

# Prepare for Leadership

**Lesson Text:** 1 Timothy 4:6-16 **Background Scripture:** 1 Timothy 4:6-16

**Devotional Reading:** Philippians 3:17-4:1

## 1 TIMOTHY 4:6-16

*<sup>6</sup> If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. <sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. <sup>8</sup> For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. <sup>9</sup> This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. <sup>10</sup> That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.*

*<sup>11</sup> Command and teach these things. <sup>12</sup> Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. <sup>13</sup> Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. <sup>14</sup> Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.*

*<sup>15</sup> Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. <sup>16</sup> Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

## TODAY'S AIM

- **Facts:** to show some important facts that spiritual leaders must keep in mind as they lead the church.
- **Principle:** to know that effective spiritual leaders are aware of what is truly important and watch their lives and teaching.
- **Application:** to understand that for effective leadership in the church, one must prepare with care and caution.

## INTRODUCTION

How does one prepare for leadership? There is no single answer to this question because different types of leadership are needed in different fields of work. In addition, different personalities respond to different kinds of challenges. So the path to leadership takes varying routes.

There are, however, certain themes common to preparing for leadership. One is the mastery of the knowledge and skills required in one's vocation. For some this comes through formal education in college or training in technical schools and programs. For others it takes the form of apprenticeships or training on the job.

## AIMING AT NOTHING

There is an old story about a man who passed by a curious looking barn. On the side of the barn were painted several targets, each with an arrow exactly in the center of the bull's-eye. The man saw the farmer standing nearby and remarked, "Someone must be a very good archer, to have hit all those bull's-eyes." The farmer replied, "Well, not really. My son shoots those arrows in the barn and then paints a target around each of them, wherever they strike."

Many people live that way. They aim at no special target in life; they simply accept whatever happens. They aim at nothing; they hit it every time, and pretend that what they end up with is just fine.

Followers of Jesus cannot afford to live aimless lives. Our Lord became a man and died for us to achieve a goal: to make us his forgiven people, now and forever. His goal is now our goal. Having received salvation in Christ, we should want our lives to reflect that salvation, to be conformed to his will. And we should want others to enjoy the same kind of life.

## **LESSON BACKGROUND**

The background for today's lesson is the same as that of our two previous lessons, thus that information need not be repeated here. One item that can receive additional attention, however, is the presence of the so-called *mystery religions* in the area around Ephesus, the city where Timothy ministered. Such religions taught that one can have an exalted spiritual status by learning secret knowledge and observing special rules about abstaining from certain foods and from marriage. Apparently, some of this thinking had infected the church at Ephesus.

In response, Paul discussed the revealed nature of the Christian "mystery" extensively in his letter to the Ephesians (see Ephesians 1:9; 3:2–11; 5:32; 6:19). Further, Paul specifically gave Timothy instructions to pass on to that church regarding how to live together and choose leaders in ways that reflect the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the passage just prior to today's text, Paul warned that the kind of false teaching the church confronted was exactly characteristic of "the latter times." From the perspective of the gospel, such times began with the resurrection of Jesus. So the struggle with false teaching was serious. It represents the battle of the end times.

That description of false teaching raises questions. What should the church's leaders do to counter such teaching? What strategy should leaders employ in this battle? The answer is to focus our aim on the right target and understand the right means of hitting that target.

## **OVERCOMING THE EFFECTS OF FALSE TEACHING (1 Timothy 4:6-11)**

Paul counseled Timothy on how to counteract the false teachings. Timothy's duty was to " *point these things out* (1 Tim. 4:6). "*These things*" included all that Paul had just revealed – that false teaching would come; that it would foster ascetic practices; and that God does not favor such teaching and practices.

God's blessing is not to be found by avoiding certain foods or abstaining from marriage or in any other practice that is unrelated to the good news of Jesus (compare Colossians 2:20–23). Timothy's aim is to direct his people back to the truth and away from such teaching.

By directing his people back to the truth, Timothy would be accounted a worthy servant of Jesus Christ. Timothy was qualified to accomplish this task because he was a servant of Jesus Christ. As one who leads the church, Timothy is no less and no more than a servant of Christ. Being Christ's servant means first of all being devoted to training oneself in the true gospel teaching.

Therefore his sound teaching must be based on the fact that he was regularly feeding on the truths of the faith and on sound teaching. To instruct the church, the minister himself must have understanding. The idea of being nourished speaks of an ongoing process. The truths of the faith are the truths of the gospel, and sound doctrine contrasts with the falsehood encountered.

### ***1. How was Timothy to counteract false doctrine? How was he qualified to do this (1 Timothy 4:6)?***

Compared with the good news of Jesus, what the false teachers offer is utterly worthless and ridiculous. The fact that their stories are *profane* means that they are devoid of anything connected with God.

“Old wives’ fables” are “myths.” That phrase is used in Paul’s time to express the complete worthlessness of a story or idea. Of course, everyone knows that men as well as women can circulate such falsehoods, as can the young as well as the old.

These myths perhaps seek to embellish the stories of the Old Testament to promote the false teachers’ concepts (compare 1 Timothy 1:4; Titus 1:14).

A person who gives attention to such myths will necessarily give less attention to the right objective: true godliness. The term “godliness” means the kind of life that shows proper respect for God. Timothy should pursue godliness as an athlete pursues fitness through exercise. Sports and physical fitness are an interest in Paul’s culture just as they are in ours (compare 1 Corinthians 9:24). The comparison stresses that godliness, like athletic fitness, increases with diligent practice.

## ***2. What were these false teachers offering (v. 7)?***

Paul pointed out the superior value of godliness by contrasting it with bodily exercise (1 Tim. 4:8). When he said that “*physical training is of some value*,” he was not disparaging it but pointing out its limited usefulness. It is limited in the kind of benefit it brings (bodily) and in the duration of its benefit (a little while). But godliness “*has value for all things*”—that is, in all directions. The godly person is a better person in all realms.

Godliness also has a more durable value—holding promise for both present life and the life that is yet to come. The value of physical exercise ends when we pass from this body, but godliness has value forever. And this eternal value is not just for the benefit of the godly minister himself; it extends to all who are influenced by him.

In verse 9, as well as 2 Timothy and Titus, Paul labels a number of statements as “*trustworthy*” or true (1 Timothy 1:15; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8). These seem to be memorable statements that encapsulate key truths. These statements need to be considered carefully and remembered well. So Paul applies that label to his previous statement about the benefits of exercising toward godliness. There can be nothing more important than pursuing what is best in life: genuine spiritual maturity.

## ***3. How is godliness superior to bodily exercise (vs. 8,9)?***

Because godliness is the greatest good one can pursue, it is worth pursuing no matter the difficulties. Thus Paul uses terms that emphasize the effort that godliness deserves.

Why should anyone pursue such a difficult task? Paul gives the reason: who God is and what He has done. The phrase *the living God* stresses that the Christian’s trust is in the true God who is active in the world, not in idols that have no reality. This true God has done something extraordinary for us: He gave himself for the sake of all people, so He is the Savior of all. But for that salvation to be effective, the sinner must accept it. Therefore, God is more particularly the Savior of *those that believe*.

If the true God has done this great thing, what in life can be more important than responding to what He has done?

## ***4. What motivates and enables us to labor and strive for godliness (v. 10)?***

### **What Do You Think?**

In what ways have you or those you know suffered reproach for the cause of Christ? What has been the result?

### **Talking Points for Your Discussion**

- Verbal abuse
- Financial hardship
- Physical abuse
- Discrimination

Paul concluded this exhortation (recommend strongly) with the words " *Command and teach these things.*" (1 Tim. 4:11). "These things" refers to all that has preceded—warnings against false teachers, encouragement to godly living, and trust in the living Savior-God. The present imperatives "command and teach" stress the need for continual reminders.

Christians base their faith on God's revelation in history, and their spiritual stability depends on consistent teaching of it. Timothy needed to know, as all pastors today, that his responsibility did not end with exhortations and commands. He had to teach God's truth consistently so that believers would understand the basis for their faith.

Rightly understood, the good news of Jesus is a matter for the head and the heart, always leading to action.

### ***5. Why is consistent teaching essential to steadfastness in the church (v. 11)?***

#### **OVERCOMING THE LIMITATIONS OF YOUTH (1 Timothy 4:12-16)**

Timothy was charged to do this in several areas. First, he was to set the pattern for speech. He had to be careful what he said, whether in public or in private conversation. James had reminded those who aspire to teach that they will be strictly judged for the things they say (Jas. 3:1,2), and every young minister should guard his tongue.

Timothy also was to be an example "*in conduct*" (1 Tim. 4:12). "Conversation" in the King James Version is not a term for speech. The Greek word used means "conduct." The overall tenor of the young minister's life was to be worthy of imitation, just as Paul's was (cf. 2 Thess. 3:7,9).

Timothy also was to be an example of love. Love is indispensable to the Christian life. Timothy would teach about it often. But would he practice it? Young church leaders often seek to establish their authority through harsh and combative behavior. But this will only produce an adverse reaction. Real spiritual leaders gain followers by exhibiting Christ's sacrificial love (John 13:34,35).

The next virtue Timothy was to exhibit was faith ("in spirit" does not appear in most manuscripts) (1 Tim. 4:12). The word used can mean either "faith" or "faithfulness." A young pastor may exhort his people to trust God; but does he trust Him? He urges them to be trustworthy; is he dependable himself? Only as he displays these virtues can he expect his congregation to follow his teaching.

Finally, Paul urged Timothy to exemplify purity. One who teaches the highest moral standards must avoid the slightest suspicion of impropriety. Purity must characterize the mind as well as the body, for the body acts out what the mind envisions. Timothy's life as a Christian leader is to be so compelling that others will be actively challenged to pursue the kind of life that he lives. By leading such a life, Timothy can overcome the reservations that some have about his youth (compare Titus 2:15).

### ***6. In what areas did Paul urge Timothy to be a personal example (v. 12)?***

Having stressed teaching with authority in verse 11 and teaching by example in verse 12, Paul now addresses the importance of teaching by word. This verse combines three terms to describe such teaching. *Reading* refers to the verbalizing of Scripture publicly. Because books in the ancient world are scarce and expensive, private reading is unusual. Instead, books are read out loud to groups of people.

Among first-century Christians, that means primarily reading from the Old Testament Scriptures. By the time that Paul writes to Timothy, it probably also means reading from earlier letters of Paul and perhaps even one or more of the Gospels.

That reading is to be combined with *exhortation*, which indicates verbal encouragement to right actions. The message read from the Scriptures always demands life-change. Timothy must encourage the church to act on the implications of the scriptural message.

The word *doctrine* may sound difficult and forbidding, but it simply means “teaching.” Teaching based on the Scriptures will stand in sharp contrast with the speculative teaching of the false teachers. Sound teaching is based on the gospel message, not on fanciful stories claiming secret knowledge (v. 7, above). Scriptural teaching always points the way to the godly life that Paul describes.

This combination of scriptural reading with encouragement and teaching based on it is very familiar to us. It represents the kind of teaching and preaching that continues in the church today, the very thing you are doing right now in your class. Teaching the biblical message and encouraging people to live by it are absolutely central to Christian leadership.

### ***7. What areas of public ministry did Paul call Timothy to focus on (v. 13)?***

Timothy's public ministry was related to the spiritual gift God had given him, and Paul urged him not to neglect it. The word Paul used refers to an ability graciously bestowed by the Holy Spirit for special service (cf. 1 Cor. 12:1-11).

Though gifts are divinely bestowed on all Christians, it is their duty to cultivate and use them for God's glory.

We do not know what gift Timothy had, but it undoubtedly enabled him to carry out the duties just enumerated. Paul did reveal how the gift was stowed — “*through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you* (the Christian elders who formally recognized Timothy's spiritual gifts)” (1 Tim. 4:14). God had revealed prophetic utterance (by Paul or other leaders) that Timothy had this gift (cf. 1:18).

This prophetic recognition was also accompanied with official blessing. The elders of the church had laid their hands on Timothy as an external confirmation of his gift. Paul apparently took part in this ordination (2 Tim. 1:6).

### ***8. What is a spiritual gift? What did Paul urge Timothy to do with his (v. 14)?***

As a Christian leader, Timothy's constant preoccupation needs to be the priority of a godly life and faithful teaching. The term translated *meditate* can mean “think about constantly” or “put something into practice constantly.” Either way, the point is clear. The same idea is in the phrase *give yourself wholly to them*, which more literally is simply “be in them.” Timothy is to see his call to leadership as his very life, the center of all that he does.

By living this way, others will see Timothy's own growth in godliness and will be challenged by it. *Persevering* refers to “making progress.” As Timothy grows in Christlikeness, those around him will feel his influence deeply.

In his steadfastness Timothy would achieve a double purpose: he would save both himself and his listeners (v. 16). Timothy will stand with God, the Savior of all people (v. 10), by living and leading in this way.

### ***9. What benefits come through ministerial steadfastness (vs. 15,16)?***

## **PRACTICAL POINTS**

1. It is a pastoral duty to warn against those who seek to impose non-biblical rules (1 Timothy 4:6).
2. A Christian teacher must not allow himself to waste time arguing about unbiblical ideas and merely human traditions (v. 7).
3. True spiritual exercise is found in Bible study, prayer, moderation, charity, and love for others (1 Tim. 4:8,9; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9).
4. God's power to save should motivate us to work and serve diligently (1 Tim. 4:10,11).
5. One is qualified to lead God's people not by his age but by his wisdom (v. 12).
6. Reading Scripture is essential for our encouragement and instruction (vs. 13- 16).

## **CONCLUSION**

### **What Leadership Is All About**

It has been said that leading by example is not just the best way to lead, it is the only way. When the church fulfills the will of God, it is always led by those who reflect the saving gospel. They know the destination to which God has called his people, and they are moving toward that destination while they encourage others to join them.

Some of us know that we are leaders in the church. We have accepted responsibilities that involve teaching, guiding, and directing others to grow in God's Word and work. In this passage we can hear God's call to be deliberate and diligent in pursuing godliness.

Some of us think that we are not leaders. But in fact, every Christian has the position and the power to lead in some regard. You may be the only available example of a Christ-follower to some family, friends, and coworkers.

The Christian faith does not have ranks. Every Christian is a sinner saved by grace, a pilgrim on the way to a destination. Living out that truth is what Christian leadership is all about.

## **PRAYER**

Great God, we ask You to lead us to true godliness, being more like You. As You have saved us, we ask You to empower us to lead others to the same salvation. In the name of Jesus who died to save us, amen!

## **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Pursue spiritual maturity.