

Sermon Title: Itching Ears, Feedback Loop, Week Four
Preacher: John Beeson & Greg Lavine
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Sermon Questions:

1. When was the last time you were tempted to want to be your own authority?
2. How does our screen-saturated age multiply the "itching ears" temptation in us?
3. Why is false teaching so attractive?
4. Which of Paul's five reminders to Timothy to combat false teaching (1. God is the judge; 2. Ground yourself in the Word; 3. Endure hardship; 4. Evangelize; 5. Fulfill your ministry) is easiest for you? Which is the hardest?

Transcript

So I want to begin here on this Mother's Day. We all recognize the importance of and desire to not just have a mom, but to have a special mom, right? A mom who stands out, who's unique. I hope that none of you bought for your mom this Mother's Day. A Mother's Day mug.

This is the world's most average moment. It's not gonna fly because we live in a day and an age where there's a longing to stand out, to be unique. We see this in all sorts of ways. So we just walked through prom season. If you're a teenager, you enjoyed the excitement of prom.

And if you're a teenage girl, as you went out to shop, above all things, perhaps the most important criteria was that you didn't select a dress that then the following weekend you showed up to and a friend of yours had the same dress on, right? You want to be unique. Just two weeks ago, we had the blessing of celebrating our son being engaged, proposing to his girlfriend, now fiancée, Vicky. And so we have some photos of that. And so this is the engagement, this is the proposal with Soren and Vicki.

It's right in the heart of Tucson. You can tell I don't know where in Tucson you are. So what's important here is. So this is the ring shot here. So I want to talk a little bit about rings, and then you'll see a picture of them.

So, you know, when Soren, as he was preparing for this big day, obviously, you know, one of the biggest purchases in his life was this little thing on her feet, finger there. And when you. When you buy that ring, you can't just buy a ring. You need a unique ring. Right here we'll show a picture of them so you get to see them together.

Aren't they cute? That's the right response. And you need to stand like she's going to wear that the rest of her life. You need something that's unique. This is really the age that we live in, a lay

age, of being unique, of standing out.

And here's the reality. Us pastors aren't immune from it either. There's all sorts of pressure for pastors to stand out, to be unique, to be creative, to capture people. I think, of just the difference between being a pastor today and 100 years ago. So 100 years ago, it was likely the pastor was the most educated person in your town.

You not only went to your pastor for advice on theological and biblical matters, but on all sorts of matters, because likely he had the kind of the most credentials the most degrees of anyone in the town. Things have changed dramatically. And I'm not saying this wringing my hands, but it's just a reality. Trust in pastors today is at an all time low. Only 27% of Americans trust their pastor high or at a very high level.

27%. So you know who leads the pack in trust is nurses. God bless you nurses. Thank you nurses. 72% have high or very high trust in their nurses.

If you are in the military, God bless those in the military or in doctors. Double what pastors are over 50% or we are below mechanics. We are right at the same level of bankers. Hey, we still beat out those in the House of Congress. God bless our politicians.

So just we're headed that way though. It's not going well. I bring all of this up because of this reality. As we've been walking through this sermon series on called Feedback Loop, we're navigating the challenges of this digital age of the way it exacerbates issues that have always been there. And today we're going to talk about this issue, the issue of false teaching, an issue of itching ears.

And that what we're going to propose today is that there is a reality that the lure of the hook of false teaching is perhaps stronger than its evidence ever been. That we are those who are called to be grounded in the truth. And it is a dangerous time to be anchored in the truth. So we're going to be based in a passage in second Timothy this morning in chapter four, Paul's writing. Timothy and Paul, all through his ministry and lifetime was a discipler, he was a multiplier.

So typically when we think of Paul, we think of Paul and Silas or Paul and Barnabas, or Paul and John, Mark or Paul and Titus. Of all the people that he disciplined, there was none more meaningful than Timothy. He was with Paul for 20 years of ministry. Paul had three missionary journeys. Timothy specifically was on the second and third of those missionary journeys.

He was with Paul for two years while Paul was in prison in Rome. In fact, the letters that Paul wrote there to Philippi, the letter of Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon, all of them have have a credit written by Paul and Timothy. Timothy was with him in Thessalonica, in

Corinth and Philippi in Macedonia. And he is the pastor of the church in Ephesus. And so with a fatherly advice, Paul writes this letter to Timothy and deals specifically with false teaching.

Let's read the passage and then we'll enter in it second Timothy, chapter 4, verse 1 5. I 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, Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke and exhort with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears that will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

We not only live in an age when you can say false teaching is more prevalent, back to a hundred years ago. A hundred years ago your pastor was essentially the solo person who coaching you in a biblical worldview. Today the Average person has 7 to 10 or 7 to 15 voices a day singing into their ears about what kind of worldview to follow. And it's not as reliable today in this sense. So by several estimates, there's three different groups that all did studies that would give us the Comforting thought that 37% of pastors today remain in an orthodox understanding of biblical doctrine.

37% meaning 63% have wandered. And it's just subtle things. It's little questions like are humans when they're born, intrinsically good? That gets a yes answer today more often than not. And it's a biblical truth that we're born in sin.

But somehow that gets washed away in a modern context. And Paul's saying, watch out, the day is coming when people will not put up with sound teaching, but instead to please their itching ears, they'll gather teachers around them who, who itch their ears. And there, there are two avenues of false teaching that just jump out to us in this passage immediately. One is a false teaching that, that in this day would have been called Gnosticism. Like the secret, the secret truth.

It's just the boringness of hearing the same thing. This is the pressure on a pastor and a congregation. So if we're going to preach an Easter series, a sermon, it's going to be on the resurrection. But if you preach an Easter sermon 25 times, you think, I got to come up with a fresh way to say it, I've got to come up with some attention grabbing new way to say it. And in attempts to draw new ways to say things, pastors can go off track.

And as a congregation member, we love to hear, we love to hear things that are new and exciting, new and improved, and we lean towards that. And that's a dangerous thing, not only in this passage, but there is a false teaching that I would call idolatry, of placing ourselves over God and over truth. In other words, we have so much coming to us today through algorithms

and screens. We have so many teachings, so many voices that we just sit back and we. We pick and choose the ones we like and we don't like.

We pick and choose the sermons we like and we don't like. We pick and choose the passages that we like and we don't like as if we are the judge of truth. Our preferences become the Lord over truth. As if. As if life is like a theological salad bar.

We just walk through it and it has more toppings than you've ever had before. You're like, well, I like some eggs. I'm going to put a little of those on mushrooms. Like, who wants fungus on their salad? Skip the fungus.

But those baby corns, those are kind of fun. I'm going to put some of those on. Like, we just pick and choose. Well, I like the fact that God is love. I like the fact that God is mercy.

More of that, please. God is just and filled with wrath and righteousness.

I don't think I like those passages.

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but have itching ears. By itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. This was a danger in Timothy and Paul's day and it's certainly a danger in our day. Yeah, there's actually a name of the actual, the false teaching that Paul's combating here. It's called Gnosticism.

It's a belief that there's a secret compartment. Yeah, there's the basic Christian. But. But let me invite you into the secret room to give you secret knowledge above and beyond what you already know. It puffs up the person.

I don't know about if any of you have dogs, like our dog loves to be itched to the ears. Right. Like just lean in right to that ear itch. Right. That's.

Oh, we lean in. We want that secret knowledge. This past weekend, this has been a busy and fun season for the Beesons. So two weekends ago, Soren got engaged last week and Camille graduated from college. And so we celebrated that with our praise God.

Absolutely. And so we celebrated that with her. We went out to brunch afterwards, this kind of this fancy posh restaurant and behind us was this massive row of bookshelves. Behind us. It looked like just a wall of books.

And about like a third of the way into the meal, a waiter kind of goes around and he pushes the bookcase open and there's a door behind the bookcase. Well, angel and I can't help ourselves.

We like go over there and look in right there, the special velvet chairs in there. Right? Like, everybody loves a secret room.

We want to be secret. We want to be special. We want to have a feeling that it's not just the gospel for the ordinary people. It's. It's special knowledge, it's secret knowledge.

It's above and beyond what the normal people understand. You've heard this passage a hundred times, but I have insight to it that you've never heard before. If you just pay attention to the numbers, if you just look at the verse, if you just pay attention to this, this is the true meaning that you've always missed. Yeah, it's a temptation for all of us. And Paul says, be careful.

Be careful about your own hearts. Be careful also about those who are proclaiming that gospel. Over in second Corinthians, Paul warns us about the preachers of this kind of gospel. He says this in 2nd Corinthians 11, verses 3 and 4. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere.

I missed my space there. Sorry. Sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Christ than the one we proclaim. Proclaim.

Or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. Paul says, hold fast to the anchored, secure foundation of the gospel and don't go chasing a new Christ, a new gospel, a secret gospel. He says this about those preachers in verse 13. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

So it is no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. Be careful. Be on guard. Paul says it's a fact.

It's a reality. We have to be especially careful to those who are proclaiming something and doing something, doing so under the guise of being proclaimers of the truth. There's something real that feed that pops up on you. That's an atheist. Abashing Christianity is less dangerous than.

Than the person who's offering a secret, a special gospel it's dangerous and it's around us everywhere and we have itching ears that feeds into it. We get this, right? If this week Greg and I were to put out a video on the YouTube, A New Life YouTube page on the Instagram feeds, right? And the first one is titled the Simple Gospel. We're gonna do a second video.

And the second video was called the Hidden Secret Key to Life. Like, which one are you clicking

on? Right? It's. Cause we're like, well, I know the secret gospel.

Let me move on to the secret stuff, the secret chambers. And Paul says, be wary. Be wary of your itching ears. Be wary of those who itch those ears. Because we need the gospel, the firm gospel, the firm truth of the word of God through Jesus Christ.

So back to second Timothy 4, verse 3 and 4. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but have itching ears. By itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

The core of the gospel. That ultimately is what we need to hang onto. There are amazing ways in today's world that people become divisive over the smallest of things. The core. The core of the gospel.

I define Christianity by two doctrines. Two. One, a submission to the Bible as God breathed inspired word. This the only God breathed inspired word, the Bible. And the second, I put a lot in this, but I would say just a biblical confession of Christ that Jesus Christ is God, that he was born of a virgin, that he lived a sinless life, that he died for our sins, that he is the only means of forgiveness and salvation.

A biblical confession of Christ. If you believe those two things, you're in the Christian camp. If you don't believe either of those two things, you're outside of Christianity. But what you believe about, what modesty is, what you believe about playing cards or going to movies. And what movies you can see.

What you believe about, I mean, a long whole list. What you believe about creation as far as when it happened. All of these things are way down here, Way down here. The gospel, the core, the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching. They'll wander away from the core of the gospel and they'll be lured into myths and side things that are not truth.

New and improved. Oh, if we hear new and improved, let's run away from that. The core of the gospel, that is what we need. False teaching comes in lots of forms. This is not a core issue.

But today's mother's day. And I want to uphold and lift up and applaud mothers. I'll say this. The highest calling for a female is not motherhood. The highest calling for a woman, just like the highest calling for a man is to glorify God, to cultivate a community that enjoys God and transforms the world through the gospel.

The highest calling for a woman, just as it is for man, is to push back darkness and shine the light of God into this world. And you can do that whether you're married or not married. You

can do that whether with children or not have children. You can walk in glorifying God in all circumstances of life. Having said that, we live in a world that is continually diminishing the significance of both marriage and motherhood.

So people are getting married less than ever before. People are having children less than ever before. There is a false teaching out there that somehow in marriage you. You can lose your own identity and lose yourself. That in the sacrifice of being a mom, you give up your dreams, you give up your life, you give up yourself.

I'm not a mom. I've never been a mom. Top secret information.

If I could, like, I don't want to become a woman, but if I could be a woman for a year and a half, have a baby, like that's a gift. I don't know why that came out. That was a psychic.

I'll just say, let's not be ashamed or bashful of upholding a beauty of motherhood. That that has biblical support. Again, not. It's not the highest calling, but there is under God on earth, no, no calling greater. It is a beautiful, God honored, beautiful gift that we should not be ashamed of upholding while being compassionate to all circumstances.

Motherhood is a good thing. Can we praise God for that? Amen.

But in this passage you get the false teaching of lording over truth. Anytime we are the discerners of what truth and not truth. Anytime we're just listening to the voices and going through like a smorgasbord and picking and choosing what we want as opposed to submitting not to every voice, but submitting to truth. We wander away. Every time we go to new and improved, we wander away.

And Paul says this is a significant thing to pay attention to. Amen. There's also a truth in here that we need to hear that curiosity is given of God. It's a good thing to be curious and explore. But there's a reality, a check in here to be careful to not be pulled by itching ears toward the secret room, the secret Truth, the gospel of myself and not of Jesus.

Let's land this with five practical applications, right? All out of the text in second Timothy, I'm going to begin with this simple application that God is the judge. God is the judge. Second Timothy four. One says this.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead and, and by his appearing and his kingdom, God is the judge. There's a beautiful gift of this because sometimes we can look around, we can see the mess that the world is in. We can see the confusion that the world is in. We can wring our hands, we can be afraid, we can think, well, maybe I need to step into every single one of these online arguments and correct the

Internet, right? Like, no, no, no, no.

Relax. God's the judge. God's the judge. And he will hold his gospel pure to the end. He will hold his church true to the end.

Over in Matthew 16, there's this beautiful passage and encouragement about the security of the kingdom of God through the church. He says this. Over in Matthew 16, he's speaking to Peter. He says this, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Be not afraid.

God is judge, and God holds his church and his people securely. A second truth. Ground yourself in the Word. Ground yourself in the Word, he says, preach the Word. Be ready in season and out of season.

Reprove, rebuke and exhort. Preach the Word. Ground yourself in the Word. We have a value statement as a church here at New Life. The Bible is our source.

I've frequently said, if you ever hear a sermon, if you're ever in a Bible study, small group, whatever teaching context, if you ever hear a message at New Life that is not out of the Word, that is not grounded out of the Word, correct it. Run, talk to the elders. Talk to pastors. Bring correction. There is a tendency to move away from scripture in today's world.

And Paul is saying that to Timothy. Get grounded in the Word. Preach the word. Be cautious. Be cautious of Google.

Now, if you want to do a Google search to say, where does Jesus teach about the Good Samaritan? Have it come back with Luke 15. Go for it. Great search engine in that kind of way. Where is this passage?

But we live in a time frame in which we're not just asking where something is in the Bible. At the extreme, there's a growing population that prays by talking to AI.

God, would you have this for my life? God, would you direct me in this? What do you think of this God.

I remember talking with my son about this. He was doing that some. And I said, like, I don't want to pull you away from the whole thing. Is this. The whole thing is garbage.

I just know this. Like, let's just assume that 50% of the information out there is good and 50% is from a bunch of doofuses.

Al wades through the whole thing and hands it back to you. Like, I don't know how comfortable you are drinking a glass of 50% water and 50% strychnine, but I wouldn't recommend it.

98% water and 2% strychnine, I wouldn't recommend.

Let's make sure we're grounded in the Word. The only perfect God breathed word. A gift that you and I, we don't have to come to church for it. We don't have to go anywhere special. We can hold it, read it.

We can sit it on our laps every day. Let's be a people of the Word. Number one, God is judge. Number two, ground yourself in the Word. Number three, endure hardship.

Down in verse five, he says this. As for you, always be sober minded. Endure suffering. There's a promise that holding fast to the Word, to the truth will bring about suffering. There's actually a dangerous false gospel.

One of the false gospels of today is a prosperity gospel. A gospel that says God cares most deeply about and wants most your happiness. My happiness and anything that falls outside of my happiness is to be pulled away. It's a dangerous truth. The Word of the Lord says that suffering will come.

To endure suffering. Just in Matthew 16. I'll go right back there. This is the words of Jesus. He says this over in verse 24.

Jesus told his disciples, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. To be a follower of Jesus Christ is to follow Christ and his cross to endure suffering. There will be a time when all tears are gone where we stand face to face with our Creator and our Savior in glory. But in this life, we will endure suffering. Number four of the fifth of the five.

Evangelize. Evangelize back over in 2 Timothy 4:5. As for you, always be sober minded. Endure suffering. Do.

Do the work of an evangelist. I don't know if you caught that in there, whether you're an evangelist or not. Do the work of an evangelist. My reading of that is that Timothy probably didn't have the gift of evangelism. That's encouraging to me.

I don't have the gift of evangelism. But do the work of the evangelists. Most of us probably don't have the gift of evangelism, but there's an invitation here to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. And actually in that, there's a gift to ourselves. Have you ever had this where you might be struggling with something internally and

all of a sudden God puts in front of you the gift of talking to someone about Jesus who doesn't know him?

It really clarifies things, doesn't it?

There is a simple truth. And if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, if you know that truth, the two truths that Greg talked about, the trust and reliability of the gospel, and then of who Jesus is for you, that he came for you, he died for you, he rose again for you, that you might be with him and be rescued from your sin. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ. And you are. You are equipped to share it.

If you have put your faith in Christ, you are equipped to share that faith with someone else. One of the most frequent things I get is someone coming up. This just happened just last week to me. Well, Pastor, I know you're equipped to answer those questions. I'm afraid to have those conversations because I don't have all the answers.

And I would just say part of the gift of doing this work is that we don't have the answers. No one is saved by having all the answers. They're saved the work of the Spirit of God through you and me. So be confident and share the gospel. Do the work of the evangelist.

You need to let me know who thought you had all the answers.

Like no one but God has all the answers. We don't. Amen. A final truth of application. Fulfill your ministry.

It's an odd little line of applications at the end in verse five. As for you, always be sober minded. Endure suffering. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfillment your ministry.

There are all kinds of false teachings in this world. A false teaching of idolatry, that we should follow our own preferences and we lord over truth. A false teaching that new and improved is always the best thing with the gospel. A false teaching of prosperity, that suffering is somehow outside of God's plan and just the result of sin. And if you really believe in God, you'll have health and prosperity.

There is also a false teaching that you can follow Jesus and have nothing to do with his church. I love Jesus, but the institutional church, you know, I can meet with Jesus in the mountains. I can meet with Jesus at home. I meet with Jesus and in my own way, I don't want that. Here's a truth.

You cannot love Jesus without also being a part of his family. Jesus did not come to live a sinless life and die simply for individuals. He came to redeem a family with God as our Father

and Jesus as our firstborn brother. He came to redeem a family. And there isn't hardly a passage of scripture that you can apply simply to your own life.

All through this passage, preach the word, Be ready in season and out season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort. You can't do those things alone. You can't live out the fruit of the spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness.

You can't do those alone. I mean, I don't know if you sit in alone a room and have patience with yourself. I'm not sure what that really means. We have patience, love and joy and peace when we interact with other people. God calls us to live as the family of God that can look different ways in different people's lives.

But it does not look like somehow you and Jesus alone off to the side, he calls us in. Fulfill your ministry. Each one of us has a ministry to walk in. We have gifts to walk in that he has given us for each other.