

# A Letter to the Church at Providence in 2023 Part 4

sermonaudio.com

*Letter to Providence Church*

By Ty Blackburn

**Preached on:** Sunday, October 22, 2023

**Providence Church**

2146 Buford Hwy  
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

**Website:** [www.providenceduluth.org](http://www.providenceduluth.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch](http://www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch)

Amen. Please turn over in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 4. 2 Timothy 4. I do want to say how much I appreciate Ray Gentry preaching last week and the excellent sermon that he shared with us, "The Word of God is the Will of God." What a helpful just distilled meaning in that sermon title. This morning we're going to resume a topical sermon series that we have been looking at, three messages. Previously I've preached on this sermon series, and so we will, Lord willing, get back to 1 Peter, our exposition of 1 Peter, before too long, but felt like the Lord wanted us to deal with some issues that we have at our church, some questions that you've raised, and some burdens that we have as your pastor and elders. So we've done this topical series, and I explained that I was drawing on the kind of the idea and the legitimacy of this kind of a series after really analyzing the contents of 1 Corinthians. I did that to teach a class via Zoom in South Africa, Bible college class a while back, and in studying 1 Corinthians, I was struck for the first time with really just the structure of it in a whole new way. I mean, that it really reads like a Q&A session in a book of the Bible that God delivered to his people in that form, where Paul has received a letter from the Corinthian church asking him questions and he responds to a series of those questions in the letter, but he also speaks from his own heart in his own pastoral concern for them because he's also received a report about some challenges they have. And so it's a movement back and forth from answering questions to sharing burdens and it reads really like a Q&A transcript, and so I've titled the messages in this series, these previous messages, "A Letter to the Church at Providence in 2023." A letter to the church at Providence in 2023. This is part four, though it's only the third question. First question we dealt with was a question that had been raised by the congregation, that is, when should children be included in worship, and so we spent two Sundays looking at that. And then two weeks ago, my third message dealt with a second question, which was a question that we felt we needed to talk about, and that was, what kind of leadership do we need here at Providence to thrive? The title of the message was, the leadership we need to thrive and so I preached from Ephesians 4 and shared with you what we felt like we needed to do going forward.

Today, I come to the third subject and the fourth message on this series, "A Letter to the Church at Providence," and I'm dealing with another question which you've raised. First couple of sermons was a question you raised. Third sermon, second message was about a burden we have. Now back to a question that the congregation has raised and it is, what is expository preaching, and how can we know if a text has been properly interpreted and

appropriately applied? How can we become better Bereans? And so this has been shared, and we want to speak today on that subject, expository preaching. And also, related to that, a second question in the same vein is, in a topical sermon, expository preaching takes a text, a particular text, and the sermon flows directly from that text throughout the whole message. The text drives the message. A topical message, on the other hand, there is a burden or a concern or an issue the congregation is needing to have addressed, and various passages are brought together, teaching of the whole Bible in a sense, brought together to speak to that topic. It's more like systematic theology. Topical preaching is appropriate and important and necessary, but that the general diet, we believe, should be expository preaching, and that's why we're normally expositing books. That's why we're working through 1 Peter for the last year and now we'll be resuming chapter 3 verse 8 when we go back to it. But what is also is topical, what is correct biblical preaching when you're preaching on a topic, that is, how do you know that the texts have been appropriately drawn and applied to the question? This morning, I want to talk about expository preaching. Next week, topical preaching. The question, what is sound expository preaching today, next time, what does sound topical preaching look like?

So this morning, a letter to the church at Providence, what is expository preaching and how can we recognize sound expository preaching? I want to read from the passage we're going to use this morning as a starting point and then for much of the matter of the message, 2 Timothy 4:1 to 5. Paul writes there, to young Timothy, the pastor of the church of Ephesus, he writes,

1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we come to You this morning praising and worshiping You because You are God who has spoken to us so wonderfully and perfectly in the pages of Holy Scripture. We pray now that the Holy Spirit that inspired this word would now illuminate the minds and hearts of everyone here, and that You would, through Your word, accomplish Your purpose in our lives, all for the glory of our great Savior Jesus. We pray in His name. Amen.*

So, a letter to the church at Providence, you know, what, in a sense, the theme might be, I'm going to show you that this is, I think, the theme of this passage, what do you need from your pastors of the church, particularly the main teaching pastor, but what do you need from your pastor? A letter to the church at Providence in 2023, what do you need

from your pastor because we're talking expository preaching. Well, you need that. You need sound preaching. That's what we're going to see the text is showing. But what I want to do is, first of all, begin with a definition of expository preaching and spend some time on that. So we're going to come back to the text shortly, but I want to define expository preaching. There's the first point this morning, there's two major points, the first is definition, the second will be demonstration.

Definition of expository preaching. Expository preaching is preaching that discovers the author's intended meaning and purpose in a specific text, and then delivers a sermon that applies that text to a contemporary audience. It's my definition I've worked up from looking at many, many definitions, expository preaching, preaching that discovers the author's intended meaning and purpose in a specific text and then delivers a sermon that applies that text to a contemporary audience. There are two parts of Bible exposition, discovery and delivery. Discovery and delivery. Discovery is sometimes called exegesis. Exegesis. That is an English word which we have taken from the Greek by transliteration; that is a letter-for-letter rendering of a Greek word. Exegesis and it means literally in Greek to lead out. To lead out. And so exegetical, or the work of exegesis is to lead out the meaning of the text, to draw out from the text what the text means. That's exegesis. And the first part of expository preaching is built on the foundation of exegesis, that's discovering the author's intended meaning and purpose. That's the first business of the preacher.

So discovery equals exegesis. Delivery is exposition. Delivery is exposition. If exegesis is, and you'll see this when you read on this, exegesis is a science, as it were, a lot of times you'll read this in various people talking about expository preaching, that is, that you apply certain rules, and it's all about observation. To lead out the meaning, you have to observe the text carefully, and there's a sense in which you go to the text like a scientist, you apply your mind, and you work hard at observing every detail in the text. with a goal of synthesizing and understanding the intended meaning of the text. So exegesis is a science. Exposition is an art, it's the art of delivering the author's intended meaning and purpose in the present day to a specific congregation. So you could say again that to exegete a passage, you are like a scientist. I'm not trying to over-blow that. I'm just saying that it's hard work. You have to show yourself approved, a workman who need not be ashamed, 2 Timothy 2:15, accurately handling the word of truth. That is, it's a work to labor in the text. That's why Paul says those elders who rule well should be worthy of double honor because they're laboring like an ox, treading the grain.

So part of expositional preaching begins with exegesis, that is, the science of discovering the author's intended meaning and purpose in a specific text and the next position is the art of delivering the author's intended meaning and purpose into the present day to a specific audience. In fact, this is one of the reasons that you will hear different people preach different messages, and they'll sound radically different though they are talking from the same passage. There's a very helpful website that's just come up in the last year or so, MacArthur Center for Expository Preaching. It's a ministry of the Master's Seminary where John MacArthur is president or the founding pastor. And it says this about, you'll read there, exegesis is a science, exposition is an art. Another word for

exposition is homiletics, that's the delivery of the message. This is a quote from the website. The fact that exegesis is a science and you're going for the same meaning, that looks a lot the same, pastor to pastor, but exposition looks very differently and this is the quote "because it's an art." This explains, and I quote, "This explains why you can listen to 10 sermons on Psalm 46, and none of them will sound exactly the same. A preacher's arrangement, emphases, audience, and method will vary as he expositors the exact same text, but if it is an expository sermon, each of those 10 sermons sounding very different, will have the same authorially intended meaning at the center of the message." Does that make sense? The exposition varies because it takes into account arrangement, emphases, audience, method, but if it's truly expository preaching, it has arrived at the one true meaning of the passage.

Now that's a definition of expository preaching, discovery of the author's intended meaning. So the goal is to figure out what was in the mind of the author when he wrote this passage and you do that by observing the words of the text. This is the exegesis now I'm talking about, okay? You look at the words of the text. You look at the phrases. You look at figures of speech. You think about the literary genre, that's the type of literature. You have to take into account, are you reading an epistle, that's a letter? Are you reading a historical narrative, a story? Are you reading poetry? Wisdom literature? Apocalyptic literature? All of that comes in to faithful exegesis. You have to know what you're reading, and you observe carefully the words of the text. You do things like word studies. What does this word mean? Why did he choose this word, not another word? But you also need to be careful to look at structure. It's not just the contents of the text word for word, it's the structure, and this is fundamental. In fact, it's more important than the words themselves is the structure. I mean, they're all essential. You can't leave any part of it out but the structure, the sentence structure, the flow of thought is what you're aiming for in exegesis. You want to know what was on the heart of the Apostle Paul, for instance, when he wrote what he wrote in 2 Timothy 4. We know what he said. If we observe it carefully, we observe the words, the sentence, we think about it, and we meditate on it, but what was his heart? What was his purpose? Not just what does he say, but what is his purpose? This is why it's not an expository sermon to have someone give a running commentary on a text, just to tell you this word means this, this word means that, this speaks to this, this speaks to that. No exposition is to take the whole of a passage, figure out what was the mind of God in that passage, and faithfully apply that big purpose, big idea to a congregation here in the 21st century.

So that's expository preaching, the agenda of the text sets the agenda for the sermon, including the structure of the text greatly informs the structure of the sermon. The tone of the text should be reflected in the tone of the sermon. If there's urgency in the heart of the author, the good expositor sees that and delivers a message with the same sense of urgency. So its content, form, tone, all of that should flow from the text. This takes a lot of hard work. That's the science of exposition. But to get to the purpose where you're transitioning, really what happens is you look for, you know, what does the text say, but then you want to say, what does it really mean and what did it mean to them originally? You're looking for the purpose. What did the author want his people to do with what he was telling them? How did he want it to impact their life? When you get to that, now

you're really ready to make the adjustment to looking at the audience that you're preaching to and say then what is the purpose of God for these people at this time? And it directly flows from the purpose of the original author.

The reason we do that is because we believe that every word of God is inspired by him. In fact, I'm going to read it in just a minute. The verse is right before this, the great passage on inspiration of Scripture, it's all breathed out by God, every word. So what we believe is that that's teaching us that when Paul writes, though he writes as a human being with his own personality, with a unique situation, whether he's writing to Corinthians or writing to Timothy, he's writing with the burdens of his heart, and when he puts it on paper, God has superintended the whole process so that what goes on the paper is the living word of God, the perfect eternal word of God. Therefore, to know the mind of the author, to know the author's intention, listen to this, to know the human author's intention is to know the mind of God in that moment for those people. Do you see what I'm saying? It's the same. God is superintending the human author to do exactly what he wants done. We're not sitting around mystically praying for some kind of inspiration when we study the word of God. No, the meaning of the word of God is the word of God. You don't import something into it. You draw out what God put there. That is faithful exposition.

That's exegesis that then, now listen, if you think about this, exegesis, discovering the meaning, to transition to delivering, and exegesis is careful observation is required for exegesis. Careful observation. But to get to exposition, what's the mind of God, what's the mind of God for those people, now, what's the mind of God for our people today, you have to add to your careful observation, prayerful meditation. Prayerful meditation. As it were, you read your Bible, not necessarily literally, but figuratively on your knees. "Lord, what is Your mind? What is Your heart for Your people?" So it's careful observation. That's exegesis. Prayerful meditation leads to right exposition. That's the definition of expository preaching. That's the first point.

Now the second point, I want to demonstrate it. Demonstration, that's the second point. 2 Timothy 4:1 to 5. Now, I'm going to do this a little differently. I'm going to let you kind of explore it with me. I'm not preaching it the way I normally would because I want you to discover and see how the discovery leads to delivery, okay? So understand that as I work through this. We're not going to go back through the hours that it takes to do this. I'm going to try to summarize and distill, but still we're going to work through it like that.

And so, the first thing we want to do here is do the exegesis, and that is the analysis of the text, the observation of the text. And when you observe the contents and structure of this, you see, for instance, that in verse 2, there's five imperatives, five commands: preach the word, be ready, reprove, rebuke, exhort, all imperatives. Four imperatives in verse 5: be sober, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill your ministry. Nine imperatives. That, in itself, communicates urgency, doesn't it? I mean, he is loading up the commands here. And when you step back from it and you work through it a little more, you see that really the main imperative is preach the word, that what Paul basically is telling Timothy is, "What you need to do, Timothy, is you need to preach." And then

what he does is he gives him seven, again, sometimes people would do it a little differently here and there, but essentially they would bring out these same points in some form or fashion. Outlines look different from person to person. But I would say that he spends time giving seven characteristics of faithful preaching. He's telling Timothy to be a faithful preacher, and he's telling him what it looks like. He gives him seven characteristics of faithful preaching and so, if you want to mark that down, this is under number 2 demonstration, seven characteristics of faithful preaching.

The first is solemnity. Solemnity, that is, preaching is serious business. Look with me again at verse 1. I solemnly charge you," he could have just gone, "I solemnly charge you to preach the word. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus," he could have said, "to preach the word." He said, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom." You see that? He puts all of that right before Timothy. He says, "Listen Timothy, I'm about to tell you something, but I want you to hear this with a force I'm telling you. I am solemnly charging you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead. Now with all of that, preach the word." Solemnity, seriousness should characterize preaching. It doesn't mean that there's not places for humor. There are, but that the overall character of preaching is not frivolity. It's not entertainment. We are hearing from God. Isaiah 66:1 and 2, I love that passage, he says basically, "Where am I going to dwell? I mean, I don't need to dwell in a temple. The heavens can't contain me. Here's where I will dwell, with him who is humble and contrite and who trembles at My word." God will come down when a man is humble and contrite and trembles at his word.

Solemnity. That's the first characteristic. The second is authority. It's in the word preach itself. The word preach, the Greek word *kairos* speaks of a herald. It speaks of an official messenger from the king or the emperor who goes out into the highways and byways, into the villages and the cities, and he heralds the authoritative declarations of the king. So preaching has authority. It's not that we're having a rap session when somebody preaches. That's not preaching. Conversation. No, it's not because the pastor is anything, it's because the word of God is everything. He's just a herald. He's just a mouthpiece, but God is speaking when Scripture speaks. When Scripture speaks, God speaks. So it's authority.

Solemnity, authority, thirdly, accuracy. The preacher does not... what does he preach? He preaches the word. It says, preach the word. In context, he's clearly talking about the word of God. Look back with me at verse 16 of chapter 3, right before this charge. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word," that is, every bit of the word of God. All of it is profitable. "Preach it all," he says, "but don't preach anything but the word." You don't need the preachers opinions. I mean, if he gives them, you know, we need to make sure when we do that that we let you know this is just an opinion. But the charge is preach the word and that's what we're getting about

when I'm trying to explain what faithful exposition is, what faithful topical preaching looks like next Sunday, Lord willing.

So, solemnity, authority, accuracy, fourthly, urgency. In the second imperative in verse 2, be ready in season and out of season. The King James says, be instant in season and out of season. It's an interesting word. It connotes suddenness and readiness. Be ready at a moment's notice, is kind of the idea. But it also pictures the fact that you need to be ready at a moment's notice as you have something to say and it's an urgent message. Don't miss an opportunity, is the idea, because this message is urgent.

Solemnity, authority, accuracy, urgency. I'm running through this quicker than I normally would because we're trying to talk about expository preaching, not really... I would just love to camp out in this passage longer. Fifthly, efficacy and there's going to be three sub-points on number five. Efficacy. So, solemnity, authority, accuracy, urgency, and efficacy. That is, you could say maybe instead of efficacy, potency, power. And it's seen in the next three imperatives. What does the word do? What does the preached word do? What is it supposed to do? That's what he's saying when he says, be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort. The word of God is intended to reprove. The word of God is intended to rebuke. And the word of God is intended to exhort. It is to accomplish the purpose for which God sent it, Isaiah 55. And God has, and generally when it's doing its work, it's doing those three things in our lives. It's a two-edged sword. It cuts and it heals. It hurts and it restores. When you come under the word of God, you come under the knife. God cuts to the heart and then he shows his steadfast love and he heals. That's what he's describing, but two-thirds of these words are negative about the cutting.

Reprove. The idea here is basically more mental and dealing with your thoughts. It's correcting the way you think, this word that he uses here. So you need to have your thoughts straightened out, he says, and the word of God in preaching, the role of the preacher is to deliver the word of God in such a way that the thoughts of the congregation are corrected. He shows us, God shows us, and this is part of what the preacher is doing, he's trying to show all of us, including himself, where we are wrong in our thinking. But I love this, 2 Corinthians 10:3 to 5, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but are mighty through God to the tearing down of strongholds. We pull down reasonings. The tearing down and pull down are the same word. It speaks of a violent activity. It's war. Preaching is war, Paul says. And what do you do? You tear down, you demolish the reasonings of the world that are in all of our minds and hearts. This means that preaching has a violent character about it at times. You know what I'm saying, understand, it's comfort as well, but there's a sense in which just the explication of the Scripture will assault the way you think, and you will find it offensive and difficult. That's what he's saying. Reprove.

Rebuke is more about the heart, the emotive aspect. I mean the heart, the mind is the heart too, so it's more of the emotive or effective part of man. This word speaks more of like cutting to the very heart, like they were cut to the heart when Peter preached at Pentecost. This is the idea here. Rebuke. It speaks more of value. There's a sense in which

you see yourself as you are. You see your thinking's wrong in reproof, rebuking, you see my whole orientation is wrong. My affections are wrong. I love what I should not love. I hate what I should love. The Scripture shows that to us. But then it exhorts. This word, it can be translated encourage. Parakaleo, it means to come alongside someone who's in distress and offer aid.

So the word of God knocks us down because we need to be knocked down and then it picks us up, dusts us off, and carries us forward. That's the beauty of the word of God and faithful preaching will do those three things. Some passages are more heavy on the reproof, some on the rebuke, and some on the exhorting, encouraging. That's why we need all of God's word, because we would all like to go to all the encouraging passages, wouldn't we? I would. I mean, I actually, there have been many times where I've thought as I'm working on a sermon text, "Lord, why do I have to preach this Sunday? Nobody wants to hear this, including me." But we all need to hear it. Every word of God is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness that the man of God may be equipped, thoroughly furnished for every good work. So efficacy, you see, it accomplishes what it needs to accomplish.

So solemnity, authority, accuracy, urgency, efficacy, and then sixthly, constancy. When he says, reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience, literally with longsuffering. The preacher must be willing to suffer at it, to stay at it, even when people don't like it, because he's making the point right before that in verses 3 and 4 or right after this, for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. So you're going to have to be constant at the work and not judged by the response of the people. Whether they like it or not is not the barometer, whether you've been faithful to the text or not, that's what matters. So, constancy. with great patience and instruction.

Number seven, clarity. Clarity, that is, that you have to explain and expound and not just, you know, in a surface way go over the text and say, "This is what it means for you. This is why you should be brokenhearted. This is why you should change your thinking." No, you've got to keep working with the people he's saying. Preach it, but be clear in your explanation, that is, true preaching, authoritative preaching also always entails teaching. The preacher must be a teacher.

Now that is what he says here in the text about what he's saying, "Timothy, this is what you're to do. You're to preach the word with solemnity, authority, accuracy, urgency, efficacy, constancy, and clarity." And that is the basic meaning of the text. But we can do a little more with it if we're really faithfully expositing the text because one of the key things we always need to be doing to get to the mind of the author is to think about the larger context, to think about the circumstances of the author and the audience. This does something dramatic in understanding the Scripture. This is where the prayerful meditation comes in. There's still some work involved because you have to do some work like, for instance, what are the circumstances of the Apostle Paul as he writes these words?



Well, let's just look at it for a moment. Turn back to 2 Timothy 1, and we see that Paul is in prison. Verse 8, "Therefore do not be ashamed," this is 2 Timothy 1:8, "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God." Paul is suffering in prison. Verse 12, "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed." I'm suffering because of the gospel, but I'm not ashamed. Verse 16. "The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains." Paul is suffering. He is in prison and he's in chains. This, we believe, is his second Roman imprisonment. He was imprisoned in Rome at the end of Acts for two years, but it was kind of a house arrest. He was free to move about, free to have visitors, entertain visitors. Now he's not. He is apparently in a dungeon, chained in the dungeon. As we do more research, we find he probably is sometime between 64 and 67 AD, this is during the persecution of Nero. Now, we've talked about that, if you remember 1 Peter, as we're looking at 1 Peter, because Peter writes right before the Neronian persecution breaks out. He writes in 63 AD.

Paul is probably, my guess is he's writing in 65 AD. The persecution has been going on for six months to a year. He's been rearrested. He's in jail for a period of time, and he knows that his end is near. In fact, turn to chapter 4 right after our passage. This is why context, context, context is so key to understand the Scriptures rightly. Look at verse 6, right after our last verse we read, he says, "Fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there's laid up for me the crown of righteousness." Paul knows that his death is imminent. The Lord has shown him he is about to leave this world. Is it weeks? Is it months? It could be days. It is certainly soon and so he writes with a spirit of great earnestness. I'm not going to take you through all the verses. You can see this. But if you read 2 Timothy again this week, you'll see it. You can hear the earnestness of a man who is writing his last will and testament to the young man that he loves and he's challenging him, he's encouraging him for the trials that are coming Timothy's way.

And so when he says what he says about preach the word, there's a lot more in it than just learning the mechanics of expository preaching. He's saying something about the urgency of the moment. In fact, I want you to note chapter 3. It's really encouraging when we look at this, the immediate context that leads up to Paul's exhortation to Timothy to preach the word. What was it? You see, you're looking for flow of thought in the Bible. What is it that Paul is talking about that leads him to say the next thing? It bleeds meaning. Context bleeds meaning. Context protects you from devilish deception. Satan loves to take the Scripture out of context and twist it and distort it and pervert it and to destroy people in that endeavor but you understand context, you're protected.

Chapter 3 verse 1, "But realize this, in the last days difficult times will come." He's just been talking about how hard it is even now with what's going on and he says this. Now listen, you read this, and I read this normally, we think the last days means the time right before Jesus comes back, but if you do good study and sound exegesis, you will look, and you can do this yourself, just look in, like nowadays, such a beautiful thing to have

computers in this one area, to do a concordant search of, you used to have to go, look, you guys remember like Strong's Concordance? Like it weighs 100 pounds, you get it out, you carry it over, you open it up. Well, now you just tell your computer what you want to look for. If you look up "last days" or "in the last days," you'll find it occurs over 20 times in the Bible, and you'll see that Peter led off his sermon in Acts 2 by quoting Joel, and Peter is saying, "We are in the last days." Peter said that to the people in Jerusalem around 33 AD, they were in the last days. Now we are too. The last days as he explains it there, is the time between the ascension of Christ after his ministry and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit until his return. That's the last days. It's not just the very last days before Jesus comes back.

Well, this is why Paul says what he says in chapter 3 verse 1. He's saying he knows Timothy is already getting wind of persecution. Persecution has broken out in Rome. Nero is a crazed madman. Remember the Roman fire that happens in July of 64 AD? He blames it on Christians. It's unspeakable the things that he does to Christians in Rome. He's arrested, we believe, Peter and Paul are both martyred during this time by Nero in Rome. The church is getting wind of that all over the Mediterranean world. Timothy is a pastor in Ephesus, which is in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, not that far from Rome, but a little ways, another major center of Roman society, though. And this wind of persecution and the craziness of the world is something that they're dealing with. I mean, the culture is becoming increasingly chaotic. Social upheaval, political persecution on the horizon, if not already happening where Timothy is. They're getting wind, Paul's about to be executed, Peter about to be executed. What is happening? And Paul writes to Timothy, a young man he knew so well, his own heart and soul. He brought him to faith. He nurtured him in the faith and in the ministry. He knows he's faithful, but he knows he needs to be encouraged to do what he needs to do. And he knows Timothy is a pastor who's been at Ephesus for a couple of years at least, we don't know exactly how long, but he's been there for an extended period of time. He's gotten 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy while he's there, and Timothy's asking the question. Paul knows the question Timothy's asking. With all of this cultural chaos going on, with a spiritual opposition, the spiritual darkness growing, "What am I to do?" So Paul says, "Listen, realize that in the last days difficult times will come. What you're seeing is what we should expect for men will be lovers of," verse 2, chapter 3, verse 2, "For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money," look at this portrait of society, "men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these." And in verses 6 to 9, he basically tells some people to watch out for. And in verse 10, he says, "Now, this is what you are to expect. This is what's happening around you. I know you're alarmed, but this is what we knew would happen." Verse 10, "Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, you've seen my love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings such as it happened to me at Antioch and Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured and out of them all the Lord rescued me." See how Timothy needs to hear that? "Be reminded of all I've been through and how God rescued me, Timothy. My God is your God. Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be

persecuted." Verse 13, "But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however," and here's another imperative, the first imperative, this makes 10, this one here in verse 14, and then we have five in verse 2, and four in verse 5 of chapter 4. But the first one is, you, however, what are you to do? Now think about that. What are you to do, Timothy? The world is going to hell in a handbasket. Your people are shaken. They don't know what to do. How are you to help them? He gives 10 imperatives and the first is, "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of." Continue in the Scriptures, "knowing from whom you have learned and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. I solemnly charge you now." Do you see that? What are you to do, Timothy? You wonder how many times, Timothy goes, "What am I going to do? What am I supposed to be doing? How can I help the people? How can I shore up and encourage them? Do I need to be figuring out a political strategy and to be figuring out, you know, an escape plan? Do we need to get out of here?" Paul says, "Listen, I'm going to tell you what you need to do and to make sure you understand that I'm telling you what to do. I'm going to solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus. This is what you're to do, keep preaching the word in all those characteristics he gives of it, preach the word with solemnity, authority, accuracy, urgency, efficacy, constancy, clarity. Keep preaching the word." That's what they need.

Now, the application of this passage, now, that's the force of the passage. You look at context, it helps you to not only see purpose and meaning, but the force behind it so that you can preach it that way. Paul's heart is to help his dear son in the faith to be faithful to the end, and his heart is for the people of Ephesus. He loves them dearly. "Just, Timothy, what you've got to do is don't get off the main thing." And the application of the sermon, strictly speaking, if we want to really accurately understand this, the most direct application of this sermon to the present is for those who preach the word. It's for pastors. So let me share this with you too now. When you're trying to preach a passage though, you preach it to the whole congregation, not just the pastors, not just the Bible teachers, not just the elders, everybody. So the question that the expositor asked with his prayerful meditation is, "Lord, how does this passage speak to everyone, every single person in the congregation? How does it speak to them? What does this require of them? What is Your mind and heart for every single member of the congregation?" And I think when you do that, what becomes clear is what this passage is saying, it is telling every member of the congregation who are dealing with the fears and trials of life in a fallen world, it's answering this question, "What do I need most right now? What do I need more than anything else?" I need to sit under the preaching of the Bible regularly. This is the most important thing. This is the greatest urgency. This is what every Christian needs to understand. As the times get darker, it's even more important that the word becomes clearer through the preaching of the Bible. This speaks to how you make a decision about where you go to church. Do you go where the kids' programs are great and the kids love being happy there? If you do, you're being foolish, like living the Christian life the way McDonald's wants you to live your dietary life. The Happy Meal was their genius

invention, wasn't it? Everybody else followed suit, but they were the first ones because if you get the kids, you get the adults. The kids want to go to McDonald's because the Happy Meal is great. The parents go there. That's just, if you apply that into the church, that's really foolish. We're supposed to lead our children, not follow them. Where do they need to be? What do they need most as they grow up? They need to be under the preaching of the word. You worry about your children and grandchildren. If you are looking at the world, you certainly should be worrying about them. Yeah, the world is in serious decline, but God has told us what we need to do. We need to be under preaching of the word.

Now, there's a secondary meaning of this too that applies to every single one of us. First thing is, what do we need most? The second thing is, what are we supposed to do? Because in reality, it also applies to every Christian, you also need to be proclaiming the word of God. Just proclaim it. The best thing you can do for people around you is proclaim the word. Speak the truth. Do it in love, but do it with authority, solemnity, accuracy, and all the other points. You see context bleeds meaning. It gives the force to the message. And listen, the preaching of the word is the most relevant thing in the world. It is, even when we think it's not. This is why it's so painful for me to watch, you know, as you hear about people, that they're trying to be so relevant, they bend over backwards to be relevant, and what they do is they make themselves irrelevant, because the most relevant thing for any person is to hear from God in their circumstance. You hear from God as you hear his word, not as you hear creative ways to have a more successful life, sermons that are more like something you'd read in an airline magazine.

We need to hear from God and sometimes this means things that, you know, we exposit the word, we apply it. Like, let me give you an example. I preached a series of messages most recently in 1 Peter 3 about marriage because that's what it's talking about, and I preach two messages on women, two messages on men, and in the middle, I sandwiched a message about the main thrust of the passage. Two messages on women, the evangelistic power of feminine beauty, and the reason I labeled it that way, because I'm going to talk about marriage, what the text says, but also I've got to apply it to every single person here, and not everyone is married and we can learn in that, and rightly extrapolate from that, that God is talking about gender roles in marriage. This is what women do. This is what men do in marriage. This is how I've designed it. And the whole point of 1 Peter, I've been making clear as we're going through that, in chapter 2 verse 13, one of the key points is, listen, they slander you as evildoers when they look at your life. They don't understand you. They think you're out to destroy everything with your wacky way of living. But in reality, you keep your behavior excellent. It's more beautiful. It's more glorious. That's the thrust and force of everything being said in 1 Peter. So when he's talking about husbands and wives, he's saying, "Listen, they may think you're crazy for living this way, but God has designed you as men and women to live this way. His word is clear. Do what He says confidently, boldly, and in doing so, they will see the beauty of it." God's speaking about gender, male, female, and so I also applied it in the sandwich message in the middle, I said, listen, the Lord wants you to understand that all that the world says out there, I've got to do some demolition. I've got to do some 2 Corinthians 10:4. I'm going to cast down some imaginations. I'm going to destroy some

of this foolish thinking that people have. There's no such thing as a sex change operation. There's no such thing as gender-affirming care. It's all a lie. And so we have to do that. We've got to apply the word in a way that does the hard work of changing our thinking, getting to our hearts, and then restoring us with the beauty of it because God's way is best. And we can help anyone who will repent, even if they've done something that is unalterable physically, Jesus is able to restore them completely spiritually in their soul. And we have the good news.

So faithful exposition takes the content and the structure of a text, it understands the meaning, it synthesizes that, it feels the force of it, and it communicates it in a way that the content, the structure, and the tone are consistent with the author. That's what we need and the wonderful thing about it is, I mean, it's so wonderful to know that it's all we need. I mean, in topical sermons, we need topical sermons to help us apply to the particular questions we have today, that's one of the reasons we're doing a topical series right now. But I love how just going through 1 Peter 3, there it is, gender. Man, we sure need to talk about that today, don't we, even the unpleasant aspects of it. And listen, I know every preacher, every time he preaches, and I sometimes get too earnest, and I sometimes say things that aren't the best, and I'm happy to receive correction on that, but know my heart, my deepest desire is to be faithful in delivering to you the word of God. So help me when you see something that's not there, help me and let's all work together to speak his word, because it is all that we need.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, how grateful we are for Your precious word. We thank You that it is completely sufficient to make us adequately equipped for every good work. Everything You're going to lead us into, the word will enable us by Your Spirit to do. Change our thinking, change our heart, encourage us, strengthen us and lead us forward through Your word. Your word reveals You to us, Your word reveals Jesus to us. Everywhere we turn in the Scriptures, we see Christ, our great Savior, who's done everything necessary by His atoning death to save us. Lord, keep on sanctifying us through Your word. May You be glorified, We pray in Jesus' name, amen.*