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# From Unbelief to Baptism

Text            *2 Timothy 1:3-7, 3:10-17*  
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## Introduction

Let's assume for a moment, and we'll return to this assumption shortly, that your highest, best, most urgent and genuine desire for your teen is that he or she become a person of whom it can be said has a [sincere faith](#)<sup>1</sup>. But you are an informed believer and are well aware that just as being in a garage does not make one a car, being in a "Christian home" (that is, a home in which the parents are Christians) does not make your teen a Christian. Perhaps, in fact, you are painfully aware of this as you watch your teen become more and more independent. As this new and emerging sense of self blossoms, there is a growing realization in you, and your teen, that they are not the Lord's and they do not desire the things of the Lord. Their resistance to *your* way of life begins to be palpable. Conversations about the gospel are terse, tense, and increasingly unwelcomed.

Or, alternatively, you have a teen in your home who claims to be a Christian and from an earthly perspective, is the proverbial "really great kid." They work hard at school, don't give you troubles at home, are generally respectful, and are kind to others. They have a great disposition and an easy to like personality. They are so full of hope, success, and aspiration that the mere thought of sin and its consequences seems barely relevant. All that carefree goodness they exhibit somehow seems to get in the way of highlighting their need for a rescuer, someone who will save them from their sin and transform their ungodliness into godliness. Conversations about the gospel are shallow, redundant, and lack a sense of urgency.

Most families raising teens will have their own particular variations on these themes. Perhaps all families will, at one time or another, find their teens wandering somewhere between unbelief and baptism. The experience for believing parents can be disorienting, discouraging, and disappointing. This morning, we continue our January Family Enrichment series on *The Grace and Duty of Biblically Parenting Teens*. As we think together about this topic, let's begin by reminding ourselves of a simple but foundational truth [3 By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life](#)<sup>2</sup>. Ultimately, God does not call us to rear "Christian" children - he has not given us what we need to cause our children to live a godly life. Only he can do that. What he has given us, however, is the power to parent in a way that brings him glory. Thus, this morning we will focus not on how we change our children, but how we, by God's grace, will be changed by the Spirit and the Word as we parent our children... all the while praying that he will, indeed, save our children. [Pray]

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 1:5

<sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 1:3-4 (NLT)

## Observations from the Text (2 Timothy 1:3-7; 3:10-17)

Turn with me to 2 Timothy 1:3-7. You may recall that the New Testament books of 1st and 2nd Timothy are really letters that the apostle Paul had written to Timothy. The 2nd letter is a very personal communication that is colored by two significant circumstances. First, Paul realizes that these words to Timothy may be his last, because, unlike other imprisonments, it does not look likely that he will escape the death penalty<sup>3</sup>. Second, Timothy, who is to be a primary torch-bearer in the next generation of church planters and leaders<sup>4</sup> is not doing well. He seems to be overwhelmed and intimidated by those who oppose the gospel, distracted by the world, and uncertain of the implications that being a minister of the gospel might have<sup>5</sup> for his life.

It is in this context that Paul, twice-over, takes time to remind Timothy of his roots - the paths and the people that the Lord used to bring him to where he is today. In doing so, he exposes us to some background material that is very interesting in that it gives us some insight into how a child, Timothy in particular, was reared in the faith. It is this brief commentary that Paul provides on Timothy's upbringing that we hope to think over together this morning.

[Read] 3 I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. 4 As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. 5 I am reminded of your *sincere faith*, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. And then 2 Timothy 3:10-17 [Read] 10 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. 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom[a] you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God[b] may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Similar to Pastor Russ last week, rather than exposit these passages this morning, we are going to step back and observe on them and ask, in the context of the whole of Scripture, what patterns do we see here that inform our living? As New Covenant believers, we understand that it is not by our own striving that we please God, but by allowing the chisel of the Word, as applied by the sculpting blows of the Spirit, to shape and form our hearts - out from which we will then live<sup>6</sup>.

### A Sincere Faith

So let us begin with a question - What is the worst thing you can imagine happening to your teen? What about having a part of their body cut off without anesthetic? What about witnessing multiple attempted murders and beatings, mobbings, and mutilations of dear friends? What about being

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 18

<sup>4</sup> 2 Timothy 1:6 f., 4:1-5

<sup>5</sup> 2 Timothy 1:4, 1:8, 1:13-14, 2:1-7, 2:22-26, 3:10-12, 4:1-5

<sup>6</sup> <http://media.sermonaudio.com/mediapdf/121514932282.pdf>

unjustly thrown in jail? What about being publicly ridiculed, marginalized and shouted down? What about being utterly rejected by their own countrymen? What would you do, how far would you go, as a parent, to keep these things from happening to your teen? Take a moment and actually answer that question in your head.

Here is another way to ask the same question: What is the best thing you can imagine happening to your teen? A comfortable life with not *too much* hardship? A faithful spouse, a college education, a good job, a decent home, a peaceful existence? What would you do, how far would you go, to ensure these things happen to your teen?

As we start this conversation together about teens between unbelief and baptism, it is important that we begin by examining ourselves. What do you really want for your teen? The gospel - or the good life? You realize, of course, that the gospel makes no promises whatsoever about the picket fence, 2.2 children, and a lifetime of salary growth. On the contrary, Paul says clearly, *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...*<sup>7</sup> Remember that first list - what did you say to yourself when I asked what you would do to keep that from happening to your child? If you said, "Anything!" I pray that there was a footnote in your thinking that read, "*Anything*, unless, it is for the cause of the gospel."

What am I getting at here? It is simply this - we must consider the possibility that we ourselves are the largest obstacle to our teens embracing all that the gospel is for us in Christ. We have not depicted the pearl of great price being worth everything and anything. Instead, we've reduced it to a way of living, a set of cultural norms, Sunday habits, moralism, legalism, Americanism, conservatism... but we've not set it forth for what it is.

And what is it? It is nothing less than total abandon, total allegiance, total reliance upon, total joy in King Jesus. We should take note that the list of horrible things I read... it is exactly the life that Paul led Timothy into, the life that Lois and Eunice prepared Timothy for... it was a gospel saturated life. It was a life of *sincere faith*<sup>8</sup>. With that said, let me ask you a very serious question: Do you desire a sincere faith, a life abandoned to the gospel, for your teen? Whatever the cost? You can't really know where it will lead... for all of you who "just want your kids to have it better than you did..." there are no guarantees where the gospel is concerned - though I would argue it can still be "better" -but just in the "best" sense.

Listen to just a few of the ways Paul encourages the young Timothy: *Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you...; Share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved...; ...pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart; I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead... preach the word... fulfill your ministry; ...wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience*<sup>9</sup>. While other wise admonitions may be appropriate (get a job, save your money, work hard in school, be wise about choosing friends...) it MUST be crystal clear that in life these are secondary to the calls and challenges for the gospel.

I think we parents may be silent on, or hold back on, the worth of the gospel for a couple of reasons. First, we ourselves may have not fully submitted to the King. Whether conscious and willful or

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Timothy 3:12

<sup>8</sup> 2 Timothy 2:5; [https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?qs\\_version=ESV&quicksearch=timothy](https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?qs_version=ESV&quicksearch=timothy) for all mentions of Timothy in the New Testament. Note the consistency with which his faith is noted and commended.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Timothy 1:6; 2 Timothy 2:3; 2 Timothy 3:15, 3:22, 4:1ff; 1 Timothy 1:18f.

unconscious and ignorant, abandon for the Kingdom and the gospel is not a reality for us. Thus, we cannot give away what we do not have. The half-way notion of the Christian life is what we put forth because it is all we know. Similar to the church at Laodicea, it is like a mouthful of lukewarm<sup>10</sup> diet coke... nobody wants that. Second, we may have a mistrust of the King himself. We fully understand the proposition - give all of your life in exchange for gaining all of His - but for many or few reasons, we fear that the King will fail in his promise to be our child's joy, their satisfaction, and perhaps most poignantly, their rescuer, despite Paul's testimony to this very thing: [The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom](#)<sup>11</sup>.

Beloved, I implore you, examine your own hearts. Make certain that what you have set before your teen as the good news is indeed the gospel. Do not be afraid that you will scare them away, Jesus says, [27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me](#). And do not be afraid that they will come to ultimate harm, Jesus says, [28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand](#). [29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand](#)<sup>12</sup>." Perhaps your teen and you, together, will discover the treasure hidden in a field, and in joy sell all you have to purchase the field<sup>13</sup>.

## Acquaintance With the Sacred Writings

After examining ourselves, I believe a second very important understanding we must come to is with regards to HOW our teens are saved and matured. Let's return to verse 14 in 2 Timothy 3: [But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith Christ Jesus... \[and make you\] competent, equipped for every good work](#). Paul really says it quite clearly here, it is the "acquaintance with the sacred writings," the Scriptures, that were used by God to lead Timothy into salvation and to grow him toward maturity.

So what is an [acquaintance with the sacred writings](#)? Although our translators do an excellent job in creating a trustworthy translation of the Bible for us, every once in awhile it is worth looking a little more closely at the words as they were used in the original language<sup>14</sup>. Translated elsewhere as household or house, this idea of acquaintance doesn't mean something you are casually familiar with - it speaks to a level of intimacy that would be found among the members of a household. In other words, Paul is saying that Timothy's familiarity with the Word, the sacred writings, is similar to his familiarity with his mother, his grandmother, his sister or brother. That is, he knows them very well, has seen them in all situations, can almost predict their next move, knows what they like and don't like, what they tend to say, how they tend to respond... do you get the picture? Timothy's life was marinated in the Word over the course of his youthful lifetime.

This marinating process is just what Moses was getting at when instructing the Israelites as they made their trek out of Egypt in Deuteronomy 6; and this is where our recent teaching in the New Covenant series becomes so instructive, and freeing. Through the lens of the cross, we have the whole Bible at our disposal. Moses tells the Israelites that if they are to have God's blessing they must obey him. With regard to rearing their children he says: [4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.\[b\] 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.6](#)

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<sup>10</sup> Revelation 3:15-16

<sup>11</sup> 2 Timothy 4:18

<sup>12</sup> John 10:27-29

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 13:44

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/oikeios.html>

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise... 20 "When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?' 21 then you shall say to your son...<sup>15</sup>, and here is where the Christ, the great keeper of the Law breaks in, you shall say, "God rescues his people through Jesus, this is what we call, my son, the gospel." Unlike Moses, we must no longer earn God's blessing - but we must learn to live *in* it. And the pattern Moses commanded for communicating truth to children is wise... everyday - everyday discussion and conversation with our teens, weaving the truth organically into all of life.

It is tempting as a parent, perhaps driven by love and concern, to resort to other means by which we think our teen may be compelled to belief. On the face of it, the parental interventions can seem wholesome, good, smart... You need to talk with Pastor Dale about the choices you are making. Your going to this summer camp - it's the same camp that I met Jesus at. We're putting you in Christian school. We're taking your Xbox away... While any of these things may be the right thing to do - the key question that a parent needs to ask is, "Do I believe that in doing this, or that, I am somehow going to find just the thing that will finally get my kid saved or get them growing?"

In living with your teen between unbelief and baptism, it is the Word, by the Spirit which will both save - and transform your child. Be on guard against temptations to try something else. When it comes to the spiritual environment of your home and the spiritual development of your teen, make it your primary focus to create a household that winsomely, intelligently, and attractively leads to an acquaintance with the sacred writings. I wish we had more time to work that out in greater detail - but start with this - saturate your own life with the Scriptures so that the overflow of your heart is shaped and flavored by the Word... 16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*<sup>16</sup>.

## Knowing from Whom You Learned It

So if acquaintance with the sacred word is what saves and transforms our children, who is making the introduction, facilitating the conversation, and ensuring frequent interaction? I've already hinted at the answer to that question, and if we carefully observe the text, we'll see that in the life of Timothy, there were two main sources. First, there's Grandma and Mom, Lois and Eunice, or, *the family*. Timothy had the very good fortune of being in a home setting which provided a multigenerational exposure to *sincere faith*. The pattern is all throughout Scripture - whether it is Deuteronomy 6 that we read earlier, the first nine chapters of Proverbs as father walks son through life providing real-time wisdom commentary, or the direct command of Ephesians to *bring children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*<sup>17</sup>, the Scriptures clearly set forth the home as the primary source of spiritual influence in a teen's life.

The second main influence we see in Timothy's life is that of *the church* - and it is, you could say, well-rounded. Working alongside Lois and Eunice was a Paul, a Barnabus, a Luke, an Apollos... The sincerity and depth of commitment to Timothy by those who were not his blood is real - listen again

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<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-9,20

<sup>16</sup> Colossians 3:16-17

<sup>17</sup> Ephesians 6:4

to its gentleness and compassion, Timothy, my beloved child... I thank God whom I serve... as I remember you... I long to see you that I may be filled with joy...<sup>18</sup> but also hear its seriousness and directness ...do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord... share in suffering; ...charge them before God not to quarrel about words...; As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist...<sup>19</sup>. And it went well beyond words, Paul reminds Timothy, 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...<sup>20</sup>. The church was actively, intentionally, and wholistically involved in the life of this young person.

Just as it is important for the family to be actively engaging their teens, to acquaint them with the Word, it is important for the church to be actively engaging their young people, with much love and encouragement to be sure, but also with much instruction and challenge. So here is a word to the church as a whole: Adults - look around, do you know these young people well enough to speak a credible word of biblical encouragement or counsel to them (12-25 year olds)? If not, perhaps you should work on getting to know them. Teens - are you so consumed with friends and phones that you are missing out on eternally valuable opportunities to get wisdom<sup>21</sup> from the adults around you? Do you have a Paul or Pauline-like figure here at the Chapel that you are pursuing for counsel and advice?

It is more than interesting to note that Paul twice over<sup>22</sup> grounds his encouragement to Timothy to go and grow in the faith, in his relationships with those who had guided him in his spiritual development. The role of an adult with sincere faith in the life of a young person matters. And lastly on this point, parents, be encouraged, you are not alone in your efforts to rear your child. You are in this with the church. I strongly encourage you to not isolate the goings on of your home, or the lives of your children, from the church. We are a family of families.

## The Mess is No Deterrent to Grace

Finally, I want to encourage those of you who may feel that your particular set of circumstances makes it unlikely that your teen could ever emerge a young person of sincere faith, loving the Lord and his people in a way that trumps all other loves in their life. It is hard to say, but many commentators think that when Paul and Timothy first met, Timothy was in his mid-teens and as Paul is writing to Timothy in First and Second Timothy he is somewhere around 30 years old. Consider for a moment the circumstances of Timothy's life experiences and ask yourself whether he was a likely success story in terms of the faith.

Timothy came from an ethnically mixed home<sup>23</sup>. His father was Greek, his mother was Jewish. Timothy very likely came from a spiritually single parent home, benefitting from the teaching and guidance of his mother (and grandmother) but apparently not from his father<sup>24</sup>. Timothy met Paul in Derbe and Lystra and one of the very first challenges the church gave to him was to be circumcised. Months later Timothy is likely witnessing the clothes being torn off of Paul and Silas as they are beat with rods and

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<sup>18</sup> 2 Timothy 1:2ff.

<sup>19</sup> 2 Timothy 1:8; 2:14; 4:5

<sup>20</sup> 2 Timothy 3:10-11

<sup>21</sup> Proverbs 4:5-7

<sup>22</sup> 2 Timothy 1:5-6; 3:14-15

<sup>23</sup> Acts 16:1

<sup>24</sup> 2 Timothy 1:5

thrown in jail. Not long after it is a mob in Thessalonica demanding that Paul and his friends, likely including Timothy, be turned over, and there is a narrow escape by night. And the list of difficulties and traumas goes on and on - recall our earlier list.

Any modern day child psychologist is going to tell you that Timothy is going to have serious emotional problems - whether it is post-traumatic stress disorder, problems with anger, depression, anxiety... But what do we see instead? We see a young man, some 15 years later who has emerged as one of the main figures of the second generation of the early church. He is for all practical purposes Paul's protege - leading the way for the church into a very difficult period of time. Who would have guessed that little Timothy, as pitted with trauma as he was, would grow up into that? Parents and teens, listen: our god is not a small god - He is the Almighty and. [...nothing will be impossible with \[Him\]](#)<sup>25</sup>.

Our fear for our teens perhaps exposes how the world has shaped, or even limited, our belief in the power of gospel grace. It raised Christ, after all the sin of God's children had been heaped upon him, from the dead<sup>26</sup> to the right hand of God... [it is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe...](#) The mess is no deterrent to grace. In fact, grace of the gospel glories in the mess. Look around here at the Chapel, begin asking questions, what you will quickly find is that you are in a room full of "unlikelies". That is NOT a testimony to the resilience of the human spirit or the ability of children to bounce back - it IS a testimony to the transforming grace that makes us a new creation<sup>27</sup>.

As we serve and minister to our teens who are somewhere between unbelief and baptism, we must never believe that their lives, histories, choices, failures, etc. makes them unreachable by the gospel or renders them unuseful to the church. For [27 ...God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being\[a\] might boast in the presence of God](#)<sup>28</sup>. Every believing parent's best reason for hope that God will yet work in their teen's life is staring them in the mirror.

Four things to remember.

1. Love the King with abandon and set forth the gospel for what it really is.
2. Rely on the Word, through the Spirit, to do the work of saving and maturing. In the meantime, acquaint your youth with the Scriptures in an everyday-everyway manner.
3. Remember you are not in this alone - invite the church into the process of rearing your teen.
4. Never stop hoping and praying - the same grace that was sufficient to raise Christ and save you, is sufficient to rescue and transform your child.

Let's Pray.

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<sup>25</sup> Luke 1:37

<sup>26</sup> Ephesians 1:19-23

<sup>27</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>28</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:27-29