

Fuel to Finish Faithful Ministry

1 Timothy 4:14-16

Introduction: Since sports have been shut down since the middle of March, we haven't been able to draw many analogies or illustrations from that genre, much to the delight of many of you. However, this vacuum allowed those who grew up in the 80's and 90's to remember the greatness that was Michael Jordan, who won 6 NBA titles in 8 years and established himself firmly in the argument of the greatest player to ever play professional basketball. He was undoubtedly talented, could run faster and jump higher than most, but it was not his physical attributes that set him apart. It was clearly his determination, single focus, and will to win that created greatness.

There was a point in his ascending career where he was playing at an All-star level, one of the best players in the league at the time, but he was susceptible to being stopped by a team that set out to wear him down physically. The self-proclaimed "Bad-Boy" Detroit Pistons made it their goal that every time Michael Jordan would fly toward the hoop, they would put him on the ground (within the 'rules'). It was brutally effective, and left Michael Jordan with a choice: continue to take the punishment and hope for a better or different result, or change the factors of the game. He determined that what he needed was added muscle and bulk in his body, so that he would not be the recipient of physical contact but the initiator. In one offseason, he added 15 pounds of muscle to better handle the style of play. The rest, they say, is history as the Bulls eliminated the Pistons the next season, paving the way for the championship run.

You could argue that MJ never went from good to great, but rather great to greatest since he was born with talent most could only dream of. However, it was what he did with that talent that set him apart. This morning we are continuing in our look at **ministry** in God's church. God has called some to vocational ministry in the pastorate, but He has called every believer in the church to ministry. The book of 1 Timothy is addressing how we are to **live and behave in God's household, His church**, and we are all called to be **good servants of Christ Jesus** (1 Tim. 4:6). The church is most effective when we are **mobilized**, where everyone is participating in discipleship and using their gifts to building up of the Body and the glory of God. This is why we talk not just about **care within and reach without**, but also **equipping** of everyone so that everyone is growing, maturing, and serving.

Often the questions we receive in terms of ministry and discipleship are: *what does it look like & how do we get started?* The answer does not rest in structures and programs, though they are helpful. The reality is found in understanding the **goal, the effort, the means, and the power source** required. We've covered the first during these last weeks, and today we'll cover the last one, where we remember that though we may not have been born with the greatest talent in the world, we were **born again with gifting that enables us to accomplish ALL that God has for us**, making us effective in areas we never would have dreamed of before.

We started with the **GOAL** of ministry, which is *maturity in Christ* (Col. 1:28), since HE is the **mystery of godliness** (1 Tim. 3:16). He is who reconciles and restores us to the Father, redeems us from our sin and guilt, and gives us His righteousness in order to follow and obey. Without Christ, we would be lost in our sin. Ministry, then, is NOT just getting people to believe in God and to pray to Him. Most will come to that conclusion based on the creation itself and the law written on their own hearts (Rom. 2:15). Discipleship ministry starts with **Christ**, helping people see and come to grips with the birth, life, death,

and resurrection of Jesus, and how He is proclaimed to all nations and believed on by those that the Father gave to Him (John 10:29), ascended to heaven, awaiting the time He will return and reign with justice on the earth. Jesus Christ is the goal the means by which we move from death to life and continue to grow up into our salvation.

Next we looked at the **EFFORT** it takes to engage in effective ministry. There is **training** that we must engage in, both at the level of proper intake in terms of God's Word, and discipline in our life for godliness. Because we have **hope** in a living God who by nature is a saving God, we can **toil and strive** every day to make our body a slave, to invest our time into others, and to keep eternity at the forefront of our mind, knowing that we are not just living for now but forever.

The **MEANS** by which all of this happens comes out of the **Word of God** and **leading by example**. Example is the greatest rhetoric we can give, so as we follow Christ we call others to do the same. We remember that what we demonstrate to others they will often do in excess, which is why it is vital we stay disciplined so as to not disqualify ourselves. Our leading must come out of a commitment to God's Word, taking in what is healthy and keeping out what is rubbish. We stay away from silly myths and those things that corrupt our thinking, and help others stay away from false teaching. When we **commit ourselves to studying, understanding, and living** out by application the Word of God, we always have something to teach and offer others. This means that *private* study is as important as *public teaching*, knowing that what we have to offer anyone is not our own intellectual acumen but our knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

That brings us to the **power component**, the ability that we have to minister. The number one reason people give as to a reluctance to enter into relational ministry, service, and discipleship is that we do not **know enough**. We are all **insecure** at some level, and we don't think we have anything to offer or don't think we are adequate for the task. This is why God has not left us alone, but has given us the **Holy Spirit**, our helper in life and ministry. The Holy Spirit has promised to **teach us all things**, especially the things that Jesus has taught (John 14:26). He is the One who **convicts us of sin** (John 16:7-8), meaning we do not have to guilt anyone into anything, but unleash the Word and let the Spirit do the work. He will **guide us in the truth** (John 16:13), not speaking on His own authority, but whatever is given to Him by the Father through the Son. The Spirit points us to Christ. That is His role. That is His job. And He empowers us, strengthens us, and guides us to that end.

Ministry Proceeds out of Giftedness (4:14)

Do not neglect **the gift you have**, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

We'll remember that Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesian church, a place that was dear to his heart. He had spent **3 years** of teaching from house to house and in public, shedding tears along the way. He left **Timothy** there, his young protégé, to continue to work. Timothy was 1) **young**, in the sense that he was under 40 and for a culture that valued age, he was still considered a pup; 2) **timid** or given to fear (2 Tim. 1:7). If Paul was an extroverted lion, Timothy was more of the introverted house cat. Extremely faithful, to the degree that Paul said he had no one like Timothy anywhere (Phil. 2:20) in other places or ministries. Ministry and leadership are difficult. The target on your back grows, encouragement can be small, and the weight of responsibility can bear down. Timothy felt all of this; 3) He faced **extreme opposition** from the false teachers among the leaders of the church. Persecution from outside the church often binds leaders together. False teaching often splits and brings disunity among a leadership team. Timothy knew he had to **charge them** (1 Tim. 1:3-4) not to teach this way, but this added to the

pressure; 4) It's clear that Timothy was **wavering in his commitments**. There was an internal temptation to stop, to yield, to back down, and even to become ashamed of Paul himself (2 Tim. 1:3-8). Large chunks of these two letters are dedicated to Timothy continuing on in what he started. When Paul said "**Do not neglect the gift**", he was really saying, "stop neglecting the gift!" Timothy was discouraged.

*Have you ever felt any of these in ministry, from a lack of **encouragement**, to a lack of **recognition**, to a **weariness of soul**? Timothy was confronted with everything from his own personality, his situation, to his own lustful temptations (2 Tim. 2:22). Have you ever felt like it's not worth it to serve others, that leadership simply brings criticism, and nothing seems to be changing anyway, so maybe we should just quit, leave, or go somewhere else.*

How did Paul encourage Timothy here? He reminded them of what God had already given him by grace through the Holy Spirit. Like a coach reminding a player of his talent and training during the crunch time of the game, Paul reminded Timothy that he was gifted, prepared, and ready for a time like this!

First, Timothy was gifted by the Holy Spirit. When anyone is saved, they receive the Holy Spirit and along with Him, receive a gift from Him (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-31; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).

Each believer's gift is a God designed blend of spiritual capabilities, which acts as a channel through which the Spirit of God ministers.

Timothy was given gifts that would have included *teaching, evangelism, and leadership*. Every believer has gifts that empower services and activities by the Spirit. We are each given **differing gifts** (1 Cor. 12:7), from the Spirit to be used for the common good, to serve one another in the building up of the body in the categories of service and teaching **to the glory of God through Jesus Christ** (1 Pet. 4:10-11). That means that EVERY believer has been given a gift to serve each other.

Second, Timothy's gift was confirmed by the church through prophecy and the laying on of hands. It's clear that it was NOT the prophecy that GAVE him the gift, but the prophecy that confirmed it. Gifts are used to build up the body, but are also recognized by leadership. That means if you have the gift of teaching, it does NOT mean you will necessarily be given carte blanche on teaching anywhere and in any capacity you deem fits you. For Timothy, this was **an encouragement** to keep going, to remember he was gifted, confirmed, and commissioned for a time such as this.

*How do I know my gift? We do not receive a prophetic word anymore, but we have the **providence of God to guide us**. Gifts are funny in the sense that the best way to know and grow in them is to use them, and you use it or lose it. Sometimes gifts are more pronounced, like teaching. Other times, you start serving and they become clear. Gifts are varied, work with our God given talents, abilities, experiences, desires, and outside training. As we serve we often find that we love to do certain things or thrive in certain areas, where other areas are a stretch (I am NOT the most proficient administrator). We have teachers who teach in *prison ministries, Bible studies, children's ministry, small groups, one-on-one mentoring, school settings, counseling and discipleship*. We have servants who *serve on Sunday mornings, in other ministries, at their workplace, in their neighborhoods, and use their gifts to help a myriad of different people*. I was struck in the last few days as we have a woman in our church who helped one of missionaries, who she has never met, with care for his mother in the States, because she has experience in caring for those who have dementia. She is a helper and encourager, and is using*

her gifts and experiences to encourage, help, and build up the body. This is what we continue to do. We all look to how we use how God has crafted us through the Spirit to serve and teach to the glory of God through Jesus Christ.

Ministry is a work in Progress (4:15)

Practice these things, **immerse** yourself in them, so that all may **see your progress**.

At the end of this section, Paul summarizes a bit of what Timothy generally needed to do. I believe it is hugely encouraging that what he was calling Timothy to was NOT **perfection, but progress**. That means that he was not a finished product. We do not have to be perfect but faithful. We do not have to have it all together to start ministering. We do not have to have experience to start the job but learn as we go. Again, so many who do not feel ready or adequate for discipleship need to remember that what is necessary is a desire to grow, since God has given us everything else that we need. Notice here that:

- **Progress is expected** – Since we have been given the immense blessing of the gifting of the Holy Spirit, the work of Christ, and the Word of God, we must **immerse** ourselves in these things. Far too often we are waiting for something to get started: waiting for the right time, season, sign, or feeling of preparedness before we serve or teach. But the reality is this: progress, growth, and maturity in faith is NOT optional. It would be the same as an athlete with “God-given” ability who ends up sitting on his couch eating cheese puffs, wasting away the opportunities afforded him. We would ALL say that is a waste! A waste of talent! A waste of opportunity. Yet we have each been given the most incredible gift in the world in terms of salvation in Christ, godliness, hope, the Word, and empowerment.
- **Progress will be visible** – Not only is progress expected, but it will be tangible as it is lived out in front of others. Ministry in all facets is about people. Even if you want to serve in the “behind the scenes”, it will cross paths with people, and that’s exactly what we want to have happen. Our progress of maturity should be visible, noted, and followed by others. That means that **none of us has arrived, that none of us is a finished produce, and all of us have areas to grow**. One of the most encouraging things I’ve observed throughout my years of ministry is older saints and ministers who still have a thirst and humility to grow. They read, ask questions, are not afraid to be wrong, are still working on their sin, still disciplining their lives and time to maximize it all.. The **discouraging** times are watching believers who stop growing, who ride in neutral, who lose their zeal. Progress should be continually made and seen by all.
- **Progress is a result of practice** – Paul doubles up on the idea of immersion. He was to “take care, practice, cultivate” his gifts, but also “be in them”. None of us stumble into growth, just like no one meanders into greatness. It takes effort, thought, and planning, meaning we must be experts at what we say “yes” to and what we say “no” to. An athlete needs to say no to junk food and yes to exercise. A faithful minister of Jesus Christ often has to say “no” to good things like certain hobbies or activities to say “yes” to time of study, time with people, or flexibility to serve. If covid-19 has taught us anything, it’s that most of us were too busy running around night after night, participating in good things but perhaps missing out on the most important ones. The way to get better at sharing the gospel? Share the gospel. The way to get better at counseling? Counsel. The way to get better at teacher? Teach. The way to get better at what areas I’m gifted to serve? Serve. Practice, then, makes progress. We need to initiate this kind

of practice with the same vigor as we would any other venture that we hope to become great or excel in.

Ministry Requires Watchfulness (4:16)

Keep a close **watch** on **yourself** and on the **teaching**. **Persist** in this, for by so doing you will **save** both yourself and your hearers

A final summary for Timothy was to be **watchful**, to pay close attention to his life and his teaching. This reminds us of a couple of principles:

- **Our life and teaching are intertwined** – What one believes and lives out is what will pour out in teaching. Teaching someone verbally should absolutely be consistent with how that person actually lives. One of the hardest things to do is listen to someone's teaching whose life is inconsistent with it. Do we really believe what we teach? Is this seen in our attitude, actions, decision making, and lifestyle?
- **We can lose and fall in both areas** – We will be tempted and attacked in both areas, so we must stay pure in both areas.
- **Salvation breeds perseverance** – It is clear that our effort to work hard or to stay committed does not save us. We are saved by Christ alone through His work alone, not by our works or attempts. In fact, if it were up to us to stay in Christ's hands we would jump out every time. That is why nothing can separate us from His love, even our own faithlessness (Rom. 8:38-39). But the Bible is clear that those who persevere until the end will be saved (John 8:31; Matt. 10:22; 24:13; Acts 14:22; Rom. 2:7; Col. 1:23; Heb. 3:14). We are saved to keep going, even though we will face times of discouragement, sin, and desires to quit.
- **Christ brings salvation to others** – In bookending where we started, with Christ, we must persist in these things so that we can bring the full embodiment of the gospel to bear. We do not want to put up any roadblocks in front of people from our life or teaching that would inhibit the message of Jesus to reach them. We want to be immersed in the realities of God's Word and the gospel of Jesus Christ so that whether someone hears our words or sees our actions they will observe the same thing. This does not just happen, but requires us to be **watchful**, to **persist**, to be **immersed**, to **practice**, to **stop neglecting**, to **devote**, to **hope**, to **train**, to **toil** and **strive** in all of these areas, and to nourish, since we have eternity in view in terms of salvation.

That is the biggest takeaway from all of this. We must consider the cost of following Jesus in discipleship and make active steps to grow, mature, and help others. This is the essence of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9, and the cost of moving from good to great, or of being good servants of Jesus Christ:

*For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, **that by all means I might save some.**²³ **I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.***

*24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 **So I do not run aimlessly**; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But*

I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

Questions to Answer:

- In terms of spiritual gifts, could you identify how the Spirit has gifted you? (Review Romans 12:4-8, 1 Cor. 12:1-11 and 1 Pet. 4:10-11). How are you using your giftedness to engage in discipleship and the building up of the church?
- Where have you seen progress in your life in terms of maturity in Christ over the last year? What are areas that still need to grow?
- Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-27. What do you notice about the goal, effort, means, and gifting of ministry? How does Paul view his freedom in Christ?

Ways to Pray:

- Pray and thank God for the gift of Jesus Christ - His life, death, resurrection, and work on our behalf.
- Pray that our church would be prepared for action, whether we get to start meeting together in the next few weeks or longer. Pray that we would be ready to love, respect, and encourage those who see things differently than us in terms of what is required by our government.
- Pray for our **PRAY – PLAN – RISK** cards and the people they represent
- Pray that more and more in our church would engage in ministry on behalf of Jesus Christ, would be using their gifts, and would make progress each day.
- Pray that more and more would bow their knee to Jesus and receive salvation for the first time, having their eyes opened and hearts softened to His person and work.