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# PRIORITIES OF A PASTOR

## THE CURE FOR INEFFECTIVE MINISTRY

### I TIMOTHY 4:11-16

**INTRODUCTION:** If you have ever thought of quitting the ministry and mailing back your ordination papers, I give you a word of consolation. You are not the first to feel the frustration of a full court press. In fact, when Paul writes his first letter to his young associate, Timothy, he wants to encourage him to continue on in the ministry and not give up. To that end, he spells out how people should behave in the church and the key priorities of a pastor. In essence, the apostle tells Timothy that in a time of trial and testing, he had better get back to fundamentals and make first things central. Thus, in I Timothy 4, Paul spells out for his young friend (and through Timothy, for us), the priority of ministry that will encourage the people of God to respect and respond to us. To illustrate his teaching, Paul focuses on one of the reasons/excuses pastors/leaders give for ineffective ministry, and then gives a solution that should eliminate all our excuses for failure or for running/resigning.

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#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

##### The Priorities of a Disciple

**A. The Potential Problem: ineffective because of age--vv. 11-12a.**

11] *Command and teach these things.* 12] *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young,*

Definition of look down on: to think down upon, indicates an inferior estimation.
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1. At age 32 or 33, young Timothy had a problem as the new pastor at Ephesus.
  - a. The older heads in the church felt he might have been a little too young for leadership.
  - b. They felt he had not lived long enough, thought deep enough, struggled hard enough with the issues of his time.
2. Timothy was ineffective because of age, but age isn't the only reason we may be ineffective.

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What are some other reasons/excuses for ineffective life and ministry?

- a. pressure
- b. no support/money
- c. past failure
- d. gifts
- e. fear/loneliness
- f. lack of training
- g. inexperience
- h. family
- i. size of church

Whatever they are, Paul's solution will apply to you. Listen carefully to verse 12. Paul is going to tell Timothy that at a time like this, he had better get back to the fundamentals.

### B. The Practical Solution: What is needed?

1. **The answer is:** set an example--v. 12b.

- a. Paul knew whether we are young or old, we often don't get the respect our position/job/standing demands.
- b. Paul recognizes we usually get the respect our character commands.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Principle: at the heart of an effective ministry is an effective life.</li><li>2) Principle: every person's life is a profession of that person's faith.</li></ol> |
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Therefore, set an example! For who?

2. **The audience:** believers/elders. Where?

3. **The areas to set an example** are in conversation and conduct.

Be an example:

- a. **in speech:** Your words will reflect your heart--II Cor. 4:1-2; Col. 4:5-6.
- b. **in life:** Your life reflects your walk with God. Is there a gap between public profession and private practice?--Matt. 23:1-3,25-26,27-28.
- c. **in love:** It is impossible to represent a caring God if we don't have a caring life and heart. Do you seek the highest good of others in your decisions and actions?--II Cor. 13; I Tim. 5:5-6.

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Be an example:

d. **in faith:**

1) in God. Do people know you will stake your soul, heart, ministry, family, future, wholly in God?

2) in others/church--II Cor. 7:2-4. Are you faithful/loyal to your church? Can you be counted on?

e. **in purity:** in motives, in actions--is there integrity, or do you manipulate --II Cor. 7:1? Impact?

4. **The application:** How do we keep these qualities in our life continually?

We are to walk with God in humility, dependence, prayer, obedience--4:9-10.

**Quote:** "Preaching is not the making of a sermon. No, it is the making of a preacher and delivering him."

**Quote:** "We as leaders of God's people are front men. The danger in that is, we can feel if our ministry is a success then we are a success. But that doesn't always follow"--Haddon Robinson.

**Quote:** "Just as my courage may be a reflection of someone else's courage, so at times my faith may be an encouragement to someone else's faith."

**The power of example:** If you are courageous, and I am tempted to fall in the battle, I can often be persuaded to stand by the inspiration of your faith.

If we are going to keep from being ineffective in our discipleship/ministry, then our priority must be our personal life--our speech, our life, our love, our faith and our purity. We must be an example of one who is walking with God. That's basic.

But Paul does not leave it there, he goes on to our public priorities.

C. **The Public Priorities:** In the arena where many people can see a person's actions, this is what Paul wanted Timothy/us to do:

1. **Be devoted to the Word.** v. 13b--"*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.*"

Definition of devote: To hold to, bring to or near; to turn one's mind, thoughts, attention to a thing; to attach oneself to a thing, cleave unto it.

Note: There is an element in the church that despises disciplined, verse by verse, book studies of the Scriptures. They want to let miracles, experiences, and a preconceived idea of "Spirit led" services be the total diet of the local church.

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These people only want cursory study of the Word, and only give attention to it as a prelude to the "really spiritual stuff." Paul says to Timothy to give attention, work on the things that enable you to be a good student and communicator of God's truth.

Specifically devote yourself:

a. **To public reading of Scriptures--v. 13a.**

- 1) We can understand why Paul would say this to Timothy. In the manuscripts Timothy used, they did not waste much parchment on white space. The words just ran together, and there were no paragraph divisions. If Timothy had stood to read the Scriptures without studying them in private, he would have been hopelessly confused.

**Note on 1st Century.** In the first century, it is estimated that about 15% of the Roman Empire was able to read or write. Since many of the Christians were slaves, it is obvious they were not literate. Even if they were able to read or write, they had to be wealthy or fortunate to own manuscripts. Therefore, what they learned of the Scripture they learned by listening. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries, the people would listen to the Word of God read to them for two hours while they were standing.

**Note about the Bible.** Most of the Bible was written to be read publicly. The Psalms in the Old Testament were to be used in public praise. They were to be spoken. The narratives from the O.T. and N.T. first went from mouth to ear before they went from page to eye. When Paul wrote, he dictated his letters to a secretary. That probably explains the convoluted sentences. What is more, Paul also knew his letters were going to be read to a congregation rather than by a congregation.

**Note to us.** There is something about hearing the Word read that escapes us when we simply read it in private. This is a book to be read publicly.

- 2) Even though we are separated from these instructions by 2,000 years, and even though everyone in our church owns a Bible of their own, we cannot escape this admonition. The reality is that most people in our society are not biblically literate. Very few people read the Bible regularly. Most of what congregations hear of the Bible comes as a pastor stands to read or teach it to them.

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In addition, an increasing number of people in our churches can't read. "Within ten years or less, most evangelical churches will have to teach remedial reading in their churches"--Howard Hendricks.

- \* Are you a reader of the Scripture?
  - \* How dependent are you on the public reading of the Scripture?
  - \* Are the public services the only place you are being fed the Word?
- Note: People who say they are not being fed are often giving testimony to their own immaturity and lack of reading the Scripture.

- In addition to reading, Paul wants Timothy (and us) to give attention:
- b. **To preaching, exhortation**--v. 13b.

Definition of preaching/exhortation: This word means comfort, encouragement, rebuke, and challenge. It is a calling near, a summons to one's side; hence encouraging and consolatory exhortation, invitation, or entreaty.

An application for pastors might be: "Timothy/pastor, give attention to this, be skilled and prayerful, so when you give an exhortation it will dig into people's lives--4:11; 6:2, but keep it balanced. Don't just scold them, catch them doing something right. Give them a sense of awe & ought."  
Application for congregation. How important is it to you to be in a church service where exhortation is given? Are pastors the only ones to exhort? In what settings can preaching/exhortation come?

- In addition to preaching, Paul also wants Timothy to give attention:
- c. **To teaching/exposition of Scripture**--v. 13b.

Paul stresses this because he knew then, as we know now, that the preaching and study of the Word is basic to the life of a church. That does not diminish other ministries, but central to the work of a church is the teaching, study and application of the Scriptures. All other ministries are dependent on it, or are bolstered by it, e.g., music ministry, evangelism, prayer, etc.

Definition of teaching: Teaching not only means the content, but it also involves the way you teach. It includes a teacher's methodology and technique. Teaching involves thinking of ways to present the truth, so that those who hear it will respond.

Quote: "There is a way to do it well and a way to do it poorly. God did not call us to be boring. He called us to take His truth and make it as interesting as we can. That takes study, and involvement, and technique, and method"--Haddon Robinson.

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To some the ministry of teaching seems overwhelming. It is obvious, however, that if God asks you to fulfill an assignment, He will also enable you to do it, by His Spirit. He will give you the gift and strength to go along with the calling. Certainly this is exemplified in the life of Timothy.

**Summary:** The pastor/leader is to be devoted to the ministry of the Word.

With a devotion to the Word in mind, Paul shares with Timothy, and indirectly with us, a second priority for our lives is to:

2. **Be dedicated to our gift areas.** v. 14--"Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you."
  - a. We are not sure about all that Paul is talking about here, but evidently by divine enablement--a prophetic utterance--Paul and the other elders recognized through the Spirit, that Timothy had been given a gift for public ministry, i.e., pastor/teacher.
  - b. They then testified to it through the laying on of hands.  
Quote: Affirming that view, Gordon Fee says: "The evidence here (see also II Tim. 1:6-7) indicates the Spirit is the crucial matter; the laying on of hands though not insignificant, is the human side (response) to the Spirit's prior activity."
  - c. There are three elements involved here: Timothy's spiritual gift, the prophecies, and the laying on of hands.

Likewise:

- 1) We all need to discover, through our own experience and the input of spiritual leaders, our gifts, and calling.
- 2) We need to know the answer to this question: **What is my gift? How do I develop it? How do I deploy it?**
- d. We should also see that the gift given to us by God does not get planted in our lives like a giant oak tree, but rather, the gift that comes from God is planted in our lives like a seed to be nurtured and watered.
  - 1) That's why the apostle says, "don't neglect your gift."

Definition of neglect: means not to care for, be heedless, to be negligent.

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- 2) In other words, don't ignore it, don't take it for granted, don't think of your gift as a charm that works its magic apart from what you do.
  - \* We need to give attention to it.
  - \* We need to develop that gift.
  - \* We need to be noted as those who are developing, growing, improving, building our gift areas.
  
- 3) Therefore, we need to be very specific about our evaluation of the use of our gifts by asking ourselves: are we neglecting our gift?  
For example:
  - a) Are you a called a good pastor, but a poor preacher?  
That is no more complimentary than to say of a surgeon; he has a marvelous bedside manner, but he doesn't know how to operate.  

Quote: "A preacher who can't preach is like a clock that won't run. It sits on the mantel and has people's eyes riveted on it for the time, but it is not doing what it was made to do"--Haddon Robinson.
  - b) Are you a singer who has a wonderful voice but never practices, does not breathe properly, or have good diction?
  - c) Are you a counselor who only talks, but can't listen or learn from others?
  - d) Are you one who prays, but doesn't read the Scripture, have an accurate view of God, or have compassion for others?
  - e) Are you a deacon who can't serve others?

If our answers reflect negligence, what is the answer?

The next verse gives Timothy and us a third priority; it reflects the human side of our response.

3. **Be diligent in everything you do.** v. 15--"Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress."  
Definition of diligent: take care of so as to be able to perform. Give your mind to it, practice it, devote yourself to it, e.g., athletics (see verses 7-10).
  - a. **What area is Paul referring to?** He is looking back to the previous verses when he says--". . .these matters."  
Give your mind, attention, devotion, and practice to these three things:
    - 1) Your spiritual life--v. 12b
    - 2) Your use of the Word--v. 13
    - 3) Your giftedness--v. 14

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- b. **What does that mean specifically?** Along with your prayer and study, develop technique, develop method. Away with the idea that it is just natural, and method and preparation is somehow foreign to the work of the Spirit of God. We need to pray, fast, train, practice, prepare ourselves, that we might be even more effective in our gifts.

For example:

- 1) What difference will it make if a gifted singer learns to breathe well and form the notes accurately?
- 2) What difference does it make if an evangelist knows how to correctly handle the word of truth and succinctly present the gospel?
- 3) How about two cooks, both with the same ingredients. One prepares something scrumptious and tasty, while the other prepares something blah and bland. What's the difference? Often the difference is technique, training, and practice.
- 4) How about a teacher of the Scriptures? He holds the content of God in his hand, and when he speaks the Word people hear it and respond.
- 5) But here's someone else with the same content, but it is inept, rambling, disorganized, pointless.

- c. **What will make a difference?** It is giving yourself to it; practicing it; working with it; developing it; giving attention to it!!!

Examples of diligence: When we read about many of the great teachers in church history, we see that before they practiced on people, they settled for lesser goals.

- 1) Some went out to the swamps and preached to birds.
- 2) Others went to the forest and preached to trees, and
- 3) Others went into an auditorium and preached to empty seats. Before they inflicted their sermons on God's people, they inflicted them on wood.  
Note: That's not a bad idea,--to evaluate your preaching. Let yourself be recorded so you can analyze your preaching and your style.

**Summary:** So invest yourself in these things. The teaching of the Scripture, or whatever your gift area is, ought to be your focus, your magnificent obsession. Meditate on it!!

c. **What's the reason for all this?**

Answer: So people will see your progress. v. 15b--"*...so that everyone may see your progress.*"

- 1) Paul, you remember, is focused in this section on public priorities.
- 2) He wants Timothy to live his life as an example and have everyone see his progress.

Why is it important everyone sees our progress?

Paul concludes with a partial restating of verse 15, as well as the whole section. This next verse gives us the reason for the whole section. He summarizes:

4. **Be doctrinally correct and disciplined in your life-style.** v. 16--"*Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*" This is a powerful motivation.

But first notice:

- a. **The commitment:** "*Watch your life...*" In the context of this passage it means, watch the way you teach--the way you use your gifts. That's his big idea.

We are to:

- 1) Give attention to the effective living of your life, i.e., in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity.
- 2) Give attention to your gifts; be diligent and dedicated to your gift areas.

- b. **The consequences:** Wow! Again look at the whole passage. What are our promises?

- 1) We won't be looked down upon and thus be ineffective--v. 12a.

Our age, or other deficits, will no longer be a factor.

In addition, Paul gives us another two promises in v. 16:

- 2) We will protect/save ourselves. Our obedience to this passage will do something for us. What will it do?

- \* In the context of chapter 4, he is talking about being saved from the heretics/false teachers of the last days who will come into the church.
- \* Thus if we give ourselves to our gift area, i.e., depending on and preaching the Word of God, we will save ourselves.
- \* It will do something for our lives.

But that's not all:

3) We will protect/save our hearers.

- \* The way a false teacher makes his gain is to prey on people who have never known the ministry and life of the one described in verse 12b.
- \* The false teacher gathers around him people who see the teaching of the Scripture and the expression of other gifts as dull and irrelevant.
- \* Once they do that, they convince their hearers that God is boring, too.
- \* How sad and far from the truth.

**Conclusion:** So as we apply this lesson it is obvious what we are to do. We are to give attention to these things; mark them out.

At the center of our life in ministry, we are to concentrate on two things: an evident Christian character, and second, an effective public ministry.

If we concentrate on character and public ministry, we will win the approval of God's people, and more important, we will win the approval of God. Of course this won't win us our salvation, it will reveal the life that is in us!!!

An example of this kind of person is Alexander White. When he was no longer able to preach, he would go into his study each week and continue to prepare sermons. Why? Because as he formed the sermon, the sermon formed him.

Alexander White, like the apostle Paul, had been formed by a life of private and public priorities. In his private life, he had set an example in his conversation and conduct. In his public life, he had been devoted to the Word through public reading of Scriptures, preaching and teaching. Likewise, he had spent a lifetime being dedicated to his gift areas and was diligent in everything he did. Thus everyone saw his progress.

**In summary**, he watched his life and doctrine closely and persevered in them.

The result of this kind of life-style was he saved himself and his hearers.

**What an outcome!!!** When a person has viewed that kind of fruit for a lifetime, he/she won't be able to stop. It's what they are and what saves them.

Does that diligence describe your life?

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ME?  
APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

- A. What is your best excuse for not being effective in your ministry?
- B. Name someone who is young, but still has an impact on you spiritually. From the list in verse 12b, what characteristics does this younger person have? What character quality in others means the most to you?
- C. If you would have to guess, what would you say you are gifted in doing? What is your ministry passion? What is your temperament? Is there harmony in all three areas of your life?
- D. If you were going to devote yourself to your gift area, what would that entail for you, e.g., preparation, time, training, prayer? Who would be positively affected by this devotion to your gift area? How?
- E. What would knowing and functioning in your gifts do for you?
- F. As you review the Scriptures in this lesson, compare them with Paul's request in II Timothy 4:13 and the illustration of Alexander White. What does that verse illustrate about the kind of life Paul lived and why he had such an impact on others? 4:13--*"When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments."*
- G. II Timothy was the last letter Paul wrote. He was at the end of his race, but yet he requested the scrolls, the parchments. Why? Who was he studying for? What does this example inspire in you about your present and future ministry even your retirement years?

