

“Bible Reflection” (1 Timothy 4:11-16)
Seven Rhythms • January 28, 2024 • www.isonrise.com

Hearing that you are “not cool” is not fun. When your teenager says that you are not “hip,” not that they would use that kind of language, it hurts your feelings. Knowing you don’t connect in a relevant way to those younger than you can be disappointing. This may surprise you, but the teenager and pre-teen in my house have accused me of not being “cool.” Ouch! Maybe you can sympathize with my pain. As painful as that feels there is an accusation that hurts much more. When your kids call you a “hypocrite” that really hurts. When your kids tell you that they can’t trust you because what you do and what you say don’t match up that hits you in the heart. There is a big difference between not connecting and having your character called into question. I want to be the funny and cool dad, but it is more important to me to be a dad of integrity.

As a church and as individual Christians, we want to connect with our community and display good character. We lose a lot of ministry opportunities when we don’t succeed at connecting with our community. We desire to be relevant to those around us. We aim to communicate clearly with those not yet following Jesus. Losing connection and relevance is disappointing and frustrating. Losing our character is even more damaging to us and those around us. I would rather be the “not hip” church, than the “hypocrite church.” Thankfully, we don’t have to choose one or the other, but one deserves more of our focus than the other. One is more important than the other. Integrity is more important than relevance. Paul the Apostle stressed the importance of character in ministry to his young pastoral apprentice, Timothy.

Big Idea: Practice what you preach. In our passage today, we will see how Paul made this point incredibly clear to Timothy. Paul encouraged Timothy to preach the Bible and to practice what it taught. Paul also revealed what was at stake if Timothy didn’t do these things. If Timothy didn’t practice what he preached, he and his hearers could face eternal consequences. The stakes could not be higher. As we are studying the spiritual rhythm of Bible Reflection, we need to see how important our obedience is to our salvation and our witness to others. If we don’t **practice what we preach**, we could perish.

1 Timothy 4:11-12, ⁹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”

Throughout this passage, we will see how Paul moved back and forth between preaching and practice. In these first two verses, I want to focus more on Paul’s encouragement to Timothy to display good character. Let’s unpack verse 12 and then go back to verse 11. Paul spoke of Timothy’s “youth,” which means he was most likely in his 30’s. In the ancient world and in our modern times, those who are on the younger end of the age spectrum are often seen as being morally immature. This age is often identified as a time of rebellion and exploration, which often leads to immorality. Those in this age bracket may complain about this perception and become defensive of the behavior. I find it interesting how Paul did not tell Timothy to complain about being judged unfairly or to argue with his critics, but rather

told him to set an example. Instead of whining about the perception of others, Paul instructed Timothy to put in work and to practice good behavior. Paul listed 5 categories for Timothy to focus on, which encompassed all of Timothy's private and public life. Several, if not all, of the categories listed are not known to be exemplary in youth. Paul was calling Timothy to live differently than his peers and contrary to the expectations of his elders. Those in the Ephesian church knew the character of Paul, who was much older, and were understandably hesitant to believe Timothy, his apprentice, would display similar maturity. Timothy was encouraged to build trust through good behavior and not complain about trust not being immediately present. As Timothy's reputation for good character grew, he was to commit himself to preaching the Bible with authority.

1 Timothy 4:13-14, "13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. 14 Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you."

Timothy was leading the church without direct help from Paul, who was elsewhere at the time he wrote this letter. Paul stressed the importance of Timothy's preaching being centered on scripture. The public reading of scripture was central to the synagogue meetings of the Jews at the time. A portion of the Old Testament was read and was then explained by one of the leaders. Timothy was to mirror this practice and expand the scope of what was read aloud. In the church, the Old Testament was to be read as well as the growing collection of New Testament writings, which were being treated as equal to the Old Testament. Public reading was especially critical to spiritual growth at the time because many didn't have access to the scriptures and were unable to read. Timothy was instructed to follow these public readings with exhortation and teaching.

The nature of the exhortation and teaching that Timothy was instructed to give by Paul is clarified by the verb he used in verse 11, "command." Timothy's explanation of Scripture was meant to impress a sense of obligation on his hearers. Even though Timothy was younger and less experienced than many of those he was pastoring and leading, he was to command them to do things. These commands were not grounded in Timothy but in the scriptures. He was relaying the commands of God not making up his own. Timothy was to **practice what he preached** and preach for the practice of others. If Timothy failed to follow Paul's instructions, he could harm himself and his hearers greatly.

1 Timothy 4:15-16, "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."

Notice how Paul increased the intensity of his message with each preceding command: "practice," "keep a close watch," and "persist." Paul was making a great effort to show Timothy how important this matter was to his ministry. Paul told Timothy that his salvation and the salvation of his hearers was at stake. We may be tempted to soften the intensity of this passage by interpreting the word "salvation" as a reference to one being "saved" from

thinking something false. This is not how Paul used this word in his writings to Timothy. When Paul used this word he was referring to one's sins being forgiven by the death and resurrection of Christ and being restored to a right relationship with God. Paul used similar language when speaking about his own ministry. *1 Corinthians 9:27*, *"²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."* Paul knew that if he didn't **practice what he preached** he could perish.

To understand Paul's meaning here, we need to recall how the Scripture speaks of faith. Faith is described as a moment and a marathon. There is a point in our lives when we admit that we are sinners, believe or have faith in Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins, and confess him as the Lord of our lives. That is the start of a life-long journey of faith. The marathon of faith is holding that confession for the rest of our lives. This is not about perfection, but a practice of faith and obedience. The scriptures teach us that true faith will finish. The moment of true faith starts the marathon of transformation.

In verse 16, Paul is referring to the marathon of faith. If Timothy doesn't practice what he preaches he will show that his faith was not authentic. If his hearers welcome and value preaching that doesn't promote Christian practice, then they will prove to have had false faith. True faith practices what it preaches and desires preaching that encourages true practice. True faith is not hypocritical or hungry for heresy.

Practice what you preach. Hypocrisy hurts us and those around us. God does not expect us to be perfect, but he does expect us to persist in obedience. Our persistence in obedience will be persuasive to those around us who don't yet follow Jesus. When we don't practice what we preach we weaken our assurance that we are true followers and we cause others to question the integrity of our witness.

I want to show you a very famous passage in the Bible and see if you can tell what is missing. *Matthew 28:18-20*, *"¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* I removed two critical words from this passage. Did you notice what those were? I took out the words "to observe." It should read "...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Jesus was aiming at obedience and not just knowledge. Jesus preached so we could practice. Jesus didn't want to just inform us, but transform us.

Does your bible reading aim at obedience and not just knowledge? Recently, I read a great book about endurance athletes and ultra-running. I was curious about this book because I wanted to learn how to run longer distances. The book covered how pain management, muscle fatigue, oxygen use, heat regulation, thirst, and fuel affect endurance. It was a thorough treatment of all of these topics. Imagine how silly it would be if I jumped on a 40-mile trail and thought that simply knowing the material would be helpful. If I didn't apply what I learned and follow the advice of the author, I would be brutally confronted with

pain, muscle fatigue, lack of oxygen, heat exhaustion, thirst, and low fuel. Reading about running isn't going to help me be a better runner. Practicing good running habits will make me a better runner.

So, are you reading beyond your obedience? You are never going to be able to obey everything you read in the Bible, but you should be aiming at obedience and not chapters. It is helpful to reframe your bible reading goals toward obedience. For example, instead of aiming at reading three chapters a week, aim at writing down three specific points of obedience, one for each chapter. Being specific is important. Don't just commit to being more loving. That is not specific enough. Rather commit to praying twice in one day for someone who has hurt you. That is easy to measure and forces you to move into action.

We mentioned at the beginning of this series that we are going to follow a "lecture and lab" model for each rhythm we cover. At the end of each month, after we have covered one of the 7 rhythms, we committed to having an experience or lab for you to put what you have learned into practice. We have covered the rhythm of Bible Reflection for three weeks. Today, I want to introduce you to a tool that will help you put this rhythm into practice. We have designed a tool we call the "Sonrise trail guide." In this weekly guide, which you will receive via email after you sign up, you will find the sermon notes, a bible reading plan related to the sermon, and life-level application questions. We want to give you everything you need to put your faith into practice. The more you practice your faith, the more you will thrive and persuade others to follow Jesus as well.

Life Level Application

- 1) **Head:** Read Matthew 4:1-11. What did Jesus use against the temptations of the devil? How often do scriptures come to your mind when you are tempted? Have you ever attempted to memorize scriptures that directly relate to the temptations you frequently encounter? Look up some passages that would help you specifically when you are tempted.

- 2) **Heart:** Read 1 Timothy 6:3-5. What are the consequences of false teaching? How have you personally seen some of these negative effects in your life or the lives of others?

- 3) **Hands:** Read Psalm 119:9-16. What commitments does the author make concerning God's word? What will be the positive results of these commitments?

- 4) **Habit:** How often does a specific step of obedience come to your mind when you read and reflect on the scriptures? How can you focus more on obeying the words you read?