

## **A Full Proof Ministry**

### **II Timothy 4:1-8**

Leadership is not optional; it is essential. It is the one ingredient necessary for the success of any institution. But leaders are quickly becoming an endangered species in America. The crisis in America today is a crisis of leadership, and the crisis of leadership is a continuing crisis of character. Our country is becoming notorious for leaders who not only deny the letter of the law, but have utter disregard for even the spirit of the law. Sadly, we have placed too much hope in politics and social reforms, only to find out that we are being deprived of our most precious possession: our spiritual life. All the celebrated technological achievements of progress do not redeem the twenty-first century's moral poverty. We need a spiritual blaze. Now that forces a question: What kind of leader does it take to make a long lasting impact in an increasingly lawless society in which everything nailed down is now coming loose? Well thankfully, Paul, through the eyes of God, looked down through history to the time in which we are living and provides us with an answer. As he writes to his "son in the faith" he gives us the four characteristics of a faithful ministry in a faithless time. *And since every one of us is called to minister in some way, since every one of us will be a leader to someone else, we can receive comfort from Paul's words.*

#### **I. The Duties of Faithful Ministry - 4:1-2, 5**

*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:<sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching<sup>5</sup> As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

##### **1. Ever remember who is watching - 4:1**

We use our spiritual gifts and minister to others under the relentless all-knowing gaze of God the Father and God the Son. We have all been given a sacred charge to live out our lives and engage in our various ministries ever knowing that we serve Christ Jesus who is both our coming King and our coming Judge. He may appear at any moment. In

Paul's day, when the Emperor was due to visit (to appear) in any place, everything was put in perfect order. The streets were swept and decorated. The town was made immaculate. Paul says serve God, his church, and others in such a way that both you and your work will be ready when Christ appears in his second coming.

## **2. Expound the Scriptures patiently and carefully - 4:2, 5**

You are not to air your own opinions, but proclaim God's eternal and authoritative word of truth - the teachings of Scripture. Our responsibility is not just to hear God's word and to believe and obey what we hear; not just to guard it from every falsification; nor just to suffer for it and continue in it; but now to preach it to others. It is good news of salvation for sinners. We are to proclaim it like a herald in the marketplace - to lift up our voice without fear and boldly make it known. Further, we have no liberty to invent, update, or tone down the words of the Bible. But instead we are to carefully, with kindness and forbearance, intelligently instruct others from its pages. We expound the Scriptures...

### **1) Eagerly and urgently at all times and in all places.**

This sharing of verses and doctrines from the Scriptures will occur at times when it is convenient and at times when it is inconvenient. Paul says to "be ready" which means that we are to have an attitude of eagerness in sharing the Scriptures and to never lose our sense of urgency. We cannot share the wondrous truths of Scripture in a lackadaisical manner since we are handling matters of life and death. Whether it is the sinner's plight under the judgment of God or the extravagant love of salvation by believing through Christ's name or instructions in living a holy life, we must have an inner compulsion to get the truth out.

### **2) Correcting erroneous doctrines.**

The word here for "reprove" is the idea of convicting and convincing those who have fallen victim to false teaching in such a way that we correct or replace this false teaching with an adherence to sound teaching. Denying salvation by grace through faith, the deity of Christ, the inerrancy of the Scriptures, the exclusivity of Christ's person and

claims is serious business and must be corrected if one is to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

### **3) Rebuking sinful behaviors.**

As difficult as it may be, we must expose and rebuke sinful behaviors for the destruction that they bring both to the person committing the sin and to others around them. Sin is always a dead-end street! That will mean that we must talk about habitual arrogant attitudes, malicious gossip, sexual sin, unbridled anger, seething resentment, lying tongues...

### **4) Encouraging the fearful.**

Many are haunted by doubts and fears and need strong loving encouragement to tell themselves the truth instead of believing the lie. All of us have questions from time to time and fears that come from a misunderstanding of forgiveness, a second guessing of our salvation, a shrinking back in the face of opposition and persecution. This is when we need to be exhorted, to be strongly urged, to be lovingly comforted by sound teaching that will bring peace to our troubled minds.

### **5) Evangelizing the lost**

All of us in ministry from the pastor to the pew are called to do the work of evangelism. All of us will be given opportunities to explain the grace of God in our lives and the day when he forever changed our lives.

### **3. Exhibit self control - 4:5a**

As we engage in ministry we may begin to get a following, become well-liked, and be admired which can be downright intoxicating. Consequently, we need to have all of our faculties at full command, to remain coolheaded and clearheaded. We need to be wide-awake to the possibility that we too could be sucked into a prideful ministry which might lead to perverting the gospel.

### **4. Endure hardship - 4:5b**

And we must ever remember that we will endure hardship and suffering as a result of our desire to be faithful to the gospel. If our Lord suffered unspeakable suffering it only makes sense that his followers will also. The harder the times and the deafier the people, the clearer and more persuasive our proclamation of the gospel must be!

## **II. The Reasons for Faithful Ministry - 4:3, 4**

<sup>3</sup> *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,* <sup>4</sup> *and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

**1. People will not listen to the truth (sound doctrine).**

As you minister you will discover that people do not want to hear the truth. So often the truth is too hard for them, too revealing and too demanding. They cannot and will not tolerate it. This is certainly true today when we talk about abortion, chastity until marriage, gay marriage, other world religions, etc. Indeed the theme of our day is to tolerate everything but the truth. People are bored by, apathetic to, and downright annoyed by “sound doctrine.”

**2. People will search out and follow those who tell them what they want to hear.** This is what Paul means by “having itching ears.” Television and the media are focused on doing just that. Television and many video games provide for us a fantasy world for the kind of curiosity that looks for spicy bits of information, sitcoms that make fun of traditional values, and a world in which there are no absolutes and no limits. Our society exhibits a self worship which touts the individual as the ultimate authority as to who teaches them and what teaching is acceptable

**III. The Model for Faithful Ministry - 4:6-7**

<sup>6</sup> *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.* <sup>7</sup> *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

**1. He was ever ready when the time for his departure would come.** Paul tells Timothy that he is about to die. But Paul had lived his life in such a way, and was living his life in such a way that daily it was being poured out as a sacrifice to God. His life was ebbing away. Soon there would be nothing left. Just as a traveler leaves one country for another, just as a sailor loses his moorings, or as a soldier breaks camp, the time has come for Paul to depart from this life to enter heaven and be with his Lord. We too must live our lives and be ready at any moment to depart this world for the next knowing that we have done all that we can to serve others faithfully for the glory of God.

## **2. He had fought a good fight.**

He had put everything that he could into his ministry. Like a boxer in a boxing match, like a runner straining toward the goal, like a soldier in combat he had lived what he had preached, “Whatever you do, do it with all your might - indeed with His might!

## **3. He had finished his race.**

He has completed what God has called them to do and he now sees himself as crossing the finish line. His focus had not been so much on winning as on finishing.

## **4. He had kept the faith.**

But most importantly, he had run the race according to the rules. His ministry had been honorable and honest. Long-range commitment had replaced short range gratification. The gospel treasure that he had been entrusted with, he had guarded and protected.

## **IV. The Reward for Faithful Ministry - 4:8**

<sup>8</sup> *Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

Now nothing remains for him but the prize!

### **1. The righteous judge**

At the judgment seat of Christ he will receive a full reward. And he need not worry concerning the judge, for our judge cannot be bribed, sees everything clearly, and knows everything fully. The judge will only do what is right by him. He will receive a proper reward.

### **2. The righteous crown**

What is exciting is that as we minister for God we do so knowing that there are rewards for faithfulness. To all Christians who live their lives in such a way that demonstrates a longing for the Lord’s return, there is a crown of righteousness.

## **Conclusion**

It is absolutely exciting to realize that each one of us has been given a valuable ministry by God. By ministry I do not mean a job. A job is one you choose. Your ministry is one Christ chooses for you. Your job depends on your abilities, but a ministry depends on your availability to God. In a job you expect to receive, but in a ministry you expect to

give. A job well done will bring you self-esteem, but a ministry well done will bring honor to Jesus Christ. In a job you give something to get something, but in a ministry you return something that has already been given to you. A job well done will mean temporal remuneration, but a ministry well done will bring eternal reward.

Now service, which is what the term ministry means, is something everyone can do and can have an amazing impact. Take this story:

Brandon Cook was visiting his ailing grandmother in a New Hampshire hospital. Nearby was a Panera café. The following letter explains what happened and was posted by the family on the Panera Facebook page: My grandmother is passing soon with cancer. I visited her the other day and she was telling me about how she really wanted soup, but not hospital soup because she said it tasted awful; she went on about how she would really like some clam chowder from Panera. Unfortunately Panera only sells clam chowder on Friday. I called the manager, Sue, and told them the situation. I wasn't looking for anything special just a bowl of clam chowder. Without hesitation she said absolutely she would make her some clam chowder. When I went to pick it up they wound up giving me a box of cookies as well. It's not that big of a deal to most, but to my grandma it meant a lot. I really want to thank Sue and the rest of the staff from Panera in Nashua, NH just for making my grandmother happy. Thank you so much! Within days that short post received more than 800,000 likes. More importantly, more than 35,000 people took the time to write a brief Facebook message commending the bakery. The authors of the 2014 book *A World Gone Social* tell the story and write about the effects: The next quarter, Panera's same-store sales increased 28 per cent. The quarter after, same-store sales were up 34 per cent. Sure, there's no way of proving that this was all a direct result of the Facebook post, but the rapidly spreading goodwill generated by one person performing one moment of kindness, amplified nearly a million times over, certainly had a significant effect. **One more story:** Every Sunday Clive Jacobsen from Sydney, Australia boards a train with a leather duffel bag, finds a comfortable seat, and settles in for a four-hour journey. He's not on the train to look at the scenery out the window. Instead, Clive will unzip his duffel bag, get out a note- pad and a pen,

and start writing letters. The letters he writes will find their way to distant countries like Zambia, South Africa, and Thailand. Clive is writing to international prisoners. He writes to inmates because he was one once. Back in the mid-1960s, Clive spent a small amount of time in jail for a relatively minor offense, but he's never forgotten the sense of isolation and abandonment he felt while he was there. So it seemed only natural that when a letter-writing organization contacted him in 2002 about sending letters to inmates abroad, he seized the opportunity. The organization told him he could write to more than one inmate if he liked, so he decided to write to three. As his correspondence went on and he began to develop relationships—however distant—with these men, so he upped it to four, then 10, then 20, then 100. Now Clive Jacobsen maintains written correspondence with more than 550 prisoners abroad. Many of them live in countries with extreme poverty and no opportunities to get out of it; many of them, in a fit of desperation, did something criminal in an effort to take care of their kids or wives. Clive understands them, and his heart goes out to them. In his words, "They can't undo the crime they've done, but no one is beyond redemption."

Why not stop and think about being faithful daily in the ministry God has called you to do: however small or large, whether to infants, kids, teenagers, or adults, to those in church, those in prison, those in the neighborhood, the hospitals, the schools, or those without a place to call home. Indeed as an old Steve Green song prays, "May all who come behind us find us faithful!" God has given you personally a charge to live out the ministry to which he has called you. So go for it! A crown for the faithful awaits! Amen!