

What Must the Preacher Do?

1 TIMOTHY 4:6-16

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What in the world does a preacher need to be doing? As we think about that question for a few moments, as we think about the role of the preacher in the congregation, I would imagine that we could have quite a discussion on this. In fact, as I was preparing for today's lesson, several weeks ago I considered passing out some cards and asking the question online, and I was thinking about asking in terms of percentages - you know, make a pie chart! Out of all of the activities that a preacher might participate in, what percentage of his time needs to be set aside for each activity. And there might be a value in asking that question at some point in the future. If you want to make me your own pie chart this morning, I would love to see it!

Most of you know that I love cartoons, and many years ago one caught my attention. On one side, the preacher is pictured at his desk, studying the word of God, but he is thinking to himself, "I should be out on visitation," and on the other side, he is pictured in someone's home, but he is thinking to himself, "I should be studying for my sermon." That right there perfectly summarizes the struggle that most preachers have when it comes to how we spend our time! And the issue is made even more complicated by the fact that most of us as preachers do not have a supervisor giving us any kind of guidance or direction.

Years ago, I heard from a church several hours north of here, and they had developed a highly regulated system to supposedly keep their preacher on track. I don't remember the exact numbers, but I remember that out of the 40-hour work week (or whatever it was), they wanted "x" number of hours to be spent in visitation. But, they went beyond this and explained that if a visit ever goes beyond one hour per visit, anything beyond that one hour is obviously socializing (and not spiritual in nature), so anything beyond the initial hour needs to come out of the preacher's personal time, not the church's time. And I remember thinking, first of all, that is one of the stupidest things that I have ever heard! Are there no spiritual struggles or Bible studies that might take more than an hour? And then I wondered: Who will manage this? Is somebody following him around? Has a deacon been assigned to this? Does he carry some kind of GPS locator beacon that sends his coordinates back to the elders? But then I also realized: As with most rules and policies, there is most likely a reason! In other words, that congregation had probably just suffered through a terrible preacher, and this was their attempt to fix it. But I mention this because the question concerning what a preacher needs to be doing is a good question, and it is something that preachers and churches have struggled with and have contemplated for many years.

We actually studied this back on September 5, 2010, and back then I mentioned an article that always hung on the wall in my dad's office for as long as I can remember, and the article was entitled, "Definition of a Preacher." I have put that article on the front of today's bulletin for you to consider. And that may be a rather interesting summary of what the preacher does (I hope you will take the time to read it), but we come back to the basic question: What does a preacher need to be doing? And thankfully, as you can imagine, there is a Scripture that answers this question! This morning I would invite you to take a copy of the Bible and turn with me to the book of 1 Timothy, to 1 Timothy 4 (p. 1857).

If we really want to know what a preacher needs to be doing, the best way to learn is to read a letter written by Paul to a young preacher! And that is what we have in 1 Timothy. This morning, then, as we return to our series of lessons from 1 Timothy, we come to a paragraph that directly addresses what a preacher needs to be doing. Last week we had Paul's warning concerning false teachers. We continue today with 1 Timothy 4:6-16,

⁶ In pointing out these things to the brethren, 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. ⁷ But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; ⁸ for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. ⁹ It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Prescribe and teach these things. ¹² 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. ¹³ Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. ¹⁶ Pay close attention to yourself 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.

As we look at this paragraph, we have Timothy, the preacher, described (in verse 6) as a ***"servant of Christ Jesus."*** And with that in mind, as we study how a preacher needs to be spending his time, I would suggest three priorities. Today, then, I am primarily preaching at myself, but I am hoping there will be some benefit for all of us as we come to a deeper understanding concerning what the preacher needs to be doing.

- I. **And as we look back at the text itself, we don't have the time to look at every word and phrase in this passage, but we find first of all (in terms of broad categories), that a gospel preacher must make it a priority to STUDY THE WORD OF GOD.**

As Paul says in verse 6, the good servant of Christ Jesus will be, ***"...constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following."*** In a sense, then, the preacher is to eat the word of God. He is to be ***"nourished"*** on it. The flip side of this comes in verse 7 as we find that the good servant of Christ Jesus will, ***"...have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women."*** So the idea is that Timothy needs to be careful in what he consumes spiritually. And just like what we eat physically, so also spiritually, there is some nourishment (there is to be good food), but there are also certain things to avoid (there are things we should not be consuming). The idea of nutrition continues into the last part of verse 7, as

we find that the preacher must also ***“discipline”*** himself, ***“for the purpose of godliness.”*** The word ***“discipline”*** refers to training or learning. So, the preacher needs to study the word of God, because the preacher cannot preach what he does not know. And study takes time. I can think of several possible outcomes if a preacher does not take time to study: He could repeat himself over and over, he could move every few years when he runs out of material, or he could plagiarize (every Saturday night he could fire up Google and just read somebody else’s sermon to the church on Sunday morning). Obviously, these are some bad options! To grow, we need to learn, and study takes time, study is important, and there are no shortcuts. So, the study of God’s word needs to be an important part of the preacher’s life. The Bible is a big book - 1,189 chapters - so it takes a lot of reading, if we plan to ***“nourish”*** ourselves on it. We cannot get distracted by those ***“worldly fables,”*** and we cannot allow those things that don’t really matter to push out what is truly important.

There are many good things that preachers can do that are not study, but study cannot be pushed to the side. As Paul goes on to say in verse 15, ***“Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.”*** As I see it, Paul is saying that if Timothy studies, the congregation would notice. For those of you who have preached, you know that it takes a lot of study and preparation to present a lesson from the word of God. In fact, the old rule in public speaking is that a speaker must spend half an hour in preparation for every minute of speaking. Preaching, then, is not a matter of just getting up and sharing whatever comes to mind at the moment, it is not a matter of just passing along something the preacher throws together on Saturday night or copies from the internet, but it involves some in-depth research and study. Paul, then, emphasizes the idea that a good servant of Jesus Christ must study the word of God.

II. **There is a second basic idea for us to consider here, and that is, a good servant of Jesus must also PREACH THE WORD OF GOD.**

And the idea is repeated several times. Right away in verse 6, for example, Paul tells Timothy that he is to, ***“point out these things to the brethren.”*** Literally, the idea is that Timothy is to ***“put these things before”*** the brethren, like perhaps a rancher would put grass before the cattle. He is to take the word of God, and he is to put it before the congregation in a way that they can understand. And then in verse 11, Paul tells Timothy that he is to, ***“Prescribe and teach these things.”*** One translation says that Timothy is to, ***“Keep commanding and teaching these things.”*** The word ***“prescribe”*** or ***“command”*** refers to making an announcement or giving a report. He is to announce the word of God in an authoritative way. And then in verse 13, Paul tells Timothy that he is to, ***“...give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.”*** The word of God is to be the focus of everything the preacher has to say. The word of God is to be read out loud, and then it is to be taught and explained in a way that connects with the congregation, in a way that means something, in a way that encourages us to do what the Bible is telling us to do.

We think about what Jesus did in Luke 4. In Luke 4:16 Jesus comes to Nazareth, and Luke says, ***“...as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found”*** a certain passage. Jesus reads the passage, and then ***“...He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”*** That is pretty simple, isn’t it? Jesus reads a passage out loud to the group, and then he applies it. This was Jesus’ custom. This was the custom of the Jewish people in the first century, to have someone read a passage and then explain it. We think of those times in the book of Acts where Paul visited various synagogues and did the same thing. We have a good example of this in Acts 13. As Paul shows up in Antioch, Luke tells us that he and his people ***“...on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.”*** Then, ***“After the***

reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.'" Paul, then, stands up, he motions with his hand, and he starts speaking. Again, very simple! They read from the word of God, and somebody gets up to explain it. This custom of reading a text publicly continues on as the early church reads these letters written by Paul. In Colossians 4:16 (at the end of Colossians), Paul says, **"When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea."** We no longer have Paul's letter to Laodicea, but it seems clear that these early churches understood the importance of Paul's writing, and they traded letters almost immediately. Copies were made, and those letters were shared from the beginning. And it was incredibly important. At the end of 1 Thessalonians (in 1 Thessalonians 5:27), Paul says, **"I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers."** **"I charge you, I adjure you, make sure that you do this."** It was important that Paul's letters be read publicly. And this continued on after Paul's death. We have an interesting comment from Justin Martyr. At some point in the second century, he wrote a few words about what worship was like back then. He said, "On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the [one who presides] verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray." So, the custom continued. And this was especially important in those days before God's word was available in printed form. Books were rare. Books were for the wealthy, and generally, Christians were not wealthy.

This style, this basic pattern of hearing the word read and having it explained, by the way, goes back to what we just studied in our Wednesday class a few months ago as we looked at Nehemiah. You might remember that when they finished rebuilding the wall around the city, the people all came together, demanding to hear the word of God. Nehemiah tells us that certain Levites, **"...read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that [the people] understood the reading."** And so just as the Levites read the word of God and explained it, just as Jesus read from Isaiah and applied it, just as Paul explained the word of God in the synagogues in Acts, and just as the early church publicly read the writings of the apostles and had someone encourage them to follow those writings in their own lives, so also the preacher is to preach. He is to preach - not his opinions, not funny stories, not current events - but he is to preach the word of God. This doesn't mean that the preacher can never say anything funny or that he can never mention what is going on in the world, but that is not the focus. The focus is to be the word of God.

As some of you may know and realize, this is why I try to preach what are known as "expository" sermons. Instead of looking at a topic, we usually look at a passage. We read the passage publicly, and then we try to learn something from it, hopefully something that we can apply to our daily lives. Following the tradition of Nehemiah, and Jesus, and Paul, it seems best to take one chunk and to stick with it, explaining it and applying it. But whatever style is used, the preacher is to preach the word of God. This is his primary mission.

After all, the word "preacher" refers to someone who proclaims a message. Perhaps you have heard the old saying that, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." That is especially true with preaching. I love doing other things. But those other things can never pull me away from the main thing. My mission is not maintaining this building. My main mission is not doing weddings or funerals. My mission cannot be mowing or snowblowing. That's not what brought us to Madison. My primary mission is not running a youth camp in the summer. My main goal as a preacher is not visiting people in the hospital. All of these things are important. I have done and hopefully will continue doing many of these things. But these other acts of service,

as important as they might be, must not distract from the importance of preaching. The Lord's servant, then, will put a priority on preaching the word of God.

III. **There is a third big idea we need to consider in this passage, and that is: A good servant will LIVE GOD'S WORD.**

Not only will he study the word, and preach the word, but he must also live the word of God. He must demonstrate the word of God in the way that he lives. In fact, perhaps the shortest and best definition of preaching is, "A good man, speaking well." For this reason, we find in 1 Timothy 4:12 that Timothy is to set an example. As a younger preacher, Timothy will need to make a special effort to overcome any bias that his audience would perhaps have against his age. So, according to Paul, Timothy can overcome that bias by setting an example in, **"...speech, conduct, love, faith and purity."** In his **"speech"** (the things that he said), Timothy was to set an example by choosing his words carefully. In **"conduct,"** Timothy was to apply the word of God's to himself first. He was to guard his behavior, serving as an example to the congregation. In **"love,"** Timothy was to love the work and love the brethren, treating others the way he himself would like to be treated. In **"faith,"** Timothy was to set an example through his consistent trust in God. And in **"purity,"** Timothy was also to set the bar high, in that his personal life and even his thoughts were to be pure. He was to be an example in **"...speech, conduct, love, faith and purity."**

And as we learned earlier, Timothy was to serve God in such a way (according to verse 15) that his **"...progress** [would] **be evident to all."** In other words, Timothy was to lead the way. The word **"progress"** in verse 15 is something of a military word. Literally, it refers to "cutting forward," the idea of a scout who presses ahead perhaps with a machete, cutting the way forward so that others can see the path and can follow along. And so by setting an example in his personal life, the preacher is to cut forward, his **"progress"** is to be evident to the rest of the congregation. It has been said that the preacher cannot lead where he has not been himself. The preacher, then, is to lead the way in living the word of God. He is to study the word, he is to preach the word, and he is to live the word.

Conclusion:

As we come to the end of our lesson this morning, I would simply ask that we look back at verse 16 as a summary of the whole chapter. How important is this? In verse 16, Paul says, **"Pay close attention to yourself 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."** That is a powerful statement! If the preacher studies the word of God, and if he preaches the word of God, and if he lives the word of God, Paul says that as he does this he ensures salvation not only for himself, but also for any of those who will listen.

Thank you so much for allowing me to serve as the preacher for this congregation! It is a great honor, it is a serious responsibility with eternal consequences, and as always, I would ask that you remember me in your prayers every day. This past Wednesday, somebody asked me whether I have any regrets in life. I do have a few. Looking back, I wish we had had children a bit sooner than we did. I think I've learned over the past 25 years that if you wait until you can afford children, you will never have children! There is no such thing as affording children! I have a few other regrets, but preaching the gospel is not one of those regrets. And I would encourage the men here today to at least consider it. We have a serious shortage of preachers in the Lord's church right now. I was contacted by two elders this week, one from a small church in the north and one from a large church in the Bible Belt, and both were having a hard time finding a preacher. We have a

shortage of preachers. If you would consider it, I would be glad to help in any way possible. We will let you fill-in, there are churches here in Wisconsin where you can fill-in and gain experience. We have some good schools of preaching with no tuition, where you can go and spend two years learning before going out on your own - Bear Valley in Denver, Southeast Institute down in Knoxville, Florida School of Preaching (where a friend of mine serves as the director), Northwest Florida (where the Long's brother-in-law serves as the director). These schools will teach and train, but nobody will ever give a better job description for the preacher than Paul in 1-2 Timothy and Titus.

The Bible teaches that God sent His only Son into this world as a sacrifice for our sins, to pay the price for our rebellion against God. Rebellion is what sin is - crossing a line that God has told us not to cross. We respond to the sacrifice of Jesus by turning back to God, by turning away from our sins. We then accept God's gift by allowing ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism, as we are immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. At that point, the Christian life begins, we are born into God's family, God places us in His kingdom, and we work together with other Christians spreading the good news from that point until the day we die. If you are ready to join us in that mission, we would invite you to obey the gospel this morning. If you are ready to do whatever it takes to make things right with God, you can let us know about your decision as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com