

A Pastor Worth Following 1 Timothy 4:12-16

Introduction

Tonight: Tonight is a special night in the life of our church, as we ordain DeVargas as an additional pastor at Redemption Heights Church. It's easy to think this is just the *next step* in leadership development, but it's more than that. It's evidence of God building his church and an answer to the prayer that we would make disciples and raise up leaders to guide us in that task.

For You: This part of the service is technically called the “**charge to the candidate**,” which means for the next few minutes I get to talk directly to DeVargas, and the rest of you get to listen in. But you should listen closely because (1) he's about to be your pastor (you should know what he's called to. (2) All of us should follow these same warnings as followers of Jesus (most of us have leadership in some capacity, somewhere.

Passage: I considered many passages to share with you, DeVargas,¹ but ultimately chose the personal charge Paul gave Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12-16, as it's closest to what I wanted to say to you.

- We've spent many hours together over the past 6 years, studying Scripture and discussing ministry. I've watched you build and develop a youth ministry from scratch, then go on to pastor those children. I've seen you grow as a Bible student and teacher, even taking you to teach on another continent.
 - I will never forget your homemade remedy from travel-related digestive difficulties.
- While I'm no Paul and you're no Timothy, I feel the affection of Paul toward Timothy, his son in the faith.²
- Your circumstances may be different, but you will find the challenges you face equally as difficult and the advice of Paul equally as important.³

Give yourself to the life and work of a pastor.

- (1) Set an Example (v. 12)
- (2) Stand on Scripture (v. 13)
- (3) Steward Your Gift (v. 14)

¹ Cf. 2 Tim 4, 1 Pet 5, Acts 20, etc.

² Phil 2:19-22 (cf. 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2-4, 3:10-11, 4:9, 21; 1 Cor 4:17).

³ Despite Paul's personal investment in Ephesus, false teachers had come in and taught a particular type of Jewish heresy focused on myth, reimaginings of history, speculation, magic, exclusivity, and a type of legalism. Timothy has been tasked to lead in these circumstances. These are personal notes from Paul to Timothy. Timothy was with Paul in his imprisonment and was trained, mentored, and disciplined by him. Paul speaks to Timothy not only as a pastoral predecessor but as a son in the faith. His words are wrapped up in encouragement, warning, wisdom, and, ultimately, love for Timothy and the church that he is shepherding.

- (4) Watch Yourself (vv. 15-16)

¹²Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

1. Set an Example (v. 12) ¹²Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

Young Pastor: Paul knows that Timothy is a young leader (Let no one despise you for your youth). He can't change that

- “When I turned two, I was really anxious because I’d doubled my age in a year and, I thought, if this keeps up, by the time I’m six I’ll be ninety” (Steven Wright). “Being young is a fault that diminishes daily.”
 - The dumb things I did as a young pastor are hard to beat. You will do dumb things and say dumb things, but make sure your heart is pure in faith and love.
- However, he can avoid the typical pitfalls of youth (e.g., arrogance, carelessness, impulsiveness, inconsistency) by setting a good example through his **public behavior** (e.g., in speech, conduct) and **private character** (e.g., in love, faith, purity).
- He’s not saying, “don’t let anyone look down on you.” He’s saying, “Give them nothing to look down on.”
 - Don’t fall into the trap of youthful temptation.

Faithful Example: The public (i.e., teaching, up front) is inextricably linked to the private (i.e., character)—life and doctrine. We are far too aware of pastors whose public teaching or private lifestyle has disqualified them from ministry.

- **To be a pastor is to sign up to be an example.** We have seen the hallmarks of Christian leadership in your life.
- Pastors aren’t super Christians. You are not called to be perfect, but you are called to be a humble and faithful example.

2. Stand on Scripture (v. 13) ¹³Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

Scripture: If you are going to say anything worth hearing, or preach anything worth considering, it is *not* going to come from you; it is going to come from God.⁴

- We know that God speaks consistently through his Word, the Bible. We do not have a silent God; we have a speaking God.
 - **Make the Bible the center of your ministry.** No amount of work is too much to understand it better or teach it more clearly.

⁴ “Command and teach these things” (1 Tim 4:11).

- Peter says that the Scriptures are “more certain” than if we saw the transfigured Jesus with our own eyes (2 Pet 1:16-21).
- Traps to avoid:
 - **That’ll Preach:** Avoid the temptation to preach what sounds good in place of what God has said.
 - **Novelty:** Avoid the temptation to say something new when your job is to say what is true.
 - **Relevance:** Avoid the temptation to twist the Bible to fit modern times. The Bible is relevant; your job is to show people how.
 - **People Pleasing:** Avoid the temptation to soften what Scripture says because you know what people want to hear.
 - **Hobby Horse:** Avoid making the text say the thing you already want to say.
 - Borrowed Conviction Trap: Avoid preaching truths that have only passed through your notes and never through your own heart.
 - **Familiarity:** Never become so accustomed to handling God’s Word that you cease to tremble before it.
- Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2 Tim 4:2).

3. Steward Your Gift (v. 14)

¹⁴Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

Remember: The church laid hands on Timothy, a tradition we will continue in a few minutes. They recognized his calling and gifts.

- We want you to look back on tonight, not as a magical moment where you get pastoral superpowers, but as a reminder that God called you to this and the church affirmed that call.
 - When things get difficult, remember this moment.

Grow in Grace: His warning is “not to neglect” his gift (elsewhere he says to “fan into flames,” 2 Tim 1:6).⁵

- **Your ministry is just as likely to diminish from neglect as rebellion.**
 - We can name the many who have fallen from sin.
 - But less obvious, and maybe more common, are those who have diminished from neglect (e.g., failed to finish well).
- The opposite of compassion is not meanness but apathy. Don’t get weary in your calling to pastor.
 - Continue to devour God’s Word, to pursue him in intimate prayer, to grow in your love for the people he has called you to serve.⁶

⁵ Never forget that your ability to be an under-shepherd to the flock of God is a divine gift you don’t deserve.

⁶ As a pastor you are called to care, strive, and try more than some think is wise. You see those that are lost as Jesus sees them, as sheep without a shepherd, and you are moved to compassion. You always have gospel hope. “If your

- ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have. All that God gives is a gift. If it's from God, then it's a good gift worth cultivating.⁷
 - I always tell my kids there are two things they control in a situation: **attitude** and **effort**. Paul is saying, you can't control the outcome, but you can control the effort you put in (e.g., Practice these things, immerse yourself in them... Keep a close watch... Persist in this). Holiness is not a temporary duty but a permanent lifestyle.

4. Watch Yourself (vv. 15-16)

¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Progress Not Perfection: "Be more afraid of yourself than the world" (Bishop Butler).

- Holiness is not a diet but a lifestyle (e.g., dieting illustration)—practice, immerse, progress.
- Progress is not seen in a good sermon or a quick program, but in a lifetime of faithfulness (long obedience in the same direction).⁸
- Don't aim for perfection (only God is perfect); aim for progress in Christlikeness.
 - You don't notice a child grow each day, but when you look back you see the growth.

Watch Yourself: ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself (your life) and on the teaching.

- Proclamation and personal character are inseparable.
 - You will behave based on what you *really* believe. If the two are dissonant, one will eventually give (either the behavior to the belief or the belief to the behavior).
 - If God's Word is your standard, the test is to allow it (by God's Spirit) to transform you.
 - Submit your life to the gospel every second of every day.
- Doctrine without holiness is hypocrisy. Holiness without doctrine is moralism.
 - It's about the message, not the messenger, but it's undeniable that one can harm the reception of the other.
- The stakes are too high! As leaders, we "keep watch over the souls" of those in our care and "will have to give an account" (Heb 13:17).
- Pastoral ministry is no trivial thing. This is not simply a job, but you are a shepherd of the flock of God (e.g., *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*).
- **Warning:** Paul's admonition stands in judgment on pastors who neglect Scripture, don't display godliness, and immerse themselves in things other than the things of God. They destroy themselves and those who listen and follow their example.

pastoral ministry prides itself on knowing how straight the road is, you'll never know to minister to those who keep finding the ditches" (James K. A. Smith). It's okay to be overflow in your love for God and people.

⁷ "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands." (2 Tim 1:6).

⁸ Progress is "progress of the gospel" (Phil 1:12).

- **Encouragement:** But to those who are faithful, this is encouragement. So we persevere, we plod on, we continue in the path of God, knowing that God is using us to accomplish the salvation of many.
 - I pray with joy for those moments of pastoral ministry:
 - When a student calls you to let you know he **surrendered** his life to Jesus (e.g., **Josh**).
 - When that person you're counseling through **addiction** experiences freedom (**Steve**).
 - When that member you're discipling **shares the gospel** for the first time (**Joe**).

Conclusion

Remember this night, not because it provides some supernatural change; you are fundamentally the same person. This is a memorial stone in the journey of your life that you can remember when a group of faithful people stood and affirmed God's call. Do not neglect the call or the gifts of God.

- Now, I'll invite DeVargas to the front. Pastor James and I are going to lay hands on him and pray for him in this new endeavor.
- We invite the members of Redemption Height to join us up front. Put your hand on DeVargas on the person in front of you.
 - If you're not a member, we'd invite you to pray with us from your seat for God's blessing on DeVargas and on this church.

The Prayer of Ordination

Dear God in Heaven,

We praise you because Jesus Christ is the head of the church, and you have promised to build your church. We thank you for **DeVargas**.

- We thank you for saving him, calling him to yourself, giving him gifts for ministry, and allowing us to see the fruit of your grace in his life.

Today, as we lay our hands upon him, we recognize what we believe you have already done.

We affirm his calling and set him apart for the work of shepherding your people.

- By your Holy Spirit, give him everything he needs to be faithful in this work.
- Make him an example to the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.
- Keep him devoted to your Word. Give him courage to preach it when it is popular and when it is not. Guard him from the fear of man, from the love of praise, and from the temptation to say anything other than what you have said.
- Help him not to neglect the gifts you have given him, but to use them faithfully to build up your church.

- Keep a close watch over him as he keeps a close watch over himself and his teaching. Guard his life. Guard his doctrine. Guard his family. Guard his heart from pride, discouragement, bitterness, and sin.
- Make him a shepherd who loves the sheep, seeks the wandering, strengthens the weak, cares for the hurting, and gladly points all people to the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

When ministry is joyful, keep him humble. When ministry is difficult, keep him faithful. When he is tired, give him strength. When he is discouraged, remind him that the church belongs to Jesus and not to him.

- And by your grace, let him persist in these things. Give him not merely a good beginning tonight, but a lifetime of faithfulness, so that years from now we may see his progress and give glory to you.

DeVargas is your servant before he is ours. This church is your church before it is his. And this ministry belongs to you.

- So use him for the good of your people, for the salvation of the lost, for the building up of your church, and for the glory of Jesus Christ.

All of this in your name and by your power. Amen.