

The Ten Commandments of Pastors (3)

¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. ¹⁵ Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. ¹⁶ Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. (1 Timothy 4:12–16)

When I worked in I.T., one of the things I didn't like was sitting down with my manager for a performance review. Here I was given a scorecard to rate my performance in various areas, and my boss had his own scorecard to rate me in the same areas, and then we were supposed to meet and agree on a number that would be an accurate rating of my performance. Now I didn't like performance reviews because firstly, I think trying to put a number on a human performance is a very strange way of thinking about people, like asking my wife to score my husbanding effectiveness out of 100. This is the refuge of those who want the exactness of numbers in those domains of life that resist it. But second, and more the source of my discomfort was the difficulty of trying to not rate yourself too high or too low. Too high, and you know your boss would bring you down. Rate yourself too low, and your boss would agree with you and tell you to pull up your socks. So it was a bit of an exercise in giving yourself a 7 out of 10 for most things.

But if we were to imagine Paul giving a performance review to one of his trainee pastors, while I'm sure he wouldn't use scorecards and multiple choice, he might very well have used some of the statements here in 1 Timothy. He wouldn't have called it a performance review, but he might have called it a ministry check, an evaluation of faithfulness.

In this section on the pastor and his approach to ministry, Paul is laying out what we've called the Ten Commandments of ministry. And we've seen, his commandments look very different to what some people think makes for effective and successful ministry. Their scorecard would look very different to Paul's. So far, we've seen Paul counseled

1. Know and Teach Sound Doctrine v6, 11
2. Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing v7
3. Develop Disciplined Devotion v7
4. Don't be A Man-Pleaser v12
5. Be An Example of the Whole Christian Life v12
6. Prioritise the Public Reading & Teaching of Scripture v13

In verses 14 to 16, Paul is going to finish with the last four of these commandments to pastors. And these final four all have to do with giving oneself completely to ministry and making sure you don't drop the ball right just before you reach the try line or the finish line.

Here is a recipe not just for a ministry but for a Christian life of fruitfulness and faithfulness.

Commandment 7: Develop Your Spiritual Abilities

¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.

Do not neglect the grace gift that is in you, your giftedness at preaching and teaching. Don't take it lightly, or dismiss it, be disinterested in it. Don't let it collect dust and sit on the shelf.

After all, it was given to you in a special way. It was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of

the hands of the eldership. What does that mean? Well, the first part likely means that one of the New Testament prophets that were present during the apostolic age, when the New Testament was still being written, had prophesied about Timothy. We saw this in 1 Timothy 1:18: This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, Perhaps it was a confirmation of his calling and giftedness, perhaps a reminder of the promises or the admonitions that came to him then. I'm sure Paul has repeated many of them in this very epistle.

The second part has to do with the very common practice of laying on of hands, as was done when elders or pastors were ordained for ministry.

²² Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure. (1 Timothy 5:22)

Laying on of hands was used in the Old Testament to set someone apart for ministry, like Moses did with Joshua. It also identified you with whomever you laid hands on: an Israelite would lay his hands on the animal sacrifice about to be killed to identify his sin with the animal, and the animal's atonement with himself. When we come to the New Testament, people lay hands on others to heal, to bless, to impart gifts, to ordain. Most often, the laying on of hands just symbolised the imparting of power, it didn't actually impart the power. But in some cases it did. That was definitely the case when the Lord Jesus laid hands on people. And it was often the case when an apostle laid hands on someone.

⁶ Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. (2 Timothy 1:6)

So when this group of pastors, probably gathered at Lystra where Timothy was from, set him apart for ministry, Paul was among them, and it was Paul specifically that granted Timothy particular giftedness. Paul doesn't specify what the gift is, but it surely includes all the giftedness Timothy needs to preach, to teach, to lead, to warn, to counsel, to evangelise.

Now all of that is just context to help us understand how Timothy obtained his giftedness and how special it was. But the main command here is: do not neglect it. And the positive form of do not neglect is, use it, develop it, strengthen it.

Even though Timothy had been gifted, the gift was not something that operated automatically with 100% power. A few of the supernatural gifts were more passive than active in their exercise, but most spiritual gifts require work to fully develop and enhance and sharpen.

What does that look like in a pastor? It means whatever natural or spiritual gifts he has been given, he needs to work hard at improving them. That's why he gets some training in a Bible college or seminary. He needs to get better at preaching. That means continued reading and training in learning how to read and understand the Bible and theology. He should be reading books on preaching and public speaking. He should be learning how to write better, how to reason better, and yes, even how to speak better. He should be learning those branches of knowledge that will affect his teaching, and generally make his teaching more interesting. He should also be learning and improving in other areas: counseling, church administration and management, training leaders, evangelism. In fact, he will never be able to fully keep up with all the improvements and training he needs. He will always be in school, in some way, always training.

You should listen to his sermons from years back and notice that they have improved in their clarity and insight and depth and persuasiveness. It is a great travesty to meet a pastor after 20 years and

find he is like a broken record, still on the same hobbyhorses, same whippingboys, same mannerisms. Some people call that faithfulness, but the right word is stagnation. In fact, some men actually have a rotation of about 5 years' worth of sermons, and then they move to a new church every few years and just start all over again. But that is to doom yourself to not growing, not developing, not covering new ground, answering new questions. And if he is not growing, then the chances are, few people around him are.

Are you happy to see your leaders grow? Happy to see them attend conferences, take courses, buy books, build their libraries? Sad is the Christian who grumbles if his pastor obtains the means to develop his gifts. Such a Christian has cut off his nose to spite his face. But happy is the Christian who knows that his pastor's growth is his own. And happy is the Christian who learns from this example and develops his own gifts. He or she works to become a better teacher, a more skilled counselor, a more useful encourager, a more precise administrator, a more skilled musician, a more efficient steward. Are you developing your gifts, your ministry? Pray for your leaders to do this, and then do it, too.

Commandment 8: Be Entirely Devoted to Ministry

¹⁵ Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

Meditate on these things, and give yourself entirely to these things. What things? All the things Paul is talking about that are related to ministry. Shepherding the church, preaching, teaching, leading it.

Towards these things, Timothy is to meditate and give himself entirely to them, which are two ways of saying the same thing. The word *meditate* means to practise, to study, to learn by repetition and strenuous effort. The words *give yourself entirely to* are actually a translation of the Greek that is literally be in it; be absorbed by these things, be immersed in them, throw yourself into them.

Put simply, Timothy, be entirely devoted to ministry. That doesn't mean Timothy gets his priorities out of order, that he can neglect his family if he is married with children. But it does mean this: Timothy cannot treat ministry as a hobby, as a weekend pursuit. Ministry is not recreational or even avocational. It is to be Timothy's vocation: it is his primary calling, what he does with his life. It is what occupies the bulk of his time, it is what he plans his days and weeks and months around. It is what he invests in, what he lives for. His work is its most public on Sunday, but he works at it every day of the week except the day he rests.

To do ministry well is to confront the fact that it becomes all-consuming. Even ministry to a small church of a small number of people can quickly occupy all the available hours in a week: preparing to teach, teaching, learning, reading, planning, counselling, administrating, organising.

But I've known the opposite too. I remember one missionary here in South Africa, whose golf handicap was becoming enviable to even serious golfers, and it wasn't because of raw talent. I remember one pastor who you would find at home when there was a five-day cricket match, taking in the whole thing on his couch. I've known pastors who have become professional-level athletes because of their devotion to a sport, or a knowledge of scores and statistics that can only come from a devoted fan. I've known pastors who did nothing except homeschool their children and take them to their extra-curriculars. I've known pastors who insisted on doing the grocery-shopping with their wives and checking every penny that was spent. I've known pastors whose social media profiles at least suggest a life devoted to hobbies, sports, family road trips, holidays. I've known pastors who seem to have tea and biscuits with people in church all week long, lingering at people's houses till the crickets chirp. I met with one pastor who spoke about the three businesses he was running.

Some pastors send me clips of sermons and podcasts and videos each of which is two to three hours long. The phrase Erin and I find ourselves saying to each other again and again is “Who has the time for this?”

But this is not devoting yourself to ministry. It is devoting yourself to a hobby, a sport, a company, or being a housedad, but it is not pouring yourself into ministry.

This is one of the problems I have with the “lay-elder” model of ministry, where several men are supposedly all elders, but really only one of them gives himself entirely to ministry; the rest give themselves to other vocations, which of course they should. And there is nothing wrong with a man who works another job so that he can support himself and pour what remaining hours he has into the church. But the man who is devoted to his secular vocation cannot do what Paul is calling Timothy to do here.

But here you can see one of the reasons for what Paul will command in 5:17: to financially support hardworking pastors. To do ministry well, they should be immersed in it, absorbed by it, and have nothing else distracting them from it.

This is one of the things you have to embrace about ministry. There is no time-card you punch when you arrive and punch out at 5pm. Ministry follows you everywhere, into the late hours of the night and even early hours of the morning. It lives in the house with your family, and you cannot leave it at the office. You have to decide when to say no, but you also have to know that there are some ways you cannot say no.

But if you try hard to find that balance, and give yourself entirely to it, then Paul says there will be a sweet result: your progress may be evident to all

Devotion to ministry will result in personal growth that others can see, and church growth that others can see. It will become evident that your devotion to ministry has been vindicated. Your church is growing, people are joining, leaders are maturing, the preaching is continually improving, ministry opportunities are growing, evangelism is growing, people are being saved and baptised.

Commandment 9: Observe and Firmly Handle Yourself

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine.

Take heed means to pay close attention, to keep close watch, even to follow with the eyes. What does he mean? The idea is obviously not stare at yourself or become fastidious about your personal appearance and demeanor. No, yourself and the doctrine are paired together. Make sure you don't see the doctrine slide into false teaching, veer into error, erode into compromise. Watch your own heart in the same way.

Timothy, become an observer of yourself. Become familiar with your own tendencies, your own weaknesses, your own temptations. Treat yourself as you would someone you were counseling: understand the unique challenges, the discouragements, the ambitions. You know yourself better than anyone else, so don't lie to yourself. You know which way you are pointed with every decision you make. You know what you are feeding, and what you are neglecting. You know what you are pursuing and what you are avoiding.

Paul told the Ephesian elders the same thing when he parted from them:

²⁸ Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

Remember the advice of Martyn Lloyd-Jones when dealing with spiritual depression? “The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself.”

Watch that your own heart is not slowly being captivated by material possessions. Watch what happens to your mind and heart when you watch certain TV shows or movies. Watch what happens when you are criticised, and watch what happens when you are praised. Watch how you respond when things at church seem great, and when they seem terrible. Watch what you are like when you are sleep-deprived, when you are exhausted, when you are sick. Watch what you are like when there is conflict at home, conflict at church. Notice where you seek consolation when you are angry, or hurt, or disappointed. Notice the trajectory of your interests, what you like to watch or research or read up on when you are free. Notice what voices you like to listen to these days, and who you don't like to listen to. Notice how regularly you read the Bible and pray compared to how often you used to. Notice how regularly you attend church compared to how often you used to. Notice your attitude towards church compared to what it used to be. This is keeping a close watch on yourself, not pretending to be surprised by where you find yourself after a long time of repeating the same actions.

I think many shipwrecks, not only in Christian ministry, but in Christianity in general are caused by people who ignored all the warning signs in their own life. They knew they were on a self-destructive path, but justified it to themselves, excused it, and continued. Some Christians don't want the pain of taking stock of where they are, and where they are headed, so they prefer to just keep going.

It is always surprising to me to meet the number of Christians who just do little to no thinking about their own Christian lives: about their motives, about why they do what they do, about why they are drawn to some things and not others, about whether they are growing duller and duller to the things of God or sharper and keener. I find many Christians never take heed to themselves until a pastor or mature Christian makes them do it. Then, for the very first time, they stop the car, and look under the hood to see what is creating that burning smell.

For the one in ministry, he must be extra vigilant to do this because sometimes he will have no one else to do it for him. He should surround himself with men who ask him how he is doing, he should have an open relationship with his wife, but he must be a self-examiner. Like a doctor who feels the symptoms of sickness in his own body, and take the right actions before he infects others, so a pastor must see the signs of problems in himself and correct. The pastor who does not do this self-watch will be heading for the cliff of depression, the cliff of marital unfaithfulness, the cliff of pornography.

Don't just do. Think about what you do, and why you do it. Think about how often you do it. Take a few moments to step aside from yourself and watch yourself, and make some mental notes.

Timothy must be trying to develop his abilities as a shepherd, he must be entirely devoted to shepherding, he must shepherd himself, and lastly, Timothy must

Commandment 10: Persevere in Ministry

Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

Continue, persevere, persist, remain faithful in doing these things. All nine commandments that have come before this. Timothy is supposed to keep doing them and do them consistently.

It is only in perseverance that actions become habits. Only in persevering do habits become character, and character identity. It is only through perseverance that Timothy will become in practice who he is in his position in Christ: a forgiven, blood-washed, redeemed child of God and faithful, protective shepherd of God's people.

Through endurance, he will save himself from ministerial ruin, from moral failure, or even from being a false professor, a false teacher. By endurance, he will save his listeners from stumbling, from returning to sin, from finding permission to turn back into worldliness. By endurance, he will preach a sound gospel, and sinners will be converted, and the saved truly sanctified and growing.

¹⁴ But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, (2 Timothy 3:14)

If Timothy applies these things in surges of enthusiasm which then give way to complete stalls and periods of disobedience, or if Timothy obeys these things every second day, or one month on and one month off, he will succumb to discouragement, temptation, and possibly even apostasy, if he is not truly saved. If he does not endure, he will plant nothing permanent, grow nothing lasting, and reap no serious fruit. He will be a shooting star of enthusiasm that fizzles out.

Ministry is full of reasons to be discouraged, to give up early. Ministry tempts you to obey in spurts and then relax. Ministry is full of highs and lows. Often ministry doesn't really correspond to your efforts: you put a huge amount of effort into a certain area or even a certain person, and nothing much comes of it. You do relatively little in another place and it blossoms. That sermon or counseling or teaching that you thought was genius has almost no effect, and the one you thought could have been written by a sick patient during a delirium ends up being greatly used. All of this tell us to keep going, and trust the results to God.

Perseverance is the capstone on ministry, the cement that holds it all together. It is what gives the whole thing its final and added value: that the man who preached it practised it and finished. He fought the good fight and prevailed, he completed the race and could say it was worth running and possible to finish.

As Spurgeon put it, "If the minister should fall, my brothers and sisters; if, set upon a pinnacle, he should be thrown down; if, standing in slippery places, he should falter; if the standard-bearer falls, what great harm is done to the Church, what shouts are heard among the adversaries, what dancings are seen among the daughters of the Philistines! God's banner has been stained in the dust, and the name of Jesus thrown into the mire! When the minister of Christ becomes a traitor, it is as if the pillars of the house start to tremble; every stone in the structure feels the shock. If Satan can succeed in overturning the preachers of the Word, it is as if a great Oak tree would suddenly fall beneath the axe; prone in the dust it lies to wither and rot;"

But a man who labours faithfully and doesn't fall or quit becomes a great source of blessing for God's church.

So what is on a pastor's performance review? Not his drip, his swag, his cultural relevance, his brand, his social media presence. Not his academic credentials, not his entertaining humour, or his knowledge of pop culture and fads and trends. Not his claims to prophetic insight or miraculous power.

1. Know and Teach Sound Doctrine v6, 11
2. Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing v7

3. Develop Disciplined Devotion v7
4. Don't be A Man-Pleaser v12
5. Be An Example of the Whole Christian Life v12
6. Prioritise the Public Reading & Teaching of Scripture v13
7. Develop Your Abilities (14)
8. Be Entirely Devoted to Ministry (15)
9. Observe and Firmly Handle Yourself (16)
10. Persevere in Ministry (16)

That's the scorecard for any pastor, and it's a great way to live your Christian life.