Title: Be an Example
Date: 11/1/26
Subject: being examples of the faith
Scripture: 1 Timothy 4

Our daughter Tiffani and the grandkids have been battling itchy, scratchy throats. She decided to use throat spray geared to boost immunity. She went around the dining room table, the kids opened their mouths and she'd give them a couple squirts. 31-month old Elijah was watching. He opened his mouth and waited for mom to spray. He didn't know what it was. He saw the example of his siblings and decided to follow their lead.

Our text from 1 Timothy is about the power of an example.

READ 1 Timothy 4.

Our study in 1 Timothy is a road trip on the truth highway. It opened with a warning about false teachers and the danger of wandering from faith. We saw the Niagara Falls of God's grace that rescues even the worst of sinners. A roadside alert beckoned us to hold on to faith and a clear conscience as some have wrecked their faith. We viewed the incredible bounty in the heartland as God desires all to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth. A hymn of truth is followed by a revisit to false teachers and their teachings as Paul doubles back to a place we've been before but not because it was pleasant.

1. Crazy doctrine town. 1-5

The later times are the times since Christ left earth, the times between his first and second coming. God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, reveals there will be false teachers and false teachings. It shouldn't be a surprise as Jesus encountered them as did the people of God in the OT and the apostle Paul. False teachers and false teachings are a fact of life because Satan uses them to try to counter God's truth.

The chief characteristic of false teachers is they abandon the faith, which is the body of teaching from and about Jesus Christ. Abandonment can mean they deliberately turn away from what they possessed, or they were merely in close proximity, never really possessing faith. They've been influenced by the demonic world. The teaching is deceptive and doctrinally in error.

They're hypocritical liars, actors delivering lines but not practicing what they teach. They may falsely claim to be Christian but aren't because they don't hold to the core beliefs of Christianity such as Jesus is fully God, he's the only way of salvation, the Bible is entirely God's Word. They have seared consciousness from sinning so much they no longer feel guilt or shame. Scar tissue prevents God's truth from having an effect. It's false sense of spirituality caters to the notion people can do things to earn God's love.

They focus on legalism – rules upon rules - and asceticism - austere treatment of minds and bodies. They forbid people to marry, not so people could live in any arrangement – free love. The idea was no marriages and abstinence from any physical relationship to be able to experience the totality of God's blessings. Some of this liberating attitude came through in the way women dressed to show independence from their husbands.

They also taught abstinence from certain foods. God says, "Not so fast." He created food. Food is good. Jesus pronounced all food clean, consecrating all food when he said it isn't what goes into a person that makes them unclean but what comes out of the heart (Mk 7:17-23). Food is to be received with thanksgiving.

Back in chapter 1, I told of a Texas church connected to a prominent candidate. There's more. It has a female minister who identifies as non-binary. She believes Christ didn't die to save people from sin. It was a political act. Rome hated him and viewed him as a threat. Jesus really doesn't matter to her as she doubts he ever existed. She doesn't need God and her church isn't a worshipping church. Sounds like the church is more of a social club. By the way, the senior pastor questions if Jesus rose from the dead or if there's an actual devil. He believes sin exists in the abstract and Christianity and Islam are equal pathways to truth.

My question: "If that's what you believe, why call yourself Christian and why have a church?"

2. How to approach false teaching. 6-8

Followers of Christ must be made aware of false teaching and deception. Some Christians are naive and think anyone who uses Jesus or God in a non-swearing way or goes to church is a real Christian. That's not the case. They may be nice people but have never come to the place where they put their personal trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. In addition, cults talk about God but have a totally different concept of who God is.

A second way to deal with false teaching is separation from it. Have nothing to do with it. It's "godless myths and old wives' tales" - superstitions. These people, and false teachers in general, base their conclusions by what they feel/think. They don't have any evidence from the Bible.

The third approach is to train to be godly. Timothy was brought up in the truth of the faith and good teaching. He'd followed it, received training, but needed to continue training. It's like military basic training. It's basic training, the initial stage. The need is for more and continual training to be better equipped. The same is true for Jesus followers. We need to continually train - learn and understand God's word and put it into practice.

Physical training has some value. Though Paul was familiar with runners, wrestlers, gymnasts - he wasn't thinking about athletes or going to the fitness center to work out. He had in mind the false teachers' austere requirements. They advocated exceptionally strict rules, rigorous self-discipline and self-denial to govern behavior. Their physical training was an attempt to gain spiritual ground. Paul admits there might be meager benefits, but it's not what their proponents think.

There's something that produces a greater impact – godliness. Pursuing right living and right relationship with God, following God rather than godless teachings, has value for the totality of life - spiritual, mental, emotional, social, psychological and physical. Every aspect of our lives is positively impacted by godliness. Its promise extends from the present life to the life to come.

The instruction is to train yourself to be godly. Repeated spiritual exercise. Exposure to and usage of the truth of the faith and the good teaching we have followed. Incorporate the truth into our lives by obeying it. The main tool we're to use in our spiritual training for godliness is God's word of truth (2 Tim 2:15).

3. The embodiment of truth 9/10

We come to the transition point that ties the two parts of the chapter together. It's another trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. There's a danger in not fully accepting what God says. We can become complacent, lack knowledge and wisdom, and allow false teachings to take root.

Paul uses more athletic words - labor and strive. Labor means to toil to the point of exhaustion, give maximum effort. Strive is agonizing, using all one's energy, determination. As athletes say, "leave it all on the field." Labor and strive after godliness. Desire to protect the precious good news, the gospel of truth from error and deceitful teaching. Desire to advance the good news of Jesus as the one and only Savior.

The Lord wants to provide hope for tomorrow and today. It's found in "the living God." He's the Savior of all. Salvation is available and potentially attainable by all but only realized by believers. It's universal in scope but limited in application. The Lord saves all who place their trust in him.

4. marching orders. 11 - 16

Command and teach these things. What things? The things about false teachers and how they're incredibly sneaky and deceptive. Warn Christians about the danger. Not just that. Proclaim the good news that comes through Jesus Christ. Give the instructions contained in the letter.

Be an example. Paul writes in other places (1 Cor 11:1, Phil 3:17, Titus 2:7) about the expectations of people watching and the need to follow examples of godly living. He asked people to follow his example as he followed the example of Jesus Christ and to note those who follow the example of Jesus. It's not "Hey there goes one, good for him." It's so we'd desire to follow their example to ultimately follow the example of Jesus.

This instruction begins with a focus on not allowing people to look down on because of age. Some versions say, "Don't let them despise." Don't give someone an opportunity because you act spiritually immature. The same is true for us no matter our age, whether a youth like Timothy - probably in mid-30s so you might not think of him as a youth - or we're a child, middle age or golden years. Don't give people a reason to look down on us, the ammo they need so they can shoot at us. People shouldn't find a legitimate reason to put down: "he calls himself a Christian and he does that? If she's a follower of Jesus, then I'm the _____ ."

Here's a weighty question to ponder: "If everybody had our relationship with God, our attitudes, our pursuit of God, our beliefs, our practices - the way we act, think and speak - what would Christianity look like?"

The command, instruction, challenge is to be an example, pattern, role model for believers. This can be an example **to** other believers to show how they're to live. It can also be an example **of** the believers to those who aren't to show them what one looks like. Give people something good to look at and talk about.

Five ways to set an example. The first is speech. God has plenty to say in the Bible about how we use the little flapper in our mouths. Do we use it to teach, comfort, edify or lie, slander, gripe? What do we talk about? Is it a good or bad or a mixture? Do we bless God and curse people? What kind of stories/jokes do we tell? Are they foul and shady in their meaning? Do we encourage and express care?

The second is life which includes our character, conduct, behavior. It's our actions and deeds Jesus said if we love him, we're to obey his commands. Two men were walking in a downtown area of a city. One of

them pointed to a passing stranger and said, "That man is a soldier." "How do you know seeing as he's wearing civilian clothes?" "I can always tell a soldier by the way he walks." What do people see by the way we walk?

The third area is love. It's about our relationships. This love is the highest form of love, God's love. It's not merely an impulse from feelings or an emotion. It's an act of the will.

We can learn from negative illustrations. Johnny was mischievous and always causing problems in Sunday school. The superintendent finally had his fill. He took Johnny to the door, "Leave and never enter these doors again." They never saw Johnny at church again. Years later the newspaper ran a picture of Johnny - just his feet. He'd been killed. The caption wondered where those feet had gone and what would have been different if someone had cared for Johnny. Johnny was the infamous gangster John Dillinger.

Next up is faith. It's trust, firm persuasion, conviction. It's what we know and believe about Jesus. It's also faithfulness which is putting faith into action.

Marion was treated for cancer before age 1. It returned at age 24. Surgery, radiation, chemo, medications, medications to combat effects of previous ones, kidney and liver malfunction, seizures. Then most of the bones on her right side were broken in a car accident. Her leg was amputated. It was months before she went home. Her goal was to show God's love. She explains, "God made me in his image. He gave me life…His gift of life and creativity are expressions of love for me and I must pass them on. That's why I have a passion for living. It's just that simple. I love to love - to the best of my ability. I have a strong sense of how sad God must be when something tragic happens...in spite of it all, he has given me laughter over things that are so pitiful and painful that they aren't really funny...Let's face it, it's hard work. But most of all, it's grace" (adapted from Kay Kuzma, Building Your Child's Character, 13-16).

The 5th is purity. It's to be uncontaminated and undefiled in the totality of our lives - attitudes, behavior, thoughts, desires, motives, feelings, speech, habits, choices. It doesn't mean we're perfect but are striving to be what God wants us to be. We don't want lives mixed with evil and impurities. Do we honor God with our actions, words and thoughts? When alone, do we wish we could do something we know is wrong?

Scripture is to take center stage in an area Paul stresses as being vitally important - the corporate meeting of believers. "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching." It's not a side job for the church. Preaching is proclaiming Scripture's message, making an appeal to moral sense. Teaching targets the mind and intellect. They combine as instruction of what the Bible says and a push to obey.

The instruction isn't only for the clergy. At one time the Bible was declared off limits to lay people. Only the clergy were qualified to interpret and understand it. Bad idea. Everyone is called upon to be students of God's word, individually and together. Key questions to ask when studying: what does this verse or passage say? What does it mean? What am I going to do about it - add to my knowledge, put it into practice?

The passage concludes by addressing the attitude and approach we're to take in our spiritual lives. They sound like coach speak. Be diligent. Give yourself wholly. Watch life and doctrine closely to make sure on the road. Persevere in doctrine and faithful living.

Two purposes. The 1st is so people can see your progress. It isn't to show off, impress other Christ followers. Each of us can and should know God's word better today than last year. Next year we should know it better than today. Opportunities for study and methods are available through the church, books and internet. It often comes down to time. We make time for lots of stuff. If we analyze our time usage, we probably don't need to spend so much time on some, but could use it to access God's Word. Financial advisors say time in the stock market leads to success. They've stolen a biblical principle: time in God's word leads to spiritual success.

The second is you'll save yourself and your hearers. Timothy was saved as he'd placed his trust in Jesus Christ, was dependent upon him for salvation. For him, many of his listeners and many of us, it isn't initial salvation but salvation in the sense of becoming more like Christ. There were others who needed to place their trust in Christ as Savior. There's also the idea of being saved as so won't wander off like the false teachers.

Lots of athletic terms and word pictures are used. Diligence, discipline, practice, perseverance, intensity, labor, strive. The purpose is to convey the need for continual spiritual training. Keep feeding on the truth of God's word. Build spiritual muscles and stamina.

People like to watch people. People like to watch Christians to see if what we say is supported by how we live. A suicidal man decided to make a last attempt to find a reason to live. He hired a private investigator to follow a prominent Christian to see if the man was real or fake, to see if there was any reason for hope. The PI trailed the man for a week, watching how he interacted with people, how he responded to situations. He reported the Christian was genuine. The suicidal man approached the Christian, "I want what you have."

Jean and I heard a 30 year forecast for Christianity (The Pine Tops Foundation on Family Life Today, 10/12/26). *"The next 30 years will represent the largest missions opportunity in the history of America. And here's the quote, "It's the largest and fastest numerical shift in religious affiliation in the history of this country. Even in the most optimistic scenarios, Christian affiliation in the United States shrinks dramatically. And in our base case, over one million youth, at least nominally in the church today will choose to leave each year for the next three decades. 35 million youth raised in families that call themselves Christians will say they are not by 2050."*

What are we as a church body going to do? What will be our effort, labor and diligence? What are you going to do so you don't become part of that statistic? What are you going to do to make sure others don't fall but stay true to the truth God has given us?

Milwaukee Brewers Manager Pat Murphy about his team (on MLB Network's MLB Tonight.): *"You have to have an uncommon mindset. Not common to the game. It's gotta be about team. You gotta care about your teammates. You really do. You don't have to like them. But you got to understand what it takes to play winning baseball. Stay relentless. Get off the floor when things don't go well. They decided they wanted to do that. They made a pact, 'Let's be the last man standing.'"* The close knit nature of the clubhouse is revealed in this comment from relief pitcher Aaron Ashby, "I'd die for any one of those guys."

This should be a lesson for the church of Jesus Christ.