

A Godly Disciple

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Preacher: Brian King

[0 : 00] Let's pray.

necessary. Lord, you know that I am weak. I'm not always able to bring forth your word with the clarity or with the precision that I would like, but I pray that you would still make yourself hurt through my weakness as well. I pray all this in the name of Christ. Amen. Now, when I was growing up, I was a big sports fan, and one of the heroes of my era was Lance Armstrong. Even though I followed football and basketball rather than cycling, I couldn't help but be captivated by his story. He was one of the world's most promising cyclists who was diagnosed with stage 3 testicular cancer when he was just 25 years old. And it was an aggressive cancer spreading to his brains and lungs. And yet he fought back with determination and bravery. He survived and then went on to win cycling's most prestigious race, the Tour de France, seven years in a row. I mean, wow, how incredible was that? No one had ever done that before. For many people, he was more than a mere athlete. He was a symbol of inspiration and perseverance. But then came the big shock. It turned out all those victories were built on illegal performance-enhancing drugs. Now, Armstrong initially and vigorously denied it all, of course. He had crafted a careful image based on his integrity. But eventually the evidence got all too overwhelming and he finally came clean on the Oprah Winfrey show in 2013. It turns out that his appearance of strength wasn't real but artificial. He was someone I wanted to grow up to be. But with the revelations, it turned out the strength I admired was simply a sham after all. And in 2 Timothy 3, Poe is basically saying, don't grow up to be a spiritual Lance Armstrong. Don't have the appearance of godliness, yet deny its true power. Because here's the scary part. Poe says this won't be rare. It will be everywhere. There will be people who look strong in the faith, who look impressive in their spirituality, and who will try to get you to buy into what they have. But underneath, there is no real life of the

Spirit. And so, post-warning to Timothy and all of us is this. Don't settle for a form of godliness that looks the part but lacks the life. If you do, one day it will all come crashing down. Instead, grow up to be a true disciple, one who experiences the power of the gospel at work in the heart.

Grow up to be a godly disciple, not just a glossy one. So how can we do that? Well, today, Poe gives us three non-negotiable ways. Firstly, we must reject counterfeit forms, for they have no power. That's verses 1 to 9. Then secondly, we ought to follow faithful examples who show us true power. That's verses 10 to 13. And finally, we must continue in the Word, for it supplies transforming power. That's verses 14 to 17. And if we do all that, here is the hope of today's passage. We can grow up to be what Lance Armstrong was meant to truly represent.

Or even better, we can grow up to be more like Jesus. So let us humbly listen to God's Word now and let it teach us. Firstly, reject counterfeit forms. Poe begins verse 1 by turning our attention to the last days. Now, what time are we talking about? At first glance, it might sound like Poe is talking about the months and the weeks just before Jesus returns. Certainly in Malaysian Christian circles, that's often how we use the phrase, the last days. But look closely at verse 5. After describing what people will be like in these days, what does he tell Timothy to do? Avoid such people. Present tense.

[5 : 45] And then verse 6. And then verse 6. He goes on to describe what they are doing right now in Timothy's time.

In other words, Poe believes Timothy to be living in the last days already. And that fits perfectly with the rest of the New Testament.

You see, in the Bible, the last days simply refer to the entire period between Jesus' first coming and his second coming. That's certainly how Hebrews 1 verse 1 to 2 and 1 Corinthians 10 verse 11 also think of it. So Poe is not talking about some far-off future. He's describing what things will be like in Timothy's time in Timothy's time and in ours as well.

And mark this, Poe says in verse 1. Listen up. Take note. In these last days, we're going to hit terrible times. As the kids say, it's going to be wow.

And why is that? Well, a glance down that list in verses 2 to 4 will tell us. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

[7 : 28] Wow, the list that is, isn't it? Now, just imagine living in a house with housemates who fit that description. That would be a very unpleasant experience, wouldn't it?

You come home after a bad day and there is your housemate bragging about how much better his job is than yours. You help wash the dishes, you even buy him some kin kombucha, and all he does is verbally abuse you for not also cleaning his room.

Now, imagine those housemates are the norm. They're everywhere. No wonder Poe says it's terrible. A world like that is not a pleasant world to live in.

But let's have a closer look. Is Poe simply complaining about how bad the world has gotten?

Is he like a cranky old grandpa, pointing fingers and shaking his head at how degenerate society has become nowadays, while wistfully saying, back in my days we were more civilized?

[8 : 44] I think not. Because verse 5 gives us two big clues he is homing in on a particular target. Firstly, did you notice how Poe sums these people up?

He says they have an appearance of godliness. In other words, you will know right away these people love themselves, love money, they are unforgiving, and so on.

Instead, these people know how to put on a good act. They maintain a facade of virtue. It won't be self-evident there will be bad housemates.

They look outwardly respectable, even though their inward reality could be very different. So this sounds like a specific group, not simply society as a whole.

And then secondly, notice in verse 5 also that Timothy is told to have nothing to do with these people. But if Poe is simply referring to the world at large, that would mean Timothy is being asked to have nothing to do with anyone.

[10 : 05] That wouldn't make sense, would it? So it seems as if Poe ultimately has in mind a more specific group of people than just the world at large.

It seems he is talking about people who claim to be godly, yet live completely ungodly lives. In short, he is talking about counterfeit Christians.

Indeed, later on in verse 6, we will see some of these people lead others astray. So at least some of these counterfeit Christians are counterfeit teachers.

And as we will see later on, they cause real damage. No wonder Poe says if you want to grow up to be a godly disciple, avoid these people.

In effect, he is saying something similar to 1 Corinthians 5, verse 9 to 11 on the screen. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people.

[11 : 17] Not at all, meaning the people of this world who are immoral or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters. In that case, you would have to leave this world.

But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister, but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler.

Do not even eat with such people. But here is the question. If you want to grow up to be a godly disciple, why must you reject these counterfeits?

Simple. Because while they may look spiritual, they carry no power. Just like Yannes and Yambres, verse 8.

Now, who were they? They are not named in the Old Testament, but Jewish tradition held these were the names of pharaohs called magicians, who went head to head with Aaron and Moses back in Exodus 7.

[12 : 33] And though they could mimic God's signs for a while, they were eventually shown to be fakes. They only looked good momentarily, but ultimately they had no power to do what only God can do.

That's what these counterfeit teachers were like. You see, you can't grow up to be godly simply by force of personality, discipline, or religious activity.

You need true supernatural power. And such power can only come from one source.

Christ himself revealed in the Gospel. But how do we know it must come from him? Well, turn with me for a moment to Philippians 2.

Now, what does this passage tell us? For one thing, it tells us Christ is the very form of God. But unlike these counterfeit teachers, his form is not a deception.

[13:47] After all, he keeps doing things that only God can do. He feeds thousands with bread, like God in the Exodus. He calms the storm, like God in the Psalms.

He truly possesses and displays the very nature of God. It is not just an act. But Christ doesn't just show he is truly God.

He also shows what God is truly like. Because listen again to Philippians 2. Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God, a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing. He emptied himself by taking the form of a servant. In other words, the one who is truly God, truly became a servant.

That wasn't deception either. We know that because he really did deliberately go to the cross in submission to his father and sacrifice himself for the sake of others.

[15:06] None of that was fake. And so Christ shows us what it means to pattern ourselves after God. He shows the pattern for godliness.

And wonderfully, he also empowers us to follow that pattern. Because the very same spirit who empowered Christ's obedience now lives in us, uniting us to him, making his life our life.

Remember what Paul said earlier in this letter, in 2 Timothy 1 verse 7? For the spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline.

The spirit applies the finished work of Christ to our hearts, shaping us into his likeness. He makes the godliness of Jesus real in us.

What would otherwise be just a form becomes living power. So do you see why Paul says to reject the counterfeits?

[16:18] Precisely because they lack this very life-giving power. Without Christ and the spirit, there can be activity, but no transformation.

Form, but no substance. Because true godliness can only flow from the gospel of Christ and be filled by the spirit of Christ.

That's what gives it power. And when someone comes without the gospel, it doesn't matter how impressive they are. It doesn't matter if they can speak the sweetest words or even perform spectacular signs and wonders.

They cannot help you truly grow up to be godly disciples. If anything, they do the opposite. Verse 6. They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning, but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

[17:31] Now, Paul isn't making a sexist remark here. He's not saying that all women are gullible. But he is saying some women and some men too are morally unstable, weighed down by guilt and so easily led astray.

You see, when we become numb to our sin, we become more vulnerable to error because we are more willing to give a hearing to people who tell us what we want to hear.

And that's exactly what these counterfeit teachers were doing. They were giving these women chewing gum for food. Why do I say that?

Because these women were always chewing and chewing and chewing but never swallowing what truly fills them up. They are always learning and learning and learning but never arriving at the truth. When I was in the UK, I often heard it said that we are designed to open our minds in the same way we open our mouths.

[18:51] We open them so that we will eventually close them on something solid. But that's not what these women were getting.

They are getting wax fruit, something cold and lifeless. rather than real fruit, something nutritious and life-giving.

So what do we do with this? It's easy straight away to move to pointing to the bad people out there such as the prosperity gospel preacher on YouTube or the wolf in sheep's clothing in some cult. But I think first of all, Paul is warning us against embracing counterfeit forms of godliness for ourselves.

You see, it's so easy to buy into the form without the power, isn't it? It's so easy to mistake our church activity for spiritual vitality.

[20 : 00] It's so easy to mistake habits like going to church every Sunday for holiness. It's so easy to build an entire life of religion without ever experiencing true regeneration.

But Paul is forcing us now into self-examination to get us to ask that penetrating question. Am I truly following Jesus or am I just wearing a Christian label?

One way to figure that out is to consider what we really love. Did you notice in verses 2-4 how these people's loves are all messed up?

They are lovers of themselves, lovers of money, without love, not lovers of the good, lovers of pleasure, and all this why?

Because they are not lovers of God. You see, growing up to be a godly disciple isn't so much about how we behave but what we love.

[21 : 20] If we genuinely love God, we will love what He loves and love whom He loves and act accordingly.

But the moment you trade for love of something lesser, it sets off a chain reaction. The heart made to orbit around God starts spinning and when it does, our whole life gets bent out of shape, breathing godlessness instead of godliness.

So who or what do you really love? That's what you must ask yourself today. And when we have examined our own hearts, then we can be ready for Paul's second explicit application.

We've already heard it earlier in verse 5, have nothing to do with such people. This isn't about being unloving or judgmental.

It's about being discerning. It's about protecting our own hearts and our church from things that have no power. If we want to grow up, then we must actively reject counterfeit forms by rejecting the teachers who bring such messages.

[22 : 54] Like it or not, every year they are visiting speakers who come to Guqing who offer precisely such things. I remember one preacher who came with impressive credentials.

It was said that he had prophetic insight. That's why he was brought in. But when I heard him preach, there was no gospel.

He just kept boasting about how his radio program in his home country was so popular. And then he treated the music team at the rally with such condescension that the musicians privately expressed relief when he was gone.

These are not the people who can help you to grow up to be godly disciples. They claim to be full of the spirit, but they can't help you grow the fruit of the spirit.

And Paul is crystal clear. Avoid such people. Don't attend their conferences, don't listen to their podcasts, don't read their books, don't promote them on WhatsApp.

[24 : 08] This isn't about cancelling people, but about choosing life-giving voices so that the real Jesus can shape us.

But if we reject the counterfeits, where do we turn? And the answer has to be to faithful examples. That's Paul's second unnegotiable. Follow faithful examples. You see, what is one of the best ways to learn to be a godly disciple? by seeing how godliness is lived in a real human life.

And Timothy has had such an opportunity because, verse 10, he's observed Paul's teaching, his way of life and his purpose for years and years.

So you might think the choice for Timothy should be pretty straightforward, right? I mean, Timothy, you can either follow those verses 6 to 9 teachers who are full of the verses 2 to 4 stuff, or you could follow Paul, who is all about faith, patience, love, and endurance.

[25 : 28] So, isn't it obvious who you should follow? What's so hard about that? And that choice might be really easy if Paul stopped at verse 10.

But here's the problem, he doesn't. You see, after saying verse 10, you know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, and endurance, he keeps going.

There's no full stop. In verse 11, he adds, you also know about my persecutions and sufferings.

What happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, the persecutions I endiom.

And now certainly, you can see why you might not want to follow Paul's example after all. You might see why those verses 6 to 9 teachers might be attractive after all.

Because Paul is telling us there is no way to be a verse 10 Christian without also being a verse 11 Christian. There is no way to pursue godliness without also facing difficulty.

[26 : 46] It simply comes with the territory. Verse 12, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

certainly that's what happened to Paul, didn't it? As he goes about teaching and living out the gospel, verse 10, he ends up with persecutions and sufferings, verse 11.

To take just one of the three examples he gives, let's see what happened to him at Iconium. We'll tell this story in Acts chapter 14.

He and Barnabas went there and spoke God's truth, but some Jews hated it, and so they poisoned minds, they stirred up opposition, and even plotted to stone them.

For like it or not, when we consistently seek to be godly, not everyone will like it. That's how it is. After all, Jesus was the most godly person who ever lived, and yet not everyone liked him.

[28 : 00] In fact, some hated him so much they wanted to kill him. So it shouldn't surprise us that verse 12 is true.

But you might ask, I still don't get it. How can being godly lead to not being like? And if we are confused, I think it's because we have mistaken niceness for godliness.

Niceness is about being pleasant and keeping everyone comfortable. To avoid conflict, we prioritize being likable. But godliness is different.

Godliness is about living in line with god's character, his love, his goodness, his justice, his truth.

To oversimplify it, we are nice so that we can keep the peace, but we are godly so that we can keep the faith. Godly and not just nice, we will certainly not make everyone happy.

[29 : 21] I remember the preacher Philip Jensen telling a story about someone he knew, an accountant, and this Christian accountant was roundly criticized by his employers who happened to be one of the big four.

Why? Because he was auditing the books of one of their big clients too carefully. And so this client was threatening to take his business away to another competitor.

You see, the client wanted someone who would make their accounts appear fine, even when they weren't. And now here's the irony, isn't it?

The point of auditing is precisely to check if things are in order. But here was a major employer criticizing their own employee for doing precisely what the employer is contracted to do and is diligently doing so.

You see, you don't have to go to somewhere like North Korea to run into hostility. You just have to be godly. You just have to be like this accountant who wasn't really doing anything out of the ordinary.

[30 : 46] He was working as he should, seeking to honour God in his daily work. But because he was committed to live a godly life, he found his career progression in jeopardy.

he may not be physically persecuted, but he was paying the cost. So this simple choice to follow faithful examples certainly doesn't seem so easy once we realise this.

So why choose to still follow people like Paul? Because the alternative is far worse, verse 13. You see, there is also a cost to following the path of counterfeit Christians and teachers.

Because sin also demands a price. Sin rarely lets you stop at one thing. You tell one little half-truth, and then before you know it, you begin to spin more lies, and it just gets worse and worse from there.

You might even find yourselves even believing the web of lies you have spun. Because to face the truth has become more painful. And so like all these counterfeit teachers, what happens in the end is you end up remaining a slave to sin because you have become self-deceived.

[32 : 12] So yes, following faithful examples like Paul does have a cost, but if it means you grow up to be a godly disciple, it's worth it.

So go find some Christians who have stayed godly in hard times and imitate them. In my own life, I've been so grateful for the examples I could follow.

And now that I'm no longer as young as I once was, I hope I can be an example to others as well. But to really do that, I will need to see to it that I also continue in the word.

Because that is Paul's third non-negotiable way. Continue in the word. Verses 14 and 15. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation true faith in Christ Jesus.

So Paul is saying, do you want to grow up to be a godly disciple? Then don't run from one thing to another, constantly chasing the latest spiritual fad, or seeking some spiritual silver bullet.

[33 : 38] Instead, stick with that firm and eternal foundation, the word of God. Because what kind of power does this word carry?

Look again at verse 15. It makes you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Think about what that means.

Put another way, it means it brings you from death to life. It turns an enemy of God into a friend of God. It transfers you out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his beloved son.

a kingdom of justice, healing, and joy instead of the chaos, cruelty, and misery of Satan's domain. That's what the word does.

Do you see, this is not just some abstract content, this is divine power. Because this word brings you the gospel. And the gospel is the power of God for salvation.

[34 : 45] salvation. Now, of course, there is a way of learning the Bible that only fills your heads with facts. It is possible to study the text, know every story, but never meet the person it points to.

But that is not the fault of the word of God. That is the fault of the reader. But if you are taught the scriptures in a way that helps you see their heartbeat, if you read it in such a way that you realize all of it from beginning to end points to Jesus, you have all you need to grow up to be a godly disciple of Jesus.

And so Paul says, don't leave your Bible on the shelf. In fact, don't even just read your Bible for the sake of reading it. meditate on it to grow up to be godly.

Take up the word and use it in all the ways it's meant to be used, verse 16. So for instance, use it to be taught.

Don't be ignorant about who God is, what he's like, what his plans are, what he intends your life to be like, how sin works, and so on and so forth.

[36 : 09] You know, sometimes Christians can be anti-intellectual, but to grow, we need proper teaching. But take the word up so that you are also being corrected.

You see, none of us approach God as blank slates. Like it or not, we come to God with all sorts of wrong ideas and perspectives. we might not have the right view of God, or of ourselves, or the world, so we need correction.

We need the word of God to correct us. And sometimes we even need rebuke. We need to be told that we are going the wrong way, and so we've got to get off that track and reverse course as soon as possible.

And we need training in righteousness. We need encouragement and equipping to keep on keeping on being godly.

But here is what Paul really wants us to understand. The Bible is all we need to be able to achieve all that.

[37 : 26] Now, remember the situation Timothy is in. There are plenty of false teachers around who are pretty popular with others. His own mentor Paul is suffering and he knows suffering is coming for him too.

And so verses 16 to 17 are not just there to give us a nice little doctrine lesson. No, it's Paul's way of saying when the pressure is on and everyone is telling you the Bible isn't enough, the Bible is too boring, the Bible isn't really useful for the real world, continue on in the word.

Because what does verses 16 and 17 say? It says the Bible is God brief. So it's not merely human, but divine. And it's useful, so it's not merely decorative, but purposeful.

And it is all these things so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for how many good works? Is it just some good works? No. Every good work.

In short, the Bible is all we need to be godly. The Bible is all we need for ministry. Now, I know sometimes people make this criticism.

[38 : 51] They say we have too much word, word, word. And the implied meaning is that word ministry doesn't achieve anything. Oh, that's not where the real action is.

But Paul says the direct opposite here. The Bible gives us everything we need even when we come up against godlessness verses 1 to 5, or opposition to the truth, that's verse 8, or depraved minds, that's verse 8 again, or persecution, verse 12, or deception.

Verse 13, it gives us what we need when we are sick in a hospital bed, when we are guilt ridden because we have let down someone badly, when we are anxious because the future is so

uncertain, when we are wondering what to say when someone asks, how can I be a Christian? Because it tells us the gospel. people. And certainly as someone who has been in ministry for nearly two decades now, I can say with confidence that the Christians I know who best exhibit those verse 10 characteristics, purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, are all those who have been most grounded in the word, who have continued in the word.

because scripture is the very word of God, it unleashes the power of God for the people of God.

[40 : 28] So, do you want to grow up to be a godly disciple? Then do all you can to encourage genuine word ministry that points people to Jesus. Be willing and receptive to such ministry.

As an ancient theologian once said, if we want to live well as Christians, we need three things. Number one, we need to know the truth so that the mind is not led astray by falsehoods. Number two, we need to have the right goal so that we do not fall away from true happiness by pursuing the wrong stuff.

And number three, we need to learn to live justly so that we are not destroyed by various vices. And you can get all those things if you continue in the word, you can get all those things if you follow the examples of word saturated people.

But you can't get those things if you chase after counterfeit ministries. so let us strive to grow up to be godly disciples, not glossy ones who are all show and no substance.

[41 : 49] In fact, let us ask God to help us to do that right now. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, all scripture is God brief.

And so that means as the scriptures have just been open for the last 40 minutes, you have spoken. So I pray now that you keep our hearts soft and humble and receptive to hear what you have said to us.

Help us indeed, Lord, to hang on to you, because in you, we have true and sufficient power to live for you. So help us not to get entangled in all these other things that might not bring true power, that might not help us to live in the way you want us to, but help us to keep hanging on to you, so that at the end of the day, we can stand before you unashamed, and full of joy, because we have done what you have asked us to.

Above all, help us to hang on to Jesus, the one whom the word points to, and help us to rest in his grace and live for his glory.

We pray all this in the name of Christ. Amen.