

A Noble Servant's Focus for Ministry: Biblical Ministry as a Lifestyle (Part 1)

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you, guys. Now we got it? Alright. They were both up waving their hands, hollering at me. Thank you, guys. I didn't mean to mute myself. As Timothy was trying to learn the ropes, as a young pastor, you know, it's kind of one of those right out of seminary things, only Paul was his seminary, was Timothy's seminary.

Paul trained this young man. Over time, he traveled with Paul. Paul disciplined young Timothy and put him in the place of pastoring in his first pastorate in the city of Ephesus, the church at Ephesus. And so, in 1 Timothy, chapter 4, I've been going through a series of expositions dealing with Paul's instruction to Timothy about what it means to be a pastor handling God's Word to feed God's people.

[1 : 17] You know, it's just not rocket science. Pastors are not in a position where we have to make up what we do. We don't have to even be very clever chaps.

We can be regular people as long as we stay faithful to God's Word and to do what God's Word instructs us in the way of feeding the sheep on the true, sound, pure words of the Lord God from Scripture.

We're going to pick it up in 1 Timothy 4, verse 6. In pointing out these things, these things would refer basically back up into chapter 4, verses 1 through 5, but the entire letter so far.

In pointing out all these things that I've been telling you in this letter, Timothy, to the brothers, to the people, the brothers and sisters in the church, you will be a good or noble servant of Christ Jesus, being nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following, but refuse godless myths fit only for old women.

On the other hand, train yourself for the purpose of godliness. Now, we made a big deal when I was working through this part of the passage in talking about Timothy is doing all of this for the joy of the Lord and to be a godly man, a godly pastor, that is, to be godlike.

[2 : 43] What does it mean for a man called of the Lord to be a godlike preacher of the gospel? Well, it's written right here for us. He says in verse 8, bodily training is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things.

Godliness holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. It is a trustworthy saying and deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, that is, for godliness, because we have fixed our hope on the living God who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. Command and teach these things. Once again, just to remind you, command and teach these things. All these things that I've been telling you, but particularly the things that I'm prescribing to you now that will help you handle God's word well and faithfully.

Verse 12, let no one look down on your usefulness, but show yourself as a model to those who believe in word, conduct, love, faith, and purity.

Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. And that's where we'll stop for today because verse 13 is where we'll camp out for this morning's message.

[4 : 07] The title of my message, A Noble Servant or A Good Servant, Focus for Ministry, Biblical Ministry as a Lifestyle. And that's what we're talking about.

That's what we'll focus in on this morning. Biblical ministry, that is ministry done in the church among God's people, faithfully, because we're handling and giving ourselves to the sound doctrine, the sound teaching of the Bible as God has revealed himself to us.

And we want to not be just hearers only. We don't want to just sit and soak this stuff up on Sunday and then check our little box that I came to church. I was a good boy or a good girl.

What we're talking about now is allowing the Word of God to penetrate into our souls to the place where it transforms us into God-like people. More and more like Jesus.

We want to become doers of the Word, not hearers only, according to James. This is our hope and prayer and goal, isn't it? This is what we're all striving for. Until we get to heaven where we're made complete and perfect and get our new body, and there's no more sin or tears or pain or decay, until that time, we need to grow daily in conformity to Jesus to become more meek and humble and gentle, more heavenly-minded, more purpose in how we think about what's important to God, what is most important to God on the earth, His people, the souls that He purchased by the blood of His Son.

[5 : 45] There's nothing more important on the planet than us to God as His people. Do you have a similar priority and treasure in your heart for what God treasures?

We have to grow into that, don't we? Why do we have to grow into it? Because the world is all in us and over us. It sticks to us everywhere. We go out through the week and it just kind of gets all over us.

It's like we come in here on Sunday and we get a spiritual bath, as it were, and that we're reminded. And I don't use hot water, I use cold. I want it to be a blast to your system.

I want the Word to blast your soul with the goodness and richness of God and warm your heart.

This is what the Word of God does for us. This is why we look to it, why we trust it, why we preach it, and why we desire to live it.

We do make a big deal here at Grace on the Scriptures and of the Word of the living God. So in all of this, let me give you a little bit of introductory material to walk you into what's going on in this context.

[6 : 49] In my first, very first, staff position in a church, fresh out of seminary, in my hometown. You know this saying that Jesus said that a prophet is not welcome in his own hometown?

That proved to be more than true in my case, for sure. My mom and dad were actually members of the church where I was serving on staff as the staff, family, life, minister, and counselor.

I had the senior pastor of that church tell a group of us in a meeting about long-range planning for the church that we all needed to think of the work of ministry like we think about McDonald's hamburgers.

McDonald's, he said, is in the business of selling hamburgers and the church is in the business of selling Jesus. Now hopefully, by the scrunched up faces, you're catching very quickly that that is a really, really unbiblical and bad philosophy of ministry.

We are nothing like McDonald's. The church is nothing like the world. At least, it shouldn't be. If anybody who is unbelieving were to come through those doors and sit in our worship services, I hope they would do two things in their hearts.

[8 : 10] The first thing I hope they would do is they would say, yeah, I don't get you guys. This should be very foreign to unbelievers because what we're doing here is a case of what we'll be doing in eternity, you know, forever kind of thing.

And the second thing that I hope they would do is they would say, but boy, is it beautiful. Boy, is it real. Boy, is it genuine.

I live in a world of fake and shallow and self and moment. Whatever can feed me and fill me in the moment, and they come in here and they get a blast of eternity and real, whether it's the reality of our confession before a holy God as he convicts us or the reality of the joy of praise that we stand in the forgiveness of almighty God because he's given us his son as his greatest treasure.

there is nothing higher. There is nothing higher. You can't get any better in the way of the gold standard for human soul living than Jesus Christ living in you.

You're at the pinnacle. You can't reach any higher than Christ. This is why the idea that we would mimic or borrow from any business in the world so that we can model in the church whatever they're doing to make them successful is ridiculous.

[9 : 56] Now, at the time, I wish I could tell you that I immediately grasped all that was wrong in that statement philosophically, doctrinally, and theologically. I did not. I just sat there and went, yeah, that doesn't sound right to myself, but I didn't know why it was wrong.

I knew there was something wrong with it but I didn't know what. That's where I was in my journey fresh out of seminary in my first church. But this particular mentality that thinking we can adopt the world's ways to make the church more successful betrays a certain focus, a certain belief, a certain philosophy about what the church is, why the church exists, and about how the church is to function.

Is it an institution? Is the church a business? Is the church a charity? Is it an exclusive club, a secret society?

Is the church like a corporation? How do we understand the church's reason for being? If you were asked to explain why our church, Grace Church Williamsburg, exists, what would you say?

What concise explanation would you give or answer would you give to someone who asks you why does your church exist? Why is Grace Church Williamsburg in Williamsburg doing what it seems?

[11 : 21] What would you say to someone who might ask you what our gathering like this is all about? If they were to ask you why do you come here and do what you do each Sunday and through the week, why do you do that?

How would you answer? Now these questions cause you and I to think about what it is that we are focused on as we gather together as Grace Church Williamsburg, the people of God in this local ascendant.

These questions help us really think about that. Well, it was similar, folks, this is why I'm doing this, it was similar in the first century A.D. for the Christians who were gathering at Grace Church Epithet.

It was just the same for them in many ways with one perhaps exception and that was this particular church was in its infancy because the church as a whole was in its infancy.

In the first century, after Jesus was crucified, buried, raised again and went to heaven to be at the right hand of the Father, He instituted the church, He began the church and the church began to grow and spread as Paul and other missionaries went out to share the gospel and form churches in cities.

[12 : 38] Can you imagine at that time there were no First Baptist Ephesus or Corinth or Thessalonica or there were none of those. If you didn't like the flavor of the church in Ephesus, guess what?

There was no other church in Ephesus for you to go to. You better make First Baptist Ephesus work or it ain't gonna work. That kind of thing. That's what was going on.

But it's kind of similar to us when you think about it. We're a five and a half year old church. We're in our infancy as a local assembly, aren't we? We're made up of all different kinds of people at all different stages of life with one wonderful thing in common.

That we are bought by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ to be a spiritual family. We belong to each other by blood. I am blood related to you.

Whether I've known you for three months or thirty years, if you're a Christian and I'm a Christian, we're bought with the same blood and so we're blood-pinned and we're gonna share our family life in heaven together for all eternity.

[13 : 45] That's a marvelous, marvelous, beautiful thing, is it not? I don't think we should ever get over that kind of thing. This is what was going on at Grace Church Ephesus.

Sounds a lot like us today. And, folks, listen to this. Like today, like today, there were many counterfeits and competitors which Satan used to great effect to confuse and deceive God's people. just very similar to what I told you earlier in the illustration about the scheme that Satan wants to foist on us back in the day when the pastor was standing up and saying, we're like McDonald's. We're gonna do church like McDonald's does hamburgers. We're gonna market Jesus to the world. Satan excels at that kind of thing.

In the case at Ephesus, the paramount issue was false teachers. He said, Jeff, what was the context that Paul is writing in where he would feel the need to say these things to Pastor Timothy?

[14 : 49] What in the world was going on in the church that he would have to hammer these things home in the way that he has because we know he's already taught this stuff to Timothy or he never would have put him and installed him as pastor at the church.

So we already know he was qualified in these ways. He may be, why is Paul having to remind him of these things? What's going on? Well, that's what we want to get at.

The paramount issue was false teachers. The false teachers had inserted themselves into the mainstream of church life and they had thrown the church into confusion about its identity and its mission.

Paul is writing to young Pastor Timothy about how Timothy is God's man to correct this awful situation. Now, I'm not going to take or assume that you understand all of that so let's look at the crux of the problem as it's exposed for us in the letter itself.

Right at the onset of Paul's instruction, if you'll go to chapter 1 and just let me read a few of these verses to you from chapter 1 verse 1.

[15 : 55] Here is where Paul immediately begins to address the issue that he wants Timothy to correct. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope.

So there's his credentials. To Timothy, my genuine child in the faith, grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Beautiful introduction. As I exhorted you, Timothy, when going to Macedonia, you remain on at Ephesus so that you may command certain ones not to teach a different doctrine nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogy which give rise to speculation rather than furthering the stewardship from God which is by faith.

So right off the bat in the first four verses, Paul is telling Timothy what to do in addressing the crux of the problem. The crux of the problem is you've got false teachers who have inserted themselves in positions of being preachers and teachers in the church and they are confusing the issue of following Christ.

Very serious stuff. It is moving people away from a joy and a love for the Lord. And then in verse 5 he says, but, but, contrasted with that, the goal of our command is love.

[17 : 28] That is the goal of our teaching, the goal of our preaching is that we would foster in you the love of the Lord from a pure heart, a good conscience, and an unhypocritical faith.

In other words, we want to foster something sound in you because we want you to have a genuine walk with God, a genuine lifestyle of serving the Lord.

We don't want hypocrisy. We don't want faith. We don't want you to be deceived. We want you to wake up to the reality of what it means to be the church and to follow Christ because everything in this life is working against you in that.

And now you've got some guys in your midst who are just furthering the problem instead of helping it. Timothy, you go to those men and you command them to stop.

And later we'll see if they don't stop, put them out of the church. And Timothy's this young guy, first pastorate, and he's probably thinking, yeah, how am I going to do that? And that's why we come to the passage we're in and Paul says, don't let anybody disregard you because you're young.

[18 : 41] You're bringing the pure word of God to these people. Now you can't retreat. You can't let your knees buckle, young man. This is where you stand up and man up.

If we were to say it today. That's what's going on. The great danger concerns then the true source of these aberrant, bad, false teachings which are poisoning the church at Ephesus.

So we ask the question, all right, these guys are stepping forward to teach this stuff but where are they getting this nonsense? What is really behind all of this?

Well, he doesn't leave us in any doubt. Go to chapter 4 and look with me at chapter 4, verse 1 and Paul tells him where this is all coming from. He tells him, this is the enemy you're really fighting. But the Holy Spirit explicitly says that in later times, that is times after the cross, the time they're living in and we're living in, some will fall away from the faith.

[19 : 46] Why? Because they're going to pay attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. There you go. You want to know where these false teachers are getting this nonsense?

This is coming from deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. This is an active spiritual warfare that these people are involved in. Whether they recognize it or not doesn't change that fact.

That's what's going on. All of this is being perpetrated by the hypocrisy of human liars. Human beings who are liars.

Human beings who've been seared in their own conscience. And they give them, he says, they give them all these rules to live by that God didn't create but man created.

If I can get you living by what I prescribe, I can control you. And that's what's going on. All false teachers have one thing in common for sure.

[20 : 53] Now they have a number of things in common, but we can put down one thing for absolutely certain that all false teachers have in common with each other. And here it is.

All of their power is centralized in their following. If they don't have a following, they have nothing. So they have to do whatever they can to secure and hold on to a following.

That's their power. Their power's in the crowd. That's why all false teachers fear the crowd. They know the power of the crowd. Caesar knew the power of the crowd.

What do you think the gladiatorial games were all about? Why did they throw these lavish parties that encouraged debauchery on every level for months at a time?

A new Caesar would come to power and the first thing that he would do is throw a giant party that would last for months to outdo the guy before him. Why? To show the people I'm going to give you what you want.

[21 : 56] Having me up here is going to be a great big long party for everybody. Why? Because he knows the power of the people and they fear it. We don't.

We don't. Because we know that we don't have any power. Our power is submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are all a family seeking to serve one another and not get ahead of each other. big difference. You get a crowd of 10,000 people where every man wants to do what's right in his own eyes. You got a problem. And that's what we see. Don't we see that in the riots?

Didn't we just see that in Gaza and in Israel recently? What happens when you take hundreds and hundreds of men who are full of lust and greed and give them weapons and turn them loose and say, go get them, guys?

You get the reports that you've seen on the news and I've seen on the news of wholesale carnage. Men doing some of the most vile and wicked things that harken back into the Old Testament times.

[23 : 00] That we read about what happened there when people would throw their babies in the fire to the god of Molech, their own children. Our hearts are capable of just about anything.

Why? Because all of this is rooted and grounded in the doctrines of demons. The teachings and beliefs of demons to perpetuate what they want, to disseminate what they want to see happen through men like these people that Timothy is now having to face.

Look, I'm trying to paint the picture for you that this young man has a formidable foe against him and Paul is saying you've got one weapon on your side that will prove efficient and one only and that is the word of the living God.

So wield it well, young man. wield it well. And that's what he's calling him to do. Our passage then is Paul's way of telling Timothy what to focus on in ministry.

Don't let these men and these problems and these issues pull you away from your primary responsibility to feed the sheep on the true words of the living God.

[24 : 05] There will be a hundred different distractions. There will be people that are emailing you and texting you. There will be people who are calling you out to meet with them to say this and do that and they want to rip you up one side and rip you up the other side.

You stay focused and teach the word. Stay focused and teach the word. That's God's priority and that needs to be upheld.

So all the instruction laid down for Timothy in chapter 4, 6 through 16 is intended to contrast with and correct the ungodly teaching and lifestyles of the false teachers.

This is why we're emphasizing lifestyle. Verses 6 through 16 teach the excellent way of true biblical ministry. You might say, you know, we're reading this in plain English in the Bible.

Why don't more pastors and more churches subscribe to this pattern of the centrality of the word of God? Why do so many pastors get in the pulpit and read from other books and tell lots and lots of stories and talk about things that happen to different people and they might read a verse or two and say a couple of words about it.

[25 : 13] Why is that going on? I don't have all of those answers. I just know that God is making it clear to us that this is what we're supposed to focus on in biblical ministry, particularly a ministry done by the pastors of the church.

This is the central teaching of this section of scripture. He is talking to a young pastor and telling that young pastor how to conduct himself in ministry in a focused, God-honoring way.

But we understand that by generality we can apply this to us as a congregation because we all need to support this focus. You can't support what you don't know unless you just do it accidentally,

unrealizing, but we need to know this.

So we're calling all of us to get on this page of this instruction. People who are concerned then with ministering in the church in a godly, biblical way will hear and heed this instruction.

And I think we're all concerned about that. Now to aid our understanding of what God's teaching us about these things, what I've done is I've characterized verses 11 through 16 as six ministry essentials.

[26 : 27] Six ministry essentials that help us maintain a godly focus in the life of our church and how we live together and minister together and go about life together as a church family.

The first essential I shared with you was a biblical focus on pure doctrine from verse 11. It starts with the foundation of scripture. The second essential was a biblical focus on being a godly example.

A godly example. Timothy is to model. We are to model to each other what it looks like to navigate life in a holy way. We stumble, we fall, we're not perfect at it, we ask for forgiveness, we repent, we pick each other up, and we arm in arm keep going together.

We cannot quit, we cannot whine, we cannot, at least not for a long time. We may give you a few seconds to whine and then we're going to give you a spiritual needy and we're going to keep going together.

That's what we're going to do. Now today we want to deal with number three, a biblical focus on church ministry, context specific. This is all being given in the context of church life.

[27 : 38] So when I say church ministry, I'm talking about a biblical focus on church serving.

Ministry means serving. So we're all ministers. We had a number of people, as Greg said, we had 15 people show up for this three day teaching thing, this three session teaching thing.

And one of the things we covered with them was we told them that all of us are ministers in the church. We're all ministers because we're all servants. We're all called to serve each other.

So it's a little bit of a misnomer to call pastors ministers. We kind of distinguish that and I understand what we mean by that but we need to understand that in scripture, the scripture doesn't make a designation like that.

We're all called ministers. And then there are those of us who are called out by the Lord as pastors to administrate and to teach and to preach and give direction to the church.

Somebody's got to do that and so the pastors or the elders do that but we're all ministers. I remember when I first started in ministry I think I was doing a hospital visitation.

[28 : 42] That was part of my job in this first church and I remember I had to get a badge or something that recognized me as a clergyman and I remember the person at the counter was, I think this is the way it went, they were trying to figure out what I wanted to be called and they asked me would you like for us to label this Reverend Jackson and I went no.

Oh, absolutely not. Just put Jeff or whatever. No, no, no. We have to designate you as clergy. I said fine, we'll just put clergy there. I'm clergy Jeff. Right? So I'm just Jeff.

You guys know me as Jeff or Pastor Jeff. One of the reasons Greg and I insist on that that we don't have some, I don't wear a robe, I don't come up here in a thing and I'm not dissing on the people who do that.

I'm just saying here we don't want to have this huge demarcation between you and us. We're one of you. We're part of you.

We love and appreciate so much the respect and honor that you show us as God's servants as long as that's what you see us as. We are servants of the Lord alongside of you.

[29 : 53] Greg and I in our spiritual maturity may be a little bit farther down the theological road than you are because we've had many years to study and walk with the Lord but that's it and we're with you.

You know, we're on that road trying to come back and grab you and just walk with you. This is the flavor of what we're trying to see in what Paul's telling Timothy.

Timothy, we're not putting you like the false teachers who want to lord it over all the people. We're saying to you, your authority is grounded in commanding them in what God has commanded.

That's where our authority is as pastors, isn't it, brother? Our only authority is to command you in the commanding of God. I don't have any authority to step outside of the commands of God and tell you what to do.

And by the way, as a collective, you don't have that to do with me either. Right? It doesn't come back that way. I've been in that situation before where the collective mind of the people was supposed to outweigh the truth of the Lord and we say, whoa, no, no, no.

[31 : 02] That's a two-way street here. So we're dealing with this third one, a biblical focus on church ministry from verse 13. Verse 13. Let me get there and read it again for us.

Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. Now, Paul, it's very, very clear, clear instruction about where he's to spend his time as a pastor and what he needs to do.

So we'll start off with that. Look, until I come. One little phrase. One little phrase. If you go back to 1 Timothy 3.15, you'll see a hint of this already mentioned.

1 Timothy 3.15. Look what he says. In case I'm delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God.

That's the purpose of the letter as a whole. I'm writing all of this to you so that you will be able to instruct the church at Ephesus in how to be the church.

[32 : 07] How to understand who they are, why they are, and what they're supposed to do. So this issue of being delayed is what he wants Timothy to understand. He comes to verse 13 in chapter 4, until I come.

He picks up the theme again. Paul expected to be delayed in coming to Ephesus to help Timothy. So this is kind of like you're on the radio and you're surrounded by the enemy and you're letting the powers that be know that you're surrounded by the enemy and you're kind of trembling in your voice and you're letting them know if the cavalry don't come soon, the issue remains in doubt kind of thing.

And so this is the cavalry saying back, you better hold on. I don't know when the cavalry will get there or if it will get there. That's what he's telling him.

So Timothy realizes, okay, this is on me and the Lord. And that's what Paul's reminding him of. You are wielding the most powerful spiritual weapon in the universe, the truth.

Wield it well. Wield it with courage, conviction, clarity, and compassion. But wield it, son. That's what he wants to do.

[33 : 32] In my absence and until I come to you, Timothy, do what I would do if I were there. Whoa, that's a big, big order for Timothy from the Apostle Paul.

Those are big shoes. In other words, here's a seasoned pastor, an apostle of Jesus Christ, no less, commanding a younger pastor in how he's to show himself an example to those in his care.

And I want you to see in this plan that there's no retreat. There's no contingency plan where he pulls the eject handle and bails. There is no parachute.

This is do or die. This is specific, detailed instruction about what Timothy is to in the next phrase, look, until I come, give attention to.

Here's what you're to give your attention to. Now, we read that in the English and we can surface it because it doesn't sound terribly, terribly emphatic.

[34 : 34] Okay, give attention to, pay attention to. All right, I can take that, but look, actually in the Greek language, this means devote yourself to. Until I come, it has the nuance of put your whole heart into being this kind of pastor to the people.

it's a lot more than just give attention to in the Greek. The phrase is used, in fact, in a negative sense in chapter 1 verse 4.

Chapter 1 verse 4. Nor pay attention to myths. Don't devote yourself. Don't give your heart to these kinds of things.

And then in chapter 4 verse 1. The Spirit explicitly says in later times some will fall away from the faith. Look, paying attention to. It's the same Greek phraseology that he's talking about here.

Now, though, in this context, it's used in a positive sense. The verb form that's used here emphasizes continuous action. Now, don't get bored on me. This is important.

[35 : 45] You see, give attention to, and the nuance of our language doesn't allow for what I'm explaining to you now. If you were all Greek people and you were listening to this in the Greek or hearing it in the Greek, which is what would have happened, you would have immediately grasped all this that I'm having to tell us now in our modern time.

The verb form emphasizes continuous action. So it would mean this. Apply all your focus and your energies to doing the following things so that you are consistently and faithfully doing these things

as your way of life, as a servant of God, to the word of the Lord and to the church of the Lord. You say, Jeff, that's give attention to? Yep. What a rich and wonderful language God chose to use to write the Bible. Isn't that great? Our English translations sometimes coming over now, you say, well, could I have been blessed in the Lord if I didn't know all of that and I just read give attention to and I just took it as, well, I need to pay attention to this.

Well, sure. But boy, when you dig down and you study the word of God and you find out how deep you can go, it's inexhaustible. There's no bottom.

You never get there and do this. Ah, I finally reached the bottom. You'll study this verse 20 years from now and you'll get even more out of it. Has that happened to you? Yeah. You know why?

[37 : 10] Because you're growing. The word of God is steady and active and living and sharper than any two-edged sword, able to pierce down into the joint and marrow and bone of your souls and search out what's there and make known to you what's there.

Why? So you can repent. So that you can be encouraged. So that you can change into conformity to Jesus Christ. Apply everything that you are to this process.

Give your full heart to it. And beloved, I'm telling you this is God's mandate for pastoral ministry going all the way back to the Old Testament times. You mean this is not new instruction for the ministers who would serve God's people over time?

No, it's not new at all. It's founded in the Old Testament. Paul is drawing on the Old Testament as an Old Testament scholar. You say you're sure yeah, yeah, look, let me show you this.

For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of Yahweh and to practice it and to teach his statute and judgment in Israel.

[38 : 25] Ezra 7 verse 10. God's shepherds are to set their hearts to study, practice, and teach God's word. This is why sometimes I'm not able to take time during the week to do other things that I might want to do with you guys as you live your lives.

Recreational times. Sometimes I have to say no. It's not because I don't want to be with you. It's because I have set my heart to prepare. What I do up here is not fly by.

I have to dig down into this and think carefully and work very, very focused to be able to pull this together for me. I'm not a brilliant guy. So, you know, this is something that I have to work at and be faithful to in order to do it with a clear conscience on Sunday.

I promise you, if I am using other people's stuff in and out of my sermons, I try to give them careful credit for that and let you know that. Whether I write it up here and Suzanne helps me put it on the slide or I outright tell you, I'm not plagiarizing this stuff.

This is stuff that I'm working through and applying to my life and trying to bring it over and preach to you as the people who are under my shepherding care. I don't want to preach even what John MacArthur preached to his church when he preached this sermon because you're not John MacArthur's church and I'm not John MacArthur as you well know.

[39 : 50] I may borrow from him a lot. I may learn from him a lot and I do, but you're not his people. You're my people and I'm jealous of my people.

I want to teach you. I want to protect you. I want to safeguard you. I want to be part of your life. I even get a little bit eh when I hear you're listening to other people. I truly am joking.

Just make sure you're you're look. The only reason I said that a few weeks ago is this. You guys listen to the great people. They're great. I listen to them too. Listen, here's why I'm telling you that I know that you guys are being held accountable by the Lord for what you're hearing today.

So you don't want to just dismiss this and move on to the other guys, perhaps the better guys through the week when you haven't dealt with this because God's going to hold you accountable for this. He holds you accountable for what you're hearing today.

So make sure that you're dealing with this and then add the other guys. You can add the other guys and listen to what they did with it and make sure I got it right. All right. That's fine.

[40 : 54] That's all good. We're all growing and learning together. Where did I leave off? I don't even know I say all this stuff. Oh, yeah. Here's another one. I'm not even going to comment.

All right. You stop it. As a Christian, look at this. As a Christian, as a member of GCW, Grace Church Williams, how do you then personally understand the heart of what a pastor does in his service to God in the church?

Well, Paul centralizes the heart of pastoral work, church ministry, in three ministries to God's word. Three ministries of God's word. God's design then, look up here and we'll think it out for you.

God's design for faithful pastoral work centers on being devoted to, number one, he says it right in our text, give yourself to, devote yourself to, be fully consumed with this Timothy until I come. This is your marching order. Number one, the public reading of scripture. That sounds so basic and so simple, doesn't it? The public reading of scripture. Public and of scripture are not in the original Greek text, but they are implied by the meaning of the reading.

[42 : 10] Here again is where the Greek nuance comes through. And so the interpreters and commentators and guys who worked on this are not playing fast and loose with the Bible.

people. What they're doing is they're taking the idea of the reading and they're helping fill it in for the English readers, for people like us. So this reading, this reading during public worship is grounded in Old Testament worship for God's people, where reading from the Old Testament was followed by explanation of the passage.

Say, Jeff, that was going on back in the Bible. Yes. Whenever a prophet or a preacher or whatever had the people gathered and assembled, they would read from the Old Testament scriptures and then there would be a time of explanation.

It sounds familiar, doesn't it? That's hearkened all the way back to the Old Testament. Nehemiah, we saw that in Ezra just a second ago. Nehemiah records an even more detailed, beautiful, and powerful depiction of scripture reading in the worship gathering of Israel.

And I want to take you to that and just read it to you. If you'll just listen and then I'll give you the scripture reference. This is in Nehemiah. He's referencing Ezra, the scribe, the prophet, and he is talking in greater detail about what's going on in the reading and handling of the scriptures with a particular gathering of the people of Israel that would have been indicative of them at the time.

[43 : 45] So just listen to this if you would. Then all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the water gate.

Now folks, this would have been thousands and thousands of people. And they said to Ezra, the scribe, to bring the book of the law of Moses, which Yahweh had commanded to Israel.

So they're going to read from the book of Moses. You and I know that at a very basic level, that's at least the first five books of the Bible. Then Ezra, the priest, brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could understand when listening on the first day of the seventh month.

And Ezra read from it before the square which was in front of the water gate from early morning until midday. Now you know what I'm about to say, don't you?

I don't want to hear no complaint about how long-winded I am. I don't go from early morning till midday yet. In the presence of all the men and women and those who could understand and all the ears of the people were attentive to the book of the law.

[45 : 05] Ezra, the scribe, stood on a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. You see where we get all this? And beside him stood, and then there's this list of all of these names of these men.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen. Thirteen men standing around Ezra as he does this. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was above the people.

And when he opened it, all the people stood up. Have you ever been in a service where whenever they come to read the word, the people stand in honor of the word? Now you know where that comes from.

They all stood up in honor of the word of God. Then Ezra blessed Yahweh, the great God, and all the people answered, Amen, Amen, while lifting up their hands.

Then they all bowed low and worshiped Yahweh with their faces to the ground. Now you see thousands and thousands and thousands of people all making room so that they could drop to their knees and do this before the Lord.

[46 : 22] That's not a Muslim thing. That's a people of God thing. Period. Period. That's what's going on now. Then also, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 13.

13 different men representing the Levites, all different men from the ones before, were providing understanding of the law to the people while the people stood in their place.

You get the picture? There's so many of them that they're having to position themselves around and take groups of them and talk to them like I'm doing you to explain what Ezra's talking about.

That's going on. I get goosebumps thinking about what a place to be. That's where you'd want to be if you were an Israelite at that moment.

They read from the book. From the law of God. Explaining and giving insight. And they provided understanding of the reading.

[47 : 34] Did you hear that? They read from the book. From the law of God. Then they explained and gave insight. And then they provided understanding of the reading.

They're helping the people understand and apply the reading to their life. So we have basically three things. Read, listen, and explain. And that's Nehemiah. Chapter 8, verses 1-8.

So this three-fold worship practice. Read, listen, explain. Was carried over into Jewish synagogue worship during New Testament time.

Alright? So now we see a progression from the Old Testament time and worship in Israel now carrying over into the 1st century A.D. where Jewish synagogues are being established during the Diaspora.

And these synagogues are now taking up this practice of reading from the Old Testament, listening, and then explaining what's going on at this particular passage.

[48 : 36] As Jews and Gentiles were converted to Christianity, New Testament believers began to include these readings from other authoritative writings in their worship gatherings.

You say to me, okay, so Old Testament and other authoritative writings? That sounds a little weird. What in the world? What were these other authoritative writings? What do you think they were?

The four Gospels and mostly the letters written by the Apostles, such as 1st Timothy, which was written by the Apostle Paul. You're going to see that with me.

So the public reading of the Word of God and New Testament gatherings of the church carried over from synagogue worship of the Jews, which came from and was rooted in Old Testament worship practices.

So we're not making this up. This pulpit has a history. What I'm doing has a history. God has always commissioned His men to stand before His people and bring them God's Word and then take time to explain it and help apply it so that the people can go out and be blessed and live in that Word.

[49 : 51] That's lifestyle from my title. Lifestyle is what we're talking about. Let me give you a couple of other examples of how this came over into the New Testament.

If you look at, for example, Luke chapter 4. Yeah, let me get there with you. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Luke chapter 4. I'm going to establish this for you beginning in verse 16.

Verse 16. Is that right? Did I get that right? Yeah, I think I did. I just need to get the right chapter.

Luke 4, 16 through 21. And Jesus came to Nazareth, Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as was His custom, Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to do what, church?

[50 : 53] Read. And what did He read from? The latest marketing techniques for the synagogue? No. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Jesus.

Jesus opened the scroll and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.

Then Jesus closed the scroll, 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.

There you go. That's the progression. Read, listen, explain. And this is what we were given. This verse from Acts.

Look at this one. For from ancient generations, Moses has those who preach Him in every city, since He is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.

[52 : 10] They are reading from the Old Testament Scriptures, from the books that Moses read and wrote. And then look at this one. And when this letter, speaking of the book of Colossians, 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.

What do we have here? We have different churches in regions that they share together, receiving these letters from the apostles like Peter and James and Paul, and they are trading letters.

Hey, we got a letter the other day from Paul in our church here in Colossae, in Grace Church Colossae, and we want to share that with you guys. We heard you got one from him in Laodicea.

Can we swap? Absolutely. Let's swap. And then they would read those to the people and they would explain them. And there were people who were realizing at the time, not everybody, but there were people who were realizing at the time that this was Scripture.

This was becoming something that was authoritative to the church akin to the Old Testament. So these were the authoritative writings that they were also adding in the New Testament.

[53 : 30] Now, how did the apostles view this reading for the gatherings of the church family? What kind of import did the apostles themselves put on this reading of the Scriptures to God's people?

Look at this verse. It's right here at the bottom. I implore you by the Lord. That's as strong as it gets. To have this letter read to all the brothers, or to the church.

1 Thessalonians 5. I implore you by the Lord to make this happen. That was their heart. I told you guys before, and I told this to the people who met with us this past week as an example, an illustration I was giving from my life in ministry.

Suzanne and I have gone to a number, more than we want to think about, services before where they never opened the Bible. They had an entire church worship service and they never referenced the Scripture.

Never. Never. There's a lot wrong with that. Amen? Well, I gave you number one, the public reading of Scripture.

[54 : 44] Here's the second one that we're doing in the way of God's design for faithful pastoral work. Exhortation. We see that in our text as well. Look again with me 1 Timothy 4.

1 Timothy 4.13 Until I come, devote yourself to, give your whole heart to, the public reading of Scripture. What's the next one? To exhortation. To exhortation.

I'm going to give you a quote that just speedily helps us better understand this. Exhortation challenges people to apply the truths they have been taught.

It warns people to obey in light of the blessing to come on them if they do and the judgment if they do not. Exhortation may take the form of rebuke, warning, counsel, or comfort, but always involves a binding of the conscience.

That's just good. I can't say it any better than that. See? Now, I gave credit. I gave credit. All right. Again, we see this connected to the central role of the Old Testament in building up the people of God in their faith as they gathered for worship.

[55 : 54] This is all connected and even the New Testament writers would occasionally remind the people of where this comes from. Look at this particular verse that I have here at the bottom of the screen.

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction. So that through the perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Notice what he didn't say. He didn't say the encouragement of and insert some other man-produced thing in there. It's the Scriptures.

Why wouldn't it be? Why wouldn't it be? We do a tremendous disservice as pastors to God's people when we neglect the Scriptures in our gatherings together.

Because the context of this verse is the gathered church. The gathered church. It's an amazing and wonderful truth that we share in.

[56 : 58] All of the pronouns from the passage this comes from are in the plural. So he's talking about the church in all of this.

The third one that I want to hasten to before I finish. Look. The third one is teaching. Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to helping the people understand and apply the Scriptures, and then to teaching.

You say, Jeff, hasn't he been doing that all along? Isn't that what this is all about? Yes, it is. This is formal instruction. This is a systematic instruction of the Word of God.

Now, folks, listen. It's not a lecture. This isn't a seminary lecture. This is not the place for lectures. I hope that doesn't seem like what this is. This is engaging.

This is a pastor knowing his people and gearing his messages to those people. I think Suzanne has told you guys before, when I went to Poland and I borrowed on some of my own material that I had done with you guys, I tweaked it.

[58 : 08] What do you mean tweaked it? Well, I crafted those messages for you. So I held on to the basic content of the truth of the doctrine, but I kept in mind the international community that I was going to be speaking to in Poland at the time.

There were four different churches, Polish churches, represented at that meeting, those meetings, those sessions, nine or ten that I did. And I had to remember, I'm going to be using a translator. There's a whole lot of stuff going on here, moving parts, that my people don't have to worry about. So I tweaked them. I also understood, they told me, these people are steeped in humanistic psychology.

Well, you guys that have been with me and Greg long enough, you know that we have worked hard to try to get that out of you. Well, over there, it's all in them and they're sitting down and they're hearing a lot of this for the very first time.

They've never heard this before. I have to think about that. How's this going to hit them? And so there were times when I had said some things to you in quick succession and I had to back off and do that one thing and then I had to spend some time kind of doing this with them, kind of doing this. [59 : 24] It's okay. It's all right. That kind of thing. I know that that just was like somebody hitting you in the gut. But it's a... You know that.

The truth is the truth. But we have to be careful as pastors knowing our people. And so I think about that. As I work through and I craft, you may hear me say a similar thing four different ways and you pick up on that.

Why is he repeating that? Because I think about people in my congregation and this one and this one are going to get it the first time. But this one and this one over here, not because you're dumb or stupid, because you're new to the faith.

Because you're growing in the Lord. And so I realize by the time I say that the third time and I say it a little bit differently, they're going to go, Oh! Oh! Oh! Right.

You have to think about that when you teach and when you preach. So while this is systematic and formal instruction of the Word of God, it's not dry, it's not, you know, it's not heady.

[60 : 35] You want to hear heady, academic, and dry, go to seminary. Oh my goodness. Now, in seminary for me, most of my classes, I've got to say this now that I've said that, most of my classes at seminary, out at the Master's Seminary, there were many times the professor would finish and I'd be sitting there weeping.

I was so grateful for what I was hearing and so convicted, I just weeped. I had one guy in one of my classes, it was church history. Church history. I'm bawling like a baby sitting there.

It's embarrassing. I was. I was bawling. I was like shoulders hunching, trying to not let them see me. I'm sitting on the front row. And I, you remember, yeah, she knows who I'm talking about.

I worked with him in the book shack. Talk about a great, okay, so you and I need to have a conversation afterwards about where I worked when I was out at Grace Community Church. I worked in the book department. I know.

So I'm working with this guy and he sees me sitting there and I remember when it first happened and I'm sitting there and I'm like hoping all of them will leave and I'll just be able to crumble under conviction and I remember he reached over and put his hand on my neck and started squeezing my neck and he did not say a word.

[61 : 46] He just sat there for five minutes with me. When I finally could speak, I looked up at him and I said, I am so thankful to hear this. I've never heard anything like this in my life.

I did not know any of this history and this is my history. This is my God working in the lives of my brothers and my sisters and the faithfulness that I'm hearing is overwhelming me.

What a God. What a servant of the truth that Jesus was. You know, that kind of thing. And so, I was very glad for those blessings that I received at seminary but I sat through some classes and I thought, can't we put some ketchup on this and spice it up even a little bit?

You know, this is good stuff but man, bless their hearts. Anyway, let me move on. Let me move on. All of this stuff, all of this was not haphazard.

It was the opposite. It wasn't random talks. It was well organized. Well organized. Well, but it wasn't false and it wasn't dry.

[62 : 58] Professor and theologian George W. Knight kind of summed this up for us before I make my closing statements. This will be my last quote for you here. Paul's threefold pastoral emphasis on Scripture can be summed up this way.

He says, Thus Paul urges a public ministry that reads the Scriptures to the gathered Christians, exhorts them to respond appropriately and teaches them its principles. There you go. That's every Sunday.

That's Wednesday night as we gather together. So given the context of verse 13, the context that this verse is written in, one application of this in your service here at GCW, Grace Church Williamsburg, is to ask a few questions.

I'll just help you do this and then I'm done. All right? This is the first one. Does your ministry here at Grace, does your service here at Grace support and undergird the pulpit ministry of your pastors? I've been in situations before where what some of the people were doing in the way of what they called ministry out in the church was actually counter to the pulpit.

[64 : 03] If you ever find yourself in a position where you can't support the pulpit, one of two things has to happen. You either go to the pastors and help point that out to them and the pastors repent of what you see as clearly a misuse of the Scriptures and that's a great thing when that happens and everybody repents or if that doesn't happen you've got to leave.

You can't leave yourself under a situation where you're not receiving the truth of the Scriptures in a way where it's handled faithfully. Can you? You can allow for mistakes.

You can allow for guys to learn how to polish and everything and you can allow for my personality up here at times I hope but what you cannot allow is for Greg or I to come up here on a repeated basis and just mishandle the Word.

Right. Another one. Look. As you involve yourself in ministry here is that service in keeping with what is taught from the pulpit.

You don't want to compete with the pulpit. You want to help support it. So whatever your teaching is if that's what you do whatever your service is does it look like it reflects what's being taught the spirit of the pulpit here.

[65 : 23] Is it gracious? Is it kind? Is it gentle? Is it truthful? Is it grounded in you trying to be conformed to Jesus? And then finally are you placing the highest priority on helping keep the pulpit or God's Word the central feature of our worship gathering?

And you do that. You know how you do that? First of all you show up. It's kind of hard to sit under my preaching when you're not here. You show up. Don't underestimate that.

You're here. You're faithfully here. You sit. You listen. And you're teachable. You affirm. You give feedback in kind ways. It's like throwing dog to a bone.

So if I go long it's on you. Because you encourage me. We love the Word don't we? And ministering God's truth has to be central to the life of the congregation gathering together for worship.

It's all over in the Scriptures and we won't compromise it. And I am so grateful. Greg is so grateful and I know that because we talk about it for you guys coming and being teachable before the Lord.

[66 : 34] Thank you for doing that. Thank you for receiving the Word with joy. It's a joy for us to give it to you and to see that happening. Let's pray together. Father thank you for the goodness of your Word that is truly sound doctrine.

We are helped. We are grown. We are made complete in Christ as we take in the Word of the Living God. And so I pray that all of our people here who come and sit and join grace and get involved with us and share their lives with us who are concerned with being conformed to the image of Christ.

I hope all of us and pray that all of us would then subscribe to a faithful obedient walk with you as we come to know your Word. Know the Bible and understand the truth here are designed to help us live godly godlike lives before a watching world and one another.

Thank you for the cross. Thank you for the gospel and thank you for the hope within us as Jesus lives in us. In his name we pray. Amen.