

“Devote yourself to a Ceaseless Progress”

1 Timothy 4:11-16

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(Area Large Group, February 16, 2018)

1 Timothy 4:11-16

¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them,^[a] so that all may see your progress. 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.

Introduction

My charge today is that we would devote ourselves to a ceaseless progress at this phase of our life. There are three phases of life that I've observed from Moses, and we're going to look at them and try to apply them. Moses lived for 120 years, and his three phases were nicely divided into 40 years each.

The first phase, the first 40 years, were his time in Egypt, which I call the Foundational Years. He received one of the best educations in Egypt, the world's superpower at the time. He was probably highly intellectual and knew he was a Jew, which is why he was against the Egyptian beating the Jew to death. It also seemed at the time, he knew his calling was to save the Israelites, except he was dependent on himself.

The second 40 years, Moses lived to develop the skills he needed in later in life. He ran away to the Midian Desert, where he gets married and raises a family. In the desert, he tended to smelly sheep, and later he was to tend to even smellier sheep, the 2 million Israelites.

In the third 40 years, he accomplished the most with the training he had received, and he leaves his legacy for the next generation as he leads 2 million Israelites. He uses all God has given him to picture Christ, the leader that would guide the people out of the land of slavery into the Promised Land, just as Jesus leads us out of slavery into life with him.

For us, we can also divide our lives into these three phases. Though the length of these phases differs for most people, the second phase begins post-college, when you know your identity. In the first phase, you have many dreams and in this second phase you are more realistic and know what to do, and understand your calling, and zone in to develop skills of life, raising a family, marriage, and being the person you need to become. The third phase of life begins when you get good at these things, and you can accomplish the most with what God's given you.

In the first phase of life, Moses was arrogant and said "I am everything." In the second phase, he humbled himself and said "I am nothing." But in the third phase, he said "God is everything." In

the second phase of life, you need to develop the skills you need to continuously grow in what God has given you. I think Timothy was in the second phase of life, and Paul, in his third phase, was telling him to devote himself to a ceaseless progress.

I. My responsibility [11, 16]

As your pastor, this is *my* responsibility. This is also your responsibility as a leader in your small groups, older brother/sister, and in your families.

A. The responsibility [11]

We are commanded to ‘command’ and ‘teach.’ This is my responsibility as a pastor, and your responsibility as a parent.

B. The result [16]

If we do this, the result will can be seen in verse 16. We are told we will save ourselves as our hearers. The people around you will grow and glorify God.

C. What are “these things”?

1 Timothy 4:5-7

⁵for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. ⁶If you put these things before the brothers,^[a] you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. ⁷Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness;

Using the Word of God and prayer, we can train ourselves and others to be godly. You may train others in sports, jobs, raising your children, or disciples. But first and foremost, we are to train ourselves in godliness. The emphasis of this passage is that we must train ourselves first, and the result is that others will be trained. Some of us are more self-oriented, which can result in neglecting others. On the other hand, some of us are others-oriented, which can result in neglecting ourselves and becoming hypocrites. We need to have integrity before the Lord so we can have influence over others. Therefore, we need others who know us well to keep us accountable. We should ask how we’re doing in our integrity and influence over others.

The grace of God is available, but you are responsible for training yourself to be godly. In your personal, spiritual, life, you need to be developed individually in learning how to read the Word and pray. Though we do everything possible to help you guys, but we cannot eat or breathe for you, as much as we wish we could. You need the church to help you get thirsty, but you need to drink yourself. Learn to depend your authenticity before the Lord and walk close to Christ. This is why 1 Timothy 4 tells us to keep a close watch on how we live.

Life get busier, which can be legitimate, but it is never a legitimate excuse in training yourself to be godly. Just as you need time to eat and breathe, you need time to train yourself to be godly. Therefore, it’s my responsibility to make sure you guys thirst.

II. Your responsibilities [12-14]

It is your responsibility to train yourself to be godly. This passage talks about three concrete ways that lead us to how to be godly.

A. Relationship with yourself [12] – Character

Verse 12 tells us we need to develop our character as preparation to influence others. Character is a relationship with ourselves. When he says ‘Let no one despise you for your youth,’ it is an encouragement because in those days in the Jewish culture, much like Asian culture, it was very hard for young Jews to get respect from the older people. Paul was telling Timothy to not worry about what others thought of him at the moment. His underlying message was that Timothy should focus on his character. The emphasis here is not on Timothy’s relationship with others, but his relationship with himself, and to develop his character.

This verse is telling us to focus on our character, and our ministry will be the result of us being an example through our character. Integrity leads to influence.

My favorite quote from Martin Luther King, Jr. is “I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” This is a great quote in terms of the perspective of racism in the world. But this quote is also true in the spiritual realm. We are inevitably noticed by the content of the character. We cannot hide it, and we cannot have influence without it. Though you may have gotten away with lots of undeserved things in your life, your character will be noticed and you will not have influence with bad character.

The build your character, there are five elements:

1. Speech – This is what you say, not only out loud, but in your heart, as well. Listen to your heart. “I will not open my mouth if I am not filled with the holy spirit.” If this were the case, none of us would ever talk. However, this is a great standard we should strive to achieve in our speech.
2. Conduct – This is how we live in our behavior and deeds. In life, we often act like God doesn’t exist. Sometimes when people talk about our problems, I question if they believe in God, because they do not consider him or scripture in their situations.

In a novel, where a lady is giving advice to another lady who wants to get married, she said this: “When you find a man you wish to marry, Tessa, remember this: you will know what kind of man he is not by the things he says but the things he does.”

3. Love – This is the motive of our heart, and the expression of how we talk and behave. Jerry Bridges said, “We don’t need to practice being angry, but we need to practice being patient.” Our sin nature is so alive. If you think about children, they are naturally angry and selfish. Instead, we are constantly teaching them to be patient and kind. We need to practice that before we teach others.
4. Faith – This draws love and power from God so we can live in the way that evokes respect from people. Helen Keller said, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet, only through experience of trials and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, and success achieved.” When we go through trials we must depend on God and receive His grace through faith so you can receive strength, and mature and grow through the process. Maturity is how we treat others lower than us. Character is shown through how we handle pressure.
5. Purity – This is complete conformity between you and God’s Word. It implies transparency: there is no discrepancy between God’s Word and what you say and do. This is especially related to moral purity and chastity. Abraham Lincoln said, “Character is like a tree, and reputation is like a shadow. A shadow is what we think of it, and a tree is the real thing.” Check to see who you are when no one is looking. If we stand before people, are we so clear that others can see God before us?

B. Relationship with God [13] – Word

Devote means to ‘pay close attention to; occupy oneself with, apply oneself.’ Some of you don’t read even God’s Word. We grow in our character through our relationship with God. When children are born, their sin nature is automatically infused, not their spirit’s nature. With time, we as parents ought to teach them to fight it and operate instead in our spirit’s nature.

1 Timothy 4:4-5

⁴For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

In 1 Timothy 4:4-5, Paul tells us we can operate in our spirit’s nature through the Word of God and prayer. We must declare war in our hearts. Ceaseless progress cannot be achieved without ceaseless war of our hearts. Character cannot be attained without spiritual battle scars. If you fight in your heart and overcome, you can love other people.

August Wilson, who probably wasn’t a Christian, said, “Confront the dark parts of yourself and work to banish them with illumination and forgiveness. Your willingness to wrestle with your demons will cause your angels to sing.” We can apply this: wrestle with your demons, your sin nature, and cause your angels to sing, your spiritual nature. Fight through the Word, and it will become your habit, which will become your character, which becomes who you are.

In the desert, the Israelites complained, despite being saved from 430 years of slavery. They were beaten, eaten with leftovers, and worked without rest, and God delivered them. After a few days, they started to complain because there wasn't variety in the food provided. Sometimes, we are like this: though we are provided the bread of life, we complain about how we receive Jesus, or that the Bible is boring, or the length of prayer. Familiarity breeds contempt. Never complain about the bread of life. Never want anything more than Jesus. You don't need different experiences with Christ, you need deeper experiences of Christ. If you complain about the manna, you are shallow and missing it. Jesus is all we need.

C. Relationship with others [14] – Serve

Verse 14 was probably talking about the ordination process of Timothy as he was becoming a pastor. During that time, there was no Biblical instruction on how to be a pastor so prophecies were given, and probably became what was written later as we saw in 3 Timothy and Titus 1, where clear instructions for pastors were given. Whatever Timothy had, he also received an anointing on top of his gifts so he could use them in his ministry.

God will use our gifts given to us in life. Some of them are given to us at birth, but others are given during our spiritual birth, which we must develop in our spiritual life. God redeems our skills and uses them for His glory. God will ordain and redeem the abilities they have. Kids who lie and manipulate can be used to persuade others to God, and counsel and lead them. Kids who scream can become prayer warriors. If you take your gifts with thanksgiving, you can use them in your spirit's nature and God can use them. Exercise your skills so you can become great in this juncture of your life. Learn how to be great wives, husbands, workers, students, lead Bible studies, counsel others, so you can use these skills to serve others in service to God. It doesn't matter what it is, God will use it.

In all three spheres of calling, become great at it.

III. Our responsibility [15] – Progress

We need to then devote ourselves to ceaseless progress.

A. Immerse [15]

'Immerse' means to prioritize. If it's not related to the things God is calling you, then you must say no to distractions so you can say yes to the things that matter. This is focus.

B. Practice [15]

After you focus, practice so that you can become better at things. Do not have the mentality of ‘as soon as possible,’ but ‘as long as it takes.’ Keep at it.

C. Progress [15]

Progress is a movement forward to an improved state; advancement, furtherance. Make sure you’re not satisfied with your own progress. As you grow you can be naturally seen by others so it can naturally result in ministry and influence. We are going to need to work at anything worthwhile. Train yourself so that others will see your ceaseless progress. Perseverance is a proof of authenticity. If people doubt your authenticity, wear them out through your perseverance. Though they may see your mistakes, if they see you grow in your character, that is a powerful witness to the world. Acknowledge your mistake, apologize, and keep growing. When they see that, they will be blessed. The chronology is important: we need to grow, which will lead to integrity, which leads to influence. It is not about perfection, but your progression.

Practical Suggestions

The first practical suggest is to start something as you make a concrete commitment. Cut things out, add things in. You should think about what is important in life. If you agree with this passage, you need to start. I was reading an article about a CEO, titled “Micro-progress and the magic of just getting started.” The CEO said this: “I’ve never been great with deadlines,” but he continues to explain that the simplest and most challenging way he has overcome this: just getting started. From the article, it states, “Enter micro-progress. For any task you need to complete, break it down into smaller possible units of progress and attack them one at a time. Slice them up into tiny, easy, achievable, micro-goals then celebrate each achievement. James Clear explain this using Newton’s Law of Motion as an analogy for productivity: Rule #1: Objects in motion tend to stay in motion. Find a way to get started in less than 2 minutes. What’s so striking about applying this law of motion to productivity is that once you shift your thinking into this frame — *I’ve started being productive, so I’m going to keep being productive* — you achieve those micro-goals at what feels like an exponentially increasing rate without even realizing it.” You will get addicted to the pleasure of achieving smaller things, that when you start the motion you will keep it going. He continues speaking biologically: “you can trick your brain into increasing dopamine levels by setting and achieving, you guessed it, **micro-goals**.” Whenever we feed our heart motive, a chemical reaction takes place as well. Lastly, he states in a research study that “ordinary, incremental progress can increase people’s engagement in the work and their happiness during the workday.” In the times that you’re afraid to start out of fear of failure, when you simply start, you will get addicted to it and keep going. Start something practically, in your spirit’s nature, and depend on the Lord.

The second practical suggestion is that we need God’s grace. 1 Timothy 4:10 says we aren’t doing this by our own sake or strength, but because of God’s grace. We need to start something and keep it going. God’s going to help us. We work in tandem with God’s work. To receive maximally in this phase of life, we can learn to grown and leave a legacy in our lives. I charge you, as your pastor, to devote yourself to a ceaseless progress.