

1 Timothy 4:12

Welcome! Good morning... My name is John and I'm one of the pastors on staff here. I don't get to share with you guys like this very often, I'm typically leading the music side of things, and you guys get MORE THAN ENOUGH of me there.. But I love whenever I get the opportunity to share like this. Where I get to speak into and encourage our community, this community we love, in (hopefully) a more expanded and coherent way.

This Summer, we've been in this series called **God-Breathed** where we've been discussing the some of the most meaningful scriptures in our lives. Last week we heard from Mike, one of our elders, out of Isaiah 41. Today, we'll be jumping from the Old Testament deep into the New Testament, to 1 Timothy 4. This was a significant text in my life when I first stepped into ministry.

I came right out of DESIGN school to begin working full-time at this church, 6 years ago, and I was in **WAY over my head**. And it's not like I even had that many responsibilities... The leadership here is pretty smart, they knew they'd better start me off small. But I remember one of the first days I was here, they gave me a budget to buy a video camera, something really nice so that we could start filming testimonies and baptisms and stuff, and so I ordered it. It came in quickly, opened it up and it wasn't compatible with any of our computers. It was formatted for PC or something, I don't know... It ended up WORKING, but I remember right off the bat, making bad decisions, getting a bit overwhelmed, and one of the guys that I was spending time with, **someone that was sort of mentoring or disciplining me, sat me down and shared this scripture**. And it goes like this...

1 Timothy 4:12 (NLT)

12 Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.

It's an incredible word of encouragement, written from a mentor to someone he was teaching and bringing up into ministry. It was perfect for who I was and where I was at.

Some of you might know this, but **1 Timothy was written by the apostle Paul**. He wrote quite a bit of the New Testament as we know it today, there were certainly other

church leaders exchanging letters and epistles in the first century, but Paul's have been most widely **recognized/celebrated** and therefore became part of the Bible as we know it today. **Paul didn't know Jesus personally but had an encounter with him a short time after Jesus' crucifixion.**

Paul was a violent persecutor of Christians, doing everything in his power to PREVENT the message of Jesus from spreading... And here he is, knocked off his horse by Jesus appearing out of nowhere, and believe what you will about miracles or what that experience was like, but Paul was blinded and didn't eat for the next three days. Clearly this was an incredible spiritual experience. One that was so drastic that it changed Paul's **ENTIRE** life trajectory, flipped it in the opposite direction.

So as Paul began teaching and traveling and starting these small communities of Jesus followers, he began to attract some young believers that looked to him as a mentor. **And for some, like Timothy, Paul embraced that and sort of "adopted" them in a spiritual sense.** In fact, at the beginning of this letter, Paul refers to Timothy as *"My true son in the faith..."*

So Paul was writing to Timothy, who was a young pastor in Ephesus. And Ephesus wasn't a walk in the park for a young Christian. There was a saying in the 1st century, **"What happens in Ephesus, stays in Ephesus."** It was THAT kind of city. This was around 30 years after Jesus' crucifixion, it was thought that Timothy would've been somewhere in his early-30s, Paul in his 60s.

Also, from additional texts, we learn that not only is Timothy **young** but he's also generally a pretty **timid** or shy person. As well as having some sort of stomach/digestive issue which Paul recommends in the following chapter of this letter to *"Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses."* (I have no idea what that's about!)

So here Timothy is, called to leadership responsibilities beyond his years, **he's young, he's shy, and he's battling some sort of stomach issue... In way over his head.** Ever been there? Yes. I'm STILL there some days. In fact, I'm most likely younger than Timothy was at the time of this letter, and here in this church, which is likely LARGER than the one in Ephesus was. I can identify... **So this was naturally a very encouraging text for me to read, especially in my first years as a pastor.**

So, in using this scripture as a platform, what I want to talk about some this morning is how to (hopefully) remove some of the FEARS that we succumb to, just like Timothy was... **Those voices in the back of our minds that are keeping us back from stepping FORWARD into God's plan for us.**

So let's start with the lie that Timothy believed. **He believed that he was too young to be used by God as an example.** That he was either under-prepared or under-educated or WHATEVER... That's a validated fear. Most of us have felt that way at some point. **So let's look to Scripture to see if there are any other people that God used when they felt a bit "too young"...**

- **Mary.** Many Christian historians believe that Mary was between 15-16 when she became pregnant. Some believe even younger. So all of a sudden, we're looking at a sophomore in high-school, and when we're reading her receptivity to God's plan... **Luke 1:38 Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.** It's remarkable. What faith, for such a young woman. And to this day, she's worshipped by millions and millions of Catholics for that faith.
- **Jesus.** How many of you are older than 30 years old? (Raise your hand!) It's important for us to remember that when Jesus' ministry began, he was only 30 years old. AND we need to remember that Jesus was FULLY man. He carried many of the same fears and insecurities that we do. Growing up, he had pimples and girls that liked him and sometimes he'd get the stomach bug throw up everywhere, just like the rest of us. He **was** without sin, but that doesn't mean he was without temptation or emotion.
- Jesus wept in John 11, he experienced sorrow in Mark 14, he experienced starvation in Luke 4. When he was called into ministry that day at the wedding, he showed a moment of insecurity. He said, *"My time has not yet come..."* just moments before He turned the water to wine. **He was not devoid of the same emotions we experience.** If that situation never presented itself, we'll never know how long Jesus would've waited before performing His first miracle. **He was a young man stepping into an incredible calling by God, one that He wrestled with until the day of the crucifixion.**

- We could talk about **David** as a young man going up against Goliath with a slingshot.
- We could talk about **Joseph's** integrity with Potiphar's wife in Genesis 37.
- **Daniel**, early on in his life when he was refusing to eat food and drink that was against his Jewish beliefs, some scholars believe he was very young, maybe as young as 8 years old.
- **Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego** were somewhere between the age of 10 and 30 when they were thrown into the furnace.
- Or what about the young boy that offered his humble lunch to Jesus at the feeding of the 5,000. He could've been selfish in the moment, could've kept those fish and bread for himself. But instead, he allowed God to feed thousands and thousands of people with it. (Including that little boy).
- Ok, so we've seen **young** people that God has used for incredible things, to set examples for generation after generation of believers... But what about being too OLD to be used by God? I'm sure that's a fear or excuse or reason that many of you feel handcuffed by. **Let's look at some people in Scripture that glorified the Lord well into their golden years.**
 - **Moses**. Moses was 80 years old and had lived an entire lifetime before God stopped him in his tracks at the Burning Bush. Moses had a speech impediment, he had killed an Egyptian man and run for his life. We can safely guess that he felt like his life was **winding down**, settling into retirement, when that bush caught his attention... And when God called him to the greatest adventure of his life.
 - **Sarah**, from Abraham and Sarah. Whatever you believe about the reliability of Scripture, the person of Sarah in the Old Testament is a woman that lived to be 90 years old before she experienced an answer to God's promise. In fact, when Abraham felt that God had promised she would become pregnant, she laughed to herself out of doubt. It was a hilarious notion that a 90 year old woman would become pregnant. And yet. Nine months later, there was Isaac. Can we explain it? Absolutely not, but it's a picture of God using someone late in life to do something miraculous.

- **Apostle John.** One of the most poetic and captivating books of the Bible, the book of Revelation, was written by the Apostle John when he was 92. He was imprisoned on a remote island in the Aegean Sea called Patmos. He had already been tortured for his faith, he had been dipped in boiling oil, and yet survived... So Rome had hoped that banishing him to Patmos would keep him quiet. He was likely the only original apostle that had lived into his 90s.. And yet God wasn't done with him yet.

- What we're doing here is **KILLING EXCUSES**. (We're acknowledging the lies, and we're **STEALING THE ENEMY'S AMMUNITION**) If you're taking notes, you can write that phrase down: "stealing the Enemy's ammunition"

- Sometimes when we're given opportunity to help or serve or speak or be used by God in any capacity, excuses begin to creep into our minds. And those "excuses" are actually **fears** of ours that disguise themselves as **reason**. We're incredibly smart, and if we're afraid of failure or looking foolish or sounding too "high and mighty" or anywhere in between, we convince ourselves, and everyone around us, that it's not wise to engage. **We need to steal the Enemy's ammunition by pressing through those fears and into how God has uniquely wired and positioned us.**

- At the end of the day, this verse is Paul breathing LIFE into Timothy in a place exactly where he needs it. Paul is close enough to Timothy to know his fears, and to know exactly where the Enemy might be lying to Timothy. And Paul steals the Enemy's ammunition. He acknowledges the fear and presses through it. *"Yes, you're young, but that doesn't mean that God can't use you."*
- What word do you need to replace "young" with to have this hit home for you? **"Don't let anyone think less of you because you are _____?"**
 - **Uneducated?**
 - **Anxious?**
 - Because you've been to **jail**?
 - You're already on your **third marriage**?
 - Because of that **ONE mistake** you made years ago that still haunts you?

- Is it because you're **too young**?
 - What is it that the Enemy lies to you about, and introduces fear into your life of faith? **FILL IN THE BLANK.** God can work with that.
- Is it because you're **gay**, and the American church has subtly (and not so subtly) made you feel unwelcome?
- Because you don't feel **smart** enough? **Dropped out of high school** or dropped out of college?
- Is it because you feel **too SMART** and feel like spirituality is beneath you?
- Are you **too old**?
- Too **successful**?
- Too **cynical** or **skeptical**?
 - Whatever it might be, we need to **NAME** those fears, just as Timothy had done at some point with Paul, and press through those.
- There is a great **necessity** to diversity in the Church. We need **all of the members of the family of God.** We need spiritual mothers and fathers, and we need to produce children, building up the next generation. We need **old folks**, we need **young kids**, we need all **races** and **income brackets** and **gender identities** and **denominations** and **political parties**... We NEED diversity in the Church to continue to be the Church.
- In 2011, David Kinnaman released a book called *"You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church... And Rethinking Faith"*
 - "The ages 18 to 29 are the black-hole of church attendance. (raise your hand if you're 18-29 yrs old) There is a 43% drop-off between teen and early-adult years in terms of church-engagement. These numbers represent about 8 million twentysomethings who were active churchgoers as teenagers but who will no longer be engaged by their 30th birthday." **David Kinnaman**

- This obviously poses a big problem for the future of the Church. If all of us are leaving as we go off and settle down with families, is the church just a few generations away from its collapse? **I don't think so.**
- That's **not** the case at Harbor. Look around you. In this church, there are hundreds of us that are young, **establishing families**, raising our children up in the love of God, and hundreds of us that are older, **providing wisdom, support, guidance...**
We need to **embrace** this and **capitalize** on it.
- So, if we've stolen the Enemy's ammunition; if we stop listening to the lies and the fears and all the "rational" reasons why we're ineligible to be used by God... **It's time for us to set an example.** I want to paint a picture of what our lives could look like if we stepped into the life that God has for us.

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- SET AN EXAMPLE IN WHAT WE SAY
 - **Proverbs 18:21** says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue..." That's what we see playing out in real-time with this letter from Paul. Paul is literally speaking LIFE into Timothy. **Have you ever had a conversation with someone and afterwards it felt like they had lifted you up?** Like they had taken a burden off of your shoulders or they had breathed life back into you? **Sometimes a friend will send a text message with divine timing, or you'll read a comment from someone on Facebook that's just a breath of fresh air?** (Pretty rare on Facebook) But that's people using their words, their POWERFUL, LIFE-GIVING words for the glory of God. That's them setting an example.
- SET AN EXAMPLE IN HOW WE LIVE
 - Have the Attitude of Christ
 - **PHILIPPIANS 2** *Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? 2 Then make me truly happy by agreeing*

wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

- *3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. 4 Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.*
- *5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.*
- **If we allow Jesus to live through us in this way**, not by our own power or mustering up enough behavior modification, but by allowing the Spirit of God to exhibit the likeness of Christ in us... **The world will notice.** If we go out of our way to **serve** people, to show an **interest** in their lives, to **genuinely listen** and to **create uninterrupted time** to spend with people... We will be setting an incredible example.
- SET AN EXAMPLE IN HOW WE LOVE
 - Teaching about Love for Enemies
 - **MATTHEW 5:43** *"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. 44 But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! 45 In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. 46 If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. 47 If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else?"*
 - **To be so enlightened that we have compassion on our enemies, or those that oppose us, would be a beautiful thing.**
 - Back in February when ISIS beheaded 21 Christians, I remember being disgusted, but I also remember feeling sorry for the ISIS soldiers. **For those that were sick enough to do that, how traumatized must they be? How broken and dark must their souls be? Their grasp of reality so distorted that they could even stomach doing such a thing?** I remember thinking, **"Ok, this is a God thought. This is not a John though."** I was amazed that I was even thinking that. Not normal, trust me.

- Jesus' call for us to love the unlovable doesn't just include the ugly and poor and outcasts and homeless (all those stereotypes), it also includes the **angry**, the **powerful** and **arrogant**, the **people in the news** that make our blood boil. If we were to have perspective to PRAY for those people, and not with a gritting-our-teeth and praying pestilence over them, but a genuine prayer that God reaches them and wakes them up... What an incredible example we'd set.

- SET AN EXAMPLE IN OUR FAITH
 - What is faith? How do we set an example here? **For me, sometimes "faith" can be simply described as TRUST.** *Do I trust that what God says is true? And today, do I choose to believe?* For me, each day, faith is a choice. Just the same as choosing to believe your spouse still loves you. Or choosing to believe that your job isn't in jeopardy. It's a decision, based on our experiences thus far, to walk in trust.

 - HEBREWS 11:1 says, *"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."* **I love that.** *"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."*

 - A beautiful opportunity to exhibit that faith is coming up in the beginning of September, at our Baptism Celebration. This is an opportunity for any believer, young or old, to express their CHOICE to follow Jesus. **We hear people's testimonies of how God reached them, sometimes in their darkest hour, and then we celebrate with them as they go under the water, to signify the death of their old life, and as they're raised up again, joining with Jesus in His resurrection.** It's beautiful, and it's a wide-open invitation, we've already had people sign up. If you're interested in that, write it on a connection card or come find one of us afterwards.

- AND LASTLY, WE ARE CALLED TO SET AN EXAMPLE IN OUR PURITY...
 - In today's culture, how is purity even possible? How do we remain undefiled and "set apart" and living in some sort of "holy way" when everything around us is begging into the mud?

- The short answer, in my opinion, is that we can't. It's impossible. Apart from Jesus at work in our lives, constantly refining what we find **interesting** and **truly changing our hearts**... Purity is impossible.
- When my wife and I started dating, 8.5 years ago, our relationship went from 0–60 quickly, we were in college and so we were basically living together within the first few months. It was easy to justify, as that's the culture in college, and because God wasn't playing any part in our relationship, I was able to comfortably drift without many feelings of conviction.
- However, after Elyse started showing an interest in faith, we started to walk together towards the Lord, we realized that we needed to make some serious changes. This obviously posed some difficult conversations. **No woman wants to hear their boyfriend say, "I think we should stop sleeping together" because her immediate thought was that I was leaving her, or seeing someone else...** But I had to assure her, as crazy as it sounded, that it was actually **FOR THE BENEFIT** of our relationship.
- It took her a while to realize, **and a while for ME to realize what I was agreeing to**, but for the next year and a half, we stepped WAY back from where we were and began to honor the Lord in our relationship. **And we really believe that we entered into our marriage with clean hearts before one another and before the Lord.**
- I share that because I believe that PURITY can come **long after** impurity is introduced. And I believe that PURITY only exists when we cover ourselves in the cloth of Christ.
 - The only way to set an example in our purity is by **constantly recognizing the impurities in our lives** and "putting on" the covering of Christ. **People won't be compelled by our lives if we simply remove ourselves from all culture and possible impurities...** but rather if we're **LIVING IN THE PURITY** extended to us in Christ. **It's a gift. It's a covering. Not anything that we can boast about or produce on our own.**
 - Coming back to Paul & Timothy's relationship, I'm struck by the **BENEFIT** they bring each other; the **REWARD of that relationship**... Timothy is clearly the recipient of beautiful words of encouragement and affirmation, **but Paul also is given**

opportunity to let his years of wisdom come out, and to be shared for thousands of years thereafter. (*Here we are, talking about a letter that a 60 yr man sent a 30 yr old man 2000 years ago...*)

- **What would've happened to dear Timothy in the heart of Ephesus if he hadn't had Paul?** And where would Paul be sharing what God had given him to share if it wasn't to encourage young leaders and future believers?
- As we close, I think we'd benefit from considering who our **SPIRITUAL MOTHERS & FATHERS** are... Who is pouring into you? And not only that, **who KNOWS you so well that they can administer grace to specific areas of your life**, such as Paul did with Timothy's youth? **Do you have someone like that?** Is it time to FIND someone like that?
- And just as we have SO MUCH to gain from those people with deeper understanding, who could we be pouring into? Who might we consider our "*true daughter in the faith*" or "*true son in the faith*" as Paul put it? **Who could benefit from what God has shown YOU so far?** Do you have someone like that? Is it time to FIND someone like that?
- I think that by focusing on our spiritual parents and spiritual children, we might continue to grow into the Family that Jesus established. May we, Harbor, steal the Enemy's ammunition and embrace our roles in the Family of God.
- Let's pray together...