

**1 Timothy 4:11-15;
2:1,2**

**Instructions to Timothy
Fight, Keep Fighting, Finish!**

The Essential Contribution of Progress!



The church at large needs people leading the way. In following Christ, a few within any given congregation are going to be more devoted to Christ than the rest! These people are examples to the rest of us. They love the scriptures and are reading them consistently - usually daily - and usually with a plan to read through the entire Bible in a year or two - and then do it again, and again. They are in a midweek Bible study - maybe more than one. They pray about just about everything. They love Jesus, and care about people - in the church and outside the church. They find some capacity in the church to serve/get involved. They grow to be more like Jesus at an accelerated pace! Their marriages benefit from this fast-pace progress, their children benefit, AND,.. the entire church benefits from their devotion to Christ and from their hunger to serve Him whenever the opportunity arises! When there is someone in our midst like this, everyone else is saying, consciously or unconsciously in their own heads, *“Wow! Look at that! Well, I guess Christ is alive and working in people and this is what it looks like, and its really wonderful!* We also think to ourselves, *“I need to be more like **them** in my walk with Christ”!* **[Matthew 5:16]**



*When I was a teen, I would attend a week of Bible camp every summer. There were always camp counselors and workers there who were very devoted to Christ - very passionate - and they were just amazing young people - mostly on summer break from college! You couldn't help but love their personalities - so caring, kind, fun and funny. They made following Jesus look very, very attractive to me. Now, understand that I had some long-time Christian leaders in my home church who I knew I did not want to be like - by-en-large, long-faced, dour people, who didn't really seem to like anyone. They seemed to function as church watchdogs, making sure that no one got too far out of line, doctrinally or behaviorally. This was only a youthful impression, although looking back, I don't think I was too far off. As a youth, I might have had the erroneous impression that following Christ was a rather severe, unappealing proposition. But those Christians at camp proved differently! They made following Jesus look like the best of all worlds! It looked like a very hopeful ideology, a sweet lifestyle, a beautiful sense of purpose, and a wonderful relationship with Jesus - all put forward by top notch people!

Those people radiated “progress”. They were such cool people, but it was the fact that they made **Jesus** attractive that made them such appealing role models. They weren’t purposefully trying to present an image. It was more like they couldn’t help it!

Any time someone is progressing in their faith to become more like Jesus, it cannot be hidden. Jesus said that his followers were “**a city on a hill**”.

You really can SEE a city on a hill! Most cities are on flat ground. You see taller buildings in the distance, but you cannot see much of the city at all!

*30 years ago, we lived in Marathon City, about 15 minutes west of Wausau.

But when you drive by the city, (located on the south side of Hwy 29), you cannot help but notice that the city is built on the side of a big hill. It is

actually a river valley, and the city is built into the other side of the valley.

From the highway, you can see most of Main Street running up the middle of

the town, and you can see the big Saint Mary’s Catholic church that dominates the center of the city, and you see the gridwork of neighborhoods. You simply can’t miss it as you drive by on Hwy 29 – from at least a mile away! By day it is all laid out before your eyes and by night it is all lit up on the side of that hill. It is quite striking!



Christ-followers are to be that eye-catching “**city on a hill**” - day and night! If there is any possibility of this, there must be continued progress! It is the way we were re-created – a part of our spiritual DNA! *If I plant a seed in my garden, it germinates and a seedling sprouts and emerges from the ground. It must then continue to grow to the ultimately point of producing fruit, **or it sickens, yellows, and/or dies!** It’s sole purpose is to propagate/reproduce/bear fruit. If it is not doing that, it is wasting space in my garden. In the same way, for there to be life in a church, there must be progress being made in the lives of people who are truly in the process of becoming more like Jesus! Those with a **temper** problem are learning to let it go – to bring it under control. Those with problems of **lust** are learning to treat others (in their minds) with respect. Rather than objectifying women, they a beginning to see them as sisters, as mothers, or as someone’s well-love daughter! We see that in our text today. Those who are selfish and stingy are learning to become generous with their resources,.. and so on! **[2 Cor. 9:10-15]**

Paul tells Timothy that people need to see his progress in becoming a man of Jesus! He further proscribes a lifetime of watching his belief system (doctrine) and his life closely! This, says Paul, is vitally important to the church he is leading. In fact, it was so important that it was actually a matter of life and death – *spiritual* life and death! People were watching Timothy, and what they needed to see was a clear picture of Jesus in the most practical terms! They needed to see their pastor showcasing the Fruit of the Spirit - chiefly, love and self-control, and courage in his character! **[1 Tim. 3:3]** - They did not want to see a man who was a drunken fool, who was neither quarrelsome nor violent! They didn't want someone leading them who was all about the money. Neither did they need someone leading them whose family was a mess! Interestingly enough, today, in some church circles, people want leaders who are “human” – in other words, pastors who are flawed enough that they don't make flawed Christians feel quite so guilty about their lack of obedience to Christ. So these pastors use bad language in their sermons to prove how “human they are” - and their people love it! I do **not** think this is a healthy trend in the church! Leaders who are disobedient to Christ, whose disobedience has the effect of making disobedient Christians feel better about themselves cannot be a good trend! Now, the truth is that **ALL** leaders **ARE** human, and as such, all are by definition, flawed. Paul was flawed himself. Timothy was flawed. He had many good points, but he also had some weaknesses. But it was nothing to be proud of! I, myself, have admitted to you more than once from this pulpit, that I have my own issues - flaws in character - things that surprise and disappoint ME! It is not something that I am proud of, but I also do not want to be over-pedestalized! It is a warning, not a boast! I tell people that at some point, I'll disappoint them. Every Christian has sins of character, and if you think otherwise, you **WILL BE** disappointed! **But** the good news is that we are people under construction! We are people who Christ is healing, changing, making *progress* with! Our *love* is growing! Our *patience* is even more patient, not diminishing. We are *kind*, and getting *better* at being kind. We are *faithful*, not giving up in the face of trouble or difficulty! We are truth-tellers, but *gently*. Being able to tell the truth with gentleness is almost an art! Our self-control is improving! In the church, such people are priceless! All Christ-followers need to be getting better and showing progress in these things! **[2 Pet. 1:8]**



The way we treat each other is important to God! In 2:1,2 – Paul makes a point of identifying those who were in a position of weakness. It was a patriarchal society in that time and place, so those men who were in the prime of life had all the power! People with power over others do not have a good track record with how they use that power! Leaders, especially, are notorious for abusing the people who they have power over! We see it all the time in government, from city government and school boards to our elected officials at a state and federal level! We see it in our places of employment, with power-hungry, abusive, manipulative owners, bosses, supervisors. We see it in abusive marriages, in abusive parenting! We see it on the school playground – the strongest against the weakest - the old “pecking order”! Everywhere in this earth, it is the way of the world, and an important part of its fundamental corruption and evil!



But Paul says that it cannot be that way in the church! The men with all the power are to use that power to care for, lift up, and to server those have no power – the old men, the young men who have not earned their way into power yet. The women, young and old who had little standing in society, with few rights. Paul says they are to be treated honorably, given deference. In fact, we are to treat older men as honored fathers, younger men as beloved brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters!! These people that are in no way related to us physically, are family to us – who are *like* family – so we love and care for them, protecting and lifting them up! This is the way of Jesus who loves and gave Himself for all equally! **[2 Pet. 3:18]**