

SOUL FOOD - The Things You Need To Know About Your Bible - Pt 8

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PREPARING THE HEART FOR A LIVING ENCOUNTER WITH GOD'S WORD (Part 2)

2 Timothy 3:10-13 - "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."

As Jesus indicated in His famous parable of the soils, the *kind* of heart upon which the seed of the Word lands has a great deal to do with the fruit-bearing capacity of the Word in that life. We're continuing our study of the *two grand forces for change* with which Paul sought to challenge young Timothy.

And I want to underscore that Timothy truly was *young* by any standard of measurement. He may not have been out of his teens as Paul wrote to him. That should *challenge* all the young in body and heart in this place, and it should probably *shame* more than a few. It's far too easy to let a huge slice of life drift by while dreaming of some later accomplishments. Now's the time to make your life's greatest mark for Christ. Don't fritter.

The two grand forces for change in this text are the *power of a great example* and the *power of the Scriptures*. In this study we're going to finish the first - *the power of a great example* - as we prepare for the second.

Paul called Timothy to look at his (Paul's) own life. Paul encouraged Timothy to follow his visible example as an extension of the life of Jesus, fleshed out right before Timothy's eyes. Timothy was to follow Paul's life the way a seamstress follows a pattern or a traveler a map.

Last week we looked at the way in which Timothy followed Paul's *teaching, conduct and purpose* (3:10). Today we pick up the list in the last half of **verse 10** - "You, however, have followed my....my **faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness....**"

Timothy knew very well the *content* of Paul's faith. This wasn't the first time Timothy had the assignment of teaching others what Paul had said and believed. We know Timothy had, in fact, studied

Paul's faith so closely, he could relate it in detail to others: **1 Corinthians 4:16-17** - "I urge you, then, be imitators of me. [17] That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, **to remind you of my ways in Christ**, as I teach them everywhere in every church."

So Timothy was an expert on the doctrine and teaching of Paul. He knew the ***theology*** inside out. And he was faithful in ***sharing*** this message with others. That's how Timothy cut his teeth in public ministry.

But Paul wasn't going to be around much longer. Paul was soon to be executed. There weren't going to be any more letters of love, instruction and reminder from Paul. There would be no other person to ***carry Timothy along*** in future years.

So, in addition to Paul's theology, and in addition to Paul's example of conduct and purpose, Timothy needed something else. Timothy needed to know how to ***keep all this going day by day for himself***. He needed to have sources of inward strength. He needed to know how to recharge the batteries of his faith and ministry when things got difficult.

All sorts of people ***start*** well. All sorts of people know how to ***plan big things***. Not everyone knows how to ***endure*** - how to ***keep things going*** when there's no ***external momentum***. That's one of the reasons everyone loves the idea of spiritual ***renewal***. In times of renewal you're carried along - you're charged up spiritually. That's why the recent season of the renewal movement - especially in Vineyard circles - chose the symbol of the ***river*** to identify its nature. You don't have to ***swim*** when you're carried along with a surging river. You can ***float***.

But Paul doesn't tell Timothy to ***float***. He tells him to ***endure***. And tied in with Timothy's ability to ***endure*** is Timothy's ability to ***remember***. There are three things that must be replayed constantly in our minds if we are to endure to the end with strength and spiritual style. And they're related specifically to cultivating the harvest of the Word's impact over a lifetime of walking with the Lord:

Here's what Paul tells Timothy to remember:

1) **TIMOTHY IS TO REMEMBER PAUL'S SUFFERING**

2 Timothy 3:10-11 - "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.”

Notice how Paul calls Timothy to remember what happened at **Lystra**. That’s because Timothy had been a citizen of Lystra. It was his home town. Timothy probably **saw** the events Paul harkened back to in Lystra. Luke records what happened:

Acts 14:15-22 - “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. [16] In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. [17] Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” [18] Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. [19] But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. [20] But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. [21] When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, [22] strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

Apparently, Timothy saw all of this. Timothy saw Paul minister healing to a lame man. Timothy saw Paul explain that the power to heal wasn’t his own, but was a manifestation of the **power of the gospel**. And Timothy watched as, at the mention of the gospel, the crowd turned on Paul and stoned him, leaving him for dead. Timothy saw the broken, bloody body of Paul, lying as though dead on the ground. Paul had done nothing wrong. He had simply been an instrument in causing a lame man to walk.

But there’s more. Timothy also knew that, after being beaten and stoned, Paul **returned** to Lystra and encouraged the disciples there. **How** did Paul encourage them? By telling them that what they had just seen - Paul’s unjust persecution and his beaten, broken body - that was the

entry point to the kingdom. “Don’t be discouraged. Tribulation is the path to glory.” I’m not kidding. *That* was Paul’s message - **Acts 14:22** - “....**strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.**”

Now, remember where we are. This whole account is exactly what Paul says Timothy was to remember as he faced his difficult situation on Crete. That’s what he was to think about as he lost all future contact with his great companion and mentor, Paul.

“Timothy, if you don’t remember these things, you’re going to be **shocked - surprised - distracted and taken off guard** - whenever things are slow-going and difficult. You’re going to be zealous, but only when the sun is shining. You’re going to lack patience with the people who need patience the most. You won’t be braced for those long seasons of drought. You won’t keep the faith when you have to stand all alone. You’ll think God is dead every time you’re not instantly healed or delivered. **Timothy, remember what happened to me in Lystra!** That’s not some weird exception. **That’s the path into the kingdom! Never forget it!**”

It’s always important to remember: For the most part, the **challenges** come now. The **rewards** come later. Live with patience. And live with an eye to future glory and reward. Be consumed with a **future** hope. You won’t do well in this area if all you read are success stories. O, how we desperately need to read great biographies of saints who turned their world upside down for Jesus. Paul tells Timothy to rehearse his **sufferings** over and over in his mind.

2) **LIFE LESSON #1 - ATTACHMENT TO JESUS CHRIST ALWAYS COMES AT A COST**

2 Timothy 3:12 - “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted....”

Underscore that little word **“all.”** This rule is exceptionless. True, there is no price to be paid for merely trying to be **moral**. Everybody applauds self-improvement. And there is no price to be paid for attending to some form of **religion**. On the whole, everybody will respect the person who quietly goes about maintaining some form of religious belief system.

The trials come to those who specifically want to be Godly *in Christ Jesus* - “....all who desire to live a godly life *in Christ Jesus* will be persecuted”(12). Sometimes they pay the price of outward persecution. Thousands of Christians die each year around the world for their commitment to Jesus Christ. Sometimes they will pay the price of *rejection or intimidation*. Friends won't be pleased. Schools make fun. Places of work shun.

The point here is that Paul now moves away from his own life experience to Timothy, and then *beyond* Timothy to you and me. Now he's making a point of truth with *universal application* - *“All who desire to be Godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*

Do you want to be Godly in Christ Jesus? Yes? Then you're going to be persecuted.” Paul got this idea from Jesus Himself: **John 15:18-20** - “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. [19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [20] Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.”

Jesus didn't share this with the disciples to *scare* them, but to *prepare* them. In just the same way you will pack extra food if you know you're not going to be able to buy groceries for a while, you will put down deeper commitments to discipleship when you know you will be going through some rough times down the road.

To prepare only for *blessing* and *miracles* and *immediate deliverance* is disastrous. All who want to be Godly in Christ Jesus need to also be ready for some form of persecution. Paul tells young Timothy to remember it every day.

3) **LIFE LESSON #2 - THE SPIRITUAL STATE OF THIS WORLD IS ONLY GOING TO DECLINE AND DISINTEGRATE**

2 Timothy 3:13 - “.... while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

There's a reason Paul tells Timothy this point. But the reason is easily missed if we forget the overall outline of these verses. Paul is giving Timothy **two sources of power for spirituality**. We're looking at the first of these - **the power of a great example** - and we're soon going to look at the second - **the power of God's Word**.

But right between these two sources Paul gives his **two axioms - his unbendable life lessons**. **First**, everybody following Jesus will be persecuted. And **second**, this world is moving in the direction of moral and spiritual decay.

Why is it so important for Timothy to remember these two points? Well, the first axiom about persecution will give Timothy hope in the middle of trials. His situation isn't unique. His beloved mentor, Paul, was stoned half to death for ministering healing to a cripple.

The second axiom - about the spiritual state of this world getting only worse and worse - isn't to give Timothy **comfort**, but to give him **warning**. You see, Paul's talking to Timothy about the power of **example**. Everyone is influenced by **someone**. Remember, either you **seek out and cling to a good example** or you will **automatically drift behind a bad example**.

That's what Paul is warning about in this second axiom. You can't afford to latch on to the patterns and teachings of this world. They are only heading toward destruction and ruin. Especially when you feel the **heat of persecution** while everyone around you seems to be having all the fun, it's easy to forget that they are all heading to destruction. Make no mistake about it - there are many times when **being Godly in Christ Jesus can make you appear like an absolute loser in the estimation of the crowd**.

So Paul tells young Timothy not to fall for that illusion. This is the same advice he gives to all of us in **Romans 12:2** - **"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."**

Note what is at stake when these two texts are put together. Here's what's in the balance when we follow great examples or common ones. There is **perfection** on one hand, and there is **destruction** on the other. It all hinges on where you shape your mind. In either direction, the

process is **gradual** - almost **imperceptible**. But make no mistake, it happens, in one direction or the other, to everyone listening to these words.

We're in the middle of a series of teachings on God's Word. I know that. But God's Word only has power when it's **applied**. It has no power as **literature** per se, or **poetry** per se. Before you open up your Bible, determine where you want your life to go. Or, as the Scriptures put it, "**Commit your way to the Lord, and He shall bring it to pass**"