

The Priorities of Christ's Servants

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[0 : 00] We come now to the reading of Scripture. And perhaps you would turn with me to Paul's first letter to Timothy, chapter 4, and you'll find that on page 992, if you have a copy of our large hardback Bible.

Page 992, the first letter to Timothy, chapter 4. As we continue in this series where the Apostle Paul encourages Timothy in his work of looking after the church at Ephesus.

Chapter 4, verse 1. Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times, some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

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

If you put these things before the brothers, 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.

[1 : 33] Have nothing to do with irreverent silly myths. Rather, train yourself for godliness. For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hopes set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

Practice these things. Devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.

[2 : 48] Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. Amen.

And may the Lord add his blessing to this reading from his word. Well, let's turn again to Paul's first letter to Timothy, chapter 4, page 992.

My title for this evening is The Priorities of Christ's Servant. And in this passage, Paul gives us a striking profile of the Bible teacher, the pastor, the church leader.

A number of years ago, I remember preaching my way right the way through 1 Timothy to the congregation that I was serving at that time. And I hadn't got very far with the series of sermons when I had to face what seemed to me a rather difficult question.

The question was, how does a letter addressed to a pastor about the work of the pastor apply to the whole church? I said to myself, I can see how useful it would be to study this letter at a minister's conference with perhaps an experienced minister opening it up and teaching it to other ministers.

[4 : 18] But how is it going to help Winnie McGillivray, age 78 and a half, who sits towards the back and who is never going to be a pastor? How is it going to help Sharon Quickmarch, age 38, who is half exhausted raising her five children?

And is it really important for Jason Puddleglum, age 12 and a half, who wants to be a neurosurgeon? Now, I think that by the grace of God, I have gradually come to see answers to those questions.

So let me offer a twofold answer. First, all Christians do need to understand the pastor's work and role because pastors and church members are very much tied up together.

They don't live in separate, sealed compartments. Members of the church need to be able to pray for their pastors and to love them and support them. And they can't do that unless they know what kind of responsibilities the pastors carry and what pressures the pastors come under.

Understanding promotes love and care and support. And of course, that love and care and support works both ways, from pastors to people and from people to pastors. But secondly, all Christians need to understand the pastor's work and life because the pastor is to be an example of Christian living to the congregation.

[5 : 42] And this is one of the main points that Paul makes to Timothy here in chapter 4. Just look with me at verse 12 for a moment. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.

Set the believers an example. So while the pastors will have responsibilities for leadership and teaching, which they don't share with the whole church, they share just about everything else. Those five elements there, speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, they're for all Christians. They sum up the totality of the Christian life. So the pastor, a bit like the goldfish in the bowl, has to have his life open for inspection.

People look at the Timothys of this world in order to learn the Christian life. To draw a simple analogy, if you wanted to become a really good tennis player, I think you would take every opportunity to watch the example of Andy Murray and others like him.

You would go to live matches and watch, like the Davis Cup. You'd look very carefully at slow motion videos. You'd run them back and forward again and again so as to see just how the player uses his feet, how he gets into position to make the backhand drive or the overhead smash.

[7 : 04] The example of the excellent player would help you to raise your own game to play better. And this is what Paul is saying to Timothy. People will look thoughtfully at your life and your lifestyle, so make sure that you set a good example.

So we all need to learn about the role of the pastor. The majority of Christians will never be pastors, but because the pastor's leadership and teaching are so central to the life of a healthy church, we need to know the purpose and the aims and the priorities of the pastor.

Now let's remind ourselves of the setting of 1 Timothy. The purpose of this letter is to rescue and to reconstruct a church which is in danger of falling to pieces because of false teaching and bad influences.

It was written either in or close to the year 60 AD. The place in question is Ephesus, an important city in western Turkey. In fact, in those days it was the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor. It was a commercially and politically important city and in those days it was full of idolatry, sorcery, and witchcraft. And the goddess whose temple and statue dominated the city were enormous was Artemis, known to the Romans as Diana.

[8 : 24] Now Paul himself had actually lived, stayed in Ephesus for three years in the mid-50s, about five years before this letter. And his evangelistic ministry there was very fruitful.

But he was an itinerant. He had to move on to other work. And having been away for a year or two, it reached his ears that false teaching was creeping into the church. And that's why he says in chapter 1, verse 3, remember how he starts off, as I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.

So Paul has stationed Timothy in Ephesus temporarily as a troubleshooter. But Paul fully intends to get back to Ephesus as soon as his diary will allow.

We know this from chapter 3, verse 14. Look with me at 3, 14. I hope to come to you soon, but I'm writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God.

and look on to chapter 4, verse 13. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture. So Paul is clearly intending to come back, but in the meantime, he's leaving Timothy in charge, and the purpose of this letter is to instruct Timothy in how to grasp the nettles that need to be grasped.

[9 : 46] In short, how to curb the false teaching and how to promote and guard true teaching and the true Christian lifestyle that arises from it. Well, let's turn then to chapter 4, which I want to take in two sections, according to the way that the ESV splits it up.

So first of all, verses 1 to 5, which is a rebuttal, a refutation, of a certain type of false teaching. And then verses 6 to 16, which describe the work and the role of the true servant or the good servant of Christ Jesus.

First then, verses 1 to 5, where Paul refutes a type of false teaching. We might give this paragraph a subtitle. Paul exposes a demonically based asceticism.

The content of this false teaching is given to us in verse 3. Have a look at verse 3. It consists of forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence from certain foods.

Now, notice just how strict it is, forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence. This is a teaching of strict rules. So let's look at the nature of the teaching, the origin of the teaching, and then the refutation of the teaching.

[11:02] First of all, it's nature. First of all, it's nature. I know we've had trouble with this particular phone. I was talking to Neely earlier on, and it's a bad phone.

It's a phone that needs to be, you know... Good. It stopped. It stopped. Good, Neely. That's fine. No problem. So the nature, the origin, and the refutation of the teaching.

First of all, it's nature. This false teaching is dealing with two of the most fundamental appetites of the human being. The appetite for sex and the appetite for food.

Now, both of these appetites are put into the human constitution by God. They can, of course, easily be corrupted. The appetite for sex can become lust, and the appetite for food can become gluttony.

But the desire for both of those things is in itself good and God-given. Now, what was clearly happening at Ephesus was that certain teachers were arguing that the very appetites for these two things were in themselves unclean.

[12:09] That the desire for sex, they were saying, is in itself a polluted desire. And the desire to eat, that's a pretty nasty and corrupted thing as well. And therefore, because you can't give up eating altogether, you must at least give up eating certain foods.

Now, probably the thinking that lay behind this teaching was the idea that the body in itself is nasty and corrupted. Therefore, its fundamental appetites are also nasty and corrupted.

So the way to be holy is to deny the body the things that it most desires. So the really holy person is the one who says no to marriage and no to various kinds of food.

Now, on the surface of it, that can look rigorous and noble and self-disciplined. But it's nothing of the sort. Look at me now for a moment, friends.

I'm an ascetic. You know what an ascetic is? Look at my hollow cheeks. Look at my sunken eyes.

Look at my waistband. I've lost three stone because I don't look a bacon sandwich in the eye.

[13:16] So how does a man or woman end up as a result of this kind of influence? Weak and wasted physically because of not getting enough food but also unable to relate in a friendly or natural way to the opposite sex because the opposite sex is seen as a danger zone, a habitation of dragons.

Don't go there. So the nature of this teaching is to command abstinence from two of the most basic human appetites which the Lord has himself put into our makeup.

Now, secondly, Paul shows us the origin of this type of teaching. Look at verses one and two. Now, the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.

So the ultimate origin of these false ideas is not human. It's the realm of evil spirits and demons, the spiritual realm which Paul elsewhere calls the kingdom of darkness.

Notice the adjective there, deceitful, deceitful spirits. The devil's strategy is usually twofold, to tempt people into sin and to deceive people into error.

[14:38] He's the father of lies, so he muddies the waters, he clouds the truth. But while verse one shows that deceitful spirits and demons are the origin of these false ideas, verse two shows that they channel their falsehoods through human beings, whom Paul describes as insincere liars whose consciences have been seared.

That word seared is literally cauterized. They have cauterized consciences. Now you can cauterize a wound or a boil. You can even cauterize the little horn buds on the heads of a young calf to stop the calf growing long and dangerous horns.

But how do you cauterize your conscience? Well, it's easy really. You just keep disregarding it.

We're all born with an able conscience.

We all naturally know right from wrong. But if we keep on persistently shutting our ears to the voice of our conscience, eventually we cauterize it. The conscience is a delicate instrument.

If we muffle it again and again, we'll finally be unable to hear its voice and we will lose the faculty of being able to distinguish right from wrong and therefore our very humanity will be diminished.

[15:56] So this is what was happening in Ephesus. Deceitful lying spirits were causing the cauterizing of people's consciences. These are the false teachers that he's talking about.

So these people with cauterized consciences in the end can only tell lies about marriage and food. Now third, let's see how Paul refutes or rebuts this false teaching.

He does it simply and quickly and robustly. He tells us in verse 3 that marriage and food are created by God and therefore they're good. They're to be received with thanksgiving.

How absurd it is then to say that marriage is bad or unholy when it was given to us by God as a good gift from the beginning of creation. Now this means for us today that we must resist contemporary denials of the goodness of marriage.

For example, the Roman Catholic Church, as you know, has for centuries denied marriage to its clergy. And some Roman Catholic priests have been able to cope with that reasonably well, but many have not, as we know, and the ugly consequences have been showing up only too plainly in recent history.

[17:07] Or take the very, very modern, very new movement that wants to deny sexuality altogether, where some people are saying, I'm a human being, but I'm asexual, non-sexual.

Well, a tiger might as well deny its stripes or a hedgehog its prickles. To deny that we are sexual beings is not only to deny something fundamental about ourselves, it's also to deny God, to deny the reality of the way that he has made us.

But let's notice something important in verse 4. Everything created by God is good. Marriage, therefore, is good in its original created form.

But we live this side of the fall, so we need to bear in mind that because we are fallen beings, our sexuality also is fallen and is to some degree corrupted.

Now, this means that when a person becomes a Christian and then marries a Christian of the opposite sex, that person's sexuality is then able to function in the right environment.

[18:18] And our naturally corrupted sexuality becomes increasingly wholesome because it is now being enjoyed within God's good created purpose. We learn in marriage how to use our sexuality in the right way and it becomes a joy.

But if our sexual energy is not channeled into the God-given safety net of heterosexual marriage, there are dangers of that powerful force being channeled into other channels, for example, homosexual activity or transgenderism or pedophilia.

And those activities are wrong because they're not within God's good creation purpose for our sexuality. Now, this means, of course, that Christians who are attracted only to those of their own sex and not to the opposite sex do have a difficult struggle on their hands, but not an impossible one.

Celibacy, abstinence, that's the only way for a person in that position. But by the grace of God, it's not impossible to live that way as countless Christians have demonstrated over the centuries.

And those who struggle with same-sex attraction can be comforted by remembering that there are many Christians who are drawn to the opposite sex, who also have to live celibate lives, because although they might gladly have married, they never met the right person at the right time.

[19:42] So as we draw out the implications of Paul's teaching, we can see that it's wrong to forbid marriage, as the Roman Catholic Church does to its clergy, but it's also wrong to promote alternatives to marriage, as our modern world is doing with such powerful determination and with such catastrophic consequences.

Now, we won't linger over foods, except to remember that Jesus declared all foods to be clean, ceremonially clean, as opposed to unclean.

That means that every type of food is acceptable, because, like marriage, it is created by God for our sustenance and for our enjoyment. So let's eat everything, and let's enjoy everything that we eat, unless, of course, we have allergies to gluten or peanuts or whatever.

Of course, we've got to be careful with that. But everything else is good and God-given. When my children were very young, and when they were reluctantly learning to like things like Brussels sprouts and red cabbage, I used to say to them, develop a predisposition to enjoy all foods.

It will stand you in good stead when you're invited out to meals, or if you find yourself in faraway places and served up with something that you can't quite christen. So, the heart of this false

teaching is that it condemns and outlaws things which are very good in themselves because God has made them and has given them to us for our great benefit.

[21 : 14] To refuse them, to say no to them, to forbid them, is to insult and defy our gracious creator. But Paul goes on now to show us how to respond to his gifts of marriage and foods.

In verse 3 he says, these things are to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. And just in case we missed it in verse 3, he says it again in verse 4.

Everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. Why? Verse 5, for it is made holy, it is shown to be holy, by the word of God.

Especially, I think, Paul means Genesis chapter 1, where God declares that everything he has made is very good, and by prayer. Prayers of thanksgiving made to God as we receive his gifts. You wouldn't dream of not thanking somebody who's just given you a lovely birthday present, would you? So, I think Paul is encouraging us to be really, really thankful people.

[22 : 18] This kind of false teaching, of course, has crept into the Christian church for 20 centuries. It didn't just disappear and stop back there in the first century. We can still find ourselves denying and rejecting some of the good things that God has given to us.

So, let's thank him for marriage and let's celebrate it. Let's thank him for foods of all kinds. And let's thank him for every good gift that he gives us. For example, the turning seasons, the hills and the valleys, the lochs and the rivers, the sunshine and the rain, cattle, sheep, pigs, chihuahuas.

And think of all the God-given creativity and work that the human race can do. Let's thank him for engineering and science and technology, for music and drama, for art and architecture, and sport. Sport. When a beautifully, think of Murrayfield, when a beautifully executed tri takes place at Murrayfield. Just think of that.

You have the man in the dark blue shirt who's racing towards the tri-line and there's another man with a white shirt on. They're both racing and battling with each other and then there's a glorious moment. I'll leave it to you to complete the story.

[23 : 34] Now, of course, every human activity can be corrupted. All of those activities can be corrupted. But all these things at their best are demonstrations of the creative energy that God himself has put into every human being.

So let's learn to be very thankful people. I know the daily news that we have to listen to. We have to listen to it. I know that. And it often fills our hearts with sadness because inevitably it focuses upon horrible behavior and conflict.

But there is a great deal in the world and in our lives that is God-given and good. And our Apostle Paul is training us to express our gratitude every day.

Well, let's turn now from the false teaching of verses 1 to 5 to the portrait of the true teacher which Paul draws in verses 6 to 16. Now, here you'll see that Paul is speaking directly to Timothy about his own life and his priorities.

But this wonderful passage sets a standard for everyone who seeks to follow in Timothy's footsteps as a leader or Bible teacher. So let's look at it under five headings.

[24 : 40] First, the true teacher prioritizes being trained in gospel words. Look at verse 6. If you put these things before the brothers, you'll be a good servant of Christ Jesus being trained in the words of the faith.

Don't you think that's a rather eye-catching phrase? Being trained in the words of the faith. Now, some Christians might raise an eyebrow at that idea and they might want to say, surely actions speak louder than words.

What we need is wholehearted Christian living more than endless words. Now, Paul is going to go on to insist on wholehearted Christian living in a moment. But before he gets to that, he insists that the words are essential to the man that he describes in verse 6 as the good servant of Christ Jesus. The good servant of Christ is willing to be trained in the words of the faith. Every pastor, every Bible teacher has two ears.

And between those fine organs, there is an even finer organ called the brain. And that brain has an enormous capacity for grasping and retaining information and understanding.

[25 : 56] And one of the pastor's main responsibilities is to train his brain so that he can understand the gospel in some breadth and depth, as much breadth and depth as he can. And the gospel consists of words.

Now, you can state the verbal truth of the gospel very concisely when you need to. For example, Christ died for our sins on the cross and was raised from the dead in glorious victory.

That's a succinct statement of the gospel. That's the heart of it. But the teacher of the faith needs to know a lot more than that if he's to be able to help others to grow in their understanding.

So it means that he needs to be studying every part of the Bible because it's the whole Bible that equips him to teach the faith. So he needs to be able to teach, in addition to the cross and resurrection of Jesus, he needs to teach such things as the authority of scripture, the reality and rule of God, sin, repentance, forgiveness, the significance of Israel, the nature of the church, the power of the Holy Spirit, the deity and humanity of Christ, divine sovereignty, human responsibility, the power of Satan, the return of Christ, the day of judgment, heaven, hell, the new creation, the new birth, prayer, evangelism, godly living, etc., etc.

The Bible is a big and detailed book, but it teaches all of those subjects and many others with words. So the Timothys of this world have to open, as it were, file after file in the memory bank of the brain.

[27 : 28] And over time, they load these files with the glorious, health-producing, joy-creating words and phrases of the Bible. And then, when that's happened, look at verse 6 in our passage, they will then be able to put these things before the brothers, which means teach the church.

And they'll be able to do exactly what Paul has been doing in verses 1 to 5, which is both to teach the truth and to expose the counterfeit. So the good servant of Christ Jesus, the true teacher, gladly submits to training in the words of the faith.

Now, this training largely happens through personal study and reading. It can be strongly boosted by joining a training course as well. But ultimately, the Bible teacher must develop his own hunger so that he says, by the grace of God, between now and the age of 100, I'm going to study the Bible. I'll never master it, but I do pray that it will master me. Training in the words of the faith. Now, secondly, the true teacher prioritizes training in godliness.

Look at verse 7. Have nothing to do with irreverent silly myths. Rather, train yourself in godliness. Now, that first training, training in the words of the faith, that is mental training.

[28 : 52] Training in godliness is moral and ethical training. Look how he contrasts training in godliness in verse 8 with physical training. For while bodily training, physical training, is of some value, godliness is of value in every way as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Athletic games and competitions were, of course, common in the ancient Greek world. The Greeks were mad about them, and it was Greece who gave us the Olympic Games way back. Perhaps Paul himself took some regular physical exercise.

Maybe he took his top off and swam in the Mediterranean when he was down there. But in verse 8, he's saying that training in godliness is far more important because it prepares us for the world to come, as well as for life in this world.

It gets us in shape for the kingdom of heaven, so that when we get there, we shan't find its ways and values are alien to us. We'll be familiar already with the atmosphere.

The atmosphere of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Now, this kind of training surely is not just for pastors and teachers.

[30 : 07] It's for every Christian to learn the ways of godliness. So, friends, let's think of ourselves as people who are perpetually in training. The top athletes of this world have to give up serious training when they get to about the age of 30 or 33 because the poor old body can no longer take the strain at that age.

But the Christian never gives up training in godliness. Every day is a new training opportunity. Think of yourself at 7 o'clock tomorrow morning. As you wake up and fling back the curtains, say, this is a new training opportunity for me.

Every day we exercise, not our muscles, but our capacity to show love, joy, peace, patience, and the other fruits of the Holy Spirit. We are as much in training in old age as we are in youth.

Look how Paul goes on in verse 9. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. He's referring there to what he's just said in verse 8. And then verse 10.

For to this end we toil and strive, that is the end of godliness through training, because we have set our hope on the living God who is the savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

[31 : 20] Oh dear, we might say. Has the apostle suddenly become a universalist? Having argued all his life that only those who come to Christ are saved, is he suddenly telling Timothy that

everyone is going to be saved here?

Well, certainly not. Paul's theology is always consistent. The problem here is that the Greek is a little bit tricky. And the best way to read it is to say the living God who is the savior of all people. That is to say the savior of those who believe. That word translated especially is a word that sharpens up the focus of what is being said.

All people. What I mean by that is all people who believe in Christ. Now thirdly, the true teacher is to set a good example to the church.

Verses 11 and 12. In verse 11, Paul speaks with great definiteness, doesn't he? Command and teach these things. Be a forthright teacher, my son.

[32 : 24] Don't stand any nonsense. But having said that, Paul thinks of a possible difficulty. Paul, of course, was a senior man at this stage, nearer 60 than 50.

But Timothy was not. He was probably only in his 30s. And if you're 30-something and you're preaching regularly to a congregation, you're well aware that many people in the church have a lot more experience of life than you do.

And what can happen at the end of the service is that you can be standing there shaking hands with people at the door. And an elderly person comes to you, a young pastor. And the elderly person says, oh, thank you, sweetheart.

But she goes on. And at this point, she might squeeze your cheek. She says, but you're only young, aren't you? You're so young. As if to say, I'm not sure you'd be quite so bold and brave if you'd knocked about the world as long as I have.

Now, look at these words carefully. How is Timothy to respond? Is he to draw himself up to his full height at this point and say, madam, I would remind you that I've been ordained and authorized to preach the word of God in this church?

[33 : 31] No. According to verse 12, Timothy's answer to that kind of attitude is to live a thoroughly godly life, to set a thoroughly godly example, so that as time goes on, the older people will say, yes, he is still a young man.

But when you look at the quality of his life, you can only respect him. And that's why we must listen to his teaching with careful attention. Just notice the qualities that Paul lists in verse 12.

Speech, conduct, love, faith, purity. Those five qualities show that godliness or holiness is always relational.

It's always to do with the way that we relate to other people. Speech. He's not talking here about preaching and teaching. This is conversation. It's the way we talk to other people.

It's to be wholesome and kind, interested. Conduct. No suggestion of anything sleazy or compromised. Love. Going out to other people, not shrinking back and away from others, being supportive and kind.

[34 : 40] Faith. Not only demonstrating faith in the Lord, but showing faithfulness and loyalty to other people. In other words, being a reliable friend. Purity.

That is openness, honesty, transparency in relationships. What you see is what you get. The power of example. Then fourth.

The true teacher is determined to keep the Bible at the center of the church's life. Here's verse 13. Until I come, here's your job description, devote yourself to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

Do not neglect the gift you have, the gift of teaching, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you, when you were ordained, commissioned. Most of you will know our good friend, David Jackman, who was here, I think, just three weeks ago, preaching to us. Well, I've heard in the past, I've heard David put it like this, that different churches have different degrees of relationship with the Bible. David says, think of the church as being like a car.

[35 : 50] In some churches, the Bible is kept in the boot of the car. You know it's there just about, but its presence hardly registers. In other churches, the Bible is in the back seat of the car.

It jollies along with you and occasionally chirps up and reminds you that it's there, but it doesn't say very much. But in other churches, the Bible is in the driving seat.

It's steering the car. It's deciding every move and every change of direction. Now that's the model, that last one, that Paul is commending to Timothy here. Devote yourself, he says.

Make this your big aim, the public reading of Scripture. But it's not enough just to read it. It has to be taught as well. Do you remember the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts chapter 8 was reading the Bible in

his chariot, but he needed to have somebody to explain it to him.

So Paul goes on, having read it out loud, then exhort the church from it. Teach it. Press it home. It's a bit like taking polyfiller and pressing the polyfiller into the cracks in the wall until those cracks are entirely filled.

[36 : 58] That's what the Bible teacher is to do. He's to press home the Bible into the heart of the congregation and of course into his own heart. And when that happens, the church comes to life. It begins to take off its jacket and roll up its sleeves and gets to work.

There is nothing more invigorating and life-giving than when a church has the Bible being pressed into its heart and conscience and imagination week after week. The Bible, after all, is the source of life.

Man shall not live, cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Keep the Bible at the center of your church life, Timothy. Don't let anything marginalize it. Then fifth and last, the true teacher must make continual progress as a Bible teacher. He's not static.

It's not as though he's learned it all by the time he's 35 or 65. Look at verse 15. Practice these things, devote yourself to them so that all may see your progress.

[38 : 00] So as the Bible teacher gets to know the Bible better, and he does that by regularly teaching from it, his confidence in its truthfulness grows immeasurably.

He's like a man who is constantly exploring a vast tract of land. Inch by inch, he gets to know that area better and better with every year that passes.

Quite simply, he comes to understand it more fully, and with understanding comes joy and confidence in God and love for God and confidence that the Bible is more than able to answer all the questions that can be thrown at it by philosophers, by scientists, by historians, by psychologists, and by any other discipline that you can name.

The Bible confronts the world and at every turn proves to be its master. So as Timothy studies and teaches it, he will make progress in being an effective church leader.

But he has got to take great care. Look at verse 16. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. He'll be tempted to be negligent and lazy.

[39 : 14] So what does he have to watch carefully? There are two things in verse 16. Himself and his teaching. He's got to watch himself. That's always the danger zone because his heart is full of potential trouble.

Jesus says, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.

Does that describe Timothy's heart? Well, of course it does. It describes every heart. That's why Timothy must keep a close watch on himself. The self is a dangerous beast and if it's not watched, it will cause mayhem.

But look at the result of this careful watching. Persist in this for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

So the result of careful devoted pastoral work, watching self, watching the teaching, is salvation for the church as well as for the preacher. So we have training in gospel words, training in godliness, setting a good example, keeping the Bible at the center in the driving seat, and making continual progress by careful watching and persistence.

[40 : 37] That's the pastor. That's the true Bible teacher. That's what every church needs. Think of our country of Scotland. If every church in Scotland, from John O'Groats to Gretna Green, had pastors like that, the face of Scotland would be transformed and Scotland's heart would become as lovely as its landscape.

It's not socialism, it's not conservatism, it's not Scottish nationalism that will transform the heart of Scotland. It's only the gospel that can do it. Here in 1 Timothy chapter 4, we have the blueprint. Let's pray that the Lord will raise up many Timothys who will boldly proclaim the life-giving words of God. Let's pray together.

Dear God, our Father, we thank you so much that we cannot live and do not live by bread alone, but can only enjoy life and experience real life as we listen to the words that proceed from your mouth. Help us, therefore, to love them more deeply. And we do pray that you will raise up pastors, Bible teachers, leaders of the kind that Paul is describing here in this chapter, so that in England and Scotland and Ireland and Wales and indeed all over the world, the church will make great progress

as people take the truth and press it home.
[42 : 03] And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.