

2 Timothy 2:14-26
Who Are You Listening To?

Summary: It's not easy to keep your life focused on Jesus, so Christians need to be reminded of Truth by leaders who intentionally pursue it themselves.

In 2009 Pixar released the movie *Up!* which tells the story of 78-year-old Carl who flies his house to South America in search of adventure along with an 8-year-old stowaway named Russell. Along the way they meet Dug, a dog with a special collar that allows him speak. Dug is thoughtful, loveable... and easily distracted. During their first meeting Dug tells Carl "I have just met you and I love you." And then is immediately distracted by a squirrel.



So, if someone has ever said "Squirrel" and acted distracted, now you know where that comes from. The scene captures something people can identify with - life is full of distractions even under the best conditions.

Unfortunately, this is true spiritually too. We say we value our faith and aspire to live a spiritually-centered life, but we get distracted. It's hard to get to church on Sunday. It's hard to read your Bible. It's hard to pray for more than thirty seconds without your mind wandering or knowing what to say or how to say it.

But did you know that's actually not new? As we read 2 Timothy this morning, we find Paul encouraging Timothy to remind Christians in the ancient world of things they already know. Hold on to spiritual truth he says. Build your life on it, don't get distracted. Don't stray from the path. Ignore the squirrels spiritually speaking and stay focused on God.

Read with me:

2 Timothy 2:14 Remind *them* of these things, charging *them* before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.

Church here's the thing I want you to see: two thousand years ago, long before anyone had a smartphone or even electricity, Paul said Christians are going to have a hard time staying spiritually focused. They had spiritual squirrels in the ancient world too.

Let that sink in – because some of us dream of getting out of DC, to someplace we can settle down and slow down and *then* we would have the life we dream of – a focused, thoughtful, intentional life. *It's not true.* Paul tells Timothy, you need to **remind** the people in your church of things they already know. And, you need to **charge** them – that's a strong word - not to get caught up with other ideas.

Christian, listen, your spiritual life requires constant calibration. Like a woodsman's ax or a chef's knife - it needs to be sharpened regularly, even if you use it daily. You are prone to wander from what is true and helpful. You either get sucked into or go chasing after things that do not **profit** or which **ruin** you.

There is no such thing as a no-maintenance spiritual life.

Over and over throughout this letter Paul emphasizes that following Christ is not easy, but it's worth it. He's already compared Christians to soldiers, athletes and farmers, this morning we'll see him offer three more examples each coupled with a specific warning. Read the first one with me:

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. **16** But shun profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. **17** And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, **18** who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. **19** Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

The Workman: Plow Straight Don't Stray

A Worker was a laborer who would plow and plant fields and then tend and harvest crops. So, Paul says, if you're going to be working for God, do good work – **rightly divide the word of truth** like a worker rightly divides the land.



Think of a farmer preparing fields for planting and making those nice, long, evenly spaced, perfectly straight rows in the field. That's the imagery Paul has in mind. You can look at the field and tell instantly if the person who planted that was focused on what they were doing or distracted by some squirrel.

So, Paul warns of things that will lead us off course. First he talks about external sources of distraction, watch out for (vs 16) **profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. 17 And their message will spread like cancer.**

Paul gives an example of two men in the early church who were teaching false doctrine and the affect it was having. They were overthrowing the faith of some people. And notice this: they were doing it in the name of spirituality and religion. These men were not leading people away from Christ and salvation with hedonism and lust and fleshly indulgence, *they sounded spiritual*. But their thoughts and ideas were poison to the soul. They were using religion to make connections with people, but instead of leading people closer to God they were leading them further away.

Paul's reaction to this is two-fold. He says the Lord knows who are really His. There will come a day of judgment and credentials will be inspected. Woe to those who claim to speak for God and are actually speaking for themselves. Woe to those who take up positions of leadership and teaching in the church for themselves without being called to those positions by God for ["The Lord knows those who are His."](#)

And then, Paul says, ["Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."](#)

In other words, if your life has really been impacted by Jesus, if you really know Him – who He is and what He has done, it will have an observable impact on your life. Just like driving down the road and seeing down those long, straight, rows of plants – it will be obvious who and what is directing your life.

We talk often around here about being increasingly available to God. When you focus on listening to Jesus and following Him, you will depart further and further and with greater consistency from iniquity, from sin. Your life will look different from people around you, because of Jesus. You will be built on a firm foundation. You will not be plagued by cankers and cancer. You will plow straight, useful, beautiful lines with your life.

So this is the first point Paul makes – be a workman who plows straight instead of going astray after squirrels. Here's the second point he makes:

[20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. 21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. 22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.](#)

The Vessel – For Honor or Dishonor

The second example is that of a vessel, Paul is thinking here of some royal palace – there are fancy cups and plates and bowls that you put out for a feast or a banquet and then there are those which are more functional for everyday purposes and chores. In your house you might have the nice dishes and paper plates.

And the point is, *you can become the nice dishes*. You can be the kind of thing God puts out on the table at Thanksgiving, a special dish, a cherished and honored dish, a favorite and useful dish – by cleansing yourself and keeping away from dishonor.

So, let's keep the big picture in view – Paul is saying Christians, *even those who are engaged in church*, need to be reminded of central truths. They need to stay focused and avoid *external* arguments and ideas that will lead them astray like Hymenaeus and Philetus, and now we see they also need to be on guard against *internal* desires and impulses that will pull them away.

Christian, you must [flee youthful lusts](#). And that includes physical lusts and desires, but it's more than that, it's also the self-centeredness and self-assurance that are the plague of our early years from the teens through the twenties when you are impatient, arrogant, obstinate and ambitious. When you think you've got it all figured out, you see what is wrong, and you're the one to fix it.

Now, a certain amount of that can be good, and perhaps even given to you by God, but if so, you'll need to learn to wear it in a way that honors God and loves people. The problem is not necessarily drive, ambition or direction – the problem with lust is it puts self at the center instead of others. And that is why, although this is a particular problem for younger people, it's also something we continue to fight throughout life. You always seem to hear that voice on the inside saying, do it this way, do it for yourself, do it now.

And Paul says that is not going to lead you toward holiness – that is not going to make a [chosen vessel](#). You need to put all of that off and put the same amount of energy, focus, and drive into seeking virtue and good company - [22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart](#).

There are three things I want to point out here.

First, I want to point out that effort is involved. On the one hand we're told to [flee](#) youthful lusts and then we're told to [pursue](#) righteousness, faith, love, and peace. And the word there for pursue is the same word used of hunter tracking prey. It requires intentionality, focus, and endurance.

But second, I want to point out the tension here. We're told to be active – to pursue these things, but they're all fruit of the Spirit. In other words, they're all the kinds of things that God will produce in us as we abide in Christ. So who is really responsible here? And the answer is, yes. Your spiritual growth is not either/or, it's both/and. God is doing His work, sprouting these seeds in your soul, but you also have work to do to tend them and cultivate them and help them grow. You need to [Pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace](#).

Finally, point three, notice it's a team sport, not an individual race. Do it [with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart](#). You need people in your life, you need people around you, who are headed in the same direction, working the same problems, and sharing the same values.

You need:

- people who are ahead of you that can pass on what they've learned,
- people alongside you who know exactly what you're going through, and
- people behind you to whom you can pass on lessons learned.

Your relationship with God is personal, but it is not private. It was never meant to be that way. You will only go so far alone.

If you want to connect with people here at City Gates there are several ways to do that. First, come early and stay late – just be here and know that a handshake goes both ways. If someone doesn't say hi to you, say hi to them. Second, get into a small group – whether it's a home group, a Turn Aside study, or a core class – our small groups create little communities in the big church. Third, serve. Get involved with a ministry and you'll meet other people.

We all go through seasons of life and some things fit better at certain times, figure out where you are and what you've got to work with and prioritize connection – other people will help you grow and you'll help them.

Our final example this morning is the servant.

23 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. 24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, 26 and *that* they may come to their senses *and escape* the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to *do* his will.

The Servant – Gentle or Generating Problems

Let me back up so we can follow the thinking here – Timothy and the church in Ephesus are going through hard times, facing disappointment and opposition. The culture is against them and what do they need to do? Remember the core truths of the faith. Guard their hearts and minds against external ideas and influences so that they plow straight, and watch out for internal drives and desires that would make them a dishonorable vessel instead of the centerpiece on the Lord's Thanksgiving table. And now, they need to get along well with others.

That's not easy. Notice the delicate balance here – avoid foolish and ignorant disputes but also correct those who are in opposition. Stand for what you believe, humbly correct those whose lives and ideology are going astray, gently call them to repentance and truth, but avoid inflammatory, foolish, ignorant disputes in the process.

Don't win the argument and lose the soul. Because, ultimately, that's what stake here – eternal souls – our own and those of others. We have to remember that.

I know some of you have people in your life that you really, really, want to see change. You want to see them repent of their sins and turn toward Christ. Well, here you find instruction worth chewing on and praying over. Here we are reminded of the spiritual side of things – that the devil really does take people captive and there is nothing we can do to set them free – but God can. So, pray for them, ask God to set them free, and pray that you would be useful in that process and ready to give an answer or an encouragement or help or direction when they need it without getting into disputes or generating strife.

This gives me a chance to bring up something I've been wanting to talk about for several weeks but the timing was never right. It has to do with not getting pulled into quarrels, being patient and humble, and it's the kind of thing I'm increasingly concerned about as we head into the election cycle.

It happened almost a month ago, in the week leading up to Easter. The first thing I heard was probably on Wednesday, when I learned the Fairfax Board of Supervisors had declared Easter Sunday as a Day of Transgender Visibility and Christians were obviously upset. Could you believe that our County officials would do this? It's despicable and insensitive – that our leaders would make a mockery of the holiest of Christian holidays.

It was shocking to me, it was disorienting, the kind of thing that had to be untrue - but I looked into it, and it was real. In fact, the headline of the article online read: *Fairfax County's board of supervisors mocks Christians by designating Easter as Transgender Visibility Day.*

Here's the opening paragraph of the article:

Last week, Democrats on Fairfax County's board of supervisors voted to designate Easter Sunday as Transgender Visibility Day. The proclamation goes far beyond the supposed intent of making transgender people and gender ideology activists feel seen. Members of the board are also sending a message to Christians that they do not matter as they turn one of their holiest days into a celebration of an ideology that undermines the church's core convictions.¹

Even more strangely, they gave a certificate commemorating the event to some person who identified as a pastor. So I looked her up and it turns out she leads a congregation of about a half dozen that meets in a townhouse in Fairfax City and she's a major advocate for all things gender and sexual orientation.



So, it was all strange, but apparently true. And yet, I let it go because it filled me with a mixture of anger and confusion neither of which helped prepare my soul and my teaching for Good Friday and Easter Sunday. So, I dismissed it and told the other pastors, well, let's just wait for Sunday to roll around and see which event is celebrated by more people – and we had record attendance on Easter Sunday.

¹ <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/restoring-america/faith-freedom-self-reliance/2936992/fairfax-countys-board-supervisors-mocks-christians-designating-easter-transgender-visibility-day/>

But before that, on Saturday morning I got a message on a text thread I'm part of with other pastors and it said the White House had just done the same thing – the President had declared Easter Sunday as Trans-Awareness Day. And again, I was totally disoriented and said what? Why would you do that? It's the kind of 'in your face' flex of political power that you expect from petty dictators and totalitarian governments. But again, I looked it up and it was true – the White House really had released a proclamation – it wasn't an April Fool's Joke.



It agitated me even more and so I looked a little further into *what is going on?* And eventually, I learned that neither Fairfax County nor the Federal Government were replacing Easter Sunday with an intentional plot. The Transgender Day of Visibility was established on March 31, 2009 – fifteen years ago, and it just so happened that this year the day fell on the same date as Easter. Next year the Day will still be on March 31, which is a Monday in 2025, and Easter will be almost a month later, on Sunday, April 20th.

But learning all of this history just agitated me even more because I had to go digging for it to understand. I felt like I had been intentionally manipulated and agitated.

I need you to listen very, very carefully to what I'm saying here. I don't doubt that some people in Fairfax County government and federal government got a kick out of this, they knew the Day of Transgender Visibility was on Easter and they probably thought it was funny. But the White House issued the same proclamation in 2021 and 2022, and 2023, when the Day was not on Easter - a fact conveniently overlooked in the reporting. For all of it's faults, the Administration most certainly was not "mocking Christians by designating Easter as Transgender Visibility Day" as the headlines read – the two dates just happened to coincide.

Now, again, I want to super clear in what I'm saying here – I'm not supporting the actions of the County or the White House, but I'm trying to help you see that some other group was *intentionally* spinning this in a way that would agitate Christians. People, voices, forces were at work to try to get you riled up and agitated. I don't know if they were ignorant of the fact that it was just an unfortunate coincidence of dates or if they knew it and just omitted the detail, but each time the story was presented to Christians it was: look at what your government officials are doing to you!

It was meant to be inflammatory. It was meant to be divisive. It was meant to agitate. There was no nuance or background as the story was presented to Christians. It was what Paul calls a foolish and ignorant dispute meant to generate strife. It was true – but only partly. If you came across this story like I did – you also, likely, were not given the full story. Why?

Again, I'm not, in any way endorsing or promoting anything other than a Biblically-defined, biologically-anchored, understanding of identity and sexuality because in this house, we believe science is real including anatomy and physiology and that theology should inform our interpretation of the data.

What I am saying is: there were, and there are, voices, forces, and people in the world today who spout things that sound religious, sound conservative, sound spiritual, and yet they are not **rightly dividing the word of truth**, they are not plowing straight lines, they are mixing your religion with other causes and fostering a culture of Christian outrage.

If you want to be upset about the government issuing a proclamation recognizing Transgender Visibility Day, that's fine – go for it, you could even ask for my support. But don't manipulate me into giving that support by telling me that they did all of this on Easter Sunday as if the two things are fused together. You're using my Christian faith to win support of your political views – which again, I may share, but there's no need to be deceitful and weave the two things together.

Church, we have to be vigilant. We have to be aware. We have to have discernment. Because, I think we will see more and more of this kind of thing. People will reduce you to a demographic and think you should be on their team because of your faith.

I'm asking you to be vigilant. Take a stance politically. Be active. Be involved. Stand for righteousness and justice. Stand for holiness and godliness. But be honest. Be clear. Don't manipulate. Humbly correct those who are going astray and pray that **God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, 26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.** But guard your own witness and testimony in the process.

Now, here's what I hope you'll be chewing on today:

- What spiritual truth do I need to remember? What will help me do that?
- Am I plowing straight, or are voices in my life distracting me?
- Am I cleansed and ready for the table or are my desires keeping me from honor?
- Who can help me grow spiritually, and who can I help?
- Am I standing gently but firmly?

This is who God wants you to be, even in difficult times. This is what He wants your life to look like – so invite Him in, surrender control, and ask Him to be the source of your strength.



A Harbor pilot is a person who knows a particular harbor well. Often they will be invited to come aboard a ship and either take control or coach the captain on how to navigate safely into the harbor and dock. That's what you need to do with Jesus – you've got this big container ship of a life that you're trying to steer – you need some help so you don't hit a bridge or another ship. Ask Him to come aboard and show you the way.

Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

2 Timothy 2:14-26 Who Are You Listening To?

Summary: It's not easy to keep your life focused on Jesus, so Christians need to be reminded of Truth by leaders who intentionally pursue it themselves.

- Are you easily distracted or laser-focused? What kinds of things distract you? Are some things easier to focus on than others?
- What have you found that you need to be regularly reminded of in your Christian journey?
- Do you romanticize the past or a slower pace of life? Are you disappointed to know that even ancient Christians needed to be reminded of Truth? Why do you think we imagine that it would be easier to stay focused at other times or in other places?
- **2 Timothy 2:19** "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."
 - o What is one thing that you have cut out of your life, or one change that you have made, because of Christ?
- Hymenaeus and Philetus brought a teaching to the church that caused division and led people astray. Have you ever experienced anything like this in a church you were part of?
 - o What are some harmful 'spiritual' or 'religious' teachings that spread like cancer today?
- What have you learned about the tension between energetically pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace and allowing the Spirit to produce them as you abide in Christ? How much of our spiritual growth should be our responsibility and how much should we receive as a gift from God?
- How do you know, personally, if you're quarreling unprofitably or gently instructing? Are you more likely to speak up or stay quiet and keep the peace? What's the advantage to each response? What's the drawback?
- If someone asked you – what does it mean to pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, how do I do that? What would you tell them?