

How to Be a Great Minister of Christ, part 1

Almost everyone who is involved in the ministry has a deep desire to be successful. By a minister, I mean the senior pastor of a church. But “minister” can also refer to anyone who is involved in any form of ministry in the church or para church ministry. The person may be ministering to the little children, youth, young adults, or adults. Biblically, every believer should be involved in ministering in some way. Some believers who are committed to serving Jesus Christ share the same passion that the apostle Paul mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:7. Paul said he wanted to finish well. They also want to finish well!

Our study is from 1 Timothy 4:6-11 and is about how to finish well. This study is the first part of “How to be a Great Minister of Christ.” This passage is actually directed to pastors in a church. But the principles also apply to everyone who ministers. This passage will help you understand what is required to be a great minister for Christ Jesus. You will discover the passage was written to Timothy, a pastor, but the principles apply to every believer who is ministering for Jesus. We will discover five

principles that are required for that to happen.

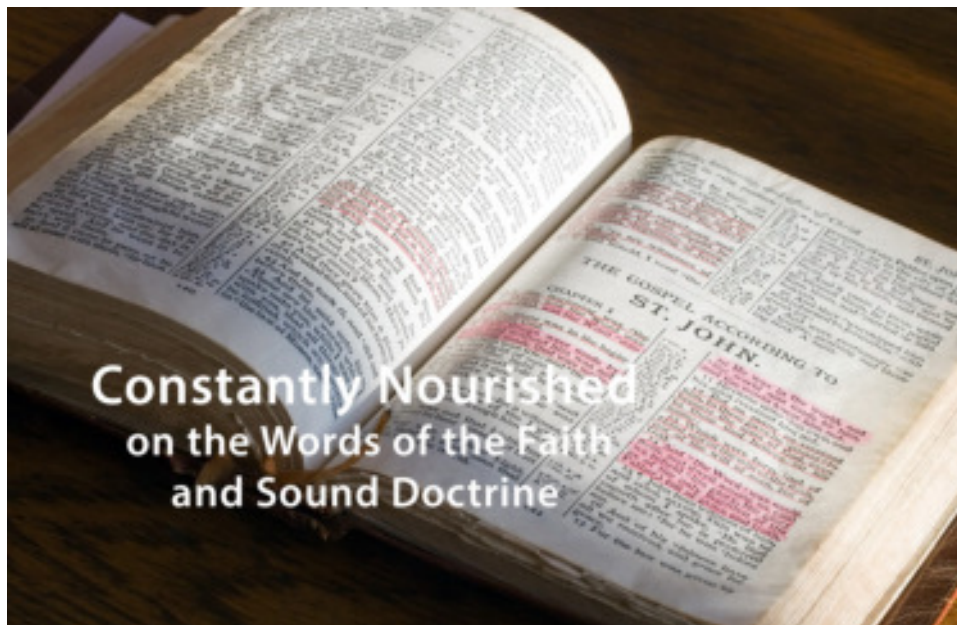
WILL REMIND AND WARN ABOUT APOSTASY. The first principle is that those who minister will remind or warn others about apostasy. Our study begins with 1 Timothy 4:6. It says,

[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. 1 Timothy 4:6 \(NASB\)](#)

In this verse, the apostle Paul told Timothy that if he points out these things, “you will be a good servant.” The Greek word for “servant” is *diakonos*. It is important to notice that Paul did not tell Timothy how to be a bad servant, or a mediocre servant. The primary purpose of this passage was to tell Timothy, a pastor in the church in Ephesus, how to be a good servant for Christ. The word “good” is a poor translation of the Greek word that Paul used. The Greek word for “good” in this verse is *kalos*. When I took Greek, I was taught that the word simply means “good.” But it means much more than good. It can have the sense of honorable, praiseworthy, beautiful, morally good, and excellent. *Kalos* has a blurred sense of all these words. So,

Paul told Timothy and he is telling us how to be a honorable servant or a praiseworthy servant of Christ Jesus. To simply say “good servant,” minimizes the sense of the word. A better statement would be an excellent or a great servant of Christ



Jesus. That is, the Holy Spirit is telling us how a believer can be worthy of praise as a servant of Christ Jesus.

The first step or principle of a great servant of Christ is he or she will be “pointing out these things to the brethren.” When the Holy Spirit says “these things” He referred to things in verses 1-5. Those verses tell us that a great servant will remind fellow believers that the Holy Spirit had prophesied apostasy

would occur in the last days. He will warn the congregation about the dangers of deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons. Some who teach the Scriptures fail to do that today because they fear offending others. So, some servants of Christ do not warn about false teachers and false doctrines. On one occasion I warned a congregation about the false teachers Joel Osteen, Kenneth Hagen, Creflo Dollar, Benny Hinn, and Ken Copeland. Later a woman complained that I did that because she liked Joel Osteen. But the Holy Spirit tells us that every good servant of Christ will warn about deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons. They will warn others in order to rescue them from apostasy.

WILL CONSTANTLY STUDY THE SCRIPTURES. The second principle of a great servant of Christ Jesus is that they will be “constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.” That is, the servant will be nourished on two things — words of the faith and sound doctrine. The phrase “words of the faith” refers to the Word of God. The key word is “word.” “Sound doctrine” refers to the teaching, or to the biblical doctrines.

So, Paul is telling us that a great servant of Christ Jesus will be constantly nourished on the Bible. That is how he will be reading and studying Scripture. But some servants of Christ are on a diet. They are anorexic. Anorexia hurts a person’s health. Paul said when a believer is not on a spiritual diet they are hurt spiritually. The Greek word for “nourished” is a present participle. It has the sense of constantly being nourished. That is, a great servant of Christ Jesus is continually reading and studying the Bible. Why? Because some servants are not very committed to the study of the Bible. Hebrews 5:11-14 tells us that a believer who is on a spiritual diet starts becoming spiritually stagnant and begins to lose their knowledge and understanding of Scripture.

Paul also told Timothy that he must nourish himself in sound doctrine or the teaching of the Scriptures. If Timothy did not do this, how could he teach the Scriptures to others? How could Timothy teach the Scriptures with excellence if he is on a spiritual diet himself? The answer is obvious. That reminds me of a pastor who was teaching his congregation while he was on a spiritual diet. His pulpit ministry left people feeling spiritually empty because he was spiritually empty.

Now imagine a believer in the church ministering for Christ while he was on a spiritual diet? I think we understand that his ministry would be spiritually empty too! The principle applies to pastors in the pulpit and to anyone else who ministers for Christ.

John Stott made this helpful comment about the phrase “a good servant” of Christ. He said,

I have always loved this expression. Jesus Christ has ministers of all sorts - good, bad and indifferent - but I cannot imagine a nobler ambition than to be ‘a good minister’ of his. Moreover, Paul makes it plain that it is the good teaching (6c) which makes the good minister, and that in two ways, namely that he both instructs people in it and nourishes himself on it.

...

This seems to be a general rule. Behind the ministry of public teaching there lies the discipline of private study. All the best teachers have themselves remained students. They teach well because they learn well. So before we can effectively instruct others in the truth, we must have ‘really digested’ it (JB) ourselves.¹

Believers can tell if their Bible teacher or pastor is constantly reading and studying the Bible. They can tell if he or she is digesting the Word of God. Just listen to what is being taught. Do you hear the same Bible truths again and again? That is a sign the teacher or pastor is not growing and they just keep feeding you the same old food Sunday after Sunday or Bible study after Bible study. John MacArthur stated,

This quality is basic to excellence in ministry, but is sadly lacking in the church today. Much contemporary preaching is weak and produces weak churches because it reflects a lack of biblical knowledge, and a minimal commitment to the study of Scripture. For many pastors, study is an unwelcome intrusion into their schedule. It interrupts the routine of administrative tasks and meetings with which they occupy themselves. They study

1. John Stott. *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus. The Bible Speaks Today.* Inter-Varsity-Press. 1996. p. 116.

only enough to make a sermon, not to feed their own hearts and think deeply and carefully on divine truth. The result is impotent sermons that fall on hard hearts and have little impact.

That has not always been the case, however. Throughout church history, most of the greatest theologians have been pastors. For example, in addition to their work of reforming the church, the Reformers had regular pastoral responsibilities. The leaders of the seventeenth-century English Puritan movement, men like John Owen, Richard Baxter, Thomas Goodwin, and Thomas Brooks, were pastors. As pastors, they were above all students of Scripture, not merely communicators, administrators, or counselors. Their understanding and interpretation of Scripture was marked by precision. They labored hard at teaching and preaching (cf. 5:17).

William Tyndale, the sixteenth-century English reformer and Bible translator, was an example of a man with a burning desire to study and understand God's Word. In prison shortly before he was martyred, he wrote a letter to the governor-in-chief asking for a warmer cap, a candle, a piece of cloth to patch my leggings But above all, I beseech and entreat your clemency to be urgent with the Procureur that he may kindly permit me to have my Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Grammar and Hebrew Dictionary, that I may spend time with that in study. (Cited in J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1980], 148)

It is to that expert study of Scripture that Paul called Timothy. The translation "constantly nourished" reflects the present tense of the participle. The continual experience of being nourished on the truths of God's word is essential. An excellent minister must read the Word, study it, meditate on it, and master its contents. Only then can he be "approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2: 15).²

So, the first principle of how to be a great servant of Christ is to remind and warn people about apostasy. The second principle is to constantly be nourished on the Scriptures. That is, read it, study it, and master the doctrines of Scripture.

WILL AVOID UNGODLY TEACHINGS. The third principle of a great servant of Christ is that he avoids ungodly teachings. It is given in the first part of verse 7,

But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women.

1 Timothy 4:7a (NASB)

Paul told Timothy to have nothing to do with worldly fables. Timothy was to avoid them, or refuse to have anything to do with them. That is the meaning of the Greek word that is translated as "to have nothing." "To have nothing" means the great servant of Christ will avoid worldly fables. The word for "have nothing" is an imperative in the Greek. That means Paul commanded Timothy to refuse to have anything to do with worldly fables. He was not to be interested in them or teach about them. Now some people may like to hear such entertaining ideas in a sermon or in a Bible study. Some servants of Christ may want to entertain the people with ungodly myths when they teach the Scriptures, but a great servant of Christ will not do that.

Now what are "worldly fables"? The ESV translates "worldly fables" differently. It uses the phrase "irreverent, silly myths." But the NASB has translated the Greek more accurately. The meaning of the Greek word for "worldly" refers to that which is extremely unholy. The Greek word for "fables" is *muthos*, from which we get the English word myth. So, Timothy was commanded to avoid or reject unholy myths. We are to avoid them also.

Books have been published that describe some of the ancient Jewish myths. The stories in these books disagree with the Bible. They contain fanciful myths and legends. Most likely Paul knew about some of them. He may have been referring to them here. In 1 Timothy 1:3-4, Paul had already told Timothy to not allow myths to be taught because they might cause people to speculate. At Never Thirsty, people have asked us questions about some Jewish myths. We have discovered that myths can cause some people to doubt the faith. Consequently, we have responded to just a few in order to defend the Bible and rescue them from false doctrine. Myths often appear as ancient facts, extra-biblical truth, pseudo-science, and occultic wisdom. Therefore, I do not want to teach them or

2. John MacArthur. 1 Timothy. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Moody Press. 1995. p. 161.

discuss them. John Stott has said, they are just “spiritual junk food.”³ A great servant of God will only discuss those things that are profitable for edification and not for entertainment.

When Paul said the ungodly myths were “fit only for old women,” he referred to a problem that existed in his day. Women were not usually taught the Scriptures. They were not always well educated. So, they tended to believe things that were not biblical. That is less of a problem in an educated culture where many Christian women study and read the Scriptures.

WILL TRAIN FOR GODLINESS. The fourth principle of a great servant of Christ is that he will train for godliness. The principle is given to us in the last part of verse 7 through verse 10. The last part of verse 7 and verse 8 says,

On the other hand, 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 promise for the present life and also for the life to come. 1 Timothy 4:7b-8 (NASB)

Now Paul told Timothy and us to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness rather than get involved with ungodly myths. We are not to get involved in ungodly myths, but we are to discipline ourselves for godliness.

The Greek word Paul used for “to discipline” is *gumnazo*. We get our English word gymnasium and gymnastics from it. The basic meaning of *gumnazo* means “to train.” It is an imperative which means Paul commanded Timothy to discipline himself for the purpose of godliness. We are to train ourselves for the purpose of godliness.

We know that physical training is hard work. It requires exercising day after day if we do it correctly. Maybe the training involves push-ups, running, weight-lifting, and other activities. But the most difficult part about training is self-control. Self-control is required to keep doing the same routine day after day. Many people have started training, and then they stop after a while. But those who train themselves, push themselves. Someone who is in training does not allow their feelings to control what they do.

So, how do we do train ourselves for the purpose of god-

liness? First, we must use self-control. Without self-control, your emotions control you. Second, verse 6 says we need to be constantly nourished on the Bible and master the doctrines of Scripture. Third, verse 7 tells us to avoid ungodly teachings—avoid that which is not the Word of God. May I ask, “What do you normally read?” Do you read about all of the lies and speculation in the news or the Scriptures? Paul commands us to train ourselves for godliness by reading and studying the Scriptures and mastering doctrine. As you read and study, you will discover wonderful insights, be encouraged, challenged, grow in your love and knowledge of God, and be convicted of sin. If you do not discipline yourself to read and study the Word of God, you will not grow in holiness either. To refuse to sin requires self-control. Self-control is part of the fruit of the Spirit. That means we must walk in the Spirit to grow in self-control. You must push yourself as if you were training for the Olympics. You must work hard.

Paul says the goal is godliness. But what is godliness? We will begin to discover the answer by turning to 2 Peter 3:11. This verse will help us understand godliness is more than holy behavior.

Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness . . . 2 Peter 3:11 (NASB)

In this verse, notice that the apostle Peter refers to both “holy conduct” and “godliness” together. This means that godliness is not holy conduct, because both words are used together. Godliness is something different than being holy. The Greek word used for godliness in this verse is the same one in 1 Timothy 4:8. So then, what is it godliness? The Greek word for godliness is *eusebeia*. It means more than living a holy life; it refers to a life that conforms to all that we discover in the Bible. It refers to devotion and service to God in the fullest sense.

The ultimate example of godliness is Jesus Christ. Why did I say that? Notice that the word “godliness” occurs in chapter 3, verse 16. There we are told,

By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh,

3. Ibid. John Stott.

Was vindicated in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory. 1 Timothy 3:16 (NASB)

The word godliness is used in reference to Jesus. We discovered that in the last study. We are to become like Him. He prayed to the Father. He submitted to the Father. He worshiped the Father. He obeyed the Father. He never sinned. He was filled with the Spirit. He was spiritually perfect. He is the ultimate example of godliness. He is our example of how to live. As we read and study Scripture, more and more we will grow toward godliness. If you do not study and read, then you will slide backward in your spiritual life.

Next Paul said, “godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” This reveals another truth that we often miss. There is a benefit to godliness. The benefits of godliness are a greater knowledge of the Word of God, answered prayers, greater commitment to God, increased devotion, overflow of the fruit of the Spirit, increasing victory over sin, and increased assurance of our faith. The only way we can realize these benefits is by being nourished from the study of Scripture. We must read it, study it, and pursue holiness. When he says there is a benefit in the next life, He may be referring to our rewards, but that is not clear.

Then in verse 9 we read,

It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. 1 Timothy 4:9 (NASB)

The Holy Spirit literally says, “Faithful words worthy all acceptance.” He is telling us that we can trust verse 8. Verse 8 is a promise for every believer. The Holy Spirit promises that if we nourish ourselves on the Scriptures we will realize great benefits in this life and in the next life. But this is a promise that we can fully trust. We can put the promise in the spiritual bank in heaven. The promise is safe and certain.

Then in verse 10, we are told,

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. 1 Timothy 4:10 (NASB)

When Paul said “it,” he referred to the life in heaven that he mentioned already in verse 8. He said “the life to come” is what we labor and for which we strive. He does not mean we are trying to earn it. He is simply referring to the fact that our labor and our striving in this life is not futile or empty. I believe 1 Corinthians 15:58 has the same idea,

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15:58 (NASB)

Our labor and striving is not empty.

Next, Paul added a statement that makes some believers uncomfortable. He said that Jesus,

... is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

Paul already told us in other passages that God the Father predestined the elect to become believers (Romans 8:29-30). He chose those who would believe before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-4). They are called the elect. A great illustration for us is Paul. Acts 9 tells us that Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. It is obvious that God decided that the apostle Paul would become a Christian. Paul was not planning or seeking to become a Christian. In fact, he wanted to murder and torture Christians! So, when Jesus appeared to Paul, it was completely God’s idea. Christ had chosen Paul to be saved, and He made it happen (Acts 26:12-23).

So what did Paul mean here? First, He was simply saying that Christ is the Savior of men because He provides those things that are necessary for life. He saves people from death by providing their physical needs (Acts 14:17; 17:25). He causes the sun to rise and sends rains on the good and evil (Matthew 5:45). He shows kindness and patience to sinners by giving them time to repent (Romans 2:3-8). The Greek word for save and savior can mean something other than salvation from sins. That is, God saves people from all kinds of things. But

in reference to “the life to come” He especially saves believers. “Especially,” is used to emphasize the special meaning of being saved from our sins.

So, our labor and strife is not empty. We must cling to the promise that all our struggles in life are not empty. We have an inheritance in heaven, a reservation in heaven, and it is protected by our God (Ephesians 2:6; 1 Peter 1:4-8). Our salvation is certain and so is the benefit of our labor for Christ. Paul was encouraging both Timothy and us.

WILL COMMAND AND TEACH SCRIPTURE. The fifth principle of a great servant of Christ is that he or she will command and teach these principles,

Prescribe and teach these things. 1 Timothy 4:11 (NASB)

Now Paul told Timothy to command and teach others. Paul gave Timothy five principles for a how to be a great minister. A great servant of Christ will remind and warn about apostasy, will constantly study the Scriptures, will avoid ungodly teachings, will train for godliness, and will command and teach Scripture.

That includes every believer - not just pastors!