

Dear Son
Part Seven – Young Guns

Pastor Ted Cunningham

It's been a great season at Woodland Hills hasn't it? Some of you obsessive/compulsives could not enjoy it because of that arrow on the screen. How many of you admit it right now; that just threw you off and you are like that student in class when the teacher erased the board halfway, you just couldn't get into the rest of the class. You wanted every little bit off that screen. I am one of them so it was very tough, but it was a great video.

We are going to take offering here at Woodland Hills and as the buckets get passed... I actually like how Bill Rogers did it last week. Just fill them up by the time they get to the back. I've never heard that appeal at Woodland Hills before.

Let me just tell you what we have going on. A small group of us are going to Haiti next Tuesday to work with the team down there to check out two sites. Woodland Hills is raising money this year to prepare us to go down and actually build a school. For a long time, about 18 schools have been supported by Cross International down there. Many of them were taken down by the earthquake. One point five million people are still displaced from Port Au Prince so we are going to go down there and meet with Cross International team as well as the local pastor and begin to develop that partnership. We have committed to them for the long haul, not only to build, but to come back and be a part of that as a church. We are trying to raise \$100,000.00 and we want to encourage you to give towards that end.

Just one more encouragement to kind of throw out there when it comes to giving is to make this a family gift to really get you kids involved in participating as well. They take offering every week out in Wildwoods. Whether that is to put a jar at home called Haiti fund or to have a little piggy bank or whatever your family might want to do to find a way to involve the kids in this as well and to give them money each Sunday so that they can give toward Haiti as well.

We are challenging our kids to bring their offerings every week. We are following in the way of my parents. My parents sat me down when I was maybe six months old when they gave me my first allowance. They divided our money up for us and it was the 10% tithe, this went to missions and then this went to savings and then with this little bit here, you could go be a General Lee Matchbox car if you wanted to.

Amy and I waited too long. Our kids are five and seven. We have just now kind of started on that idea of breaking it up for them and helping them see. I can't wait to introduce them to Uncle Sam's portion of that in a few years down the road and say we give this to him and that's why we are republicans. Hey, I'm just kidding. Handy, you don't have to leave on that one, seriously. Oh, you're giving the bucket.

Honestly, get your kids involved in this so when they come into money, help them sit down and divide that up for them. Here's the 10% you're giving to the church; here's the money you are giving to missions or to Haiti. We just encourage you to do that as a family. We wanted to let the parents know that they do take an offering in Wild Woods so if you want to get your kids into the practice and into the giving generously, you can do that, starting now.

We are in this series called *Dear Son*. If you've been with us for a while, you know we did Ephesians this winter and spring. We covered that in a series called *Dear Church*: I have some things I want to say to you. It was God speaking to us blessing, blessing, blessing and then how that plays out in the church and in the family and in the marriage, and in the workplace. We ended that series and decided to stay in Ephesus, but let's do it in 1 Timothy.

So now we are looking at this letter from an old pastor writing to a young pastor. The church is dealing with leadership issues. We thought it would be a perfect summer series for our church to look at how to structure a church. If you are new to Woodland Hills and many of you have probably been bring guests and friends and you've seen that we've been trying to model this. Bill Rogers has been teaching a lot of these and doing a fantastic job. I want to say thank you, Bill for taking on so much of that this summer. We've been having a great time with that. So some of you are thinking this isn't a real exciting topic. You don't jump out of bed on Sunday morning thinking how we discussed elders and now we are discussing deacons...

Today we are talking about what it means to be young and in ministry. Actually the term youth in this day... Check this out; four commentaries all say the exact same thing. In this day, 40 was considered youth; 40 and younger. So if you are 39 and younger, praise your father in heaven this morning, by considering yourself a youth.

If you are 40 or over, you are (we're just going to give you this biblical term) old. So we are just going to divide the church into two halves of old and young. We are going to look at this text. If you have your Bibles, turn to 1 Timothy 4 and we are going to pick up where Bill left off. We are going to pick up at Verse 9 and take it all the way to Verse 16.

If you don't have a Bible, we would love to give you one. Actually, we would love to get to know you. If you are new to Woodland Hills today, would you please do us a huge favor before you leave today? Please stop by out there where you will see a couple of offering buckets. There are green cards. If you didn't get a program, our summer program is still out there, so grab that. Take that neon green card and fill out your information and drop it in the bucket out there. We would love to get to know you. If you would like a Bible, you can take that green card to the Welcome Center and they would love to hand you a Bible and you can dive into this with us.

We are in 1 Timothy 4, a text that is rich with two more issues the church is going to have to deal with. We've dealt with the leadership of the church. If you remember in Chapter 2 of 1 Timothy, we looked at that we are heralds of the gospel of Jesus. What old pastor Paul is telling young pastor Timothy is as you go out into Ephesus, make sure you aren't a distraction to the gospel. What we've seen in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 3 is this idea that the only thing that can really screw up the church is men and women.

That's it: people. Everything about the church is fun and great; we have the best message ever, but people screw it up. That's what we saw in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

We are going to see two more issues that bring churches down today. It's the balance of how older people get along with younger people and how you balance life and doctrine, how you balance theology with actually doing life together, and we will see that in the text. So we are just going to pick right up in Verse 9 and then we have something special planned here in just a couple of minutes.

²This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance ¹⁰ (and for this we labor and strive)... Circle that last part in your Bible. The first point to share with you this morning is if you get involved in ministry, it will require work. So we are saying work it. Remember everything in these first few chapters that we look at has to do with ministry and what it means to serve other people. When we saw the qualifications for deacon, every one of those qualifications pointed back to serving people and how hard serving people can be. It says don't indulge in much wine because if you are someone who medicates with alcohol, people will drive you crazy, and you'll go home and medicate with wine. If you are moody, people are going to make you even more moody. If you are prone to anger and if you are working with people on a regular basis and don't have your anger resolved or under control, you are just going to be angrier.

Well here is what Paul is going to tell young Timothy. He's going to tell him now "I've been in this for a little bit and you've had some worship issues and you've had some leadership issues, Timothy. It's important that you learn the value of work." It's about labor and striving, not napping and hobbling. I'll be honest with you; in ministry there are people who can be quite lazy. There can be a lot of lazy pastors who don't work it all that much. Here's what we've seen and we've seen it now for the eight and a half years Woodland Hills has been going. We've seen a lot of people get in and get really excited because young churches and new churches are fun; they are easy because you have all of this energy going. But then, after a while, people start showing up and you step back and go "We've got to do something with all the people."

That's where the labor and striving come in. We've seen too many people flame out. I could put a list up here of people who started strong, not only at Woodland Hills, but in their Christian faith. They labored and they strived and they did that for a whopping six months. "I am laboring and striving; I've worked the hardest in the last year." But then now they are nowhere. They're not even in a church anymore. The laboring and striving part is the part we can't lose sight of.

This week I found just the perfect little illustration. It was actually sent to me in an email. I usually don't open forwards, but this is a good one. It wasn't really a forward; it was a friend of mine saying "Hey Ted, check this out; it's a post by Pastor Perry Noble out on the east coast." He gives 10 reasons why he believe leaders in the church flame out; why they stop laboring and striving in working with people and in ministry. If you don't mind, I want to read all 10 of them.

#1 – They feel like have something to prove...and so instead of becoming obsessed with God's greatness they become obsessed with their own.

#2 – They have a hard time accepting Gods grace...thus throwing themselves into an achievement based mentality. They think the more they accomplish the more God loves them – despite what is written in Ephesians 2:8-9

#3 – They feel like rest is sin...despite the LONGEST command in the 10 commandments being the one on rest! (Leaders...Isaiah 30:15...READ IT NOW!!!)

I love what Theologian Jim Gaffigan says on this one. He's a comedian. He says you never hear anybody bragging about rest. We always brag about how hard we work, but you never hear anybody show up late to a meeting and go "Well, I overslept, it was awesome." You never hear anybody show up to an afternoon meeting and say "Sorry I'm late, I was napping in my office." We don't value rest in our culture.

#4 – They do not trust the leaders around them...thus they feel like they need to do it all. (We were not called to do life and ministry alone!)

#5 – They are unwilling to ask for help...thinking that doing so is a sign of weakness, when in actuality it is a sign of strength!

#6 – They fear man way more than they fear God...thus becoming obsessed with "their" expectations rather than HIS! (SEE Proverbs 29:25)

#7 – An unwillingness to repent of sin...instead of doing so they become obsessed with pointing out the sins of others!

#8 – They do not allow their identity to be established in Christ but rather in how many people they having attending/giving to their church/ministry.

#9 – They refuse to care for their own family and begin to recite the ridiculously stupid phrase, "I take care of the church and God will take care of my family." Dude...the church is HIS bride, not yours!!!

#10 – They get consumed with fighting the wrong battles. Christian leaders fight over the most ridiculous things...and doing so ALWAYS drains the life out of them! We should fight for what Jesus fought for–period–and leave the rest alone.

As a church, that is our commitment. We labor and strive. Look at what Paul is going to tell Timothy in the next verse.

¹⁰ (and for this we labor and strive) that we have put our hope in the living God... We serve Jesus here at Woodland Hills Family Church. We believe that if you are alive, if you are among the living, Ecclesiastes 9:4 says you still have hope. If you are in here today, no matter what your struggle, no matter what you pain, you have hope because the God we serve is still alive and still performs miracles today.

He finishes Verse 10 by saying this and this is a complicated verse. Some have pointed to it as one of the most stressed out verses in all of 1 Timothy, but it's really quite easy to understand when you know what Paul is saying. He says **who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe**. Paul is not telling young Timothy here to begin preaching a Universalist gospel which says everybody ultimately will be saved. The scripture is very clear. Two places: heaven and hell.

This week I was watching a classic show called *Everybody Loves Raymond*. Raymond goes up to teach his daughter about sex because she's been asking questions. But she's not asking questions about sex, she's asking questions about why people exist, why God put us on the earth. She says this to him and it's a Universalist statement. "Dad, I know all people go to heaven; I just want to know why we are here right now." Raymond brought the wrong books into the room so he didn't have an answer. Here's what he came up with. "It's because of heavenly congestion, heaven is very packed and God has to leave people down here while he continues to build up there." That was Raymond's theology. Thank you, Raymond Barone.

You will hear that all people will go to heaven even in the church. This is not true. That is a false doctrine. It's a doctrine taught by demons. When the scripture says he is the savior of all men, it is pointing to the fact that not only is Jesus our creator, but he is also the sustainer of all life. If you are in here today and you are not a believer, he is your sustainer of life. You take a breath because Jesus allows you to. He has given you that breath, but it says **especially of those who believe**, speaking now to the believer, those who not only have life because of Christ, but now have a new life because of Christ. He says this is why we labor and strive, this is why we work.

We are going to get into the youthfulness part here in just a second. I've been told this a lot. It started all the way back in South Georgia. South Georgia was on the news this week. Did anybody see the gator attacks, the feeding frenzy? It was on CNN. They showed the gator attacks and then underneath it, it said Homerville, Georgia. I called my friend in Homerville, Georgia. I was so excited they were in Homerville, Georgia. They interviewed this redneck guy who... it was a phenomenon of two to three hundred years. This has nothing to do with the message, but it's a fun little story.

The news guy puts the microphone in this rednecks face. He got caught up with like three hundred gators in a feeding frenzy right around his little 14 foot aluminum boat. They are biting each other because the water is low, it happens about once every couple of hundred years. They are all around the boat. They go, "What did you do?" He goes, "We just eased on through them and kept on fishing." If you've ever been to Homerville, Georgia, you know exactly... that guy was spot on for South Georgia.

I remember serving in a church about 15 miles from the Okefenokee Swamp where this was filmed. If you go to YouTube... Some of you will be like that will be the best thing to get out of the message today: YouTube gator feeding frenzy. But I remember serving 50 miles from there. I was 22 and the pastor was 26. We were just ready to go. Do you know what all the old deacons would tell us? They would say "You guys need to settle down. You'll one day be like us and you'll understand things better. You'll be calm and realize that not everything is worth fighting for."

This is worth fighting for. That we serve a living God who is the savior of all men, sustains life, but especially those who believe. We continue to preach and proclaim this and until I die or Jesus returns, I should continue to labor and strive to that end. Ministry is hard, it will never let up, God will always be great and people will always be crazy. They will always be crazy and we continue to labor and strive in the midst of that.

What I want to do right now is to let the church know that because we believe in a living God, the sustainer of all life. What I want to do, in the middle of this message, is just take a time of prayer for people in our church who I know need it. Many of you know Rod who plays our keyboard up here faithfully. Three times a week now, Rob is going to dialysis because his kidneys are failing and Rod needs our prayers as a church. I see my friend Sandy back there. Raise your hand if you would, Sandy. He is fighting cancer. We need to pray for him.

Here's what I want to do right now. If you need prayer... we are going to cry out to our heavenly father, the living God, for help this morning and to heal. If you would like us to pray for you right now, in the middle of this message, please just stand up right where you are. As an entire church family, we are going to gather around you and we are going to pray this morning. You can just stand up. Or if you would like to stand up on behalf of a family member or a friend, we will do that as well. I don't know if Rod can hear me back there, but I'd love Rod to join me on stage if he's available. Sandy has been a great model and testimony to us and Kay, his wife, standing next to him. And pray for Rod. He may be back there getting ready for the next service.

I'd like to just ask, if our elders are standing close or near... I see Ted coming down. If I can just have a couple of people gather around some of these folks and encourage them and lay hands on them, we are going to pray.

Father, we are grateful today to be here. We call out to you as the creator and sustainer of all life. For this we labor and strive. As I look back at our friend Sandy who has been laboring and striving through this treatment, and has dozens more radiation treatments to go through, he is among the living and still has hope. For that we pray.

We pray for every person standing, whether they are representing a family or a friend or they themselves need physical healing, we call out to you as Jehovah Rapha, knowing you are the God who heals. You are the living God. There are many people gathered in Mosques and gathered in false religions all over the world today, praying out to dead gods who have no life and can do nothing for them. Today we cry out to you the living God, knowing you bring healing, you bring hope and for this we pray for all of our friends and all of our family standing.

We ask you to give the doctors wisdom as they perform the procedures, as they give the treatments. We pray that you would work in every cell and every bone and in every tissue and that you would provide the healing that many of them are crying out for today. May they begin personally to see this as a journey they are on to continue to grow closer to you. May they not be faint of heart and may they labor and strive because we serve the living God, the sustainer of all life. And it's in the name of Jesus that everyone in here agreed and said... Amen.

We put our hope in the living God, who is the savior, the sustainer of all men, especially those who believe. Some of you are visiting this church this morning, coming from another church, where you labored and strived and you are starting to feel the flameout; you're starting to feel the burnout. Let me encourage you. People aren't going to change. People are going to be ridiculous; they are going to be scattered; they are going to be irrational; they are going to be emotional; they are going to judge you falsely; they are going to accuse you. Guess what you are to do. You are to labor and strive. Don't quit; don't stop. Some of you are going to give up and you will one day stand before your living savior for the works you have done upon this earth. You are not going to be able to point to people and blame them. You're not going to point to people and say I quit on you; I quit on your bride, the church, because I didn't like the people.

Let me tell you that early on it's easy. Every relationship is easy early on. They get hard as you go through life. Every married person said Amen.

Let's move onto number 2. Here's what he is now going to get into: Verse 11. He is now going to tell young Timothy, who would be considered youth, this. ¹¹**Command and teach these things.** He is now telling him and reminding him of his authority. Timothy, it's not about your age, praise Jesus, it's about the authority that I left there with you when I removed myself from Ephesus. You have a position in the church, a place of authority, and you need to continue, no matter how crazy people get, no matter how wacked out the ministry gets, you have to labor and strive and continue to be authoritative.

I can testify to this as a young leader. When you do bring about authority, people get frustrated, they get mad and what do you want to do, especially when you are young? You want to back away. When I'm fifty and a few years from death, I'll probably be bolder. I know I've held back a lot this summer and in recent messages, but you've seen older guys be bolder. Younger guys tend to retreat because we get worried about people liking us. We get worried about budgets and buildings and having the \$10,000.00 to pay for the AC up there. I threw that in extra so you would know. We get nervous about it, so we retreat and Paul says no, Timothy, you are going to continue to work and you're going to continue to be in a position of authority.

I get the opportunity to go and be a sidekick to the Joe Whites and the Gary Smalleys as they travel around and speak and I get to speak. People always come up at the end of stuff and go "This was great; this was awesome. You know, we are looking for a pastor right now." I go, "You know what? You wouldn't like me; you really wouldn't. You like me right now because I'm not in a position of authority over you. I've been here last night and this morning. We've had fun together; we've laughed together, but I haven't told you what to do. I haven't asked you for any money. I haven't told you to give more. I haven't told you to start disciplining your kids. And then you've not seen me mad. I haven't been mad all weekend, but I get mad."

I get this all the time. I get it from pastors who are still there. I get it in the staff. You start to hear it in the staff and you start to hear it... "Well, our pastor..." Do you know what? Your pastor is in charge. Your elders are in charge and that's why you hate them. Truthfully, it is when somebody is in a position of authority...

Young leaders, let me help you with this. Age does not equal wisdom. Some of you are waiting to be old to get wisdom. Wisdom can come with old age, but we've met plenty of people in their senior years that have no wisdom. He's going to say that seniority has nothing to do with it in the church. Some of you young guns, which is what we are calling today's message, need to step up in leadership and begin leading and taking authority. We delegate authority around here all the time. We don't have committees so we don't have a group of people that meet for three hours to determine what one person should go and do. We don't do that here. We say here's the responsibility and with this responsibility, we give you authority and meager budget, now go do it.

Some of you are leaders in this church already. If you lead in any capacity, whether that is worship or leading up here or leading out in the children's area, or being a small group leader, a children's volunteer, or you run the Resource Center, whatever position you have in the church... If you are a leader right now, serving in ministry in this church, first, I want to say thank you for serving in this church.

If you can say honestly and wouldn't be afraid to raise your hand and say "I'm ready; I want to be in a position; I want to serve and move forward and serve people and labor and strive in ministry. I know that means a calling of leadership upon my life as well," would you raise your hand. You are going to notice that many of them are much younger. You need to know at this church, that is our job. You're not the next generation; you're the right now generation.

You don't have to wait until a certain age or do this thing called prolonged adolescence where you take a vacation before you decide to become an adult. One professor has actually come up with a new term because we've prolonged adolescence so long in our culture. There's a gap between childhood and adulthood that was invented in 1904 called adolescence. Well now that's grown so long, there is a new one. There is now a gap... They are like "Well we can't call it adolescence for 30 years." So instead of calling people to adulthood, we've created this gap between adolescence and adulthood and they are calling it youthhood. It's another period of time for you to find yourself.

Let me help you find yourself. Labor and strive. Serve people. We don't have to create a new ministry for you, we have plenty. If you want to get around crazy people, come and see us. We will plug you in. Don't come see us; come see Denise Bevins. That's what I should say, I'm sorry. I have to be really careful how I say that. We want to plug you in. Don't allow your age to stop you because that's the next verse.

¹²***Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young...*** Another translation puts it this way: Do not let anyone despise your youth. So if you are 35, you are still considered to be youth according to this text and it's been a problem in the church for I don't know how long. Old people despise young people. It started back in South Georgia. I forget this goes on podcast. It started back in South Georgia. I love that church back there, but I can remember the seniors (Like Ted shared in his story) coming up to me and going "I don't like the music."

One thing about this church here that's the same about that church in South Georgia is that we have multiple generations here. We have three and four generations in this church of one family. It was the

same thing in South Georgia. It was a much smaller church, about 250 people. I remember (I'll make up a name) Myrtle (there was five of them in the church so they will never figure it out if they are listening to the podcast). Myrtle comes up saying "I don't like the music; it's too loud; I can't even understand it and we just say the same words over and over and over again." I go, "It's for those senior moments when you can't remember that much. We make the music repetitious so you can just... I thought we just sang that." "We did, but that's the melody."

Now her grandson was in my youth group and he was 16 and on the front row, praising Jesus. I thought here's the problem with old people. If you're not careful, you will choose your traditions over your children. You'll choose your preferences over your children or your grandchildren. That's what she was doing. Her grandson was on the front, praising Jesus. "Have you thought about the alternative? He could not be on the front row and not praising Jesus."

Carson and Corynn tell me right now that they want to go into ministry. So we are challenging them and telling them "Let's do it." Carson has this big inflatable guitar that looks like something that Gene Simmons would have used with Kiss. He goes around the house... If Carson becomes a worship leader, I'll probably hate the music. I won't be able to stand it. But guess what I'm going to do. I'm going to get my ear plugs, like Pat Kershaw does every week, I'm going to put them in, I'm going to sit where she is sitting, maybe next to you, Pat, if you live like your mom did, into your nineties, and we are going to praise Jesus together with music we can't stand. Amen? That wasn't reverse psychology there, Pat. I was just trying to be direct and straight with what I was saying.

But yea, I'll probably hate it, but guess what I'm going to do? By the way, just so you know, because I've noticed that in the back the volume has been softer. It's because these two big woofers down here on the front, that we paid big dollars for a couple of years ago, have been broken and I guess they've been broken for six months and I said let's get them fixed. I don't know who in here broke them. We have our suspicions, but they are getting fixed this week so back in the back, you are going to feel it right there. We decided we are going to hand you a free Bible and a free set of ear plugs. Just give us your green card. Why? Have you thought about the alternative? Have you thought about it? Are you going to choose your preferences over the next generation? I've seen it in too many churches.

I've had the opportunity to transition two churches; one in Texas and one in Georgia. They brought me in and said "You're going to run youth because we have nobody that wants to do that. But you are our worship guy so here's what we need you to do. We need you to transition us from traditional to contemporary and we are officially calling you our sacrificial lamb because we hope they murder you and not us. You are just a stop along the way in seminary so we want you to go through this whole deal." I can't believe the number of people who resisted their young people taking the reigns of leadership in the church.

Paul tells Timothy to stay in his position of authority. He said "Don't let anybody look down on you because you are young." Really, young is relative. Have you ever thought about that? My father-in-law is 62. He is a greeter at Walmart. Many of you know him. He is young to most of the people who he lets use those motor carts there at the front door at Walmart. They are some of the meanest, nastiest people to walk planet earth. They've grown old and crusty.

The look at my 62 year old father-in-law and call him sonny. There is a rule at Walmart that you can't take the cart across the parking lot. Well the last time my father was in Bentonville, setting Walmart policy for the electric cart... He didn't set the policy! He's just enforcing it and these people, with some of the foulest mouths you can imagine, go out the door going nuts on him. I just told him "I would give them half dead batteries to take off into the Walmart with." I told him I wouldn't put up with that. He goes, "Well, I'd get fired." I would be okay with that. Let them die in aisle 16. I mean the carts; just so you know.

I remember the first time I heard a pastor say... Norma Smalley, are you all right. She doesn't look real happy sitting back there. Gary turned 70 this year and Gary, you don't act like an old man do you? He tells people all the time "I'm 70, but I feel... (cough, cough) 40." He was honest a couple of weeks ago. He goes, "Well, I have to be honest with you. I'm almost 70, but I feel today like I'm 85." That's one of the reasons I love that guy so much. Another one I love is Jim Sedlacek, and Bill Rogers. They are old, okay. They will tell you that. They are old, but they have the heart of a young person. It's so amazing to me when I sit there and listen to a 73 year old talk about what we can do to engage the youth more.

I want you to know that if you are young here today, the leadership of this church does not despise youth. We are ready for you to take it and run. One of the reasons we started the Paul/Timothy relationships back in May and with Men at the Cross and with meeting one on one... I get to meet now with Ryan, who is the bald headed guy in the Alabama group that was up here this week. We get to meet because our job, as old people... I'm only four years away from being old. It's our job to meet with the younger guys and not only do we not despise our youth, but we pass the church on to them. We hand it to them and say "Lead. Take the music. Get up there and let's do this."

People come in all the time and they meet me in the lobby and I talk to them. I don't tell them that I have any position here and they are nice and cordial. Then they go "What do you do here?" I go, "I'm the senior pastor." They go "Really? Seriously?" I go "We have two Teds. We have two pastors at this church; one old and one young." We function well together. Do you now why? It's because we will never be a church that allows generational issues to plague this church.

You think that's easy because we fashioned the church around our preferences. I'm getting older and older and honestly, when I talk to Ryan, much of my preferences... I'm a Stephen Curtis Chapman /Michael W. Smith, fan. These guys are beyond that and I'm sitting there defending our 80s music which was ordained by our all mighty Father in heaven. Today some of you heard the far end going Oh, oh, oh, and you were thinking, "What is he doing up there?" That's their generation and he's going to do a lot more of that. It's in a lot of songs these days, just trust me.

Now, young people, here is what he's going to say. We live it because we have to set a testimony. **...but set an example for the believers in speech...** meaning the way that you talk, Timothy, in life and in your behaviors. You have to model mature behaviors. He says in love, in the way you related to God, and the way you relate to other people. **...in life, in love, in faith and in purity.** He's talking there about sexual purity. There is the inside approach here, the outside approach here, but he's saying Timothy, you make sure that everything about your life is living the gospel of Jesus, our living God who is the savior of all men, especially those who believe. He says you live it.

Don't run around telling people... We are going to see this in the next chapter, after our Twolgnite Sunday. He says do not rebuke an older man harshly. So there are times he would have to rebuke an older man, but he says don't be harsh with it. There are times you are going to have authority over a person who may be older than you. You are to treat that person like a father and don't rebuke him harshly. But do you know what he says more than that. He says Timothy, you focus on you. You make sure your life is a model of the gospel of Jesus.

And don't worry about the believers in this church right now. Many of them are far more educated than you, Timothy. They've been on planet Earth longer than you've been a live. That's not the issue. The issue is that from a young age, we begin to take on the life and practices and teachings of Jesus. We build them into our lives and then he says this and this is the third point. Do not neglect this. ¹³**Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.** These are the duties of an elder. It's speaking here of a public worship service. To be reading the scriptures publicly, as we are doing this morning. Your translations may read "to be encouraging." He then says to teach, to explain the scriptures and what they mean and how the believers can apply this to their own life. He says to commit yourself to this.

¹⁴**Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.** Many of us today in the church would call this ordination. God is the only one who gives gifts. They are not given or passed on to another person by a human being. The elders come in and lay on hands. Through a prophetic message often times would be just the reciting of scripture, but they lay on hands. And do you know what the elders do when they lay their hands on young people? Gary Smalley talks about this in *The Blessing*. We do this at ordination. All we are doing is passing on a blessing to younger people, saying we believe in you. We understand and see what God has placed in you. Young person, it's time to step up, it's time to rise up and labor and strive.

Young people, it's our turn to take over the church in a healthy way and give some of our older seniors in this church some time off. Many of them are spending their days staying alive. We are going to see this in Chapter 5, but it's true. Jim has been in for testing. Sandy is going in for testing and treatment. Young people, these are some of the most faithful servants of our church.

I tell them all the time that they are letting their doctor's appointments get in the way of their ministry. As he went in for testing and what kind of treatments he would do, I told Jim that I get a say in that because we are going to keep him on as long as possible until this budget is balanced. But, young people, it's time to step up. It's time to let the elders and the older people in this church come around you, lay hands on you, and say we picture a special future for you. We see what God has placed in you.

Then the last part... and we could spend some time on this, but we don't have time to spend on it. This is the last point which would simply be to progress it. Don't quit and don't flame out. Let people see your progress. ¹⁵**Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.**

Young people, a lot of seniors, a lot of adults, and the older folks in our church are sitting around watching some of you make no progress. You claim to be a follower of Christ, you attend church, you may read your Bible, but as far as stepping up and laboring and striving, they are not seeing progress. Yet for many of you we see progress. That's one of the greatest things. The fuel for me to do ministry and labor and strive is that I serve a living God who is the sustainer and savior of all men, especially those who believe. That's the fuel for why I do what I do.

I have to be honest with you. There are times I want to flame out and this is one of the biggest reasons why. There have been plenty of times where Amy and I go home and go "Are we seeing progress in the church? Are we making a difference in the lives of people at Woodland Hills and what we are doing as a church?" We always come back to yes, and baptism is a huge part of that when we see people step into the pool, saying I've given my life to Jesus, I want to let the body know this, and I want to be baptized.

When we see a couple on the brink of divorce who goes to the National Institute of Marriage and their marriage is saved, there is nothing that fans the flame and pours fuel on the fire of what God is doing here than to see a couple who is done and then makes progress in their marriage. For some of you right now, your marriage is at a one, your dead. Listen, nothing would bring more joy to me than to see you go from a one to a two. You may be a long way from a ten, but progress is everything.

Young people, you have blown it in the purity area, you've blown it in the faith area, and you are hot and cold when it comes to your life in Christ. Let us begin to see your progress, start making steps forward. Get out of this mindset that Christianity is all about perfection. Our savior is perfect, we are not. Our righteousness is perfect because of him, not because of us. We are to make progress. We call this the big theological term of sanctification, working out our salvation, making progress in our faith and being somewhere next year that we aren't today, but moving forward in laboring and striving, not moving backward, giving up on the bride, giving up on the church and walking away all together.

¹⁶***Watch your life and doctrine closely.*** These are the two other places where churches get way out of whack. If churches die on the whole generational deal, old verses young... You see this in churches. Churches die because the old people will not give up their traditions for their children. I've been in them. We visit one in Minnesota regularly where there are 40 people in a church that wants the hundreds and hundreds. Those 40 people are going to sit there and literally die, and the church as well because they wanted to chose the traditions taught by men rather than their living God, the savior of all men, especially to those who believe. They chose their cotton pickin' traditions. Cursed be them, is what I say, for choosing their traditions over the faith they are to pass on to their children. I know many of them may not even be believers and they have attended church their whole live.

May this never be a church where we choose our traditions over our children... ever. May this church continue to thrive and make progress. Where churches get out of balance is when we pick life over doctrine. We've seen this. If you are a church... We've been accused of going to the life over doctrine angle where we are all about relationships and not as much about Bible. So you can become a shallow church. Or you can go to the other angle where it's all about doctrine and has nothing to do with relationships and become an arrogant church. We don't want either of the two extremes. We want to watch and balance our life and doctrine closely. We want to make sure that it's personal in our own

lives, that I'm not sitting around reading the Bible all week and coming home and loving on my kids half-heartedly because I'm just so enthralled with studying. No. It's about balancing, watching life and doctrine closely. It's that I don't just read and study on how to be a great husband, but that I practice it. It's that I don't just read or study on how to be a great dad and then tell you how to do it while I'm lousy at home with it.

Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. He's telling young Timothy to listen to this, apply it in your life, and you are going to save not only your own life, but as you are making progress in your life, the people will make progress as well. They will move forward in it. Paul said this in Galatians. Anybody who teaches the gospel other than the gospel of Jesus, may that person be a curse. May this church always be about the gospel of Jesus and not the traditions of men. May it not be about the preferences of men. May it always be about our living savior.

My challenge to you today is that first of all, you inspect your own heart and where you are with the living God. Right now you may have breath from him, but you don't believe. What I'm going to ask you to do is to bow your head where you are at. I know I've gone long, but I just want to give you the opportunity to become the part of that verse that says "especially for those who believe." I want to give you the opportunity to receive Jesus this morning.

You say you have flamed out. You grew up in church your whole life and never made it personal and never brought into your own life and you know that you need to start making progress. Your progress today begins by you becoming a follower of Jesus. We talked a lot about age and age has nothing to do with it. When we see a seventy year old step into the baptismal... I know what research and statistics say about young people and that the majority of decisions made for Christ are before a certain age, but if you are among the living, you still have hope and you can receive Jesus this morning. With every head bowed and every eye closed, I am just going to pray and you make this prayer personal if you want to receive Jesus this morning.

Father, thank you for making me and loving me. Thank you for sending Jesus who is the creator and sustainer of all men, but now I want to be "especially one that believes" and I want him to be my personal savior. Forgive me of my sins, cleanse my heart and I want to walk with you.

The scripture says that if you place your faith in Jesus, you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead; the scripture says you shall be saved. If you made that decision today, we would love to know about it. If you would fill out one of those green cards on your way out or we will have members of the prayer team that will be down front. You can come down and share with them. If you would like somebody to pray with you and encourage you, we would like you to come down as well. The band will close us out.