying about, in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our

body. We who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake that the life of Jesus also may be manifest in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you." This is killing us, he says. But it's giving you life.

Why does he do it? Because, he says, "We have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, I believe, therefore I spoke. We also believe, therefore also we speak; knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and present us with you. For all things are for your sakes that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to redound to the glory of God. Therefore, we do not loose heart, though our outer man is decaying, our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things with are not seen are eternal."

What does all that say? Paul suffered all that he suffered in his ministry because the outer was far lass important than the inner. The present was far less important than the future, and the temporal was far less important than the eternal. He labored because, back to verse 10, his hope is fixed on the living God who is the savior of all men, especially of believers. Why do you labor so hard? Because you're involved in serving the living God in his saving enterprise. That's the point. You wouldn't work this hard for anything. But you do it and you pay the price because you understand that you are involved in the saving redemptive history unfolding from our sovereign God. He is the savior of all men.

In a temporal sense, he demonstrates his saving nature by not giving the unregenerate what they deserve when they deserve it. HE is the savior of all men in a temporal, physical sense in that he lets the sinner live and enjoy common grace. But he's the savior of believers in a spiritual and eternal sense. In any case, he demonstrates himself as a savior and we serve him in his saving work. There is no more important, no more glorious, no more wondrous work than as Paul said in 2 Corinthian 4 I read a moment ago, adding souls to the heavenly hallelujah chorus so that their voices can redound to the glory of God.

Number six, an excellent minister teaches with authority. He teaches with authority, verse 11, "command and teach these things." Direct, order, charge, prescribe - is probably not a good word. It makes God sound like a pharmacist. He's not just prescribing some fix. This is a command. Actually, keep commanding, keep teaching these things. What things? All the things related to divine truth and virtue. This is a call for Timothy and it's a call for you to assert yourself. You're not just there to share your thoughts and share your ideas. You're not just there to have a conversation with people. You're there to command them, to command them to repent, to command them to believe the gospel, to command them to bow the knee to the authority of the word of God, to teach them all things whatsoever Christ has commanded.

Even God commands all men everywhere to repent. Authority comes from God through the Scriptures to you when you handle the Scripture accurately, clearly and boldly. And so our preaching must be filled with commands and charges and calls and orders and directives. This is counter culture to our day, but changes nothing in terms of what God asks of us.

Number seven, an excellent minister is a model of spiritual virtue. Now we're getting down to the life behind the message. Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct or lifestyle, love, faith, faithfulness, and purity, sexual purity primarily, show yourself an example of those who believe.

Thomas Brooks it was who said example is the most powerful rhetoric. The single greatest support of the truth in your preaching is the power of an exemplary life. This is your most reliable weapon. This is what makes everything believable. This is what causes all your critics to disappear when your life is behind what you say.

Thomas Fuller, another puritan said, "Though the words of the wise be as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, yet their examples are the hammer to drive the nails in to take a deeper hold." One of the reasons to stay in a ministry as long as you possibly can is so that people have time to see you over the long haul and come to believe that what you preach is really what you believe because it's what you live. It's what you live. Nothing is as powerful as the model of spiritual living. Let no one belittle you, think down about you.

Timothy was probably in his late thirties at this time so he wasn't a kid. But Paul was called the aged in Philemon 9 when he was probably 55. If he was the aged at 55, what does that make me? If Timothy was still young at 34 to 39, somewhere in there, then youth goes a long ways. Don't let anybody belittle you because you're young.

You're gonna face that men. You're gonna go to a church and - I remember my first week or two here. I was introduced to a Sunday School class. The first time I was going into a class and then one of them introduced me and made some comment about, "We don't know what this young kid is gonna be able to tell us." That was his introduction. We all start out kind of that way. We have the zeal, we have the knowledge, we have the excitement, the enthusiasm and they question our youth. The way you overturn that is by living a godly life, letting your virtue speak.

Number eight, and excellent minister maintains a thoroughly Biblical ministry. Verse 13, "Until I come, give attention to the reading of Scripture to exhortation and teaching." This sort of sums up what you're supposed to do. Read the Scripture, explain the Scripture and apply the Scripture. We already said that we are men of the book.

God has made us responsible to teach his revelation and it's all in one book. "Until I come," Paul says, "Until I arrive," he says in chapter 3 verse 14, "I'm writing these things to you hoping to come to you before long. Until I come, give your attention," some commentators say that the cross echo there implies a sort of previous private preparation. "Give your attention to the reading." That is to say, "You're just not reading, but you're reading - haven't given your attention to it." That is to say, you are reading it and explaining it. It could also mean being fully enrapt in the Scripture.

The word is used in Hebrews 7:13 of a priest fully absorbed in his work at that alter. Be fully consumed and absorbed, having given your attention to the Scripture. The public reading including the correct exposition. The idea of explaining it. And then directing it to their hearts by way of exhortation and clarifying it by way of teaching. Your whole ministry is all about the word of God. And know you know that. And you are prepared for that.

It was John Huxtable who said, "A man does not qualify to be a preacher of the word by making weakly sallies into the good book to discover some peg on which to hang some scattered observations about men and affairs." Some of the expositors of the past have gone a little overboard, like the German exegetical preacher who, after lecturing on the Book of Isaiah for more than 20 years had reached the middle of the second chapter. It was David Martin Lloyd Jones who was in Romans for twelve years and didn't finish chapter 14.

But the greats of the past understood their whole life was given comprehensively to the word of God. Joseph Parker said, "If I talk all week, I cannot preach on Sunday. That is all. If I attend committee meetings, immerse myself in politics, my strength would have been consumed there. That is all. About my ministry, there is no mystery." There is no mystery. People have asked me, young people through the years, "What's the secret to great preaching?" Simple answer, keep your rear end in the chair until you finish the work. Come out when you have something to say. Make sure when it's time to say something, you have something - well prepared to say our labor spear is clearly identified. 1 Timothy 5, "Double honor to those elders who labor in preaching and teaching."

Continuing in this twelve step program, number nine, an excellent minister uses his spiritual gift, employs it. And the idea here is to keep doing it. Verse 14, "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you." Another way to say this is an excellent minister has endurance. And excellent minister has endurance. He doesn't neglect what was give him by the Holy Spirit, what was affirmed through prophetic utterance, what was confirmed by the elders of the church when they laid hands on him at his ordination. That is to say he is faithful to the usefulness of that gift, that calling, that ordaining, that setting apart over the long, long haul. He does not neglect the gift. You're headed for a long life. And I hope it's long - very long.

My father went to be with the Lord last summer - June. And was still teaching the word six months before he died. And he died at 91. It's a long, long life. And he began to teach it when he was just a college student many years before. There is a gifting that has come to you. There is a confirmation of that gifting from the church and an affirmation from the men around you and the faculty and those to whom you minister. It is a gift for life. It is not temporary. It is permanent. And it goes on in season and out of season until you are ready to be offered and my God help you to be faithful to the end.

Number ten, an excellent minister is passionate regarding his work. Verse 15, "Take pains with these things. Be absorbed in them." That's an interesting translation. The phrase here is actually entutois disphe. Literally, it says, "In these things be you."

And Paul keep coming back to this. It's all about the word. It's all about reading it, explaining it, applying it. And here he says it another way. "In these things be you." It's another way of saying, this is your life. This is your life. . This is not your job. This is where you live and move and have your being. I've been asked as you perhaps have or will be asked, "If you weren't a minister, what would you be?" And I don't have any answer. This is where I live and have my being. I frankly can't do anything else. I - if I don't do this - have no plan B. Be in these things.

Number eleven, an excellent minister is manifestly growing spiritually. I love this. If you are fully absorbed in the matters of ministry, both in the knowledge of Scripture and its application in your own life, your progress may be evident to all. Look, you're in progress and so am I. Don't try to fool anybody when you show up at the church and make them think you've arrived. Be manifestly growing. Let your progress - your advance, procopae, a military term. You're marching forward, you're moving ahead. Let it be manifest. Don't spend your whole life trying to defend a stupid sermon. Admit it was a stupid sermon and preach a better one. Interpret it the right way.

I remember preaching a sermon here one time on why the antichrist will be a Jew. Somebody came to me and said, "That's wrong." And so I went back and studied during the week and the next Sunday night, I preached on why the antichrist will be a gentile. And the sad part of it is I was convinced both times. So I left both tapes in the tape ministry for awhile until I finally made up my mind. You don't ever want to say something and then spend your whole life defending it. You don't ever want to do something and then try to defend yourself for having done something that was sinful or insensitive or unholy, offensive and then try to play as if someone is unjustly criticizing you. Take your medicine. Humble yourself. Let your progress be seen by everybody. People can live with that. They can love someone like that. They need to see your weakness. They'll embrace you for it. They'll love you for it. And they'll know you understand their weakness.

And finally, an excellent minister perseveres in ministry. Perseveres - pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching, persevere in these things. The exhortation picks up everything that's gone before. The word is helpful, epimeno, stay there, remain. I'm not talking about lifelong endurance.

Really the idea here is where you are, Timothy, and what you're doing keep doing. I guess you could say prolong your stay, is another way to say it. Plan to stay. Come and plan to stay.

All the other eleven elements flourish in an enduring long ministry of godliness and Scripture saturated teaching. Stay. What a joy for me to stay 37 years. What a benediction. What a blessing. I've seen 37 years of the work of the word in this church and what a joy, what an unspeakable benediction to my life. And when you do all these things, you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. A lot of ways possibly to interpret that. But certainly, the perseverance of the saints is a necessary element in our own salvation. And our faithfulness will be the instrument that God will use to save others as well.

So what does a pastor do? Some of you parents are wondering, "Now that my son is graduated, what's he going to be expected to do? What does he do when it's time for him to begin ministry?"

He makes the following commitments. I will warn my people of error. I will devote myself to the study of Scripture. I will avoid the influence of unholy teaching that sucks out my conviction. I will discipline myself in godliness. I will work hard. I will teach with divine authority. I will endeavor to be a model of spiritual virtue. I will maintain a thoroughly Biblical ministry. I will employ my spiritual gift and not neglect it. I will be passionate about this privileged work. I will let all see my growth in grace and persevere with endurance to complete the task that God gives me and pledge at the end as the _____ and joy the salvation of God and so will those to whom you minister.

You want results? Those are the best you're gonna get. Heaven - that is the greatest result. It comes to those who persevere. And to those who persevere in ministry, they become the agent by which others receive this glorious salvation.

Father, we thank you for this word to us. The reminders are clear, straightforward, helpful, and necessary. And we would be obedient in all matters so that we might truly know what it means to be used to bring salvation to those who hear us. We pray that you will use these men in that way, far beyond their expectation, for the honor of Christ, Amen.

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