

Main Idea: Because of our desire to be a healthy church we are committed to expository preaching. We’re going to do two things in this message, first look at our God-given assignment in 2 Timothy 4:1-5 and then consider the implications for our church.

- I. Expository Preaching: A God-given assignment in 2 Timothy 4:1-5...
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- II. Expository Preaching: Getting serious as a church about the implications...
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Expository preaching is making known the biblical author’s intent of a passage so that hearers will understand it and make Christ-exalting application of it in their lives.
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    - 1. You make it clear who the authority is.
    - 2. You address all the issues that God wants us to address.
    - 3. You have a Christ-centered ministry since the Bible is all about Him.

No doubt you’ve noticed there are a lot of churches in our area. This week I did a quick count of the churches listed in our yellow pages came up with around 140 churches. That’s a lot of churches, and that’s a good thing knowing there are so many places where people identify themselves as followers of our Savior, Jesus Christ. And yet, for people who don’t go to church, that can be a very confusing thing too. You know as well as I do that while there are some similarities between those 140 churches, there are also some significant differences. And I don’t mean the more obvious differences, like how old they are (some, like WBC, have been around for over a century, while others are quite young), the architecture of their buildings, worship styles, the programs they offer, and of course, differences in doctrine.

There’s a question we’re going to think about for the next two months. What makes a church a *healthy* church? Sadly, not all churches are healthy. Many are struggling, we might say *sickly*. So what’s true of a healthy church?

For the next nine weeks we are going to open our Bibles and identify nine marks of a healthy church. On Sunday mornings you’ll hear a sermon preached on each mark. On Sunday evenings we’ll be discussing in small, inter-generational groups the implications of each mark, as we digest the morning sermon as well as Mark Dever’s book, *What Is a Healthy Church?*

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

I want you to know what's driving this series. I believe that healthy things grow. Healthy children grow. Healthy animals grow. Healthy plants grow. Healthy businesses grow. And healthy churches grow as the Lord deems best.

I believe the Lord wants His church to grow, first in its depth and then in its breadth. It is the Lord that saves people and adds them to His church. That's what Acts 2:47 says. Jesus said, "I will build my church." And that's what He is doing. So He is the builder of the church. He is the grower of the church.

What's our role in this? What should be our focus? I believe the word *health* captures it. We ought to be doing everything we can to insure the *health* of our church, with the understanding that healthy churches grow as God intends.

So what does it take to be a *healthy* church? According to God's Word, many things. When you read the epistles you'll discover a host of responsibilities God has given to His church, like over forty one another commands, and each is important. But we're going to narrow it down to nine distinctive marks that contribute to God-honoring church health. And quite honestly, if they're absent, a church will not be healthy long term.

Frankly, not every church would agree with these nine marks. In fact, very few in our area would affirm the whole package. But these nine marks are the DNA of WBC. You're not going to hear anything in the next nine weeks that you haven't heard before from this pulpit. But there's a difference between hearing and *living*. So what we're going to do is take time to say, *this is who we are and aspire to be*, and invite you to affirm and live out what you are hearing.

So where do we begin? We begin with this foundational mark. *Expository preaching*. Because of our desire to be a healthy church we are committed to *expository preaching*. Why? And what does that mean? We're going to do two things in this message, first look at our God-given assignment in 2 Timothy 4:1-5 and then consider the implications for our church.

### I. Expository Preaching: A God-given assignment in 2 Timothy 4:1-5...

Paul wrote this letter from a dungeon prison cell. He's facing execution, and he has one consuming thought on his mind. What's going to happen to the gospel after I die? That's why he wrote to his young associate, Timothy. In chapter one he urged Timothy to guard the gospel. In chapter two, to train men for gospel ministry. In chapter three, to persevere in the gospel. And that brings us to chapter four.

Notice verse 1, "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge."

These are solemn words, literally, "I affirm solemnly." The term has legal connotations. It means to testify under oath. Friends, what Paul exhorted Timothy to do carries huge implications for every person today who calls himself a minister of the gospel *and* for every church where ministers serve.

This is what a pastor is to do, and this is what a church is to expect a pastor to do. Paul left no room for misunderstanding when he told Timothy, "I charge you." Paul spelled out three things for the preacher. First...

**A. Here is the preacher's task (1-2a).** The apostle begins verse 2, "Preach the Word." Those three words make two things perfectly clear for the church leader and the churches they serve.

1. *He has a God-given verbal assignment.* That's crucial to see in our visually driven society. Some today are saying that preaching is out, that if you're going

to reach people for Christ these days, you need to get rid of the pulpit, cut the sermon, and use drama and video clips and discussion groups. I'm not saying there isn't a place for ministry aids at times, but we must never forget that God has given the church a *verbal assignment*. He chose to use the ministry of proclamation to rescue sinners and transform saints. So the preacher, if he is to be faithful to his God-given task, must *preach*.

Interesting word, *preach*. It's the Greek *kerysso*. It means to herald a message, to proclaim it before the public. In Paul's day, they didn't have newspapers and television and radio and internet. So if a ruler had some information he wanted to pass on to his subjects, he assigned a special herald to make the announcements to the people. The herald would travel to a city, as the Emperor's representative, and make a proclamation in a loud, clear voice, so everyone could hear. He wasn't to negotiate the message. He was simply to *preach* it.

Right there is the job description of every pastor. First and foremost, he is a herald. His task is to preach. But preach what? What's the subject matter he is to herald? Self-help techniques? His thoughts on current issues? No.

2. *He is to proclaim God's Word*. You mean, God has spoken? Indeed He has. As Hebrews 1:1-2 states, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."

Where do find these words God has spoken? Paul just answered that question for Timothy in the previous chapter. He told him in 3:14-16, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known *the holy Scriptures*, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. *All Scripture* is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

So there's the preacher's curriculum, the God-breathed *Scriptures*, which for Paul referred primarily to the Old Testament and a few available New Testament books, and for us refers to the completed Bible, both Old and New Testaments.

That's the preacher's assignment. Preach what God has said, not your opinions, not the latest philosophies of men. Preach His Word.

And of course, that's exactly what Paul had done for the past thirty years. Authorized by the King of Kings, he journeyed throughout the Roman world preaching the Word. Sometimes he stayed a few weeks. Sometimes longer. But his task was always the same. First, to announce the bad news... Hear ye, hear ye, I have a message from the Ruler of heaven and earth, God Almighty. His highness announces that every human being enters this world as a sinner under His wrath, doomed for eternal destruction, without exception.

Then Paul announced the good news... Hear ye, hear ye, the Sovereign Ruler announces that in His mercy He has sent His own Son into the world. His name is Jesus the Christ, and He chose to die for sinners and take the punishment they deserved, and then He rose from the dead in triumph. And now His Majesty offers a full pardon and eternal life as a member of His family to all who will acknowledge their guilt, turn from their rebellious ways, and put their trust in His Son. This is the word of the King!

That's the preacher's task. Just preach the Word!

**B. Here's is the preacher's target (2b).** Notice the rest of verse 2, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction."

Paul uses another military word. *To be prepared* [KJV 'be diligent'] means "to stay at one's post." In other words, we are to preach the Word with the diligence of a soldier guarding his post.

When should we preach? Paul says to do it "in season and out of season," that is, whether it's convenient or not and whether it's popular or not

Now, to whom should we give the Word? Who needs to hear it? Paul uses three commands to identify three groups we need to target, *correct*, *rebuke*, and *encourage*.

1. Those in error--correct
2. Those in sin--rebuke
3. Those doing well--encourage

This is the preacher's assignment as he preaches. He has three types of people in mind and he uses the Word to engage in three specific activities with them.

1. *He will correct those who are thinking wrongly.* God's Word corrects. God's Word reveals error. God's Word reproves wrong thinking. When doctrinal error is present in a church, the preacher must confront it. But he must not confront it by sharing his opinion, but by opening the Word.

Speaking personally, as your pastor I must confront wrong thinking when I preach. It's not because I don't love you, but in fact, because I do. Wiersbe hit the nail on the head when he said, "True preaching is the explanation and application of Bible doctrine. Anything else is just religious speechmaking."<sup>1</sup>

Friends, this is a distinctive of this church. We have agreed to use the Scriptures to reprove those in doctrinal error. We must do so. The church's health is at stake, and thus the reputation of Christ.

Notice the next verb. Rebuke. That too is the preacher's assignment.

2. *He will rebuke those who are living wrongly.* As a skillful surgeon uses his scalpel to remove deadly cancer cells from a patient, so the man of God must use the scalpel of God's Word to rescue a brother from the cancerous effects of sin. At times we must "rebuke" people who have sin in their lives. That's never pleasant. But it's essential. It's been well said that "the preacher's job is to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted."

That brings us to our third modifying verb. Encourage. When the preacher opens the Word...

3. *He will encourage those who are thinking and living rightly.* May we never forget this third group. Thank God for people who think right and are living right! What do they need? They need a word of "encouragement" to keep on keeping on. And how do we encourage someone who is already doing well? Give them the Word again!

God's Word does all this. With it the preacher can correct those thinking wrongly, rebuke those living wrongly, and encourage those thinking and living rightly. And when he does this he must do it all, "with great patience and careful instruction," or as the KJV puts it, "with all longsuffering and doctrine." Or we might say that ministering God's Word is like planting seeds, not shooting bullets. You teach truth, then water it with prayer, more truth, more prayer.

That's what expository preaching is all about. You expose your hearers, not to your opinions, but to what God has said in His Word. The preacher's task is to preach the Word. But it's not a shot-gun approach. The preacher has a target in mind. He proclaims God's Word so as to correct, rebuke, and encourage his various hearers.

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<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, p. 254.

Awhile back I went to the home of a person who had just visited one of our worship services. I thanked the person for coming, and they said they enjoyed it. But then they asked me a question about our music, with this comment, “You know, it’s the music that makes the church.”

What you think about that statement in light of our text? Do you think that Paul would agree that music is what *makes* the church? Do you see any mention of music in Paul’s parting letter to Timothy? “Timothy, make sure you teach the churches how to put together a dynamic music ministry. That’s essential for reaching lost people, and for growing the saints too.”

He didn’t say that, did he? He said to preach the Word. That’s what makes God’s kind of church. Not a strong music ministry, nor fellowship dinners, an attractive nursery, and quality programs for the kids either. By the way, we ought to have a vibrant music ministry, and meaningful fellowship, and excellent children’s ministries in this church, and we should do everything we can to make them better. But why? Not because they *make* the church, but because those are the kinds of things the preaching of the Word will produce in a church. It’s God’s Word that calls us to exalt Christ through Spirit-filled singing (Eph 5:19), through meaningful fellowship (Acts 2:42), and through ministries that care for the little ones (Matt. 18:5).

I don’t believe I’m splitting hairs here. There are many churches these days that are about ten years away from losing the gospel. They may affirm it today, but they don’t give much attention to *preaching* it. And what you assume today, you will lose tomorrow. How do I know? It’s the very subject Paul addressed next with Timothy.

**C. Here is the preacher’s test (3-4).** “For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

Paul just gave us three guarantees.

1. *Guarantee #1: People do not naturally want sound doctrine.* Most of you are here today because you have a love for the truth. You hunger to hear and know and live the truth of God’s Word. But beloved, that’s not natural. You desire that because the Lord has graciously given you a new heart. But the lost people we are seeking to reach in this community don’t have a new heart. Which means they don’t naturally want to hear the Word of God.

Which brings us to Paul’s second guarantee.

2. *Guarantee #2: People will find teachers who tell them what they want to hear.* Watch carefully. Paul didn’t say the time would come when people would quit going to church. Rather he said that people would quit going to church to hear the Word of God.

There are two types of people that are in great danger this morning. First, there’s the person who right now is at home, slouching in front of his TV, with his coffee in one hand, and the remote in the other. He doesn’t think he needs church, and is pretty sure he’s okay on his own, and yet he’s in great danger spiritually.

Then there’s a second type of person. Right now he’s sitting in a “church” somewhere, but his church doesn’t value expository preaching. Which means he’s not hearing God’s Word taught. In a few moments, he’ll go home, perhaps inspired, but not instructed, for instead of hearing, “Thus saith the Lord,” he’s hearing a “talk” on “Helpful Hints for Hurtful Habits.” And the truth is, he likes his church. As Paul put it, he’s found a place that “suits his own desires,” with teachers that say “what his itching ears want to hear.”

Which person is in greater danger this morning? You say, “Well at least the second fellow is in church!” Yes, and he’s being told week after week by that church that he’s okay with the One who says in His Word that he’s not okay and in great need of a Savior.

It’s not a new problem. In John Bunyan’s classic, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Evangelist warns Christian to look out for Mr. Morality. He’s dangerous, and subtly so. Why? Because he sounds good at first, and his behavior is so impressive. But he leaves out Christ.

Here’s a third guarantee.

3. *Guarantee #3: People will turn from God’s truth to man’s ideas.*

That’s what verse 4 says. “From the truth...to myths.”<sup>2</sup> People don’t naturally want to hear God’s truth. It disturbs them. They’d rather hear something that would make them feel good. And so Paul says they will be attracted by “myths” (fables, man-made legends). They “turn aside,” like a ship that’s shifted off the right course that leads to the safe harbor, and they’re heading for destruction.

Look again at those three guarantees. People do not naturally want to hear sound doctrine. People will find teachers to tell them what they want to hear. And people will turn from God’s truth to man’s ideas. Those realities are the preacher’s test, and it’s also the test that every church must face. Are we going to do what people don’t want us to do, or what God commands us to do?

By the way, the fact that people don’t want to hear God’s Word doesn’t mean they don’t need it, nor does it mean they can’t develop a desire for it. They will, if the Spirit of God gives them a new heart. And what does the Spirit use to regenerate a heart that doesn’t want to hear God’s Word? James 1:18 tells us, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth.”

Amazing. God’s Spirit uses God’s Word to produce a new heart in the person who previously didn’t want to hear the Word, so that now he wants to hear it!

So there’s the preacher’s task, target, and test. Finally...

**D. Here’s the preacher’s trust (5).** “But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” God has entrusted to the preacher, and therefore to the church to whom he preaches, a work to do, a ministry, a trust. This trust involves four responsibilities.

1. *He must not crave the sensational.* Paul begins verse 5, “But you, keep your head in all situations.” Literally, “You be sober.” A preacher cannot base his sermon topics on the whims of people with itching ears.

2. *He must be willing to suffer.* Bible preaching is not popular with the world. It reminds them that the mansion they’re building is on a sand bar, and that’s not what they want to hear. It offends them, and when they’re offended they attack the preacher. So Paul says, “Endure hardship.” Yet the preacher can’t just hunker down. Even while he’s being attacked...

3. *He must do the work of making good news known.* “Do the work of an evangelist,” says Paul. It’s not just the church that needs God’s Word. So do those perishing in the world. Go after them, says Paul. The preacher (and his people) must do the work that’s necessary to make the good news of Christ known to them.

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<sup>2</sup> This is the sixth time in this letter that Paul has referred to the “truth” (2:15, 18, 25; 3:7, 8). The characteristic of people living in the last days is that they are “ever learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth” (3:7).

4. *He must fulfill His God-given ministry.* “Discharge all the duties of your ministry,” says Paul. In other words, Timothy, put your hand to the plough and never look back until your ministry is finished.

Friends, this is the kind of pastor that the churches in America need today, men who do not crave the sensational, are willing to suffer, will do the hard work of making the good news known, and are in it for the long haul.

A young preacher once complained to the famous nineteenth century British pastor, Charles Spurgeon, that he did not have as big a church as he thought he deserved. “How many do you preach to?” Spurgeon asked. “Oh, about 100,” the man replied. To which Spurgeon wisely replied, “That will be enough to give account for on the day of judgment.”<sup>3</sup>

Alright, now let’s talk about some implications for us as a church.

## II. Expository Preaching: Getting serious as a church about the implications...

When I say that the first mark of a healthy church is *expository preaching*, that should raise some questions in our minds. I want to address six questions. The second is, *what is expository preaching?* But let’s back up and answer this question first...

**A. What is it NOT?** There are a lot of preaching that’s called *expository* that in my opinion is *not* expository preaching. Here are two examples.

1. *It’s not just using the Bible in a message.* Just because a preacher opens the Bible does not mean he is delivering an expository message. Frankly, you can use the Bible to say just about anything you want to say. Politicians do it from time to time. And so do preachers. The preacher comes up with a message and then goes looking for Bible verses to support his message. That’s not what Paul told Timothy to do. That’s not expository preaching.

2. *It’s not just going verse by verse in a message.* While expository preachers often preach through books of the Bible, the mere fact that a preacher is going verse by verse does not mean he’s exposing the intent of that passage. A preacher can read a verse, then springboard to his own ideas, then move to the next verse, then springboard again, and work through an entire passage and never even begin to expose the biblical author’s intent. That’s not expository preaching.

**B. What is it?** Here’s my definition. I’ll read it and then work through it phrase by phrase. *Expository preaching is making known the biblical author’s intent of a passage so that hearers will understand it and make Christ-exalting application of it in their lives.* Now let’s break it apart...

*Expository preaching is making known the biblical author’s intent of a passage --* That’s the preacher’s task, and that’s what you should always expect of the person who’s opening God’s Word to you, whether your pastor or Sunday School teacher or Youth Leader, to communicate to you the intent of the person who wrote the passage. A moment ago I preached to you from 2 Timothy 4. The primary issue isn’t, what does this passage say *to me*, but what does it *say*? What did Paul mean when he wrote those words? What’s his point? There’s power in a text when we get the point of the text.

But it’s not just a history lesson. If all I do is give you a history lesson (what Paul told Timothy), I haven’t preached an expository sermon, for Paul didn’t write this text just for Timothy. The Spirit of God guided him to write these words for the good of the church, for us. So...

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<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, 254.

Expository preaching is making known the biblical author's intent of a passage *so that hearers will understand it and make Christ-exalting application of it in their lives*. Both are key. We preach so hearers will *understand AND apply*. And not just apply to others, but *in their own lives*. And not just apply in some self-help sort of way, but with *Christ-exalting application*.

That's expository preaching, and that's what we're committed to at WBC. From this pulpit, in our Sunday School classes, and even in our small groups teaching sessions. If a person is opening the Scriptures at WBC, his intent must be to make the biblical author's intent known in a way that helps hearers understand and apply it for Christ's honor.

**C. What does it take?** Here are three essentials.

1. *It requires a refusal to be novel and trendy.* Friends, there are things we must choose *not* to do if we are serious about expository preaching, and this is a big one. We must refuse to be novel and trendy. For starters, it's almost impossible to stay with the trends.

I was at a missionary board meeting last year and having dinner with a group of pastors. One of them asked another at the table, "Do you twitter?" I was glad he didn't ask me. I thought I was on the cutting edge because I had been using Facebook! Twitter? You mean I've got to start twittering if I'm going to reach certain people for Christ?

I can't tell you how many mailings and phone calls we receive at the church from companies trying to market their teaching materials. I remember as a young pastor thinking, "Wow, if our church is going to be relevant, we'd better get that DVD series, or that new small group series, etc." But it never ends. There's also another product to buy.

What could be more relevant than a Book from the God who made us that He says is sufficient for life and godliness?

2. *It requires hard and joyful work in the study.* I say *hard* because digging into the text and developing a nourishing sermon or lesson is work, exhausting at times. Laboring over words, wrestling to grasp what Paul or Peter or David meant, takes time and effort. Doing word studies and checking cross references and outlining the flow of a passage and then consulting commentaries to make sure you're not off base, that takes eight to ten, sometimes fifteen or more hours per message. And I say *joyful* because looking into the pages of the Book God gave to reveal Himself to us is the highest of privileges!

It also takes hard work on the hearer's part. Brothers and sister, a sermon or Sunday School lesson won't do you any good if you're not present to hear it. It takes work on your part to arrange your busy schedule to make time to hear God's Word.

3. *It requires prayer.* It's not like studying your science book, young people. This book is God's Word, so to get its message we must be crying out to God for wisdom, and then crying out to God so hearers will come and get its life-changing message.

**D. What are some substitutes for it?** I'll mention two.

1. *Some churches don't use the Bible.* I spent my early childhood in a church like that. No one brought a Bible to church. You didn't need to because they didn't use it.

But it's not just liberal churches. There are plenty of evangelical churches today, churches that say they believe in the Book, that don't use it. You'll find a lot of quality activity in their worship services, but not much Bible.

Friends, there's a reason the pulpit is the central piece of furniture in our auditorium. Though we do other things in our worship, the preaching of the Word is the bread and butter that leads to God-exalting health.

2. *Some churches use the Bible to preach about the issues they think are important.* Politics. Family. Preserving culture. When you preach expositional messages, you preach on issues, but you let the text determine the issues, which means God determines the issues.

**E. What are hindrances to it?**

1. *One is laziness.* I touched on this earlier. You can't be a lazy preacher and produce nourishing sermons. And you can't be a lazy hearer and benefit from them.

It takes work to listen to a sermon. Kids, I know it's hard at times to sit and pay attention, but it's worth it! God Almighty has something to say to you personally, and you don't want to miss it!

2. *Another is a high view of ourselves and a low view of God.* When we don't make expository preaching a priority, that's what it boils down to. We're saying we know better than God what we need.

3. *Another is a faulty view of spirituality.* More about this when we get to the eighth mark, but many churches operate with a deficient view of spirituality. They think that *busy* people are spiritual, or talented people. They don't understand that we enter God's family as spiritual babies that need the Word to grow.

**F. What are the benefits of it?** Let's talk about three.

1. *You make it clear who the authority is.* Every time we say let's open our Bibles and hear what God has to say to us, we're reminding ourselves that it's God who is the authority around here. Not me. Not the deacons. Not the oldest members. He is our authority, and the more you get to know Him, the more you realize it's a joy to submit to an authority like Him!

2. *You address all the issues that God wants us to address.* When we expose the message of the Bible, that's what *expository* means, we are exposing ourselves to the Book that "equips us for every good work (2 Tim 3:17)."

3. *You have a Christ-centered ministry since the Bible is all about Him.* This is so important. Some say, "Bible teaching is dry." And I say, not if we're teaching the Bible with its intent in mind. Jesus said in John 5:39, "These are the Scriptures that testify *about me*." When this book is properly opened up, and it doesn't matter whether we're talking Deuteronomy or 2 Timothy, we're going to get to know Jesus better. So a Bible-centered ministry will be a Christ-centered ministry.

That's our commitment, dear friends. I invite you to affirm that commitment today. By the grace of God, WBC is committed to expository preaching.