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YOUR WALK AND YOUR WORK FOR CHRIST

1 Timothy 4:11-16

By

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Lesson 14

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1 Timothy 4:11-16

William Carey, often called the father of modern missions, was a shoe cobbler by trade before he went to India. He kept a map of India in his shop, stopping every so often to study and pray over it. Sometimes, because of his preaching ministry, his shoe business suffered. One day a friend admonished him for neglecting his business. "Neglecting my business?" said Carey, looking at him intently. "My business is to extend the kingdom of God. I only cobble shoes to pay expenses."

No matter what your occupation, every Christian should have Carey's mentality: "My real business is to extend God's kingdom; I just work to pay expenses." In other words, every Christian is in the ministry. Ephesians 4:11-12 states that God gave to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service (ministry), to the building up of the body of Christ." My job is to equip you to do the work of the ministry. If you are a saint (= "holy one," true of every believer) then you're in the ministry! Some may be supported so that they work full-time in their ministry. But every Christian, like William Carey, should see their main business as serving God.

Since that is the clear teaching of the New Testament, it ought to be of great concern to every Christian to know how to fulfill the ministry God has entrusted to him or her. It seems as if there are droves who are either burning out on ministry because they are exhausted, or bombing out of ministry because of moral failure. Timothy's danger was that he would just fade out of the ministry because his timid personality had a tendency to want to avoid conflict. The fact is, you can't preach God's truth without confronting error and offending some people. So Timothy was in danger of neglecting his ministry (4:14).

Some of you are not involved in any kind of ministry for the Lord. Maybe you burned out, bombed out, or just faded out. Frankly, ministry is battle, and who likes war? The tendency of the

flesh is to let someone else do it, especially if it's a hassle. Maybe you justify your lack of involvement by thinking, "I'm not all that gifted anyway." But remember, in the parable of the talents, it was the guy with only one who buried it and was rebuked by his master because he didn't use it to further the master's interests. If you know Christ as Savior, you're called to serve Him in some capacity. In our text, Paul gives us a basic lesson of Christian service that will enable us to fulfill our God-given ministries:

Your walk with Christ is the necessary
basis for your work for Christ.

"Pay close attention to yourself [your walk] and to your teaching [your work]" (4:16). It's the same principle Paul imparted to the Ephesian elders when he said, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock" (Acts 20:28). First, your walk; then, your work. Your work for the Lord must always be the overflow of your walk with the Lord. I define ministry as being full of Jesus Christ and slopping over onto others. That means that your ministry will be backed by a life of integrity; you are imparting to others what you have because you walk in reality with Christ. If we all would learn this simple but profound principle, that our walk with Christ is the necessary basis for our work for Christ, we would avoid burning out, bombing out, and fading out in the work He has given us to do.

1. Pay attention to your walk with Christ.

One reason the church is often short of workers is that so many who attend church are not walking in daily reality with the living Lord. They have fallen into the American self-centered way of life. They attend church because it meets some of their personal needs. If it fails to meet their needs, they either shop around for another church that does meet their needs or they stop going altogether. They are living for self and using God and the church to help self be more fulfilled. Sometimes volunteering to serve in the church helps meet a need to feel useful, so they sign up. But even their service has a self-focus. They do it because it meets their needs.

If I have just described you, I say to you in love, you are not living the Christian life. The Christian life is not living for self and

using God and the church to meet your needs. The Christian life involves denying yourself daily and living under the lordship of Christ. We are no longer our own; we have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus. We no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:15). As we live each day with our hope fixed on the living God, He shapes our character in conformity to Christ and then uses our changed lives as a witness of His saving grace so that others come to know Him and grow in Him.

So ministry is not volunteering for Jesus, or doing a job because the pastor or the church needs your help. Ministry is based on dying to self and living to please Jesus. God never calls us primarily to a task. Rather, He calls us to Himself. Before I can *do* something for God I must *be* something in relationship with God. I can only impart to others in ministry what I possess from my walk. Therefore, the primary responsibility of every believer is to develop godliness through the daily discipline of a walk with the Lord Jesus.

Timothy was relatively young when Paul wrote this, about 35 (a mere youth from my perspective now!). Some of you think 35 is ancient, but in that culture age was more highly regarded than in ours. Paul wrote, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness" in part for the church, so that they would not shrug off Timothy's teaching with the excuse that he was too young to know what he was talking about. But Paul also wrote it for Timothy. He's saying that even if you're younger in years, you can have a ministry if your message is backed by a godly life.

Paul mentions five areas (the KJV's "spirit" is based on weak manuscript evidence and should be omitted):

A. Speech

There's a convicting one, for starters! How's your speech? Has your tongue been tamed by the power of God's Spirit? As James 3 tells us, the tongue can be an instrument for great evil or great good, depending upon whether it is under the control of the flesh or of the Spirit. Ephesians 4:29 commands, "Let no unwholesome [lit., rotten] word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear." There is no place for

name-calling, sarcasm, profanity, ridicule, gossip, blaming, destructive criticism, angry words of threat and revenge, griping, complaining, lying, filthy talk, or dirty jokes.

Instead a godly person will use words to build up others and show them grace: encouragement, praise, appreciation, gratefulness, cheerfulness, understanding, sympathy, testimony, truth, caring correction and warning, and helpful counsel.

So often, even in Christian homes, family members rip into one another with rotten words and never confess their sinful speech and ask forgiveness. Several years ago Marla and I were at a pastoral couples conference. We had just checked into our room when we could hear through the door into the adjoining room a couple exchanging barbed attacks on each other. This was a pastor and his wife, but they sounded like the kind of destructive speech you hear on the worst TV sitcoms! The man was disqualified for ministry because he was not using godly speech toward his wife. Walking with the Lord Jesus means bringing your speech under His lordship and judging yourself when you sin with your words.

B. Conduct (KJV = conversation)

In modern parlance, your lifestyle. This points to your behavior which should testify to your commitment to Jesus Christ. Honesty, integrity, how you spend your time and money, your priorities, your attitude toward possessions, your personal appearance, the way you maintain your home, the way you treat people—all of these factors should add up to show that Christ is Lord of your life.

C. Love

This focuses on your relationships. Biblical love is not a gushy feeling, but rather a self-sacrificing, caring commitment which shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved. Since the highest good for each person is that they glorify God in their lives, love is committed to help each person grow in submission to Christ's lordship. Paul spells out the qualities of love in 1 Corinthians 13. Each of us should frequently evaluate our conduct toward others, especially in our homes, by that list.

D. Faith

This could point to faithfulness or reliability, a fruit of the Spirit. Or, it could point to the faith we are to have toward God. We call ourselves believers, and yet all too often we are not believing believers! We aren't expecting God to work. We aren't trusting God with our problems. But in order to carry on any significant ministry, we must be men and women of faith. We have leaned upon God in our own trials and have proved Him to be faithful. So we can ask and trust God to work in the lives of those to whom we minister.

E. Purity

This means moral purity, not just outwardly, but in the thought life. Sexual immorality always begins in the mind. Walking with Christ means taking "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). As soon as a wrong thought pops into your mind, you confess it and turn from it. You "put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Rom. 13:14).

A survey of American pastors revealed that 20 percent view pornographic material at least once a month (*Leadership* [Winter, 1988], p. 24)! And only 64 percent of evangelical seminary students think that watching pornographic movies is morally wrong (David Wells, *Christianity Today* [1/15/88], p. 25)! Is it any wonder the American church lacks God's blessing? I believe that a man who yields to viewing pornography at least once a month should not be in leadership until he gains victory. Purity in thought and deed is essential for ministry.

Thus your walk with Christ is the necessary basis of any work you do for Christ. Since the Lord wants every member of His body to function in serving Him, pay attention to your walk. You don't have to have all these qualities in perfection before you start serving the Lord. But you do need to be growing in each area, bringing every aspect of your life into submission to the lordship of Christ. Then, as you relate to others, you slop over what you have of Christ to them; you are ministering.

But ministry doesn't happen automatically. It requires attention and work as well:

2. Pay attention to your work for Christ.

“Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching” (4:16). Since Timothy’s spiritual gift was in the area of public ministry of the Word, he was to focus on that. Note the importance of the ministry of the Word in the church assembly: reading it (especially in a culture where many slaves would have been illiterate); applying it to life (“exhortation”); and, teaching it (4:13). Paul exhorts Timothy not to neglect his gift (4:14), to take pains in making progress in it (4:15), and to persevere in it (4:16), which implies that it won’t be easy or automatic. There is much more that could be said, but I want to point out five things concerning spiritual gifts:

A. God has given every believer at least one gift.

A spiritual gift may be defined as “a God-given ability for service” (Dr. Ryrie). While there are a lot of debatable aspects about spiritual gifts, it’s significant that in each of the four New Testament passages dealing with spiritual gifts, it is stated that each believer has one (Rom. 12:3-6; 1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). You have not been left out. God has gifted you to serve Him.

B. Your gifts will be recognized and confirmed by the Body.

Normally, believers receive a spiritual gift at conversion. Of course God can bestow other gifts subsequent to salvation as He deems necessary to equip a person for a specific ministry. Apparently God revealed to Paul what Timothy’s ministry was to be. The elders at Timothy’s home church affirmed Paul’s prophecy. So they laid hands on Timothy, prayed for him, and he received the gift of teaching for his task (see 2 Tim. 1:6).

God does not normally reveal your gift supernaturally. As you grow in Christ and get involved in serving Him, other believers begin to confirm your gift. They will say things like “You’re good at that,” or, “God ministers through you in that area.” I remember even when I was in college and would take a stab at teaching, as unpolished as I was, people would tell me how much it had helped them. If every time you try to teach, you see people squirming in their seats, looking at their watches, and not coming back the next time you’re scheduled, maybe your gift is in another area!

C. Your gifts must be exercised and developed.

Even though Timothy received his gift in a rather dramatic fashion, he had to work at developing it. Note the words Paul uses

to exhort Timothy to exercise and develop his gift (4:14-16): Don't neglect it. "Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them." Make evident progress. "Pay close attention." "Persevere in these things." In 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul had to exhort Timothy to kindle afresh his gift. The fire was dying out. The spiritual muscle can atrophy from non-use.

Although spiritual gifts are God-given, they're not automatic or fully developed. You must make a commitment to fulfill the ministry God has given you: "be absorbed in these things." It's a good idea for a new believer (or one who doesn't know his or her gifts) to try as wide a range of ministry experiences as possible. As you do certain things, you will narrow down your field of interest and ability until you discover your area of gift. Then concentrate primarily on your area of gift, while remembering that every Christian is responsible to serve in most areas. In other words, just because your gift isn't helps doesn't mean that you never help others. But you focus in your area of gift. You work hard to develop your ministry skills in that area.

A common mistake many pastors make, especially as a church grows, is neglecting the ministry of the Word. They start doing everything else, or often become more like the manager of a company, and the teaching ministry suffers. But a pastor's main work is preaching and teaching to equip the rest of the church for their ministries (4:13-16).

D. Your gifts, when backed by godliness, should be exercised with confidence in the Lord.

As I emphasized already, giftedness must be accompanied by godliness. But my point here is that when gifts are backed by godliness, they can then be exercised with the quiet confidence that your faith is in God and you're doing what He wants you to do. So when opposition comes (as it often does), you don't quit in anger or frustration. You persevere.

Timothy was a timid fellow. Perhaps he was threatened by the older Ephesian elders. Maybe he felt inadequate ministering in the shadow of a man like Paul. Maybe he was afraid of people. Paul says, "Prescribe and teach these things!" (4:11). The word "prescribe" means to command. It refers to an order passed down a

military chain of command. What Paul is saying is, "Timothy, exercise your gift with confidence and authority, backed up by your godly life!" And, persevere when opposition comes (4:16).

Perhaps this especially applies to the gift of teaching. You can't be a people-pleaser and preach God's truth. The Bible isn't God's handbook of helpful hints for happy living. It gives us God's sure truth, His commandments for life. It confronts sin and selfishness. God's spokesman had better not beat around the bush.

Hugh Latimer, who later was martyred by Bloody Mary used to say to himself before he preached at the royal court: "Latimer, Latimer, thou art going to speak before the high and mighty king, Henry VIII, who is able, if he think fit, to take thy life away. Be careful what thou sayest. But Latimer, Latimer, remember thou art also about to speak before the King of kings and Lord of lords. Take heed thou dost not displease Him."

But it also applies to every spiritual gift when the person is growing in godliness. If you're walking with Christ, then you have a vital contribution to make to His body. We should never do it with arrogance or confidence in ourselves. But the point is, God wants to use you to impart something of Christ to others. It's not humility, but rather the sin of being too self-absorbed, if, like Moses when God called him, you refuse to do what God has gifted and called you to do. And you're not being faithful to Him if you quit at the first sign of difficulty.

- E. Remember that eternal issues are at stake in the exercise of your spiritual gift.

"You will save both yourself and those who hear you" (4:16). Paul obviously is not talking about being saved by works. We are saved by grace through faith apart from works (Eph. 2:8-9). But there is also a future aspect to salvation. Those who are saved will persevere and they will influence others to be saved as well. This may apply more to those with gifts of teaching or evangelism, but it also applies to someone with the gift of helps or giving or showing mercy. As you grow in godliness and exercise your gift faithfully as unto the Lord, He will use you in the eternal salvation of lost people.

You need to remember this especially when opposition comes. Timothy was not in an easy situation in Ephesus, where he had to confront these false teachers. No doubt he was being attacked. It would have been easy to say, "Why bother? Why take this flak? I'm out of here!" But Paul says, "Timothy, remember that eternal issues are at stake! You must persevere in the salvation you have received. Those hearing your message need to be saved and to persevere. So when you're discouraged, when you're being attacked, don't quit! Eternal issues are at stake.

Conclusion

Stan Mikita, a star center for the Chicago Blackhawks hockey team, used to get in a lot of fights during games. He stopped one day when his daughter, Meg, who was eight at the time, asked a very grown up question: "How can you score a goal, Daddy, when you're in the penalty box all the time?"

If I might rephrase the question, How can you work for the Lord if you aren't walking with the Lord? If you have trusted in Christ, you're on His team. You're in the ministry. You are as responsible as I am before God to fulfill your ministry. To do it, pay attention to your *walk* with Christ; that's the foundation. And, pay attention to your *work* for Him. Don't neglect the gift He has entrusted to you.

Discussion Questions

1. How would this church be different if every member viewed himself or herself as a minister of Jesus Christ?
2. How godly does a person need to be to get involved in ministry?
3. How important is it to know your spiritual gift? What difference does it make?
4. Why are so many Christians suffering "burnout"? Is it inevitable? How can it be avoided?

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