

Some people are fortunate to have someone who has influenced or guided them through a period of their life, and the guidance we receive from these people has a profound impact on the direction we take, usually for the better. Some use the term ‘father figures’ to describe such people. I had a ‘father figure’ called Mickey who was my boss at work when I was twenty, and through bullying, cajouling and although I didn’t recognise it at the time, love; Mickey pressured me to go to night school, and then to college and finally to turn my work into a career. Mickey’s a Christian and he saw something worthwhile in a feckless young man who lacked direction in his life. Mickey was my father figure and I will always be grateful to him for the effort and time he spent on me.

Timothy had a father figure in the Apostle Paul, and the following sermon is going to examine how Paul’s message to Timothy on becoming a credible witness for Christ God in the face of all odds, has much to teach us about being good witnesses. *Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.* (1 Tim 4:12). It seems that some believers in the church looked down on Timothy because they thought he was too young to minister to the older people in the church. Did they expect Timothy to wait until he was older before serving God? This wasn’t an option for God had called Timothy to minister to people precisely at that point in his life. Ministering to the church elders was extremely difficult because of his youth. After all, what could a young man possible know about church leadership? And so Paul tells Timothy to overcome this challenge by living in the Bible!

This was good advice because we all need to live by the standards of Bible, and most of us are young in our faith. I would not consider myself wise or mature by biblical standards and there are times when I don’t understand the pressures of the world we live in, and I don’t fully understand why there is such opposition to the church.

All I know is that if we are to make a difference our lives, and the lives of those around us, we must point towards someone who has not participated in the world and is sinless, and that's God. Thankfully, God has given us a road map for living called the Bible. Living God's word in speech, conduct, love, faith and in purity is the five keys to becoming a mature and wise Christian.

***So how do we live God's Holy word in our speech?*** *The things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. (Matt 15:18)* 2 Cor 10 states the battle is in the mind because there are evil desires in our hearts that entice us, and when these desires are left unchecked, they lead to sin and death. When we made Jesus the Lord of our lives, did we truthfully give Jesus command over all our life including your thoughts? How can we claim that we love God with our heart, mind, soul and strength, when we think or speak harshly to another person created in the image of God? How can we claim to be the salt and light of the world when we're bearing false witness and gossiping about others? If our thoughts are bad then our speech will be bad, and if our speech is bad then we will be bad witnesses for Christ!

***How do we lead lives by Holy conduct?*** Not only does our speech need to be holy but our conduct as well, otherwise we find ourselves saying one thing, while doing another and that will not please our Father God. While we cannot be sinless. We can try to avoid some of the biggest sins of life. Even the world in all its foolishness knows of the ***Seven Deadly Sins***:

***1. Lust: "I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman/man lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matt 5:28).***

***2. Pride: "Pride goes before destruction." (Proverbs 16:18).***

***3. Laziness: "The way of the lazy is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway." (Proverbs 15:19).***

**4. Wrath: “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Proverbs 15:1)**

**5. Envy: “Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.” (1 Peter 2:1).**

**6. Gluttony: “For drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags” (Proverbs 23:21).**

**7. Greed: “Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more” (Eph 4:19).**

*Whew, you are thinking. My sins are not on this list. Are you sure? Did you know that the average person lies at least three times a day? Have you not looked at another person’s body for a longer time than you should? Have you never been angry enough at someone to slander them to try and gain support for your own position? 1 John 1:8 tells us that if we claim to be without sin we make God out to be a liar. There’s an internal struggle between our sinful nature and the Spirit that lives inside of us. Sins are numerous and hard to avoid and living a sinless life is impossible. So should we just give up trying to live by Holy conduct? Certainly not!*

Listen to what Scripture says concerning overcoming sin: God does not expect you to be sinless but to be constantly asking for forgiveness. (1 John 1:9) and then to rely on Him to stop sinning. That is why Paul in Romans 7 said: *O wretched man am I, who will save me from this body subject to death; only Jesus Christ!* It’s precisely in your confession that we repent and change the directions in life needed to stay on God’s narrow path!

***Lead by Holy Love:*** *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. Luke 6:32 to 33.*

As people of God, we should try and see God, or good in all people for everyone is created in the image of God. When Christ was on the cross Scriptures says that He died even for those we were His enemies. Can we not love each other in the same way? It's how we make room in your hearts for our enemies that points to the fact that we love God and those around us. It's inevitable that someone may say nasty things about us and may even treat us badly, and it's at these times that we can demonstrate how to love unconditionally and provide a way back for the person who has wronged us.

***Lead Holy lives through Faith:*** *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature; have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. (Rom 1:20)*  
*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. (Heb 11:1)*

The main thing the church can offer people is the hope that death is not the end, but merely the beginning. Timothy had much to get discouraged by; his rejection by the elders of the church and his insecurity which was borne out of his youth. Yet, he lived with faith believing it was his mission to tell others the wonderful life saving news of Christ. And Timothy through the teaching of his mentor Paul, knew that the troubles of this life are not the end because we run our race for Christ. Living by faith is an attitude that this challenging life is not the final word, because we've a glorious future in Christ and His Kingdom ahead.

***Lead lives of Holy Purity:*** *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do for it is written: Be holy, because I am holy. (1 Peter 1)*

Like Timothy, we can overcome the world's perception that attaining holiness is an impossibility by being an example in our speech, conduct, love, faith and purity. By living holy lives, we point others to our Creator God!

Living in a fallen world it is very difficult to live as people who are truly obedient to God, and we need Father figures at times. We have a greatest Father figure in our Father God and He has given us His manual for guidance and discipline, and it's called the Bible. While we have all sinned, we should know that purity is not found in being sinless, but purity is found in continual repentance! After all, Job was considered right in God's sight not because of being sinless, but through repentance for his sins and God then washed as white as snow. Following God and being holy is possible despite our sin because of what Christ did for us on the cross.

*In conclusion;* We want to know God and be more like Him and living in a fallen world makes this difficult but not impossible. Like Timothy, we can overcome the world's perception that attaining holiness is an impossibility, by being an example in our speech, conduct, love, faith and purity. While there will be many times when we sin and are flawed in means to be a Christian, never forget that repentance restores holiness! We are called to bring others to Christ and the best resource we have in this endeavour is ourselves. May our lives point others to the light and give them every opportunity to know God the Father for themselves. And may God bless us all in this pursuit. **Amen**

(1729 words)