

Devote Yourselves to God and his Word

1 Timothy 1:3; 2:1; 3:1–2; 4:6,13; 5:1–2,17–25; 6:2–10,17–21

Key Verse: 1 Timothy 4:13

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.”

This message was originally the second part of a message at our Leadership workshop but I adapted it for us today. The original intent of the message was to encourage those who are seeking to grow as a spiritual leader. For someone who doesn't just want to attend church but be a part of it and be active in it. For those who want to see the church do more and have an impact in their world. Since this was the second part of the message I can tell you that they first part covered the topics of dealing with false doctrine, making an environment of prayer, and installing godly leaders. But I will focus today on the 3 remaining parts of the study guide, carrying out the ministry of God's word, managing relationships and helping people have a godly view of money. Through this passage I hope that all of us will be encouraged to devote ourselves to God and his Word.

As a young man Timothy was called to serve the work of God in Ephesus. In the early Christian church, he had to learn many things in order to be an effective leader of the Ephesian church. So throughout this book Paul urged Timothy to grow and serve as a good minister for God's household. This was a daunting task even for the best of men. As one young man, how could Timothy lead a large ministry? How could he keep the ministry going in the right direction when it was continuously being attacked by false doctrines and superstitions? How could their humble church compete with the famous temple of Artemis one of the seven wonders of the ancient world? How could Timothy proclaim the gospel of Jesus in such a way that would turn the people, living in the second largest city of the Roman Empire, from all their distractions and really change their lives? In this way, Timothy's world isn't much different that our own. And Paul's encouragement to him is valuable to us today.

Through the grace of God and help of the Holy Spirit, Paul planted the church at Ephesus. God worked powerfully there and the Ephesian church grew in number and spirit. Timothy was with Paul during this eventful period as they held daily discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. (Ac 19) For two years they met every day until all the Jews and Greeks in the province heard the word of the Lord. God did extraordinary work through miracles to the point where people publicly confessed their evil deeds and repented by burning their sorcery scrolls and leaving their idol worship of Artemis. This was like a shock wave to the community. The burnt scrolls were valued at 50,000 days wages and the silver smith union started a riot because they were losing money. It was an amazing time. Sometime later Paul left and he sent Timothy to lead that ministry. In order to do this, Timothy would have to learn how to grow to be a good minister of Christ Jesus and then to put what he learned into action by serving as a good minister of God's household. Paul wanted Timothy to be a servant leader who led by example and not as one of the Pharisees who only ordered people around.

First, carrying out the ministry of God's word.

From the start of the book, Paul challenged Timothy to stay in Ephesus and to take command of and lead the church. This may have worked for Paul who was more experienced, well trained and had planted the church there in the first place. But Timothy wasn't like Paul. He was young, weak and timid. And as a timid man, how could he command older, wealthier and more influential men? Timothy would have to grow in courage and faith and overcome his fear and limitations in order to be a effective leader. Because of this maybe Timothy wanted to leave, but Paul urged him to stay. Humanly he didn't have the strength or qualifications to do it, so the only way that he would be able to, was if his strength and wisdom came from the Lord.

So Paul taught Timothy the secret, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” (4:13) This is probably the most important task that a good minister can do. Good ministers have to be, without a doubt, whole heartedly devoted to reading, preaching and teaching God's word. Devotion to God's word requires our whole heart. Timothy had to be more devoted to God's word than the false teachers were to their myths. He had to be more devoted than the business men were to their business or the gladiators who fought for life and death in the coliseum and certainly more devoted to God than those who served in the temple of Artemis. Most professional's lives depend upon how devoted they are to their skill. To be successful there has to be devotion. They say that it takes about 10,000 hours of practice to truly master a skill. That's the equivalent of working full time 8 hours a day for 5 years. However, Timothy's devotion had to go beyond human strength or love of his craft, his devotion had to come from his hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men. (4:10) His devotion had to be whole hearted - not half way. The Bible says that we can't

serve two masters, (Mt 6:24) so we will be devoted to something. If we are not devoted to God's word, then what will we be devoted to? This is why Paul found it crucial for Timothy to be diligent in giving himself wholly to reading God's word. (v4:15) This would be his power source to carry on the work of God's household and give Timothy the courage and faith to overcome his fear.

However, devotion to God's word requires focus. We live in a time of unparalleled distractions. There are so many things that clamor for our attention. There are; movies, cable and Netflix, theater, sports, and restaurants, Facebook, Twitter and blogs, phone calls, emails and texts. And those are things we like to do in our free time. What about our responsibilities. There is; work, school and chores, our kids, parents and relatives, paying the bills, fixing things that breakdown and not to mention the items on our honeydo list. That's the list where our wives ask, "Honey can you do this for me." In our time, we are busy people.

If we're so busy, how can we devote our selves to God's word? Psalm 1:2-3 says, "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night."³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." First we have to delight in God's word. If we don't truly like something we will never do it. It will always be forced, like eating our vegetables. We have to be drawn to God's word and love it. I have four kids and that means we have a lot of spills in our house. Have you ever noticed when you take a paper towel to wipe up a puddle how the liquid is sucked into the material? Sometimes I would put the corner of the towel into the spill to see how far the juice can make it up. It seems the liquid is drawn to the towel. Just as the juice is drawn into this is how we should draw the word of God into us. We have to have a thirst for the word of God and delight in it. Secondly we have to meditate on it day and night. This requires persistence and commitment. This is where we have to train ourselves to be faithful. This is the hard part. We have to set aside our time, block it out for the specific purpose of meditating on God's word. In the beginning it may be difficult but over time it will become our habit and blessing.

If Timothy delighted in God's word and devoted himself to faithfully reading it he would be blessed and fruitful. Then his soul would be nourished and God would equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:17) and have the strength and conviction to teach what God was giving him to others. Therefore, Bible study had to be his first priority so that he could have one clear message to give to the people. Otherwise the people will not be built up but only confused and frustrated. In teaching God's word, Timothy had to correct, rebuke and encourage those in the church with great patience and careful instruction. (2 Tim 4:2) This teaching had to be done in season and out, which means continuously, because Satan doesn't sleep. Just as an army guard must keep watch to protect the troops, God's word must be continuously taught so that God's people may be prepared because we don't know when Satan will attack.

Not only did Timothy have to teach God's word, he had to preach it. This required him to proclaim the gospel. In our times, it's not welcomed to talk about Jesus in public. There is a strong push from the world to keep God out of public life under the separation of church and state. They want to keep prayer out of public schools, the Ten Commandments out of the courtrooms and remove "In God we trust" from our money. So being a preacher is not on any of the "Promising Career Lists." But preaching the gospel is one of the duties of a good minister. This meant that he would have to understand those to whom he was speaking and present the gospel in a way that connected with them so that their hearts were moved. This takes time and sincere love for those whom Timothy was serving. He couldn't hide from them during the week only to pop out on Sunday deliver the message and go back into hiding. He had to spend time with them and know them and do everything out in the open so that everyone could see his progress. (4:15) A good minister of Christ Jesus should set a good example for the believers through his own character, study of God's word, lifestyle and spiritual growth. (4:12b,15)

Second, Managing relationships and church finances

To be a good minister of God's household we have to have a much larger vision than what we are normally used to. We have to care for all of God's house not just our own personal part. We have to manage relationships within the church and without. Paul wanted Timothy to understand that he had to not only pray for others but he had to practically care for them as well. Just like in our house where we have parents and children who need our care. If our child needs our care we don't say, "I'll pray for you," and do nothing. No, we love our children and give them the care they need. Likewise, God is our Father and all of us are his children. We are a spiritual family and have to really care for those around us. So Paul taught Timothy to care for older men & women as if they were his father and mother and younger ones as his brothers and sisters. (5:1-2) However it's easy for people in a church to have impersonal, business-like relationships. But a good

minister of Christ Jesus creates a loving, family-like environment where everyone senses the grace of Jesus. To do this we have to be humble and see ourselves before Jesus and know that we're not perfect and we have to accept people for who they are and accept them because Jesus accepts them. Then we can love and respect one another.

A minister of God's house has many administrative duties. And a good one will carry out those duties in a fair and just manner. We can't show favoritism. (v5:21) Favoritism creates jealousy, conflicts and causes divisions. In reality, showing favoritism is sin. (Jas2:9) To avoid showing favoritism we need clear public standards based on facts. (5:7) Ultimately, we need to live before God as if he sees all that we do, knowing that he doesn't show favoritism. (5:21a; 6:13a; 2Ti4:1; Ro2:11) We must set clear standards and communicate them to everyone. For example in Ephesus they had the widow distribution list. The qualifications to who was put on that list had to be made known publicly. They couldn't play favorites and only take care of those who were in tight with the pastor. They had to be completely different than Chicago politicians who only take care of their friends. There has to be clear standards that everyone knows and a good minister has to uphold those standards.

Part of managing relationships a good minister also needed to recognize and honor the elders who do a good job directing the affairs of the church and protecting them from being attacked. (5:17a,19) At the same time, elders who sin need to be rebuked before everyone, so that the others may not do the same thing. (5:20) Managing relationships is a difficult job but an import one for the health of church. To do it Timothy needed wisdom and discernment to know what he should and shouldn't do. Paul taught Timothy that he had to not only be good steward of God's people but also of God's money. The church's money should be used properly not randomly. It should be used to support truly needy people, especially those whose lives have been characterized by faithfulness, hospitality, service and many good deeds. (5:9–10) Dealing with church money is very sensitive so everything has to be done in the open for all to see, not in secret like back room deals. It is God's money and if it's used properly there is nothing to hide.

Third, Helping people have a godly view of money

Timothy had to be strong when it came to teaching. When deceiving spirits came into the fellowship he had to protect God's house. To do this he had to rebuke their evil intentions, and correct their mistakes and then encourage them to go the proper way. This would apply to many sensitive topics, one of which is the proper use of money. No one likes to tell others how to use their money but that's a duty of a good minister. Timothy had to help people have a godly view of money. Our world is crazy to get rich and many people fall into this trap. But Paul said, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." (v6:10) In reality God is the giver of all. "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it." (v6:7) Timothy had to teach people that godliness is great gain. (v6:6) And when we are godly we are content with food and clothes. So Paul challenged Timothy to command those who were rich, not to put their hope in wealth but in God and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they would store up treasure in heaven. (v6:17)

Through the book of 1 Timothy, my eyes have been opened to all the duties that a good minister must do. I've been stuck in a very narrow view of what I should be doing and realize that I have such a long way to do to be even a fair minister let alone a good one. Personally it has been difficult for me to be a minister of God's household. I believe that I have been called to serve God's house at IIT. In 1988 I was invited to Bible study by M. Paul Young Kim. During the course of our relationship we had good times and bad times. We laughed and we fought. At one point he yelled at me that he didn't want to study with me any more and threatened to give me to P. Ron and I said, "good." But he never did give up on me but faithfully stuck around and gave me God's word. I thank him for his love and persistence. It's only by the grace of God that I could meet Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

Then in 1996, M. Paul died suddenly of a brain aneurism and I had to take over the fellowship. For the next 11 years I served as a fellowship leader and presider for the Chicago worship service. Then in 2007 God established IIT as an independent chapter and appointed me to serve it as the director. I was not prepared to teach and preach God's word. For me, it has been a huge struggle to prepare messages every week. In the beginning I delivered 3 out of 4 messages while working full time with a demanding job and family of 4 kids. There have been times when it has felt like my bones were being crushed. Having to figure out which book we were going to study and dividing it for weekly studies. Then to prepare the message so that people may be properly nourished on God's word is a daunting task. We meet for about two or more hours on Monday to study the passage, then meditate on it throughout the week. I have to dedicate my whole Saturday to write the message and then we meet at 9 pm for about another two or so hours going over the message and giving comments. Then I get up early Sunday morning to make all the edits. During the week there are so many things

that I have to do. I have to take care of my kids, help them with homework or science projects. Take them to open houses for high school. Teach them to ride their bikes and give them baths. I have to do things around the house like fix the furnace, take out the garbage, fix the toilet, unclog the drain etc.

How can I devote myself to the word of God in the midst of all this? The fact is I didn't. I became like a hamster running on his wheel in a cage, exerting a lot of effort but not going anywhere. Recently in our chapter I was approached by many of our members because they felt that the messages as of late were not building them up but only confusing, boring and frustrating them. When I heard this, my heart was struck and I to deliver this news to our message team. That was a difficult night and our hearts were heavy and we were convicted. I was especially guilty because no matter who delivers the message I am responsible. The truth was I had become complacent and wasn't really devoted to God's word. Sure I read it, but I neither remembered it, nor obeyed it. Sometimes I didn't remember the previous passage and I was the messenger. As a result our hearts were not wholly on God's word and it showed. Many students have come but not many came back and I wondered why. Recently I found out that one student who brought many of her friends to worship service was struggling because none of them wanted to return. When she asked them why, they told her that there was no grace of God and they couldn't see Jesus in the message. So she didn't know if she should bring any more. I was cut to the heart. What was I doing? Personally I repent for not giving my whole heart and devotion to God's word. As a result I have not been deeply nourished by God's word and could not feed others. I thank God for his grace and that each of our messengers took the rebuke to heart and we vowed to devote ourselves to God's word. As we move forward, my eyes have been open to the huge task of taking care of God's house. I've been praying to serve God full time. I'm not sure if this is what God wants me to do, so I am praying that he may reveal his will and direction for my life. However none of that will matter if I don't devote myself to reading God's word and really applying it to my life. Have you ever seen the movie "The Book of Eli?" It came out last year and stars Denzel Washington and its set in the future where the world had been ravaged by war and everything has been destroyed. And Denzel has the only Bible in existence and he keeps it wrapped up protected in his back pack. And every night he takes it out carefully un-wraps it and reads it as if it is the most important thing in his life. You can see that he treasures it and really enjoys reading it as he soaks up every word. He has been traveling west for 30 years on a mission to deliver it to a printing press so the world would have it again. But he is wounded along the way by a man who steals it. Yet he continues his mission and reaches the place with the printing press. But they won't let him in unless he has a book so he tells them that he has a copy of the King James version of the Bible. They gladly let him in. But you're left wondering because it was stolen from him. And then he sits down and begins to dictate the whole Bible from memory. And shortly after he finishes he dies from his wounds but he's completed his mission. I wouldn't call him a minister in the classical sense, but he was certainly devoted to God's word and treasured it as a matter of life and death. That's how I want my devotion to be toward God and his word. To value and treasure it and to be so committed to serving God and his household. May God give me this whole hearted devotion to his word so that I may grow to be a good minister of God's household.

Enoch, Noah and Abraham all were men who were busy and had many distractions in their lives and yet they were still not too busy do devote themselves to the word of God. Enoch lived a devoted by walking with God and having daily conversations as he walked. We can do the same in our daily prayer. Noah lived a devoted life by obeying what told him to do. We can do the same by applying what we learn each week and really living according to God's commands. And Abraham lived a devoted life by putting up reminders so that he would remember God's word. We can do the same by memorizing Bible verses regularly.

All of us are running the race of faith together. However unlike sports we are not competing with each other. We are teammates working together so that we may cross the finish line and enter the kingdom of God together. Ministers are like coaches planting vision and training the team to work together to reach our goal. "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching." May God train us and use us so that he raise up a generation of young men and women with this same devotion and a noble desire to be good ministers of God's household so that we may impact the world we live in and change people's lives to confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior.