

Title: Living Examples
Date: 9/27/26
Subject: We are to be examples of what the Lord can do in a sinner.
Scripture: 1 Timothy 1:12 - 20

President Coolidge invited friends to eat at the White House. Worried about etiquette, they decided to do what their host did. All was well till coffee was served. The President poured some into a saucer. The guests did. Coolidge added sugar and cream. The guests did. Then Coolidge placed his saucer on the floor for his cat.

The apostle Paul furnishes a good example to follow.

I. Paul's experience

1. Paul the thankful. V. 12. Paul was extremely thankful for what God had done and was doing in his life. He directed praise to Christ Jesus our Lord as the one who carried out God's plan of salvation.

Paul was thankful for God's provision. First, God gave him strength which is power and ability to live out God's plan for him. In another place (Phil 4:13), he testified God's strength enabled him to live in plenty or in want. In another, when Paul struggled with a thorn in the flesh and pleaded 3 times with God to take it away, the Lord told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:8). Paul's response? "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:9, 10).

A second thing for which Paul was thankful was the opportunity to serve. He'd been appointed, chosen by God, to be in his service to proclaim and communicate the good news to Jews and gentiles.

The appointment to service was based on God considering Paul faithful. It wasn't true of him pre-conversion as he wasn't faithful to the Lord. It was after he met Jesus and was born again. He quickly began talking about Jesus to former associates, strangers, anyone and everyone.

This brings us to his past.

2. Saul the deplorable. Vv. 13, 15, 16. Paul, when known as Saul, was adored by family, friends and ordinary people for his religious devotion and zeal. The reality was he was a horrible and deplorable person because he was a sinner. He was an enemy of God because he was seeking salvation through his method rather than God's.

Paul admitted he was a blasphemer. He spoke injuriously and evilly of God. He attributed to God things that weren't true. He was a persecutor and a violent man. He breathed out murderous threats against Christians (Acts 9:1). He arrested men and women and threw them into prison (Acts 22:4, 5). He tried to force them to blasphemy the name of Jesus Christ and voted to put Christians to death. His obsession led him to foreign cities to carry out the persecution (Acts 26:10, 11).

His statement about acting in ignorance and unbelief wasn't an excuse that his actions should be overlooked. He merely stated his condition. He wasn't aware who Jesus was. When he dramatically encountered

Jesus, Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" (Acts 9: 5). He believed the voice from heaven was God but wanted to know the identity of God. God said, "Jesus."

Paul's unbelief was more a "won't believe." He wouldn't believe. His mind was hard set as cured concrete. He refused to listen to the testimony of those who saw Jesus alive after he'd risen from the tomb. He refused to listen to the teachings from the OT. His attitude was "Don't confuse me with the facts and evidence."

Twice Paul referred to himself as the worst of sinners. He was horrified at the depth of his depravity. There wasn't a competition of sinners from which Paul emerged as "the worst sinner ever." But he felt like it. He depicted himself as "a wretched" (Rom 7:24). He understood he made Jesus Christ die for his sins which made him the worst of sinners, one who was bad, evil to the core, a horrible sinner who deserved any and all punishment the Lord could inflict.

Paul uses a variation of the word *but* in v. 13 - *even though*. He uses the powerful 3 letter *but* in v. 16 – *but* for the very reason that he was the worst of sinners God could show his patience.

3. Paul the thankful. Vv. 13, 14 16, 17. In 13 and 16 Paul stated he was shown mercy. The Lord didn't treat him as he deserved. The Lord withheld judgment and punishment because Paul came under the protection of Christ. It took place when Paul transferred his trust from his goodness, works and religiosity to trusting in Jesus Christ.

Paul said he also received grace that was poured out abundantly (v. 14). It wasn't merely a couple dribble drops of God's goodness. The floodgates of heaven opened. He got what he didn't deserve - forgiveness of sins, pardon, placement into God's family...and the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

V. 16. Paul notes he was a recipient of God's unlimited patience. God could have acted at any moment to judge and punish Paul, but God has all the time in the world. He delayed the rightful punishment by giving Paul the opportunity to turn to Jesus as the one who paid the penalty for Paul's sins. If Paul hadn't turned to Jesus by the time he died, then he would have suffered the punishment and judgment of God.

The realization of what God had done for him caused Paul to erupt in the praise. REREAD v. 17.

The praise seems to be directed at the Son of God. The word Christ is a title meaning Messiah, Anointed King, the one who was sent by God and is God. As King he's the sovereign ruler over all. He makes the rules, lays down the laws. He can do anything he wants or pleases that's consistent with his character.

He's eternal. There's no way to get around him as he's beyond time. A person can't outlast God, hoping he'll tire or age out. It's also comforting to know God doesn't age out but is always there. He's immortal. He doesn't die but continues to live. Therefore, he has the power to give life. He's invisible. He sees us even though we can't see him. He's the only God. Most belief systems claim their god is the only God: "There is no God but..." Those supposed gods pale in comparison to the God of the Bible in attributes and power. They're false gods. There is no God but the Lord God Jehovah. He is the one and only true God.

Paul ends his praise with "be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." Sounds like it could be the end of the book, but we can see there's more to come. Paul's heart was full and bursting in praise to Jesus for what he's done. He couldn't keep his praise contained till the end.

4. Paul the example. V. 16. Paul said he was Exhibit A of what God could do for those who would believe on Christ Jesus and receive eternal life. "If God can save and transform a wretched rascal like me, one who hated his Son and actively persecuted those who followed him to the point of voting to kill them, he can save anybody." God is patient, including with difficult people, but one day his patience will run out.

We're part of those who would believe on Christ Jesus and receive eternal life.

II. Our experience VV. 15 - 19

1. Sinners one and all. V. 15 presents the first "trustworthy saying" found in Timothy and Titus. Some say they reflect words to a Christian song or poem. Songs were often used to teach people, help them understand and remember doctrine, core principles and tenets of faith. Was Paul reaching into his era's Top 40 Christian songs?

Our experience began the same place Paul's did – "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Jesus explained his purpose: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31).

In order for people to receive any benefit from what Jesus Christ has done, they have to admit they're sinners. There were a lot of people in the time of Jesus and Paul and are today who feel they aren't a sinner, at least, not a horrible sinner. They feel they're basically pretty good and righteous. They've been taught that belief and think they may need a little spiritual tweaking, but certainly don't consider themselves to be a sinner. Paul counters that idea in another Bible verse: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

We may not feel we're the worst of sinners because of what we've done and haven't done. The truth is all of us are the worst of sinners because all of us sinned causing Jesus Christ to die in our place.

I touched on this in Sunday School, but the insight is something we need to hear again and again. I certainly need to be reminded of it multiple times. It comes from Erwin Lutzer, pastor and author. "We cannot comprehend the seriousness of sin. We must confess that we do not know exactly how much punishment is enough for those who have sinned against God. . . What if, from God's viewpoint, the greatness of sin is determined by the greatness of the One against whom it is committed? Then the guilt of sin is infinite because it is a violation of the character of an infinite being. What if, in the nature of God, it is deemed that such infinite sins deserve an infinite penalty, a penalty that no one can ever repay?" (One Minute After You Die, p. 108).

We can add: what if sin, any and all sin, ranging from murder to lying or stealing candy from the grocery store is viewed by God as so horrible . . . that the only payment for sin would be the sacrifice of his Son?

The tremendous news is God decided to take the punishment for people's sins through his Son who was named Jesus. The name means "the Lord saves." He fully embodied the meaning when the Father sent him into the world as the one and only rescue plan. Only a perfect sacrifice could fully pay the penalty for humanity's sins. Jesus lived a perfect life and died on the cross as our substitute. He was buried and rose from the dead to show he could save, rescue, redeem, ransom, enable us to cross from death to life so we no longer belong to death (John 5:24). He gives spiritual life (Rom 5:18), removes guilt and judgment (Titus 2:14), delivers us from God's wrath (Eph 2:8), unites us with himself (Phil 2:1).

In April, 2010, Beijing, China officials hatched an unusual tactic to counter the smell from one of its 13 garbage dumps. They used 100 high pressure deodorant spray cannons followed by covering new garbage with odor eating sheets and then more deodorant sprayed on top. Experts and creators of the product thought it worked. Residents in nearby housing disagreed feeling it only temporarily masked the stench.

Writer Marvin Williams applies the story: “When we sin, it's futile to try and cover it up. The odor of our disobedience can't be contained. But when we confess our sin and repent of it, he [God] will remove it and leave the fragrance of his grace and forgiveness. He'll restore the joy of our salvation, allowing us to once again celebrate in his presence” (Our Daily Bread, July topic, 2026).

2. Thankful. Like Paul we've been shown mercy, the grace of our Lord was poured out on us abundantly along with faith and love. Christ Jesus has displayed his unlimited patience in us.

Florentino Santos wrote a book titled *To the Headhunters of Sierra Madre*. Sierra Madre Philippines, not California. Santos includes part of the testimony of Tanitan who came from a headhunting culture. “I killed people in the past, but ever since I chose to believe in Jesus Christ, he will not allow me to commit such practices anymore. Before, I was afraid to die but not afraid to kill. Now, I am afraid to kill but not afraid to die.” Tanitan's reverent fear of God led to a desire to obey (not disobey). Thankful for deliverance.

3. Examples. Have you ever thought one of the reasons God saved you was to showcase his love? Let people around you know if God could save you, as bad as you were, he could save anyone? We probably don't view ourselves as bad as Paul. We didn't kill anyone...but, people should see we've changed from what we were before we placed our trust in him to after we become Christian or that there's something different about us.

Alistair Begg on his Thursday radio program told about a guy who shared how he'd become a Christian. Years earlier, after college, the man worked as a door-to-door salesman making cold calls. He'd ring the doorbell and ask if he could show them his product. Most often the response was “No!” followed by a bam as the door closed. The man shared how his whole life was rejection: no, bam, no, bam.

One day someone said, “You can come in and show me your stuff.” He did and while there he told the couple, “Your house has a real peacefulness.” The homeowner said, “Really?” “Yeah.” “Would you like to know how that is?” The salesman said, “Yeah. I showed you my product. Go right at it.”

The prospective customer shared the story of his and his wife's conversions. He got a Bible and read the verse: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Then he asked, “Do you want to be saved?” The salesman surprised himself as he said yes. The man led him to Christ. He went home, led both his brother and his sister to Christ.

Begg ended the story by saying sometimes we just need to ask someone if they want to be saved. “Do you want to be saved?” Will you be saved today, if you haven't done so before?

4. the charge. Vv. 18 – 20.

Paul reminded Timothy he was set apart for spiritual leadership. The present instruction was in keeping with that. We may not have the experience of Timothy but we're all in positions of being spiritual ministers.

The charge is to fight the good fight. The language used describes military or boxing. Both are involved in a fight. Both involve strategies, obeying orders, maintaining discipline, exercising determination and the idea of taking one more step. The good fight is to defend the gospel of Jesus Christ and go on offense. Christians aren't called to take up weapons as we invite people to choose to become Christians. . . or die.

Paul knows the fight. He was on the opposite side for years, fighting against Christians verbally and physically. Then he switched and became a defender of Jesus. He faced false teachers and opponents of Jesus. He reminds us in another place: "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12). The real enemy isn't false teachers but the power behind them which is the devil.

We're to hold on to faith and a good conscience, mentioned in 5. They're foundation blocks of our spiritual lives. Faith is a commitment to, confidence and trust in the body of teaching about Christ, doctrine...in contrast to the false stuff. A good conscience comes from right behavior, obedience. They're built by a steady diet of God's word, fellowship with dedicated followers of the Lord, quick accounts with God about our sin.

Paul provides a warning about some who shipwrecked their faith. Hymenaeus appears in 2 Timothy (2:16-18) a few years later. He spread godless chatter, was becoming more and more ungodly and taught the resurrection had already taken place. Alexander may be the guy from Paul's visit to Ephesus (Acts 19:33). People rioted against his teaching about Jesus out of fear it'd destroy the worship of the goddess Artemis they created. The Jews called on Alexander to speak to the mob to defend Jews and condemn Christians.

Hard as it is to believe, it seems they were connected with the church. Paul's statement about handing them over to Satan was church discipline, exclusion from the church and the refuge it provides from the devil. They'd be in the world away from the fellowship and care of the church body. The hope was they'd be taught not to blaspheme. In other words, they'd return to their senses about who Jesus Christ is and what he's done.

My dad didn't like cool rainy autumns as low spots in the fields would remain wet. Sometimes when harvesting corn for silage, the tractor, chopper and wagon would get stuck in the mud. We'd hook a logging chain to another tractor to get unstuck.

When that was accomplished, we didn't focus on the stuck part: "It was horrible. The tractor couldn't move forward or backward. All the tires did was spin and dig deeper. There was mud everywhere. It took a long time to get unstuck. What a mess." No. We focused on being freed from the mud and got back to work.

We were mired deep in the mud of sin. Trusting in Christ freed us. We don't have to focus on the stuck part – the pre-Christian past, full of evil and sin. We will remember some of it, but don't need to constantly bring it up. Focus on the saved part. Children of God because of the mercy and grace of God.

"Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me...Alas and did my Savior bleed, and did my sovereign die! Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?" And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood? Died he for me, who caused his pain? For me, who him to death pursued? Amazing love? How can it be that thou, my God, should die for me?"