

Good morning.

Good morning.

Today's scripture reading is from 1 Timothy 4, 11 through 16.

Of course, I lost it on my way up here.

Command and teach these things.

Don't let anyone look down on you because of your youth.

but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, and to teaching.

Do not neglect your gift which was given you through the prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

Be diligent in these matters.

Give yourself wholly to them so that everyone may see your progress.

Watch your life and doctrine closely.

Preserve in them because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

The sermon might sound a little familiar.

This is the sermon I gave, I think it was my first one.

You guys had me come preach like a million times when I was candidating.

But it was the first sermon I gave the first time I was down here to candidate.

And then I gave the same sermon at my dad's church right before he retired.

So they asked me to just come speak to the church.

They also asked me to come pastor the church, but I told them that I love you guys here and that I'm not going anywhere.

So trusting that the Lord is leading them through that process as well.

But this was, I think, an important, critical time in that church's life.

And I think these are important, critical things to hear at those various transition points.

But also, it's a sermon that I know I need to hear and that we need to hear as a church probably at least once a year, if not more often.

So I wasn't...

I wasn't too concerned about dusting it off, bringing it out again, and presenting it to you again, because these are important truths that we need to keep in front of us all the time, not just at beginnings, not just at ends, but even as we live life together and in the middle as well.

So let's pray and ask the Lord for help this morning.

Lord, we do ask that you would open our eyes, that you would help us to see the beauty of your son,

the reliability of your word, the comprehensiveness of the gospel, Lord, and just the power that you have worked through all of these things to build your church, to renew us, to grow us, to conform us into the image of Christ.

Lord, we just ask that as we open your word this morning, as we hear some pretty straightforward and clear commands,

Lord, that you would produce faith, that you would strengthen our faith, that you would help us to lean on your word and trust you and the things that you have said.

We pray all this in Jesus' name, again.

Amen.

So it's baseball season.

It's a fun time of year.

The Guardians look pretty solidly mediocre again for another season.

Can't wait for a first round exit for us in the future.

It's going to be wonderful.

It's wonderful being a Cleveland fan.

Sometimes though, I don't know if you've ever played baseball or maybe there's other activities that are similar.

I think this is a universal principle that applies to any skill or art or sport that you might play.

but hitters will get in a slump or pitchers will lose command and they can't find the strike zone anymore.

When that happens, when things seem to be going wrong and you just seem to not have the touch that day, it's easy to panic.

It's easy to overcompensate.

It's easy to start pressing and start making some big changes in your swing or in your delivery.

But my baseball coach in high school helpfully always preached,

If you take care of the little things, the hits, the batting average, the strikeouts, those will take care of themselves.

You do the next thing that you know to do right and to do well, and the big things will take care of themselves.

And really what he meant by that was that there's a lot of factors that go into hitting a home run or a high batting average or

you know, high strikeout rate, some of which you don't have control over, right?

So don't lose focus, you know, looking around at the things that you can't control, but rather take the next step that you're supposed to take in preparing well and doing what you need to do to get yourself right

for the next game, for the next pitch, for the next at-bat.

And Paul's telling Timothy something similar in our passage.

He's reminding Timothy, who you'll remember as a young pastor, he communicates that here in this passage by saying, don't let anyone despise you for your youth or for being young.

And he's reminding Timothy here that God does big things as his church trusts him in the little things.

right, emphasis on God does big things when his church trusts him in the little things.

And I kind of described this principle, broke this principle down into three things that I think Paul's saying here.

One, he's encouraging Timothy that being comes before doing.

Faithfulness comes before fruitfulness, and progress comes before perfection.

You'll probably have heard one of those things out of my mouth at various times, at Sunday school, or in a combined board meeting, or a sermon here on Sunday, because there are three crucial, important principles when we're thinking about how to live together, how to conduct ministry, and what God's doing among us as we're doing what he's called us to do.

So first, being before doing.

Look at verse 11, chapter four, verse 11 here.

command and teach these things, right?

Command and teach these things.

What are the these things in verse 11?

Well, this little phrase, these things, comes up quite a bit in the pastoral epistles.

Primarily what he's saying with these things is kind of like the whole body of teaching, right?

The gospel, all that the apostles are saying and sharing about what Christ has done, but the gospels and their interpretation in the epistles.

But in particular, in a closer context in the pastoral epistles, Paul's already used this phrase a few times here in 1 Timothy.

So if you look at 4, 6, if you put these things before the brothers, and then chapter 3, 14 to 15, we saw that these things was kind of referring to the gospel or like the...

historic events of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, but then also the profound spiritual impact that that had in starting and growing the church.

So Paul's basically saying right here, the gospel, the good news of who Jesus is, and all that God is through Jesus for his church.

So put these things, the gospel, very plainly, lived out by the church before the brothers.

And part of Timothy's job description is to kind of live out, to set an example of the gospel at work in somebody's life for the brothers.

So the gospel is good news.

It's a message.

It's what God has done for us through Jesus and his death, burial, and resurrection.

But the gospel produces fruit.

It's good news not just that you can be right with God,

but that's the most important part.

But it's also good news that you can become a new creation.

You can become who God created you to be, right?

So you can be transformed from a sinful person, marred, disfigured, by sin to being something beautiful, holy, in Christ's likeness.

Look at verses 12 and 15.

This is how Paul has called Timothy to live that example of faithfulness and holiness before the brothers.

He says,

Verse 15 says, practice these things, immerse yourself in them so that all may see your progress.

So these things that he's talking about is not just cold doctrine, but it's doctrine that has a living effect, that produces fruit in people.

Verse 12 describes godly behavior.

Verses 14 to 15 describes the giftedness, the gifts that Timothy has received in ministering the word

And then verses 15 to 16 implies that this is a lifelong thing that Timothy's to do, to model for the believers what it looks like to be godly, but also what it looks like to be one who's immersed in the word, ministering the word.

I just want to point out, notice the glaring lack of concern for Timothy, young pastor, that is really the second wave of caretakers for the church.

You have the apostles who saw the risen Christ.

I feel like we need to clarify this.

Apostles saw the risen Christ, received a special type of authority from God for those who saw Jesus physically, bodily, and that was a period within the church.

No more apostles today.

We can talk more about that at another time.

But it's Timothy coming up as a pastor, as like this first wave of pastor elder that's gonna take care of the church.

Paul's instructions for him are to set an example, right?

Preach the word, set an example.

Notice the glaring lack of concern for strategy and results.

He doesn't place upon Timothy this burden of, hey, make sure you grow the church by 50% in 10 years.

He doesn't say, hey, why don't you take a poll of everybody in Ephesus and then find out what they really want to hear and mix in the gospel in a package that they're going to be a little more accepting of.

I'm not saying that that's necessarily bad.

I'm just saying Paul's just not concerned with that at all.

He's primarily concerned with Timothy's behavior and the fact that he's continuing to preach the word.

And this isn't just a Timothy or a senior pastor thing.

We saw this in the qualifications for elders in chapter three, for elders and deacons.

All of the qualifications except for one

are character qualifications.

The one that's a skill requirement is a qualification for elder that they're able to teach, that they're able to instruct.

And that's a pretty big umbrella as well.

It doesn't mean that all elders need to be able to get up here and preach a sermon necessarily, although I believe all of our elders are more than capable of doing that.

There's a lot of ways to teach and instruct at the Sunday school level, in the counseling room.

There's a lot of ways to impart doctrine and godly wisdom.

So anyways,

Primarily, character qualifications.

And if we're going to be effective in ministering to others, this is kind of breaking this down into a principle.

If we're going to be effective in ministering to others, priority one is our own walk with God and becoming like Jesus.

Priority one is our own walk with God and becoming like Jesus.

Ministry flows out of that.

Becoming like God or walking with God and becoming like Jesus requires sound doctrine, right?

It requires truth, but it also requires the power of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

It requires other believers.

All the stuff we've been seeing in the book of 1 Timothy requires more than that, more than just being accurately right.

So being before doing, right?

It says if you want to be a true minister of the word, if you want to hold this office of pastor, if you're called to lead God's people, if you're called to minister to others and speak God's truth to others, which we all are, Paul calls us in Ephesians, every one of us in Ephesians, to speak the truth and love to one another, if we're going to participate in that, being has to come before doing.

But Paul does tell Timothy to do some stuff, right?

He tells him there are some specific things that he tells Timothy to do.

And in these things that he tells him to do, he emphasizes faithfulness before fruitfulness.

I did the same thing in Sunday school.

I'm sorry, guys.

Those are, there's the points.

I just totally forgot the PowerPoint.

Faithfulness before fruitfulness.

So when we're thinking about, okay, I still, I live in a world where things have to get done and we got to do some kind of action.

Like what are we to do?

Well, when we're thinking about what we're to do, the particulars of the things that we're to do, we're to emphasize faithfulness as opposed to jumping immediately to maximizing fruitfulness.

Paul instructs Timothy to do three things in verse 13.

Look at verse 13.

He says...

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

The public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

These are not unrelated things, but he does give them three things to do.

First, the public reading of Scripture.

It's good for us to just hear Scripture.

It's good for us to just hear Scripture read in larger chunks.

I was just having a conversation with somebody.

We're talking about evangelism a little bit, and they're like,

Yeah.

Sometimes I've been shocked at how the scripture just changes people's minds, right?

I'll just sit down and we'll just read the passage and I won't say a word.

And they'll be like, you know what?

I never saw that before.

I never realized that that's that way.

The word of God is living and active, we're told in Hebrews, sharper than two-edged sword, be able to pierce to

like the division of soul and spirit, right?

It cuts to us.

There's a wisdom and there's a divine beauty in the scripture that's self-authenticating and speaks for itself.

We don't have to help it out, right?

We don't have to help it out.

We're told to do other things and explain it, but the scripture often just speaks for itself.

Again, it's living and active.

So trusting that the scriptures are sufficient is much easier said than done, right?

It's easy to get impatient with God

to not see immediate results in someone we love, someone behaving in a way that we don't agree with or that we don't believe is biblical or right, or to see the glaring need in our community or even in our church and changes that we believe are biblical and we wanna see happen and they're just not happening fast enough.

It's easy to take the reins

to take matters into our own hands, and to get ahead of God.

But really, any change that we're going to see is primarily going to come from God at work through his word, right?

Through his word.

Now, he doesn't say that we shouldn't be passive and just like, you know, launch scripture bombs and then walk away.

He also calls Timothy to exhortation, right?

Exhortation is encouraging someone to continue doing the good they already know to do.

So you know this is a good thing to do, but you just need a little encouragement to actually do it.

We're prone to wander.

We need regular reminders.

That's why I'm okay preaching this sermon again, even though we preached it three years ago.

We need constant reminders of what's real, what's true, what's important.

Jesus really did pay it all, and he's really coming again.

That doing what he says is really worth the sacrifice and rejection.

You know, we need to be reminded that not doing what he says leads to pain and destruction.

Because there's all kinds of stuff every day that's saying, you know what?

You don't really need to do that.

You don't need to think that way.

This will pay off more than walking with Christ, than being with the Lord.

There's all kinds of things, our own desires.

It's not just even out there, right?

It's in our own hearts.

Our own little idols are always telling us, you know, feed me, feed me, and I will give you what you really want.

It's a lot, and we need reminders of that.

We forget easily.

We're easily discouraged.

I'm chief among those probably, right?

I need reminders every day.

We need to be exhorted and encouraged from the word.

There's not a day that I don't need to be in the word.

There's not a day that...

that you don't need to be in the word.

We need regular reminders.

But he also says teach, right?

So read the Bible, exhort people on what they know is true from the Bible, and then teach.

Teach the Bible.

Listen, we don't know everything.

Newsflash, you don't know everything.

Neither do I. If you needed that reminder today, take that one home with you.

It'll serve you well.

Some of the things we think we know are wrong, and so we need to be taught stuff from the Bible, right?

So sometimes just being informed that you don't know what you think you know, and then also receiving some stuff that you didn't know you didn't know is helpful.

If that's confusing, just read the Bible and just know that you don't know everything, right?

And that you need to learn stuff.

Teaching is providing new information, new perspective to God's people from God's word.

Information is always more than just information.

It shapes how we see the world and how we interact with the world.

So those are three pretty simple things to do, right?

Read the Bible, tell people and encourage people on what they know to do already, and then help provide new information and new perspective from the scripture.

And Paul wants Timothy to do these things with persistence, right, in verse 16.

He says, keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching, persist in this, for by so doing, you will save both yourself

and your ears.

These aren't things for you to do a little while and then move past them.

They're things that require attention and effort every day.

Day in, day out, Sunday in, Sunday out, year in and year out.

The pull is going to be away from these things.

The current of the stream that we're living in is gonna be away from these things and it's gonna take persistence and effort to be centered on the word of God and to rely on the word of God to not get ahead of the word of God and move away from the word of God.

That's gonna take effort.

We're not just gonna stay here.

It's not like, oh, this is what the church has always done so we're just not gonna move.

There's gonna be a current away from this

And this isn't always what the church has always done.

This current has been flowing for a long time.

So it takes effort to recenter and to keep ourselves centered on the word of God and to stay there and to just rely on it.

David Helm, pastor in Chicago, got a couple of great podcasts.

You can check them out.

He helps run the Simeon Trust, which is like coaching for pastors.

preaching for to help uh preachers uh he says pastors overestimate what they can do in a year so they overestimate what they do in the year they're like i'm gonna come in right and i'm gonna change things up we're gonna shake things up and and uh we're gonna be you know have 50 salvations by the end of the year and everything's gonna be great church is gonna be huge they overestimate what they can do in a year um and underestimate what god can accomplish in 10 years

When you go to cut down a tree, you don't just, you know, you've got this massive tree, say you've got like a 35-inch tree, pretty good-sized tree, right?

And you're going to cut this thing down with an axe.

You don't just start swinging randomly.

Like, oh, let's try hitting it here once.

Let's try hitting it way down here once.

You pick a spot, and you keep swinging.

You keep swinging, and you hit the same spot.

That's what we're doing every Sunday.

We preach the Word, we sing the Word, we pray the Word,

And then we come back and we do it again next week.

And we hit the same spot.

Because I need to be reminded.

You need to be reminded.

We need to hear the word of God.

And we trust that as we do that faithfully, that God is doing something behind the scenes that you and I could never do in our own strength and our own power.

So bottom line, faithfulness comes before fruitfulness.

Thinking about the church's ministry in general, faithfulness to biblical principles and the regular ministry of the word is priority one.

If anything gets in the way of the regular ministry of the word of God, or if it draws us away and gets in the way from us being faithful to the principles that we find in the Bible, then we need to get rid of it.

1 Corinthians 3.6 says, I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

God gave the growth.

And as we're faithful, God will provide the fruit.

Now listen, I'm all for, and we have been, and I believe we're doing a good job in this.

If you think otherwise, feel free to shoot me an email or have a conversation.

I'd be glad to hear from you.

But I'm all for the strategic use of our resources.

and careful planning, and we're working hard at doing that.

But Paul was, and Paul was extremely strategic in the churches, in the cities that he went to, as far as setting up the spread of the gospel in the ancient world at that time.

However, faithfulness needs to be at the heart of the strategy.

The strategy needs to be centered around being faithful to the word of God.

That needs to be the first and foremost consideration, not just how can we draw a crowd or how can we get a bunch of people to feel a little bit more warm and fuzzy about Christianity and about Jesus.

First and foremost is how can we be faithful in a way that's winsome?

So how can we be faithful to the word of God in a way that helps share the good news and the hope that we have?

Because sometimes the faithful path isn't always the most strategic path.

The faithful path isn't always what seems to be the most strategic at the time.

David coming after Goliath with five stones wasn't like the war council's first plan in defeating Goliath and the Philistines.

Gideon attacking the Midianites with a bunch of dudes with clay pots and torches and trumpets wasn't like a strategy that they teach at West Point.

Jesus leaving the gospel and the future of the church

with 12 working class guys that were mostly fishermen and like a shady tax collector, wasn't the most strategically sound option at the time.

You know, sometimes the church living together in unity and love and being committed to the ministry of the word doesn't feel like the most strategic thing.

It can sometimes feel like insignificant.

But what God has called us to do

And what he has called us to be faithful in is our job.

That's our end of the bargain.

Who knows what God's going to do with the faithfulness of his people?

The God who turned five loaves and two fishes into a meal for 5,000 can do whatever he wants, like whatever he wants with our humble offering.

Being before doing, faithfulness before fruitfulness, and lastly, progress before perfection.

Being and faithfulness are hard, and none of us do them perfectly.

There's bad ways to say that we're working on being and working on being faithful.

We can just sit on our hands and do nothing and be lazy and be like, oh, I'm just being faithful.

No, but if we're going to actually do them, if we're going to actually walk with the Lord and we're actually going to be faithful in what he's doing and rely on him, that's going to be difficult.

We're not going to do it perfectly.

But Paul...

Paul expects that as Timothy focuses on these things, that there will be progress.

Paul expects that as Timothy gives himself and centers the church on these things, that there will be progress.

Look at verse 15.

He says, "...practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress."

As you do this, there will be progress and people will be able to see it.

This is probably the most comforting verse in the passage.

This means that the whole process is marked by grace.

Because we know Timothy wasn't doing it perfectly.

That's one of the reasons Paul wrote the letter.

Because he's like, hey, Timothy, you got to kick these guys out of the church, right?

They're preaching a false gospel and they're dragging everybody down into this sin.

You got to do a hard thing.

And so we know Timothy wasn't like doing all this stuff perfectly from the beginning and rather the progress that was going to be made and the progress that was being made was by grace.

Faithfulness looks like growth, not perfection.

This means that a big part of the example that we set for one another is that of confession.

and repentance, and forgiveness, right?

That, you know, being an elder and a deacon, there is a certain level of conduct that is laid out in chapter three, but largely, they're big categories, right?

Largely, they're big categories, and it doesn't mean that you don't sit against your wife, or that, I'm not talking about big ways necessarily, I'm just saying like that you're not a

  speak a hard word to your wife or that you sit against your kids that are too harsh to your kids at times.

What it does mean is that when you mess up, right?

When you sin, when you wrong these people, that you come back to them humbly in repentance, that you give yourself to the judgment of your other brothers on the board and say, hey, this is what happened.

What do I need to do to make it right?

Like, do I need to step down at this time?

I'm throwing myself at the grace and mercy of God and the judgment of my other brothers on the board and the judgment of God's people within the congregation.

And you respond in grace and humility, right?

That I am not perfect, we are not perfect, but rather we're on a journey that's marked by grace and humility.

  growth, progress, progress before perfection.

And we ought to have, we've had a lot of discussions about this over the last couple of years, right?

We ought to have a community where it's, it's never easy to confess sin, right?

But we ought to have a community starting from the top down on the elder board and on the deacon board as well, where it's expected

  that there will be the confession of sin to one another, even on those boards.

And that sin will be dealt with properly in an appropriate, gracious and merciful, but also faithful manner from the top down.

And that we as a church ought to embody a community where it's expected that we're making progress, but we're not perfect.

  It's okay not to be okay, but it's not okay to stay there.

And it's okay to come forward with our sin, with the things that God has revealed to us as we're in his word that are not right in our life.

And it's okay to ask for help with those things.

That was it in the notes.

I think God just wanted me to say that this morning.

And if you want to talk, if you want to talk about something that's going on in your life, we'd be happy to talk with you and walk through those things with you.

All right, I gotta get back on my nose though, so.

You know, we,

again, this is done with persistence, right?

The biggest thing that he's doing here is not necessarily that he's drawing a crowd.

It's not necessarily, the biggest thing that God is doing here at Lakewood is not that he's drawing a crowd or that he's establishing this big infrastructure or this big institution.

The biggest thing that God is doing here is that he's saving us, right?

That he's bringing us, that he's growing us spiritually, that he's killing sin in us and that he's molding us and shaping us into people

into Christlikeness.

And I think that Paul's got a couple things in mind when he's talking about this progress that's evident to everyone.

You know, if we persist in the reading and encouraging and teaching the scriptures to one another, we'll be saved from lies, false teaching,

and the destruction that comes with them, right?

So when Paul says you'll save both yourself and your hearers, you'll be saved from following falsehoods and the destruction that comes with living out of step with the way that God created the world, the destruction that comes with offending a holy God and breaking his laws and incurring his wrath.

But he's also saying that if we persist in love, faith, and purity, we'll be saved again from that hideous, marred, and sinful existence of

and be made into beautiful new creations now, right?

Now, right?

That we'll be part of salvation is not just being right with God again.

The other half of salvation is that we're glorified, that we're sanctified into being more like Christ.

And that's huge.

Like we want everyone in this town and in this world to experience what it's like to be born again, right?

And to be brought into God's family, but also to be who God has made them to be.

And if all that God does in the next 10 years is keep us from falling and makes us a little bit more like Jesus every day, that's not a fail.

If we don't take in another member tomorrow or the next year or the year after that and it's us walking with the Lord and him molding us and shaping us into his image, that's not a fail.

That's a miracle.

But I trust that if God's

giving us his heart for others, and that he's molding us and shaping us into his image, that that's not just gonna stay here with us, right?

That in order to be faithful to that heart that he has for others, the great commission that he's given us, we'll be sharing that good news of what he's done in us and through us with others.

So, you know, I've been here three years, gonna be four years in August, I guess, so three and a half years.

Time flies.

I know.

Well, yeah, thanks, Kirk.

It's been but a day to me, especially with you, Kirk.

It's been great.

You know, there's been a lot of ups and downs over the years.

There's been a lot of ups and downs even in these three years.

But especially if you look at the time when Lakewood was planted back in the 60s to now, there's been ups and downs.

But by God's grace, Lakewood is here.

We're here today, gathering together to worship the Lord.

And that's a work of God.

Wasn't one man, wasn't a couple of men, but it's a work of God that his people are still here, praising him and worshiping him.

And that's a big thing.

That's a wonderful thing.

I'm glad to be a part of it.

I hope you are too.

God does big things as his church trusts him in the little things.

The little things look like being before doing, faithfulness before fruitfulness, and progress before perfection.

I mean, Paul even alluded to this.

He said, I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

It's not always easy to trust the Lord with the big things.

It's never easy to trust the Lord with the big things.

But I'm sure many of you can testify that it is sweet, right?

That living in dependence on the Lord

might be scary.

We may not want to do it initially, but when we take that step of faith and we trust him and we're faithful with the little things that he's given us to do, that it is sweet to be in the Savior's arms, leaning on him for the things that are ultimately out of our control.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father,

Lord, I pray that you would help us to feel the weight this morning, again, of what we often take for granted.

Lord, we take your word for granted.

We take the gathering of your people together to worship you for granted.

Lord, we take the other believers that you put in our life for granted.

Amen.

Lord, we even take the great grace and mercy that you've shown us in calling us out of darkness into life for granted.

And Lord, I just pray that you would impress upon us again the weight and the glory of these gifts that you have given us.

Lord, you're doing things that we can't begin to comprehend today.

things that we can never do for ourselves or by ourselves through these ordinary, sometimes mundane things.

And so, Lord, we look to you again in amazement and in wonder

at what you've done.

And Lord, we look to you again in anticipation, in eager anticipation of what you will do as we put forward the effort, as we recenter ourselves and take the next step that you've called us to take.

Lord, we're thankful for your grace, for your mercy.

We're in awe of your majesty.

Lord, we pray that you would give us the level of joy that's appropriate to the glory and the majesty that we experience on a regular basis but often forget.

We pray all this in Jesus' name.

Amen.