



“Self-Nourishment”

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Idea: Learning how to nourish your spiritual life is a key component of spiritual maturity.

Intro: Every spring a certain kind of bird builds a nest made out of mud and grass under my deck. It is a real mess, but they always hatch and raise a bunch of chicks. When I walk out under the deck, it is an eerie feeling as several eyes stare down at me. Last week I walked out there expecting to be looked down upon, but they were all gone. The ole momma and daddy birds fulfilled their mission.

One of the primary goals of parents is the maturity of their children. Mom and dad want to see their kids become fully developed physically, emotionally, mentally, relationally, and for Christian parents spiritually. It is a beautiful journey with many stops along the way. Babies start to crawl. Toddlers learn to walk and talk. Preschoolers learn letters and how to count. Elementary kids become more independent as they learn to tie their shoes, pick out their clothes, fix their own breakfast, and study on their own. Adolescents learn to drive and make complex decisions. Young adults choose careers, get married, and have children of their own. Through the entire process there is an ongoing physical, emotional, mental, relational, and spiritual transformation taking place that culminates in maturity.

In the beginning of the process, the child is unable to care, provide, and protect for his or her self. Along the way, though, the child begins to become more and more independent as he or she develops. Self-reliance morphs into self-nourishment. Dependence on parents turns into reliance upon self. In many ways this is also true of Christian maturity. God’s desire and plan for His children is not that that they become reliant upon themselves but that they learn to nourish themselves in the Lord. Mature believers know how to identify and avoid self-inflicting wounds. Likewise, they know how to nourish themselves. In the passage before us today, the Apostle Paul provides some insight on how to nourish your spiritual life as you walk toward maturity in Christ.

Read 2 Timothy 3:10-17.

Inquiry: Last Sunday I mentioned that the Ephesian church was beginning to drift in their discipleship. They had started strong with a solid commitment to the Lord and a love for their brothers and sisters in Christ. Unfortunately, the church had begun to slip. We, having the privilege of hindsight, can see the ramifications of their drift as the Lord Jesus rebuked them in Revelation 2 for leaving their first love (vs. 4). The cause of this drift was self-inflicted wounds. They allowed themselves to listen to and be influenced by self-centered and

simulated spiritual leaders who devalued the Word of God. The result was a damaged church that was not moving toward maturity.

This is a common problem. Some people never grow up – they just grow old. Many a woman has a teenage husband, and many a long-suffering male has a child bride with wrinkles. Our Heavenly Father desires for His children to grow up...to learn how to nourish themselves in the faith. Paul gives three instructions to Timothy.

1. Follow the right example. (vs. 10-11, 14)

In stark contrast to the false teachers already mentioned in the letter, Paul gives Timothy the imperative to “*continue in what you have learned and believed, knowing from whom you learned it*” (vs. 14). This instruction is a reminder of the truth he has come to believe and know is true. It is also a reminder that Paul’s own life is an example to emulate. People need a standard of how they are to live their lives as well as a model of how to live out that standard. Jesus is the greatest of models. His teaching explained His life, and His life exemplified His teaching. He told us how we should live, and then lived it out in His life. In turn, Jesus expects His disciples to go and do likewise.

Paul cites nine features of the godly example he has modeled before Timothy. He mentions them not for his own enhancement or ego but for Timothy’s encouragement. Paul’s life had born rich testimony to God’s faithfulness. It is significant that *teaching* is mentioned first, for throughout the Pastoral Epistles it occupies a prominent place. Timothy had been privileged to listen to Paul’s expositions on many themes, but teaching must be linked with life. For that reason, the next six virtues bring out the practical character of the apostle’s impact on Timothy.

He mentions his lifestyle... *my conduct, my aim in life.*” Unlike the false teachers, Paul’s conduct confirmed his teaching. He walked his talk. Today, one of the great needs in the church is less talky-talky and more walky-walky. In addition, Paul’s consistent lifestyle was infused with purpose. He was single-minded and focused on the most important things...the gospel and the glory of Christ. Alongside his lifestyle, Paul mentions his virtues: faith, patience, love, and steadfastness. He believed God despite circumstances. He was patient. It is not easy to be patient. R. Kent Hughes shares a story of fishing with his grandchildren. One of them was his three-year old grandson, Joshua. He was an active little boy. Hughes was constantly reminding young Joshua, “Now, if you want to catch a fish, you have to sit and be patient.” Every few minutes Joshua would say, “I’m being patient, huh, Grandpa?” When strangers would walk by, Josh would tell them, “I’m being patient!” It all came to an end when his uncle Wil dropped by, and Joshua handed him his pole saying, “Here, Uncle Wil, you be patient!” Paul was patient with people. He also loved God and others. And he was steadfast in his hope of God. That hope sustained him throughout the many persecutions and sufferings he experienced.

The apostle was a great, godly example for Timothy to emulate in his own discipleship. He was a Christian not just in word but also in deed. The practice of his life was Christlikeness. We all need examples like that to follow in our own lives.

Appl: Everyone is influenced by someone.

Illust: I have a friend who speaks in a unique way. Every time I am around him, the way he speaks rubs off on me. Thankfully, many good, godly traits are transmitted as well.

Who is influencing you? Who is your model for parenting, prayer, faith, spiritual discipline, finances, and behavior? You will and are influenced by someone. Who is that someone? Is it the right example?

Who is showing you how to endure difficult times? There is a second instruction.

2. Embrace difficulty. (vs. 12-13)

Paul reminds Timothy that everyone who seeks to *“live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”* He listed his experiences at Antioch, Lystra, and Iconium as examples (vs. 11). Difficulty is inevitable in the Christian life (John 15:20; Phil 1:29; 1 John 3:13). You will pass through many troubles as you live out the gospel, so you should expect some degree of persecution. It will look different in various places. Believers in the Middle East may experience persecution in the form of imprisonment and martyrdom, whereas believers in the U.S. might experience it by being ignored, mocked, or passed over.

Regardless of the form of difficulty you may face, it is neither easy nor enjoyable. It is, however, inevitable. We should not be surprised by it. What should surprise us is not experiencing some sort of difficulty. No persecution may mean you are heading in the wrong direction.

Christian embrace difficulty. As James the half-brother Jesus said, *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”* (James 1:2-4).

God is using the difficulties you experience to develop your character. Learn from them. Learn to grow from them rather than resent them. There is a third instruction regarding self-nourishment.

3. Be strengthened in God’s Word. (vs. 14-17)

Paul instructs Timothy to *“continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed.”* What had he learned and believed? It was the Word of God. Timothy’s journey toward belief and faith began in childhood as his mother and grandmother exposed him to the *sacred writings*...the Old Testament. Timothy’s dad was a Greek and by all estimations a non-believer, but his mother and grandmother were Jews. They had deposited God’s Word into Timothy’s young and impressionable mind and heart. That deposit resulted in Timothy putting his faith in Jesus when he heard Paul preach the gospel.

Parents, it is eternally imperative that you deposit God’s Word into your children’s hearts. If perhaps you waver on this, remember that God has commanded us to do so (Deut 6:6-9). We are not to leave it up to our children to decide whether or not they want to learn God’s Word. Why is this? The answer is because God desires to be in relationship with your children. Look at the second half of verse 15. It is the Word of God that makes one wise for salvation through faith in Christ. *Faith comes by hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ* (Rom 10:17).

We, then, should expose our children and ourselves to all of Scripture not just the parts we like or are familiar with. All of the Bible is God’s Word. It is breathed out by Him (vs. 16). The Greek term is θεόπνευστος...θεο (God), πνευστος (breath). Literally, “All Scripture is breathed into by God.” When you speak, your word is “you-breathed”...breathed into existence – your breath, conditioned by your mind pours forth in speech. The Old and New Testaments are God’s Word to us, and they are profitable for salvation and sanctification. The goal of God’s Word is to prepare a people to meet the Savior.

Are you nourishing yourself with God’s Word? How do you do that? You nourish yourself as you daily feed on the Scriptures. How can you expect to grow in your relationship with Jesus and strengthened in your faith if you don’t know what He says? You shouldn’t and you can’t.

Lifeway Research conducted a survey in 2017 of 1,000 people to study how many people in America read the Bible. The results revealed that about half of Americans (53%) have read relatively little of the Bible. One in 10 has read none of it, while 13% have read a few sentences. 30% say they have read several passages or stories. I personally believe there is not that much difference in the church. You

might ask, "Pastor, why do you say that?" It is because the average Christian lives just like the average person. This tells me that the average Christian is not reading and applying the Bible to his or her life.

You need a systematic plan of reading and application in your life. I personally believe every Christian should read the Bible through each year. This practice has been life changing for me. I have read it through every year since 2002. That is 17 straight years, and I am reading it through again this year. I don't tell you this to boast. No, I share it as an example. Every one can do this...reader and non-reader alike. It only takes 10-15 minutes per day to read through the Bible in a year.

Why should you read the Bible consistently? Our experiences and the people we interact with each day influence us. Simply by living in our world, we accumulate a lot of stuff. Disparaging conversations, tempting images, self-centered ideas, arguments, frustrations, hurt feelings, kids that won't stay in bed, and road rage among other things snatch at our attention. They cause us to slowly lose our sense of gratitude and contentment. They hinder our worship. Regularly exposing yourself to God's Word, however, reminds you of what God declares to be true and interprets your experience in the world. It anchors you to ultimate reality. It works to decalcify and wash away the junk that clogs up your life.

The Word of God teaches and rebukes for the purpose of making you holy and ready for service. Learn to feed yourself from it daily.

Conclusion: The crazy birds that build nests under my deck year after year have one primary goal...get the chicks out of the nest. Their goal is maturity in their young. This too is God's goal for you. His goal is for you to be a man or woman of God who is complete and equipped for every good work.

This morning I have some good news, some bad news, and some best news for you.

Good News – You are loved by God. He designed you. You were made by Him and for Him (Col 1:16). You were designed to perfectly relate and to be in relationship with holy God.

Bad News - You are sinful and broken. You possess both an inherited and a self-inflicted wound. The sinful nature of Adam in the Garden has been passed down to you, and you were born into the world in rebellion against the God who created you for Himself. Your sin is under the just wrath of holy God. Sin has produced brokenness in your lives. You choose to sin because it is your nature, further wounding yourself. Therefore, apart from Christ, you are as far away from God's purpose and desire for your life as you can get.

Best News - The gospel declares that God the Son has paid the penalty for your sin. Romans 5:8 says, "*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" He offered His life as a substitute for you and experienced the wrath of God the Father against your sin. So that now, you can experience forgiveness for sin by placing your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. You are given a choice to make?

Through the gospel we understand that we can know God. You can be set free, made whole, and forgiven of all sin. You can grow into maturity in a new life in Jesus.

The first step for all is to put your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Have you faithed into Jesus? The next step is to follow Him in baptism. Have you been baptized? Then, begin to walk with Him daily through the study of His Word and prayer. How is your devotional life? Finally, connect with His church? Are you connected to His church? Find a place to faithfully serve the Lord in His church. Are you serving in some capacity?

Are you learning to nourish yourself spiritually?