

March 22/23, 2025

Training in Godliness
God's Design for the Church in 1 Timothy
1 Timothy 4:6-16
Pastor Bryan Clark

So how awesome is that to be led in worship by these young people! I just think it's great! (*applause*) Also, it's not just the talented people on stage, but you've got youth pushing the buttons on the sound and tech/light stuff, and up on the cameras. (*applause*) We brought in the youth for preaching this morning. (*laughter*) It's an all-youth service. (*laughter*)

So I doubt anyone thinks that if you want to be on the worship team, you just walk up on stage, pick up an instrument and magically start playing it. I wish it was that easy, but we all understand it's not. To reach that level of proficiency represents a lot of training, a lot of practice, a lot of discipline, which is true with a lot of things in life. If you decide you're going to run the marathon, you can't just show up the morning of the marathon. It takes weeks and weeks and weeks of training and discipline and practice. Think about whatever it is for you that you're really good at, whatever skill you develop. That didn't just happen. You have to be very intentional, have a lot of discipline, a lot of training. So, it's equally true to grow spiritually, and that's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, I invite you to turn with us to 1 Timothy, Chapter 4. Paul's had a consistent concern in writing to Timothy about the importance of truth, in order to expose the error that was happening in the church in Ephesus. So we pick it up then in chapter 4, verse 6, where he says to Timothy:

In pointing out these things to the brethren (or to the Christians), you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. (*NASB, 1 Timothy 4:6)

So again, **the faith** is a consistent reference to the body of doctrine that defines them. And then I think **sound doctrine** is just the ongoing teaching of Paul to Timothy. So what he's saying is, "Timothy, if you do your job, it requires you keep learning, you keep understanding, you keep believing, in order to teach the truth, to expose the error, and that process brings nourishment to your own soul." He continues to give him what he needs to fulfill his calling. Verse 7:

But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. (Vs. 7a)

Ha! So how do you like that one? (*laughter*) So it's like, "What does that mean?" Well, again, you have to understand this within the context it's given. So in a first century Roman world, women were greatly devalued. Most were not allowed to be educated; they were illiterate. Their value was, "You stay home; you take care of the home and, mostly, you raise the kids." But in that culture, by the time a child was about 12 or 13, they were considered adults and on their way. So, what is a woman supposed to do with the rest of her life? So this was a huge problem, and it created all

kinds of difficult dynamics that come up in multiple ways in different New Testament passages. In this particular case, one of the things the ladies would do is gather around and tell crazy stories to the children. So it became like a cliché. It became a saying, and that's what Paul is referring to. It basically just means any kind of conversation that has no real profit to it. So we may think that's strange, but isn't it true today? We still sometimes refer to something as, "Oh, that's just an old wives tale." It's where that comes from; it's the exact same thing. So I think for us in a 21st century culture, it would basically be a reference to any kind of a conversation outside of biblical truth.

So think of it this way. If you show up at a coffee house, people are talking about all kinds of things. That's fine. You can discuss your family. You can discuss politics. You can discuss social issues. You can discuss your latest conspiracy theory. It's like, "Hey, have it; it's fine." But Timothy's job in the church is to teach the Bible. That's his job. We've learned that ***the church is the pillar and support of the truth***. Our responsibility is to be the guardians of the truth. There's a sobering reality that if we don't do it, no one else will. It's not the responsibility of anyone else. I can tell you, as a preaching pastor for four decades, there is always constant pressure from people who want you to talk about "this" and want you to talk about "that". So, it's really important for people like me in this role to be really clear. "That's not my job. My job is to teach the Bible." That's what Paul is telling Timothy.

On the other hand (he says), discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds for this present life and *also* for the *life* to come. (Vs. 7b-8)

So, rather than getting caught up in all this stuff, Timothy is to *train for godliness*. That word translated **discipline** (train) is the word from which we get our English word *gymnasium*. This was a very big deal in an ancient Roman Greek culture. As a matter of fact, a couple of years ago, I had the opportunity to travel in Turkey and Greece, and in a number of these ancient ruins, there were huge ruins of buildings that were the city's gymnasium. You realize how big of a deal this was for these people. So this makes a very powerful imagery for Paul. But what he's saying is to *train*, to **discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness**.

So **godliness** is an important term to Paul. In Paul's writing, it shows up 15 times, but 9 of those times are in the book of 1 Timothy. It's a major theme. So, what is **godliness**? In simple terms, it's simply *becoming more like Jesus*. It's understanding, believing the truth, so that we live the truth. So we say it in our vision statement: *to know Jesus and become more like Him*. It's a simple understanding of godliness. So, does that just happen because you've been a Christian for a long time? The answer is, "No! You can be a Christian for 30 years and still be a baby Christian. You could be a Christian for 5 years and be a really mature Christian." Just like living doesn't necessarily make you physically healthy. It just isn't that simple. You have to train yourself for it. You have to discipline yourself. There has to be intentionality to it. So he says, "Physical training is good. It's a little bit of profit." The reason it's a little bit of profit is because it's temporary. No matter what you do, time is still going to take its toll. You can't really do anything about that. Should you be physically healthy? Yes, it's got profit, a little bit of profit. But what's different about

training for godliness is it not only affects all things in this life but also prepares us for the life to come. That's a lot of profit.

It's interesting that he says *it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. But godliness is profitable for all things*. So that's interesting to think about. *All things* means every area of my life. Godliness affects my mental. It affects my social. It affects my physical. It affects me psychologically. If you struggle with anxiety, if you struggle with worry or fear or anger, training for godliness affects all that. It affects my marriage. It affects my family. It affects my relationships. It affects my job. It affects every area of my life.

Our friends at the Bible Engagement Center have done a significant amount of research...tons of research. One of the things they found is that 57% of adult Christians never engage their Bible between Sundays. Well, that's interesting. They also have found that those people live lives that have very little difference from the unbelievers around them. Those that engage their Bibles at least four times a week—so this is one, so three other times during the week—live significantly different lives. The reality is you have to train for godliness. It has to matter to you. There has to be discipline. There has to be training. There has to be intentionality. Just because you walk in this building doesn't make you more spiritual, any more than having a gym membership makes you more healthy. You can't train for a marathon going to the gym one day a week. That won't be enough. I wonder how many people, how many Christians, if you were to ask them, “How come they don't spend more time in the Word?” they would say, “Well, they just don't have time.” But somehow they have time every week to go to the gym. Everybody has time. It's about values. It's about what matters to you. It's about what do you think is most profitable in your life. I would encourage you to at least think about matching the number of hours you spend in the gym each week with the number of hours you spend in the Word. That seems like a reasonable standard. He says in verse 9:

It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance.

In other words, this is true. What he just said, you can believe it. Verse 10:

For it is for this we labor and strive, (Vs. 10a)

Those are two very strong words. **Labor** means *labor to exhaustion* and **strive** is the Greek word from which we get our English word *agonize*. It's a word used to describe a runner at the end of the race giving the last ounce of effort he or she had to break the tape. So it's to agonize all the way to the end of the race. This is a good description of the musician getting ready for the big concert, for the athlete getting ready for the big game or the big race. It's the businessman or woman totally focused on getting ready for the big launch. It's just this sense of focus that this matters, and I am dialed in. I'd probably call it my game-face: that this really matters to me. He said:

For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. (Vs. 10)

So there's a lot of conversation about what's meant at the end of that verse, that God is the **Savior of all men**, I would say, what makes the most sense, especially remembering what Paul wrote to Timothy in chapter 2, that God desires all people to be saved, that Jesus died for all people. That's His heart. He wants them all to be saved. It isn't just all the population. It has a flavor of all people: the Jews...the Greeks...the Romans...every race...the old...the young...men...women...rich...poor...all people! The Greek word translated **especially**; maybe that's not the best translation. There's a lot of evidence that it simply could be translated “in other words”. *In other words... ultimately...to those who believe*. So Jesus died for all people, but it is experienced, in other words, by those who understand it and choose to believe it. Verse 11:

Prescribe and teach these things.

Prescribe is a strong word. We had it in chapter 1, verse 3. It was translated *instruct*. It means *to command*. There's authority in it. I would refer to it as preaching. In our study of 1 Timothy, we've tried to distinguish between *elder authority*—so preaching, defining and defending doctrine—with *teaching*—which is a more general term, which is different ways of discipleship. So:

Prescribe and teach these things. Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. (Vs. 11-12)

I think you get the impression if you read both 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy, that it's likely Timothy was a little bit timid. Part of the message of Paul is, "Timothy, this is your job. This is your calling. This shouldn't be happening in Ephesus. It's your job to do something to stop it." Perhaps one of the reasons Timothy was a little timid is because of his youth. Now, youth here doesn't mean teenager. Timothy was certainly somewhere in his 30s, but still in that ancient culture, that was still very young to stand before these people and tell them what's true. So what Paul says to Timothy is, "Timothy, hey, don't let them do that to you just because you're young. You tell them, 'Hey, Paul told me I'm in charge. You have to listen to me.'" That's not what he says. He says, "You tell them you have a big, fancy title. It's Reverend Timothy. You better listen." He didn't tell them that either. Really, none of that stuff matters. What he does say, which has been consistent in this letter, is, "Timothy, through your character, show them what it looks like to live out this truth. If you want them to listen, if you want them to respect you, then you need to live as an example of what it means to be a Christian." We don't really need to go through and define these words. These are pretty clear: **speech, conduct, love, faith and purity**. Verse 13:

Until I come, give attention to the *public* reading of *Scripture*,

So Paul's desire is eventually to come back to Ephesus, but until that, a big point of emphasis is the **public reading of Scripture**. Now, again, you have to understand that in its context. They did not have a New Testament. Nobody possessed their own personal copy of the Scriptures. So the only opportunity they had was that the Scriptures were read publicly to them. So that's the idea. “Keep feeding on the word.”

...give attention to the *public* reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation (which I would call preaching. It's a strong, authoritative term.) and teaching. Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. Take pains with these things; be *absorbed* in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. (Vs. 13-15)

I think this is simply referring to Timothy's calling. He was called to be a pastor and sent to Ephesus. The whole idea of **spiritual gift** is, if you've been around here for a while, you know I don't take the traditional view of that. The traditional view that actually isn't very traditional—it started basically in the 70s—and that is that when you get saved, you get some sort of a supernatural ability. I don't think that's what it means at all. The Greek word translated **gift**, is a form of the word for *grace*. It just means *this is a gift of God's grace*. I think it refers to a *calling*. Every Christian has a calling from God. Courtney just talked about it when she did the announcements, that she had this calling from God when she was 12 years old. Every Christian has a calling. There's this sense in which God is inviting me to be part of something that will matter forever. It's not because we've earned it. It's not because we've deserved it. It's a gift of God's grace. The spiritual part of that is the promise that the Holy Spirit is with you and will empower you to fulfill the calling which you've received. So that's what he's saying to Timothy, "Hey, Timothy, don't forget the elders laid hands on you"—what we would probably refer to as ordination—"and sent you out to be the pastor in Ephesus. This is your job. This is your calling. You have to do your job." Verse 16:

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; (Vs. 16a)

I really love the way that's worded. Any of us in a teaching role—whether that's teaching like I do, whether it's youth ministry, it's children's ministry, whether you're leading a Life Group, wherever you find yourself teaching—there's always a danger that it just becomes academic, that it just becomes about getting the doctrine right. But that's never enough! It's not just enough to get it right; you need to *be* right. You need to *live* right, need to *understand* it, need to *believe* it. You need to *live* it, and that's what Paul is telling Timothy, "**Pay close attention to yourself**, that you're nourished and continually growing in the Word, **and to your teaching.**"

...persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. (Vs. 16b)

We often talk about the fact that **salvation** in the New Testament comes in all three verb tenses: past, present and future. You were saved in the past. You're being saved today, and, ultimately, fully saved in the future. We tend to kind of get locked into always thinking about the moment we got saved. But what this is talking about is the living-out of your **salvation** now in the present. "Timothy, if you do your job well, not only will you live out your salvation, but you'll also train and instruct the people how to live out their salvation in very difficult times."

There's a strong emphasis in this text about this idea of *training in godliness*! It doesn't just happen. You can walk through these doors month after month, year after year, and still be a baby Christian. It takes intentionality. It takes discipline. It takes training. More than anything else, it takes a desire to understand, to believe, and live out this truth, and to experience your salvation today in this world. But there's also a significant message throughout this whole letter of Paul having received the truth and now passing it on to Timothy. It's Timothy's job now to pass it on to the next generation, and they are responsible to pass it on to the next generation, and the next generation, and on it goes. When Ryan preached on the end of chapter 3, he mentioned that the Church's responsibility is to be the guardians of the truth. And from the first century on, the Church has been faithful to do that, to pass it on all the way to us today in Lincoln, Nebraska. And it's our responsibility, as our generation, to continue to pass it on to the next generation.

So it's interesting to think about this as it relates to our own local church. So, let me give you a quick history lesson of Lincoln Berean. This church was officially established in 1962, downtown. It's moved to different locations. The original founding pastor was Curt Lehman. Curt served as the senior pastor for 32 years and served very diligently and faithfully. This is the church I grew up in. I started downtown, moved to 17th and A, then out here. I would say without hesitation, "Pastor Curt Lehman was my Paul. He taught me. He mentored me. He loved me. He encouraged me. Maybe more than anything else, he believed in me." I can say without hesitation he believed in me long before I ever believed in myself. There are other people that were part of that congregation who built into my life. Many of them are still here in the congregation this morning. They know who they are. They've had a significant impact in my own journey.

Patty and I got married; we went to seminary. I ended up as a pastor in Broken Bow, Nebraska for the first ten years of my ministry. In 1993, the elders invited me to come back and be a pastor on staff at Lincoln Berean. So, I came back in 1993. In the fall of 1994, I was voted on as the new senior pastor...just the second senior pastor. I served in that role for three decades. Over time, one of the things I began to notice was that many senior pastors, especially in larger churches, just seem to stay too long. They just can't seem to let go. And what happens is the church just gets stuck. The reality is, for a church to be effective, you just have to keep changing and changing and changing because the culture is constantly changing. That's just the way of it. But at some point in life, you just don't have the energy to keep doing that. So what happens is the church gets stuck, and everybody pays the consequences for that. So I was determined not to be that guy.

So in a season we referred to as a *Decade on Purpose*—2010 to 2020—I initiated the conversation with the elders that we needed to start thinking about transition: Transition of the senior leaders, transition of ministry staff, transition of the elders, transition of people that serve all over the church, in order to continue to move forward. We went through different challenges trying to figure out exactly what this would look like. But in August of 2021, Ryan became the new senior pastor. We call him the Lead Pastor. Ryan is also from the Lincoln Berean family. He attended Lincoln Berean, was hired on as young adult pastor, eventually was sent to Madrid, Spain, with the church planting team to plant a church there, came back, continued on staff, and in August of 2021 became the new senior pastor. At that time, I offered to resign and move on. I felt it only fair to clear the

deck, but Ryan said he actually would like to have me stay, be part of the preaching team in a pastoral role here. So I was happy to do that, and it's been absolutely wonderful. I have loved serving under Ryan. He has been really good to me. I honestly couldn't ask for more. It's been great. The elders have been great to me. It's been a fruitful season for me, as I've had the opportunity to do a lot of ministry here at Lincoln Berean, but also the freedom to do a lot of ministry beyond our borders, helping other churches with a variety of things, which for me, personally, has been a very fulfilling thing. So it's been a very fruitful season. But I would say what's probably been the most meaningful to me was the unique opportunity to be an encourager, to be a coach, to be a mentor, maybe more than anything else, to be a cheerleader for the amazing, young, talented staff that God has brought into Lincoln Berean. I had the opportunity to share some of these things with the staff on Thursday. It was very moving for me to stand in that room and look at our staff. I've been in that room and talked to the staff a lot of times over the years, and what I remember seeing was an aging staff. Now, I look into that room and it's full of young, talented, committed, passionate staff that God has brought to Lincoln Berean, who are excited to move the church forward.

I think about what our desire was and to see it fulfilled in this staff, that's just deeply moving. This then reminds me that I do believe my time as a pastor at Lincoln Berean is coming to a close. I want you to know this is my last year as a pastor on the Lincoln Berean staff. This is not new. It's been my timetable for several years. Ryan has known that; the elders have known that. I will go full speed up until the end of the year, and, technically, through January. My birthday is in January. I will turn 67, and at that point I will be 100% done with my time as a pastor on the Lincoln Berean staff.

Why am I telling you now? Because over the last few weeks, it's become more and more evident, there's just no way to keep this quiet. Part of ministry is scheduling things way out in front, and just continually bumping into, "No, I can't do that...No, I can't do that...No, I can't do that," which creates weird conversations, and I don't want to be dishonest with people. So the reality is, it's going to get out and I'd rather you hear it from me than just hear it through the grapevine. So I wanted you to know. Patty and I aren't going anywhere. We still consider this our home church. We still plan to be around, but in no official capacity with the church. But there's still a lot of year left. There's a lot of 2025. I'm excited to roll up my sleeves, be part of the team, and see what God wants to do with us in this next year ahead, as we seek to be His church. So let's pray together.

Our Father, I'm so thankful that we have the privilege to be Your church. Lord, You've been so faithful for 60 plus years. I don't have the slightest doubt that You will continue to be faithful in the years to come. Lord, may we be faithful to be Your church here in Lincoln, and around the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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