

A Danish health survey asked almost 10,000 people between ages 36 and 52, "In your everyday life, do you experience conflicts with any of the following people—your partner, children, other family members, friends, or neighbors?" ... Eleven years later... 422 of them were no longer living. Now... that's an expected number... by the law of averages.

But here is something (slightly) more compelling: the researchers noted... that the people who answered "always" or "often" in any of these cases were two to three times more likely to be among the dead. (And the deaths were from standard causes: cancer, heart disease, alcohol-related liver disease, etc.)

How easy it was for the researchers to conclude: "*Stressful social relations are associated with increased mortality risk among middle-aged men and women.*" Stress kills. We probably don't need a study to tell us that. But here is a result of that same study... that I would not have expected: people who said they "never" experience conflict from social relationships had a slightly higher mortality rate than those who "seldom" do. ... In other words... perhaps a little conflict is good for your health.

This discovery that some conflict may be beneficial for us... sounds like good news... in light of what our passage (today) is about. ... In fact... I am going to say TODAY'S TOPIC has been the underlying theme of the entire book of 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy (which we have been studying through.) ... Well... What is the topic?

The topic that best sums up Paul's entire first letter to Timothy is found in chapter 6... verse 12: "*Fight the good fight of the faith.*" ... Here we are at the end of Paul's letter... but Paul said something very similar at the

beginning... when he told Timothy to “*strongly engage in battle*” (1:18). So at the beginning and end of this letter... Paul was reminding Timothy of the battle and the struggle involved in the Christian’s life. Timothy needed to realize that he was in a battle for his faith (and for the faith—the gospel.) ... As followers of Christ... this is precisely the realization we need to come to today.

(I want to say more about our need to recognize that we are in a battle)... but first... please take a look with me now at our passage for today in it’s entirety. It is only two verses. But they are so full of battle instruction for us... that these two verses will be all that we will explore.

### 1 Tim 6:11-12

The value of these verses comes alive to us... once we recognize that every Christian is involved in a spiritual war... and his or her faith may be under attack in any number of ways. ... (LISTEN!)... Sometimes the battle is for a marriage. ... Sometimes the battle is between a parent and a child. For many men today... their mind is a battleground for purity. ... And as we saw (last week)... in the previous section of 1 Timothy 6... there’s a battle to be fought against materialism (in our consumer-driven culture.) ... And (of course)... there’s always the battle with unbelief and doubting God. ... Worry and despair seem to be unrelenting for some people. ... The POINT IS... the Christian life is **NOT** an exercise of simply coasting along. ... (“Just invite Jesus into your life... and then you can blissfully wait around for Heaven!”) ... No! A spiritual battle rages! And many believers are not prepared for it.

Followers of Christ must not take this spiritual battle lightly. ... The enemy in this spiritual war is very significant. ... His power is greater than any human's. Martin Luther was right (in his description of Satan in his well-known hymn "A Mighty Fortress") - "*on earth is not his equal.*"

Satan aims to destroy God's people. ... First Peter 5:8 describes the Devil as "*a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour.*" (LISTEN!) He is real and he wants to wreck your marriage... destroy your relationships... abolish your purity... attack your integrity... and at all costs keep you from knowing the glory of God and spreading the gospel of God. ... This enemy cannot be taken lightly.

We need to see that the enemy in this spiritual war cannot blissfully be ignored... and (if you are a follower of Christ) your involvement in this spiritual war is inevitable. You do not get to choose whether or not you will be involved in it. The Bible doesn't say, "Ignore the Devil, and he will flee from you." No, it says, "Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you" (Jas 4:7). ... If you try to avoid this war... pretending there is no struggle to be had... then you will not stand. Spiritual retreat only leads to spiritual defeat. Don't let that be you.

This war is universal and inevitable... and it's critical that we prepare for it because the stakes in this spiritual war are eternal. The casualties are so much more than merely losing an arm or a leg. A casualty in this war means losing everything. ... Casualties of this war are plunged into a hell of everlasting torment. ... (You say)... "*Pastor... that sounds a little extreme ...doesn't it?*" ... And I will answer: "*Perhaps it does... but sometimes truth is extreme!*" ... The Bible teaches us these realities: there is a God over this

world who wants all people to be saved... and there is a god (little g) in this world who wants all people to burn in hell. ... There is a battle raging for your friends... coworkers... neighbors... and for all the peoples of the world. ... How we fight this battle has eternal implications. ... Satan wants nothing more... than for you and I to be ignorant of... or indifferent to this war. ... Is he succeeding in your life? Are you even aware that you're at war?

In light of the battle that is waging all around us... Paul tells us in verse 12 to “*fight the good fight of the faith.*” ... This is the **good** fight... (You see... out of all the selfish and silly fights you and I have had in our relationships with people... this one is distinguished as “**the** *good fight.*”) ... It is the fight for the gospel... eternal truth... and eternal life. ... It's the fight for peace... confidence... and hope — not just for **you** but also for others too. This is the **good** fight... but that doesn't mean it's **easy**.

Think about where the battle is raging in your life — whether it's your marriage... your parenting... your relationships... or your emotions — and be encouraged from our text to **persevere**. ... Let the Word comfort and strengthen you (today)... in this fight of faith.

Peacetime is coming! Be assured of that! But it is not now. ... So Paul tells us that we must fight... and he begins with this exhortation:

### **1 Timothy 6:11**

Did you happen to notice how Paul addressed Timothy (here)...? ... It is easy for us to miss... but I would like you to stop and consider Paul's deliberate wording. (There is a very big message here for us.) Paul used the title “man of God.” ... Paul was an Old Testament scholar – and in the

Old Testament this title was not flippantly thrown around. It was reserved primarily for the prophets... men like Samuel... Elisha... Elijah... David... and other strong men of God who confronted evil Kings with a message from God. ... Now in the New Testament... Paul only used this title with Timothy. No one else shares this very distinctive title – “man of God.”

Just try to imagine the effect it must have had on young Timothy... when his eyes read that! ... I think Timothy would not have so quickly passed over those words (as we have the tendency to do.) No. Timothy would have understood that Paul was (in essence) saying:

*“Your task is great... the challenge is unbelievable... It is no less than the “men of God” in the Old Testament who were sent to confront kings who could have instantly murdered those “men of God.” Your circumstances are like David’s when he faced Goliath... and like Elijah before all the prophets of Baal on Mt. Caramel. Timothy(!)... You are God’s champion in a war against false teaching among the elders in Ephesus. You are God’s voice...”*

... [ P A U S E ] ...

(Now) Why did I have you stop and recognize this...? ... Because you know (as well as I) – that whenever WE are faced with a spiritual battle that looks challenging... we lose the battle RIGHT HERE (before it ever begins.) ... “Who am I to fight this battle...?” “I am not at all qualified for this...” “I simply need to give up and surrender... It’s too difficult!”

(LISTEN!) If God leads you to address a need... (in your own life or in someone else’s)... it was NOT for you to play dead... or so that you can sit on your hands and hope for someone else (more qualified) to come along and take care of it. You need to step out and BE the “man” or “woman” of God that the Lord made you to be!

So... how does that happen...? How do we prepare ourselves to win the spiritual battles that God leads you and I to...? (We know that He will. Let's not be ignorant... and let's stop being *indifferent* to the spiritual war that we are in.) We need to prepare! (And) verses 11 and 12 are all about making ourselves battle-ready.

We are given four commands that prepare us for success in our spiritual warfare. Each command begins with the letter "f." ... We must **FLEE**... We must **FOLLOW**... We must **FIGHT**... and we must **FASTEN** onto... This will be our outline for the time that we have remaining (FLEE... FOLLOW... FIGHT... and FASTEN onto.) So here is the first...

*"But as for you, O man of God, flee these things"* (v. 11). Flee from the things that characterize the false teachers (there in Ephesus) which Paul has been describing. Flee from their petty quarrels about genealogies and myths... flee their divisive talk that pushes Christ and Holy Scripture aside in order to emphasize OTHER things... (and) flee delusional materialism that makes us think that money will bring contentment. ... Flee evil that pulls you from God.

*"Flee"* does not mean to stand around and negotiate... but it means there is serious danger present that requires a quick exit from the danger. ... It is like moving quickly out of the area of a rattlesnake. Delay could be deadly. Evil strikes quickly... *"Flee"* evil before it gets you.

Ironic... isn't it? We fight by fleeing. ... Now that may sound **more** like running from a fight - than fighting... but let me remind you that running is sometimes the best way to avoid defeat. ... I am not too ashamed to tell you that if I meet a three hundred-pound angry man with a fire in his eye...

and an expressed desire to demolish me... hand-to-hand combat is not going to be an option that I'm going to consider as my best strategy.

(Running is!)

Keep your running option available. And perhaps it would be helpful for us to consider two different ways in which we should run from evil.

(Remember we are planning strategy here. This is training to be prepared for winning spiritual battles.)

**First... *Run from sinful thoughts***. ... Why is it that we run after materialism and earthly possessions? Because we do not believe God is enough for us. Paul is telling us to fight the desire for more stuff with the belief that God is enough for us. Our spiritual struggles with sin are, at the core, struggles to believe God. Consider the following questions:

- *Why do you lie?* Because you believe things will go better for you if you do. You believe yourself more than you believe the God who said, "Do not lie" (Col 3:9; Exod 20:16).
- *Why do you give in to sexual impurity?* Because you don't believe that purity is the best thing for you. You don't believe God's plans are best in this area of your life.
- *Why do you struggle with doubt and despair?* Because you don't believe God will take care of you, He is good, and His promises are true.

Follower of Christ... God's Word is your weapon in this fight of faith. If you are struggling to believe God is with you... fight unbelief with verses like Matthew 28:20... where God promises us His presence.

**Matthew 28:20 (ESV)**

*<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

Think: “*He has promised to be with me; He is with me.*” Believe it. Bank on it. ... .. If you’re struggling to believe that God is in control, meditate on Psalm 31:15...

**Psalm 31:15 (ESV)**

*<sup>15</sup> My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!*

One Bible version reads: “*The course of my life is in Your power.*” (Isn’t that great?!) ... Be confident in God’s promise.

The fight of faith is a fight to believe. Therefore... **Run from sinful thoughts.**

**Second... Run from sinful desires.** ... Run from every temptation to sin. Understand that sin usually starts slowly and subtly... with just a glance... or a thought... or a kiss... or a purchase. ... Don’t flirt with the danger—run!

This is so contrary to our natural tendencies. We have a habit (or we lean towards) getting as close as we can to the flame – without getting burned. Our pride has us try to figure out how far we can go toward sin – rather than how far away from it we can run.

(Now)... if this is you... please take a moment (right now)... to silently confess this as wrong to God... and ask Him to point it out to you... every time that you are tempted to play with fire like this. It is only a matter of time before you are seriously BURNED.



But don't just run from sin - run to something. ... To flee and follow are both necessary. ... We have seen that we must **FLEE**. We now turn our attention to the fact that we must (also) **FOLLOW**.

Unfortunately... some Christians flee but they do not follow. This always leads to a prideful legalism! *“Look at me! See what I don't do? I don't dance... smoke... drink... play cards... or go to the movie theater. I flee temptation!...”* ... *“Yes... but what a shame that you don't follow (and by that... I mean... “pursue”) these positive qualities mentioned in verse 11... such as love and goodness...”*

Fleeing without following leads to legalism... but following without fleeing brings DISASTER – as well. If a Christian merely (follows hard after) these qualities that are mentioned in verse 11... WITHOUT also fleeing temptation... it is very likely that they will eventually have sin enter their life and consume them. (You see?... Both fleeing and following are necessary.)

Paul said to “pursue” (or follow after) six different (but related) things in verse 11. The first three concern our relating to God... and the second three concern our relationships with other people. They are: (with regard to the Lord) “righteousness”... “godliness”... “faith”... (and to other people) “love”... “steadfastness”... and “gentleness.” ... *“Follow hard after these things”* with earnestness and persistence.

The first one on the list is “righteousness.” Certainly this involves our BEHAVIOR... but Paul is even more talking about our BELIEF (which affects our behavior.) Huh...? ... OK... I'll explain.

The moment you were saved... God gave you CHRIST JESUS' righteousness. (LISTEN!) He sees you and I in this way. We are no longer guilty. We are not tied to evil. We are not filled with weakness. We have been made righteous in God's eyes.

Pursue a fervent belief in this. Pursue this true righteousness. Allow it to give you a sense of security and stability in your life. ... If you try to peruse righteousness DIRECTLY as a behavior... trying to gain a sense of your value before God – you will only become a frustrated legalist. Your behavior will NEVER make you acceptable to God. And it certainly will not keep you in God's favor.

God made you as righteous as you will ever be. He has made you acceptable... and He loves you with the same love that He has for His Son (Jesus Christ)! In God's sight... you are as righteous as Jesus is. Positionally this is true. And for the rest of our time here on earth... we are to pursue a life that matches this position. Knowing and believing in our POSITION... we need to make our **condition** (here on earth) match it. Our true position needs to fuel our life right now. It needs to motivate us. ... (LISTEN!) This is what I'm saying... don't try to be righteous in order to gain God's favor. Act righteous because you ARE righteous!

(I get it)... As a Christian... you are in Christ and you have His life in you... but you struggle on a daily basis to believe and therefor experience the fullness of this supernatural life. ... Just know that until that day in the future (when you are completely free from sin and the spiritual battles of this life are over)... you must continue in this day-to-day battle. In order to

act righteous... focus on believing what God's Word says – you are righteous! ... .. [ P A U S E ] ...

The second item on the list for us to pursue is Godliness.

Righteousness and godliness may look like they are the same... but they are different. They both serve as motivation for having moral behavior. But godliness is a deep... inner attitude of reverence for God... that penetrates the whole heart and behavior of the Christian. ... Jesus was constantly at odds with the religious leaders of His day. They did the right things... (they looked very righteous in behavior) but they were not godly. They were righteous in appearance only. You see... their motivation was entirely for **SELF**... (for the applause of man.) If their actions were motivated MORE by a desire to glorify GOD (instead of themselves)... they would have had this quality of godliness.

How many of your actions at church have this quality of Godliness...? ... Follow after having the right motives!

The third item on Paul's list is faith. ... Run after a confident trust in God. Pursue more of an unwavering confidence in His power... His purpose... His plan (especially when it seems to differ from YOUR OWN plan)... Does your faith need more confidence that God REALLY does know what is best for you?

(Now) when it comes to our relationships with other people... our first item is: love. ... The sign that we have been touched by the Spirit of God is that we are becoming more and more loving. Is it evident in our home...? In our church...? At your work place...? Do you relate more consistently with demonstrating attitudes of genuine concern for other people's welfare?

Next... we have “steadfastness.” This carries the idea of “endurance”... (sticking to it... hanging-in there... refusing to give up)... when the going gets tough. ... Giving-up is one of the most contagious attitudes in life. When things become difficult and somebody says: *“That’s it! I’ve had enough... I’m not going to try anymore...”* it is amazing how quickly people pick up the note and chime-in with: *“Yeah, me too! It’s not worth it...”*

But on the other-hand... perseverance is JUST AS contagious. ... If just ONE person says: *“Sure it’s tough... but let’s keep going. God is with us. If we hang-in there... God will see us through this...”* others will usually follow. ... I have seen this to be true on the elder board of our church during some dark moments of our church history! ... Unwillingness to quit needs to be the mark of a Christian... in a world that gives up easily.

The last item on our list of qualities to pursue (or follow after) is “gentleness.” Hmm. Gentleness seems like a rather odd item to cap this list off with... doesn’t it? ... Timothy had to confront false teachers in his church – who were purposely trying to harm God’s people. (They despicably looked on their church work as a great way for making some money.) ... Paul has already told Timothy that he must deal FIRMLY with them. So why does he (now) tell Timothy to pursue gentleness?

BECAUSE – firmness does not mean “abrasive.” ... Being gentle when confronting wrong... can be far more powerful than harshness could ever be! ... (LISTEN!) Even those appallingly evil false teachers (who Timothy had to correct) could have no greater power... than a righteous and gentle person... who has truth on his side. ... Can I get an “AMEN!”?

Why is it that we tend to forget this when we feel the need to confront...? Harshness closes the ears and the heart of the other. Gentleness stands a far better chance of proper correction. ... (LISTEN!) When the need to correct someone is very urgent... and even when the behavior is as **heinous** as the false teachers in Timothy's church... pursue **gentleness!**

We are at war! Our tactics must include: fleeing and following. Follow hard after these six qualities in your life. THIRD – we must fight.

### 1 Timothy 6:12

You cannot ignore... or be indifferent to the fact that the Christian life is a battlefield. (You might hear what I am about to say as rather pessimistic – but I see it as REALISTIC.) You will not be given much of a breather.

You see... many Christian have trouble with this very thing. They are always hoping that the battle will end... that the enemy will give-up and go home... and we can begin to enjoy life - as it was meant to be (that is: enjoyed without any challenge or struggles.) ... Sometimes... we... as believers... will even pretend that this has happened! ... But we must not live under any such delusion!

We need to FLEE... FOLLOW... FIGHT... and there is one more thing. We must FASTEN onto our ETERNAL life. Christians have an eternal life to which we have been called... and we must fasten onto it... and let it work in WHATEVER present circumstances we are facing.

But too often we don't. Instead... we fasten onto the temporary situation that is troubling us at the moment. We don't look at it... in terms of what it means to the bigger picture of eternity! (The chances are that whatever GREATLY troubles you – at this moment – will not even be an issue one

month from now.) ... But we preoccupy ourselves with the mundane and temporal matters of this life here on earth.

(And) here is what happens – because we often do that. We refuse to accept the spiritual challenges that God wants us to take on – because we really don't have much of a grip (much appreciation... much understanding... much of an eternal perspective.) We don't agree to take God's assignments for us... because we see no purpose in them. We have not fastened onto the eternal life to which we have been called. ...

Ephesians 2:10 is just a BIG YAWN !

**Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)**

*<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

So let me ask... as we close today.

Are you as active as you know God want's you to be? Have you been pinned down by this spiritual warfare and unable to move? Have you retreated to some foxhole... pretending THAT is where God wants you to be?

Rise up O man (or woman) of God!