THE GOSPEL IN YOUR LIFE

The passage we come to today in 1Timothy 4:6-16 turns the gospel inward. To this point, especially if you read what Paul warns Timothy about in the first 5 verses (false teachers) which we looked at last week, it’s all been about being defensive and protective. Being on your guard. Fighting against what is wrong, and promoting what is true, and I know we all can slip into this where we are so vigilant against evil, and injustice and protecting ourselves, and reacting to everything we believe is so wrong, and stand on our platform for truth, that we forget the gospel as it relates to our own lives. I love the prayer by John Baily where he cries out, “God, May I not rest until I am like Jesus in all his fullness.” I realize in my own life that I can long for others to change, or come to Jesus, or for justice to happen in what I see as so evil, but in that prayer by Baily, and in what Paul writes today, there is the equal longing that this gospel would keep changing me and keep reminding me that I am a sinner who is forgiven, because that is what the gospel does. I remember in the first church I pastored in Texas back in the late 80’s, Elaine finally was brave enough to talk to me about a lady who was always griping about one thing after another; so Elaine said to me, you know what is wrong with “so and so” (obviously not her real name)? I said what? She cares so much about missions and lost people in Africa and China, but she doesn’t seem to like anyone here. And Elaine was right, and we caught ourselves falling into this tendency too, of being so driven by sharing the gospel we forgot our own need for it. So that is what I want to talk about today.

In v.6 you notice Paul does something rather subtle. He shifts the emphasis to Timothy. Don’t forget what he has just written in v.1-5 about fighting false teaching, which is causing people to depart from the faith, and teaching that is demonic in origin. But now he gives a key instruction to Timothy. First, “if you put these things before the brothers,” (and Paul is referring to Timothy’s elders from chapter three), to pass on to them this concern and responsibility and warning, “you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith (and here it is, the gospel turns inward) and of the good doctrine that you have followed.”

 So what I want to do this morning is take a break from how the gospel is about truth that needs to be promoted and defended and take some time to look how the gospel also shapes us and continues to speak to our sin. “6 If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. 7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; 8 for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. 9 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. 10 For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. 11 Command and teach these things. 12 Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. 13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. 14 Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. 15 Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. 16 Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

 I am really conscious in my own life of a huge imbalance with the gospel. And Paul knows that a pastor who forgets the gospel as it relates to his own life will be cold. The Preacher’s Commentary describes Paul’s purpose here this way: And so here he now exhorts Timothy—not to develop elaborate arguments disproving the false doctrines—but to a way of teaching and living which will point clearly to Jesus Himself. It’s really obvious this far into 1Timothy that Paul loves the gospel and so does Timothy. But it was all in danger of being way off balance, where you had a pastor and leaders and a congregation who could easily be calculated and cold in their mission, unless they allowed that same gospel to keep transforming their own lives. This gospel must work inward and when it does something happens to us. Look at v.11-12 and notice what the gospel does when this balance exists. “Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. That happens because of the gospel. That happens to people who have died to self, and now live as forgiven sinners. And also verse 15, “Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. 16 Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. (NIV watch your life and doctrine closely) Persist in this, (and get ready for this) for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” I want this balance but how does it happen? How does the gospel bring about this balance where it is equally and powerfully working in my life and speaking to my sin as I expect it to change others who I don’t like or I am angry at, or the lost, or at the injustice around me? Paul tells us in three very simple statements. It’s the balance of the gospel in our lives. First, he tells us to eat well in v.6. He really does. Then in v.7-8 he tells us to get lots of exercise. And then finally he tells us in 9-16 to relax and just serve. 1. Of course in v.6 Paul is not talking about physically eating, but of Timothy’s gospel intake. What you have in v.6 almost looks like a tension, and it can be if the wrong things exist in us. “If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Jesus, being trained (lit. nurtured) in the words of faith and of the good doctrine you have followed.” What is Paul saying? Timothy, you are only as good as the gospel in you. Timothy put these things before the brothers, but wait, before you do, Timothy what’s in your heart? Are you at end of v.6 following this doctrine? Doctrine of course is the summary of the gospel as it is given in God’s written word, the scriptures. Verse 12, are you setting before the believers an example in your speech, and in your conduct and the way you love, in your faith, in your purity? And how does this happen? How does this gospel that changes the world keep changing me? Well the answer is in that word training there in v.6 which actually means to be nourished, which most translations use. It has to do with your gospel intake. Allowing the gospel to continue speaking into your life and speaking to your sinfulness. That you are reminded of your need for forgiveness daily. If the gospel keeps reminding you that you are a forgiven sinner, you will be a certain kind of preacher. The best pastor is the one who knows he needs the gospel, too. One thing I’ve seen having done this for three years and it’s challenged me personally is this: the pastor who is resilient, whose call is not threatened under conflict or from the crucibles he faces is the one who is personally and deeply committed to continue feeding his own soul with the gospel. Who understands that this gospel he handles and promotes is something he desperately needs daily. Who gives out a lot, but realizes it’s only as good as what he is receiving from Jesus. Or as Dr. Ironsides puts it in his commentary about Timothy: no man can lift another person above his own level. So back to our verse, chapter 4:6 it’s exactly what Paul is needing to do. He’s urged Timothy to do so much, raising leaders to fight false teaching, but in a tender moment, Paul sees Timothy his son needs to be reminded of the gospel. So he says this, “If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained, nourished in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.” And later Paul appeals to Timothy’s early history here, vs. 14-15: 14 “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.”15 “Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. 16 Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.” Those phrases are amazing aren’t they. Practice, immerse, keep close watch. All a call for us as we give, give out, react, respond, protest, doing so out of a heart that has been shaped by the gospel of Jesus and continues to be shaped by that gospel. I love the commercial about some investment company where the potential client asks the investor a question that becomes awkward. He says, “Do you invest your own money in these stocks?” And of course the point is you would not choose an investment company who is not committed personally to those stocks. Great challenge for you. Make sure your next pastor invests himself in the gospel. If not, he will not bring you a lot. But how about you? How’s your gospel intake? Is there this drive that as you pursue doctrine, trained in the word of faith, and following good doctrine that the reason is so what comes from you has been the outcome of the gospel in your heart? Timothy, put these things before the brothers, but wait, before you do, Timothy, what’s in your heart? Does it drive you? There is nothing more wonderful than to observe a life that has been shaped by the gospel. Yes, they hate the sin in the world, yes, they are burdened for lost people, but wait, there it’s coming out of a heart that needs the gospel. So this balance starts by eating well, being spiritually nourished by the gospel. But Paul also tells Timothy to … 2. Get lots of exercise. Look at what he calls for in v.7-8 that leads to this gospel balance and it has to do with developing your spiritual muscles. Or strengthening yourself mainly in the areas that really matter. Paul connects us to those things that relate to the gospel, not petty things in life. v.7 “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; 8 for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” Godliness which we are training for there (you could say it’s our workout goal) is purity, holiness, piety. Literally seeking to be actually what Jesus rescued us to be. Living this imputed righteousness which has been freely and undeserved offered to us. Training in that. Paul is saying something like this to Timothy, Love it that you are working out Timothy. Great abs. But let’s talk about pumping some spiritual iron while we’re at it. Dr. Ironsides in his commentary has Paul saying this, “Timothy, do not neglect your soul as you care for your body.” The connection is somewhat weird between those two statements in v.7 having nothing to do with irreverent silly myths but rather train yourself for godliness. Think about our own tendencies. Pettiness can distract the gospel from us. How common and easy it is for us to put so much energy, attention, conversation, or reactions to things that are just plain silly or just unnecessary. Things that don’t really matter that much. Irreverent, silly myths Paul refers to there, in context were things being taught that people were following, and it was a distraction to the gospel. A huge distraction. They were meaningless stuff. He uses words like this in v.7-8 irreverent, silly myths and put them next to words like value, in v.8, or godliness which has value in every way and notice the impact that has on the now, v8. As it holds promise for the present life, but also the life to come. I love that. It tells us not to defer attention to godly things for the afterlife. It won’t happen. Paul follows an interesting and similar line of concern in 2 Tim. 2:14-19 and notice that tension we all live with between the mundane and the spiritual. 14”Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. 15Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. 16But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, 17and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. 19But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” Do you notice there how quarreling about words in v.14 and irreverent babble v.16 leads people into ungodliness, but worse v.18 it causes us to swerve from truth about the resurrection. Really Paul says be careful about dwelling on insignificant things that will distract us from the gospel but more specifically here, the gospel’s ongoing work on our spiritual growth and development. If you look back in 1 Timothy 4 it’s interesting how Paul tells us we have to work at this kind of eternal balance the gospel brings, like an athlete has to train. We have to work at this because it goes against our nature. Against our flesh. It’s not natural for us to be gospel-saturated. It’s not natural to wake up knowing we will spend another day as sinners who need the gospel. Just like if you let your body go physically, it will get sloppy. When I was twenty and into my thirties I could eat whatever I wanted and never exercise and I stayed at 155 pounds. Well eventually that had to change. Stop exercising and you lose muscle tone. Well, if that is true physically imagine what happens if you neglect your spiritual growth. Look again at what he writes, v.7 “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.” One translation says reject profane and old wives tales. Paul is directly referring to false teachings from back in v.2-3 but he’s referring to anything that takes away from the gospel. BTW That is normal. It’s what we do. We can focus on things that just don’t matter. But when the gospel drives your life, as I said in the beginning of this series there is an urgency. We realize we are in a battle and suddenly what matters to us is so much larger than little petty things. Like two soldiers in a fox hole with bullets whizzing by are not going to talk about baseball. They will talk about life and death, and surviving. Helping one another. The enemy. What they will do if they survive. Where will they go if they don’t survive. So notice Paul places this into a contrast. Having nothing to do with silly stuff, Rather train yourself for godliness; 8 for while bodily training is of some value (lit, profitable), godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. I love that. It holds promise for this present life and also for the life to come. Do you see it? Physical exercise helps now. Spiritual exercise helps now and forever! That is the gospel. Balanced. The Gospel is for here, now and for then, there. I am so driven by the gospel. It shapes the way I talk and walk and act and react here, but I know it’s also for the life to come, and I sense Paul’s point here is that when your attention is on the life to come, it will influence how you are here which is why he tells Tim this in v.12 “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” Sometimes Elaine and I will be in a conversation about something so petty, and you know too it can turn into a bit more than that sometimes. And often one of us will say, does this really matter? That’s the gospel. And we have to work at this, like an athlete in training. It’s not natural for us. We have to develop those muscles. I am drawn a lot to Col. 3:1-4 “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” I am also drawn to Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42 where Jesus finally says to Martha, 41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” Mary had developed a rhythm in life that was gospel driven. You see also that contrast between a disciple and a former prostitute in Mathew 26:6 “While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, 7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. 8 When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. 9 “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.” 10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. 12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” Look over your life, and what does it say about the gospel’s role in you? Do you know what’s exciting? You can develop this. It will take work. It will fight against your impulses. I love that phrase godliness is of value in every way, back in 1. Tim. 4:8- I think the application here is really simple and exciting. And it’s summed like this for us. Live mostly for those things that really matter, the gospel. Jesus. What he did. And when you do you will enjoy this life a lot more. It just works that way. Very quickly there is a final way to live with this balance of the gospel as it is also turned inward and shapes us. It begins with eating well. Then it requires getting lots of exercise and finally we are called here to just relax and serve well in v.9-12. 3. Just Relax and Serve. I love how Paul in v.10 connects our life of service completely and totally around the gospel of Jesus. For to this end (to what end…when you see statements like this just look what is said before - we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. Here’s what the gospel does to us. And when we are reminded of it every day, this happens more. When we realize it’s all been done for us, that we are sinners who are forgiven, and we remember that every day, it’s our intake, and it’s what we talk about and think about. Something happens where we are driven to just want to serve Jesus. And when Paul calls Timothy to toil and strive, it’s doing what we do in relationship to the gospel, because we have our hope set on the living God who is the savior of all people. How? Easy. Look what Paul tells Timothy and it’s so easy. “Let no one despise your youth but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” In that culture, age was a value. Young people were looked down on, and Timothy likely felt he had to prove himself. Paul said, no Timothy just live the gospel. Relax and serve. Timothy, just be nice, be respectful in your conduct, in love, in faith. In other words, don’t forget why this is all happening, and stay pure Timothy. Now that he’s got a grasp of his call, and he’s relaxed and just committed to serve, man he’s ready. “13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” And notice in v.14 Paul urges Timothy to remember who gave him this responsibility and the stuff to do it. “14 Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. 15 Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. 16 Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” In England, I had the privilege of seeing a husband of one of our members come to faith in Jesus. It happened like this. Golfing for hours. Months. Finally he was willing to be discipled. It was fascinating there. Most of those I discipled were not believers. But many came to faith through that discipling. I had the privilege of baptizing him and his whole family. Months later he came to me and said something that stung and woke me up to what we’ve been talking about today. He said,” Mitch ever since I came to Jesus you stopped spending time with me. I feel like I was just a project to you.” Ouch. He was right. That was the moment the gospel exposed ME and turned inward and I struggle still to need it. Or see that I need it. But I do. Desperately. Every day. Here’s what to work on this week 1. What does your life say about the gospel? Does it reflect the gospel? Now if you feel guilty that it doesn’t, relax. Jesus died so you can come to him for forgiveness and help. Ask him to keep working in you. It’s what the Holy Spirit does. i 2. Just trust that your intake of the gospel, through the reading and study of his Word, will make a difference. Do so in humility and need. 3. Look at how much your life is focused on petty things and include attention and conversations on things that really matter. Amen.