



Text: 1 Timothy 6 11-16¹
Series: Living the Gospel
Title: Part 14 – Living the Gospel “against the flow”
Date: May 30, 2010
Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

This morning I want us to think about “living the Gospel against the flow.” I believe that that is the essence of Paul’s challenge to Timothy and God’s challenge to you and me.

I’m reading from Paul’s First Letter to Timothy, chapter six, verses eleven to sixteen. This is Paul’s message to Timothy and God’s Word for you and me today. Paul wrote...

¹¹ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. 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. 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, ¹⁴ to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which he will display at the proper time—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.

“But as for you, O man of God...” 1 Timothy 6:11

Two university students in Moorhead, Minnesota, painted a mural on the wall outside their dormitory room. According to USA Today, it showed a school of fish all swimming in the same direction except for a single fish heading the opposite way.

The one fish was intended to be the age-old symbol for Christ. Printed on the picture were the words, “Go against the flow.” University officials, arguing that the mural might offend non-Christians, ordered the students to paint over it.²

“But as for you ... go against the flow.”

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.

²Vernon C. Grounds, “Against the Flow,” Our Daily Bread, April 8, 1995, <http://odb.org/1995/04/08/against-the-flow-2/>



Last week I brought that little phrase, “But as for you...” to your attention and asked you to think this week about how it might apply to your life. This little phrase ... a phrase so simple it’s easy to pass over on the way to the rest of this passage ... this directive is reminiscent of something Jesus once said to his disciples.

One day two disciples privately asked Jesus to do something special for them. They had been thinking about what it meant to be significant in the eyes of God and they’d been looking taking their lesson from what people around them thought about significance. So they asked Jesus to give them positions of prominence and authority in his kingdom that would set them above and apart from other people. Jesus responded to their request by calling all the disciples together and giving them a lesson on what it meant to follow him. Jesus said to them...

“You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:42-45

“But it shall not be so among you ... go against the flow!”

Jesus calls us to live a life that follows a different standard ... we’re called to follow Him. And Jesus’ example will often take us in a direction that runs against the tide of life that others are following. If we’re going to be God’s people in this world we will need to make a daily declaration of the kind that Joshua made when he challenged the people of Israel...

“choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15

What does it mean for us to be God’s people in this day and age? **How do we “live the Gospel against the flow”?** What are the daily choices we are called to make as we follow Jesus?

First of all, Paul lays down a challenge for us which I believe to be one of the most monumental challenges we face in culture. If we want to live “live the Gospel against the flow,” we must....

Flee the love of money

That’s what Paul had in mind when he wrote to Timothy...



“But as for you, O man of God, flee these things.” 1 Timothy 6:11

The “these things” to which Paul referred are found in the previous verses, in verses 9 and 10. Paul has just been talking with Timothy about a group of people in his church who were following the flow of society and were abusing the Gospel. They were using the Gospel as a means of financial increase (v.5). These false teachers, Paul said, were...

“imagining that godliness is a means of gain.” 1 Timothy 6:5

They had fallen in love with money and they wanted lots of it. (v.9-10) Somehow these people had been able to twist the message of God’s grace into a sales pitch in which they sold the love of money right alongside the message about the love of Jesus Christ. But at what a price! Paul wrote...

“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” 1 Timothy 6:9-10

There has always been something about being a spiritual leader that has involved a temptation with money. Perhaps it’s because, as a spiritual leader, people come to trust you and so they listen to the financial advice you give them. It’s tempting to slip a little self-interest into the advice that’s given and sadly, in recent years, there have been a number of bogus investment schemes that have been sold by people by abusing the trust they find in church relationships. Unscrupulous people have literally traded on the trust that exists between believers in Christ to make themselves rich.

I still remember two phone calls I received years ago from a young man in a previous congregation I served. His first call was to tell me that another man in the church had invited him out for coffee. He was excited that someone in the church had reached out to him and he was looking forward to getting together with this other believer. The second call was very different in tone. He called to inform me that this man’s invitation to coffee had really been a set up for a sales pitch. I will never forget the disappointment that I heard in that young man’s voice. I had to go and speak with the offending brother and inform him that relationships in the church of Jesus Christ were not to be used for financial gain.

Money has a persistent way of worming itself into our lives and replacing spiritual priorities with financial interests. That’s why Jesus warned us...



“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” Matthew 6:24

That’s why Jesus warned us about the inherent danger of desiring to be rich when he said...

“Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” Matthew 19:23-24

Money itself can be used for God’s glory, but when our soul is gripped with a desire to be rich, we’re in trouble! There are preachers today who will tell that God wants you to want to be rich. But that’s not what the Word of God says. The Word of God says that desiring to be rich is a temptation. The Word of God says that desiring to be rich is a snare. The Word of God says that desiring to be rich will lead you to spiritual “ruin and destruction.” Here me: when we desire to be rich, we are out of God’s will!

I can tell you the story of a believing man who desired to be rich. He told me one day, “The Lord is going to receive a great tithe when I get my first million!” He never made it, and in the process he lost everything, including his family.

But I can tell you about another man. I was speaking this week with a man who because of his financial skill and God’s providence has known great wealth, but who never desired to be rich! He desired to be used of God and God chose, for a time, to use him in the financial world where he experienced great financial success. But then God took that all away – using a believer who desired to be rich -- and God is now using him in a totally different sphere. And he’s rejoicing in it because his life was never about being rich, it was about serving God wherever God put him! His life was about being rich in God, not in money. In two weeks you can hear all about what God is doing with his life now. The man I’m referring to is Mark Maxwell, the new president of Prairie Bible Institute.

We struggle with the love of money in our culture and the love of money is so insidious that we often don’t see it. David Livermore in his book, *Serving With Eyes Wide Open*, tells the story of a friend of his from Northern India who came to visit him in Chicago. They went out to eat one night and ran into a youth pastor with his youth group. The group had just returned from a mission trip to Central America and had met in the restaurant to talk about what they had learned on their mission trip.

“So what did you learn from your trip?” Ashish asked. Student after student obsessed about the poverty of “those poor people.” After they left, Ashish said [to Livermore], “Why do they think we’re so poor?”



"Ashish," [Livermore] retorted, "you are poor compared to any of those kids. It's hard to get their minds off their consumerist passions. I'm glad they experienced some dissonance."

"I'm sick of sympathy from Westerners who think we need more stuff," Ashish rebutted. "What does that have to do with our happiness? Please don't help import the consumerism idol into India."

He then told about the American group that was just with him in Delhi. "They were concerned about the bicycle I use to get back and forth to church. They told me they'd all chipped in to get me a car! That was the last thing I wanted. I think I 'rained on their parade,' as you say, when I told them that members in my church could use those same dollars to help start a micro-enterprise. They thought I was just being supersacrificial." (© 2010 PreachingToday.com David Livermore, Serving with Eyes Wide Open (Baker Books, 2006)

How can avoid the snare of the love of money? It's possible. We can have money and not "love" it, "desire" it, "crave" it. Mark's testimony is that it's possible. Let me tell you another story about someone who's found a way to "flee the love of money." Bryan Wilkerson has two friends involved in mission work in New York City. Their names are Charlie and Agnes. He wrote...

Charlie and Agnes are some of the meekest people I've ever known. Charlie is a bright, energetic, hard-working man who could have been successful at just about anything he set out to do. What he set out to do was mission work. He spent his entire career working with some of the lowliest people on earth—alcoholics on skid row. For many years he was director of Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago, and then in his retirement years he went to work for the McCauley Water Street Mission in New York. At a time in life when most people his age were playing golf or taking cruises, Charlie would commute every day to minister to homeless men on the streets of New York.

*You don't get rich doing mission work your whole life, but every once in a while, Charlie and his wife, Agnes, would get to do something special. One year they invited me and my wife, Karen, to join them for a night on the town. Someone had given them tickets to hear Handel's Messiah at Carnegie Hall—velvet-covered seats in a private booth. It was a great night, and we all enjoyed it. As they drove us home that night, Karen and I were sitting in the back seat, and I was admiring Charlie and Agnes. They were all dressed up for their big night out. She was sitting close to him, like they were high school sweethearts. They struck me in that moment as two of the happiest people on earth. Just then I noticed a little plaque they had stuck to the dashboard of their old Chevy. It explained everything: **"God always gives what's best to those who leave the choice to him."***



Charlie and Agnes had long ago given up striving, fretting, and demanding things from God and from life. Instead they had surrendered to God their talents, their careers, their safety, their material needs, and even their retirement. Instead of chasing the abundant life, they waited for God to bring it to them. (© 2010 PreachingToday.com Bryan Wilkerson, in his sermon "In God We Trust (Though We'd Rather Pay Cash)

Paul's habit was to always balance a negative command with a positive challenge. Whenever he tells us to "put off" something, he follows it up by telling us to "put on" something. (cf. Eph 4:22-24) And so after telling us to "flee" the love of money, he tells us **secondly** that if we want to "live the Gospel against the flow" we must...

Pursue Jesus

He uses quite a few more descriptive terms but that's the essence of what he means when he says...

**"Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness."
1 Timothy 6:11**

Who else is all that but Jesus? He's telling Timothy, "Live Jesus! Make it your goal to be like Him."

Righteousness is acting in complete accord with God's revealed will in all our relationships with people and who else but Jesus lived that to completion? In fact, Paul tells us that the quality of righteousness is something that Jesus accomplishes in our lives. Paul prayed that the lives of the believers in the city of Philippi might be...

"filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." Philippians 1:11

Godliness is acting in complete accord with God's revealed will in our relationship with God and who else but Jesus lived that to its full? Paul calls Jesus...

"the mystery of godliness" 1 Timothy 3:16

Faith in God and **love** for people are two of Paul's favourite word pairs. **"Steadfastness"** is the patient endurance of the hard challenges of life and it is intimately connected with hope. Paul encouraged the believers in Thessalonica by telling them that he constantly thanked God in his prayers for their...

"work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thessalonica 1:3



Faith, love and hope are Paul's summary of the Christian life in Jesus.

And finally, there is no greater example of the quality of **gentleness** than Jesus. Jesus said...

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Matthew 11:28-29

Notice with me that every quality in Paul's list is “other” directed, either towards God or other people. It's the complete opposite of those who want to be rich and have lost their spiritual bearings in greed and self-interest. When we make it our goal to pursue living like Jesus we're going to find ourselves drawn to a quality of life that demonstrates, as Jesus said, that “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35)

I was listening this week to the radio and I heard a Christian comedian tell a story of something that happened to her while she was on the road. She was doing her show in community after community when she got sick and had to see a doctor so she went to a drop-in clinic in the community where she was performing. The waiting room was packed with people and just after she took her number, a nurse came out from the treatment rooms and announced, “Number 7!” She looked at her number: number 40!

So she sat down and prepared for the wait. She felt really terrible and to make matters worse, there was a young boy who was running and yelling through the waiting room. All she could do was curl up and try to get her mind off how sick she felt by reading her Bible.

Time passed. The nurse came out and called out, “Number 34!” The young boy who had been running and yelling stopped, pulled out his number and said, “Yippee, I win!” and then proceeded to run around doing the “nanananaboo” routine, telling everyone else that he had won and they hadn't ... until he got in front of this woman reading her Bible.

He stopped. “Are you a Christian?” he asked. “Yes,” she said, “I am.” “So am I!” he yelled. “Great,” she thought, “now I have to share heaven with this kid!”

“You sure look sick!” he said. “I'm not very sick. I only have a sore throat.” “Yeah,” she thought to herself, “from all the yelling you've been doing!”

The boy was silent for a moment. “You're sicker than I am. Why don't you take my number. We're Christians and we're supposed to be nice to each other.”

That little boy was right. We're supposed to pursue Jesus. We're supposed to “be nice” to one another. As the Apostle Peter put it...



“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 1:5-8

Thirdly, if we’re going to “live the gospel against the flow” we must...

“Fight” for the Gospel

“Fight the good fight of the faith.” 1 Timothy 6:12

As I mentioned last week, this verse could be translated as “run the good race of the faith.”³ But in Paul’s mind, “fighting the good fight” and “running the good race” mean essentially the same thing. That’s why he could write to Timothy...

**“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”
2 Timothy 4:7**

D.L. Moody was a great evangelist in the nineteenth century. He wrote...

When I was converted, I made this mistake: I thought the battle was already mine, the victory already won, the crown already in my grasp. I thought the old things had passed away, that all things had become new, and that my old corrupt nature, the old life, was gone. But I found out, after serving Christ for a few months, that conversion was only like enlisting in the army--that there was a battle on hand. (© 2010 PreachingToday.com D. L. Moody, *Leadership*, Vol. 3, no. 3.)

It’s a fight because there is an enemy to face. As Paul preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ he found he was...

“afflicted at every turn -- fighting without and fear within.” 2 Corinthians 7:5

There is an enemy of the faith who does not want the message about Jesus to be heard by those who need it. (cf Eph 6:12) He uses people to fight against us on the outside and he uses our own fear to battle us from the inside.

Evangelism Explosion was a very popular method of sharing the Gospel for many years and its still in use today in many places. One of the key aspects of

³ John R.W. Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 156.



this method is home visitation as a follow up to people who visit the church on Sunday. The basic procedure was that when a person filled in a Visitor Card during the Sunday service someone would call them on Monday night to see if they would be willing to receive a visit from the Evangelism Explosion team on Thursday evening. The team would be made up of two people, a trainer and a trainee, who would then share the Gospel with whoever was willing to have a visit from them.

The woman who trained us, Dr Jeva Lougheed, regularly reminded us as we went through the training and then through the visits that Thursday would probably be the worst day of our week. She warned us that things would happen during the day that would discourage us from coming in the evening. She warned us that we might feel physically sick and not feel up to the visits. And she was right. But she encouraged us to “fight the good fight” and “run the good race” and not let those things deter us from sharing the Gospel. And when we did, when we persevered and pressed through, people heard the Gospel and believed in Jesus Christ.

We’re in a relentless battle for the souls of men and women. We’re in a marathon race to God’s eternal kingdom. It’s a good fight and a good race because it’s for the Gospel of Jesus Christ! But every step of the way it’s a race that’s run against the wind; it’s a battle that’s fought uphill for every foot of territory.

Billy Sunday was an evangelist in the early twentieth century. In fact, he was the “Billy Graham” of the first two decades of the century. He’d been a professional baseball player before coming to faith in Christ and his preaching was homespun, it was passionate and full of simple, direct talk about faith. Billy Sunday knew what it was to “fight the good fight of the faith” all the way to the end. He once said...

"Listen, I'm against sin. I'll kick it as long as I've got a foot. I'll fight it as long as I've got a fist. I'll butt it as long as I've got a head. And I'll bite it as long as I've got a tooth, and when I'm old, fistless, footless and toothless, I'll gum it till I go home to glory and it goes home to perdition." (© 2010 PreachingToday.com)

We need some of that relentless passion in our “good fight of the faith” because that’s the kind of fight we’re in.

Finally, if we’re going to “live the gospel against the flow” we must...

Take hold of hope

Paul wrote...



“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.” 1 Timothy 6:12

I think what’s in view here is the day that Timothy was baptized, the day that he publicly professed his faith in Jesus Christ. There is a debate among Bible scholars as to whether it’s the day of Timothy’s ordination to Gospel ministry or the day of his baptism and I lean toward the baptism side of the argument. The fact that “eternal life” is in view, the fact that Paul speaks of Timothy being “called” by God to eternal life and the fact that “many witnesses” were present when Timothy made his “good confession” push me in the direction of baptism rather than ordination.

But the really important question about this passage is about what Paul means when he says, “Take hold of the eternal life to which were called...” The gift of eternal life is something we receive from God the moment we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. The simple Gospel is that...

“God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

Jesus said...

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” John 5:24

The moment we trust in Jesus as our Saviour from God’s punishment for our sin we receive eternal life. So what does Paul mean by challenging Timothy to “take hold” of something he already possesses?

Remember that we’re in a battle. Remember that we’re living against the flow of the world. It might help us understand what Paul is getting at if we realize that the expression, “take hold of” means to seize or arrest. It means to forcibly possess. It means to lock it down. There is intensity in the grip.

Best-selling author Annie Dillard heard of a man who, after shooting an eagle from the sky, examined it and found the dry skull of a weasel fixed by the jaws to the bird’s throat. Evidently when the eagle pounced on the weasel, the animal bit onto the bird with determination. Though torn and eviscerated, the weasel refused to let go and became an airborne skull. Dillard reflects:

I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you.... Seize it and let it seize you up aloft even till your eyes burn out and drop; let your musky flesh fall off in shreds, and let your very bones unhinge and scatter, loosened



over fields, over fields and woods, lightly, thoughtless, from any height at all, from as high as eagles.^{8 4}

There will be days when we will need to grab hold of our faith and hold on for all we are worth because the tide of the world is running against us and the evil one, the enemy of our souls who is the prince of this world, is trying to rip our faith from our grip. There will be days, brothers and sisters, when everything around us says that our faith in God's promise of eternal life is ridiculous, foolish and stupid.

The case of the murder of Emily Stauffer two years ago in Edson, AB, has wound its way through the court and her murderer was recently convicted of his crime. I remember the shock of the news of her death and I also remember the strength of her father's words just after her murder. Emily's father is Pastor Terry Stauffer, the pastor of Edson Baptist Church, and in the hours just after the murder he issued a press release in which he said...

*"Please pray for us, for our church family who are meeting without us right now, and for family that is travelling ... We are realizing from the inside the value of good Gospel theology right now... We are mourning the death of our daughter, but we are comforted by knowing she is with our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ."*⁵

Brothers and sisters, that is what it means to "take hold of ... eternal life." Terry and his family were grabbing hold of the promise of God and that's what you and I need to do when life tries to rip our faith from our grasp. Steve & Andrea Hawiuk are taking hold of that hope this week. Every believer who has ever faced the death of a loved one or the death of a dream takes hold of that hope. We take hold of the hope that this life is not all that there is ... God has something waiting for us in eternity that is, as Paul described it in such beautifully compressed language,

"far better." Philippians 1:23

"But as for you, O man and woman of God, go against the flow!"

- ❖ Flee the love of money – leave the choice of how God blesses you to Him.
- ❖ Pursue Jesus – fill your life with the One who truly is your greatest treasure.
- ❖ Fight the good fight – all the way home to glory!

⁸ Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), pp. 12, 16.

⁴R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus : To Guard the Deposit.*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000), 154.

⁵ "Town mourns pastor's child," *The Edmonton Journal*, September 29, 2008



- ❖ Take hold of hope – because God has something waiting that is “far better” than we can imagine!

- ❖ **Invitation to the Lord’s Table (Mark 14:22-25)**
- ❖ **Songs of Communion:**
 - *Communion* (Mac Powell)
 - *Alas, And Did My Saviour Bleed* (Kauflin)
- ❖ **The Lord’s Table**
- ❖ **Benediction**