

A Challenging Call to Young People

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1 Timothy 1. This is the very word of God. Paul's first letter to a young Christian, a young man who desires to serve the Lord.

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope; 2 Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

3 As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, 4 Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. 5 Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: 6 From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; 7 Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. 8 But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; 9 Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, 10 For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; 11 According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. 12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; 13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. 16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. 17 Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be

honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. 18 This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; 19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: 20 Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Thus far the reading of God's holy and infallible word.

The purpose of this evening's message is to just challenge young people, call teenagers to live free, to be liberated from the shackles of culture that seeks to bind you and to imprison you and to lay on you a burden that you'll never escape so long as you look to those very things themselves. The only freedom that you will ever experience is being in Jesus Christ. Paul writes to Timothy at the beginning of this chapter and urging him to remain faithful. At the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, that is, love out of a pure heart and of a good conscience and of faith unfeigned, but some had swerved from that as he mentions: Alexander and Hymenaeus, whom he says, "I have delivered unto Satan that they may not learn to blaspheme." Paul calls Timothy, doesn't he, in verse 18 and this is what we're going to launch from, as it were, pulling from other parts of Scripture to equip you to use the promises of God to your advantage. All the promises of God are yea and amen to the glory of God in Jesus Christ but not yes and no at the same time. They are sure. Just as he has given them to me, he has given them to you as young people and if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, every promise belongs to you, handwritten by Jesus for you for every situation. There is not a situation in this life that the Bible does not address and deal with. All Scripture is given by revelation and is good for teaching sound doctrine, Christian living. He means for you and for me to use them and so he calls us to live by faith looking to the promises that are in front of us. How do I remain obedient? Not in my own strength, I can tell you that much right now. I'm a miserable failure. By looking to Jesus and his promises and that's what I shoot for and aim for. His promises.

He has not given you the spirit of fear but of power. We like to say, "I'm type A or I'm type B or C or all the way down to Z," as an excuse but what that does is that tells people that Christ is not powerful enough to deliver you and to help you in every situation that you are faced with, every temptation. But the one who believes on Jesus, looks at God's word and says, "He hasn't given me the spirit of fear but he has given me the spirit of power. In Christ I can overcome this," and he calls me and you to look to the promises. So I write to challenge teenagers to live as people who are free, 1 Peter 2:16 where Peter says, "Be wise and strong and free, as it were, from the slavery of culture conformity." That's what he's saying basically in 1 Peter 2:16, "Don't fall for the lusts of the flesh that wage war."

There is something about teenagers, isn't there, young people and people in their mid to late 20s that is often missing in older people as I mentioned in my prayer this morning. There is that fervency, that vivacious that they have, that energy that is just packed within them when they come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ like none other. I'm not saying that

it's not in older people but as I get older I seem to calm down a little bit, slow down a little, more contemplative but not as energetic as I was when I was younger. But in you young people, there is that energy, that vivaciousness that you have. There is this uncanny willingness, isn't there, to plunge headlong into something like Jack Lucas in World War II. He was a World War II hero, I'll mention more about him later, without the worry of what it was going to cost him. Young people seem more ready to lose their life than save it as Jesus said, "Whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall gain it but whosoever seeks to gain their life is going to lose it." Better to lose your life and actually gain it than try to gain it and lose it. There is just no hesitation, they just do it. The passion, white-hot fervency, often dampened by old age is at its peak in young people. Not shackled by the daily weights of heating bills and mortgage payments and raising children and attending meetings and cooking and laundry and work and a plethora of other legitimate things that often rob older people, young people are at a stage in their life where they are able by the Spirit's enablement, to live passionately for Christ and do uncommon things for him. You don't have all those things that weigh on you. Ask mom and dad. Ask what burdens them and fills their thoughts and minds at times. A teenager doesn't often worry about changing a diaper, not too many do, but moms and dads do. Dads worry about what's going on at work.

As a teenager, the word "teenager" did not exist before World War II. There was no such category amongst the class of people. There were young people and there were older people. That's all. You were either a child or an adult. It hasn't been that long ago where the responsibility of a 13-year-old was to roll up his sleeves, grab the shovel and get into that pigpen and work for dad on the farm. Pick rocks in the field. Haul water to the cattle. Walk behind a plow for hours. Drive a tractor. Daniel was between 12 and 14 years old when he was in the University of Babylonia, considered a young man. At that age you would be trained for a gainful employment, domestic enterprise, by age 17. You would marry before you were 20 and be a responsible husband and father, a wife and mother, by your early 20s. This may be hard for you and me to imagine and I'm not saying that we can go back to that period of time. I'm not saying that we could do that, that would be very difficult but my aim is that you be liberated with the truth of God's word and that the truth will set you free, the truth that you do not have to fit into the contemporary lockstep expectations put on you by culture or by your peers.

There are few teenagers that have any sense of past history and that loss of understanding of our past history leads to ignorance which leads to slavery. Most teenagers are slaves of the expectations of their peers and the big industries that market their fashion and music and technology and entertainment and it seems so pleasant, doesn't it? It seems so fulfilling because it's so immediate. It gives us that gratification like that. But we are called to be aware from history of the dangers of that and to live in a wartime mentality in the name of Jesus and so Paul says to Timothy, "This charge," verse 18, "I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare." Verse 19, "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck." You are called as teenagers to wage a good warfare.

It's not easy to be a teenager. I was a teenager. You don't get to be my age without being a teenager. I know what it's like to be put in the pressure cooker, trying to fit into the mold, trying to be liked, wanting to be popular, thinking it's cool. But what really is cool? That's an old-fashioned word that never seems to lose its meaning, does it? I heard it when I was young and it doesn't seem to go out of vogue at all. It's the same. When someone says, "Boy, that's cool," you know what they're saying, "It's neat. It's a great thing." But what is cool? What I'm wearing? What I do with my hair? What shoes I have on? Which phone I have? Is that what's cool? I'll tell you what's cool, it's none of those things.

Here is what is cool for a 14-year-old young man: Jack Lucas, and I want you to view this in a spiritual sense. This is a natural sense but I want you to view it in a spiritual, wartime, teenager mentality. The year is 1945. World War II was still raging. Thousands of teenagers wanted to fight. The battle of Iwo Jima was one of the deadliest, 6,800 American soldiers are buried on that tiny island, many of them teenagers. Jack Lucas had fast talked his way into the Marines at 14 in 1942, fooling the recruits with his muscled physique. He stowed away on a transport out of Honolulu, surviving on food passed along to him by sympathetic Leathernecks onboard. At 17, he landed on D-Day at Iwo Jima without a rifle. He grabbed one lying on the beach and fought his way inland. Now on D-Day+1, Jack with 3 comrades were crawling through a trench when 8 Japanese sprang in front of them. Jack shot one of them through the head. Then his rifle jammed. As he struggled with it, a grenade landed at his feet. He yelled a warning to the others and ran the grenade into the soft ash. Immediately another rolled in. Jack Lucas, 17, fell on both grenades, "Luke, you're going to die," he remembered thinking. Aboard the hospital ship Samaritan, the doctors could scarcely believe it. "Maybe he was too young and too tough to die," one said. He endured 21 reconstructive operations and became the nation's youngest medal of honor winner and the only high school freshman to receive it. You translate that into a spiritual sense, Christians fighting that way, willing to die rather than live for Christ. That's cool. That's really cool.

Knowing you were in a war changes everything about cool. If your family is under attack, fretting about your clothes and your hair, that goes out the window. We're not thinking about what we're going to wear, are we? We go in protection mode. We go into fighting mode and we are at war. Don't kid yourself, the cultural war is great. The enemy is stronger than the axis of Germany, Japan and Italy. It is more powerful than the Taliban and ISIS and Al Qaeda and China and Russia and North Korea and Iran and a host of other terrorist countries combined. It is stronger than all human powers put together and the battle is not just for 2 or 3 years, not for a decade, but it is lifelong. As long as this world will exist this kind of battle is going to be fought. It is fought in every locality and in every culture and in every ethnicity and its victory lies in heaven or defeat in hell. One of the 2.

Paul says, "Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil," Ephesians 6:11. "Fight the good fight of faith," 1 Timothy 6:12. "Wage the good warfare," 1 Timothy 1:8 which we read this evening. "The weapons of your warfare are not carnal," 2 Corinthians 10:4. "Share in suffering as a good soldier of

Jesus Christ," 2 Timothy 2:3. "Abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against the soul," 1 Peter 2:11. So what God is saying to you and me through what Paul is writing to Timothy is, "Don't be blind to the teenage masses who don't know what is going on. They think that the latest YouTube or iPhone or whatever app that you can get or every hit song is to know what is going on. Those things," he says, "are like cut flowers. They look pretty today but they are withered tomorrow. They are insignificant compared to what's really going on."

People are either being enslaved by Satan or they are being liberated by the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ but it's not going to happen, people aren't going to be liberated if you and I are amusing ourselves with all these things. We can't be wrapped up in ourselves and how we look and whether anyone likes us. Those things make a very poor soldier. One of the great marks of the soldier in wartime is that personal comforts give way to strategic mission. Soldiers may be joking around before the next day of battle. They may be walking in the hangars on one of the islands in the Pacific Rim and be joking with one another when all of a sudden a Japanese Zero comes in and drops a bunch of bombs and immediately they go into wartime mentality, no joking around. You are called to set aside your personal comforts and your own personal pursuits and to live that kind of way, have a strategic mission on your mind.

You are to be lights on a hill. Lights don't go unnoticed. Have you ever noticed that there is no amount of darkness that can drown light? You can go into a closet, it can be as dark as a tomb in there, take some towels and shove them underneath the cracks so that there is no light coming in, wear sunglasses, anything you can do to try to block out as much light in that closet and you just light one little match and no amount of darkness can put that light off. When soldiers were on these islands and they heard enemy warplanes coming in, strict orders were, "No lighting a match. Those planes can see." You as a Christian soldier don't have that option, don't have that comfort. God doesn't say to you when the enemy is coming in, "Don't shine." He calls you to be lights and as lights, we're going to draw enemy fire.

Satan is going to draw us on the battlefield with at least 4 things that I want to go through tonight: money, that's one battlefield; comfort is another; sex and fornication is another; and ego is another. Four battlefields and there are more but these 4 are very predominant amongst young people. Satan is going to draw you into these things.

Take the battlefield of money, for example. The trumpet has sounded, you are a soldier, the battle has begun. You may not be rich but you have lots of stuff and your stuff threatens to strangle your soul by lying to you how important and how satisfying and how pleasurable and how wonderful and valuable those things are as Mark 4:19 says. That's what that stuff threatens to do to you. And the money that you don't have threatens to pierce you by creating a passion to be rich. But what is Jesus Christ your, as it were, your General, the great General who rides upon that great white horse, that wonderful steed, what does he say to you? He says, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition for the love of money is the root of all evil which while some covet it after, they

have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows," 1 Timothy 6:9-10. That's what money will do to you. Money will not give you liberty. Money will not free you. Money will not make you feel good. It's going to burden you and enslave you and pierce you through with many sorrows.

So what Paul is saying through this text is, "Wake-up. Smell the roses. It's not as great as what you think it is." So he speaks to you those words but then he doesn't just leave us there, that's not how God's word presents itself. He has a command and he tells us what will happen but then he holds out the promise and he says, "Keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have for he has said I will never leave thee nor forsake thee so that we can confidently say the Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me?" That's freedom. That's liberating. Hebrews 13:5-6. So you're free from fear and greed by the confidence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that he gives to you through his promises so you can look your enemy in the eye, the enemy of money, the love of it rather, and stare down covetousness and craving and slay them with the sword of the Spirit and with the superior, all-satisfying pleasures of Jesus Christ. "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of Jesus Christ my Lord," Philippians 3:8. And what does the psalmist say in Psalm 63:3? "Thy lovingkindness is better than life." Better than money. Better than cell phones. Better than any gadget, any house, any relationship. His lovingkindness is better than life. That's what he commands you to use.

Then there is the battlefield of comfort. Almost all the forces in life incite us to seek comfort and ease but Jesus Christ, your great General, has sent you a message as the enemy surrounds you, "Remember the great warrior Moses, fight like he did." And what kind of warfare did Moses fight? There is Egypt and there is Israel. There is comfort and ease in Egypt, there is affliction with Israel. What does the word of God say? Hebrews 11:25, what did Moses do? "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin for a season." He considered the reproach of Christ greater than all the comforts of and treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to what? Another treasure? Yes, but not the kind of treasure that expires in this life but he was looking to Jesus Christ. He was looking to the reward. Yes, there is a reward in our warfare, a reward beyond all your and my imagination. Satan, he comes in and what does he do? He drops thousands of propaganda leaflets behind the lines and he says, "Heaven and the promises of God, all fairytales. All fairytales. You're a fool to live for a reward of heaven and not a reward of comfort and ease in this life." That's what he whispers, doesn't he? "Have it your way. Have it now. Just do it."

But what does Jesus Christ, the Commander-In-Chief say? He counters that propaganda with his wonderful promises. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven," Matthew 5:11-12. "This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison," 2 Corinthians 4:17. But not only that, Jesus Christ is our reward. "In thy presence there is fullness of joy. At thy right hand are pleasures forevermore," Psalm 16:11. So with that sword in hand, with

the sword of God's promises, we beat back the hordes that come across the line to try to convince us that comfort and ease are far better than Christ's service in risky assignments.

Then there is the battlefield of sex and fornication. \$30 billion a year is spent on pornography in the US alone. Sex trafficking brings in more money than illegal arms and drugs combined. Why these statistics? Why do I bring them up? It tells me more than the money that is made, it tells me of the insatiable desire for those things. People crave those things. That's what that tells me. It's a very dangerous battlefield to be on but he calls you and me, young man, young woman, to fight on that battlefield, to get in the trenches, to dig your heels in and say, "I will not cave in on this battlefield. I'd rather die on this battlefield than cave into that."

By faith Joseph said to Potiphar's wife, "There is none greater in this house than I and neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee because thou art his wife. How can I then do this great wickedness and sin against God?" And that's what you have to say, young people, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God, the God who loved me, who bought me with his precious blood and who ever intercedes in heaven for me. How can I do this?" You see, your love for Jesus has to trump everything that seems lovable in this world, everything that seems to have worth and value in this world. He has to be more worthy and more valuable and more pleasurable. Just as it says about Jonathan and David's love that the love that they had for one another was greater than the love of women and so the love that we have for Jesus Christ has to be greater than all these things if you're going to win on that battlefield. If it's not greater, you're going to lose. You're going to succumb. So thrust onto the battlefield of sex and fornication. Joseph took a stand, dug his heels in, fought trench warfare believing in the promises of God, seeing God more soul satisfying pleasure than anything Potiphar's wife had to offer because, in principle, Joseph believed that he wasn't given a spirit of fear but a power and you young people have been given a spirit of power, not of fear. You can by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ in faith in him overcome this battlefield. "Therefore," says Peter, "abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against the soul," 1 Peter 2:11. "Flee youthful lusts. Follow righteousness, faith, charity. If a man purge himself of these things, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use and prepared unto every good work," 2 Timothy 2:11. So God's word and God's call to you and God's challenge to you is, "Live free from the love of sex and fornication, looking to the promise that he has given."

Lastly, the battle of ego or acceptance. Before we go into that, let us sing from Psalter 322, "Guidance for Youth." The song that we just sung speaks much of God's precepts, God's testimony, God's law. So many ways of describing what he loved, he delighted in, he cherished, he valued and counted more worthy than anything else that this life could offer.

There is a struggle as a young person, isn't it, to maintain a certain ego. A little bit of peer approval, acceptance. Every one of us wants to be accepted. I have never run into anyone who never wanted to be loved. All of us want some sort of approval but ego and peer approval is a powerful enemy. Approval has swallowed up more teenagers perhaps than

any other adversary, even lust. This is how he works. He will come at you with horror stories of how painful and how difficult it's going to be if you don't fit in, if you don't conform to the world. He's going to say, "You're going to be ashamed. You're going to be teased. You're going to be mocked. You're going to be laughed at. You're going to be looked at as weird," and as I experienced when I was young, "called a freak." I was in the trenches with you. I know what you're going through. It's not easy. It can be downright hard. He will lie to you and say that the only alternative to the mood and fashion and music and movies and sexual pleasures of this world is utter humiliation and embarrassment. That's what he's going to say to you.

It's true, isn't it? Ask your mom and dad. Sit down with them and say, "Hey dad, how was it when you went to university? How was it when you went to college? What was it really like? Tell me. What did you experience? What was it like to refuse drugs or alcohol or going to the movies? What did you experience when you caved in if you did?" I can tell you now that there are probably fathers and mothers, myself included, that would relate to you with many tears, that the rewards of caving in just to be approved are definitely not worth it. Your Lord Jesus sees everything. He sees what you're going through. He knows. He knows the pressures. Jesus was a teenager at one time. Don't ever think that Jesus grew up in a culture where there wasn't any sort of thing that you and I experience today to some degree. Sometimes we look at the life of Jesus as if it was a life of utopia. It wasn't. There is nothing new under the sun.

He knows what you're going through. I'm not saying that Jesus was desirous to be accepted. I wouldn't say that. That would be blasphemy. But because of our fall, we seek acceptance but I want you young people to understand that your identity is in Christ. Recently a young pastor came to me, his wife had lived a rather ungodly life, served at a bar, but God mercifully converted her, brought her to repentance and faith. But the guilt of her past life hung to her and she was sometimes saying mean things to him because she didn't understand her identity in Jesus Christ, that indeed she was free from the bondage of sin. And so he sat down with me and he talked with me and I explained and said to him, "I don't believe she understands her true identity now and she's still living a life of paralysis and fear." He went home and just related to her who she is in Jesus Christ and I've never heard anything back.

You are in Christ Jesus if you believe in him and he calls you not to be deceived, not to believe the lies that you will experience. Nothing but shame, yes, from the world but not from your Savior. He's not going to be ashamed of you. He has promised that. You have to understand and I have to understand that their end is destruction, their God is their belly and they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things, Philippians 3:18-19. They think all the fun and all the joy lies with them but it is fool's fun. Peter says that they are surprised, doesn't he, that you don't join with them, 1 Peter 4:4-5, in the same kind of debauchery and sinful lifestyle but by God's grace you are the ones who know the truth and the truth will set you free and the truth will give you a sense of acceptance with Jesus. You know that all flesh is as grass and all its glory as a flower of the field. You know that. You know that the grass withers and the flowers fail and you know that the word of the Lord remains forever. I'm speaking to those who believe in Jesus. And those

of you who don't, you have heard that too. I pray that you come to faith in Jesus Christ and you forsake your sins and put your trust in him alone. Let the message of the Commander Jesus sink in. Your identity is deeper and stronger and more durable and more glorious than any plastic veneer that this world wants to force you into and mold you into. You're not your own. You have been bought with a price. Glorify God in your body. You're a treasured possession, 1 Peter 2:9. That's a wonderful thing to contemplate on, isn't it? You're a treasured possession. Treasured. That's what Jesus says of you. You're a son and daughter of the Creator of the universe, Romans 8:16.

So you are called, aren't you, when you are struggling and when peers are trying to force you into their mold, you're called to say to them, "My Savior's lovingkindness is better than life, better than whatever you're trying to force on me. Much better." And those are the things that you are to take in hand and go on the battlefield. These promises are meant to be used. I have a promise app on my iPhone. God calls us to bring everything, doesn't he, into conformity and under the Lordship of Jesus Christ so you get an iPhone, right? You know people use it for wicked things but you and I have been bought with a price and so we look at this thing and we say, "Oh, what a wonderful thing for Jesus. Let's make this thing work for him." So we download apps, don't we, that help us in our fight on the battlefield and so we have this Bible promise program and so every day I get a promise at 10 o'clock in the morning automatically it comes down. I don't know how many times God has blessed my wife and I when as soon as this heavenly music because that's the sign that a promise has come, my wife will say, "What's the promise?" She's like a little kid. "What's the promise?" And I'll look at it and say, "Here's the promise." Always a blessing. Always. Jesus loves you so that he has given you many promises.

I don't know what I would do without the promises. I would have succumbed long ago without the promises and your Lord and Savior comes to you, young people, and says, "Let no one despise you for your youth. Cleave to my promises." Don't fit into the stereotype of aimless, careless, superficial youth. Break the mold. Burst free from it. You belong to Christ showing the world that there is another kind of teenager, a blood bought teenager. A Christ possessed teenager. A teenager that loves Jesus with all his or her heart and soul and mind and strength. That you're not a teenager that is like a leaf being blown along with the wind of cultural trends. You're not a jellyfish floating with the current of the times but you're a tree that stands firm in the strongest tropical storm. You're like a dolphin that slices through the oncoming tide. You're going somewhere and God not only calls you to dream of being the kind of teenager that the world cannot explain but it calls you to be the kind of teenager that the world cannot explain. That's what he's challenging you to do, to be. And maybe someday by God's grace, teenager, at least the description that you and I know of it today is only going to be a footnote in history and that you will be known as children, young people, adults, warriors, the faithful, saints of the living God. Amen.

Let's pray.