

Exemplary Lives

2 Timothy 3:14-17

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There is a tension in Christian life between having hearts that are genuine in faith and being concerned with how we represent Christ to those around us. For Chinese churches in particular, especially for me growing up as a pastor's kid, the concern about our reputation can be overblown to the extent of becoming idolatry. While we are called to be concerned about how others see us as Christians, it is not for our own glory but for the glory of God. It's not our reputation that's important as much as it is Jesus' reputation. We should be living lives that bring glory to God rather than shame. Live a life that is worth imitating by imitating Christ.

Today's passage gives us two reasons why we should be concerned with how we represent Jesus in our lives. First is that people are watching how we live and will benefit from good examples. In 2 Timothy 3, Paul contrasts Timothy with the false teachers. In v. 5 he mentions that these false teachers put on a show of holiness but deny the power that is available through faith in Jesus. We know people are watching because some are actually swayed by this show they put on. So if people are exposed to these bad examples of empty religiosity, how much more important is it that Timothy live an exemplary life that reflects the true transformative power of God? And so this is what Paul urges him to do (v. 14). Paul contrasts the false teachers in v. 7, who learn but never acknowledge the truth, with Timothy in v. 14, who learned and has been convinced. It's not enough to know the facts; you actually have to buy into it. God's word is like food. In order to benefit we must eat and digest it, absorbing its nutrients. And when we internalize God's word through faith, we walk accordingly. This is what Paul means when he tells Timothy to continue in what he has learned. Once you eat and digest food, it gives you energy to move, to exercise. Then the power you have in Jesus will become visible to others in how you live. Too many churches are filled with spiritually obese Christians, who ingest the word but do not exercise it in their lives. But here Timothy is charged with living an exemplary life to encourage others to do likewise, which we also see in 1 Timothy 4:12. And Timothy should know how important a good example is because he himself benefited from the example of those who taught him the gospel (2 Timothy 3:14), who we know from 1:5 are his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice. This is the reason why Timothy was already a believer when Paul met him in Acts 16. And the third exemplary figure in Timothy's life was Paul, as we

see in 3:10-11. Paul showed Timothy why Jesus was still worth living for in the midst of suffering. And this encouragement Timothy received by way of example is what he is asked to give to others. We likewise must be an example to others. Pay attention to what you say. It's even more critical today where our words can live forever on social media. I will do my best to live a biblical life as an example to the Oasis kids. And the older Oasis kids should set an example for the younger ones, being warm and welcoming rather than exclusive and cliquey. Parents should also set an example for their kids, not being hypocritical but demonstrating genuine love. My dad showed his love by taking care of chores and errands for my mom, and I strive to do likewise for my wife.

The second reason we should live exemplary lives is that Scripture is worth following (vv. 15-17). Scripture is God-breathed, inspired by the Holy Spirit such that its authors wrote down exactly what God wanted them to convey to all subsequent generations. Thus it is the pure truth from God, and completely trustworthy. God's word also reflects God's power to bring things into existence. Just as He spoke light into existence (Genesis 1:3), His word brings light into the darkness of our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6). And the power of His word is most displayed in the wisdom of God for salvation (v. 15). Though we can see God in part through creation, the Bible is the only way we can really know God, follow Him, believe in His Son, and be saved. Apart from what is revealed in Scripture we have no knowledge of salvation. From the time of creation, God gradually revealed His plan of salvation to mankind through Scripture. And finally, Scripture equips us (v. 17). It is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training so that our minds can be renewed and conformed to that of Jesus. Let us encourage and exhort each other not based on our own opinions or preferences, but based on Scripture. Let us not judge each other, but help each other grow. Let us look at ourselves through the mirror of Scripture. Let us walk exemplarily in the light of Scripture, because it is valuable, trustworthy, and powerful. Let us live, full of the power of the Holy Spirit and rooted in Scripture, a life worth imitating.