

“Fight the Good Fight”

I Timothy

Downtown & Lexington

July 5, 2020

This is a bittersweet moment for me today, this is my last sermon on staff as a church planting candidate here at Midtown. As many of you know, My wife, Lindsay and I moved to Charlotte, NC a few weeks ago to begin planting Citizens Church.

So, here’s a quick update on Citizens Church:

- We have two groups in the city, with about 25 folks between the two groups
- We are starting our in-person monthly worship gatherings on July 12 - will do this through the Fall
- We greatly appreciate all of your prayers.
- If you know anyone in Charlotte looking for a church or that need to know Jesus, send them our way.

This season of COVID-19 and stay at home orders and all of that makes all of life weird and different, but I think we felt that distinctly in the moving process. A lot of goodbyes we weren’t able to say in person, a lot of “last times” we weren’t able to have. **Including this.** It feels weird and strange to not get to preach this with people actually in the auditorium here at Blanding to fake laugh at my jokes. It’s sad.

But this is the reality of life, and I’m still excited that I get to say some final things to you today as we close out our series on the book of 1 Timothy.

To summarize this series: We’ve covered a lot of ground over the past twelve weeks. Throughout the whole series we’ve been asking the question - **“What does it mean for the church to be the church?”** 1 Timothy 3:15, how we started the whole series, Paul says he is writing these things so we “may know how one ought to behave in the household of God.” And so we’ve been wrestling with this question - how do we live as the people of God, as the church?

We’ve seen that being the church means:

- That we should defend and fight for the truth of the gospel
- That we should be a people of prayer
- That we should put off distractions and divisions and seek unity
- That God has given elders and deacons as a gift to the church to lead the church forward
- That we need to train for godliness because the lies of the devil will lead some astray
- That we are a family that helps those in need
- That we should honor those who lead us
- That we should trust in God and not in riches or wealth

And what we turn to this morning is Paul’s final thoughts for Timothy and this church in Ephesus in this letter. And so I thought it’d be fitting today to take some of Paul’s final thoughts to Timothy and this church here in 1 Timothy 6 and I want to share some of my own final thoughts for you all as well. Just some final parting encouragements and challenges I want to leave you with from 1 Timothy 6.

1 Timothy 6:11-12

But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

Paul here says much of what he already said in chapter 4. He calls Timothy, as a man of God, as a follower of Jesus, as someone who claims the name of Christ to not chase what everyone else around him wants to chase. He says flee from the love of wealth and from false teaching, and pursue what God calls you to pursue.

You see everyone flees something, and everyone pursues something. The question isn't "if", but "what". We are all running away from something and towards something else. Paul tells Timothy - everyone else in your life is going this way, you don't do it. Don't go that way. Flee. Run away. Everyone else is going in this direction but not you. You go this way.

To be a man or woman of God means you will begin to flee different things than you used to pursue, and pursue different things than you used to. You'll begin to run away from certain things and run towards other things.

The problem is that this does not come easy. Everything in and around you is set up for you to not flee from and pursue what you should flee from and pursue.

Just think about our culture for a second:

- Bible says to flee sexual immorality and pursue purity and holiness. Culture says to flee from any sort of restriction and pursue whatever makes you happy.
- Bible says to flee division and pursue unity, peace, reconciliation. Culture says to flee, or to cancel, or to cut off anyone who disagrees with you and pursue winning the culture war or the argument for your side.
- Bible says flee from your old ways of thinking and living and pursue a new heart and a new mind in Christ. Culture says to flee from those old oppressive fairy tales of Christianity and pursue open-mindedness and enlightenment.

And this is everywhere. You have access to an abundance of sin, or distraction, or secular worldviews and anti-Biblical or anti-God ideas, and a whole slew of addiction-creating-idols sitting right in your pocket or on the computer you're watching this on right now. **Everything in your life is set up to lull you asleep to the things of God, His working in the world around you, His working in your life.**

That's just the external influences:

- Not to mention your own **sin nature, "the flesh" as the Bible calls it**, that we said a few weeks ago means you don't default to godliness. You don't default to a heart and a life that wants to pursue Jesus.
- Not to mention your very real enemy - the **devil** who Scripture says hunts you like a lion. Who wants to devour you through deception and lies and deadly schemes.

And all of these things are calling you towards a false vision of the good life. The world, your flesh, the devil - all calling you to believe you should pursue things that go against how God has designed your life and your heart to work.

That's why Paul continues and says in verse 12 → **"Fight the good fight of faith."**

We said this in week 8 - the Christian life takes toiling and striving. If you want to follow Jesus, you might get a couple of scars. It's hard work. It's tough. It takes grit. It takes tenacity. It's a fight.

This imagery is used throughout the Scriptures to talk about the Christian life - it's a war, we're soldiers, it's a battle, it's dangerous. Paul says fight the good fight *of faith*. Fight for your faith.

- Fight to cling to Jesus. Fight to trust in Jesus.
- When everything in your life feels haywire, fight for faith.
- When everything in your life feels topsy turvy - fight for your faith.
- When you want to throw in the towel on that ever-pressing temptation - fight for your faith.

Cling to Jesus. You will flee something, you will pursue something. Fight the good fight of faith.

Author **Jerry Bridges** says it this way,

“So there is a sense in which we are growing in our character every day. The question is, in which direction are we growing? Are we growing towards godly character or ungodly character? Are we growing in love or selfishness, in harshness or patience, in greed or generosity, in honesty or dishonesty, in purity or impurity? Every day we are training ourselves in one direction or the other by the thoughts we think, the words we say, the actions we take, and the deeds we do.”

When all of the stay-at-home orders began back in March, myself like so many of us had these ideas of how I wanted to use this time. I wanted to come out on the other side more in love with Jesus, better connected to my family. My daughter was born right at the beginning of all of this. We were all at the gathering on Sunday, she was born on Tuesday, we left the hospital Thursday and we haven't had gatherings since.

And so I had strong desires for how I wanted to use this season. In some ways I got an extended partial paternity leave that still hasn't ended. And I wanted to use the forced times of being at home with my family to grow a particular way in holiness and godliness. I wanted to establish strong rhythms and routines with my family.

And I found myself asking the question a few days ago, taking stock of this season - **Did I actually do that?** Did I actually put into practice the rhythms/habits/routines that would grow me in godliness? And I took stock of the past 3 months and so much has happened in my life - sold a home, bought a home, moved, all of this - but I have this overwhelming sense that I've wasted this season. I'm not more in love with Jesus. I'm not living more righteously. I haven't pursued the things of God like I wanted to.

Righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness - that's the way of Jesus. That's the calling of an image-bearer of God. To fight for these things.

Between our time in college and then again this go-round, Lindsay and I have been in Columbia and at Midtown for 7 years. The majority of our adult lives have been spent at this church and in this city.

And I've gotten to see the fruit over time of folks who own the fight and folks who don't:

- I think about my college spring break group from the trip to Miami 7 years ago, back in 2013. Two guys in my group who this was really their first experience with church family, with what a

life pursuing Jesus would actually look like. And just seeing the Holy Spirit take hold of their lives and them get caught up in the most beautiful way of a life clinging to Jesus would look like. And now 7 years later their both in love with Jesus, leading, serving, living flourishing gospel-centered lives.

- I think about a woman who two years ago came back around Midtown, racked with shame and guilt and uncertainty about her life, who met Jesus there. And by the power of the Holy Spirit said - my life is gonna be about this. I'm giving my life away to see this gospel come to bear in other's lives. And now she's moving with us to Charlotte to see other people know and follow Jesus.
- I also have more stories than I wish I did about folks who have thrown in the towel on their godliness. Who have given up. Said it's too much. Too hard. Not fulfilling enough. Not worth it. Not satisfying. Not giving them what they need.

Will you own your fight? Your pastors can only do so much. Your Lifegroup Leader can only do so much. Your best Christian friend can only do so much. Will you own this pursuit for yourself? Will you chase down righteousness, will you fight the good fight? Will you chase down godliness and faith and love?

Will you stop pushing the blame onto everyone and everything else for who you are and who you're becoming and start owning and believing and living into the work of the Holy Spirit in your life that you should and can become more like Jesus tomorrow than you are today? Will you not give up?

There isn't enough fight in the church. Too much comfort. Too much apathy. Too much sleep-walking in our faith. Jesus is calling us to fight. To take hold. To cling.

I Timothy 6:12

Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Paul's urging is for Timothy to take hold of what is already true about him. When he talks about the "good confession in the presence of many witnesses", he's most likely referencing Timothy's baptism. A baptism that looks much like what we celebrate twice a year here at Midtown - someone going under the water and coming back up in front of the whole church as a means of publicly declaring - I have died with Christ to my old life and now I am raised to walk in newness of life with him.

This is what Timothy has done as well. Confessed that Jesus is Lord and King. And now Paul urges Timothy → this eternal life He's been called to, he's confessed, this Jesus he's trusted in for life everlasting - he's to cling to that. To take hold of. Grab it and not let go.

Timothy has already received eternal life through Jesus. This was true when Christ called him, but that wasn't and isn't the end of the story. It's one thing to say - "I have Christ. I know Christ. I have eternal life." **It's a whole other thing to actually live into that reality.**

And then I love the connection Paul makes for Timothy:

I Timothy 6:13

I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession

Paul says to Timothy that he can take hold of eternal life, based not just on his own confession, but on the confession of Jesus. On Jesus, who confessed to be the Messiah. Who didn't back down. Who didn't save himself or go after his own kingdom. But confessed to be the true king - Pilate himself had "Jesus, King of the Jews" written on the sign on Jesus' cross. This cross which Jesus willingly took on to purchase our redemption, our forgiveness, our eternal life - and Timothy's as well.

What an encouragement for us! As we fight the good fight as soldiers. As we pursue the good life. As we pursue eternal life - we have the one who went first. Who led the way. Who purchased our salvation.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, [Let us flee what we are supposed to flee] and let us run with endurance [let us pursue] the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

We fight, looking to Jesus.

I Timothy 6:14-15

To keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—

Jesus is coming again. He's going to do it. We can't talk about it enough. We can't remind each other of that fact enough. It's our hope. I mean if ever there was a time to remember that it's 2020 am I right? That there's a king, his name is Jesus, and he's going to come again.

This isn't the end. This isn't it. Take hold! Take hold of the eternal life offered freely to you by the blood of Jesus. Take hold of that which is truly life.

Throughout both 1 and 2 Timothy Paul urges both Timothy, his friend and disciple, as well as all of those who are a part of the church at Ephesus to fight the good fight. To toil and strive and pursue the things of God. To not grow weary but to hold fast, to labor till the end. To not fall away but to stay in the fight. To keep being the church regardless of what's going on around them. To pursue godliness.

And we know from church history that Timothy does this. He stays in the fight. He clings to the gospel and to Christ and ultimately is stoned to death because of his faith.

But we have another letter written to this church in Ephesus some 30 years later, and this is what we see:

Revelation 2:1-5

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Ephesians - you did all the right things. You toiled, you labored, you fought for godliness. You had patient endurance. You played the long game. You tested false teachers and fought to defend the truth. You hate evil works. You haven't grown weary in all of this.

But I have this against you....you've abandoned the love you had at first. You've forgotten who it's all about. You've forgotten Jesus. In the midst of all of the good you were fighting for and experiencing as a church, you forgot who the church is about.

It's all about Jesus. It's always been about Jesus, it always is about Jesus, and it always will be about Jesus.

That's why we do this. Any of this. Not so we can become better people. Not so we can feel good about ourselves. Not so we have something to do on Sunday mornings. Not so we can make some friends. Not so...whatever. Because of Jesus.

Because God the Son took on flesh, came to earth, lived a life that we could not - obeyed God's law perfectly, lived a sinless, spotless life - and yet died the death we and our sins deserved for us, on our behalf. Took the wrath of God meant for us. **Willingly.** Willingly took the cross, died - and yet didn't stay dead! Three days later got up out of the grave and is now risen and ruling and reigning FOREVER.

This Jesus. Look at what Paul says about Him in 1 Timothy 6:15:

I Timothy 6:15

-- he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

THIS IS WHO IT IS ALL ABOUT!

The church....is about Jesus.
Your life....is about Jesus.
Your LG....is about Jesus.
Your godliness....is about Jesus.
Our worship and our preachingis about Jesus.
Planting churches....is about Jesus.
Your family....is about Jesus.
Your friends....are about Jesus.
Your job, vocation, and career....is about Jesus.
Your kids....are about Jesus.
Your marriage....is about Jesus.

It's all about Him. All of it.

Why do we defend and fight for the truth? Jesus.
Why do we labor in prayer? Jesus.
Why do we put off distraction and division and seek unity? Jesus.
Why do we raise up elders, and deacons, and leaders and submit to their authority? Jesus.
Why do we train for godliness? Jesus.

Why do we live as a family that helps those in need? Jesus.
Why do we trust in God and not in money? Jesus.

JESUS. It's all about Him. All of it.

He's the blessed one. The one who deserves all the glory and honor and praise and worship we can give and then some times a thousand.

He's the only Sovereign. The one who is not surprised or caught off guard by 2020 or anything in this world or in your life.

He's the King of kings. Who isn't anxious about an election or who becomes president because he rules over the whole universe seated on His throne forever.

He's the Lord of lords. The one who won't share the throne of your heart with anyone or anything else because he's worthy of your whole devotion and love.

He's the immortal one. Who always was, always is, and always will be. Who does not change or shift or turn but is always the same forever.

He's the one who dwells in unapproachable light. And yet had made a way for us to approach His throne of grace with confidence.

To him be honor and dominion forever. In our lives. In our church. In our city. In our world.

My heart and my prayer is this:

- 5 years from now I can come back and preach and see all of the people that are here now still loving Jesus, clinging to Jesus, worshipping Jesus in unity and peace.
- That when I'm an hour and a half up I-77 that I'll get texts or phone calls or hear stories from afar about the beautiful ways that people are serving the city, confessing their sin, pursuing the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives and in each other's lives.
- That I'd get to come back for baptism gatherings and see group after group getting around the pool celebrating the work of Jesus because they gave their lives away to the mission of God to see their neighbors, coworkers, family, and friends come to know and follow Jesus.

On Easter of 2019 we had a baptism gathering. Big party like we do, you know. And in the weeks leading up to Easter, we had had some conversations with the pastors here where they had offered us to stay here in Columbia, continue working with the Groups Team, equipping and training up our group leaders and helping multiply groups throughout the Columbia area. And that was exciting to us. Getting to be at a church we love, doing a role I felt like I was a good fit for, the majority of my family is in the Columbia area. In a lot of ways it made sense.

But I remember being in that Easter gathering, standing over here on the right side of the auditorium in the back, and hearing a story from a woman who had become a Christian through one of our LifeGroups. And it was a beautiful story, the LifeGroup got up and got around the pool and they baptized her, we all cheered, it as awesome. And then the next video fired and it was her husband, and he starts talking about how his wife and his Lifegroup had been praying for him to trust Jesus for years. And he finally did. And the same LG stayed around the pool, and the wife who just got baptized 10 seconds earlier declaring Jesus as her Lord and Savior gets to turn around and baptize her husband.

Because a bunch of people were faithful, put their focus on Jesus, and clung to Him as they started this brand new little church, here's a couple by God's grace whose lives and stories and family are changed forever.

And I'm standing over in the corner and everyone is cheering and going crazy and I'm just weeping. I mean ugly crying, because I know what this means - that we have to go. That we have to go and start this church because people have to know and follow this King Jesus.

Will you hear me on this family? Don't take those stories for granted. Those stories don't just happen. But they come about when God blesses and honors and the Spirit moves because a small group of people committed their lives to Jesus and to each other and are willing to give it all away because they love Him and want others to love Him too.

I want to hear those stories in 5 years. I want to hear those stories in 10 years, 20 years, 30 years. Don't forget your first love. As a person, as a church.

Being Jesus-centered isn't a cool thing to say. It has to be everything. He's worth it.

Pray.