

## Success in Ministry (Part 2)

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[0:00] 1 Timothy chapter 4, verses 12 through 16. Again, as our text, would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together.

Timothy, a young pastor serving at the church in Ephesus, receives this letter from the Apostle Paul, who's probably in his 60s at this point in time, maybe a little bit older, giving him instruction on how to pastor the church.

And he continues in chapter 4, verse 12, saying, Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

Practice these things. Immerse yourself in them so that all may see your progress. 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.

[1:29] May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? In baseball and softball, a batting stance refers to how a batter positions their body as they prepare to hit.

A good batting stance provides a solid base, a clear view of the pitcher, and hopefully results in a smooth swing. That gets hits.

When I was a kid, I wanted to be a professional baseball player. And my favorite team was the Baltimore Orioles, and my favorite player was Cal Ripken Jr., who had a Hall of Fame career.

I wanted to be a great player like Cal Ripken, so I modeled my batting stance after his, thinking that the same stance, if it perfectly matched his, I would get the same results, and that I would have the same success.

But Cal Ripken had really strange batting stances throughout his career. Sometimes he would bend his knees. Sometimes he would stand straight up.

[2:52] Sometimes he would hold the bat flat on his back, with the bat pointing down. Sometimes he would stick his bat out behind him, perpendicular to the ground. Sometimes he would lay it on his shoulder and move it up and down like this, looking more like a violin player than a baseball player.

My attempts to emulate Ripken's stance in the hopes of experiencing his success did not achieve the results that I had hoped for.

Eventually, I was picked up by another team whose coach played minor league baseball. And after watching me bat in a weird, strange way, he sent me home with a videotape.

And the videotape was called Mechanics of the Major League Swing. And in that video, Tom Amansky breaks down the batting stances and swings of some of the greatest baseball players during that time.

And those swings were captured in slow motion. And what I learned was that despite all the different ways baseball players held their bats and positioned themselves to hit, they all ended in just about the same position right before they swung the bat.

[4:12] That was a breakthrough for me. I stopped copying what other successful hitters were doing before they swung the bat, and I started working on the basic fundamentals that they learned when they were in Little League.

And as a result, I had a lot better success. Obviously, I didn't have that much success because I did not achieve my dream of being a baseball player. But I share this story with you this morning to illustrate the point that I believe Paul is making to Timothy in our text today.



In verse 8, he conveys the value of pursuing godliness by contrasting it with physical exercise, which, though it is a good thing, is not nearly as important as incorporating the spiritual exercises, the spiritual disciplines, because they reap an eternal reward.

[10:40] In verse 12, Paul underscores the importance of training for godliness, showing the positive effect it can have on those who may doubt Timothy's capability as an elder to lead the church due to his youthfulness.

So again, in verse 12, Paul says, let no one despise you for your youth, but set believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

The Greek word translated as despise is *kataphrino*, and it means to look down on someone, to see them as insignificant or unimportant, to belittle them and not take them seriously.

Some biblical scholars believe that Timothy was in his late 20s at this time. Others suggest he was in his late 30s. But Timothy's exact age is less important here than the fact that he was not an old man.

So for those of you who are approaching 30 or approaching 40, take heart. The Bible says you are not old.

[11:54] The church that Timothy pastored was in Ephesus, a town that was immersed in Greek culture.

And by the standards of Greek culture, he was young, and in this culture, they equated youth with inexperience and a lack of wisdom.

I started serving as a senior pastor about a month after my 30th birthday. Not too long after I started, I was visiting one of our elderly church members in the hospital, and his sister was there. She was younger than him, but still more than twice my age. And after I read scripture and was about to leave, she kind of scowled at me, and she said, I still think you're too young to be a pastor. And in my mind, I'm thinking, you still think I'm meeting you for the very first time. But this is what I said to her. I said to her, well, I'm 30, which is about the age of Jesus when he died on the cross.

[13:07] So if he wasn't too young to be the savior of the world, then I'm not too young to be your brother's pastor. Maybe amen, maybe not. I'm not sure. But most of us have been young.

Either you are young now, or if not, you still remember what it was like to be this age. And you can probably remember a time when you felt despised for your youth, like the story I shared.

Ah, you don't know what you're talking about. Someone said something that made you feel unimportant, unqualified, or unappreciated.

And feeling despised, you may be, or may have been, tempted to despise them for despising you. Paul doesn't say to Timothy, though, to those older people who despise your youth, Timothy, just ignore them.

Just move on without them. In fact, in chapter 5, verses 1 through 2, where we'll be next week, Paul tells Timothy what his interactions and confrontations with older church members should look like.

[14:24] Like a son who's talking to his parents, showing them love, honor, and respect. Paul's not saying to forget them, he's not saying to get angry with them, and he's not saying to agree with them in their assessment that he's too young.

He's telling him, Timothy, that because he is young, because he didn't have a long record to establish credibility with them, he would have to earn their respect.

And he would earn their respect by demonstrating godliness, exemplifying Christ's likeness to them in five specific ways so that they would regard him as they should.

1 Timothy was to demonstrate godliness in his speech. In Matthew chapter 12, verses 34 through 37, Jesus warned the scribes and the Pharisees, he said, you brood of vipers, how can you speak good when you are evil?

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. Now hear this, I tell you, on the day of judgment, people, if you're a person, this includes you, will give an account for every careless word they speak.

[15:51] For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. A person's speech reflects what is in their heart.

In Ephesians 4, 29, Paul, writing to the same people that Timothy was pastoring, said this to them, let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up as it fits the occasion that it may give grace to those to who hear.

So if Timothy was going to gain respect of those who despised his youth, he would need to use caution with what he said and with how he said what he said, seeking to build up the church and make its members better.

And Paul's telling him if your speech is honest, if you tell the truth, if you speak the truth in love, those people who doubt you eventually will learn to trust you.

Second, Timothy was to demonstrate godliness in his conduct. A hypocrite is someone whose conduct does not match what they say. Jesus was, again, constantly pointing out the inconsistencies with what the scribes and the Pharisees said and what they did.

[17:11] A person who is godly is not a hypocrite. The Bible is full of exhortations to live godly lives.

If you remember the disciple Peter, prior to our Lord's death and resurrection, he demonstrated oftentimes carelessness with his words. But after Jesus rose again, after Jesus reinstated him to the ministry, Peter had a lot to say about our conduct as Christians.

In 1 Peter 1, 14 through 16, he said, as obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct since it is written you shall be holy for I am holy.

And then in chapter 2, verse 12, he says, keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Third, Timothy was to demonstrate godliness in love. In John 15, 13, Jesus said to his disciples, greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends, which is exactly what he did on the cross.

[18:26] 1 Corinthians 13, we call that the love chapter and in that chapter Paul communicates the same truth that true love, real love, genuine, authentic, Christ-like love is self-sacrificing.

And so successful ministers demonstrate godliness by living like Jesus and loving like Jesus.

Timothy was also to demonstrate godliness by setting an example of faith.

Now faith here doesn't refer to belief but to faithfulness. A successful minister is a faithful person, faithful to communicate the word of God, faithful to conduct themselves in obedience to the word of God, and faithful in their commitment to serve the congregation they minister to, the people that they teach, no matter how difficult that can be at times.

Finally, Timothy was to demonstrate godliness in his purity and this primarily refers to sexual purity. We're all aware of how many pastors have fallen in this area.

I don't need to say any more. But to add that a successful minister constantly, must constantly be on guard against Satan's efforts to disqualify him and his ministry and this is a primary way he tries to do that.

[19:49] Later, Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2, verse 22, so flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Since elders are to set the standard for others to follow, they must be on guard against lowering the standard of godliness in the church.

And young people, if you want older people to take you seriously, then the best thing that you can do is to take following Jesus seriously.

If you take following Jesus seriously, other people, especially those in the church, are going to take you seriously. Secondly, the next criteria, a successful minister is a dedicated teacher.

They are a dedicated teacher. Verse 13, until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. A successful minister's ministry is built on God's word.

[21:08] Paul planned to come to Ephesus, but until such time, Timothy was to continue to build God's household, the church, according to God's revelation contained in his word.

Devote yourself as the present active indicative of Prosecco. Timothy was to continually give his attention to the message that he would preach to the church who gathered for worship on the first day of the week.

the implication is that Timothy invested a considerable amount of his time throughout the week preparing the message that he was going to give to the church on Sunday.

The first century church's worship model followed the practice of the synagogue. a scripture was read and then it was explained and people were exhorted.

They were encouraged. They were rebuked. They were the pastor would seek to persuade them to adjust their lives in obedience to the instruction of God's word that was read, explained, and exhorted.

[ 22 : 25 ] Now, we are about 2,000 years removed from New Testament times and even further removed from Old Testament times.

Today, in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, we are culturally, geographically, linguistically, philosophically, and historically far removed from Bible times.

And there are a couple of important things about preaching for us to understand here. First, biblical exposition was the norm in the early church.

Expository preaching isn't a way to preach, it is the way to preach. John Stott said, it was taken for granted from the beginning that Christian preaching would be expository preaching, that is, that all Christian instruction and exhortation would be drawn out of the passage which had been read.

That's what they did, that's what we need to keep doing. The example of preaching the apostles set wasn't a series of sermons based on some topic, but a sequential exposition of the inerrant word of God.

[ 23 : 45 ] I read a quote recently from Brian Chappell which accurately describes the style of preaching that takes place in many evangelical churches today.

He refers to this style of preaching as dis-exposition. This is what he said. The congregation hears the text read and waits in anticipation for its exposition only to be disappointed when the text is never alluded to in the next 30 minutes or more commonly the text is handled superficially with no serious engagement of its meaning.

The preacher mouths its words but there is no substance. This exposition takes many forms.

Sometimes the text is encrusted with stories and jokes that is unseen and unheard.

Other times it is disordered because it is preached through a therapeutic political or social lens.

Paul commands Timothy to be radically and thoroughly biblical in his preaching.

He was to be the opposite of the false teachers who he said incorporated irreverent and silly myths and endless genealogies in their sermons. I have a lot to say about this.

[ 25 : 05 ] I spent the last four years of my life reading and writing about preaching. Preaching is firstly and most importantly an act of worship.

It is central to our worship when God's people gather as his church to worship. I have said it before and I will say it again.

This pulpit is not a piece of furniture to me. It is an altar upon which the word of God rests open in front of me in front of you.

I stand behind it not in front of it. My sermon notes are aligned underneath it. My message is an offering to God without this book and without the truth contained in this book the person and the sermon are inconsequential.

I want you to see God's word. I want you to hear God's word and I want you to obey God's word. Preaching is not a performance.

[ 26 : 07 ] It is an act of worship. Preaching is not a speech. It is a proclamation of God's word. And successful ministers, successful pastors, elders, teachers preach to persuade God's people to follow God's ways.

To adjust their lives to God's standards. To know the truth. To know doctrine. And to know why knowing these things matters.

prayers. So secondly, a sermon that accomplishes all of that takes time. 20 minutes isn't sufficient.

I didn't hear any amens on that one. If you teach, you must prepare and you must be ready.

in 2 Timothy 4, 1-4, Paul again gives this charge to Timothy, I charge you in the presence of God and of Jesus Christ who is to judge the living and the dead and by appearing in his kingdom preach the word.

[ 27 : 15 ] Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience in teaching. For the time is coming, and friends, that time is now here, when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

If you have received the duty to preach and to teach, you must be devoted to it. Now the third criteria, a successful minister is developing spiritually. They are developing spiritually.

Verse 14, again Paul tells Timothy, do not neglect the gift you have which was given to you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. We know this. Not all who enter ministry stay in ministry. Some leave because they didn't belong in the first place. And others leave because frankly, ministry is hard. Paul knew that Timothy, despite his gifts, could be tempted to neglect them and tempted to leave the ministry.

[ 28 : 35 ] In chapter 2, verses 3 through 18, Paul gives us some insight into the pressures that Timothy was facing at Ephesus.

He said, I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

As I remember your tears, I long to see you that I may be filled with joy. today, I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now I'm sure dwells in you as well.

For this reason, I remind you, why would he remind him to flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying out of my hands? For God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control.

Timothy faced external pressures, and as a result of that, he dealt with internal temptations to quit.

[ 29 : 51 ] Paul remembered Timothy's tears, probably in reference to their parting. You imagine for Timothy, no longer having the apostle Paul by your side as you are continuing to pass on.

And serve a church. Ministry is hard, it's lonely, and at times it's depressing. Charles Spurgeon is one of my heroes.

He was called the Prince of Preachers. But at the end of his life, he experienced overwhelming depression.

depression. Why? Because this is hard. And if it could happen to Timothy, if it could happen to Spurgeon, it can happen to anyone who's called to ministry.

And I'll just be honest with you, there have been times when I've imagined what life would be like if I had a regular nine-to-five job that I could leave behind when I clocked out for the day.

[ 31 : 02 ] A job that didn't require my wife and my children to be immersed in it. I could teach, I could coach, I could do a number of different things.

things. But as I entertain those thoughts, I know ultimately I can't because I'd be miserable because I wouldn't be obedient to God's will for my life.

I'm not saying this to make you feel sorry for me or for anyone else in ministry, I'm just stating a reality that only those in ministry understand. And the truth that if you are in ministry, sometimes the passion, the vigor, the flame, it flickers.

And it needs to be fanned back into a flame. Timothy had hard things to do at Ephesus. And instead of being encouraged to quit, Paul doesn't say, hey, you sound burned out, just take some time off. Paul reminds him instead of his calling, of his giftedness, which was confirmed by all the other elders of the church.

[ 32 : 19 ] He reminds him that he's been entrusted with a sacred task to communicate God's inspired word. And so in verse 15, Paul commands him to practice these things, immerse yourself in them so that all may see your progress.

A successful minister is a work in progress, and that progress should be seen by others. Even Paul admitted his need to practice and immerse himself in the truth of God's word, not being content with where he was at, not living in the past and being satisfied with past successes, but pressing on towards the Lord, towards the end of his life, in that time he would be with him eternally.

In Philippians 3, 12 through 14, he says, not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

In this life, friends, the work is never finished. none of us retires from serving the Lord Jesus Christ. The goal, the prize is still ahead of us all, and it will all have been worth it when we see what no eye has seen, and what we hear what no hear as heard, nor heart imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him, for those who press on, for those who have served him faithfully.

[ 34 : 06 ] Now, the last criteria. A successful minister is determined to practice and proclaim God's word. Verse 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.

A successful minister is determined to live holy and preach in ways that encourage other people to be holy. holy. The Bible teaches that preserving faith is a mark of genuine salvation.

Matthew 16, 24 through 25, Jesus told his disciples, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

While the perseverance of the saints can only be accomplished by the power of God, it is also the responsibility of each believer to keep a close watch on themselves and on the teaching, on the truths of God's word, especially if you're called to serve as an elder in a church.

A successful minister who is determined to practice and proclaim God's word will experience how his word does not return to the Lord void.

[ 35 : 25 ] God is the author of salvation. salvation. He is the one who saves. However, in his infinite wisdom and grace, he has chosen to use sinful people to communicate his divine revelation.

He has called sinners to salvation and he calls sinners to call other sinners to salvation. Again, Charles Spurgeon, he said, we are not responsible for the souls that are saved, but we are responsible for the gospel that is preached and for the way in which we preach it.

And so ultimately, all of these criteria collapse into one goal. To make disciples. disciples. To disciple those disciples who have been made.

To point people to Jesus. And to encourage them to trust him. To implore them to follow him.

To persuade them to enter through the narrow gate, to walk the narrow path, to seek to be like Jesus. Because Jesus is better.

[ 36 : 52 ] To know him, to trust him, to obey his word. That would be more like him. And so how do we adjust ourselves according to what we've heard?

I think as believers, it's this. Use God's standard to measure and evaluate success in ministry. Use God's standard to measure and evaluate success in ministry.

history. Here's the standard. To know the standard, you must read it and understand it. And trust it and apply it. For those of you this morning, you've heard these truths and you are not saved.

Friend, I implore you. I plead with you. Turn to Christ. Because apart from him, there is no salvation. There is no hope of heaven for you. The wages of sin is death. Eternal separation from God in hell. You know, we've enjoyed the dedication of babies today.

[ 38 : 07 ] Let me tell you what God has done for you. He gave his only son for you. to die the death that you deserve.

To show you his love. To adopt you as his child. And to lavish you with his graces upon grace. What more could you want from God than that?

And it's not about you being good enough. It's not about you going on some kind of journey or anything like that. It has nothing to do with what you must do. It has all to do with what Jesus has done.

And you, asking for the Lord to forgive you of your sins, turning in repentance of those sins, and trusting in Jesus. And the Bible says that if you do that, you will be saved.

You will be declared righteous. You will have eternal eternal life. And that begins the moment of your salvation. And it stretches all throughout eternity. Let's pray.

[ 39 : 22 ] Lord, we we thank you for those whom you have called to serve in ministry. Lord, we thank you for those good ones. God, who who these ten criteria apply to people who are devoted and dedicated, who love you and who want other people to know you and love you too.

And so, God, we pray for those those who are serving throughout the world. God, who have already met with their church in worship or who will later today.

Lord, we pray that in the ways that that you do that you would encourage them to press on. Lord, that you would encourage them through your word to not lose hope and to not give up, but to press on because it's worth it.

Lord, we pray for those who have served in ministry and they've been hurt bad. They've experienced more so than others just how hard it can be. And as a result of that, Lord, they've stepped out.

And God, only those who have been in the place to see what it's like understand. But Lord, you understand more than anybody. You were despised and you rejected. Your own hometown kicked you out.

[ 40 : 45 ] And so, Lord, we pray in the ways that you do that you would encourage them. We pray that the flame that is flickering, Lord, that you would fan it into flame. Father, our churches need good men behind pulpits who preach your word.

And we pray that you would call them. We pray that you would sustain them, that your word would be proclaimed and that people would hear the truth and we pray that they would believe it. And God, for our church, I pray for our elders, I pray for our teachers, that, Father, we would seek to measure our success not by how big our congregations are, not by how many likes we get on our posts or how big our classroom is, members-wise.

But that, Lord, we would seek to be diligent to know you, to follow you, and encourage others to do the same.

Knowing that, Lord, if we do this, the results will be yours and you will be pleased and we'll all be worth it on that day when we stand before you.

We hope to hear you declare to us, well done, good and faithful servant. Until then, Lord, give us the strength and the energy and the passion we need to serve you and to serve you with you.

[ 42 : 11 ] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Thank you.