

GOD'S PROVISION FOR HIS CHURCH
1 TIMOTHY 4:11-16

In April of 2001, I received this email —

Greetings from California! This is Keith Palmer, Carla and Rich Boyd's son-in-law....

I heard through my in-laws that there may be an intern position opening up at your church this summer and thought I would write you to get some more information. Lisa and I have been praying a lot about what we will be doing this summer. We have a few possibilities but we both would like to immerse ourselves in ministry this summer....I am not sure what you are looking for in an intern, but I am interesting in working in a church and would like to talk with you more about it sometime.

We are excited to see what the Lord does in the next few months. Lisa and I look forward to coming out to visit this June....

In Christ,

Keith Palmer

Little did I know how the Lord would use that first email exchange from Keith in my own life, as well as in the life of our church body.

Keith did come to do an internship with us that summer. At that time, we were looking for an associate pastor and I told him when he arrived, "We are looking for an associate, but we need someone *now*; we can't wait for next summer [when Keith would graduate]..."

By the middle of the summer of his internship that changed. We saw that while Keith's training and spiritual gifts weren't a fit for the job description we had put together, *he was the right man*. And having the right man of godly character, we could wait and we could figure out what he would do in ministry.

And here we are 20 years later, with so many unexpected blessings that have come through his ministry to us and among us. None of us envisioned 20 years ago what the Lord has been gracious to do — and isn't that just the way the Lord works in all of our lives personally, and in the life of the church?

During the fellowship meal, we will offer some particular expressions of thankfulness to Keith for his ministry; during this hour, we look "past Keith," at the One who has saved him, equipped him, and used him in our lives. We look at God, and His Provision for His Church.

To do that let's look at Paul's first letter to Timothy, chapter four. As we read this passage, you might be tempted to think, "this isn't about God; this is about the pastor's responsibility." Yes, these verses contain 10 imperatives for the young pastor, Timothy.

But even while we see the responsibility of the pastor, we also see the provision of God in three ways:

- While these commands are Timothy's responsibility, we understand that whenever God gives a command, He also gives ability to fulfill that command. He does not leave us powerless to be obedient to Him (which is something we learned in Romans 8, particularly vv. 11, 31-32). [There is also an allusion to this reality in the middle of this passage.]
- In another letter to the same church, Paul says that "pastor" is not just a role someone fills in the church, but pastors and elders are God's gift to the church — they are one of the ways God cares for us so that we will be equipped to serve each other (Eph. 4:11-12).
- Additionally, Timothy had been given to the Ephesian church as a particular gift to that particular church (1 Tim. 1:2-3). *Timothy* was one of the instruments of God's grace to those believers.

So pastors and elders are a gift from God to us; in our context we can say that our elders (and deacons, and teachers, and all our other members) are a gift from God so that we can thrive spiritually.

As we make our way through this passage, we can use it in two ways: those who serve in capacities of leadership can be reminded of our calling and responsibility, and secondly, all of us can use it as a means of gratitude to God for His gracious provision of individuals and leaders for the care of our souls. He has given lavishly to us. He has not left us alone in our spiritual journey. We thank Him for His gifts.

GIVE THANKS FOR THE FAITHFUL SHEPHERDS GOD HAS PLACED IN OUR CHURCH.

While there are ten commands in these verses, we want to turn those commands into occasions for rejoicing and gratitude for all those whom the Lord has placed in spiritual authority in our lives. Here are five objects of thanksgiving for faithful shepherds.

1. Give Thanks for the **INSTRUCTION** of Faithful Shepherds (vv. 11, 13)
2. Give Thanks for the **EXAMPLE** of Faithful Shepherds (v. 12)
3. Give Thanks for the **SPIRITUAL GIFTS** of Faithful Shepherds (v. 14)
4. Give Thanks for the **FAITHFULNESS** of Faithful Shepherds (vv. 15-16)
5. Give Thanks for God's **PARTICULAR** Gift to Grace Bible Church

1. Give Thanks for the **INSTRUCTION** of Faithful Shepherds (vv. 11, 13)

- The first two imperatives for Timothy are in this verse: **prescribe and teach**. Similarly, he will say in v. 13 to **give attention to the public reading of Scripture**.

- ✓ To **prescribe** is to teach with authority — there is an exhortational component to preaching and teaching. We are not just informing minds, but we are transforming hearts, lives, and conduct.
- ✓ Both verbs in this verse are present tenses, which means there is an ongoing component — this is what we do repeatedly and habitually: we prescribe and teach. And this is now too uncommon:

“Preaching in our day is often intriguing, but seldom commanding; often entertaining, but seldom convicting; often popular, but seldom powerful; often interesting, but less often transforming. Paul does not ask Timothy to share or make suggestions to his congregation. Rather, he is to prescribe the truth to them.”
[MacArthur]

- ✓ In verse 11, the emphasis is on the teaching of the Teacher. *Is he teaching authoritatively?*
 - ✓ In verse 13, the emphasis is on the preparation of the Teacher. *Is he ready?*
 - **Give attention** doesn’t just mean, “read and teach the Bible in worship,” but it also includes the idea of preparation — “get ready in private before you teach in public.” It’s the hard work of study (“staying in the chair until it is finished,” MacArthur) and thinking about communication.
 - It’s also the preparation of his own heart — “Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.” (Ezra 7:10) One cannot genuinely teach what he has not implemented in his own life and heart. Preaching is about the transformation of the preacher before he attempt to help the body be transformed.
 - And there is accountability to this readiness — Paul tells Timothy to do these things **until I come** — Paul will return to Ephesus and this is Timothy’s responsibility until then.
 - ✓ Give thanks for the faithful spiritual shepherds the Lord has given us who are committed to this task — they teach with God’s authority, and they live what they teach. No facades.
- Specifically, Paul exhorts Timothy to teach **these things** (v. 11); he is likely referring to the things he has spoken of in vv. 5-10, particularly in **vv. 8, 10**.
 - ✓ The teacher is responsible to teach one thing — the authoritative Word of God. Our task anytime we preach, teach, disciple, or counsel is simple (*hard*, but simple): this is the inerrant Word of God; don’t mess it up. We have a responsibility to accurately represent God’s truth.
 - ✓ No one has the right to teach their own opinions (our own opinions are not authoritative).
 - ✓ Every teacher has the responsibility and privilege to teach the unerring Word of God. It alone is authoritative and powerful to transform lives.

- This book is the revelation of **the living God** and gives us all hope and salvation (v. 10).
 - This book is the means of godliness and transformation (6:3-4).
 - This book is uniquely authoritative (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
 - This book is our calling and command to teach (2 Tim. 4:1).
 - This book is our only message in any time (when it is “acceptable” and not; 2 Tim. 4:2-3).
 - This book contains the “healthy” doctrine that leads to “healthy” living (Titus 2:1ff).
- ✓ And thanks be to God, He has given us such a Word that is able to change us. He has given us the one effective tool to minister to people’s lives. He has given us the privilege of using it to care for souls (1 Tim. 1:5). And He has given us faithful servants who faithfully instruct from His Word.

2. Give Thanks for the **EXAMPLE** of Faithful Shepherds (v. 12)

- When Timothy was installed as pastor at Ephesus, he was evidently a young man — so the apostle says, **Let no one look down on your youthfulness**. Generally that term “youth” referred to someone under the age of 40, so we think Timothy might have been in his early 30s when this letter was written.
 - ✓ Paul inserts this because Timothy “had no long record to establish credibility...” [MacArthur] His teaching, ministry, and faithfulness had not yet been tested.
 - ✓ Twenty years ago this applied to Keith. I’m sorry, brother, but biblically you are now middle-aged, and this part of Paul’s command no longer directly applies. ☺ You are seasoned and mature.
- Timothy did have something he could do in the absence of gray hair and experience — he could prove to be an example. He could be someone worth emulating (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Pt. 5:3). Paul suggested five areas of his life where he should be particularly careful to live an exemplary life (not an exhaustive list):
 - ✓ His **speech** — not just when he teaches, but his daily conversation; are his words graciously true and kind (Eph. 4:25, 31-32)? Do they give grace according the need of the moment?
 - ✓ His **conduct** — what is he like in his daily affairs; how does he treat people when he has been sinned against; what is he like when he is alone; is he above reproach (3:2)?
 - ✓ His **love** — does He love God and God’s people (1:5)? One of the saddest condemnations of a pastor I read was of A.W. Tozer — after his death, his widowed wife remarried and someone asked her shortly afterwards about her new marriage. She said, “Aiden loved God; [my new husband] loves me.” There should be no such dichotomy. To love God is to love God’s people and live sacrificially for them — serving no matter the cost to us because we love Christ.
 - ✓ His **faith** — not just a reference to his trust of Christ for salvation, but his faithfulness & unwavering commitment to Christ. He doesn’t deviate away from Christ. He is trustworthy (1 Cor. 4:2).
 - ✓ His **purity** — he has a life of integrity in all things. He will do what is right.
- Aside from the command for the elder and leader to pursue these things, we should also rejoice that God enables us to do these things through the Spirit (Rom. 8:4). We really can please Him (2 Cor. 5:9).

3. Give Thanks for the SPIRITUAL GIFTS of Faithful Shepherds (v. 14)

- **Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you** — i.e., “you have a spiritual gift; use it for the care and strengthening of the church body” (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12).
 - ✓ There is an implied warning with this command — there is going to be a temptation to forget the spiritual gift (the divine enablement) and attempt to do things in one’s own power and wisdom (which will result in what man can do and not in what God can do).
 - ✓ There is always a temptation to abandon God’s plan and provision for living life and building the church. We will always neglect that gift to our own detriment and the detriment of the church.
 - ✓ Paul also reminds him of the source of the spiritual gift:
 - It is **within you** — while not stated specifically, the implication is, “you didn’t put it there.”
 - Instead it came by **prophetic utterance** — in the early church there was a prophetic revelation about the gifting of Timothy and that’s how he received the gift. It’s a reminder that the gift came from God; the source (like us) is not from Timothy, but from God (**1 Cor. 12:7, 11**).
 - This gift also came **with the laying on of hands by the presbytery** — that is, in a symbolic act, the elders placed their hands on Timothy and marked him out for this ministry responsibility. He did not have a right to act on his own; he needed to act in concert with the recognition from the church of God’s direction on his life and ministry.
 - ✓ This is a reminder to Timothy that he does not originate his spiritual gift; he is simply a steward of it and he needs to employ it as a faithful steward, living as if it really is a treasured gift. We might say, “I must use the gift God has given me! I must not waste it!”
- This is another reminder of the grace of God to give us as a church the exact giftedness we need to care for one another (**Eph. 4:11ff**). He does that generally, but He also does it particularly with individual churches. We have exactly the right gifts and right gifted people to care for one another. He has sovereignly provided through His distribution of gifts. We should give thanks for that provision.

4. Give Thanks for the FAITHFULNESS of Faithful Shepherds (vv. 15-16)

- There are a series of commands in these verses that relate to an elder’s private life: **take pains...be absorbed...pay close attention...persevere**.
 - ✓ He should work hard on his **teaching**, but he should take just as many pains (work just as hard) on his personal life and character.
 - ✓ The word **absorbed** is not actually in the Greek text; it says literally, “be *in* them” — we might say, “Get into it!” He should be consumed with his personal life as well as his ministry.
 - ✓ He should not only be an effective teacher and preacher, but he should also be an effective disciple of Jesus Christ so that **his progress is evident to all**.

- ✓ The idea is that he lives with such openness with the people that they see where he is being changed and transformed. He is still flawed (still has the flesh), but he is making progress.
- ✓ He is growing in grace, and that is not his evaluation, but the obvious evaluation from the church.
- The result of all these things is that it ***insures salvation both for yourself and for those who hear...***
 - ✓ He doesn't mean that his good conduct leads to or produces salvation. He does mean that because he perseveres, it gives evidence that he has been saved in a way that leads to final salvation. He does not have a false profession of faith (and too frequently there are false professors, **2 Tim. 4:10**).
 - ✓ He is also able to help others in a way that leads to their salvation — faithfully preaching and living the gospel of Christ and showing others how to do the same.
 - ✓ “There is no better proof that a ministry is authentic than its ability to persevere.” [Swindoll]
- When you have a faithful shepherd, give thanks to God because God has saved him and God is sanctifying him; it's evidence of God's fruit in that shepherd and through that shepherd. (And faithful shepherds have always been in short supply and they may be a sign of God's judgment against His people; cf. **Zech. 11:15-17**).
- Gratitude for God's faithful shepherds leads to one final source of gratitude...

5. Give Thanks for God's PARTICULAR Gift to Grace Bible Church

- There is *so much* reason for gratitude as we think about how God has provided for our church.
 - ✓ We have faithful home group leaders.
 - ✓ We have faithful counselors.
 - ✓ We have faithful disciplers (and I'm thrilled about the training program that's being developed)!
 - ✓ We have faithful SS and Children's Church teachers.
 - ✓ We have faithful deacons and servants in many areas of ministry.
 - ✓ We have faithful elders.
 - ✓ We have a faithful associate pastor.
- Perhaps as I was preaching, because this day we are recognizing Keith, you were thinking about how he measures up to the commands in these verses. I sure did as I was studying this week.
 - ✓ He is a faithful teacher. We hear it from him every Sunday morning and we see it at our conference, and we have been helped in the counseling room, and we are told by many others.
 - ✓ He is a faithful example. I'm unafraid to say, “Look at Keith and model your life after him.” You will not be led away from Christ if you follow Keith (1 Cor. 11:1).
 - ✓ He faithfully uses his spiritual gifts. And we have seen those gifts flourish and mature as well.
 - ✓ He is faithful to Christ. He is not the same as he was 20 years ago. He is *more* like Jesus Christ.

- Give thanks to God for all of the gifts of grace He has provided to lead us.
- This day, let us give particular thanks for the gift of grace that Keith Palmer is to us.

CONCLUSION: In August of 2002, we conducted a worship service in which we installed Keith Palmer as our associate pastor. As part of that service, I gave a charge to Keith as a pastor, and he responded with a personal affirmation and commitment. A few days ago, I found my manuscript for my charge, and I read through it.



In God’s providence, when I was exhorting him to be a faithful shepherd, I used an illustration of another faithful shepherd — one who would become particularly dear to Pastor Keith, **John Newton**. And the quotation I gave was not from Newton’s pen, but it was about Newton and his faithful service to a troubled parishioner of his, William Cowper. Newton and his pastoral and counseling care is the subject of Keith’s dissertation, and he examines in particular Newton’s care of Cowper. What Cowper wrote about Newton served as a good exhortation to Keith (and all pastors) 20 years ago, and serves as an appropriate affirmation of Keith and expression of

gratitude to God as we have been recipients of his ministry for 20 years —

“I knew you; knew you for the same shepherd who was sent to lead me out of the wilderness into the pasture where the Chief Shepherd feeds His flock, and felt my sentiments of affectionate friendship for you the same as ever.” [Piper, *Hidden Smile of God*, p. 111.]

The earthly-shepherd, following the direction of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, knows his sheep, is a friend in fellowship to the sheep, and through prayer and the Word of God, leads the sheep to the Guardian of their souls — the place where they will find the only rest for their souls.

My admonition to Keith 20 years ago was, “Be a Shepherd, Keith. Or rather, continue to be a shepherd, and grow in God’s grace so that you will become the best, godly shepherd that God has created you to be.” Thanks be to God, He has provided just such a shepherd for us, and thanks be to God that Keith has been faithful to that calling for 20 years.

BENEDICTION: **1 Thess. 5:23-24**