

Gains | Ready for Anything

Aaron Brockett | 2 Timothy 4

Alright, how's it going everybody? You doing good? It's good to be back with you. I want to welcome all of our guests and first-time visitors across all of our campuses. My name is Aaron and I get to serve as one of the pastors around here. We are one church that gathers across multiple locations. So I just want to say hello to all of our campuses right now.

And our mission as a church is to remove unnecessary barriers that keep people from Jesus. And the reason why we say that so often and the reason we say it the way that we do is because we believe that Jesus is the only one who can change anyone. And so we want to get as many people to Jesus as we can.

And then once we get you to Jesus, we want to help you to grow and we can't do growth for you, but we can show you the way and we can give you some tools and we can cheer you on. That's largely the heart behind Growth Track. That's why we talk about that so often and encourage you to get there.

So I want to encourage you to go to Growth Track right after the service at all of our campuses. And for those of you who are going through Growth Track, thank you so much. Glad to have you in all of that. Before we jump in to wrap up this study that we've been in for the last several weeks, I just have some things that I want to celebrate with you.

Earlier in the year I was able to tell you that we're going to launch campus number five and six, our Midtown campus in Broad Ripple and our Northeast campus in Fishers. And I was able to tell you about... Yeah, that's a matter of clapping. We can celebrate that. Can't get tired of that.

And I shared with you who our Midtown campus pastor is going to be a few weeks ago, Kyle Riley, who currently serves at our Downtown campus. Today I want to announce who our Northeast campus is going to be.

Those of you who have been around here for a while, you know that campus pastors have an important role. They have to have the character and the competency and the calling and the Traders Point humble, hungry, healthy DNA. And man, this individual has all of these things in spades.

So, I'm just super excited to announce our Northeast campus pastor. It's going to be our very own Aaron Hoover. Let's go ahead and give it up for Aaron. I believe we have a picture of Aaron and his wife, Megan and their kids.

Aaron currently serves as our North campus pastor. And I can remember eight or nine years ago, Aaron was attending this campus, the Northwest campus, and he just reached out to me and said, "Man, what do you do if you feel called into ministry? And what are my next steps?"

I just remember trying to encourage him. It's been amazing to see how he has grown in his leadership. He's doing an incredible job at the North campus. Basically, they sort of came to us and said, "Hey, we want to throw our names into the hat to go and launch Northeast. They are comfortable at North. North has its own facility and all of that.

And Aaron is like, "You know what? We're willing to go wherever God is sending us to reach more people. And I love his heart. So we're really excited about the leadership that he's going to provide to that campus. Now, with him moving to Northeast, that obviously left a vacancy at our North campus and so I just want to go ahead and announce that we have a North Campus pastor to step in behind Aaron as well. It's going to be our very own Bart Shaw. So go ahead and give it up for Bart and his wife, Brooke, and their kids. Bart has been leading our groups effort at a church-wide level. So even though you may not necessarily know Bart, you've probably felt the effects of Bart. I call it the Bart effect.

No, I really don't, I just made that up. Bart is a phenomenal leader and Bart just came and said, "Hey, we're willing to do whatever God's asking us and calling us to do. And so Bart is going to be stepping into the North campus role while, simultaneously, still leading our groups effort.

I realize that we're so spread out as a church that you may not know these individuals and their families personally, but I want to ask you to be praying for them even if you don't. If you do know the Hoovers and the Shaws man, reach out to them and encourage them. Be praying for them in the coming months as they get ready to launch out.

And then, as always, if you have any desire to be a part of a launch team of either the Midtown or the Northeast campus go to TPCC.org/launch team and sign up. Right now we have about 600 people, 300 for each campus who have already signed up to be on a launch team. That's just really encouraging. Really excited about it.

Today, we are wrapping up this series that we've been in, which is a study in the New Testament book of 2 Timothy. So if you have a Bible or maybe a device with a Bible on it, go ahead and get to 2 Timothy, chapter 4. I say that it's a book in the Bible, and it is. But it's actually more of a letter than it is a book. It's a personal letter written from an older man by the name of Paul, to a younger man by the name of Timothy.

So in a sense we're sort of opening up somebody else's mail and reading it, which is borderline creepy and generally frowned upon. But I don't think that Paul and Timothy would mind. I think they would be like: By all means, if this is going to help you—it helped me—read it because there is so much good content in this letter that is applicable to every single one of your lives, regardless of who you are, how old you are, or what you might be currently going through. It's important to know that 2 Timothy is actually a part of three short letters that Paul writes kind of generally within the same time frame: 1 and 2 Timothy and then Titus.

And really what Paul is doing is that he is writing to encourage two younger leaders who find themselves in a role in which they are in way over their head. I know a thing or two about that. It seems like I'm always over my head.

And Paul knows it. He's like: You two guys, you need some help. But not in a condescending way—Paul loves these two young men. Timothy had just stepped into a leadership role in the church of Ephesus, a church that Paul had actually served in. Titus had just stepped into a leadership role in the church in Crete.

And Paul finds himself in a Roman prison cell awaiting execution. In fact, 2 Timothy—I don't know if you picked up on this or not—in the study of this book it sort of has a feel of a farewell letter, because it is. Paul knows that he doesn't have much longer left.

He's in his final days. And so he is writing to these two young guys to pass on to them the spiritual gains that had been going on in his life and that he had been developing through years of following after Jesus.

I love that about the heart of Paul. I was thinking about this last week. It's the first time I've really ever thought about it. For a second, put yourself in Paul's sandals. Think to yourself, "Okay, here I am. I'm an older person. I've been following Jesus for decades.

And instead of getting a watch and a nice retirement party or instead of going down to southwest Florida to spend the remainder of my days on a warm beach somewhere, I'm in a Roman jail cell, locked away, largely forgotten. Nobody is saying thank you to me for all of the years of service.

And I thought to myself, it would have been tempting for me—I can only speak for myself—I think I might have been feeling sorry for myself, borderline bitter. And maybe even thinking, "I'm just going to live for me. I've already worked hard. I've already done my time. I'm just going to try to spend the remainder of my days doing what I enjoy doing."

But Paul doesn't do that. In fact, Paul could have very easily thrown his hands up and said: Here I am and older person in a Roman jail cell, what can I do? But he says: I can do something. And so he put pen to paper and he begins to encourage these two younger leaders who will be around long after he is gone.

I love that about his heart. And we've sort of packaged this study of this letter by calling it Gains. And that may be a term that you may or may not be familiar with but it's mostly a term that you hear in the gym. People are trying to get in shape, trying to make some progress, trying to pack on some muscular gains. My sixteen-year-old son, he's kind of right in the middle of this. He's going to open gyms after school every day, lifting some weights, trying to put some muscle on his frame.

And every now and then he'll text me and be like, "Hey, Dad. I got 10 more pounds on my bench press." And he'll send me a video. Or like, "Hey, Dad. I've got 15 more pounds on my

back squats.” I’m just like, “Way to go buddy.” I’m cheering him on. I don’t know, those of you dads of teenage boys who are in the room maybe you can sort of identify with me. You’re simultaneously cheering them on and kind of secretly resenting them.

I look at him and I realize, “I ain’t that anymore. You’re like a younger, better version of me. You’re Brockett 2.0.” Like, “You’re welcome for those genetics. Please don’t ruin them at Taco Bell,” right? It’s just that kind of feel. But what we’re after here is not muscular gains, what we’re after in this series is spiritual gains. So when we talk about gains, it’s just another way of talking about spiritual growth, spiritual maturity.

I want you to know... I just stated what our mission is. Our mission is to get people to Jesus. And our mission is very simple and it’s complicated. The simple part is we are laser focused on getting you to Jesus. We will do anything short of sin to get you to Jesus. The complicated part is the growth part. And I’ve been saying this over and over again. I can’t do growth for you. And growth is really inconsistent. Here’s the thing about spiritual growth. Those of you who have been following after Jesus for a long time, you can testify to this. Spiritual growth never is just up and to the right. It is never like consistent growth, growth, growth, growth. It just doesn’t work that way. Speaking from personal experience and from observation, spiritual growth is up and it’s down.

It’s forward and it’s backward. And it’s side to side. And sometimes you feel like you are on a plateau for a really, really long time. What I’ve noticed is that it has not necessarily been the mountaintops that have caused me to grow. I’ve actually born more fruit in the valleys. Spiritual growth is messy. It’s heartbreaking. I had somebody ask me this question last week. He said, “How many people do you figure are still following after Jesus after all of the people you’ve baptized in that tank over the years? How many people are still following after Jesus?”

Well, I don’t know. But Jesus wasn’t 100 percent. You just look at his 12 disciples. You’ve got Judas... I don’t think I’m 100 percent either. It’s messy. And the reason why it’s messy is because people are messy, inconsistent, and deeply flawed. Just turn to your neighbor and say, “Man, you are messy.” And the reason why I can stand up here and say that—some of you are enjoying that way too much. I just caused a fight on the way home.

The reason why I know that to be true is because I’m messy and I’m inconsistent and I’m deeply flawed and that’s just the way that spiritual growth goes. Yet at the same time, we’re still going after it as a church.

So on this final week of this series, can I just ask you a question? I just realize... I just want to go ahead and put it out there. I know this is invasive, alright? I know this is probably going to cause you to say, “Whoa, back up preacher man.” Here’s the question: When it comes to your spiritual growth, how are you doing?

Now, I’m not asking about the spiritual growth of your spouse or your roommate or your co-workers or your kids. I’m asking about you because you’re the only one who can answer that

question. Let me take it a step further. Give yourself a grade. Like A through F, how are you doing?

Now, please don't misunderstand me because this is easy to misunderstand. I'm not asking you to grade your salvation. Man if your life is in Christ, if you've made a decision to follow after Jesus—the grade for your salvation is A+ because it's not based on anything that you can do. It's based on what Jesus did for you. I'm talking about your spiritual growth. I'm talking about your spiritual gains. And the only bad answer is a dishonest one. You can be really honest and go, "Man, I don't know. Maybe like a D-." Well, at least your honest and now you know what to work from.

So, how are you doing when it comes to your spiritual growth? Just because you made the decision to follow after Jesus a long time ago, just because you've been in church most weekends, just because you're getting up there in age biologically does not mean that you've been making spiritual gains. In fact, the author of Hebrews, who is anonymous by the way, and I think the reason why he stayed anonymous was probably because of verses like this in chapter 5, verses 12 through 14. Listen to this. It's pretty hard hitting, but it's true. He's writing to a group of believers and he says this: "You have been believers so long now," let's just put a number on that. How long do you think that is?

I don't know, let me just go ahead and throw a number out there. Let's just say five years or more, right? You've been following after Jesus five years or more, now "... you ought to be," now can you imagine what he might say next if you didn't know what that passage said?

You ought to be better. You ought to know more. You ought to be more generous. What do you think? Of all of the things that he could say, here's what he says, "you ought to be teaching others."

Now, teaching others—that doesn't necessarily mean like leading a group or teaching a Bible study or preaching a sermon because not everybody has a teaching gift. Now it could mean those things, but it means way more than those things. The primary focus of what he's saying there is that your spiritual growth is others focused. It's not about you. It's always about others.

And he says, "Instead, you need someone to teach you again," in other words, basic review here, "...the basic things about God's word." You don't need new things. You don't need deeper things. You need just a basic review once again because you haven't applied all of the truths to your life that you've already heard. And then he says, "You are like babies," can you imagine saying that to somebody's face?

"You're a baby." You'd probably get smacked. "You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food." Now think about that for just a second. He's talking about spiritually here, but what if this popped up in real life?

Let's just say that you and I decide to go to lunch after church today and we go to a restaurant. We sit down and we look at the menu. And there is all of this sophisticated adult food that I

could order off of the menu. You've got maybe a Cobb salad or a salmon filet or sandwich of some kind.

And you order an adult meal, but I ask the waitress for a bottle. You know a bottle with a little tippy thing on the top. And it's like, "Could you fill that up with some warm milk? That would be great."

You'd look at me and be like, "Are you serious?" They come and they serve you your nice little Cobb salad and I take the bottle and I'm sucking on it. You'd be like, "This is embarrassing." You would leave. Like, "You're a grown man drinking out of a bottle."

And the author of Hebrews says we have so many people following Jesus five years or more still slurping out of a bottle, and "...someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know to do what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature," now here it is, how do you get mature? Say these two words with me: through training. That's how you get it. You do not get mature by listening to sermons. It can help, but if you never apply it then you're not training. Nobody else can do growth for you.

Now, Jesus did your salvation for you when you placed your faith in him. Your life is hidden in Christ but your spiritual maturity, your growth, the fruits of the Spirit come not just by attending church, not just being a Christian for a long time, not just by naturally growing older, but by training. You've got to train and "have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong."

Here's what the author of Hebrews is saying: Your spiritual growth is not about you. It's not about you. In fact the only time that gains have anything to do with just you is in the gym. That's why when you go into one of those big box gyms there are mirrors all over the walls, so that you can look right back at yourself. I have never gone to a curl station—over there banging out curls looking at the person beside me. Like, "I hope this benefits you." No! I'm doing it so that you can be envious of me, right? I'm focused solely on myself.

Spiritual gain is just the opposite. And if you're looking into the spiritual mirror just trying to go deeper for you, then the author of Hebrews—and Paul is going to back this up as we finish out this series—says it's misplaced. He is talking here about becoming others focused.

In other words... Let me say it as plainly as I can. The primary mark of someone who is spiritually maturing is that they invest themselves into others.

I would say that behind our mission statement and behind the words: Jesus is my Lord and Savior—the most important four words that we need to be reminded of as a church family are these right here:

It's not about me.

It's not about me. And the next time I begin to feel sorry for myself, I just need to say, "Man, it's not about me." And the next time I'm tempted to complain, "It's not about me." And the next time I start to get fit or I start to feel like I'm forgotten, I just need to say, "Man, it is not about me." It's so crucial. I think that, lovingly, we need to say these words to each other from time to time. Those who you are in relationship with, those whom you have already earned their trust, maybe in your group or maybe in your personal relationship... I've just found that from time to time when I find myself complaining I just need a loving friend to say, "Hey, man. I just want to love you and tell you, man, it's not about you." And this is what Paul is doing with Timothy and Titus. He's been training himself—all of those decades of training—and he's not going to hold onto it, he's going to pass it on to these younger leaders so that they will pass it on to others. And that's why you and I are sitting here today.

So two questions before I read these last eight verses that I want you to ask of yourself: How's my training? How is my spiritual training, and; Who's going to benefit from it, other than me?

And the truth is that good intentions are never enough. If you want to grow spiritually, you've got to be intentional about it. So let me read these last eight verses then I want to make three observations that are application take aways to go with you today, alright? Let me start in verse 1. Paul writes these words to Timothy, "I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he comes to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not.

"Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching." Now, as a preacher, Timothy was primarily a preacher, and as a preacher I really love and appreciate that verse. The Message paraphrases that verse this way, "Don't ever quit and just keep it simple." Man, there have been so many times in my preaching ministry over the years where I've just had to say that to myself over and over again. Don't ever quit and just keep it simple.

I'll finish preaching and from this point back to that point as I'm walking across the stage, I'm like, "Brockett, you forgot to keep it simple, stupid. Just keep it simple. Just keep it plain. Just keep people's eyes fixed upon Jesus.

"For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths." Verse 5, "But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you. "As for me, my life has already been," and here he says it, "poured out," he has poured himself out "as an offering to God. The time of my death is near." I love verse 7, he says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful." And what a great thing to be able to say at the end of your life.

What makes that verse particularly meaningful is if you flip over to Acts, chapter 20, verse 24 Paul as a younger man said that exact same thing to the Ephesian elders when he was serving at that church. He told these guys: I just want to finish the race. I just want to remain faithful.

Now he's telling Timothy that he did. And then in verse 8 he says, "And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing." Now let me take what I just read there and boil it down into three primary take aways for you and me to continue to make spiritual gains. Here's the first one:

If you want to grow, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. I know that sounds simple, but it is so profound. Here's the reason why. The focus of your attention determines your direction. The focus of your primary attention will determine your direction. And when you're distracted, you don't grow.

It's kind of like the big thing right now is—because we've all got our phones on us so much—that we make sure that we're not texting and driving. You ever pull up beside somebody as you're going down the road? You kind of look over and they are texting? You just want to roll down the window and yell at them because I don't care how good of a driver you think you are. You're distracted. And you're going to end up off of the road because you're not looking out the windshield. The same thing is true in life. I'm reminded of that time when there was a storm and Peter's walking out to Jesus on the water.

He's doing this incredible thing. He's actually walking on water, but when he begins to sink what happened? Well, he took his eyes off of Jesus and he started to focus on the wind and the waves. I don't know how many times I've done that in my life. There will always be wind and waves and the minute that I begin to focus on them over Jesus in my life is the minute that I begin to sink.

Can I just ask you what do you do on a daily basis just to kind of redirect your eyes back to Jesus? It doesn't take as long as you think it does. Just to stay focused upon him. Not to get wrapped up in the things that might cause worry or anxiety or fear, but in the moment to fix your eyes upon Jesus.

And let me just take this one step farther—why this is so profound. I asked you a few minutes ago to grade your spiritual maturity. And I want you to know that even though it might be helpful for you to do that for yourself from time to time, God's not doing that of you.

Here's why. When God looks at you, if your life is hidden in Christ, God sees his Son, Jesus. And he receives you and he loves you and you don't have to do anything to perform for God or to get his good intentions. Your life is hidden in Christ. What that does now is that actually frees you up to live more confidently for him. And some of you today may be like, "Man, it sounds so simple just to say keep my eyes fixed on Jesus. But you don't know what I'm going through. I'm just going through something really, really difficult right now." And I know that you are.

Can I just ask you to shift your perspective just a little bit? When you are going through something that is incredibly difficult, that you don't know if you have enough strength to do it, just begin to think to yourself, "This is an opportunity for me to train."

I said a moment ago that it's been in the valleys that I've produced the most fruit. It's been through the most significant trials of my life that I've grown the most. Now, I wouldn't wish them on my worst enemy. I don't want to go back through them again. But when I'm in the middle of them, it's an opportunity for me to train, it's an opportunity for me to put my trust in God and say, "God, I trust that you're going to take this trial and this difficulty and you're going to produce spiritual gains in my life if I stay focused upon you."

Here's the second thing that Paul says to Timothy: Be aware of your surroundings. Always be evaluating. Always be meditating on, thinking through what's going on in your life. What's God trying to say to you?

Paul tells Timothy back in verses 3 and 4, he says: you need to understand the culture and the times in which you are living. Hey, Timothy, understand what is going on in the world.

I love this passage in the Old Testament, it's 1 Chronicles, chapter 12, verse 32. It says, "The men of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do." So it's this idea that they were students of the culture. They knew what was going on. Therefore they took that into account and then they knew what Israel should do.

So here's the deal. Spiritual training without giving any thought to how our growth is going to benefit others, particularly those people in the world who are far from God, if we never consider that then it's going to lead us into this place where we don't love the world or have a heart for the world or compassion for the world.

What ends happening, if you've been following Jesus five years or more but you've not been growing with that mindset, it ends up causing you to maybe be fearful of the world or judgmental of the world or isolating yourself from what's going on around you. There are times I can just hear traces of this in conversations of Christ followers that have maybe begun to isolate from the world. They end up kind of turning it into us versus them. Like we're the good guys and they're the bad guys and we are shocked that non-Christians don't act like Christians. Imagine that.

So our response is to maybe, I don't know, boycott. That's the answer. You mean to tell me that Starbucks isn't going to have red cups at Christmas time this year? Boycott. You mean to tell me the Pillsbury Doughboy still doesn't have pants? Boycott. No more cinnamon rolls for us. And we end up isolating ourselves from the world instead of actually trying to engage. Paul says to Timothy: Hey, Timothy. Be aware of what's going on around you so that you can be clear minded in every situation.

What do you think that means? It means that you have a proper understanding, you know that the world is not the enemy the world is the hostage of the enemy. So we don't blend in, but we also don't isolate.

Jesus would put it this way in Matthew, chapter 4, verse 19. Now those of you who have been following Jesus five or more years probably know how to finish this statement. Don't do it just yet. Just let me read it. He says, "Follow me and I will make you _____."

Once again, how do you think he might finish that sentence? Hey if you follow me, if you're making spiritual gains in your life, I will make you better. I'll make you more religious. I'll make you irresistibly attractive. How do you think that Jesus might finish that statement? Here's how he finishes it. Follow me and I will make you fishers of men. Now he originally said that to his 12 disciples, most of whom were professional fishermen. And he's calling them out of that profession to follow him. And instead of fishing for fish, you guys will fish for men.

But understand the principle behind it. He says the result of your spiritual gains in following me is that you will search for other people. It is not about you. Spiritual gains will always be about the benefit of other people. Primarily, your spiritual maturity will cause you to say, "Hey, man. I've got to go search for some of God's lost kids," because there's a lot of them. You ever heard that phrase: Hurt people hurt people? Well what about this one? Found people find people. That's always the results of your spiritual gains. It's that you are so wrapped up and concerned about people who are far from God that you want to go after them. Now, occasionally there might be somebody who wonders... I mean this is the reason why we encourage you to invite your friends at Easter. This is the reason why we start new campuses because we just believe that there are more lost kids out there than are found.

You might think that adding campuses and inviting to Easter is just all about growing a bigger church. Can I just let you in on a little bit here? There was a time in my life that I thought growing a big church was kind of cool. I'm way past it now. I've gotten over it, because a bigger church just means more criticism and more problems and more complexity. I'm just kind of like, "You know what? I don't really care." I'm serious, I don't.

What I am concerned about, like red hot, never been more concerned about it in my life—it's finding God's lost kids. And it doesn't have to be this church. It's not like they have to come here. I just want them to know Jesus. Every now and then I take shots for this. Like, "Well, you're just about the numbers." No, I'm not.

How many of you have kids and you've lost one? I've misplaced—I like to say misplaced, alright? I've misplaced a child. I've done that from time to time in a public place: airport, Disney.

I've got four kids and never once whenever my wife and I have that heated conversation, because all of the time it's my fault, never once have I looked back at her and gone, "What's the big deal? Why are you so much about the numbers? We've still got three! You know, it's quality over quantity—look who's missing." Never once have I said that. But yet, I hear that all of the time in the church. So found people—we find people.

Listen man if that has begun to seep into your language, this whole idea of us versus them... Religion divides the world into good guys and bad guys. The Gospel divides the world into sinful people and Jesus. This is not an us versus them—good guys bad guys. There is not a good us and a bad them. There is only a sinful we and a gracious he. Spiritually mature people want to get others to the grace of Jesus.

The last take away is simply this, Paul says to Timothy: Be inspired. Timothy be inspired. That's always the result of encouragement. But also go and be inspiring. Paul says: I've poured my life out into you, Timothy. I want you to pour your life out into others. Let me just say it as plainly as I can: If other people aren't benefiting from the way you follow Jesus, then chances are that you're not following Jesus right.

I wouldn't be where I am today and doing what I'm doing today if it wasn't for older, spiritually mature men and women who saw some things in me that I couldn't see and chose to encourage me when I didn't deserve to be encouraged. I never, ever thought I would be a pastor until somebody spoke that into my life. They looked at me and said, "You know, Aaron have you ever thought about this because I see that maybe God has gifted you in this particular..." I didn't see it until they said it.

If you ever see somebody, particularly who is younger, who demonstrates some sort of gifting don't just think it to yourself, say it to them. Just find an opportunity to say, "You know what? I just see this in you. God's got big plans for your life. And whatever I can do to help, man, I'd love to be able to help."

I've shared my story with you before. I'll just share a condensed version of it. I felt called by God to preach when I was 19, which is just crazy if you would have known me. I was such a shy kid. I got Ds in my high school speech class. I never, ever thought... My grandfather was a preacher so anytime I hear Reverend Brockett I am always looking for him.

I never, ever thought that God would call me to do this. And yet there was this dramatic experience where I felt like God was calling me to preach. I did not want to do it. I went kicking and screaming. I remember I was 19 years old and I got my very first opportunity to preach. It was this small, little church in a small, little town in northwest Arkansas.

I wrote a sermon on the Good Samaritan. It was 25 pages long. I still have it. It's in a notebook. It's horrible theology. I'll never preach it again.

I remember I got to the church. I was scared out of my mind—19-year-old kid. And I walked into this church. They didn't have a preacher, so they were just looking for different people to fill the pulpit. And they had one of those big, huge wood pulpits up front that kind of wrapped around you. Any of you remember Home Improvement that television show in the 90s—Tim the Tool Man Taylor? His neighbor, you never saw his face it was always forehead and above. That's what it was like.

I stood up there and I looked down and I read that sermon as fast as I could, all 25 pages, in about 10 minutes. Some of you are like, “We like that time frame, why don’t we get back to that time frame?”

I get done and I walk off the state and I was just like, “I don’t know what happened. That was awful.” And I sit down. There was literally fifteen people there that morning. And I’ll never forget...

I never articulated this to anybody. Not my mom and my dad, not even my very best friend that I was feeling called to preach. I was just sitting on that because I just thought, “This is a season, it will pass.”

I will never forget. There were three men in that church who asked to talk with me afterward. And I thought I was in trouble. I didn’t know how it worked. I didn’t know if you got a pink slip, if this went on your permanent record—three strikes and you’re out of ministry. I didn’t know. I didn’t know.

I’ll never forget. They pulled me into this little Sunday school class room and they came around me and they said, “Hey, is that your first sermon?” And I said, “Yeah.” And they go, “We thought so.” And I will never forget what they said next because it changed the whole trajectory of my life.

[pause] I didn’t expect to get emotional. They said, “We feel that God is calling you to do this for the rest of your life and we just want to pray over you before you leave.” I was stunned. I said, “Did you hear that sermon? That was awful.”

They could see past the imperfections and they could see something that I couldn’t quite see. And if it wasn’t for those older, gray-haired men who took an opportunity... They could have just let me go back to campus, but they said it. And I want to encourage you to do the same thing.

Here’s the primary take away that I want to leave you with today. If you see a younger person, would you just speak some courage into his life. And as a younger person, would you reach out and thank someone who has spoken that courage into your life. Listen, that’s what it means to be a multi-generational church. We’ve thrown that term out. We’ve talked about it from time to time and I know...

Can I just take an opportunity? Petie did this a couple of weeks ago and I just want to back him up and say the same thing. If you’ve been in our church and you’re over the age of 50 or 55 and you’ve been in our church for a long time, you have seen a lot of change. And I know that probably a lot of the change has not been all the exciting to you from time to time. But thank you for hanging in here with us. And thank you for loving people the way that Jesus loves people. We need you.

A multi-generational church is not about creating a traditional service and a contemporary service where everybody is happy. That just divides age groups. And we need people of different generations worshipping right alongside of one another. And I know that it may not always fit your preference, but I want you to develop the same heart that Paul had for Timothy and Titus to say, “You know what? I’m going to pour myself out.”

And I see this all of the time. At the Lecrae concert a few weeks ago I was sitting right back there just to the right of the sound board with my son and his three friends. And I looked down that little hallway right there, here at the Northwest campus, and I saw these two older ladies. I’m not going to guess how old they are that would be rude. But they were older.

One was an African American woman and one was a Caucasian lady—they were buddies. They were kind of like next to each other and they were serving that night. I recognized them. They go to our church. And they were serving, they were taking tickets, and showing younger people where to sit.

I was watching them, and I was like, “Man, that is so cool that they would give up a Friday night to come and serve at this Lecrae concert so they could pour themselves into the life of younger people, but they ain’t going to like this. I mean, you think it’s loud on Sunday morning. Whoa. Wow. It was loud in here and I thought, “Man, as soon as this concert starts, they are going to be out of here. And I was so wrong. I looked down during the middle of the Lecrae concert and they were both jamming—giving each other high fives. Recording the thing with their iPhones. And I was like, “That is so awesome.”

Man that’s what it means. And can we all just kind of develop that same kind of heart as well? Say, “Man, I need to always be on the lookout for those who maybe I just need to articulate what the Spirit of God has been doing in their heart to bring it to life.” And you circle back up and thank those people because I guarantee you, your personal growth has a name attached to it. So go seek them out and thank them.

Father, we come to you right now and I just thank you for this study in 2 Timothy. I thank you that our salvation if we were going to give a grade to it is A+ because of the finished work of Jesus.

Right now maybe our spiritual maturity isn’t doing so well. And so, Father, I pray today that we would just be willing to be honest about it and that we would lean into you and take our training seriously recognizing that the benefit of our spiritual training is always for the good of others.

The side blessing of that is that we grow from it. So, Father, I pray that we would have that kind of heart, that we would foster that kind of a heart as a church. We love you and we thank you for who you are and what you’ve done. And may we give that to others. We ask this right now in Jesus’ name. And everybody says: Amen.