

SOUL FOOD - The Things You Need To Know About Your Bible - Pt 7

Sunday, February 7th, 2020 - 6:30 p.m. - Teaching #2375

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PREPARING THE HEART FOR A LIVING ENCOUNTER WITH GOD'S WORD

2 Timothy 3:1-13 - "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. [2] For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, [3] heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, [4] treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, [5] having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. [6] For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, [7] always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. [8] Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. [9] But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. [10] You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, [11] my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. [12] Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, [13] while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."

Today we're going to see how we can increase the fruitfulness of God's Word in our hearts before we even open its pages. That's what the first part of this text is all about. One of the features distinguishing the "perilous times" described in **verse 1** is mentioned in **verse 7**. Paul says religious people will actually come to the place where they are, "**always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.**" That is, what they learn has no transforming power on their lives. They love collecting **data** but never arrive at any life changing **conclusions**. They love **information** but never arrive at solid **faith**.

Then Paul gives his instruction to Timothy, a young pastor in Ephesus, about how to deal with some of the problems in the church. Most of the instruction deals with the danger of false teaching and false teachers. But in the middle of all this instruction he also gives Timothy some wonderful instruction about powerful, vibrant godliness. And the instruction is all about how he (Timothy) can **keep the growth happening in his own life and ministry while working in a godless, difficult time**.

Timothy need not go down the same path into powerless, empty religion. Paul wants Timothy to stand out as a **contrast** from the others - "**You however...**"(10), "**But as for you...**"(14). Timothy, though young, can shine spiritually. Neither the **bad environment** nor the **difficult task** ahead of him need blunt his spiritual life.

Paul says there are two ingredients to staying shiny in these perilous times: First, there is ***the power of a good example***. And second, there is the ***power of the Scriptures***. We're going to look at the first of these two today:

1) **THE ELEVATING POWER OF A GREAT EXAMPLE**

2 Timothy 3:10 - "You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness...."

That word "***followed***" carries more meaning than just ***learning***. The word actually means ***carefully using a pattern*** - like you would trace around the edge of a stencil or cut fabric pinned to a pattern. In other words, Timothy shaped his life - cut the image of his life - around the shape of Paul's. He ***kept his eye*** on Paul. He used Paul's example as a ***measurement*** for his own responses.

Here are some of the things Timothy followed in Paul's example:

a) ***He followed Paul's teaching*** - 10 - "You, however, have followed my teaching...."

We know that took a lot of work. We know Peter said some of the things Paul taught were deep and sometimes tedious. But Timothy worked at it. He was young. He was bright. He made time to study and learn Paul's doctrine.

How much time do you give to learning the truths of the faith? When do you do this ***outside*** of church? Every Mormon gives the first two years to study and missionary work. How much time do you give to understanding your faith? What do you read that ***isn't*** fiction? How much time do you give per week to doctrinal study?

Then Paul tells us the ***reason*** this is so important. It's not that people don't like to learn. We ***all*** like to learn. The problem is we all like to ***decide*** what we're going to learn. We ***program*** our own ipods. This can be a huge problem in the church. In fact, Paul says it will become a bigger and bigger problem in the last days:

2 Timothy 4:3 - “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions....”

As time goes by, people will increasingly want to have the option of ***choosing and shaping their experience of faith and church around their own tastes***. They will decide ***for themselves*** what they want to hear and how they want to hear it.

And Paul says, increasingly, they’re going to move ***away*** from doctrinal depth and intellectual effort. Paul says they will want their own ***itches scratched*** when they go to church. And church ***leaders*** will increasingly move to ***dishing up what people want in order to keep their numbers up***.

Our whole society pulls us in the opposite direction of Paul’s words to Timothy. The people with the most ***visibility*** may often have the ***emptiest message***. The most prominent examples aren’t worth following. Yet, most of the young people in our church could name the top video stars and tell us what they do faster than they could recite the backgrounds of Bible characters. And that ***has*** to have an effect on the level of spiritual insight and power in their lives.

And it’s not just a ***youth*** problem. Many older ***adults*** in our church could more quickly give information on the best mutual funds, car makes, or sports figures than they could, off the top of their heads, outline the teaching of Romans chapter 8. And sooner or later, the church will pay for this sell out of her mind to the heros and idols of the world.

Right now, every person in this church can do his or her part to turn this around. Don’t sell yourself short. You can do it. Dig for truth worth knowing. Immerse your life in examples worth following. Don’t waste your time anymore than you would waste your money.

“Study to show yourself approved unto God.” Have you ever considered God’s call to ***homework?*** Yes, the Creator wants your ***study time***. He doesn’t just care about who you live with. He cares about what you put into your head. Give God some study time every week!

- b) **Timothy followed Paul's conduct - 10 - "You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct...."** When the world around you is getting dark, find someone who walks in the light and follow him or her. I'm not just talking now about following **Jesus**. Of course we all want to follow Jesus.

But there is a problem with that. Jesus isn't here right now. He does give us guidance and direction from His Word and by His Spirit. And that's very precious. But you can't physically **see** Jesus right now.

That's why Paul told Timothy to follow **him**. Timothy could **see** Paul. He could **remember** watching how Paul reacted in very concrete situations. And we know that even **Paul** was very influenced by the example of how **Stephen** faced death.

We need to shadow people who do the right things. We **all** need this. And here's why. If we don't work at following **good** examples we will naturally follow **bad** examples. But follow we all will. The difference is only in the effort required. You can **drift** behind a bad example. You have to **seek** out, and **hold on** to a good one.

But either way, examples hold great moral sway in all of our lives:

Years ago **Chuck Swindoll** wrote an excellent little comment on the moral power of the crowd on our lives: **"On March 16th, 1968, the U.S. military conducted "Task Force Baker" in Mylai (Me-lie), South Vietnam. American soldiers killed between 5 and 6 hundred unarmed women, children and old men. All of this was under the command of Lt. William Calley."**

"Strangely, the American public didn't find out about this until the end of March, 1969 - one whole year later. Though he never fired one shot, Lt. Calley was the only one convicted of war crimes. This, even though over 500 soldiers knew all about the brutality of that incident. In a whole year, not one person admitted or reported anything at all about the incident."

“Psychologists later reported on this strange silence - ‘It’s a classic example of the *Psychic numbing* which operates in any group. The group creates its own *moral anesthesia*. In situations where our moral limits are tested and stretched, the group aids in the capacity to block out and numb one another’s accountability. We are greatly *encouraged* by being in the midst of others doing the same thing. Instead of crisp thinking, distinctly weighing the rightness or wrongness of an act, we find it possible - *even easy* - to *pass the moral buck to some other part of the group*. In this way, not only does the individual forsake his or her conscience, but the *conscience of the group as a whole* becomes so diluted and fragmented that it is almost non-existent. It’s a simple sort of thing. The horrid becomes normal, and we lose our sense of guilt altogether. We simply tune it out.”

If you doubt the truth of that for a minute, think of the most stupid things (I mean *morally* stupid) that you have done. Many of them were done with at least some other outside social influence. Silliness grows in a group. You take on the standards of the group. We *all* do. Just watch the lunacy as it grows on social media. And then think of the name. There’s a reason we call it *social* media.

No wonder, in the middle of a corrupt society and a doctrinally skewed church, Paul tells Timothy to stay close to the pattern of his own example. Find a person that will *sharpen* your standards, not *nullify* them. Find a person who will stretch you after Christ, not one who will pull you more and more into the world.

- c) ***Timothy followed Paul’s purpose - 10 - “You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life....”*** This is an important step in the whole process. It *explains* the previous point. Not only did Timothy know and follow what Paul *did* (his *conduct*) - he also knew *why* Paul did those things (Paul’s *purpose*).

That’s very interesting. Timothy never interpreted Paul’s disciplined life as merely *legalistic*. Lots of people *do* interpret holiness that way. Rather, Timothy saw Paul’s *passion and love for the Lord*. Timothy could look at Paul’s life and, without any words spoken, still feel the heat of Paul’s zeal for following Jesus Christ above all else.

You just can't go wrong following an example like that. Timothy could see a ***difference*** in Paul. Most people loved ***three things***. They're the same three dominating loves of our world today:

2 Timothy 3:2-4 - "For people will be ***lovers of self, lovers of money***, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, [3] heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, [4] treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, ***lovers of pleasure*** rather than lovers of God..."

Now, there are many ***sins*** mentioned in those verses, but there are only three ***loves*** fueling them. These people, then as now, loved ***self, money and pleasure***. But when Timothy watched Paul, he saw Paul was possessed by a totally different sense of ***purpose***. Paul wasn't motivated by any of those three loves.

This is really amazing. Timothy could live, work, travel, and minister with Paul, in very close quarters, for years and actually say, "Here is a man not motivated by those three things!" ***How many people do you know like that?***

You can almost hear Timothy as he thinks about his mentor Paul: ***"He's really quite amazing. He's a man you just can't buy. He's not much interested in money, except to fund the expansion of missionary outreach. He's driven, but not by a quest for power or position. He's just consumed by a holy love for the Risen Christ that steers his whole life. It shines through in everything he does."***

The church is supposed to be ***full*** of people like that. Young people are supposed to be bombarded with examples like that. Kids are supposed to see parents so committed to Jesus Christ they find no satisfaction whatsoever in ***self, money or pleasure***.

Parents, what choices do you intentionally make each week to ***demonstrate visibly*** to your children that you aren't motivated at all by selfishness, wealth or pleasure? And without your example, how will they grow up to crave true satisfaction in Jesus Christ?

We'll look at more characteristics of Paul's example to Timothy next week. But there is much to think about right here. Of course we all want to follow **Jesus**. But perhaps we need to rethink the fact that there are many others following **us**. Right now, right here in Cedarview, there are people who are living their Christian life **just like you do**.

There are two responsibilities before each one of us from this passage of Scripture. First, **find good examples**. You either **seek out** good examples or become **drawn after** bad ones automatically. Second, **be a good example**. Remember, the Christians you know in this church aren't **just** following **Jesus**. They're following **you**.