

Women's Bible Study Spring 2011
A Spiritual Legacy: Passing On What You Know
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Look At My Life...2 Timothy 3:10-13; Acts 14:6-20
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Titus 3:10-13.

You , however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, 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. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

For the past several days, I have been watching two eagles on a nest in Decorah, Iowa. Someone set up a webcam very close to the nest and it has been fascinating for me to observe the eagles up close and personal. Their every movement can be seen and sometimes the camera zooms in for a very close look. I, along with at least 100,000 others have anxiously watched the arrival of three eaglets.

Paul starts out this passage of scripture by saying.....put a webcam on my life and do what I do. Let's read verse 10 again.

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings

Paul wanted Timothy to watch him, to observe him, and even to follow him. These verses come right after the warnings about the false teachers in verses 1-9 that Gretchen talked about and they clearly state that Paul was the one Timothy was to follow, not the others. Paul felt confident in his example of being a godly man. He even used the word "my" eight times! That seems rather unusual to me for him to use himself as an example so I decided to try it. Now listen as I paraphrase this sentence into my life. "I want all of you younger women here in Bible study to follow me and do just as I do as I raise my children, organize my house, love my husband, work at my job, dream my dreams, buy my car, explore my volunteer work, and how I deal with my sicknesses." Doesn't quite sound the same as Paul. I sound rather foolish, arrogant, and utterly selfish. When Paul uses these verses, I sense encouragement, exhortation, and a desire to be like him. The verses are not based on selfishness or pride as mine were, but on godly holiness. There is an attractive yet

humbling aspect to the thoughts of being more godly and following Paul. It is like being told to keep on running during a marathon. You might be tired and feel like giving up, but then you see someone you know cheering you on and it gets you going once again. You want to finish the race for them. Paul says in

Philippians 3:17, "Join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us."

I mentioned that I think it unusual that Paul encourages the believers to follow him. Not only is it unusual for me, but also scary. As I teach in MOPS, I have the privilege and responsibility to be an example and let them observe me. It astounds me how what I say or what I do affects them. Sometimes I hear from women something like this....." something you said a few years ago still rings in my head." Wow. It is a responsibility and one I do not take lightly. I often do not think my words have much of an impact at home, but even there I can see how my children have followed me. Maybe some of you moms feel the same way. You say the same thing repeatedly and with little or no result. I would like to suggest that those words are being heard. Do not give up. Keep it up and it will reap the benefits.

However, here, today, could I actually say to you all....come and follow me in my example to serve God. Follow my life and all I do. Be like me to be more godly. Words to think about and ponder. My prayer is that we all will be able to do that. Our lives are full of grace and I know we blow it often, but we also should be growing in holiness and being an example to others. Are we growing in this? Are we able to be confident in Him and be sure of our example?

Now lets' look at what they are to follow from Paul.

1. His teaching. **1 Corinthians 1:23 says, "We preach Christ crucified". Ephesians 3:8 says, "This grace was given me to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:3 says, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scripture, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day..."**

He has a clear focus and he maintains that focus. His teaching was always about the risen Christ. I knew a missionary doc named John in Zaire. He was dedicated to his work with leprosy and had a huge impact on the people. However, it was not his medical work that he was known for, even though he eradicated leprosy in our area. He was known for his trust in God and his prayer life. When he died in Zaire, over 5,000 people attended his funeral. He had a clear focus. We all knew what John was about. Never a doubt in our minds that if we needed prayer we would go to John. I want that kind of focus in my life and I want it for you, too.

2. His conduct. As I am going through these ways to follow Paul, I am looking up verses from other letters of Paul to get a flavor for his life. His conduct was the same in all of the letters covering several years. **In Colossians 2:6 Paul says, "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."**

He emphasizes again that we are to follow his example. In our conduct, we must be rooted and built up in God. We must act like a tree next to water that bears fruit in its season and withstands the storms. We must live our lives in such a way that not anyone will be discouraged from following Christ.

3. His aim in life. Look at **Colossians 1:28, 29. "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."**

Sometimes I think too small. Maybe you do too. Like it would be great to get our pictures organized this year. Or, maybe we can get our basements cleaned out. Or, maybe we can potty train that son or daughter that just is not interested. This is small stuff. Paul is after the big stuff. Eternal stuff. Stuff that truly matters, like presenting everyone mature in Christ.

4. His faith. **2 Corinthians 5:7 says, "We walk by faith, not by sight"**. We have had some friends staying with us for several days. The wife is here to figure out why she has felt lousy for a long time. The answers were not easy to hear and the answers leave them both with more questions. Like do we return to Africa as missionaries? And if so are we to change our jobs? What do we do if we stay here? And they said at our dinner table in the midst of this conversation...we walk by faith not by sight. So true.
5. His patience. I don't know about you but if I had spent several months teaching you and explaining things to you over and over and I left and within a short period of time you decided to not do as I had taught I would lose my patience with you. But in his letters to the churches, Paul has to regularly remind and rebuke the believers to stop following the wrong people or ideas and stick to the truth. He never gave up on them. This sounds like being a mother to me. Isn't one of the most used prayer request of mothers to be more patient? I know Paul is not a mom, but he asks Timothy to follow his example in patience. I think his patience is also very tied into numbers 1-4, his teaching, conduct, aim and faith. It is a package deal. When his faith

and his aim and his teaching and his conduct are on the same page, patience is much more likely to follow.

6. His love. The famous love chapter in 1 Corinthians 13 was written by Paul. He describes love as patient, kind, does not envy or boast, it not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way, is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. This could easily be a whole lesson, but would you want someone to follow your kind of love?
7. His steadfastness. In the next couple of weeks, we will read **2 Timothy 4:7 where Paul says that he has fought the good fight, finished the race, kept the faith.** He did not give up. I attended a John Piper conference a few years ago on perseverance. The reason I wanted to attend this particular conference was that Helen Roseveare was speaking. She had been a missionary in Zaire for many years and we worked in the same place she had been. I had always heard about her and had read great things about her so I wanted to hear her speak. She did not disappoint. She was in her 80s, quite small, and full of God. She had endured much, from physical abuse to mental torture during her stay in Zaire but she was still full of God. And besides that, she was beautiful. Her clothes, as you can see, were nice but nothing splashy. Her talk was not eloquent and polished, but she was beautiful. She received the longest standing ovation from that crowd during the weekend we were there, even more than John Macarthur and John Piper. Steadfastness is not just for our moral character. Steadfastness affects us deeply.
8. His persecutions and sufferings.

Do you ever wonder why you are persecuted? Do you ever wonder if there is any persecution at all in Rochester? Having a very busy day, having everything go wrong in your day, having difficult work to do, or an illness is not persecution. I asked my daughter to look up the definition of persecution for me and in her very professional sounding voice she said, "What Juli Fischer does to Joanna". She is wrong. Persecution (according to the dictionary) is the systematic mistreatment of an individual or group by another group. The inflicting of suffering, harassment, isolation, imprisonment, fear, pain or exclusion are common. Even if this definition fits the job of most mothers, we do not persecute our children. Paul, however, was clearly persecuted.

Let us go to the Acts section of our reading today.

Acts 14:6-20

“They learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to preach the gospel. Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, “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 run from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations, he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. “Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. 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. 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.

Before we tackle the topic of persecution and suffering, I want to go over two items. As we read this, I am struck by the fact that Paul had spiritual insight into this man. Look at verse 9. It says that Paul was looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well he then acted. The Holy Spirit gave Paul the ability to somehow see what was happening in the spiritual realm. God works like that. A couple of weeks ago I was preparing for a Bible study at Next Chapter Ministries. I was praying as to what verses to use and I knew from God that Psalm 1 was to be the verses we focused on. Those same verses were given to another woman in the group and she was battling some of the ideas found in Psalm 1. When I gave the verses out that evening she was shocked and awed that God would do that. Another woman had been thinking about trees by water. She had a picture in her head of what God was doing and that picture kept coming to her. It was amazing what God did. He gave me the idea and He used it the lives of others. It certainly had nothing to do with me, or even of Paul. It is not that Paul had special gifts or abilities to hear God. He was an amazing man who knew how to hear God and live in His presence. Living in the presence of God is truly beyond words.

Secondly, in this passage, Barnabas was called Zeus. Zeus was the supreme ruler of Mount Olympus and of the Pantheon of gods who resided there. Being the supreme ruler he upheld law, justice and morals, and this made him the spiritual leader of both gods and men.

Paul was called Hermes and he was the god of shepherds, land travel, merchants, weights and measures, oratory, literature, athletics and thieves, and known for his cunning and shrewdness. Most importantly, he is the messenger of the gods.

These two Greek gods were allegedly visitors in this region in human form and the Lycaonians thought they had returned. It is certainly a complement to Paul and Barnabas. The people were amazed at their abilities and wanted to honor them. But they were misled by their own beliefs and traditions. Even at Paul and Barnabas' urging and insistence, the people continued to shower them with sacrifices and gifts. They could not hear the truth. Their own culture and ways of living dominated their thinking. Before we get too hard on the Lycaonians I want to tell you another story. When we were in Zaire and celebrated a birthday of one of our children, we invited some of our Zairian neighbors. They were shocked at our use of candles on the cake and making a wish. They wanted to know which god it was that we were doing that to because the God of the Bible is not like that. They thought we were probably talking to some dead ancestor of ours. Convicting. Our American culture became so much a part of us that we did not give it even a thought about putting candles on a cake. From then on, we became more sensitive to the American way of doing things and being willing to forego them for the bigger glory.

As Paul is trying to convince them not to worship him, he recounts to them all of the signs of the true God. He reminds them that God made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them and he controls the weather. He was telling them to look at the big picture and see that the true God had it all under control and was supremely powerful. Have you ever felt God's power and sovereignty as you looked at creation? From a field of blue bells to a view from the plane of the Rockies God shows himself to be above all. Remind yourself of that next time you are in awe of the beauty or severity of this world.

Now back to persecution and suffering. The Jews that came to stir up trouble had to travel over 100 miles to get to them. They really wanted to stir up trouble and get rid of Paul. Their stoning of him was so complete that they thought he was dead. They walked off thinking their job was finished. They must have been surprised when they heard of him later on. To be in God's hands is the safest place to be. As I have dealt with my adult children living in areas that are not known to be safe I have had to remind myself that God is sovereign and He is able to take care of them. He can work in hearts, in villages, in armies, in countries, in organizations, and in churches for His glory. He does not need me to protect my children from all harm. To be in God's hands is the safest place to be, even when you are persecuted or suffering.

Paul continued in his ministry with perseverance and did not let the stoning diminish his desire to glorify God. Verse 20 states that he rose up and entered the city and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. Right before that in verse 20, it says the disciples

had gathered around him. Was this to mourn? Was this to pray? We do not have the answers but we do know from this verse that there were believers in Lystra. This experience must have encouraged their hearts, too. Paul's persecution had a spiritual impact on himself, on his onlookers, on others that heard of it, and on the multitudes that have read about it. God certainly does use all things for our good and for His glory. And remember the verse also says our sufferings are to work the same with us as persecution does. He says persecutions and sufferings. So all of those times when we do know that we are suffering, think of Paul's example.

And as we go back to 2 Timothy 3 we see in verse 11 that Paul says the Lord rescued him. To be rescued does not mean to be kept from harm. If someone we love is serving God and is persecuted or injured it does not mean that God is looking the other way and has forgotten about them. To be rescued is to be able to keep on serving God as He chooses and to be kept faithful through it all.

As we look at verse 12 we see the word indeed. The Thesaurus states the word indeed could be replaced by the words certainly, without a doubt, undeniably, and definitely. So then the verse could read, **"Without a doubt all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."**

This man is a pastor in Faradje, Congo. His name is Ayez and he lives where my son, Jon, is now. A few years ago he was brutally beaten from foot to head and then turned over and brutally beaten from head to foot. He was then thrown into a pit of mud and dirty water hoping that the wounds would become infected. They tortured him for months, repeating this same procedure each time. All because he was a Christian. He was tortured with two other men, one of which is still a believer and following Christ. The other one became bitter and is still holding grudges and blaming others and not living for God. Ayez is a strong force for God in this very remote and hurting place. He brings joy to others and encourages them on. He is definitely following Paul's example.

Recently I took a trip to CA to see my family. It is always fun to reconnect with siblings, cousins, and nieces and nephews. This time, however, I was asked to talk to a nephew who is in the midst of a divorce. It is difficult to be talking to both him and his wife, but I strongly felt like I was to show God's grace and love to my nephew. He is searching for God, by his own words, and I wanted to show him forgiveness. It was not easy for me because he is not acting in a way that I approve of. But I reasoned that God shows me forgiveness and I often do things that don't please him so why should I not extend that to my nephew? A few other members of my family are now quite upset with me and saying negative things about me. They do not agree with my showing grace and have said some lies about me. It hurts. Maybe this is persecution and maybe it is not, but I felt like God rescued me out of it by giving me love for them all. I am praying for them all, not just my nephew, and finding it a joy to consider what God can do. The remarks and comments and emails continue on, some not so great about me. But it is not stoning and I was not left for dead. I did think that I was talking and showing truth and was attacked for it. Should I have been surprised? Doesn't it

say that if we desire to live a godly life we will be persecuted? If we are not persecuted should we wonder about that?

Our verses close with verse 13. "While evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." Those doing the deceiving are themselves deceived. Sometimes the evil people and impostors can look really good and appear as if all is right with the world. But these verses say the opposite. We can trust that God will deal with them and it is our job to remain faithful, even if the evil people are after us or harassing us or making fun of us.

I come from a Swedish background; in fact, I am fully 100% Swedish. In my culture you do not talk about yourself. You are supposed to ask questions about others. In fact, it is probably better to gossip about others than it would be to talk about yourself! If anything, you would put yourself down. Such as, "No, I was not that good at the talk. I made so many mistakes that you don't know about. "Or, "thanks but this is just something old from my closet, it is nothing special". That is the appropriate way to talk as a Swede. Paul was not Swedish! He tells Timothy to follow his example and that he is godly. Seems very arrogant to me in my Swedish head, but this is the inspired word of God. Paul emphasizes and reminds Timothy of all he has gone through and to remain faithful like he did. Arrogant again! Maybe I should be comfortable saying that I was persecuted because I desired to live a godly life. Maybe by saying things like Paul said I am actually not bragging about myself but boasting in what God has done and He certainly deserves the glory. I should not let my culture get in the way of truth. Maybe your culture dictates to you a way to live that does not seem to jive with what the Bible teaches. Think about it and pray about it and ask God to show you what His desire is for you. I don't need to brag about anything or flaunt it or be boastful about myself, but I can be confident in who God is. I can be confident that when I am following Him and doing as He says and listening to what He says, I should be able to encourage others to follow me.

I would like to close by re- reading the passage in 2 Timothy again. What part of this passage has spoken to you? Are you ready to be an example for others? Are you persevering in your persecution? Do you want a more godly life?

2 Timothy 3:10 - 13

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