

Youth Weekend 2026

1 Timothy 4:12
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If we have not met yet, my name is Micah Kongkousonh, the Youth Assistant at Edgewood. While I am young, I can feel the age gap with our students. One Thursday night I came in for youth group and everyone was doing some kind of hand motion whenever I said two certain numbers. At first, there were only a few of them doing it, but then, while I was teaching about legalism I told them to turn to Matthew chapter 6 verse 7 and everyone started doing this hand motion. When I asked what those hand motions meant, I was told that it meant nothing, which they thought was hilarious. Sometimes, I message the students in my small-group and even my texting is out of style. They only reply with pictures of various characters like an emoji smile with real-looking teeth or a picture of a dog with a really sharp jawline which added little to the conversation, but everyone thought it was funny. I was left wondering what to reply. Responses I had used since I was in high school no longer landed and I became irrelevant. Eventually I started being called “unc” by a few students which I guess means, “a Gen Z/Gen Alpha slang term shortening of "uncle," used to jokingly or affectionately refer to a man who is older, acting older, or out of touch, often applied to someone over age 30.” For reference I am only 24. In the same way that I viewed people strangely who listen

to Dave Matthews or said “radical” instead of “cool” when describing what they have just seen, I had become the weird person who was out-of-touch. The same students, who I can clearly see Christ in and are a part of the Church already, are the same ones who behave this way and that is good! On this Youth Weekend, I love to look back. There have been many events which showcase so clearly how God has built a foundation in the student’s lives already. We say it all the time, the students are not just the future of the church, they ARE the church already. Many have given their lives to Christ and are faithfully seeking the next step in their lives such as baptism, membership, discipleship, and serving. It is exciting and it bolsters so much encouragement for us to know that our students are already and living as examples of Christ and doing so by faith with the gifts that are given to them by the Spirit.

One of the students I think about is Alijah Langworthy. He literally is speaking a different language since he has moved to Uganda. Many people who are older than me have poured into me throughout my faith journey. My parents have set an example, my youth leaders have set time aside to walk through life with me, various pastors have like Pastor Chris who is very cool, hip, and radical, along with family, friends, and others. There is a unique place that Alijah has for me because I look up to him and I am consistently encouraged by where he is at in his walk with Christ, his own maturity, and even his physical location despite “unc” jokes about

me he makes about me. For those of you who do not know who I am talking about, Alijah is one of our Edge students who has been in Uganda for less than 6 months with his family. In fact, the Langworthy's were on this week's episode of the 4G podcast if you want to hear the latest news about their ministry.

Alijah was the first student I ever connected with when I began volunteering with the youth around 4 years ago. He came up to me with tears in his eyes and asked me if he was truly saved because he was tired of sinning and knew he should follow the urging of the Spirit and heed the Word better. I marveled at this young student as he showed such strong conviction and my heart was stirred to encourage him. I think of that moment now and that same student has grown in every Christian aspect. When he left for Uganda, I recall being sad to see him go, but rejoicing that God had a role for him in the church across the globe at 15! He lets people know that he is not just a missionary kid, he is a **kid missionary!** Even now, I have heard from him that he has been asked to share about the hope that he has in Uganda and I am filled with joy, knowing that Alijah is willing to live out his faith as well as any "unc" and he is not the only student who is willing to set an example of what the church as a whole **should** look like. In the same way that Alijah is a kid who is living out life as a missionary, we set an example for others when we recognize our circumstances are a cover for our role as missionaries.

This reminds me of the message that the “unc” Paul has for the young pastor, Timothy in his first letter to him. Paul was more than just a mentor and leader to Timothy, he was like a father to him, and Timothy was like a son to Paul.

In chapter 4 verse 12, Paul reminds Timothy, “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.” The main idea we can gather from this text is, **Don’t judge people who are different than you.** “Despise” is a strong word. It means to look down upon, hold contempt for, disdain, or scorn. We often don’t need any major reason to despise someone, because we deal with people and people are irritating.

Timothy is exhorted, “Let no one despise you for your youth,” which is a call both for the young leader to live above reproach and for the congregation to honor God-given leadership regardless of age. Were the people of Ephesus despising Timothy? Or did Timothy need to be reminded of this because of how he was behaving?

It is frustrating when a leader does not lead well. It may be normal for you to be upset with them because they are not doing their job. Romans 12:8 tells us, “*the one who leads*” should lead “*with zeal.*” In all likelihood, this was Timothy’s first sustained solo assignment under Paul’s mentorship. Some further context is that Paul met Timothy on his second missionary journey and in Acts 16:2 Timothy was described as, “*well spoken of by the believers who were in Lystra and Iconium.*” Timothy’s father was likely not a believer as he is simply described as a

Greek, but later in 2 Timothy 1:5 we learn that Timothy's mother and grandmother were devout believers. In 1 Timothy 5:23, we see that Timothy was frequently ill and in 2 Timothy 1:7 Paul is quick to state that Timothy should not be afraid for God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and of a sound mind. This suggests Timothy may have been naturally timid and sickly. Despite all of this, Paul describes Timothy as having the ability to pastor the flock and care for others and so he was confident to send him to many churches. Paul clearly sees something in Timothy that he did not see in himself. If Timothy was not stepping up, the Church of Ephesus could have viewed him poorly. We can only speculate, but the Ephesian Church could have been wishing for Paul to be over them instead of Timothy. No doubt Paul was more well known than Timothy and they may have been disappointed that Paul was not their pastor. Maybe they expected Timothy to do a better job than he was doing. Maybe Timothy did a great job, but the expectations they had for him were too high. Maybe Timothy was just being as his own worst critic. We can see later in verse 14 that Timothy was affirmed for ministry by the elders of the church and Paul clearly approves of him. Whatever it was, they were looking down on him. This is why Paul tells Timothy not to let them despise him "for his youth."

Although Timothy may have been around the age of 30, he would have been younger than Paul and lacked the experience Paul had. I think there are certain

expectations placed upon the youth. They are energetic, hyper, insecure, uncertain, searching for identity and purpose, lacking in life skills, learners, not teachers, immature. Maybe some of you see them as disrespectful, self-absorbed, indifferent to the true issues of the day, lovers of play rather than labor, conformers to peer pressure, slackers, always on their phones, or speak a language very different than yours. Church, let's take these words to heart, "Let no one despise you for your youth." Paul is saying "if these are the expectations placed upon you simply because of your age, then do NOT live up to these expectations! People will place assumptions upon you for whatever arbitrary reason, so be careful about how you are seen. Paul tells Timothy to live out his faith as the younger man so that people won't look down on him. The goal is not to absolutize adult expectations, but to avoid being despised for the world's expectations by living by God's standards, not letting anyone look down on him because of his youth, but setting the believers an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. **Don't judge those who are different than you.** When living in this way, our youth can become examples to us "uncs." But it works both ways because sometimes the younger people diss the older generations as irrelevant and out of touch.

Church, do not let anyone look down on you because of your life circumstances, but set an example for believers in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity! Whatever expectations that people have for the position you are in or the

expectations you place upon yourself is not the final say because when we are One Church, the standards which equalize us are God's holy standards, not mankind's.

If we are the ones looking at others with unreasonable expectations, then we should look at ourselves in the mirror and exercise more grace, realizing we have been saved from our own sins and expectations. If we are looking at others with contempt, viewing them as less than, and disdaining them, then we are not living as we have been called. If we truly look at everyone at the church, from SecondWinders to the students and children and we celebrate how God has brought many generations of people to be with each other and glorify Him rather than living life the way they want to be, that's what the church is for! Let's see the work God is doing and join one another in celebrating that!

If we find ourselves thinking so little of ourselves that we suppress who God has made us to be then this is a problem too. If you are a young parent and think you are not doing enough for your children because they rush to church and their kid picked their outfit that day and they have pajama pants on with a pool shirt on and you just feel like everyone is judging you, then it is time to relax and acknowledge that you made it to church today. Or that couple who is figuring out your new schedule and the family aspect is something you are stressing out about because there are two sides and every one of your friends is seemingly wanting to hang out but there just is not time, then relax and make sure you are doing what is

right by the Lord and remember everything falls into place after that. If you are single and feel like you are left out everywhere, do not limit yourself by the standards that you place upon yourself or feel like others place upon you. If you help a homebound parent, grandparent, or spouse, and you feel like you give more than you get or you feel like you are not doing enough, do not limit yourself based upon how you wish life was for you. Wherever we are, we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength! He works all things out for the good of those who love Him! We have a mighty God on our side and He does not look down on us! **Don't judge those who are different than you.**

In whatever life circumstance we find ourselves in, set an example of one whose identity is in Christ. Looking at the stereotypes of the youth, it is no wonder why someone like Alijah sets a good example for me. When I see one who is setting an example in all that he does by submitting to the Lord in all that he does, as is willing to be in an unfamiliar place different from the Midwest, and speak to those who don't even know his language about the hope that he has sets a very good example for me to rise above the expectations that I feel are placed upon me or others. This is why Paul tells Timothy not to let anyone despise him for his youth, but to "set the believers an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and in purity." If the bar is set so low by the world's standards, then the standard that God places upon believers should become the standard we strive for. God does not have

a small vision for our lives. His will for us is fruitful labor, Christ-honoring ministry, and eternal-shaping influence. This is what we are designed for. We are One Church and no matter what expectations are placed upon us, it is our role to reflect Christ.

Paul's method for setting an example can be seen in five points and follows a believer's 1) speech, 2) conduct, 3) faith, 4) love, and 5) purity. Although he addresses these for Timothy's youth, I think the understanding is that everyone should set an example. Everyone can fill in "their youth" from verse 12 with their present life circumstances. As we saw with those wonderful senior blessing videos, the youth need to be affirmed in the Church, the seniors need to be affirmed and set an example, parents and grandparents need to, those who are a couple need to, those who are single need to. If we replace the role that Timothy is in at the church of Ephesus with any of the life circumstances that we find ourselves in, we rise above the expectations placed upon us and join together as one Church who is striving to live on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus in our families, among our neighbors, and among the nations.

Firstly, Paul urges Timothy and all believers to keep watch over their speech which should not be perverse; Ephesians 4:29 says, "***Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.***" Being an example in speech begins

with recognizing the power of our words to build up or to tear down. Our words hold “the power of life and death” (Proverbs 18:21). A believer who sets an example in speech is someone whose words are “always full of grace, seasoned with salt” (Colossians 4:6), aimed at encouraging and edifying rather than criticizing, humiliating, or gossiping. Setting a godly example in what we say means speaking truthfully but with love (Ephesians 4:15), avoiding unwholesome talk (see Proverbs 4:24), and only saying what is helpful and encouraging (see Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 3:8; James 3:9–10). Since our words reflect Christ, we must strive to resolve conflicts peacefully, offer words of gratitude and praise, and opt for silence over unnecessary negativity. We must also keep in mind that the tone and intent behind our words are just as important as the words themselves. I heard about a story one of the members had a wristband with a student’s name on it for them to pray for the student as they went on a retreat. That Sunday, this member walked into the service and sat next to a student and used the wristband to strike up a conversation. This member showed the student the name on the bracelet and said, “I’ve been praying for this person even after the retreat; do you know who this is?” Turns out that the member was sitting next to the student they had been praying for. What a great example of our speech bringing others together when they may not have otherwise spoken to each other! Our speech should bring us together! Does our speech reflect Christian character?

Second, our conduct should be unmistakable as believers, and we can all set an example in this. Our behavior is often the first testimony others witness of our faith. Living a life worthy of imitation means embodying the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). We need integrity in both public life and private moments, ensuring that our actions align with the teachings and character of Christ as 1 Peter 2:21 says, “*For this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*” (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 2:5–8; 1 John 2:6; 1 Peter 2:21). We imitate Jesus by showing kindness to strangers, avoiding hypocrisy, maintaining honesty in our relationships and professional dealings, and extending forgiveness when we are wronged (see Ephesians 4:32—5:2; Colossians 3:13). This applies to us all. I think of the Celebrate Recovery Ministry and the lengths they take to conduct themselves as followers of Christ, battling sin, addiction, hurts, habits, and hangups! Every Friday night, they can be seen walking through life with one another, submitting to the work of Christ as they go through up and down battles for the glory of God. When you are there, the joy is evident as they celebrate how God is working in their life, and the grief is mingled with joy as one who is struggling is encouraged to pick up their cross and follow Christ once more, knowing they are never alone.

Third, is the example we should set in love. This is certainly a high calling for believers. The love Jesus exemplified was not mere affection but rather a selfless, sacrificial love that mirrors God's love for humanity. Jesus said, "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples" (John 13:35). Being an example to the believers in love involves compassion, generosity, and a willingness to serve. It extends beyond family and friends to embrace strangers, outcasts, and even enemies. Godly love is patient, kind, and not self-seeking (1 Corinthians 13:4–7). It involves acts of humble sacrifice, listening to others' struggles with empathy, and showing respect to those with differing beliefs. I think of the 13 guys on the Rock Island County jail ministry and the other 6 guys in the Kairos ministry in which prisoners become saved through the love that these men show! By the way, this had to be rescheduled this week.

Fourth, being an example to the believers in faith means living with confidence in God's promises, even in the face of uncertainty or adversity (see Hebrews 11:1). This kind of faith isn't passive but active, demonstrated through prayer, worship, good deeds, and obedience to God's Word as Ephesians 2:8-10 tells us, "***For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that none may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Jesus Christ for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.***" (see Romans

4:18–21; Ephesians 2:8–10; James 1:22–25; 2:14–26). Others are inspired when they see us trusting God through difficult seasons, remaining steadfast in trials, and praising Him in times of blessing (1 Corinthians 15:58; James 1:2–4). Our faith shines brightly when it is unwavering and contagious, drawing others to seek and trust in the God we follow. I can't think of a better example of this than the entirety of the SecondWinders ministry! Every week I get a prayer request email, and it is consistently filled with needs they faithfully pray and request prayer for those who are sick, hurting, or going through a hard time. Along with this, every week there are some who commit to pray for their unbelieving family to be saved and know Christ as their Savior and their commitment and fervency in this sets a beautiful example of the faith that they have.

Fifth, purity is freedom from anything which contaminates. Being an example to the believers in purity encompasses every area of life—our thoughts, intentions, and actions as Philippians 4:8 tells us, “***Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.***” (Matthew 5:8; Philippians 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5; 1 Peter 1:15–16; James 1:27). It is a struggle for us to remain pure in all that we do. The world around us tries at every turn, to turn us away from the purity which Christ brings. Various devices, advertisements, books, news, and many other things drive

us toward the world if we are not careful and if we think we can fight it on our own or think we are above temptation, then we deceive ourselves. We should ask the Holy Spirit to fill us and empower us to walk in holiness and guard our hearts against the corrupting influences of the world (Romans 12:2). We immerse ourselves in God's Word (Psalm 119:9–11), depending on the Lord for strength and running from temptation (James 4:7; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Timothy 2:22). We set healthy boundaries, cultivate wholesome habits, and develop accountability. We are honest about our struggles while seeking God's grace and strength for growth. Related to purity, I think of how God has used the various discipleship groups for accountability! The amount of time that older believers set aside to preparing to meet their disciple is encouraging because they want to invest in their purity, and hold them accountable, help them develop habits which will honor God, and fight temptation all while getting to know each other better. As for the disciple, I am encouraged by their willingness to be vulnerable and ask for help in their walk with Christ.

Being an example to the believers is achievable through God's strength and guidance. Whether you are a young student living for God across seas or an "unc" who is faithfully serving God and others here in the QC, every follower of Christ is called to live a life of integrity, intentionality, and influence that reflects our Savior's love and character. As we all seek to be examples in speech, conduct,

love, faith, and purity, we fulfill our role as ambassadors of Christ, pointing others to the hope and truth found in Him. This is because we are ONE CHURCH and as One Church, we are called to remember how we are unified and gather to celebrate the good news of the Gospel. The gospel is good news when we understand that we do not and cannot earn our salvation; the work of redemption and justification is complete, having been finished on the cross. Jesus took the place for our sins. The gospel is the good news that we, who were once enemies of God, have been reconciled by the blood of Christ and adopted into the family of God as One Church. We will all one day sit at the same table, worshipping the same God together. Whether to those around you or those who Alijah and the Langworthy's are speaking to on the other side of the world, we will all join together as one, with various languages, backgrounds, and people groups, declaring the glory of the Lord for all eternity. Yet it is exciting to set an example of that praise today as we remember all Christ has done for us.