

Marks Of A Good Minister

1 Timothy 4:11-16

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In 1 Timothy 4, I want you to see the context, Paul opens the chapter by saying, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some,” not all, but some, “shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils,” or demons, “Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared,” and they’ll do a couple of things. They’ll forbid marriage and also certain foods. They were practicing asceticism—the denying of the flesh. They were legalists. Basically, in the first five verses, he’s warning Timothy about the danger of false teachers, what we call apostates. Those are people who profess to be believers who say they follow Jesus Christ but were never regenerated or born again. They didn’t have a real faith and a certain time comes along where they turn and fall away. The word apostasy means falling away or to fall away. They fall away but were never really true believers. John says, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.”

When Paul comes to 1 Timothy 4:6, he begins to tell Timothy, as a pastor, what his duties and responsibilities are (don’t go there quite yet), and it runs from verses 6-16. We looked at that section last Wednesday night, so I want to start with verses 11-16. Let’s read that passage. Paul says, “These things,” these things are going to take us back to verses 6-10, so we’re going to go there in a moment. “These things command and teach. 12 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity,” love, “in spirit, in faith, in purity. 13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. 14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. 15 Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. 16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

It would be very easy to dismiss this section of the Bible tonight and just say, “It’s just for the pastor. It’s just for the minister. It’s just for the clergy. It’s just for the elders of the church.” You would be right in saying that it’s for them, but you wouldn’t be right in saying it’s just for them. Even though it has its primary application to the pastor, speaking to Timothy who is pastoring in Ephesus, it does have a secondary application that everything that Paul tells Timothy is true of the believer as well. When he talks about, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine,” and “...but be thou an example of the believers,” all of this is apropos and applicable to every believer. I’ll do my best tonight to try to give it that application as well because, obviously, I realize I’m not speaking to pastors. If I were, I would pick this as a text. This is a text for a pastor’s conference about the marks of a good minister.

In verse 11, Paul tells Timothy, “These things command and teach.” The question is: What “things” is Paul referring to? They go back to verse 6. Turn there with me (or look back there with me). He says, “If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou,” Timothy,

“shalt be a,” here’s our theme, “good minister,” so we have the marks of the good minister, “of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. 7 But refuse profane,” or unholy, “and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. 8 For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. 9 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. 10 For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.”

Now, I don’t want to get bogged down in rehearsing what we covered last week, but I wanted to tie it together because the section starts in verse 6 and runs to verse 16. In this whole section we’re going to cover tonight, we actually have 12 qualities of the faithful minister or the good minister. I just want to rehearse what I covered last week, the first six of them in verses 6-10. First of all, a good minister is a servant of Jesus Christ. The word “minister” means servant. It’s the idea that he is there to serve. If you are a Christian, you are to be a servant to others. Jesus said, “And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all,” right? So, a good minister is a servant.

Secondly, a good minister is a person who warns God’s people of error. He says to warn the brethren, “put the brethren in remembrance of these things.” He’s telling him to warn the people about the apostates, about the false teachers, those who would forbid marriage and those who would command to, “abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.” First, a good minister is marked by a servant’s heart. Secondly, he warns God’s people, and I went into great depth about that last week talking about the pastor’s job is not only to teach the positive truth of God’s Word but to also warn the sheep about wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Thirdly, a true or a good minister is to be a student of the Scripture. Notice it in verse 6, “...nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.” He’s to be built up and grounded in the Word of God. The great Donald Grey Barnhouse actually said that if he only had three years of ministry, that he would take the first two and study the Bible. He would prepare himself for that last one year of ministry, so a minister needs to know the Word of God and be a student of Scripture.

Fourthly, (I wanted you to get these points) he avoids foolish teaching, “But refuse profane and old wives’ fables,” or fairy tales, “and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.” The last thing you want is a pastor that follows all the silly teachings and false doctrines that come along. Believe me, all the time, there are all these winds of doctrines coming down the pike, and he needs to avoid these “profane” or unholy “and old wives’ fables,” these fairy tales, “and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.” This is the fifth, the true or good or faithful minister disciplines himself for godliness. “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” He has the discipline of godliness.

Sixthly, he works hard and is willing to suffer for the sake of Christ. Notice verse 10. “For

therefore we both labour," we agonize, we work hard. It speaks of wearisome toil, "and suffer reproach," so those are the two marks of a faithful minister. They're hard-working and willing to suffer reproach for the name of Christ, "because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." Now, without skipping a beat, verse 11, "These things," the things we just read in verses 6-10, "command and teach." Paul is actually telling Timothy to go back to what I just spoke about and there encouraging him to teach them.

If you're taking notes, there are six more qualities and marks that I want to bring out about the good minister, the marks of a good minister. First, he teaches with authority. I want you to notice this in verse 11. "These things command and teach." The word "command" there is in the present tense and means to teach with authority. The way that a pastor preaches and teaches with authority is that he preaches the Word of the Lord. He is able to say, "Thus saith the Lord," this is what God's Word says. It's not speculation, it's proclamation. It's taking what God's Word says and proclaiming it with power and authority. When Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 to "Preach the Word," the word "preach" is the word *kerysso* and means to herald with authority and gravity. It means to be very serious and authoritative in the way you preach the Word of God. You know, you don't namby-pamby around, and you don't skip over issues. You preach the clear text of Scripture.

When the Bible is clear, we can be dogmatic. People get upset with preachers because, "Oh, they think they know everything," and "They think they're so right," but a preacher worth its salt is preaching the Word and can speak with God's authority. The authority isn't the preacher. The authority isn't the church. The authority isn't the denomination. The authority is the Bible. It's the Word of God, right? If the Word of God is being proclaimed, then he can speak with that kind of authority. I think that there's a lot of lack today in our modern church of true biblical preaching and as a result there's a lot of preaching that lacks authority. The authority lies in the Scripture. It's not in psychology. It's not in philosophy. It's not in feeling good. It's not in my experience or my story or whatever that might be. A lot of preachers today talk about, "I have a word from the Lord for you," and that "word" is actually the Bible. If you don't preach the Bible, you don't really have a "word" for God's people. So, the first mark of a good minister is that he teaches the Word of God with authority. By the way, those words "command" and "teach" not only speaks to do it with authority but it is in the present tense. Those words "command" and "teach" is in the present tense which means you're to continually, ongoingly be teaching with authority.

Let me give you the second mark of a good minister. By the way, I believe, too, that as believers—you and I, as Christians—when you go about your business in the world, that you can share with authority the truth of God's Word. You can say, "Thus, saith the Lord." When you quote Scripture, and you tell people what the Bible says about Jesus, about heaven, about hell, about sin, and about eternal things, you are speaking with the authority of God; so don't be afraid to just preach the truth.

Notice the second mark of a good minister (verse 12), he's a model of spiritual virtue. Now, don't misunderstand that. It doesn't mean that he's perfect. It doesn't mean that he glows in

the dark. It means that he is a person who is living a godly life, but he's not perfect by any means. Notice what Paul says in verse 12, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers," not to the believer but be an example of the believer so that people can look at you and see what a Christian really is. Paul gives the areas that he's to be an example, "in word, in conversation, in charity," in my King James or love, "in spirit," which is omitted in some modern translations, "in faith, in purity." They're all stand-alone points that he makes. Notice, "in word, in conversation, in charity," love, "in spirit, in faith, in purity."

It seems to be evident that Timothy was on the younger side. It's believed that when he first started to travel with Paul the Apostle that he was a teenager. Think about that. Would you imagine giving your son to Paul to take off on some wild trip? And, traveling in those days must've been so difficult. I tell you, I do not like to travel. I've traveled a lot over the years. I don't travel at all like I used to, but anytime I travel it's like, "Oh, great. Fun." You know, airport security, airplanes, hotels, all the rigor of travel, the food and the diet, the time changes and all that stuff. It's just not fun. I often try to imagine how difficult it would've been to travel with Paul the Apostle—to travel by these ancient vessels and to sleep out on the dirt and have nowhere to eat, no place to sleep. It's just very, very hard and difficult travels. It's believed by most scholars that Timothy was about 17 years old when he took off with Paul. At this point in time, we don't know, we can only guess, but the best scholarship puts Timothy's age somewhere between 30, maybe 35 or 40 at the oldest, so somewhere between 30 and 40 years of age. In this time period, that would be very young to be in spiritual leadership.

When I was a young pastor...I'm a pastor still, but I'm not a young pastor anymore. When I was young and a pastor, this verse really encouraged me. I remember when I was teaching the Bible, if someone came into the church with gray hair I freaked out, you know, "Oh, an old person's here." If someone over 30 showed up for Bible study, it's like, "Huh uhh uhh," I was scared to death. I read these verses, "Let no man despise thy youth," the challenge is, "Well, I don't know that much," or "They know more than I did," or "They've been a Christian longer than I have," or "They're older than I am." That must've been what Timothy was going through, so he's wanting to encourage him. He says, "Don't let anyone despise your youth." The word "despise" means to look down upon, to despise, or to hold in contempt. "Don't let anyone look down upon you because you're young," so we should speak with authority and we should also model spiritual virtue and not let anyone despise us as young people. He says, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example," a pattern or picture of what a true believer should be.

There's an interesting emphasis in this passage written to a pastor because it deals with character and then it deals with doctrine. Those are two ingredients in a good pastor. He has to be a man of character, and he has to be a man of sound doctrine. I think one should lead to the other, and you can't have one without the other. I think that as believers we should have the same. This verse definitely applies to every believer. We should all seek to be an example of the believers. Somebody should be able to look at you and say, "That's what a Christian is to be. That's what a Christian is to do. That's what a Christian is to be like."

Let's break it down. In what areas was he to be an example? First of all, in his word. This is his speech. These are the things he says. If you're a professing Christian, people are listening to what you say.

You are writing a Gospel,

A chapter each day,

By deeds that you do,

By words that you say.

Men read what you write,

Whether faithless or true;

Say, what is the Gospel

According to you?

Believe it or not, people are listening to the way you talk, the words you use, and the way you talk to people. So, he's speaking of his words. They are to be an example.

The second, in my King James translation, has "in conversation," and that's an old English word that was actually used for the way you live or the manner of living. The first is his speech, and the second is his conduct. "Conversation" there isn't the way you talk, it's the way you walk. He first tells him to talk properly and then to walk properly—the way he lives and his conduct should be exemplary.

The third example that we're to be as believers is, the King James has, "in charity," or love. Certainly, if you confess and profess to be a Christian, you should be loving, right? It's inconsistent to say, "Well, I'm a Christian, but I'm not one of the loving kind. I'm one of the mean Christians," you know, "I don't like people, and I get down on people," and "I'm a Christian, but I'm not a loving one." Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Sometimes you think it means if you have a Revival bumper sticker on your car or you wear a Christian t-shirt or listen to Christian music, "By this shall they know you're My disciples." No, that you have love. Love is the birthmark of a believer. God is love. The Bible says, "How can we say we love God and we don't love people?" That's inconsistent, so the way we speak, the way we live, and our love should be God's love flowing through us. As I said, some translations have omitted the word "in spirit," and that's because it doesn't appear in some, not all, but some of the older manuscripts; but if it does belong here, it means in our zeal. In our enthusiasm, we should be examples.

Then, "in faith." The word "faith" is talking not about "the faith"—the body of truth that we believe—but it's talking about our faithfulness. It's talking about being reliable people or being faithful.

You know, one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is faithfulness—love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness. We are to be marked by that fruit in our life that we are to be faithful and committed people.

Last, but not least, “in purity.” We’re to be people who are walking in purity. Some scholars believe that the purity here is not necessarily a reference to living a pure and holy life but about our motive in ministry. I think that’s an interesting point, not just that we should live pure lives, but in the context that Paul is talking to Timothy more about his ministry and that he should be an example in his words, in the way he lives, in his love, in his zeal, in being faithful, and that he should be motivated—have a motive of a pure heart and have a pure motive. In other words, that he shouldn’t be ministering with any duplicity or hypocrisy. Mark number one of a faithful ministry, he teaches with authority. Mark number two, he models spiritual virtue. It’s inconsistent to think that you can be a minister of the gospel but not live the gospel, so we need to have both in our lives.

Let me give you mark number three, (we have six, we’re almost halfway through) he has a Bible-centered ministry. This is one of my favorite verses in the entire Bible, believe it or not, verse 13. Paul says to this young pastor, Timothy, “Till I come,” in other words, “I’m going to come meet with you. You’re in Ephesus. I’m in Rome. I’m at a distance away, but I’m going to come to you; and until I get there, until I come to meet with you, I want you to “give attendance,” pay attention to, I want you to focus on, I want you to actually do these three things: I want you to read (and this is the Scriptures), exhort, and then I want you to teach doctrine.” Again, you might be saying, “Oh, you know, this is not for me. This is for the pastor,” and strictly speaking, you would be right, but I think this is something that we could all take to heart, that we can all use to minister to other people. If I’m speaking to pastors, this certainly is apropos and applicable to them. He’s basically saying, “Timothy, I want you to have a Bible-centered, Bible-focused ministry.” I believe that’s what a New Testament pastor of the church is called to do and be today. He’s all about the Bible, the Bible, the Bible, the Bible, the Bible. He’s not a program director. He’s not to just lead groups and put things together and kind of be an organizer, you know. He’s to be a Bible-centered, Bible-focused, Bible-preaching man of God. That’s what a pastor’s about.

Let’s go back to the verse and I’ll explain what I’m talking about. Paul says, “Till I come,” I want you to do these three things, “give attendance to reading.” In the Greek it’s actually “the reading.” He’s not just saying read books. He’s saying “the reading.” The reading of what? The reading of Scripture. Paul is actually telling this pastor, and this is a mandate, by the way, “You are to read the Scripture in the church.” It’s a sad day when people come to church and don’t hear the Bible read. It still blows my mind how many times people come to Revival and don’t have a Bible and just fold their arms or just kind of look at me like, “Bless me, preacher boy,” you know. It’s like, “You don’t bring your Bible. You don’t follow in your Bible.” I mean, if you’ve been coming here at all for very long you know that the first thing I always say is, “Open your Bibles,” right? This is the church of “open your Bibles.” Bring your Bible, open your Bible, follow me in your Bible—we’re going to read the Bible, we’re going to preach the Bible, you’re going to hear the Bible until the Lord takes me home or I drop dead or whatever happens, I

don't know. That's basically when I'm going to...by God's grace, that's what I want to keep doing is be all about the Bible. Like it or not, I'm a Bible-preaching, Bible-teaching, Bible-thumping pastor, that's what I am. That's what I'm about, and that's what Paul says Timothy is supposed to do. He's supposed to actually just open the Bible and read.

Do you know there's value in just opening the Bible and reading it? You know when we open the Bible and we read it, that you're hearing God speak? When the Bible speaks, God speaks. That's why I love John R.W. Stott, that amazing statement he said, "God speaks through what He has spoken." I love that! "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," it's God breathed, and "...holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." When the Bible speaks, God speaks; and the goal of preaching, by the way, this is one of my soap box, the goal of preaching...(by the way, we've recently put together a little booklet on preaching. You may not be a preacher, and these books are kind of for preachers and have been distributed to pastor's conferences; but if you go into our little bookstore, there's a little book called The Charge, and we put together a book about preaching. You can get that and give it to other pastors or read it yourself.)

The goal of the preacher is to let God speak through His Word and to get out of the way. It's to let God's Word speak and run its course and to get out of the way. This is why I like to read the entire text without comment, without any points, without saying anything. I just like to start and read the whole text, so you are hearing the Word of God read. Then, we go back and I read it again as we unpack it. So, by the time you leave a message, we've read it three or four times, over and over, and unpacked every verse because there's virtue in that. That's what he's telling Timothy to do. By the way, this is in the context of public ministry. Should a minister read the Bible on his own private time? Yes, but he should also read the Bible in the church. Some more liturgical traditional churches, and I think this is commendable, just have a reading. They just open the Bible, the congregation stands, and they either read it together or they listen to the pastor read it, but you just hear the Word of the Lord. The opposite has happened today in the church where very little is read and a lot is spoken. They usually read one little verse and then a lot of preaching, a lot of jokes, a lot of stories, a lot of humor and life application but very little text; or they pull text from different assorted places and don't ever put it in its context, so you never learn the Bible. It's just a motivational speech, it's not really Bible teaching. So, the first thing he's supposed to do is read the text.

The second thing he will do, (and I'm going to take it in a slightly different order, although it's not necessary) he's to teach the text. This is doctrine. The word "doctrine," didactic there, the word literally means teaching. When you find the word "doctrine" in the Bible, it literally means teaching. When you have the word "sound" in front of it, it's a medical term. It means healthy or life-giving teaching. You know, we freak out, "Oh, that's doctrinal. We don't want to get into doctrine." Doctrine is just teaching. The doctrine of God is the teaching about God, the doctrine of Christ, the teaching about Christ, and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, it's the teaching about the Holy Spirit. Don't freak out about doctrine. Doctrine is basically just teaching, and again, the pastor is to read the text and then explain the text. He's to do that in the historical, grammatical, and theological context. He's not to impose his ideas or his thoughts into the text.

He's to pull out what the grammar says, what's going on historically in the setting and what theological truths are found there, and how does it sync with other things that are taught in the Bible beginning with a literal interpretation of the Word of God, not to allegorize or spiritualize it or to change the word but to just say, "God said what He meant and meant what He said." So, it goes like this: You read the text, and then explain the text—doctrine—you teach it. I do believe that it's important to have teaching, didactic content, in the sermon.

A sermon that doesn't have teaching or truth, there's no substance to it. I listen to other sermons sometimes by different people, and like I said, it's very exciting and humorous and the speakers are charismatic and get you laughing and tell stories, but there's no didactic doctrinal content. You don't learn anything. There's no information, and I think that's tragic because Christians do not grow in their faith and walk with God.

The third thing that they are to do (verse 13) is exhortation. "Timothy, read the text, explain the text, and then apply the text." Exhortation would be the idea of putting it in shoe leather. That would be the idea of how it applies to us and how we live it out in our lives. This would be the motivational kind of preaching aspect to it. Some actually think that this word could be translated "preach" the text or herald the text. So, there's three things that you do: you read the verse, explain the verse, and then apply the verse. That's just basic but super important—read it, interpret it, and then apply it. By the way, I never planned on saying all this either tonight, but you must first know what the text says, know what the text means, before you can know how the text applies. I cannot tell you how valuable that is. If you don't get anything else I tell you tonight, get that, okay? Write those three things down: know what the text says, know what the text means, and then you can know how the text applies.

A large portion, and forgive me for keep making this reference, but a large portion of preaching that I hear reads the text and jumps right to the application. You begin to look and listen to other preachers and see if I'm not right. They read the verse and then they jump immediately to application, but you can't properly apply a text until you have properly interpreted the text. You need to know what it says, you need to know what it means, then you can know how it applies. Whether it applies to me or applies to you or someone else, you need to put it in its context. That's why I took the time tonight before we even go through these verses to explain, Paul's writing to this pastor, Timothy. False teachers have come into the church, and he's telling him what his duty is in light of them. So, you have these qualifications, these marks of what a faithful minister is.

You can see why I love this verse so much because my life's calling has been to be a pastor and to pastor and preach the Word. My passion is to encourage young pastors to be preachers of the Word—to read the text, explain the text, and apply the text, doing these three things. When Paul met with these very elders in Ephesus in Acts 20, he actually said, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." He shared the Word with them. In Ephesians 4, Paul said that God's given to the church pastor-teachers, and then he tells us why, "For the perfecting," maturing, "of the saints," so that they won't be like children, "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine."

In 1 Peter 5:2, Peter says to the elders, “Feed the flock of God which is among you.” In 2 Timothy 4 (my all-time favorite passage) Paul says, “Preach the Word,” and he tells him how to preach it, “be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” He tells him why to preach it, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” One of the saddest things for me as a pastor is that people have itching ears and gravitate to the sensational and the exciting and to the practical, and they don’t gravitate toward the doctrinal, the expositional, and the exegetical preaching of the Word. They want the thrills and the excitement and the goosebumps and the, “Whoa, that’s so exciting.” It’s kind of like a pep rally. Now, I’m all for getting excited. I’m all for getting pumped up; but if there’s no content to it, you’re not going to grow as a believer.

So, I don’t want to lose sight of this whole passage. First, he is to be a man who teaches with authority, is marked by spiritual virtue, and thirdly, he has a Bible-centered ministry. I chuckled at J. Vernon McGee this afternoon when I was reading him on this text. He says, “God have mercy on the minister who is not giving out the Word of God. It would be better for that man to be a gangster.” I thought that was pretty funny. Good ol’ J. Vernon McGee. He said, “God have mercy on the pastor that doesn’t give out the Word of God. He might as well go out and be a gangster.” I thought, Wow! That’s pretty radical!

Here’s the fourth. Write it down. It’s verse 14. A good minister fulfills his calling. “Neglect not the gift that is in thee,” Paul tells Timothy, “which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.” This is a fascinating verse. Don’t neglect your gift, Timothy. He said, “Don’t let anyone despise your youth,” and then “Don’t neglect the gift that you have.” Apparently, Timothy was timid and kind of intimidated because of older people and maybe he was pulling back and wasn’t exercising the gift that God had given to him. There’s a lot of things I could say about this verse, but it is interesting that God the Holy Spirit gave him a gift. Don’t misinterpret verse 14 as though the leadership in a church can lay hands on you and impart a spiritual gift. That ain’t gonna happen (forgive my grammar), it just ain’t gonna happen. No one can lay their hands on you and impart a spiritual gift.

A gift of the Spirit comes from, duh, Who? The Spirit, right? If it’s a gift of the Spirit, it comes from the Spirit. The Bible actually teaches that the Spirit has given every believer a gift—at least one gift—according to His will. So, whatever your gift of the Spirit is, it’s given to you by the Holy Spirit, and it’s a gift from the Holy Spirit—you don’t earn it, merit it, discern it, but you can exercise it. It can lie dormant if you don’t step out in faith and do what you can do to use that gift for the good of others and for the glory of God. God might give you the gift of teaching, and if you don’t study the Bible, you’re not going to teach very well. If you’re called to teach the Bible, then you need to study the Bible, and then you need to take a step of faith and exercise your gift. Whatever gift God has given you, you need to be bold and step out and use it for God’s glory. But, this is talking about when Timothy was ordained to the ministry that God had called him to, being a pastor-teacher, “Neglect not the gift,” don’t let it lie dormant.

I think, again, it's so applicable to you and me as believers tonight. What is the gift God has given you? Don't let it lie dormant. Don't put it on a shelf. Don't bury it under the ground somewhere. Whatever gift God has given you, you should use it. You should exercise it. It's not for you, by the way, the gift isn't for you to be famous. It's not for you to get any advancement. It's for others to be blessed and edified and for God to be glorified. Someone said, "The gifts aren't candy, and the gifts aren't jewelry; the gifts are tools for us to build up other people." God gave him this gift.

Evidently, there was a prophecy (and whether it was Paul or some other prophet in the church, we don't know), but someone spoke a prophetic word and said that the Lord had called Timothy to preach, and then they laid hands on him. Why did they lay hands on him? They laid hands on him to show that they were commissioning him and that they were participating with him, that they were part of what God was doing in and through his life. Nothing is imparted by the laying on of hands, but it's a show of unity, harmony, and support. The leaders of the church are called the presbytery here. They would lay their hands on Timothy in his ordination, no doubt, and recognize that God had given him this gift.

Another way to know what your gift is, too, by the way, is that the leadership and the membership of the church will acknowledge, recognize, and see it. I've often said, "If you think you have a gift, but you're the only one that thinks it, maybe you don't have it. Okay?" "I got the gift of teaching," and everybody goes, "No...you don't." "I got the gift of music." "No...you don't." If you have a gift, when you begin to use it, people will be edified, people will be encouraged, people will recognize, "Hey, God's given you that gift."

I remember when I was just starting to teach the Bible. I had no aspirations to be a pastor, no idea I'd ever be a pastor, and I just started teaching the Bible. I had an opportunity to go for some training, for pastoral training, and I was really apprehensive. I got accepted into this kind of week-long class of preparing pastors to do ministry. It was back in the early 70's, and I remember being real discouraged like, "I don't know if I'm supposed to be here. I don't know if I'm supposed to do that." It was a member of the Bible study that I taught, a young fellow that said, "John, it's obvious God has given you a gift to teach. Move forward with that. Move ahead with what God has called you to do." Just that one little word of affirmation kind of helped direct my whole life. It was just a quick little statement one night together in his apartment when I was discouraged, just that, "John, God's called you to teach. It's obvious. It's evident." I thought, Oh, thank you for that encouragement. I stepped in that direction and it set the course for my whole life, so you never know what you can do to encourage somebody.

Maybe you know somebody that's got a gift and you need to go to them and say, "Don't neglect your gift," like Paul told Timothy, "Don't neglect your gift." Maybe someone needs to say that to you, or you need to say that to someone else encouraging them to use that gift that God has given them. It's so very important. Don't neglect that gift that God has given you, and you recognize that gift by the laying on of hands on Timothy. Some translations have, "Be not careless about your gift," or be diligent in the tending to the gift that God has given you. So, the gifts come from the Spirit, but they're required for our cooperation. It's obvious that they require

our cooperation.

Let me give you the fifth mark of a good minister. He is loyal or devoted to his calling (verse 15). So, now Paul says, "Meditate upon these things." He starts in verse 11 with "these things," and now from verses 11-14, he says, "I want you to meditate on these things." Now, by that he means study these things, ponder them, give attention to these things. So, focus on these things, "give thyself wholly to them," this is a radical statement here. By the way, verses 15-16 contain a whole series of imperatives or what are called commands. They're not options. He's actually commanding Timothy, "I want you to think about this. I want you to study this. I want you to ponder it. I want you to pay attention to it," and in verse 15, "give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting," or progress, "may appear to all."

This really spoke to me today as I was studying this to share with you tonight; that is, he's telling this young pastor that he is supposed to be devoted to his calling as a minister. He's to be a one-minded man. He's not to be distracted with other things. He's to be wholeheartedly devoted to his occupation. Some translations have, "Be wrapped up in them." What it means is that if God has called you to be (let me speak to the pastors first, in case some of them listen to this) a pastor, don't be anything else. If God has called you to be a pastor, focus on being a pastor. There have been point in times in my life, "Well, I could do this and make some money," or "I could start a business here," or "I could go get a job here," or "I could go get a job on the side," or "Maybe I ought to preach part-time and do this full-time or lead here," and the truth is that if God's called you, you need to be fully, completely, with all your heart committed to and concentrated on what God has called you to do. Too many pastors are sidetracked into other things, and they're not fully devoted to, they're not one-track minded. Paul said, "...but this one thing I do," the idea there is you're never off duty.

In 2 Timothy 4, Paul says to Timothy, "Preach...in season, out of season," he's to make full proof of his ministry. I love that "in season, out of season." That means when it's en vogue or it's popular and when it's not popular, when it's in season and when it's not in season. It's always preaching season, right? It's not always hunting season. It's not always fishing season, but it's always preaching season. So, all the time be completely devoted. I like the idea of being wrapped up in these things that I'm teaching you. Be completely concentrated and focused on what you are doing.

Sixthly and lastly, and by the way, at the end of verse 15, I missed it, he says, "...that thy profiting may appear to all." It has the idea of your progress. A pastor should be growing. One of the best compliments a pastor can get is that he's growing in his walk with God, he's growing in his preaching, he's growing. He doesn't just stagnate or sit where they're at. The same thing is true of you, right? If someone comes up to you and says, "Man, I've really seen you grow in the Lord. I've really seen you blossom in the Lord." You say, "Oh, praise the Lord, I'm growing." So, we don't want to stagnate. We want to be progressing. If we devote ourselves to that, we will.

Paul closes with a summary in verse 16. "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine;

continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” Here’s my sixth and last point. I don’t know if I got you confused or didn’t make it clear, but the sixth and last mark of a good minister is that he is growing spiritually. He is growing and progressing.

At the end of verse 15, “...that thy profiting may appear to all.” Then he says, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee,” really good sound advice for the minister. Now, notice, “Take heed unto thyself,” you are to be focusing on your own personal walk and relationship with God, and the second is the doctrine. These are the two important areas of our lives, whether you’re a pastor or not. Every one of us Christians, take heed about your walk with God. You want a happy marriage? Focus on your walk with God. You want to have a happy heart? Focus on your walk with God. You want to be effective in serving the Lord? Focus on your walk with God. Focus on that relationship with God and then the doctrine. So, “Take heed unto thyself,” this is your own personal life in growth in holiness, “and unto the doctrine,” and this is your truth and your teaching. By the way, this is a summary of verses 11-15. When he says, “Take heed unto thyself,” that goes back to verse 12 where he says, “...but be thou an example,” and when he says, “and unto the doctrine,” it goes back to verse 13 where he tells him “to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine,” to preach and teach sound doctrine. Those are the two categories, so you’re to be focusing on your personal walk with God, and you are to be focusing on your truth, your doctrine. You’re to prepare not only your sermons, but you’re also to prepare yourself and your own heart.

The results (verse 16), “...for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” He’s not trying to teach there that we save ourselves or we work our way to heaven, but he’s actually saying that if you’re devoted to your ministry—you watch your life, you preach sound doctrine—that you’re going to have a fruitful and long ministry. You’re going to have an effective ministry. You’re going to save your ministry, your life, and eventually end up in heaven. You’ll also bless those “that hear thee.” What a great blessing it is when a man of God preaches the Word of God, and the people of God flourish in the house of God because of the faithful ministry.

Now, as I said, he’s speaking primarily to pastors, but every one of these points, (there were 12 of them, by the way, because we went back and looked at the first six and then the second six, and I hope you got them all down) go back and meditate on them. They’re applicable to every one of us as people of God. Amen? Let’s pray.