

Flee, Follow, Fight
1 Timothy 6:11-12

About 25 years ago I was ordained into the ministry at my home church. My dad was the Senior Minister, and he was the one who preached my ordination sermon, and gave me my ministerial charge. I remember to this day the outline my dad used for that sermon.

I remember it because he took it directly from the apostle Paul and his charge to the young minister, Timothy. I have since discovered that it may well be the most used sermon outline ever, because it's three points come directly from the pages of the King James text: Flee. Follow. Fight. Paul passed a torch on to Timothy. My dad passed that torch on to me. Kelly, this morning, I want to pass that torch on to you. I want to entrust you with the same high calling with which Paul entrusted Timothy nearly 2,000 years ago.

Today, I'm preaching to Kelly. I want to set a high bar for him in ministry. I'm here to entrust to him a sacred commission. You all are just getting to listen in. But you share in this commission too. Kelly and I aren't the only ones called into the ministry.

We've all been called into the ministry. You may not be called to minister professionally, but you all have God's call upon your life to minister, to use your gifts to serve the body and to be salt and light, in your neighborhoods, in your schools, on your teams, in your offices, with your coworkers. So, just about everything I have to say to Kelly today, applies just as much to you.

Open your Bibles to 1 Timothy 6. Timothy was a young minister. We would say that Timothy came from a mixed family. His father was Gentile of Greek ancestry. Paul speaks of Timothy's mother and grandmother having faith, but not his dad. His mother, however, was a godly Jew and they lived in the village of Lystra, a part of the Roman province of Galatia, in what it now Turkey. During his first missionary journey Paul preached the gospel in Lystra where his mother received the good news of Jesus as the long awaited Messiah, and apparently Paul played an instrumental role in Timothy's conversion as he was there when Timothy made his good confession.

Paul saw promise and potential in the young Timothy, and so took him under his wing on his second missionary journey. Towards the end of that journey they planted a church in the Metropolis of Ephesus. Paul remained in Ephesus, teaching and building up the church for three years. It's the longest Paul stayed anywhere during his ministry. After three years, Paul left Ephesus to go to take the gospel to Europe.

He entrusted the young church in Ephesus to the young minister Timothy. Paul planned to come back later to encourage Timothy, but when he was delayed, he wrote Timothy this letter. He offers all

sorts of pastoral advice on the many issues Timothy was dealing with as a minister. Finally, after dealing with all the practical and theological matters, Paul issues Timothy this charge:

But you, man of God, flee from all this and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. – 1 Timothy 6:11-12

I. Flee

Kelly, Paul is telling Timothy, and he's telling you that to be a minister of the gospel there are some things you need to flee, some things you need to follow, and something to fight for. And so this morning I want to encourage you to flee, to follow, and to fight.

First, you must flee. Paul writes, "*But you, man of God, flee from all this.*" Sometimes the holiest thing you can do is to run. I know that may sound counter intuitive. Wait, I'm a minister shouldn't I be charging into battle? Elsewhere, Paul wrote to the Ephesians to tell them to put on the full armor of God so that they could stand against the devil's schemes. And many have pointed out that in the midst of that armor, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the boots of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the spirit, in all that there is nothing covering your backside. It doesn't sound like God has equipped us to retreat.

But Paul doesn't tell Timothy to stand strong, to be courageous, to resist the devil, but to flee. What does he mean? Maybe we've misunderstood this word. Perhaps this isn't the best translation.

So I dug deep into my Greek dictionaries and word studies to learn all I could about this little word translated *flee*. It comes from the Greek word *pheugo*. After all of my in depth research and study, you know what I found out this word means? It means flee. Run. Take flight. Escape. The idea here is get out of Dodge as fast as you can or else.

This is the word the Bible uses when Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus and fled, *pheugo*, to Egypt to escape the murderous wrath of Herod. When Jesus sent his disciples out to preach, he tells them when they are persecuted in one town to flee, *pheugo*, to another. When Jesus prophesied the destruction of the temple and God's judgment on the Jews that would come in 70 AD, he warned the Christians would be in Judea at that time to flee, *pheugo*, to the mountains.

Sometimes, the right strategy is not to see how strong you are or how great your faith is. No, the most spiritual, courageous thing you can do is turn tail and run. This does not mean you run from God ordained responsibilities. It does not mean you just quit your job because you don't like it. It does mean you bail on your marriage because you don't like it. Those are God-ordained responsibilities. Paul says,

“Flee from all this.” All of what? Well, “*all this*” are all the problems, temptations, and distractions that Paul has just got done talking to Timothy about in his letter.

There are things that Paul talks about all the way back in chapter 1, but the context for these comments really in chapter 6, verse 3. First thing he talks about is false teaching. Anything that does not agree with sound doctrine is not to be tolerated. You are to run from it. I’ve been in churches where we tried to sweep it under the rug, or treat it with kid gloves. You just kind of hope it goes away. No, it’s a cancer, it always spreads, and it always infects other parts of the church. You flee from it. You have nothing to do with it.

Some false teaching is obvious. Most churches are going to have no tolerance for people who say Jesus wasn’t divine, he was just a man, or we have to believe in some other book in addition to the Bible. But he also talks about things here that are tolerated in many churches— controversies and quarrels, envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people. You ever known any of that to take place in the church. Believe me, there will be times when this kind of garbage wants to suck you in. It will drain your time, your talent, your energy. Don’t do it. You know what Paul says is the best strategy for dealing with that stuff? Flee. Don’t fall for it. Leave the conversation. Don’t respond to the email in kind. Don’t take the bait. Walk away. Don’t get sucked into it. It’s trap.

He talks about the insidious snare of the love of money, and importance of learning to be content. Sometimes this is obvious. We live in a day and age where you can turn on the TV and some televangelist flashes a million dollar smile. He wants you to send in more money because he needs a new private plane. If you send him just a few dollars he will pray for you to receive your very own miracle.

Yet millions fall for it all the time. There are diploma mills constantly churning out more charlatans to peddle the gospel of greed and we gobble it up. Give me, give me, give me. It’s nothing more than greed is good with a nice Christian coat of paint. Flee from all that.

But Kelly, the love of money isn’t always so obvious, and you don’t have to have a multi-million dollar ministry to fall into its snare. It can operate on much more subtle levels. This summer Benjamin Carruthers, a youth minister at his church since 2007 was arrested. An audit discovered that over the last 6 years he used the church credit card to make more than \$39,000 in personal charges. Another youth minister, John Mertes, was charged after depositing more than \$8,000 worth of checks that had been written to the church into his personal account. Another youth pastor stole several thousand dollars’ worth of charity vouchers meant to help the needy. Flee from the love of money. Don’t flirt.

Don't underestimate how treacherous this can be. Paul warns, *"Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."*

Paul gestures back to all these things, anything that tears down and tears apart the body, anything that tears you from Jesus and Paul says, "Flee."

Here are some other things the Bible tells us to flee, *pheugo*.

- 1 Corinthians 6:18 Flee sexual immorality!
- 1 Cor. 10:14 My dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. He's not just talking about golden statues here. He's talking about anything in your life that becomes more important than God.
- 2 Tim. 2:22 Flee from the evil desires of youth.

So, when God's word tells you to flee all this, what do you think he wants you to do? He wants you to run. When it comes to evil desires. When it comes to temptations. When it comes to useless squabbles. When it comes to false teaching, what does he want you to do? Flee.

That means if you have to put blocking software on your computer, you do it. That means you're never alone with a girl in the youth group or one of your female volunteers. If that means you have an accountability partner, you do it. If that means you have to unfollow or unfriend some people on Facebook, you do it. That means if you have something becoming too much of an idol in your life, you throw it in the trash.

The best biblical example of this comes from the life of Joseph in the Old Testament. Joseph was probably just a teenager when he was sold into slavery by his brothers because he was daddy's favorite. The slave traders sold him to an Egyptian official named Potiphar, and Joseph quickly became Potiphar's most trusted and capable slave.

Here's what we read in Genesis 39:6-7 *"Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, (OK ladies, you get the picture. He was Beefcake McDreamy) and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"* Wow, and you thought girls today were getting aggressive. There were no hints or batting of the eyes going on here.

But Joseph flat out refuses. He doesn't try to let her down nicely. He doesn't string her along until she gets bored. No, he says, "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God."

Now, do you think Mrs. Potiphar took "No" for an answer? Verse 10 says, *"And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her."* You see, Kelly, sin and temptation are relentless. They will never let go. They will never stop. She was trying to wear him down. Most of us can say "no" the first time. Some of us can even say "no" the second or third time. But

we have this habit of hanging out too close to a bad idea, of seeing how close to the edge we can get without falling off. We don't want to actually do the bad thing, but we kind of like the idea we could if we wanted to.

We're like the kid who already had two cookies, and mom says, "No more cookies." Later, mom looks in the kitchen, and junior has his hand in the cookie jar. Mom scolds him and says, "I thought I told you no more cookies. What are you doing with your hand in the cookie jar?"

Junior says, "But I'm not getting any cookies. I just have my hand in the cookie jar." But you know what's going to happen with his hand in the cookie jar. Junior at some point is going to falter in willpower and he's going to get a cookie. That's just how our sinful nature works. You can't keep your hand in the cookie jar without getting cookies. That's why Paul says we must flee.

So, here's what happens with Joseph in verses 11 and 12.

But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house.

He fled from her. He didn't try to talk her out of it. He didn't try to reason with her. He didn't test his own limits by seeing how long he could resist. He didn't go back in to get his jacket. He didn't call her later to ask about the jacket. He didn't email her or Facebook her to see if they could meet somewhere so he could get his jacket. He didn't just take his hand out of the cookie jar, he fled the kitchen and got out of the house.

A strong Christian doesn't stand up under temptation, he flees from it.

I know, a lot of you know the rest of the story. Mrs. Potiphar gets mad at him, and used his garment as evidence that he tried to assault her. Potiphar believed his lying hussy of a wife, and threw Joseph into prison. It turns out thought that is exactly where God wanted Joseph to be. And God blessed Joseph and honored Joseph, and he became the second most powerful man in the land.

Kelly, if you want to have a ministry that God blesses and honors, you will flee from these things. Flee is the first thing Paul tells Timothy to do, because you will never do the right thing as long as you're doing the wrong thing. You have to first flee.

II. Follow

So, there are some things you must flee. Secondly, Kelly, Paul tells Timothy there are some things you must follow. It's not enough to flee the wrong things, you must follow after the right things. The best way to avoid the stick, is to be chasing the carrot so tenaciously, that the stick never has a chance to get you.

Paul uses these two things together in a similar manner in 2 Timothy 2:22 *“So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”*

In the same way here, he writes, *But you, man of God, flee from all this and **pursue** (or follow after) righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.*

When Paul tells you to follow after, or pursue these things, he’s not talking about a lazy summer stroll in the general direction of these things. This is an intentional pursuit. This is a chase. This a hunt. You are stalking after the things of God. You are Captain Ahab going after Moby Dick, but instead of a legendary whale, you are pursuing the will of God.

Paul lists six things you are to follow after. We can’t spend a lot of time on each of them, but I want to look at them briefly.

1. First, is righteousness. This is simply doing the right thing, to pursue justice, not in our cultural sense of justice where justice is getting even, or as an avenue to political power, or a way of making money through activism. No, this is doing the right thing, even if it costs you. This is doing the right thing even if it goes unnoticed. This is justice in the sense of doing what’s right in God’s eyes, no matter what anyone else thinks. God wants you to chase after doing what God desires. It may not be popular. It may not win friends and influence people. It might mean you don’t have the coolest youth program in town, but he wants you to follow after righteousness.
2. Secondly, he is to pursue godliness. This is like righteousness. We often use it as a synonym for righteousness, but it points us to the source of what it right, the definition of all that is right. Godliness is having a heart and mind that are so focused on God that there isn’t room for competing thoughts or competing passions.
3. Next, you are to pursue faith. This is your trust in God, you confident application of your belief in God. Your faith isn’t just something you have, Paul says you need to live your life in passionate pursuit of faith. This isn’t about slogans, or nice ideas, but you pursue your faith until it is lived out in every part of your life.
4. Fourth, Paul calls Timothy, calls you Kelly, all us to pursue love. Our culture is in love with the idea of love. It is one of the most popular words today. We use this word to excuse all sorts of wicked behavior, because love knows no limits, right. We define love as this sentimental

permissiveness that accepts anything and everything because we want to be supportive and loving right. The world has no idea what love is. Love is something the world is constantly chasing, but never finding, because they're chasing after the wrong thing.

The love God wants you to follow after is something different, something greater, something better. To pursue love doesn't mean to go from one place to another until you feel loved. This godly love isn't about how someone makes you feel, it about how you treat others. It's loving them like Jesus, generously and sacrificially. It means you go find somebody to love. It means you find some outcast kids so you can show them what it means that you are going to be Christ to him. Do you want to know what it means to live like Jesus? You go find somebody who is unlovable, and you love them. That's what Paul says we are to pursue.

5. The fifth thing you are to follow after is endurance. A good start doesn't mean a good finish. Endurance is simply running the race until the end. You've been in my office, so you know I'm a Nascar fan. I did some quick checking this week, and as best as I can figure there have been a total of 88 races where the winner of the race led only one lap, the last one.
6. Finally, Paul says pursue gentleness. We live a harsh world that seemingly rewards the aggressive, the demanding, the loud, the forceful, but Christ calls us to a life of gentleness. You are being sent into a world of broken and hurting people. Gentleness is required. Jesus himself is our model. Isaiah prophesied of the Messiah, "*A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.*"

Kelly, make sure your life and ministry are spent living in hot pursuit of these things.

III. Fight

Finally, Kelly there are some things you must fight for. There are some things you must flee from, some things you must follow after, but you also have something worth fight for. Paul urges the young Timothy to, "*Fight the good fight of the faith.*"

The word Paul uses for *fight* here comes to us from the ancient arenas and colosseums that featured contests of strength and battles to the death. Think of the ancient gladiators who engage in fierce conflict. Think of two ancient Spartan wrestlers going to ground locked in a battle of supremacy. Think of the Colosseum in Rome which would be flooded with water and two Roman galleys would do battle until one of them sank. In modern terms, you are a UFC fighter thrown into a spiritual cage match with eternal stakes on the line.

So what is it you are fighting for? Paul says the faith. The faith isn't your personal trust in Christ. Faith without "the" in front of it is your personal faith, your faith IN Jesus. But when he says THE faith, he's talking about those truths, principles, and beliefs that define Christianity and that we hold dear.

You are to fight for that, and let there be no doubt, the faith is under attack today. Christians are the most persecuted group in the world, and living in America no longer means you're safe. As a pastor, you won't lose your job contending for the faith, but you are going to be serving kids for whom "The Faith" will be under attack every day in school, in their music and movies, in the podcasts they listen to." They will be heading off to universities which in many cases have been systematically designed to dismantle and destroy THE faith and their faith. There has been much written recently how the younger you are, the greater the chances are that they will identify with no religious faith. They are called the nones. When asked to identify religious preference, they check, in ever growing numbers, none of the above.

As a youth minister, you will be contending on the front lines of this war for the faith, and nothing less than the souls and eternity of young people is at stake. It's a battle you can only win if you flee from the wrong things and you are passionately pursuing the things of God. You must fight for it.

But it's not just their souls and their eternity that's at stake. So is yours, that's why Paul writes, *"Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses."*

Kelly, never forget who you are and whose you are. You are living behind enemy lines. You are doing youth ministry in the enemy's back yard. By entering the ministry and by doing youth ministry here at Son-Rise, you didn't just start a new job. You didn't just change careers; you put a rather large target on your back, and on your family's. Satan doesn't like it when a new combatant enters the arena to do battle against him. He will throw everything he's got at you, because now he knows, not only can he take you down, and maybe your family down, but by taking you down, he can start picking off these kids one by one. He's coming after you because he's going after them.

This isn't just about the faith; it's about your eternal life. Paul says take hold of it. Cling to it. Do not let go, because everything in this world will try to take it from you. It's yours. It's the free gift of God through your Savior, Jesus Christ. What he's given you, no one can take it away, unless you give it up on your own. Don't let them have it.

Kelly as a minister, you will be known by what you flee from, what you follow after and what you fight for.

Sat through something they should have run away from and slow death into mediocrity.