

**1 Timothy 4**  
**February 6, 2022**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: If you were to write a job description for your pastor, what would it contain? [Ex: A pastor preaches regularly, performs weddings and other Christian services, visits the sick, conducts funerals, and counsels the distressed.]

Q: How would it compare with the description he might write?

**Transition:** But what *is* his ministry, and what kind of person must he be to fulfill his God-given ministry? In this section of his letter to Timothy, Paul emphasized the character and the work of the minister himself; and he listed three qualities that a minister must possess if he is to be successful in serving God. Let's begin.

**BOOK:**

**Instructions to Timothy**

**4** The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. <sup>2</sup> Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. <sup>3</sup> They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. <sup>4</sup> For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup> because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

<sup>6</sup> If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. <sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. <sup>8</sup> For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

<sup>9</sup> This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance <sup>10</sup> (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.

<sup>11</sup> Command and teach these things. <sup>12</sup> Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. <sup>13</sup> Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. <sup>14</sup> Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

<sup>15</sup> Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. <sup>16</sup> Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

- The title "Savior of all men" does not imply that everybody will be saved (universalism), or that God saves people in spite of themselves; for Paul added "specially of those that believe." It is faith that saves one's soul (Eph. 2:8–10). Since God "will have all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4), and since Christ "gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:6), then *any* lost sinner can trust Christ and be saved. Christ is "the Savior of all men," so nobody need despair.

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

**LOOK:**

The building up of the saved and the winning of the lost are the purposes for our ministry, to the glory of God. But God must work *in* us before He can effectively work *through* us (Phil. 2:12–13). As good ministers, we preach the Word; as godly ministers, we practice the Word; as growing ministers, we progress in the Word.

**Close in Prayer**

## **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 224–228). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

### **HOW TO BE A MAN OF GOD**

#### *1 Timothy 4*

If you were to write a job description for your pastor, what would it contain? How would it compare with the description he might write? A pastor preaches regularly, performs weddings and other Christian services, visits the sick, and counsels the distressed. But what *is* his ministry, and what kind of person must he be to fulfill his God-given ministry?

In this section of his letter to Timothy, Paul emphasized the character and the work of the minister himself; and he listed three qualities that a minister must possess if he is to be successful in serving God.

#### **A Good Minister, Preaching the Word (1 Tim. 4:1–6)**

Paul had warned the Ephesian elders that false teachers would invade the church (Acts 20:28–31); and now they had arrived. The Holy Spirit had spoken in specific terms about these teachers, and the prophecy was starting to be fulfilled in Paul's time. Certainly it is fulfilled in our own time! We can recognize false teachers by the description Paul gave in this paragraph.

***They are energized by Satan (v. 1a).*** This is the only place where demons are mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles. Just as there is a “mystery of godliness” concerning Christ (1 Tim. 3:16), so there is a “mystery of iniquity” that surrounds Satan and his work (2 Thes. 2:7). Satan is an imitator (2 Cor. 11:13–15); he has his own ministers and doctrines, and seeks to deceive God's people and lead them astray (2 Cor. 11:3). The first test of any religious doctrine is what it says about Jesus Christ (1 John 4:1–6).

It comes as a shock to some people that Satan uses professed Christians *in the church* to accomplish his work. But Satan once used Peter to try to lead Jesus on a wrong path (Matt. 16:21–23), and he used Ananias and Sapphira to try to deceive the church at Jerusalem (Acts 5). Paul warned that false teachers would arise *from within the church* (Acts 20:30).

***They lead people astray (v. 1b).*** Their goal is to seduce people and get them to depart from the faith. This is the word *apostasy*, and it is defined as “a willful turning away from the truth of the Christian faith.” These false teachers do not try to build up the church or relate people to the Lord Jesus Christ in a deeper way. Instead they want to get disciples to follow them and join their groups and promote their programs. This is one difference between a true church and a religious cult: A true church seeks to win converts to Jesus Christ and to build them spiritually; conversely, a cult proselytizes, steals converts from others, and makes them servants (even slaves!) of the leaders of the cult. However, not all apostates are in cults; some of them are in churches *and pulpits*, teaching false doctrine and leading people astray.

***They are hypocrites (v. 2).*** “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:15–20). These false teachers preach one thing but practice another. They tell their disciples what to do, but they do not do it themselves. Satan works “by means of the hypocrisy of liars” (1 Tim. 4:2, literal translation). One of the marks of a true servant of God is his honesty and integrity: He practices what he preaches. This does not mean he is sinlessly perfect, but that he sincerely seeks to obey the Word of God. He tries to maintain a good conscience (see 1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9).

The word *seared* means “cauterized.” Just as a person’s flesh can be “branded” so that it becomes hard and without feeling, so a person’s conscience can be deadened. Whenever we affirm with our lips something that we deny with our lives (whether people know it or not), we deaden our consciences just a little more. Jesus made it clear that it is not religious talk or even performing miracles that qualifies a person for heaven, but doing God’s will in everyday life (Matt. 7:21–29).

An apostate is not just wrong doctrinally; he is wrong morally. His personal life became wrong before his doctrines were changed. In fact, it is likely that he changed his teachings so that he could continue his sinful living and pacify his conscience. *Believing* and *behaving* always go together.

***They deny God’s Word (vv. 3–5).*** The false teachers in Ephesus combined Jewish legalism with Eastern asceticism. You find Paul dealing with this same false doctrine in his Letter to the Colossians (Col. 2:8–23 especially). For one thing, the false teachers taught that an unmarried life was more spiritual than a married life, which is contrary to Scripture. “It is not good that the man should be alone” are God’s own words (Gen. 2:18). Jesus put His seal of approval on marriage (Matt. 19:1–9), though He pointed out that not everybody is supposed to marry (Matt. 19:10–12). Paul also affirmed the biblical basis for marriage (1 Cor. 7:1–24), teaching that each person should follow the will of God in the matter.

Beware of any religious teaching that tampers with God’s institution of marriage. And beware of any teaching that tampers with God’s creation. The false teachers who were infecting the Ephesian church taught that certain foods were taboo; if you ate them, you were not spiritual. The fact that God called His own Creation “good” (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25) did not interest these teachers. Their authority to dictate diets gave them power over their converts.

Those who “believe and know the truth” are not impressed with the do’s and don’ts of the legalists. Jesus stated that all foods are clean (Mark 7:14–23). He taught this lesson again to Peter (Acts 10), and reaffirmed it through Paul (1 Cor. 10:23–33). A person may not be able to eat certain foods for physical reasons (an allergy, for example); but no food is to be rejected for spiritual reasons. We should not, however, use our freedom to eat and drink to destroy weaker Christians (Rom. 14:13–23). The food we eat is sanctified (set apart, devoted to God) when we pray and give thanks; so the Word of God and prayer turn even an ordinary meal into a spiritual service for God’s glory (1 Cor. 10:31).

The emphasis in a minister’s life should be on “the Word of God and prayer” (1 Tim. 4:5). It is tragic when a church keeps its pastors so busy with menial tasks that they have hardly any time for God’s Word and prayer (Acts 6:1–7). Paul reminded young Timothy of his great responsibility to study, teach, and preach the Scriptures, and to spend time in prayer. As a “good minister” he must be “nourished up in the words of faith” (1 Tim. 4:6). Timothy had certain responsibilities in the light of this growing apostasy:

***Teach the church the truth (v. 6a).*** God’s people need to be warned about false doctrine and religious apostasy. A minister must not major on these subjects, because he is obligated to teach “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27); but neither should he ignore them. As we travel the streets and highways, we see two kinds of signs: those that tell us where we are going (“Boston 45 miles”) and those that warn us of possible dangers (“Bridge Out!”). A pastor must teach positive doctrine so that people will know what they believe and where they are going. But he must also expose false doctrine so that people will not be seduced and led astray.

***He must nourish himself in the Word (v. 6b).*** Of course, *every* Christian ought to feed daily on the Word (Jer. 15:16; Matt. 4:4; 1 Peter 2:2); but it is especially important that a pastor grow

in the Word. It is by daily studying the “good doctrine” and meditating on the Word that he grows in the Lord and is able to lead the church.

The “good minister” preaches the Word that he himself feeds on day by day. But it is not enough to preach the Word; he must also practice it.

### **A Godly Minister, Practicing the Word (1 Tim. 4:7–12)**

Paul shifted to an athletic illustration at this point in his letter. Just as a Greek or Roman athlete had to refuse certain things, eat the right food, and do the right exercises, so a Christian should practice “spiritual exercise.” If a Christian puts as much energy and discipline into his spiritual life as an athlete does into his game, the Christian grows faster and accomplishes much more for God. Paul discussed in this section three levels of life.

**The bad—“profane and old wives’ fables” (v. 7a).** These are, of course, the false teachings and traditions of the apostates. These doctrines have no basis in Scripture; in fact, they contradict the Word of God. They are the kind of teachings that silly people would discuss, not dedicated men and women of the Word! No doubt these teachings involved the false doctrines just named (1 Tim. 4:2–3). Paul also warned Titus about “Jewish fables” (Titus 1:14). Paul warned Timothy about these same “fables” in his second letter (2 Tim. 4:4).

A believer cannot rediscover new doctrines. Paul admonished Timothy to remain true to “the good doctrine which you have closely followed up to now” (1 Tim. 4:6b, literal translation). He warned him not to “give heed to fables and endless genealogies” (1 Tim. 1:4). While a pastor must know what the enemy is teaching, he must not be influenced by it. A chemist may handle and study poisons, but he does not permit them to get into his system.

**The temporary—“bodily exercise” (vv. 7–8).** Again, this is an athletic image. Certainly, we ought to care for our bodies, and exercise is a part of that care. Our bodies are God’s temples, to be used for His glory (1 Cor. 6:19–20), and His tools for His service (Rom. 12:1–2). But bodily exercise benefits us only during this life; godly exercise is profitable now and for eternity. Paul did not ask Timothy to choose between the two; I think God expects us to practice both. A healthy body can be used of God, but we must major on holiness.

**The eternal—“godliness” (vv. 7–12).** Phillips Brooks said, “The great purpose of life—the shaping of character by truth.” Godly character and conduct are far more important than golf trophies or home-run records, though it is possible for a person to have both. Paul challenged Timothy to be as devoted to godliness as an athlete is to his sport. We are living and laboring for eternity.

Paul used two similar athletic images in writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:24–27), emphasizing the disciplines necessary for godly living. As an athlete must control his body and obey the rules, so a Christian must make his body his servant and not his master. When I see high school football squads and baseball teams going through their calisthenics under the hot summer sun, I am reminded that there are spiritual exercises that I ought to be doing (Heb. 5:14). Prayer, meditation, self-examination, fellowship, service, sacrifice, submission to the will of others, witness—all of these can assist me, through the Spirit, to become a more godly person.

Spiritual exercise is not easy; we must “labor and suffer reproach” (1 Tim. 4:10a). “For this we labor and strive” (NIV). The word translated “strive” is an athletic word from which we get our English word *agonize*. It is the picture of an athlete straining and giving his best to win. A Christian who wants to excel must really work at it, by the grace of God and to the glory of God.

But exercising ourselves in godly living is not only profitable for us; it is also profitable for others (1 Tim. 4:11–12). It enables us to be good examples, so that we encourage others. Paul named several areas of life in which you and I should be examples.

“In word” (1 Tim. 4:12) implies that our speech should always be honest and loving, “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15).

“In conduct” (the KJV’s “conversation” means “walk,” not “talk”) suggests that our lives are to be controlled by the Word of God. We must not be like the hypocrites Paul described to Titus (Titus 1:16): “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him.”

“In love” (charity) points to the motivation of our lives. We do not obey God to be applauded by men (Matt. 6:1ff), but because we love God and love God’s people.

“In spirit” is not in many manuscripts, but it would describe the inner enthusiasm and excitement of a child of God.)

“In faith” implies that we trust God and are faithful to Him. Faith and love often go together (1 Tim. 1:14; 2:15; 6:11; 2 Tim. 1:13; 2:22). Faith always leads to faithfulness.

“In purity” is important as we live in this present evil world. Ephesus was a center for sexual impurity, and the young man Timothy was faced with temptations. He must have a chaste relationship to the women in the church (1 Tim. 5:2) and keep himself pure in mind, heart, and body.

But godly living not only helps *us* and *other believers*; it also has its influence on *the lost*. Paul reminded pastor Timothy that Jesus Christ is the Savior (1 Tim. 4:10), and it is the believer’s task to share that Good News with the lost. In effect he wrote, “We Christians have fixed our hope in the living God, but the lost have no hope and do not know the living God. All that many of them know are the dead idols that can never save them.”

The title “Savior of all men” does not imply that everybody will be saved (universalism), or that God saves people in spite of themselves; for Paul added “specially of those that believe.” It is faith that saves one’s soul (Eph. 2:8–10). Since God “will have all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4), and since Christ “gave Himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:6), then *any* lost sinner can trust Christ and be saved. Christ is “the Savior of all men,” so nobody need despair.

Timothy should not fear to practice the Word of God and apply it to the life of the church, for this Word is “a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance” (1 Tim. 4:9). These faithful sayings made up a summary of truth for the early church (see 1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 3:8). The fact that Timothy was a young man (the word then applied to a person from youth to forty) should not deter him from practicing the Word. In fact, he was to “command” these things, and this is our military word “charge” (1 Tim. 1:3). The local church is a unit in God’s spiritual army, and its leaders are to pass God’s orders along to the people with authority and conviction.

### **A Growing Minister, Progressing in the Word (1 Tim. 4:13–16)**

The key thought in this section is “that thy profiting may appear to all” (1 Tim. 4:15). The word *profiting* (“progress,” NIV) is a Greek military term; it means “pioneer advance.” It describes the soldiers who go ahead of the troops, clear away the obstacles, and make it possible for others to follow. As a godly pastor, Timothy was to grow spiritually so that the whole church could see his spiritual progress and imitate it.

No pastor can lead his people where he has not been himself. “Such as I have, give I thee” is a basic principle of life and ministry (Acts 3:6). The pastor (or church member) who is not growing is actually going backward, for it is impossible to stand still in the Christian life. In his

living, teaching, preaching, and leading, the minister must give evidence of spiritual growth. But what are factors that make spiritual progress possible?

**Emphasize God's Word (v. 13).** "Give attendance to" means "devote yourself to, be absorbed in." Ministering the Word was not something Timothy was to do after he had done other things; it was to be the most important thing he did. *Reading* means the public reading of Scripture in the local assembly. The Jewish people always had the reading of the Law and the Prophets in their synagogues, and this practice carried over into Christian churches. Jesus read the Scriptures in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16ff), and Paul often read the lessons when he visited a synagogue (Acts 13:15).

In my itinerant ministry, I have noted that many churches have dispensed with the public reading of God's Word; and I am disappointed. They have time for "special music" and endless announcements, but there is no time for the reading of the Bible. The pastor may read a text before he preaches, but that is a different thing. Every local church ought to have a schedule of Bible readings for the public services. It is commanded by Scripture that we read God's Word in the public assemblies. (I might add that those who read the Word publicly ought to prepare themselves privately. Nobody should be asked "at the last minute" to read the Scriptures publicly. The Bible deserves the best we can give.)

*Exhortation* (1 Tim. 4:13) literally means "encouragement" and suggests the applying of the Word to the lives of the people. The pastor was to read the Word, explain it, and apply it. *Doctrine* means "teaching," and is a major emphasis in the pastoral letters. There are at least twenty-two references to "teaching" or "doctrine" in these thirteen chapters.

"Apt to teach" is one of the qualifications of a minister (1 Tim. 3:2); and it has been correctly said, "Apt to teach implies apt to learn." A growing minister (or church member) must be a student of the Word. Before he teaches others he must teach himself (Rom. 2:21). His spiritual progress is an example to his flock and an encouragement to others.

**Use your spiritual gifts (v. 14).** So much has been written in recent years about spiritual gifts that we have almost forgotten the *graces* of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). The word *gift* is the Greek word *charisma*. It simply means "a gracious gift from God." (The world uses the word *charisma* to describe a person with magnetic personality and commanding appearance.) *Every Christian* has the gift of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9) and at least one gift from the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1–11). The gift of the Spirit, and the gifts from the Spirit, are bestowed by God at the moment of conversion (see 1 Cor. 12:13ff).

However, when God calls a believer into a special place of ministry, He can (and often does) impart a spiritual gift for that task. When Timothy was ordained by the elders ("presbytery"), he received an enabling gift from God when the elders laid hands on him. But for some reason, Timothy had neglected to cultivate this gift which was so necessary to his spiritual progress and ministry. In fact, Paul had to admonish him in his second letter, "Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:6).

It is encouraging to know that the God who calls us also equips us to do His work. We have nothing in ourselves that enables us to serve Him; the ministry must all come from God (1 Cor. 15:9–10; Phil. 4:13; 1 Tim. 1:12). However, we must not be passive; we must cultivate God's gifts, use them, and develop them in the ministry of the local church and wherever God puts us.

**Devote yourself fully to Christ (v. 15).** "Meditate" carried the idea of "be in them, give yourself totally to them." Timothy's spiritual life and ministry were to be the absorbing, controlling things in his life, not merely sidelines that he occasionally practiced. There can be no

real pioneer advance in one's ministry without total dedication to the task. "No man can serve two masters" (Matt. 6:24).

While I do not want to sound critical, I must confess that I am disturbed by the fact that too many pastors and Christian workers divide their time and interest between the church and some sideline. It may be real estate, trips to the Holy Land, politics, civic duties, even denominational service. Their own spiritual lives suffer, and their churches suffer, because these men are not devoting themselves wholly to their ministry. "This one thing I do" was Paul's controlling motive, and it ought to be ours too (Phil. 3:13). "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8).

**Take spiritual inventory (v. 16).** Examine your own heart in the light of the Word of God. Note that Paul put "thyself" ahead of "the doctrine." Paul had given this same warning to the Ephesian elders in his farewell message: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves" (Acts 20:28). A servant of God can be so busy helping others that he neglects himself and his own spiritual walk.

The great American evangelist of the 1800s, Charles Finney, used to preach on this text. He titled his sermon "Preacher, Save Thyself!" That sermon is needed today, for we are seeing people having to leave the ministry because their lives have not kept up with their profession. Moral problems, divorces, and other kinds of shameful conduct have destroyed many of God's servants. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

The building up of the saved and the winning of the lost are the purposes for our ministry, to the glory of God. But God must work *in* us before He can effectively work *through* us (Phil. 2:12–13). As good ministers, we preach the Word; as godly ministers, we practice the Word; as growing ministers, we progress in the Word.

**Litfin, A. D. (1985). 1 Timothy. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 739-741) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

#### *B. Predictions of apostasy (4:1–5).*

4:1. As the repository and guardian of the truth, the church must be aware of the strategies of the truth's enemies. It is crucial then for the church to understand what God has revealed about these enemies (cf. 1 Peter 4:1–18; Jude 17–18). By **the Spirit clearly says** Paul was not necessarily referring to any particular revelation but to the repeated teaching of the Lord (e.g., Mark 13:22), the other apostles (e.g., 2 Peter 3:1–18), and Paul himself (e.g., Acts 20:29; 2 Thess. 2:1–12). According to this teaching the situation will degenerate as Christ's return approaches. **In later times** (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1 for a synonym), which Paul viewed as still future though casting their shadow already, **some people will abandon the faith** (cf. 1 Tim. 1:19) to **follow** after the false teaching of **deceiving spirits and ... demons**. Spiritual error is seldom due to innocent mistakes. It is more often due to the conscious strategies of God's spiritual enemies (cf. Eph. 6:12). The teachings (*didaskaliais*) of demons are false doctrines taught by errorists whose views are instigated by demons.

4:2. But God's spiritual enemies do not directly confront their victims with error. Instead, they work through **hypocritical liars** (lit., "men who speak lies in hypocrisy"). This is Satan's standard operating procedure (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13–15). He selects likely representatives and renders their **consciences** beyond feeling (cf. Eph. 4:19), **seared** (from *kaustēriazō*, "to brand, cauterize") **as with a hot iron**. In this condition they are ready to do Satan's bidding.



4:3. The false teachers plaguing the Ephesian church were the forerunners of the Gnostics of the second century. Even at this relatively incipient stage, the strong dualism of the Gnostics is clear: spirit is good; matter is evil. They believed all appetites relating to the body are therefore evil and should be rooted out, including normal desires for sex and food. Thus, the false teachers **forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods** (cf. Col. 2:21). But Paul went to the heart of the dualistic error by stating that matter is not inherently evil; it is rather part of what **God created** (cf. 1 Tim. 6:17b). Hence **those who believe and who know the truth** can gratefully (cf. 4:4) receive and use the things God created, which were designed **to be received** (*eis metalēmpsin*, “for partaking”).

4:4. Contrary to the teaching of the errorists, **everything God created is good**. Here Paul echoed God’s own verdict (Gen. 1:31). Whereas the false teachers were intent on “forbidding” and “abstaining” (1 Tim. 4:3), Paul said that **nothing is to be rejected**—nothing, that is, that God created. Man can abuse what God has created, as adultery is an abuse of the marital sexual relationship, and gluttony is an abuse of a normal appetite for food. Such abuses should certainly be rejected. But God’s creations themselves are all good and should be **received with thanksgiving**, not with taboos.

4:5. All the seemingly “ordinary” things of life can then become extraordinary as they are **consecrated by the Word of God and prayer**. In the light of the Scriptures a Christian recognizes God’s good hand behind the things provided and offers thanksgiving to the Lord. In this way the ordinary things so easily taken for granted (some of which are forbidden by errorists) become sanctified as occasions for worship and praise.

### C. Responsibilities of a good minister of Christ (4:6–16).

4:6. From his warning of the apostasy to come, Paul turned to Timothy and exhorted him to pass along these same warnings to others in the church. One of the works of **a good minister of Christ Jesus** is that he is a faithful conduit of the truth to other Christians (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). To do this, however, Timothy first had to keep himself “nourished” (not **brought up**) by (a) the objective **truths of the faith** which, as Jude 3 puts it, were “once for all entrusted to the saints,” and (b) the **truths of the good teaching that you have followed**. This latter phrase probably refers to Paul’s own instructions to his young disciple, which Timothy had faithfully carried out (*didaskalia*, “teaching” is also used in 1 Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1).

4:7. But since Timothy was to channel God’s truth to others, he was to **have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales**. The godless (*bebēlous*, “profane”) and the worthless go hand in hand (cf. 1:9; 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:16) and should be shunned. Instead, Timothy was to devote himself to much more manly pursuits. Paul introduced an athletic image with the words **train yourself**. The verb here is *gymnaze*, from which comes the English “gymnasium.” But Timothy’s training was to be for godliness (cf. 1 Tim. 2:2), not physical fitness. Paul often used athletic analogies to drive home the need for spiritual discipline (cf. esp. 1 Cor. 9:24–27).

4:8. As valuable as **physical fitness (training is gymnasia**, “exercise,” used only here in the NT) may be (and Paul did not disparage it), spiritual fitness, or godliness, is much more valuable. Physical fitness is profitable only, literally, “for a little.” **But godliness is profitable for all things**, not merely in this **present transient life** but in **the life to come**, that is, for eternity. Godliness colors all aspects of temporal and eternal life, bestowing its blessing on all it touches.

4:9. The **trustworthy saying** formula can point forward, as in 1:15, or backward, as in Titus 3:8. Here it is probably best to see it as reinforcing the proverbial impact of 1 Timothy 4:8 (in contrast with the NIV).

4:10. To this end, said Paul, **we labor and strive**—that is, to develop the godliness of verse 8. The word “strive” translates *agōnizometha* (“I agonize”), another athletic term. Paul practiced what he had just preached to Timothy (cf. Col. 1:29). **We have put our hope** renders *ēlpikamen*, a perfect tense denoting an action with the results continuing. The durative quality of Paul’s confidence is stressed. Paul knew his struggle was worth it because his hope was set, not on himself, some philosophy of life, other men, or nonexistent gods—but **in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe**. The mention of the “living” God picks up the reference in 1 Timothy 3:15; the stress on God as “Savior” picks up 1:1 and 2:3. Again Paul stated that God is the Savior of “all men” (cf. 2:2, 4, 6) since He desires that all be saved and He provided Christ as the ransom (2:6) to make that salvation possible. Yet God is the Savior of those who believe in a special way since only in them has His desire for their salvation come to fruition.

4:11. Timothy, as a young man with perhaps a nonassertive personality, was evidently given to timidity and fear (cf. 1 Cor. 16:10–11). Thus Paul exhorted him to **command** (*parangelle*, “insist on”) **and teach these things**. By “these things” Paul usually meant the contents of his instructions in the immediate context, but the term here seems almost intentionally ambiguous (cf. 1 Tim. 3:14; 4:6, 15; 5:7, 21; 6:2, 11). Paul was prodding Timothy to be firm and courageous in his ministry. Paul used the same Greek word *parangelle* in 5:7 and 6:13.

4:12. At first Paul’s instruction that Timothy should not **let anyone** “despise” (KJV) his youth might seem impossible to fulfill since Timothy could not control the attitudes of others. Yet when combined with the latter part of the verse, the thrust of Paul’s instruction becomes clear. Timothy must not be intimidated by his relative youthfulness or what others might think of it. Instead he was to demonstrate his maturity by living such a godly life that he would become a pattern for other Christians in every area of his life: **speech ... life** (i.e., “behavior or conduct,” *anastrophē*; cf. “conduct” in 3:15), **love ... faith, and ... purity**. The word for “purity” (*hagneia*, “moral cleanness”) is used only here and in 5:2.

4:13. After referring again to his own movements (cf. 1:3; 3:14–15), Paul exhorted Timothy to attend to his public ministry as well as his private life. This public ministry was to consist of at least three elements: (1) **Public reading of Scripture**. It has always been the practice of God’s people to read the Word of God aloud in the congregation (e.g., Ex. 24:7; Deut. 31:11; Josh. 8:35; 2 Kings 23:2; Neh. 8:7–8; Luke 4:16; Acts 15:21; Col. 4:16; 1 Thes. 5:27). (2) **Preaching**; better yet “exhortation” (*paraklēsei*). This term includes the exposition and application of the passages read. (3) **Teaching**. The distinction between this and the former term is by no means clear-cut. The two merge into each other. Yet “teaching” (*didaskalia*; cf. 1 Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 6, 16; 5:17; 6:1) may refer primarily to a more catechetical treatment of the truths of the Christian faith. The two terms occur in Romans 12:7–8 and are there related to spiritual gifts.

4:14. Timothy’s image of himself as a minister was evidently deficient, so Paul reminded him of the fact that God had given him the requisite ability for service. Timothy must not ignore or **neglect** this basic factor (cf. 2 Tim. 1:6). If others were not to look down on Timothy, neither was he to look down on himself. His **gift** had come to him **through a prophetic message** which was delivered at the time of his ordination, and the remembrance of this prophecy was designed to strengthen Timothy’s confidence. The laying on of **hands** is commonly associated in the Bible with a continuity of leadership (cf. Num. 27:18–23; Deut. 34:9; Acts 6:6; 8:18; 13:3; Heb. 6:2). The phrase **body of elders** renders the Greek *presbyteriou*, which speaks of a group or “board” of elders, or “presbytery.” These men together constitute a biblically recognized group. The

Bible never speaks of a corresponding group identity for deacons. The notion of deacons functioning as a “board” is never mentioned in the Bible.

4:15. Here is the positive side of Paul’s negative (“do not neglect...”) exhortation of verse 14. The command **be diligent** (*meleta*, from *meletaō*, “give careful thought to”) is the converse of the command in the previous verse (*amelei*, from *ameleō*, “give no thought to”). Timothy was to give his careful attention to Paul’s instructions; indeed, he was, literally, “to be in them” (or, with the NIV, to **give himself wholly to them**). As he would do so his **progress** would be evident to all observers and his problem of low credibility, implied throughout this section, would be alleviated.

4:16. **Watch your life** (lit., “yourself”) **and doctrine** (lit., “the teaching”; cf. 1:10; 4:1, 6, 13; 5:17; 6:1) **closely** summarizes 4:6–16. Throughout this epistle Paul had been advising Timothy concerning his private life and public ministry. He was to keep a sharp eye on both, persevering in the instructions Paul had offered in the two realms. In so doing, said Paul, **you will save both yourself and your hearers**. Ultimately only God can save, of course; yet in a secondary sense the New Testament speaks of a person “saving” himself (Phil. 2:12) and others (James 5:19–20; Jude 23). Paul’s words are a pointed reminder of the awesome burden of responsibility that congregational leaders carry.

***Dockery, D. S. (1998). The Pauline Letters. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 605–606). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.***

**4:1–10.** As the repository and guardian of the truth, the church continually must be aware of the strategies of the enemies of the truth. Paul stressed that Timothy’s pastoral duties involved guarding the truth and refuting the heretics. The church was instructed to confront the false teaching by teaching correct doctrine and by godly living.

The false teachers taught a false asceticism, forbidding marriage and the eating of various foods. But Paul maintained that God has given these things to be appreciated and used for God’s glory.

**4:11–16.** The apostle moved from the general concerns of the church to personal exhortations specifically for Timothy. Paul recognized that Timothy was a young man and that some of the older believers might be tempted to look down on his youth. Timothy was to be an example for the church “in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” He was to give himself to the public proclamation of the Scriptures through the use of gift given to him. Since God had called Timothy and the church had sanctioned his ministry through the laying on of hands, Timothy was to strive to live up to these high responsibilities.

***Fields, W. C. (1972). 1 Timothy. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (pp. 764–765). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.***

### **False Teachers and Timothy’s Growth (1 Tim. 4:1–16)**

In spite of the glorious spiritual heritage to which he had just referred, some will turn away from the faith led by false and insincere teachers (vv. 1–2). He warns especially against two of their errors, forbidding marriage and the use of certain foods (vv. 3–5). Paul asserts that, contrary to the gnostic teachings of all matter being evil, the entirety of God’s creation is good, if properly dedicated to him.

Paul gives Timothy some personal counsel which he is to pass on to others (vv. 6–10). Avoid worthless legends. Keep in training with appropriate spiritual nourishment and exercise. Timothy, perhaps 30 years younger than Paul, is not to allow his lack of age to stand in his way. He must strive to be an example. He must devote himself to public reading of the Scriptures, preaching, and teaching. He is to be a diligent steward of the spiritual authority and power invested in him.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Tim 4:1-16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**

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