

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES



Set an Example: 1 Timothy 4

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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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The Pastoral Epistles: Set an Example: 1 Timothy 4
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1 Timothy 4: Introduction

Having outlined a proper order for the church, with Scripture and prayer in the foundation, men and women assigned their respective roles, and the work of elders and deacons defined, Paul turns in chapter 4 to instruct Timothy in the kind of example he must set for the flock.

The fact that he is to be an example is not merely instructive to Timothy or other pastors. They are to be an example to us. What they exemplify, we should strive to emulate, so that together we can increase in the godliness and love of Christ.

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1 Lies Abounding

Pray Psalm 12.1, 2.

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.
They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;
With flattering lips and a double heart they speak.

Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 4.1-3.

Preparation.

1. To what does Paul say departing from the faith can lead?
2. This passage begins with *faith* and ends with *believe and know the truth*. What's the connection between these?

Meditate.

It's very important that pastors and church leaders follow Paul's teaching about the manner in which it is necessary to conduct the ministry of the local church (1 Tim. 3.15). The church is the pillar and ground of truth, but it always exists in times when spiritual forces are working against it, and the conscience of many is opposed to the truth of Jesus.

Paul's mention of "latter times" refers to the times in which we live, the times when the Spirit of God has been poured out into the Church, and God's Kingdom is advancing on earth as it is in heaven (cf. Mic. 4.1-8; Joel 2.28; Acts 2.14-17). So we should expect to see "some" departing from the faith of Christ and turning to all manner of demon-inspired false teachings (v. 1). Many of them will not renounce their faith; they'll keep using the terminology and trappings of Christianity, but their doctrines will not be those which, grounded in the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3.16), lead to sincere love (1 Tim. 1.5).

How does this happen? How do some pastors, teachers, and theologians – not to mention many other putative believers – turn from the truth that is in Jesus to teach doctrines which are designed more to create, by their rigor or peculiarity (v. 2), a following, rather than disciples of the Lord? Some of these will be honestly misled, and can be recovered by loving confrontation and teaching (cf. Gal. 2). Others are simply demonstrating that they never really had faith in Christ, and that they were only acting as if they did to gain a following or gratify some selfish interest (cf. 2 Pet. 2.1-22).

Such turning from the Lord begins in the conscience (v. 3), when someone doubts the Word of God, or thinks they can use God and His Word for their own purposes. This plays right into the hands of demons, who know every trick in the book to help wayward-leaning believers justify their views and conduct, and still believe they can bear the name of Jesus.

This is why it is so important that all believers, but especially pastors and teachers, stay grounded in the Word of truth. How can we expect to know false teaching, errant instruction, or deceitful doctrine if we don't hold fast to Scripture, always going deeper and deeper in it, and growing more and more in the Lord?

Reflect.

1. What is the role of *truth* in the life of *faith*? How can we increase faith, so as to keep from being drawn away by false teaching?
2. What are some examples of lies that have been or are being spoken in the name of truth, even in the Name

of Jesus? What makes these lies?

3. All lies are the work of demons, because they are in the employ of the father of lies (Jn. 8.44). Why should this motivate us to hate and expose all lies?

These are “the doctrines” of men and “of demons” that produce for itching ears of the spirit this world’s wisdom. This is what the Lord called “foolishness.” God “chose the foolish things of the world” to confound even philosophy itself. For philosophy is the material of the world’s wisdom, the rash interpreter of the nature and the providence (dispensations) of God. Tertullian (155-250), On Prescriptions against Heretics 7

Lord, I know I must go out into a world rife with lies today, so help me to stand firm for Jesus as I...

Pray Psalm 12.1, 2.

Pray that God will make you alert to the lies, flatteries, and deceptions that are everywhere circulating in our society. Ask Him to arm you with His truth, so that you might serve Him faithfully.

Sing Psalm 12.1, 2.

Psalm 12.1.2 (*Hamburg: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)

Help, Lord! The godly cease to be!
They who believe in Christ are few.
Falsely the wicked confidently
flatter, deceive, and mock Your truth.

2 Sanctifying Power

Pray Psalm 12.6, 7.

The words of the LORD *are* pure words,
Like silver tried in a furnace of earth,
Purified seven times.
You shall keep them, O LORD,
You shall preserve them from this generation forever.

Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 4.4, 5.

Reflect.

1. How many different kinds of qualifications for being an elder can you identify?
2. What must those who would be elders guard against?

Meditate.

Paul's comments here refer to those deceiving teachers mentioned in verses 1-3, who were seeking to create a following for themselves by insisting people abstain from certain foods. This was probably being done by the same people who taught that believing in Jesus wasn't enough; you had to be circumcised, and, while you're at it, refrain from all unclean foods.

But Paul knew what Jesus had shown Peter about foods and the Gentiles – whom Jews considered to be unclean (Acts 10.9-16). His point in these two verses is to remind us of the sanctifying power of God's Word (Jn. 17.17). God had declared all foods clean, and in so doing, He declared His salvation should be proclaimed to the Gentiles, who were to be accepted into the Body of Christ by the obedience of faith, not by keeping Jewish ceremonial and dietary laws. Paul's instruction in verse 4 is directed not merely at foods, but at Gentile peoples of all kinds.

God had sanctified all foods simply by declaring them clean – so great is the power of His Word! That same Word speaks to our souls – heart, mind, conscience – with power to sanctify us in Christ Jesus, that we may increase in Him. If we receive the Word of God with thanksgiving, and read and study it prayerfully and obediently, we will see God at work within us, making us more like Jesus (2 Cor. 3.12-18), and fitting us for every good work of love (2 Tim. 3.15-17). Anything other than this is a diversion from grace and truth and a distraction from faith.

Reflect.

1. In what ways have you seen the Word of God at work in you lately, sanctifying you and transforming you into the image of Jesus Christ?
2. What does it mean to receive something from God with thanksgiving? What should we receive with thanksgiving? Why?
3. How does the Word of God sanctify us (Jn. 17.17)? How would you explain the importance of this work to a new believer?

So a thing is not unclean by nature but becomes so through your willful disobedience. What then, is not swine's flesh unclean? By no means, when it is received with thanksgiving and with the seal. Nor is anything else. It is your unthankful disposition to God that is unclean. John Chrysostom (344-407) Homilies on 1 Timothy 12

Set an Example: 1 Timothy 4

Lord, thank You for all Your good gifts, and all the people You have put in my Personal Mission Field. Help me to receive them as my calling, and to...

Pray Psalm 12.5-7.

God's Word has power to set free the oppressed and to refine our souls. Pray for those who need the renewing grace of God, and for yourself, that you might be faithful in the Word, as He is faithful.

Sing Psalm 12.5-7.

Psalm 12.5-7 (*Hamburg: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)

Rise up, O Lord, and rescue all
Your precious children sore distressed.
Save those who faithfully on You call.
Grant them deliv'rance, peace, and rest.

Your words are pure and proven true,
like silver seven times refined;
You will preserve Your Word ever new,
and keep the heart to You inclined.

3 The Exercise We Need

Pray Psalm 12.6, 7.

The words of the LORD *are* pure words,
Like silver tried in a furnace of earth,
Purified seven times.
You shall keep them, O LORD,
You shall preserve them from this generation forever.

Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 4.6-9.

Reflect.

1. How does Paul especially want us to exercise? Why?
2. What comes from such exercising?

Meditate.

Paul says that Timothy must “instruct the brethren in these things”, that is, in the warning about false teachers and the need for God’s sanctifying Word to guide us in all things (vv. 1-5). A “good minister” does both, constantly warning people about the lies and false doctrines that come at us from various directions, and urging them to hold fast with prayer and thanksgiving to the Word of God (v. 6). There is even benefit for the minister: As he faithfully attends to these topics, he himself will be “nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.”

In our day, even more than in Paul’s, all kinds of information and images barrage us throughout the day. Believers, beginning with their ministers, must not allow themselves to become absorbed with ideas or opinions or gossip that is “profane”, that is, from the world. This doesn’t mean we shouldn’t pay attention to what’s going on in the world. It simply guards us against having worldly news, trivia, and foolishness take our thoughts captive (2 Cor. 10.3-50). Especially in these days of the Internet and social media, it’s all too easy to let our heads become filled with trivial, non-edifying information and images. Ministers must lead the way in refusing to become captive to such folly. Instead, they should *exercise* themselves for godliness.

The Greek word for *exercise* is the root of our word *gymnasium*. You have to “go to the gym” if you want to become godly. But first, you have to *want* to become godly. How will you know if that’s true? Do you “go to the gym” or is your “membership” in the Spirit’s workout club largely unused?

Exercising ourselves for godliness is work. We need to set a schedule and develop a routine – of prayer, meditation, reading, and study. Then, as we “tone up” our spiritual muscles, we must put them to use each day in the practice of godliness – words and deeds refracting the growing presence of Christ in us (2 Cor. 3.12-18). Exercising like this “is profitable for all things” (v. 8). It will help you to realize right now more of the eternal life you have in Jesus Christ; and it will better fit you for the life which is yet to come – tomorrow and forever.

You should take good care of your body, of course, and a little bodily exercise can be a good thing. But more important is the daily exercise of your soul, with the goal of increasing in righteousness. Paul says that this is a faithful saying, and all believers – not just Timothy and other ministers – should receive and act on it wholeheartedly (v. 9).

Set an Example: 1 Timothy 4

How is your workout time with the Lord?

Reflect.

1. Why is spending time with the Lord like going to the gym for a workout?
2. What should you expect to gain from consistent spiritual exercise?
3. How can believers encourage one another to greater consistency and exertion in spiritual exercise?

The school of righteousness attempts to bring us to maturity by first teaching us easy, elementary lessons suited for our limited intelligence. Then God, who provides us with every good thing, leads us to the truth, by gradually accustoming our darkened eyes to its great light. In the deep reaches of his wisdom and the unsearchable judgments of his intelligence, he spares our weakness and prescribes a gentle treatment. Basil the Great (330-379), On the Holy Spirit 14.33

Lord, help me to be more consistent, and to work harder at my spiritual exercises, so that I...

Pray Psalm 12.5-7.

As you pray, ask the Lord to show you ways you can make better use, and get more out of, your time with Him in His Word. Are you reading each day? Do you meditate? Should you start a journal? Are you seeking daily applications for what you read?

Sing Psalm 12.5-7.

Psalm 12.5-7 (*Hamburg: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)

Rise up, O Lord, and rescue all
Your precious children sore distressed.
Save those who faithfully on You call.
Grant them deliv'rance, peace, and rest.

Your words are pure and proven true,
like silver seven times refined;
You will preserve Your Word ever new,
and keep the heart to You inclined.

4 Working? Agonizing?

Pray Psalm 12.5.

“For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy,
Now I will arise,” says the LORD;
“I will set *him* in the safety for which he yearns.”

Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 4.10, 11.

Reflect.

1. Whom is Paul including in his “we”?
2. In what sense is Christ the “Savior of all men”?

Meditate.

Paul’s “we” is inclusive of Timothy, those he serves (v. 11), and all of us who believe and read these words. Two things especially stand out for us in these two verses.

First, Jesus is our Savior (v. 10). We believe in Him – that His life, death, and resurrection have accomplished everything we need to be acceptable to God. We are saved because we “trust in the living God” (v. 10) Who gave His only-begotten Son to forgive our sins, transform our hearts, and give us His Spirit. Jesus is *our* Savior.

But He is also the Savior “of all men”. But in what sense? Is everyone going to be saved because of what Jesus has done? No, only those who, like us, trust in God and believe. But still, Jesus is the Savior of all men because *He is the only Savior they can ever hope to save them*. There is no other name given among men under heaven whereby we must be saved (Acts 4.12). Put in theological terms, the salvation of Jesus is *sufficient* to save every person who ever lived or will live. But it is *efficient* to save only those who believe.

But – second – what does it mean to trust in the living God and believe in Jesus? Paul says it involves working and agonizing (v. 10: *κοπιῶμεν καὶ ἀγωνιζόμεθα*, *we work and we agonize*). Believing in Jesus is work, and working out our salvation in a hostile age such as we know in these last days (v. 1) can require agonizing struggle and perseverance. Again, when Paul says “we”, he doesn’t mean just him and Timothy and other current “servants of the Lord”. He means *we* – you and I and all who believe in Jesus. We have been assigned a Personal Mission Field to which the Lord sends us every day (Jn. 20.21; 2 Cor. 10.13-18). There we are to work *out* and work *at* our salvation, doing good, bearing witness, and standing firm for Christ and His truth in all we do.

And if that doesn’t describe you, then in what sense do you “believe”?

Reflect.

1. How do you work and agonize in your own walk with and work for the Lord?
2. What’s the difference between working *out* our salvation and working *at it*? Why is each necessary?
3. How would you explain to an unsaved friend what it means to believe in Jesus?

You see, if Christ is the Savior of all, especially of the faithful—it is the apostle’s judgment, and a true one, that Christ is the Savior of all—then nobody may say, “I have no need of a savior.” If you say this, you are not bowing humbly to the doctor’s

Set an Example: 1 Timothy 4

orders but perishing in your disease. Augustine (354-430), Sermons 292.4

Give me grace, Lord, that I might work and agonize for You today as I...

Pray Psalm 12.1-5.

In your prayers, remember the poor and needy, and especially those believers in Christ who are suffering oppression or persecution.

Sing Psalm 12.1-5.

Psalm 12.1-5(*Hamburg: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)

Help, Lord! The godly cease to be!
They who believe in Christ are few.
Falsely the wicked confidently
flatter, deceive, and mock Your truth.

Stop, Lord, the lips that utter lies,
all those who speak with boasting tongue!
See how Your holy Word they despise,
while their own praises they have sung.

Rise up, O Lord, and rescue all
Your precious children sore distressed.
Save those who faithfully on You call;
grant them deliv'rance, peace, and rest.

5 Learning from Timothy's Example

Pray Psalm 12.6, 7.

The words of the LORD *are* pure words,
Like silver tried in a furnace of earth,
Purified seven times.
You shall keep them, O LORD,
You shall preserve them from this generation forever.

Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 4.12-14.

Reflect.

1. What kind of example was Timothy supposed to set for the people in Ephesus?
2. What was Timothy *not* supposed to do? Does this apply to you as well?

Meditate.

Pastors have essentially three tools which they must master for the work to which God has called them. They must be faithful and diligent in the Word of God and prayer (Acts 6.1-4). And they must set the people they serve an example of Christlikeness and love (cf. 1 Pet. 5.1-3).

Paul reinforced the importance of the Word and prayer in chapters 1 and 2. We can assume that the officers – elders and deacons – who were the shepherds of the churches in Ephesus were to be men skilled and consistent in each of these, as, indeed, Paul expected of Timothy.

Now Paul addresses the example Timothy is to set for the Lord's flocks. He must be confident and mature in all his ways, despite his relative youth (v. 1). In his conversation, daily life, love for God and neighbors, spiritual growth, and Christlikeness, Timothy is to show the people he served what they, too, must strive to become. If he is faithful in reading the Scriptures, and in exhorting and teaching the people, he will be a faithful servant, and unashamed (2 Tim. 2.15). And he must continue to develop his gifts and improve in his calling to the work of ministry, which he received when he was ordained (v. 14).

That's a tall order for any pastor, young or old. But let's not lose the focus of these verses: Paul is calling Timothy to set an example for us. This means that whatever Paul required of Timothy, he expects of us. He expects us to grow and improve and become more consistent and effective in all these areas. Timothy's example should have the impact on us of making us as diligent as Timothy and Paul at growing in the Lord and fulfilling our calling from him.

In the Christian life, in these last days of lies and apostasy, there's no standing still. Either you're growing and improving in your witness, or you're losing ground. Take Paul's words to Timothy to heart, and learn from his example what the Lord expects of you.

Reflect.

1. In which of the areas of Timothy's example do you most need to improve?
2. What are you doing to improve your calling to serve the Lord in your Personal Mission Field?
3. How can believers encourage one another to greater faithfulness and consistency in following Timothy's example?

Set an Example: 1 Timothy 4

*So, then, the superior guide is to be mindful of the apostle's precept, "Be an example to the faithful." He should make his life a shining model for the observance of every commandment of the Lord, so that there may be no excuse for those under his guidance to think the Lord's commands impossible or readily to be set aside. Basil the Great (330-379), *The Long Rules*, Q.43.R*

Help me to grow in all these ways, Lord, and let me be an example of growth and ministry today as I...

Pray Psalm 12.5-8.

Let God's Word reveal any lingering sin in your soul, and commit yourself to faithfully obeying whatever He calls you to this day.

Sing Psalm 12.5-8.

Psalm 12.5-8 (*Hamburg: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)

Rise up, O Lord, and rescue all
Your precious children sore distressed.
Save those who faithfully on You call.
Grant them deliverance, peace, and rest.

Your words are pure and proven true,
like silver seven times refined;
You will preserve Your Word ever new,
and keep the heart to You inclined.

Proudly the wicked strut and stand;
Your indignation builds on high;
Men may exalt their wicked plans,
but You will judge them by and by.

6 Progress, Please

Pray Psalm 12.6, 7.

The words of the LORD *are* pure words,
Like silver tried in a furnace of earth,
Purified seven times.
You shall keep them, O LORD,
You shall preserve them from this generation forever.

Read and meditate on 1 Timothy 4.15, 16.

Reflect.

1. Why should Timothy meditate on and give himself to the things Paul had written to him?
2. What did Paul want for Timothy and those who heard him?

Meditate.

We can assume that Paul's exhortation to *meditate on these things* refers to everything he has written thus far. The purpose of meditation is to allow truth to sink more deeply into our soul, so that it can work with transforming power to make us more like Christ. If we meditate on the truths of God's Word, we will be much more likely to give ourselves entirely to them, because they will have shaped us from within to be more favorably disposed to obedience.

Thus we make *progress* in the faith. Paul expected Timothy to make progress in his salvation, so that the people who heard him could make progress in theirs as well. That's the sense of what he wrote in verse 16 about Timothy saving himself and his congregation. They would realize more of their salvation, growing to be more like Christ, if they would hide the truths Paul wrote to Timothy in the depths of their souls.

Pastors and teachers have an extra responsibility and duty in the church (Jms. 3.1). They are entrusted with the Word of God, to read and meditate and study it so as to teach others in the church how to know and serve Christ. The more faithful they are in this, and in keeping a close watch over their own walk with the Lord, the greater will be the likelihood that those they serve will see their progress in faith, and will want to make progress of their own.

We have to persevere in this (v. 16), disciplining ourselves for daily times of reading and prayer, and for maintaining an effective self-watch. We're not naturally disposed to do this, so it's going to take some effort. But the Lord Jesus expects progress in faith of all His followers, beginning with those who preach and teach.

Reflect.

1. What progress are you seeking in your salvation?
2. Are your spiritual disciplines – especially prayer and reading and meditating in Scripture – what they should be? How might you improve them to make even more progress in salvation?
3. How would you recommend to a new believer that he maintain an effective self-watch over his soul and life?

Again, a pastor is said to save himself, when, by faithfully discharging the office committed to him, he serves his calling; not only because he avoids that terrible vengeance which the Lord threatens by Ezekiel, — "His blood will I require at thy hand,"

Set an Example: 1 Timothy 4

(Ezekiel 33:8,) but because it is customary to speak of believers as performing their salvation when they walk and persevere in the course of their salvation. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on 1 Timothy 4.16

Help me to make progress in my salvation today, O Lord, especially as I...

Pray Psalm 12.

The Word of God is the only true shelter in an age replete with lies. Let God's Word illumine your path and drive out any darkness in your soul as you pray through this psalm today.

Sing Psalm 12.

Psalm 12 (*Hamburg: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)

Help, Lord! The godly cease to be!
They who believe in Christ are few.
Falsely the wicked confidently
flatter, deceive, and mock Your truth.

Stop, Lord, the lips that utter lies,
all those who speak with boasting tongue!
See how Your holy Word they despise,
while their own praises they have sung.

Rise up, O Lord, and rescue all
Your precious children sore distressed.
Save those who faithfully on You call.
Grant them deliv'rance, peace, and rest.

Your words are pure and proven true,
like silver seven times refined;
You will preserve Your Word ever new,
and keep the heart to You inclined.

Proudly the wicked strut and stand;
Your indignation builds on high;
Men may exalt their wicked plans,
but You will judge them by and by.

7 The Pastor's Example

Pray Psalm 12.6, 7.

The words of the LORD *are* pure words,
Like silver tried in a furnace of earth,
Purified seven times.
You shall keep them, O LORD,
You shall preserve them from this generation forever.

Review 1 Timothy 4.

Reflect.

1. How would you describe the kind of pastor Timothy was supposed to be?
2. Why was it so important that he set a good example?

Meditate.

In the first three chapters of his first letter to Timothy, Paul outlined the general structure of the local church. Established on sound teaching, churches flourish when men and women embrace their unique roles, and when elders and deacons serve to shepherd and care for the congregation.

In chapter 4, Paul addresses the role of the pastor. The pastor needs to keep an eye on the times and to take the lead in guarding the Lord's flock against false teaching and empty practices. He must be an example for all the flock, standing firm on the doctrines of Scripture, growing and making progress in the Lord, and leading the congregation to greater heights of godliness and love.

The local church should be a place where members and congregation alike increase continually in the salvation of the Lord, and careful, faithful shepherds are a key to this happening.

Reflect.

1. What did Paul want us to learn from the example Timothy was to set for the churches in Ephesus?
2. What does it mean to make progress in our salvation? How can believers help one another in this?
3. How would you describe the role of God's Word in helping believers and their churches to grow as the Lord intends?

He knew Timothy's diligence, and yet he recommends to him diligent reading of the Scriptures. How shall pastors teach others if they be not eager to learn? And if so great a man is advised to study to make progress from day to day, how much more do we need such an advice? John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on 1 Timothy 4.13

I know that You have called me, Lord, to be an example to the people in my Personal Mission Field. As I go forth today, therefore, give me grace to...

Pray Psalm 12.

Pray that the Lord will revive His Church, according to His Word, to reach the lost people of our generation.

Sing Psalm 12.

Psalm 12 (*Hamburg: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)
Help, Lord! The godly cease to be!

Set an Example: 1 Timothy 4

They who believe in Christ are few.
Falsely the wicked confidently
flatter, deceive, and mock Your truth.

Stop, Lord, the lips that utter lies,
all those who speak with boasting tongue!
See how Your holy Word they despise,
while their own praises they have sung.

Rise up, O Lord, and rescue all
Your precious children sore distressed.
Save those who faithfully on You call.
Grant them deliv'rance, peace, and rest.

Your words are pure and proven true,
like silver seven times refined;
You will preserve Your Word ever new,
and keep the heart to You inclined.

Proudly the wicked strut and stand;
Your indignation builds on high;
Men may exalt their wicked plans,
but You will judge them by and by.

Set an Example: 1 Timothy 4

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Why is the example of the pastor so important to the health of a local church?
2. Against what kinds of dangers must pastors guard their churches?
3. How should believers exercise themselves to make progress in their salvation?
4. Why does the Christian faith require us to labor and agonize? How can we help one another in this?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from 1 Timothy 4? How are you putting that lesson to work in your Personal Mission Field?

For prayer:

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