



## Pilgrim Home Baptist Church

NT 260 2022 • GAUGING SPIRITUAL GROWTH • 1 TIMOTHY 4:11-16 • 8/21/2022

### MAIN POINT

Spiritual growth is the clearest gauge of a person's connection to Christ and commitment to Him.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Can you consistently tell what a person believes by how he or she behaves? Why or why not?**

**Along those same lines, what evidence should there be in a person's life that he or she believes in Jesus?**

Timothy was a young pastor, and Paul wrote in part to encourage him to not worry about his age as it related to the Lord's calling on his life. In short, his age should not have been the primary determining factor for how he behaved spiritually. In 1 Timothy 4:11-16, Paul gave several characteristics of discipleship that should accompany the Christian life, and that is what we will discuss today.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 4:11-12.

**When does age matter to you in regard to leadership? (ex: Would it bother you if your doctor was just out of medical school?)**

**Do you relate better to young Timothy or the church members who looked down on him because of his youth? How so?**

**What do you think Paul meant when he said, “Don’t let anyone”? Was Paul trying to stir up an argument in the church, or was he implying something else?**

Spiritual maturity does not necessarily come with age (Heb. 5:11-14). Paul wanted Timothy to remember the real issue at hand: Christian leadership and discipleship are not defined by the number of years a person had lived. No matter how old you are, what you say you believe must be congruent with the way you live.

**Does this mean that we shouldn’t expect older believers to set the example? Why or why not?**

**What should you expect from a Christian who is 14 years old? 25? 45? 75?**

**Look again at verse 12. Instead of letting people look down on him, what did Paul tell Timothy to do?**

**What does it look like to set an example in speech? In life? In love? In faith? In purity?**

Paul stressed to Timothy that no one should despise his youth. In his selfless courage on behalf of his people, Timothy must take the initiative and set an example for other believers to follow both in word and deed. Paul encouraged others to imitate him just as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

**In the same way, the pastor’s example must so closely mirror Christ’s that if anyone were to imitate the pastor, they would essentially be imitating Christ. Which is more difficult for you—speaking in a godly way, or speaking about God? Why?**

**If love isn’t just a matter of theology but of practice, then how should it demonstrate itself in the life of a believer?**

**In your life, who sets an excellent example of faith? What in particular do they do to convince you of this?**

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 4:13-16.

**What additional instruction did Paul give Timothy about continuing to grow as a disciple and a leader?**

Paul also taught Timothy that he should show progress in leading an exemplary life, and that this progress should be evident to all (v. 15). It may seem, at first, that Paul was endorsing an arrogant, self-righteous attitude. But the word translated “progress” was used in military circles to describe an advancing force that would go out before the rest of the army and clear any

obstacles that would hinder the rest of the troops. This progress happens primarily through the study of Scripture and the exercising of spiritual gifts.

**Why does Paul use the verbs “toil” and “strive” when referencing his approach to spiritual growth? Why is spiritual growth so difficult for us sometimes?**

**How might having our hope set on the living God help us endure when spiritual growth becomes difficult?**

**What are some practical ways we could devote ourselves to growing as disciples?**

Paul challenged Timothy to faithfully teach the Bible as a means of “being trained in the words of the faith” (v. 6). Toward the end of chapter 4, Paul challenged Timothy to devote himself “to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and to teaching.” This tells us that studying the Bible is one of the most important means God has given us by which we can grow in our relationship with Him. It is very difficult to grow in your relationship with someone if you do not get to know them, and the most reliable way God has given us to know Him is through His Word. God has also given us prayer (Col. 4:2) and the church as means of growing in our relationship with Him (Heb. 10:25).

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Lately, have you been counting on your age, name, or beliefs as the basis for your example to others, or have you been counting on the way you live? Explain.**

**Of the five characteristics of discipleship (speech, life, faith, love, purity), where are you growing most and where are you struggling most?**

**How can this group help you be a better disciple?**

## PRAYER

Pray for your group to set an example to others in speech, life, faith, love, and purity. Pray that unbelievers would see your lives and know that Christianity is not just about what a person thinks; but relationship with Christ changes everything.

## COMMENTARY

| 1 TIMOTHY 4:11-16

4:11. Paul's instruction was for Timothy and all church leaders to command and teach others about the Savior. Grace is no side issue. Legalism is no weak enemy. Rules are great for discipline but not for righteousness.

4:12. Chronological age does not necessarily bring spiritual maturity (He. 5:11-14). Deep devotion and spiritual strength as well as apathy and weakness can be found among young and old alike. Paul's encouragement to Timothy, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young," should remind us that the issue for leadership is never age but spiritual development. True spiritual progress is more than exegetical expertise; it is marked by exemplary conduct and love. But whatever the response of those around us, age is never an excuse for speaking or leading. As Christians we are to set an example in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

Speech and life encompass the observable aspects of life. It is how we conduct ourselves. Speech is a valid indicator of a person's character, "for out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). Of course, the point is not to muzzle our mouths, for we can be silent and very wicked. The principle is to pursue Christ so diligently that the inner spirit is purified, producing only good and appropriate things to say. The same is true of our outward acts, our lifestyle. Faith and love are the essence of the Christian life. Faith is our knowledge and confidence in Christ, our deep reliance on what he has done and what he declares as truth. Love is the Holy Spirit's action in our life, the evidence of our relationship with the God who rules.

Purity refers to sexual conduct and integrity of heart. Sexuality seems to be a mysterious picture of our relationship to God. God is very particular about how we treat our bodies and honor others. Sexual purity is a symbol of spiritual consecration. Misconduct in this area of life ruins fellowship with Christ and destroys a person's influence and reputation with others. Authentic spirituality cannot be separated from inner righteousness. Christianity which is honest and genuine envelopes the entire person, from inner heart and spirit to outward behavior.

4:13. Paul told Timothy to give his energies to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching when the church came together. The public reading of Scripture, along with teaching, was an accepted custom of the Jews in the synagogues (Acts 13:15). This practice is carried over to Christian worship. Reading God's Word is a command for church life, but God does allow flexibility in how services are conducted. There are many variations and styles of worship which may be used, as long as they point to Christ and his grace. But within stylistic and cultural preferences, there are certain essentials that must undergird worship. One of these essentials is the public reading of Scripture.

The Word of God is powerful (Heb. 4:12); creates change (Isa. 55:11); is essential for life (Deut. 8:3). Too often our familiarity with the Bible causes us to forget that these written words contain

the very breath of God—his wisdom and intelligence, yearnings, energy, strategies, and humor. The Bible is a bit of the mind and personality of God laid open for us. The public reading of God’s Word prepares our minds and hearts for the preaching or teaching which follows. The Holy Spirit acts through the revealed truth which God has given. As the church reads and affirms what God has declared, the Spirit is freed to instruct, convict, and guide. The public reading of Scripture also hedges the church against error.

The problems facing Timothy and the Ephesians centered on false teaching. The corporate reading of truth is a defense against falsehood. Preaching (exhorting) and teaching (explaining) are also essentials of public worship. Preaching deals with encouragement, exhortation, and warnings from which the preacher intends to elicit a response from the hearers. Teaching is regarded as instructional. A teacher explains the principles of Scripture in more intellectual terms. The point is not to create some rigid rules, but to understand that both teaching and preaching are Spirit-given gifts which must be exercised for the good of the fellowship of believers.

4:14. Although this verse is an intensely personal message to Timothy regarding his spiritual gift, the same directive can be leveled to all Christians, especially those who lead: Do not neglect your gift. Each Christian leader has been specifically gifted in some way by God for ministry. The peculiar ability is given for the benefit of the church. With the gift comes a God-exacted responsibility which cannot be shunned. The gift Paul referred to here was some capability which Timothy was given. This was not some inherent ability. It came through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. It seems likely that this was Timothy’s ordination into ministry, a ceremony of approval by mature Christian leaders signified by the laying on of hands. This was an affirmation of God’s call upon Timothy’s life for special ministry to God and his church. It made him responsible to both—the God who called him and the people whom he served.

4:15. Having outlined what is required for being a good minister before God and his people—what, in fact, is involved in true Christian living—Paul told Timothy to be diligent in all these things. The word diligence means “to keep at it,” “to practice with serious intent.” This is not a once-in-a-while proposition. This is day-to-day dedication. Paul reinforced this appeal: give yourself wholly to [these matters]. Literally this means, “be in these.” Live them, breathe them, immerse yourself in them. This is your life, not a job. As Thomas Carlyle said, “No man ever became a saint in his sleep.” This admonition was directed toward all who claim to be followers of Christ. Such a life does not happen automatically without concerted effort and desire. As Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples” (John 8:31). A true follower or disciple of Christ abides, or lives, in what Jesus taught.

If we live in God's teaching, pursuing him every waking moment, everyone [will] see your progress. A life growing progressively close to God, dynamically changing, cannot be hidden. Christianity is not a matter of creed but of life. Timothy was to lead the way by pouring himself into Christian life and ministry. The church would respond because it would see progress, the authentic presence of Christ in his people.

4:16. Paul recapped what he has just written in detail: watch your life and doctrine closely. Ultimately, Timothy could effectively control only himself. We are the only person over whom we have immediate authority. My ability to lead and influence others is connected to my ability to manage and live my own life well. The Christian life hinges on conduct (life) as empowered by God's Spirit and correct faith (doctrine). Paul could not emphasize it enough: persevere in [Christian life and doctrine]. Perseverance is evidence of salvation; a disciplined person is willing to continue in God's way. Such commitment will be tried again and again.

The result of such continuance and devotion is that it would save both yourself and your hearers. Salvation is a process. It has a beginning point at conversion and its full realization when we are united with Christ. In between is the process of becoming more Christlike in our person and behavior. Exemplary living and God's truth will safeguard the leader and those whom he leads. A leader's perseverance in godliness will save his congregation from the dangers of false teachings which can shipwreck faith and cause ruin to the soul.