

Spiritual Leadership 101

1 Timothy 4

Down through the ages when God has gotten ready to do a great work in this world, He has always chosen to begin it by calling out a man or a woman through which to do it. Just a few examples are Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Deborah, David, Elisha, Peter, Paul, and in more modern times George Mueller or D.L. Moody or Mother Teresa or Chuck Colson or Billy Graham. But God always chooses to do His work through individuals.

1 Sam. 13:14 – “The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart...”

Jer. 5:1; “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem... and seek if you can find a man, if there is *anyone* who executes judgment, who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her”.

Ez. 22:30; “I sought for a man...that should...stand in the gap...but I found none”.

You’ve seen the title of the sermon, Spiritual Leadership 101. But the message does not target a select group of Christian leaders to hear and apply God’s Word to their lives today. For you see, every child of God is a spiritual leader in one way or another. And the vast majority of God’s work is not accomplished through pastors of mega-churches or through the means of TV or radio or internet, or in church committee meetings or deacons meetings. God’s work is accomplished most often in the bedroom of your child, or in the break room at your workplace, in living room of your new neighbor, or in the weight room at your school, or in the hospital room of your friend. It’s accomplished as Christian moms and dads model Christ to their children, or as older adults still give counsel and still model Christ to their adult children. It’s accomplished as Christian young people take a stand for Christ with their peers. God’s work is accomplished in Sunday School classes and Discipleship Training classes and in children’s choirs, and in Vacation Bible Schools and on mission trips, and it’s done by ordinary people like you and me. But with all of the earnestness I have within me I say again to everyone of us who have been saved by the grace of God, including you young people and even children, we are all spiritual leaders. And in our text today God has some invaluable instructions for us as we seek to be effective leaders, as we seek to be a positive influence upon many for Jesus Christ. So let’s see what God has to say to us through one of His most effective leaders, the apostle Paul.

Look with me know as I read 1 Timothy 4

“1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:

5 For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

6 If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.

7 But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.

8 For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

9 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.

10 For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

11 These things command and teach.

12 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

15 Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.

16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

Last week we spent much time looking at what Paul calls the mystery of godliness from 3:16. And we said that the mystery of godliness was the most complete, succinct statement of the Christian faith that you will find in the Bible. That statement began by declaring that God was manifested in the flesh. And of course, Paul is referring to the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, God incarnate. And after that Paul writes that Jesus was justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory. This is what Jude calls the faith which was once delivered to the saints

(Jude 3). And we know that whoever believes this mystery of godliness and by faith alone receives Jesus into their lives as Lord and Savior is saved for all eternity.

But in the beginning of ch. 4 Paul tells us about another mystery. In 2 Thess. 2:7 he calls it the “mystery of lawlessness”, and it is the work of Satan in this world that is diametrically opposed to the work of God. In our text Paul says that is the work of deceiving spirits and that it is the doctrine of demons. And Paul says that it will take place in the “latter times”, which according to 1 John 2:18 and Hebrews 1:2 began simultaneous with the church age 2000 years ago. John wrote, “Little children, it is the last hour...” The writer of Hebrews said that God, “in these last days has spoken unto us through His Son...” So the apostles were living in the latter days, and you and I are still living in the latter days. And God says that in the later days many will depart from the faith.

Now the word “depart” refers to a person who has outwardly embraced the Christian faith but has never had a heart change – they have never been truly saved. They are examples of the rocky soil in the parable that Jesus tells in Luke 8. When the seed was sown on the rocky soil it sprang up for a while, but it lacked moisture and soon withered and died. Likewise, Jesus said that there are those who hear the Word and receive it joyfully. But the Word takes no root in their heart, for there is no true repentance and faith attached to it, and when temptation comes their joy dissipates and they abandon their profession, proving it to be false. John describes these people in 1 John 2:19:

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us”.

Do you think that we see this happening in the church today? Beloved, we see it all the time. I cannot speak for other denominations, but I can speak for us Southern Baptists. Some of you saw the following statistics in your Alabama Baptist this week. According to the church analyses of the more than 45,000 Southern Baptist churches in America, we have 15,978,000 members in our convention, almost 16,000,000. And last year we reported that in our primary worship services, which would be Sunday morning for most churches, we had an average of 6,155,000, which is 38.5 %. That’s less than 4 out of 10 who’ve professed faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior who are still living out their faith as God says they should, through a local church.

Now, what has happened? Just exactly what Paul said would happen. Most of these have given heed to seducing spirits and the doctrine of demons and they have quit living their faith, for it was a false faith to start with. For some who've fallen away their's was a true faith and they have just backslidden on God, but according to 1 John 3:9 they will come back, for John says there that whoever is born of God does not habitually commit sin.

Now, I want to examine these doctrines of demons a little more closely. First of all, v. 1 says that these doctrines come from deceiving spirits. They are so deceiving they appear as angels of light, Paul writes in 2 Cor. 11:14. And those who fall for their lies would tell you in a heartbeat, "There is absolutely nothing wrong with what I believe or what I'm doing".

If you are a fifty something or if you watch the oldies channels then you know of the sitcom Happy Days, with Richie Cunningham, Ralph, the Fonz, and all the rest. And Happy Days was a pretty good show most of the time. But do you remember the lyrics to the lead in song? Part of them went like this, "Good-bye grey skies, hello blue, nothing can hold me when I hold you, feels so right it can't be wrong, rockin' and rollin' all week long". Did you catch that? "Feels so right it can't be wrong". Beloved, that's a lie! It felt so right when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. It felt so right when Noah got drunk, and when many get drunk today. It feels so right for many to have premarital sex, it feels so right for many to cheat on their wives. Friend, Satan will not take you down with a body slam, he will take you down little by little with deception that feels so right!

Now, the deception in Timothy's church was that remaining unmarried was a means of righteousness before God, and so was abstaining from certain foods. In other words, faith in Christ is not enough to be saved. There must also be human effort. Beloved, my I say that this perversion, adding to simple repentance and faith in Christ, is a common denominator to every single cult known to man. They all believe that salvation cannot be by faith alone. It always involves human effort, being good enough to be saved. And it is such a natural thing for men to buy into this demonic doctrine. For the unconverted man believes there has to be just something men must do to have a part in their own salvation. The lost man believes that despite his sin there's still something good in him worth saving, and apart from the Holy Spirit he simply cannot accept that the blood of Jesus Christ is his only hope of eternal life.

Friend, if you are here this morning and you do not have perfect peace in your soul about your eternity, you will never find it as long as you look to yourself for any part of your salvation. The Bible says, "There is none righteous, no, not

one”, and that includes you. You have a problem that you cannot deal with, and that is your sin. But praise God, He has dealt with your sin by Jesus’ death on the cross. Paul writes in Rom. 5, “But God demonstrated His love for us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”. Jesus took the punishment for every sin you will ever commit on the cross. And now He offers salvation to you as a free gift. Paul writes in Romans 6:23, “...but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord”. And until you are willing to accept God’s free gift of salvation by casting yourself completely upon Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross as your only hope of forgiveness of your sin, you will always have that nagging question in your mind, “Have I done enough”, or, “Have I been faithful enough”, or “Have I repented of every sin”, or “Do I have enough faith”.

But let me say a one more brief word about doctrines of demons. And that is, they are not passed off just on the unsaved. It is something that Satan uses on Christians all the time. Paul writes to the Galatians, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). Paul exhorts us in Eph. 6:11 to put on the whole armor of God that we may be able to withstand the schemes of the devil.

What are some doctrines that the demons whisper in the ears of believers? Young people, the demons will whisper to you, “Just a little sin is not all that bad. Just cheating on just one of your finals won’t hurt”. Or, “Just one or two swigs of Bud Light won’t matter”. Or, “That’s going to be a really cool concert. You can just overlook the songs that are so bad you’d never let your own kids’ ears hear them one day”. Adults, Satan will whisper to you, “It is really not that important that I be faithful in my church attendance as I am to my job. I’m saved by grace”. Or, “God doesn’t look down too harshly on the little harmless lies I tell to keep from being embarrassed”. And here’s one of the biggest demonic deceptions, “I’m grounded in my faith enough to watch television programs with profanity and explicit sexual content without it affecting me”. Beloved, I’m constantly amazed at how many who claim to be Christians can stick their finger in the fire and not expect to get burned!

May I say to all us, beware of flirting with sin! It is the little sins that add up to colossal falls! “Little strokes fell great oaks”. A slow drip will eventually wear down a huge rock. Beloved, that first drink might lead you into a life of debauchery. That first hit on a porn site might lock you into a lifetime of perversion. And beware of listening to anything contrary to what you learned in Sunday School as a child. A friend of mine told me this week about a young man he knew who entered one of our Baptist colleges on fire for God and came out four years later not believing anything. Because those liberal professors just

wore his faith away, little by little, with their demonic false doctrine. And beloved, don't let the demons deceive you by saying it can't happen to you.

So we've seen that in the last days, the days in which we live right now, many will fall away from the faith. And in verse 6 Paul tells Timothy that he will be a good minister of Christ if he will warn his people of the demonic spirits that will cause them to fall away from their faith. And that makes sense. If we know that a rattlesnake is coiled and ready to strike just outside the door of the church, we would tell everyone inside to go out another way.

But then Paul goes on to tell Timothy how he can be an effective leader of his people, so that they will follow his leadership and grow in their faith instead of falling away. And he says that Timothy must focus on four things. Now beloved, these instructions are not ultimately from Paul, they are from God. God had four words for Timothy about spiritual leadership, and I want us to examine each one briefly. For they are just as surely for us today.

The first thing that God says to Timothy is, "**feed your soul**". Look at verse 6 again ("...nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed"). Paul told Timothy that if he wished to help instruct others that he must be nourished in the faith himself, in the good teaching that he had already carefully followed. And he reiterates this in verses 15-16. Now, I must tell you here that when Paul says that if Timothy continues in the doctrines he will save himself and all those who hear him he is not talking about eternal salvation. Timothy was already saved. He was talking about Timothy saving himself and his church from a life of uselessness and dishonor to God.

But notice those verbs in those verses. "Meditate". The word "meditate" means to be diligent with something. "Give yourself entirely". That means to be as immersed in the teachings of God as the body is immersed in the air we breathe. And God goes on to say "take heed" and "continue". God is saying, "Timothy, feeding your soul is not a casual, careless thing. It is the most important endeavor this side of Heaven and requires all of your spiritual energy". But the capsule statement is back in verse 7. Look at the end of the verse 7 "...exercise yourself toward godliness".

Beloved, do you want to be a godly influence on your spouse, on your children, on your peers at work or at school? Well, I can tell you, you will never lead them to a place with God that you've never been. You will never lead them to a place of godliness that you've never been. You must exercise yourself toward godliness, which begins with feeding your soul! For this reason Paul says

in verse 8, “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things...”

Back in Dec. 2010 there was an interesting article in Christianity Today magazine entitled, “Chasing Methuselah”. It was about the passion of Americans to be healthy and live longer. It claims that almost 100 million Americans are now using some sort of anti-aging product or practice. For instance, a man named Roy Walford created what he called a 120 year diet, but unfortunately Roy died when he was 79 of ALS, Lew Gehrig’s disease.

But even Christians have gotten caught up in the frenzy to outdistance our God-given three score and ten. In 2009 the Christian Broadcast Network aired a program entitled Anti-aging Secrets. And more recently CBN had a program featuring Doris J. Day, whom they called “one of America’s top beauty doctors”. How spiritual is that, considering the Bible says that man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart? But the program said that Ms. Day worked primarily with Hollywood stars. But on that program she taught us ordinary people how to “beat the clock without needles, surgery, or spending much money”. And if you walk into any Christian book store you can be inundated with the number of books and exercise DVDs on the shelves, all written and produced by Christians and designed to keep your dying body from dying quite so fast. We are obsessed with building up our bodies, almost to the point of worshipping them.

Now, beloved, it is not wrong to want to be as healthy as possible. You can do much more for the Lord with a healthy mind and body. Oh, but God says that bodily exercise only profits a little. And many, many Christians are spending invaluable time which they could use to advance the Kingdom of God on pumping iron and doing sit-ups and running on treadmills, and that’s all they’re doing, running on a treadmill to no profit whatsoever in matters of eternity. No souls won to Christ, no glory to Christ, nothing that will cause them to hear Jesus say to them one day, “Well done, good and faithful servant”. What about you? What is the focus of your exercise, your body or your soul? And when I say body I mean anything that pampers your flesh. Bible teacher Harry Ironside puts it this way: “No one who really wants to count for God can afford to play at Christianity. He must make it the one great business of his life”. But that is exactly the case in many people’s lives. Someone hit the nail on the head years ago when they said that most people worship their work, work at their play, and play at their worship.

So God says that to be a spiritual influence we must feed our souls. But I want to consider the opposite for just a few minutes. If you don’t feed something

what happens? You starve it, right? Do you know that you can starve your soul? You can starve it to the point that it will dry up like a corn stalk in the August sun. And here's how.

If you want to starve your soul, then **let it feed on that which is unspiritual**. We talked about this earlier. But when you choose to view and hear that which is ungodly, it will poison your soul just as a poisonous mushroom will poison your body. And you may never flesh out those sinful things, but you'll sin with your mind just the same, your spiritual power will be shut off and you will starve your soul.

If you want to starve your soul, then just **quit having a personal time with God every day**. Just you and Him in His Word and in prayer. I'm not talking about the prayers you pray on the run, like while you're driving or while you're waiting in the grocery store line or while you're walking or jogging. Keep praying those prayers for they have benefit. But unless you get alone with God in the quiet place, where you can be still before Him and hear Him speak to your soul through His Word and His Spirit, your soul will soon dry up.

If you want to starve your soul, **don't make going to church a priority**. Bob Pitman was right. A few weeks ago in our revival Bob said that he's learned over the years that Baptist people come to church in shifts. One shift will be there one Sunday and the next shift will be there the next. And in many churches that is true. Sunday is just such a good day to let other things take priority over meeting with God's people. And we do such a good job of rationalization about it, too. But let me tell you what happens when you miss church.

First of all, you miss **being encouraged by other Christians**. We know that God says in Hebrews 10:25 that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. But do you know why? The rest of the verse says it is because it is then that we encourage one another. God has a word of encouragement for His discouraged, spiritually hungry children. But if you are not at church you miss it. And you may miss being an encouragement to someone else. So many of us don't ever think about that. But beloved, we are to go church to be a blessing as well as receive a blessing. And when you miss being encouraged or encouraging someone else, you starve your soul.

But when you miss church you also miss **worshipping God**. Beloved, God created our souls for worship. Psalm 45:11 says, "Because He is your Lord, worship Him". Yes, you can worship God privately, and you should. But there is no substitute for corporate worship of our Lord and King. The psalmist wrote, "I will give thee thanks in the great congregation; I will praise thee among much

people” (Ps. 35:18). And when you deny yourself the opportunity for regular worship with God’s people you are starving your soul.

But when you don’t make church a priority you do something else to starve your soul. You miss **feeding upon God’s Word**. Psalm 119:50 declares, “...Your Word has given me life”. Peter says that we should desire the sincere milk of the Word that we might grow (1 Peter 2:2). The writer of Hebrews says that we should be mature and eat the strong meat of the Word. (5:14). Now, I know that there are many ways that you can hear God’s Word other than on Sundays in church. Oh, but there’s nothing like being with God’s people under the preaching of the Word of God anointed by the Holy Spirit of God. But if you don’t feed upon the anointed Word somewhere on a regular basis, you starve your soul.

So we have seen the first thing that God says we must do to be a spiritual leader. We must feed our souls. So I ask you this morning, how healthy is your soul?