

Motivation for Ministry

1 TIMOTHY 6:11-16

Baxter T. Exum (#1510)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
August 11, 2019



Over the past several months, we have been looking together at the book of 1 Timothy, and today we are getting very close to the end of this book. We have one more lesson after this one, and we hope to wrap it up in two weeks, if the Lord wills. But today, as we come near the end, we come to some final words from Paul to the young preacher Timothy. So far in this book we've seen the importance of solid, healthy teaching. We've seen some severe warnings against the danger of false teaching. We've looked at the importance of prayer. We've looked at the role of men and women in the church. We've seen the qualifications for elders and deacons. We've looked at the role of the preacher. We've looked at the church's responsibility to the widows of the congregation. We've looked at how to handle a bad elder. We've looked at how to relate to those who are older and younger than we are in the church. We've looked at the blessings and dangers of wealth. We have had a wide variety of instructions from the apostle Paul to this young preacher - everything Timothy needs to know. And as we think about all of this information, and as we try to put ourselves in Timothy's place, we might imagine that hearing all of this at once might be at least a little bit overwhelming. Here he is as a young man in a far off place that is somewhat hostile to the Christian faith, and it is almost too much to handle. So, as we come near the end, we have some closing thoughts, and these closing thoughts include some motivation. This morning, then, we are looking at some "motivation for ministry." The image on the wall up here was taken when I dropped off the canoe at camp a few weeks ago. Not knowing how strong the current would be, I started going upstream so I could make my way back to where I put in. And I'm using this image today, because when you are paddling upstream, sometimes you need some motivation! And so, as we think about being motivated, we come to some words this morning that were intended to encourage Timothy to not give up, but to keep on fighting the good fight. Do not give in! Do not just go with the flow. And as we look at this passage, I want us to be looking for a series of very brief commands.

In context, Paul has just warned about the danger of loving money, the danger of always wanting more, and we pick up with 1 Timothy 6:11-16. The apostle Paul writes these words,

¹¹ But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴ that you keep the

commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,¹⁵ which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,¹⁶ who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

So, as he motivates Timothy to hang in there, he starts wrapping up this letter with a series of commands, a series of reminders.

I. And we start in verse 11 as Paul tells Timothy to FLEE, “flee from these things, you man of God.”

First of all, I love how Paul addresses this young preacher as a “***man of God.***” In the Old Testament, this is a title reserved for men like Moses, and Samuel, David, and Elijah. Imagine what a motivation this must have been for this young man, “***But flee from these things, you man of God.***” A “***man of God***” is someone who has dedicated his life to God’s service. Literally, he is a man belonging to God. In front of the building out here, we have a sign that says, “Church of Christ.” That is not so much a title as it is a description. We are a church belonging to Christ, a church of Christ. In the same way, Timothy is a “***man of God.***” He is a man belonging to God. And this puts Timothy in a completely different category than those who were dividing that congregation with various false teaching. So, just the way Paul words this would have been very encouraging to this young man.

It’s a bit difficult to nail this down, but it seems as if various forms of the word “***run***” or “***flee***” are found close to a hundred times in the Bible, sometimes literally, and sometimes symbolically. We run the race that it set before us, but sometimes we are told to run away from certain things. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul tells us to “***flee from sexual immorality.***” We think of Lot and his family fleeing from the city of Sodom. We certainly think of Joseph as he was propositioned by Potiphar’s wife. Joseph ran, which is exactly what he should have done. It’s what we should do. And here in 1 Timothy 6:11, Paul tells Timothy to “***flee***” or to “***run***” from the love of money. He is to flee from greed (in that passage we studied two weeks ago). This isn’t a retreat. We are not really running from a battle we are losing, but we might describe this as “a tactical advance to the rear.” We are avoiding the conflict altogether. Perhaps some of you will remember the scene from Monty Python where they come upon the killer rabbit. Once they realize what is going on there, the cry is, “Run away! Run away!” It was too late for some, but the rest finally realize that they need to get out of there. And that is the advice Paul gives to Timothy. Run!

For some of us, the temptation might be always wanting more. For others, it might be a sexual temptation. We need to run in the opposite direction. If I have a problem with gambling, I don’t need to be hanging out down at Ho-Chunk. If I am tempted by a lack of self-control around food, some huge buffet is not the place I need to be. If my struggle is alcohol, I certainly need to run in the opposite direction. I don’t need to be playing with it. I need to get away from it. I need to run. Someone has described temptation as offering fresh hot bread to someone who has been fasting for forty days and forty nights. As human beings, we are weak, and sometimes we need to run. And the word Paul uses here is the basis for our English word “fugitive.” A fugitive is somebody who runs. I need to be a fugitive from temptation. I need to run as if my spiritual life depends on it, because often it does.

Thankfully, I haven’t had to do too much running in my life. But I do remember walking along the train tracks when I was growing up down in Crystal Lake. I’m not sure my parents know about this yet. I hope the statute of limitations has run out on this. But I was taking a shortcut by walking along the tracks, and as a train passed,

it stopped, and several Metra police jumped off the train and started running toward me. I will admit that instinct kicked in, and I ran in the opposite direction. I ran through the briars and bushes, I ran like I had never run before in my life, and I escaped. I had scratches and cuts all over my arms. But I made it. I guess I realized later that they really don't want you walking alongside the train tracks. But I was motivated to get away. We need that same motivation in outrunning sin. We are to flee from these things that Paul warns us about in this book. And Timothy is to be motivated.

II. However, it is not enough just to run away from something, so Paul continues with the reminder that Timothy must also PURSUE some good things.

So, we run from temptation, but we also need to be running toward what is good. We are to pursue ***"righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness."*** In a sense, if we spend our time pursuing these good things, we really won't have any time for anything else. Many of us were here at the building about 7 hours yesterday for the clothing give-away. And during that time, I didn't have time to sin! I was too busy doing something good! There is a value, then, to pursuing what is good. We don't just run away from sin, but we pursue those things that are good. We do what is right, we try to become like God, we put our trust in Him, we love each other (that is, we treat others as we ourselves would like to be treated), we persevere (we endure, we are steadfast), and we are gentle (we focus on restraining our power and using our skills for good, not evil).

We flee from sin, and we pursue righteousness. We fill our lives with doing good. Yes, we avoid sin, but we live to be like Jesus. As Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:21, he ***"left us an example to follow in his steps."*** As we sometimes say, our mission is to "be Jesus" to the world around us. Our mission is to pursue righteousness.

III. In verse 12, Paul continues as he tells Timothy to, "FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH."

This reminder is needed, and it was also understood. When Paul first came to Timothy's hometown, the Jews, ***"...having won over the crowds, ...stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead"*** (Acts 14:19). Not long after this, Timothy obeys the gospel and joins Paul on his missionary journeys. We don't know if Timothy witnessed that first beating, if perhaps that motivated him to also preach the gospel like Paul, but we do know that Timothy was with Paul for some terrible abuse and persecution. Timothy was there in Philippi when Paul and Silas were arrested, and beaten, and thrown in jail. So, when Paul tells Timothy to ***"fight the good fight of faith,"*** Timothy knows what this means. He knows who this is coming from. He knows from personal experience that the Christian life truly is a struggle. It is a fight.

In fact, the word Paul uses here is the basis for our English word "agonize." And so, in a sense, there is some agony involved. There is a struggle involved. The Christian life is not easy. The Christian life is not for cowards. So, Timothy, then, is to ***"agonize the good agony of faith."*** But it is a ***"good"*** agony. It is a ***"good"*** fight. This doesn't mean that we are out there beating on people - either literally or figuratively - but there is a fight involved. Who are we fighting? We are not fighting people. We are not fighting the government. We are not fighting culture. Our fight is against sin. And specifically, I'm fighting my sin, and you are fighting your sin. This is a spiritual battle, it is a spiritual struggle. ***"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood,"*** as Paul says in Ephesians 6:12, ***"but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."*** And there is some spiritual agony involved in this struggle. So, Paul is reminding Timothy to fight the good fight. And in a sense, this is a warning: The Christian life, and Timothy's work in particular, will not be easy. It will be worth it, but it will be difficult.

- IV. As we return to our text, we also find in verse 12 that Timothy is to **TAKE HOLD** of something, he is to, *“...take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”*

So, Timothy is to take hold of eternal life. He is to grab it. He is to reach out and take it. Usually we think of *“eternal life”* as being something that is out there in the future somewhere (and it is), but it’s also something we can have and enjoy right now. It is something we can take hold of. And we also find here that eternal life is tied to making the good confession. The good confession is our public acknowledgement that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Many of us in this room have made this confession, just like the Ethiopian officer did in Acts 8. But the question is: Do we continue to make it? When is the last time we acknowledged publicly that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? In Ephesus, home to the temple of Artemis, making the good confession would have been very unpopular. And yet Timothy was not a citizen of Ephesus. Timothy was a citizen of heaven, *“For our citizenship is in heaven,”* Paul wrote in Philippians 3:20, *“from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”* And this seems to be Paul’s encouragement here in verse 12, that Timothy is to take hold of eternal life right now, stay faithful to your confession, keep on preaching as if eternal life is a present reality. Jesus is all that really matters. So, hold on to eternal life.

- V. As we come to the end of this passage, we find another motivator (in verses 13-16) as Paul tells Timothy to **KEEP THE COMMANDMENT**.

He throws in some extra motivation here with the *“I charge you”* and *“in the presence of God,”* but the main emphasis here is that Timothy is to *“keep the commandment.”* He doesn’t specify what this commandment is, so I would take it to include pretty much everything. In a sense, Paul is motivating Timothy: Be true to your confession. Do the work of an evangelist. Speak the truth about God at all times, and do it fearlessly. And I say this, because Paul calls on the example of Jesus. Just as Jesus courageously testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, knowing that it would lead to his own death, so you also are to make the good confession at all times. Speak up for the Lord. And at the end: We also testify courageously because of how awesome God is. He is the blessed and only Sovereign. The word *“blessed”* means *“happy.”* Our God is a happy God; he is a God of great joy. As we sometimes sing, he is the “giver of eternal gladness.” “Joyful, joyful, we adore You; God of glory, Lord of love. Hearts unfold like flowers before You opening to the sun above. Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away. Giver of Eternal gladness, fill us with the light of day.” He is the *“King of kings and Lord of lords,”* Paul says. He alone *“possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see.”* This is the amazing God we serve. Yes, it is a tough situation in Ephesus; yes, you have this huge temple to Artemis; but, our God is an awesome God. He is the God who gives life to all things. So Timothy, you need to *“keep the commandment.”*

Conclusion:

The point of all of this is to motivate Timothy to hang in there, to keep on doing the work that God has called him to do. He is to run from sin. He is to pursue righteousness. He is to fight the good fight of faith. He is to take hold of eternal life. He is to keep the commandment. All of this is motivated by God. And the lesson for Timothy is the same as it is for us today. Here we are as a relatively small group of Christians meeting together in Madison, Wisconsin. Our mission is to flee, pursue, fight, grab onto and keep the commandment, motivated by the awesome God we serve. As we read earlier in our time together today, *“The Lord is my helper; I will not fear... Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”* (Hebrews 13:6-8). What was true for Timothy is still true nearly 2000 years later.

Hopefully we can finish this book in two weeks. But for now, we end with an invitation to obey the gospel, to become a part of this, to join us in this quest to become more and more like Jesus. The gospel is the good news that Jesus came to this earth to live a perfect life and to offer himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. We accept his offer by turning to him in faith, by turning away from sin, by confessing him publicly as being the Son of God (as Paul refers to here in 1 Timothy 6), and then we are born into the Lord's family at the point of baptism, when we are immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. God does the saving. All we do is trust and obey. If you have any questions, please talk to one of us after the service today. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can talk to me right now as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com