



YOU: Connect. Grow. Serve. Go!
Winter 2017-18 Leader Commentary

Unit 2: Spiritual Checkup
Session 2: Grow Up (see pp. 128-131)

The Question: What do I need to do to grow up spiritually?

The Point: Growing up spiritually does not happen automatically.

Background Passage: 2 Timothy 3

Focal Passage: 2 Timothy 3:1-5,10-12,14-15

This commentary is designed to help you think about the question, “What do I need to do to grow up spiritually?” and drive home this one truth: Growing up spiritually does not happen automatically.

Focus on These Points

Stand Out
(2 Tim. 3:1-5)

Paul continued his deep concern for encouraging Timothy. In the first two chapters of 2 Timothy, Paul had already urged being loyal and unashamed (2 Tim. 1) and he had reminded Timothy to be strong in the work of the Lord (2 Tim. 2). In chapter 3, Paul turned Timothy’s attention to difficulties that lay ahead and to the sufficiency of the Scriptures to guide him. Timothy was leading a church filled with people who, apparently, were satisfied with what they viewed as spiritual maturity. God desires that we stay connected with Him so that we might grow in our spiritual walk with Him. With that thought in mind, Paul challenged Timothy to grow up spiritually and to demonstrate that maturity for those in his church. As believers grow in their own level of spiritual maturity, they are a witness and example to others to also grow spiritually.

In case Timothy hadn’t figured it out for himself, he was to “know this”—that is, to realize the truth of what Paul was about to say (v. 1). Increasingly “hard times” were on the horizon for believers. The phrase *hard times* can mean “dangerous,” “stressful,” or “terrible” times. For the apostles, “the last days” didn’t refer just to the period immediately preceding Jesus’ return. Rather, the phrase referred to the entire time from Christ’s resurrection until His return. In this sense, Jesus’ first coming ushered in the last days (see Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; 2 Pet. 3:3). Sadly, the terrible behaviors Paul identified will characterize this “church age.” Paul began verse 2 with a long list of awful sins that demonstrate anything but spiritual maturity: “lovers of self,” that is, being completely self-centered; “lovers of money;” “boastful” and “proud;” “demeaning” (use of abusive language to hurt others); “disobedient;” “ungrateful;” and “unholy.” The first two sins listed in 3:3 suggest the cumulative effect of ruined family relationships: “unloving” and “irreconcilable.” Ordinary family connections have broken down. “Slanderers” are those who

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spread rumors and willfully ruin the reputation of others. In fact, they have sunk to the level of wild beasts, being “without self-control” and “brutal.” Morally, such persons become so twisted that they are “without love for what is good.” (This contrasts to the quality desirable in church leaders, “loving what is good,” that Paul described in Titus 1:8.)

In verse 5, Paul clarified that sometimes persons with these evil behaviors are found within congregations. “Holding to the form of godliness” refers to individuals who can take on the appearance of true religion but lack its reality. Timothy needed to avoid the mistake of supposing that acting religious means someone is right with God. It’s a matter of the heart. If persons are denying the power of the gospel, then they are false. The people who are characterized by this list of sinful behavior and character traits have never received new life and begun transformation into Christlikeness. Paul counseled Timothy to “avoid these people.” He didn’t mean for Timothy to be unkind, but rather to separate himself from them.

Stay the Course ***(2 Tim. 3:10-12)***

With the words “but you” (v. 10), Paul contrasted Timothy with the false teachers and those characterized by the long list of sinful traits. Paul listed seven positive qualities. (1) “Teaching” was Paul’s presentation of Christian truth. (2) “Conduct” could be translated “lifestyle” or “way of life.” (3) “Purpose” referred to his passionate commitment to Christ. (4) “Faith” was his confidence in God. (5) “Patience” was Paul’s willingness to put up with difficult people. (6) “Love” meant sacrificial concern for others. (7) “Endurance” implied “keeping on keeping on” in the face of discouraging circumstances. Paul wasn’t bragging but rather reminding Timothy of how the Lord had worked in and through his life. Paul referenced areas in his own life in which he felt he was growing spiritually and used those as examples for Timothy to emulate. The end result, for believers today, is that we can also pattern our lives and our spiritual growth after Paul’s journey.

Timothy also knew about the “persecutions and sufferings” Paul had experienced in the course of his ministry (v. 11). Timothy hadn’t personally witnessed Paul’s rejection in Antioch [AN tih ahk] (see Acts 13:50-51) or Iconium [igh (eye) KOH nih uhm] (where Paul evangelized on his first missionary journey; see Acts 14:4-5). In Antioch, hostile Jews had persecuted Paul. However, “Lystra” was Timothy’s hometown, so he well might have witnessed Paul’s troubles there when Paul faced persecution during his first missionary journey (see Acts 14:8-20; 16:1-2). And these were Paul’s troubles on his first missionary journey. There were many later tribulations as well.

Paul cheerfully noted, “The Lord rescued me from them all” (v. 11). Yet ironically, the apostle was writing from a prison cell from which he would not be physically rescued except through death’s door (see 2 Tim. 4:6-8). As Paul recalled the experiences he had been through, especially on that first missionary journey, he was moved to challenge Timothy to strive for his own spiritual maturity to prepare for the dangerous days ahead.

Study the Scriptures ***(2 Tim. 3:14-15)***

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Not only did Timothy have the example of Paul to inspire him, but he also had the Scriptures, which were profitable for making him complete and fully equipped. Timothy's confidence was not to be in novel ideas but rather in biblical truth. He had "learned." He had "firmly believed." Now he was to "continue" or remain in the truth. The apostle again complimented Timothy's ancestors in the faith ("those who taught you"), probably referring to Lois and Eunice, Timothy's grandmother and mother (see 2 Tim. 1:5).

The term "Scriptures" referred in Paul's day to the writings we now know as the Old Testament (v. 15). We are confident, however, that the New Testament is equally inspired (see John 14:26; 16:13). The last two verses in 2 Timothy 3 stress the validity of God's Word as our source for wisdom and guidance. Paul stated boldly and with conviction that all Scripture (not just some of it) is inspired by God—God breathed. And all of Scripture is profitable to believers. Scripture is that which God Himself breathed out, the creation of His Spirit.

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