

1 Timothy 4:8-16 — What Is A Good Pastor?

May 7, 2017

Welcome to CrossWinds Spirit Lake Campus. Last week, we took a break from our studies in 1 Timothy. Pastor Stephen taught us about Sabbath. I hope you found his teaching beneficial and you feel well rested because this week we are back to work in 1 Timothy. Two weeks ago, when we were last in 1 Timothy, we were talking about having a plan for fitness. We were not just talking about physical fitness but more importantly spiritual fitness. The message was titled, "Get Fit for Jesus!" We learned that there is no replacement for hard work. Just as there is no substitute for the hard work at the YMCA for physical fitness, there is no substitute for the hard work of reading, studying and memorizing the Bible when it comes to spiritual fitness and becoming more like Christ in our lives. There is no magic pill to take you from a beer belly to a six pack, and there is no magic pill for spiritual maturity. Both physical and spiritual fitness involve hard work, accountability, having a plan and consistency.

The big difference is that while all the benefits of physical fitness fade in a matter of weeks, the benefits of spiritual fitness last for a lifetime and are even brought with us into eternity.

I hope you left two weeks ago encouraged not to just spend regular time at the YMCA but to also have a plan to do the hard work of spending time studying your Bible.

As we continue our way through 1 Timothy, Paul moved from teaching Timothy that maturity in Christ involves hard work to telling him there is also no substitute for hard work when it comes to pastoring. Young Timothy pastored the

mega church in the city of Ephesus and to do his job right, it involved hard work. So today we are going to see what it looks like to be a good pastor.

This sermon is a little weird because it is essentially my job description. What does it take to be a good pastor? While this sermon is directly applicable to yours truly, it still applies to each of us. This morning you will learn what to expect from a good pastor and how to find a good church. In addition, if God calls any of you into the pastoral ministry or church leadership — which I really hope he does — you need to know what the Bible says about what to strive for if you want to be good in ministry.

So this morning we have six qualifications of a good pastor.

1. A good pastor is committed to hard work.

...for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. 1 Timothy 4:8–11 (ESV)

We begin with the importance of physical training and spiritual training that we studied two weeks ago. Paul said the phrase, “Physical training is of some value but godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also the life to come.” Paul said, “This a trustworthy saying.” In other words, memorize these words. Put this verse on bumper stickers. Write it in the front of your Bible. Put it on a card and tuck it in the side of your mirror so you read it when you brush your teeth. This is something to remember.

Then he said, “For to this end we toil and strive.” Training oneself for godliness is something Paul and Timothy were to work hard to obtain.

The word *toil* literally means to labor until extremely fatigued. It means to work at something to the point of wearing yourself out. The word *strive* means to engage in a struggle or endure something that is painful, like a wrestling match or a judo match where it is hard and nobody gets a break. The Greek word for strive is the word *agonizomai*, which is where we get our word agony. Paul said when it comes to growing in godliness, it is worth wearing yourself out to the point of exhaustion and even enduring agony for spiritual growth.

Why is it worth working so hard to pursue godliness? Paul said the reason we pursue godliness is because our hope is in God. That means one day we will stand before Christ. Let me explain his idea. One day every one of us will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. As Christians we will be rewarded based upon how we have lived for Jesus.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)

While we are saved by faith in Christ alone, we are rewarded based on how we lived for Christ. It is worth wearing yourself out to become the godliest man or woman you can be so we are rewarded on that daily.

For pastors, here is the sober reality. Every pastor will be judged by Christ and rewarded by Christ on that day not just based upon his personal walk with Christ but he will be judged based upon how he pastored and disciplined his church. If the pastor sets the pace for the church, it is extremely important he works hard to grow in Christlikeness because others in the church will follow in his steps. To some degree pastors on that day are not just judged upon their own spiritual lives but as pastors they will be judged for how they helped others in

their walks with Christ. This is why it is extremely important that a pastor is willing to work to the point of exhaustion and even agony to grow in Christlikeness. He is not just responsible for himself. He is responsible for others. This was Paul's motto.

Him (Jesus) we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. Colossians 1:28–29 (ESV)

Paul said, "I take all the energy that God works in me, and I work myself to exhaustion so I can warn and teach everyone and present people to Christ mature in him on that day."

Good pastors do not think of their work like a librarian where they shelve books with no urgency. They are like fireman. They give every last bit of strength they have to their work because people's eternal lives are on the line.

Paul ended these verses with an interesting phrase I need to explain because it is often misunderstood. We are to work hard because we set our hope on the living God *who is the savior of all people, especially of those who believe*. That last phrase sounds like Paul was saying God saves everyone.

Was Paul teaching universalism?

Some people hear that God is the savior of all people, and they think this is teaching universalism, that God saves all people. If you think this verse teaches all people will be saved, you have a problem. That teaching clearly contradicts many other parts of the Bible which tell us everybody is not going to heaven. Paul, the same author, said this in Thessalonians.

...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do

not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...
2 Thessalonians 1:7b–9 (ESV)

These verses teach us there is a Lake of Fire. They also tell us two kinds of people will be in the Lake of Fire eternally. First, there will be those who do not know God. That is anyone who has not heard about Jesus Christ. Second, there will be those who hear the good news of Jesus but do not obey the gospel of Jesus. Those are people who hear about Jesus but consciously reject him.

Why would those who have never heard of Jesus end up in hell? That sounds unfair. Actually, it is fair. The Bible says everyone on the planet is sinful. Everyone on the planet deserves the Lake of Fire as a just response to his or her sin. There is no way anyone on the planet can save himself or herself from this problem. The only way to take care of the problem of sin is Jesus, God's own son. That is why God sent his son. Jesus came and died for our sin, so if we ask his death to pay for our sin we don't get what we deserve, which is eternal, conscious, never-ending punishment in the Lake of Fire. Now let's circle back to our original question: What did Paul mean when he said God saves all people? He clearly couldn't have meant all people are saved.

The key word to understand what Paul said in 1 Timothy is the word *especially*. God saves all people but he especially saves Christians. When we read the word *save in this context*, it can be misunderstood. The word *save* in this context doesn't refer to eternal salvation. The word *save* can also refer to temporal salvation. It doesn't always refer to eternal salvation.

For instance, if we were crossing the street in downtown Spirit Lake and we were waiting for a break in traffic, we thought we saw a break and at the last

minute a car comes flying around the corner that you don't see so I grab you and yank you out of the street at the last minute before the car hits you, what would you say? "Thank you for saving my life?" Paul said God rescues people all the time from earthly disasters simply because of his kindness. How many times have you had close calls where if you were 10 seconds earlier or 10 seconds later in a situation you would have been seriously hurt? Thank God for making you a little late or a little early to save your life!

While God saves all kinds of people this way all the time, he especially saves those who believe because he doesn't just save them from temporal disaster but he saves those in Christ from eternal disaster in the Lake of Fire by Jesus taking the punishment we deserve.

2. A good pastor is committed to godly character.

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. 1 Timothy 4:12 (ESV)

When Paul wrote this, Timothy was in his thirties. By the standards of his day, that was considered a young man. Timothy was in charge of the megachurch of Ephesus. You can almost hear the comments about his age when he had position of such high responsibility. How was Timothy to silence their criticism? He was to live a godly lifestyle. His lifestyle would quiet their criticism because a good pastor strives to live a godly lifestyle.

Speech — A good pastor is especially careful of his language. It is easy to let your mouth get you in trouble. Saying things you regret is like squeezing toothpaste out of a tube. No matter how much we wish we could put it back, we can't.

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. Ephesians 4:29 (ESV)

The word corrupting refers to rotten fruit. It doesn't just mean not using swear words but using rotten words that tear people down. A good pastor's words should not tear people down but they should build people up. That doesn't necessarily mean you don't have hard conversations. As a pastor, you need to have a lot of hard conversations but you have to have them in a loving way.

Conduct — Conduct refers to how someone lives his or her day-to-day life at the grocery store, at the gas station, at soccer games, while washing his or her car and when talking to neighbors. A pastor needs to be careful to not be one of those out-of-control parents on the sidelines at youth soccer games. Conduct matters.

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. James 3:13 (ESV)

Love — A good pastor is known for showing love to all kinds of people. People don't care what you know until they know you care.

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13 (ESV)

The good pastor gives his time and energy to the people he is called to serve before caring about himself. He puts the needs of others before his own.

Faith — In this context, the word faith is not referring to faith in God but faithfulness in your commitments. If a pastor says he will be at an appointment at 8 a.m. and he is persistently late, he is not being faithful. Faithfulness to commitments and to your word is especially important for a pastor.

Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. 1 Corinthians 4:2 (ESV)

Purity — In this context, it is referring to sexual purity. A pastor's purity is not just about the sexual actions of the outside of his life but about the purity of his heart. A good pastor goes out of his way to maintain sexual purity. This means a good pastor is like Mike Pence. He doesn't take a woman besides his wife out to dinner. If he does take another woman out to dinner, his wife comes along. He doesn't invite someone of the opposite sex into his home without his spouse present. Spending extended time alone with someone of the opposite sex that is not your spouse is unwise. It opens the possibility of a relationship. He doesn't go over to a woman's home and spend time behind closed doors with her if his own wife is not there. Even if nothing happens there is the problem of perception. Even if nothing happens, people think something happened and rumors can destroy you and cause damage to your reputation.

A good minister is ultra-careful when it comes to what he looks at on the Internet. Many pastors spend time in either hard-core and soft-core porn. I ran across this statistic during the week. More than 15 percent of men over age 60 admit to regularly viewing of pornography. Twenty percent of men in their 50s admit to regular porn. Twenty-five percent of men in their 40s do. Thirty percent of men in their 30s do. Fifty percent of men ages 18-29 admit to ongoing porn use.¹ A good pastor must maintain sexual purity, especially on the Internet where so many guys fall into sin.

¹ "A non-scientific survey of desiringGod.org readers, conducted online via social-media channels (April 2015)."

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife.. 1 Timothy 3:2 (ESV)

The phrase husband of one wife in the Greek literally reads a pastor is to be a one-woman-man. It is not referring to the number of times someone is married but to the exclusive devotion of the heart. A church leader must be radically faithful to the woman he marries. He is to be above reproach in the area of sexuality.

3. A good pastor is committed to teaching the Bible.

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. 1 Timothy 4:13 (ESV)

When it comes to teaching, Timothy was to devote himself to three things. The word devote means to give something continual attention. The first thing Timothy was to give his attention to was the public reading of the Scripture. If we study this, we can find in the Old Testament that on every Sabbath, the Word of God was read in the synagogues when people assembled for worship.

For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.” Acts 15:21 (ESV)

The church grew out of the Jewish synagogue. Early Christians kept up the practice of reading from the Old Testament Scriptures every week. They added to this practice and also began a weekly reading from the apostles' letters. Paul mentioned this a number of times in the New Testament. One occurrence is in the book of Thessalonians.

I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 1 Thessalonians 5:27 (ESV)

Church from the earliest days always involved a reading from the Old Testament and from the New Testament each Sunday. One reason they did this

is because people didn't have Bibles to read on their own. Even if they did, most people didn't know how to read so they needed to hear the Bible.

This is why Timothy was to make sure he read from the Bible each Sunday. Timothy was then to give himself to exhortation and teaching of the Bible passage that was read. Some translations use the words preaching instead of the word exhortation. The word preaching or the word exhortation means the same thing. They mean to *call people to a response to what they heard in the Bible*.

Timothy wasn't just to call people to respond to the word that was read but he was also to teach the Word. The word teaching means *to explain what was read and connect it with the rest of the Scriptures*. Paul instructed Timothy on how to preach his Sunday sermon. "First, you read from the Word, then you teach the word, and finally, you show people how it connects to their lives, and then you call them to obey and respond." That is called expository preaching.

It was taken for granted in the early church that all preaching would be expository preaching. That is the kind of preaching Paul instructed Timothy to follow as he led the church in Ephesus. Read the Bible, explain the Bible and call people to respond to the Bible. Why was it essential for Timothy to preach this way? Why was this the type of preaching the early church committed itself to follow? The authority of the sermon was to be the Word of God, not the preacher's opinions or recommendations. When you preach expositively all you are doing is bringing the text to the people. You are serving the Word of God to

the people of God. That is your authority, not something you made up in your own head.

This is why we preach through books of the Bible at CrossWinds. The Bible tells us to preach from the Word, not from the pastor's wisdom. That is why I am always telling you to keep your finger in the text. I have no authority. My opinions have no authority. God's Word is the only authority. All I can do is to show it to you, explain it to you and call you to obey it. That is what a good pastor does.

This is also why we follow the pattern of the early church, and we teach the Old Testament for a while and then teach the New Testament for a while. Like the early church, we study both sides of God's Word.

I say this because many pastors today are topical preachers. They write very creative sermons where they use a few key verses to decorate their message, not to be backbone of the message. If this is a continual practice, you find their thoughts guide the teaching not God's thoughts. While not all topical teaching is wrong, this is the danger of a consistently topical teacher.

There is another danger a good preacher must avoid. It is a practice we see in some mainline denominations. That is when a preacher touches a text but doesn't teach the text. The Word of God is read in the service but the message of the preacher is only vaguely connected with the passage at hand.

That is not the consistent practice of a good pastor.

4. A good pastor sees ministry as a calling and a privilege, not work as a job.

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. 1 Timothy 4:14 (ESV)

Timothy was to realize he wasn't serving as a church leader because he couldn't find a better job. It is a privilege to lead a church. The only reason anyone should pastor a church is because God calls him to the work and God gifts him for the work. If you can be happy in another job, work in another job.

Paul said Timothy was not to neglect his God-given gift of pastoring. The Bible says each of us are given different spiritual gifts from God for the purpose of building up of the church. Timothy was entrusted with the gift from God of pastoring. That is a high calling. He was to use it and not neglect it.

In addition, there was apparently a prophecy made to Timothy about pastoring. Someone with the gift of prophecy told Timothy he or she felt God was calling him to pastor a church. I don't want to get into a lengthy discussion of the gift of prophecy. I simply want to make this observation, if you have the gift of preaching or pastoring, when you use that gift in the church, there will be people that come up to you and affirm the gift. If nobody affirms you have the gift of pastoring, you have acid reflux, not a God-given gift.

In addition, when the church met, the leadership of the church gathered around Timothy, laid hands on him and prayed for him. They ordained Timothy for ministry. There wasn't just a few random people in the church that affirmed his pastoring gift but the leadership of the church formally stood behind him and set him apart for pastoral ministry. In a similar way, if God has called you to pastoral ministry, the church leader will stand behind you and you will go through what we

call an ordination service. If you have been gifted for pastoral ministry, affirmed in that gift by others and the leadership of the church has formally set you apart for that work, you must not neglect that gift.

5. A good pastor gives himself to continual improvement.

Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. 1 Timothy 4:15 (ESV)

This is probably my favorite verse in this section. It reminds us that Timothy was a pastor, but he wasn't a perfect pastor. He sometimes felt like throwing in the towel. He didn't always like his job. He often felt inadequate for the task. He sometimes struggled with his character. He felt terrible when he used hurtful words. He sometimes struggled in his preaching. He sometimes woke up on Mondays and wanted to hide because of his sermon. That was OK. He was not perfect, but he was making progress. A good pastor is always making progress and becoming a better pastor. I find that incredibly encouraging. I am painfully aware of my shortcomings. I am striving to make progress.

Not only was Timothy to make progress in becoming a better pastor but he was to practice the skills necessary for serving as a good pastor. Just like anything else, it takes practice to improve. It means every day work on something. It means to go over something again and again until you get it right. A good pastor makes a plan for continual improvement and growth. The only way to get better at pastoring is to practice the skills needed to pastor. It is hard work.

Timothy wasn't to take his progress in the faith and in his pastoral skills casually. He was to take his job seriously. Paul told him to immerse himself in his work. That means to be totally absorbed in your job. A good pastor must be

consumed by the work of pastoring and preaching. If you only have a passing interest in pastoring and preaching, it is impossible to be a good pastor.

It always worries me when you find a pastor that can find a lot of time for his hobbies. If you immerse yourself in the church and in continual improvement, the honest truth is you won't have time for hobbies. Caring for people, studying the Word, teaching the Word, loving people, and trying to sharpen your character to be more like Christ is a full-time job. If a pastor has a lot of time for hobbies, the truth is he is probably not working hard enough.

A good pastor will be continually improving himself because his job is important. Souls are at stake. Just as Paul agonized and wore himself out to present people mature in Christ, every good pastor will do the same. One day every pastor will stand in front of Jesus and give an answer for how he spent his time and how he led the church God entrusted into his hands. Telling Jesus "I could have done a better job but I was too busy with my hobby" is not a great answer.

6. A good pastor watches his life for mission drift.

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. 1 Timothy 4:16 (ESV)

A good pastor is constantly examining himself for mission drift. If you are like me, you can think of many pastors that started out well but as their influence grew, they flamed out or they failed out. Perhaps they succumbed to an affair because they didn't focus on the character issue of sexual purity. Others drift away from faithful Bible teaching because Biblical texts seem too hard to apply.

Other pastors flame out because as they grow in influence, they walk away from humility and into pride.

A good pastor is constantly checking his inner life and his teaching life for any kind of mission drift from this job description given by Paul. It is when a pastor is faithful all the way to the end of his life, not just faithful to retirement but faithful to death, that he not only saves himself but he has a great spiritual influence on everyone else through his ministry.

What Paul described is the dream of every pastor. It is the day they stand in front of Christ and they present to Jesus not just their lives but the churches they pastored, which Lord-willing, are mature in Jesus. The finish every pastor dreams of is that he didn't burn out of faith out of ministry but finished well and brought great glory to Jesus not just through his life but through the church he presents to Jesus on that day.

For years almost 20 years I have kept a verse on the bottom of my computer monitor so I would see it and be reminded of it every day.

For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 1 Thessalonians 2:19 (ESV)

The joy of Paul's life was the churches he pastored. He was looking forward to the day he would present them mature and complete to Jesus on that final day. I count it an incredible privilege to serve as your pastor. The joy of my life is you. I try to live each day looking forward to the joy of presenting you mature and complete to our savior on that final day.

Conclusion

What is the job description of a good pastor?

1. A good pastor is committed to hard work. He will literally wear himself out to grow in godliness.
2. A good pastor pursues a godly lifestyle. Purity, love, and character all matter.
3. A good pastor is committed to the expository teaching of the Bible. A good pastor doesn't just touch the text. He teaches and applies the text.
4. A good pastor doesn't neglect his God-given gifts and calling.
5. A good pastor constantly works at improvement.
6. A good pastor examines himself for mission drift.



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