

Patterned After Jesus - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **1 Timothy 4:6-16** (#535)

Introduction: What comes to mind when I mention “following Jesus”? Images of walking an aisle or getting baptized? Or maybe you think about moral teachings to be believed? Perhaps you link following Jesus with commands to be obeyed? Whatever your own connections, let me add another: being an example of Christ’s love and patience. The Christian faith is not only a set of truths to believe (it is), and not only a set of morals to uphold (also true), but also a life to be acted. Actions never justify us before God, but are evidence of responding to Christ.

Let’s ask a second question: what do you think our church needs most to be faithful? Money for evangelistic efforts, hiring professionals, or to have societal influence? Do we need more political engagement? Perhaps we need to emphasize some truths over others in an effort to win a hearing for Christ? Instead of any of these, what Paul writes to the church in Ephesus is that Timothy and they are to give time and attention first and foremost to their own spiritual walk. Their own discipleship. Now, when we put the answers to these two questions together, we see a church that represents Christ’s love to one another and to the world around us. A church that is faithful not only for a season, but from generation to generation. A church that builds disciples, not through flashy programs or by being a controversial lightning rod, but instead by slowly and surely exemplifying Jesus. That’s our call, too. Let’s see how to do it in **1 Timothy 4** starting with **verse 6**...

4:6-10 It would be easy to read these verses and think that they only apply to Timothy. After all, several of the commands that Paul writes here are specifically addressed to him. But let’s not forget who the recipients of this letter are: not just Timothy, but the Ephesian church overall. While the truths in these verses are

given as specific commands to Timothy, they are also to set a pattern, an expectation that the Ephesians will have for themselves and future leaders as well. What, then, are churches like ours – churches that desire to faithfully be and make disciples – supposed to uphold? Paul gives four pictures in these verses; we’ve just read the first two: Timothy and the Ephesians are to “hold” and to “do”...

First, they are to “hold”: to hold on to and teach what is true. Paul says it in no uncertain terms in **verses 6-7a** that Timothy will be counted as a good servant of Jesus by putting “these things” in front of the church. What are “these things”? From the rest of the verse, we find that they are the words of faith and the good doctrine that he himself has followed. But what is that? Rather than filling in the blanks with our own ideas, we simply need to remember the context. In **chapter 1**, we saw the difference between false doctrine and true teaching. In **chapter 2**, we read about the priority of prayer and how the church is to reflect God’s intended order for the family. **Chapter 3** continued those thoughts, speaking of how those who are examples and servants in the church are to reflect Jesus. And **chapter 4** began with snapshots of how Paul’s teachings will lead to a very different way of life – and eternal destiny! – than what the false teachers were offering.

So, we see then that there are two ways to live, two patterns that the Ephesian church is being pulled toward. They can either give themselves to the false teachings of those who care little for anything God has said – the silly myths that Paul mentions in **verse 7**; or they can give themselves to the God-given, God-intended pattern that Paul has been describing over these past few chapters.

Friends: which pattern will be yours? We live in a time of unprecedented opinions. Whatever ideas you could imagine for the church are out there, whether you look

on social media, at popular conferences, or at bestselling books. Your challenge – and mine – is to constantly look back to the Scriptures instead of the world, instead of the culture, even instead of the American “Christian” culture. Note how I said that: our mission isn’t to look at all the options and ideas out there and decide which ones are Biblical. Instead, what I’m advocating – what Paul is promoting – is that we first and foremost look at the Bible itself to get our ideas of church and ministry and go from there. Said differently: we need to look at Scripture more and look to publishers, conferences, Christian celebrities, and influencers less.

So: who is influencing you most? When you are crunched for time, what do you read? Your Bible, or the latest blog? Which do you give your limited time to: the Scriptures, or what somebody else says about the Scriptures? Don’t misunderstand: there are many, many wonderful resources out there, many faithful teachers. But none of them should ever get more of your time than God’s Word.

So, we hold to and teach what is true – whether formally in the church, or informally as parents or those sharing the faith. Second, we “do” the hard work of growing. This is what we see in **verses 7b-10**. Timothy, alongside the church, is to train himself for godliness. Think on that: we admire sports stars who give themselves to hours of training, but do we do that ourselves? Do we spend time each day to grow in the faith? Do we sacrifice other things in life so that we would be counted as disciples? What is necessary is faith-fueled, Gospel-driven effort to follow after Jesus. I’m not saying – and Paul isn’t saying – that such efforts save you or me. But instead, these efforts are the fruit produced by growing in Christ. They are indicators of health. What are your efforts indicating about you?

Think of all the things you give your time to each day, each week: which of them will matter in eternity? Paul's teaching to Timothy is that while bodily training does have some value in the present, training to follow Jesus, training in godliness, matters both now and forever. How you spend your time, what you train for, indicates where your hope is set. Is it set on the living God? Is it aimed at the one and only Savior? Are you somebody who believes in Christ and follows Him?

Hold and do. Now, third and fourth, we speak of "being" and "practicing"...

4:11-16 All of these truths, all of these teachings that Paul has entrusted to Timothy, he is to... what? Keep to himself? Just know and apply to his own life? Beware, dear friends, of that idea: we never say it, but it's oh so easy to just sit and soak. You won't find that mentality in the Scriptures: those who follow Jesus are to learn, yes; but part of learning is also to be an example, it is to pass on what we are learning. So Timothy is commanded here. And he must do that in spite of his age. In the early church, age was prized – the idea was that wisdom generally, though not always, increased as somebody got older. Yet Timothy's authority wouldn't come from age, and it wouldn't come from his own experience: instead, it would come from being an example. What's that look like? Certainly, every Christian is called to use their words well, to act in ways that represent Christ faithfully, to show His love in our interactions, to display faith in how we think and engage the world around us, and to live with a purity that is defined not by culture or emotion, but by the Scriptures. This is the example Timothy is to give: his influence, similar to the overseers of the church that we spoke of in **chapter 3**, comes not from any power or authority inherent to him. Rather, it comes from how closely he follows the Lord. Let that be your marker as well. Are you setting an example in how you

Speak? How you live and love? Could anyone pattern their faith after yours and be saved? Would they grow in Christ? Is your purity worth following?

And this isn't just an individual task, it's also given to the church in **verses 13-14**: Timothy is to give his time to the reading of Scripture: God's Word needs to be heard as a church. This is why we read the Scriptures in our service and why I direct you there at the start of each sermon. Similarly, it is because Timothy is called to make preaching and teaching a pattern in the Ephesian church that we also aim for that to be our pattern here, too. The point of such a focus on the Word isn't to speak to felt needs, or the concerns of different demographic groups. Instead, as we see here, it's about patterning our lives and how we do church after Christ's teachings. It's about, in the Ephesian church, Timothy giving himself to this God-given, God-appointed mission. It's no different for us.

Lastly, it's also about "practicing" the faith...

One of the things that amazes me most about healthcare and the medical field is that we are so sure of ourselves these days. And when we aren't – when guidance changes on everything from responding to a pandemic to the best way to go about treating a cancer – many in our culture react with shock, skepticism, and fear. Friends, could it be that in spite of our wonderful technology and God-given medical advances, we still don't understand nearly as much about health as we think we do? This is why we used to speak of people "practicing" medicine. It was a way to recognize the humility that we needed to have even as medical professionals sought to grow in their knowledge of how the body works.

There's a sense in which we Christians should speak of "practicing" our faith. Of growing in Christ. Of trying, perhaps failing at times, and then getting up and trying again. That's what Paul commands of Timothy: note – he isn't to be a pastor who has all the answers or who always gets everything right. The cult of the expert that is so popular here in 2021 is nowhere found in the Scriptures. Instead, Timothy is to be seen as a pastor who is trying. Who is giving himself to growing in Christ. It's the progress that is important, more so than the wins and losses. When Timothy gives himself personally to this pattern of life, those watching get to see how God uses him, and then be encouraged that He'll use them also. How about you? Are you practicing the faith? Are you growing? When was the last time that you admitted you were wrong about something in the Scriptures?

We often seek out leaders who never apologize, who never admit they got something wrong, and we think that is "strong" leadership. But that's not the pattern given in the Scriptures: it must not be my pattern, nor should it be yours. Instead, aim to grow in Jesus. Make a practice of it every single day. Would somebody watching your life see how you look to Jesus even in your mistakes, even when you need forgiveness? Would they see somebody who isn't perfect, but who is loved by a God who is? This sort of example is more crucial than you might think: Paul writes that if Timothy gives himself to these things – to living and thinking and teaching and speaking in these ways – then the result will be salvation. Not because of his works. But the Lord's. When those watching Timothy emulate how he follows Jesus, the result will be genuine saving faith. So, what pattern are you showing? When's the last time you took stock of yourself, asking Jesus to continue the work of making you humble and faithful? Let's be known for that pattern around here: hold, do, be, practice. Let's close in prayer, asking the Lord to make us a church marked – and changed – by God's Word...