

2 Timothy 3:10-13 — Why Do I Need Christian Heroes?

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What does it take to be a hero?

Let me begin by telling the story of U.S. Army Sergeant 1st Class Alwyn Cashe. He is considered to be one of the greatest heroes of the Iraq War. While serving in Iraq, a roadside bomb detonated, ripping through the fuel tank of his Bradley Fighting Vehicle. The seven men inside were knocked unconscious and had no chance to escape the fire.



Sergeant Alwyn Cashe managed to crawl out of the burning vehicle. Thankfully his injuries were not severe, but his uniform was soaked in fuel. In spite of Bradley being on fire and his uniform dripping fuel, with no regard for his life, he went back to the vehicle to pull unconscious passengers to safety before the flames devoured them alive. The first soldier he pulled to safety was the driver.

Then he went back to get another.

This time he had to struggle to open the Bradley's hatch. While straining with all his strength to open the hatch, his fuel-soaked uniform caught fire. By the time he got into the Bradley, only his body armor and helmet were left. The rest of his uniform was burned off his body. In that burned state he managed to carry another of his dying men out of the Bradley to safety.

Then he went back to get another.

This is the first time he noticed what he thought was his uniform on fire. It was not his uniform that was burning. It was his skin. He ignored the pain and pulled another of his unconscious soldiers to safety out of the burning Bradley.

Then he went back for another.

While the vehicle was wrapped in flames, he continued pulling unconscious men out until he pulled out six soldiers plus an interpreter, saving seven men from death in the flames.

Sergeant Cashe put his life on the line. At this point, he had second and third degree burns over 75 percent of his body. Alwyn Cashe later died from his horrific burns. The Army posthumously awarded him the highest award for bravery on the battle field, the Medal of Honor. He is considered a true unsung hero. He is a man who gave his life in a heroic attempt to save seven others from a horrifying death. That is what a military hero looks like. That is the kind of man that is worth following. That is the kind of man that is worth imitating when you go to war.

This morning we are going to talk about heroes. Why do we need to have them? How do they shape us? Where do we look to find the right ones to follow?

Today we are studying 2 Timothy 3:10-13. The theme of these verses is that strong Christian men and women of today have studied, and are intentionally copying, the lives of great Christian heroes of the past. That way, when life gets tough, they act like heroes because they know what to do.

Let's read our text together.

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, 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. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 2 Timothy 3:10–13 (ESV)

These verses break into two parts. The first part tells us how Timothy chose to intentionally model his life after the apostle Paul, his Christian hero. Timothy chose to model his life after Paul so he would know how to act when times were tough. The second part tells us all Christians should expect tough times. If this world persecuted Jesus, expect it will persecute me.

We need to learn from Christian role models in prior generations.

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness... 2 Timothy 3:10 (ESV)

The key phrase in this verse is, "You, however, have followed." Timothy, had a bunch of spiritual scammers around him. They were living for themselves. They were using religion for money. They were ungrateful people. Thankfully, Timothy intentionally chose to not have them be an example in his life that he chose to follow. Timothy chose to pattern his life after someone else, someone worthy of imitation, the apostle Paul. Paul knew that. This is why he praised Timothy by saying, "You are different. You have followed me."

Timothy chose to study the way Paul lived, then he copied what was admirable about Paul's life as he followed Jesus.

This is the principle I want you to remember: *The great heroes of the faith will almost always point to another hero of the faith that lived in an earlier generation that they are trying to follow.*

This is incredibly important. Whether we admit it or not, all of us are copiers. We are mimickers. We imitate the people around us for good or for ill. We dress like them. We have the same accent. The people we spend time

around shape us. We imitate them. We live like them. We are marked by our mentors.

Young people, this is so important. A friend once said to me about teenagers, show me their friends and I will show you their future. Teenagers copy the people they call their friends. They dress like them. They act like them. They let their friends define what is cool.

My oldest son, when he was about 6, always spoke clear English. One of his first friends down the street who was struggling with clear English spoke with a lisp. David came home from playing at his friend's house, and he began speaking with a lisp. Subconsciously, he was imitating his friend. All of us are like that. We subconsciously imitate others.

Today, we don't just find ourselves imitating the physical friends around us, but through the Internet, we now have virtual friends on social media. We start to imitate our virtual friends as we begin to act like them and think like them.

In the city of Ephesus, Timothy had plenty of bad examples around him. Instead of subconsciously following them, he intentionally chose to pattern his life after a good hero of the faith that was worth imitating, the apostle Paul.

Timothy patterned his life so closely after Paul that when Paul was upset with the Corinthian church, he told them to stop patterning their lives after the spiritual kooks around them. He told them to imitate his life and his faith. To help them do that, he sent Timothy to them because Timothy had copied Paul's life so well. He was a virtual duplicate.

That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.
1 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV)

If we want to be heroes in our generation and live well when we suffer for Jesus, we need to intentionally copy the life of a great Christian hero in an earlier generation so we learn how to suffer well. That is what Timothy did with the apostle Paul.

Let me tell you about one of my heroes of the faith from an earlier generation. It is Eric Liddell. You may know him from the movie Chariots of Fire. He was an incredible athlete and a man of character. He refused to run in an Olympic event because it was on a Sunday. To avoid the Sunday conflict, he ended up running in a different Olympic event for which he never trained. He ended up winning a gold medal. For me, he modeled what it looks like to handle success as a Christian. He was willing to put Jesus before his athletics, even if it meant he didn't run in his Olympic event because it was on a Sunday.

After he won gold, rather than enjoying the limelight, he got to the real mission of his heart which was being a missionary in China. When the Japanese invaded China in World War II, he sent his wife and children back to England, but he stayed in China. He even was eventually captured as was a prisoner of war in a Japanese concentration camp. There he taught Bible classes and sports to children until he died of a brain tumor. He didn't only model handling success well as a Christian but he modeled what it means to handle hard times well as a Christian. He was reaching people with Jesus as a famous Olympic athlete. He was reaching people with Jesus while dying a slow death in a concentration camp. I want to pattern my life after his. In the successful times of my life and the

hard times of my life, I want to keep reaching people with Jesus. I wanted to learn so much about Eric Liddell's life that I read three biographies of his life. I want to learn from his life because many parts of it are worthy of being followed.

Sometimes you hear that trying to learn from a person or be like a person is a bad thing. We are told to just be ourselves. While there is nothing wrong with being yourself, there is also nothing wrong with intentionally learning and replicating admirable character qualities of spiritual heroes. In fact, Paul told the Corinthians to imitate him.

I urge you, then, be imitators of me. 1 Corinthians 4:16 (ESV)

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1 (ESV)

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord... 1 Thessalonians 1:6 (ESV)

Strong spiritual leaders almost always have strong spiritual leaders who lived before them that they are trying to learn from and imitate.

What are the areas of life in which I should learn from Christian heroes?

At this point, Paul broke into a list. If you know the apostle Paul, you know he loved lists. Paul gave a list of different areas in life that Timothy intentionally sought to copy him. These are areas of life where we should intentionally try another Christian to follow, just like Timothy did with Paul.

To make this last manageable, let's break it under three headings.

Learn from the way heroes of the faith pastored.

This is the first area in Paul's life that Timothy chose to intentionally learn from and replicate --- the way Paul pastored. Paul divided pastoring into two areas, teaching and conduct.

Teaching simply means what it says. It is instruction in doctrine and truth. Timothy said to himself, “What did Paul teach about Jesus? That is what I want to teach about Jesus.” Timothy did not try to get creative. He did not try to teach something new about Jesus. He strove to faithfully replicate what Paul taught about Jesus. I am sure Timothy sat under hundreds of Paul’s sermons. I am sure many of them were repeats. Timothy learned the truth about Jesus well, and he tried to faithfully teach that truth to others. Paul even told Timothy to replicate the truth about Jesus in the lives of others that he learned from Paul.

...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV)

Conduct. The next thing that Timothy intentionally modeled was Paul’s conduct. The Greek word means manner of life. Just as important as what we teach is how we live. Much more is caught by our living than is taught by our teaching. If what we say and how we live are not in sync, how we live will speak louder than what we say. How we live is what people will remember.

The bottom line is Timothy looked at both the teaching and the living parts of Paul’s life, and he intentionally tried to copy both of them into his own life.

Let me give you an example of the power of a teacher’s conduct. In the past, I told you about Dr. Haddon Robinson. He is one of my Christian heroes. He was considered to be one of the five greatest preachers in the English language. What left the greatest impression on me were not the hundreds of hours of great teaching I was privileged to enjoy. It was the way he lived.

Years ago, when I completed my ordination for ministry, I was told to ask a pastor I admired to deliver a special ordination sermon for me on the day I had

my ordination service at church. The person I admired most was Dr. Robinson. The request was like shooting for the moon. Why would a popular author, seminary president, and famous man take time to come to a tiny church in the backwoods of Michigan to preach one sermon for me?

To my shock, Dr. Robinson emailed me back and said he would make the time. After he was in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to record a year's worth of episodes for his national radio program, before he flew back to Massachusetts, he attended and preached for my ordination service.

That marked me. Here was a man of incredible importance and brilliance making time to care about an unknown preacher. When that happened, I immediately found myself saying, "that is the kind of Christian I want to be." I want to care about and make time for the people that nobody else notices, like Dr. Robinson did for me. His conduct was more impactful than his teaching.

Learn from the way heroes of the faith lived.

My aim in life. Paul said Timothy also intentionally copied his aim in life. Some translations say Paul's purpose in life. Paul's aim or purpose was what motivated him. Paul's aim was what got him out of bed in the morning. It was what gave him purpose, direction, and focus in life. What was Paul's aim that Timothy wanted to copy?

For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 1 Corinthians 9:16 (ESV)

Paul was driven with a deep-seated desire to proclaim the gospel wherever he went. He wanted to reach people with Jesus. When he got out of bed, he was strategizing how to reach someone with Jesus. That is what drove

Paul. Timothy saw that in Paul's life, and he tried to duplicate it in his life. One of the things we learn from our heroes is what motivates them, what is truly important to them. The great heroes of the faith were all motivated by telling people about Jesus. That is worthy copying from their lives and duplicating it in our lives, just like Timothy copied that purpose for living from Paul.

My faith. The next area of Paul's life that Timothy tried to intentionally copy was Paul's faith. This could mean faith in God, but some Bible scholars feel that in this context this word could better be translated as Paul's faithfulness. As you know, Paul was legendary for his faithfulness to the gospel. When many others drifted away from the gospel, he was a rock. He boldly proclaimed that we are only saved by grace alone, by faith alone, and by God's grace through Jesus alone. Paul was faithful. He never bent on that in his generation. Timothy saw that faithfulness to the gospel message in Paul's life, and he tried to duplicate that in his life. Just as Paul was the gospel rock in his generation, Timothy was trying to be the gospel rock in the next generation. This is a way of living that was worth imitating.

My patience. This is an important word. It means a spirit that endures persecution from people. Does anybody have difficult people in your life? This is a skill worth learning. Apparently Paul was a very patient man. He was patient with people who failed him. He was patient with people who disappointed him. Timothy saw this quality in Paul's life, and he was trying to intentionally learn from it and imitate it in his life.

This is an incredibly important area for all of us to have a Christian hero or mentor. When people are harsh with us, the model we usually have in front of us is Rambo. They hurt us. We hurt them. We need godly models to follow, like Timothy saw in Paul. When people fail us, we want to be patient with them.

My love. In spite of all the difficult situations Paul faced and the difficult people who were persecuting Paul, Paul continued to love them. We think of Paul as a great theologian, and that he was. It is interesting if you look at the end of his letters, he sent greetings to many people he knew and loved. Paul was legendary for how much he loved people. He genuinely cared about people. Church wasn't just about head knowledge. It was about people and loving them.

When I read about Timothy trying to learn to love people with great compassion like Paul loved people, that brought to mind another of my heroes that shaped my life. His name is Robert McQuilken. He was a seminary president when his wife came down with early onset Alzheimer's. She was never content unless he was around. He couldn't be a president and care for her at the same time. Instead of institutionalizing her, he chose to resign from his job as a seminary president to care for his wife until she died. Why did he do that? He said that he promised he would be there for her for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do them part. He was going to be a man of his word.

His example marked me. After reading the story of his life, I found myself saying, "I want to imitate him. I want to copy him. If my wife gets sick, I want to follow the example of his life and be faithful to my wife all the way to the end."

So Timothy intentionally copied the way Paul pastored. He copied the way Paul lived. Next we see Timothy intentionally copied the way Paul handled difficult circumstances in life.

Learn from the way heroes of the faith suffered.

...my steadfastness, 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. 2 Timothy 3:10–11 (ESV)

Paul went through some very difficult experiences. Timothy watched Paul endure them. Timothy learned how to endure difficult experiences by watching the way Paul endured them. Timothy learned how to suffer well for Jesus by watching the way Paul suffered well for Jesus.

Steadfastness. Steadfastness means patience in difficult circumstances. Earlier, we saw how Paul had patience with people. The Greek word here is different. It is patience in difficult circumstances. Timothy saw how Paul had patience in difficult circumstances, and he tried to learn that from Paul. Think of some of the difficult circumstances Paul faced for Jesus. He was thrown in jail. He had a thorn in the flesh. He was shipwrecked and adrift on the sea. He had people hunting down his life. In all of these, Paul demonstrated patience. No matter what happened, he knew God was still in control. Paul didn't come apart. He didn't freak out. He never gave up. Paul endured difficult circumstances and didn't develop a negative, whining, complaining, and pouting attitude. Timothy said, "When life falls apart, I want to handle it like Paul did when his life fell apart." Timothy was fortunate to have Paul and to learn from Paul in these areas. For Timothy, his mentor marked him. Paul taught him how to suffer for Jesus well.

Persecutions. Paul also said Timothy followed his persecutions. This is more specific than difficult life circumstances. This is people pursuing your life trying to either injure you or take your life. In Acts 20 the Jews were lying in wait to kill Paul. Imagine what it was like to have a group of people committed to killing you, so committed that they didn't plan to eat or drink until you were dead! There was not just one plot against Paul's life but multiple plots. That is incredible stress. Timothy saw how Paul handled all that stress and tried to learn how to handle it well if and when persecution came into his life.

But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. Acts 17:13–14 (ESV)

This kind of persecution was routine for Paul. He was always escaping from cities and getting whisked away by his friends because somebody wanted to cause him harm. In spite of all the persecution, Paul kept telling people about Jesus! What a great mentor to follow!

Sufferings. Paul said Timothy learned from his sufferings and was trying to handle suffering the way he handled suffering.

Steadfastness shows in difficult life circumstances. Persecutions are worse circumstances. It is people threatening your life. Sufferings are worse yet. It is people actually hurting you and possibly trying to take your life. Paul suffered for Jesus all the time. Timothy saw that and learned from Paul how to handle that.

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less

one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 2 Corinthians 11:23–27 (ESV)

Now Paul reached back into history and reminded Timothy about some of the suffering he experienced in different cities. Why did Paul mention these cities? These cities were all in the province of Galatia, which is the area Timothy grew up in. In fact, Lystra was Timothy’s hometown. Let’s see a sample of the sufferings Paul endured in these cities.

...but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.” Acts 13:14–15 (ESV)

Paul was a guest in the local synagogue. They read the Scripture and said, “We have a guest rabbi. Would you stand up and speak to us if you have something to say?” Paul stood up and taught people about Jesus. Things went incredibly well. Paul was even invited back the next week to tell more people about Jesus. Things went well until we get to verse 50.

But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. Acts 13:50 (ESV)

The suffering was bad, but it wasn’t too bad. Paul was just driven out of town. Next Paul went to Iconium. He entered the synagogue, and again he spoke about Jesus. Again, many people believed in Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. It didn’t take long until some people started stirring up trouble again.

When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them... Acts 14:5 (ESV)

The suffering began getting worse. Last time, Paul and company were ran out of town. This time people tried to mistreat Paul and his friends and stone them. Thankfully, they escaped. Undeterred they headed to Lystra to keep telling people about Jesus.

Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. Acts 14:8–10 (ESV)

Before, Paul preached and people were saved. Here things got really exciting. Not only were people saved but a cripple was healed. This should have gotten everybody excited about Jesus. It didn't go that way.

But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. Acts 14:19 (ESV)

This time, instead of being driven out of town or an attempted stoning, even though Paul miraculously healed a man, they stoned him, drug him out of town and threw his body on the trash pile. Amazingly, later he opened his eyes, got up, and undeterred, headed to the next town to tell more people about Jesus. Timothy came from Lystra. Timothy probably saw Paul heal the cripple. Timothy probably watched get stoned. He saw how Paul handled that horrid suffering and learned from Paul. He wanted to imitate Paul and handle suffering well.

Timothy saw in Paul a man of tremendous courage, uncompromising character, a man who would give his life for the proclamation of the gospel. Can you imagine how deeply that marked Timothy?

Learning how to endure persecution and suffering was important for Timothy. Just as Paul suffered for Jesus in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, Timothy was suffering for the gospel in Ephesus. Timothy learned how to handle that suffering well by modeling his life after Paul.

Now these verses take an interesting twist.

God rescues the righteous.

...yet from them all the Lord rescued me. 2 Timothy 3:11 (ESV)

"Timothy, you know that the Lord preserved me in all of my suffering. In fact the Lord rescued me out of my suffering." Wait a minute. That doesn't seem right. Paul was stoned and left for dead at Lystra. How could Paul say God rescued him?

The Lord rescuing us is not saying we will never face sufferings. It is saying God never allowed these people to kill Paul even though they wanted him dead. Nobody was able to take Paul's life until God decided to bring him home. Even when they thought they killed Paul, God made sure he was rescued, and he lived.

This is important for us. God will rescue us from our sufferings, but that doesn't mean we won't go through sufferings, persecution, and hardship. We will. Paul did. Job did. God kept his promise to rescue Paul from certain death when he was preaching the Word until it was God's time to call him home. God will rescue us from certain death when we are preaching the Word unless it is God's time to call us home. In this we can take great comfort. Yes, we will suffer for Jesus, but God promises to rescue us from those who plan to destroy us.

All who desire to live a godly life for Jesus will be persecuted.

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 2 Timothy 3:12–13 (ESV)

Why will those who desire to live a godly life in Jesus be persecuted? Evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. Paul told Timothy it would never end. It will not end until Jesus returns. People will just keep persecuting Christians and causing suffering for Christians. Expect it. It is not that just Timothy should have expected this, but we should expect this. If we choose to live godly lives in Jesus, we will be persecuted.

This is not just a promise from Paul. It is a promise from Jesus.

Remember the word that I said to you: "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. John 15:20 (ESV)

Thankfully, on the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us this promise of suffering comes with a promise of reward.

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Matthew 5:11–12 (ESV)

We are left with three principles to help us live faithful Christian lives in our day.

1. Know that all who live a godly Christian life will be persecuted. That is not just a promise from Paul but it is a promise from Jesus. The more we resemble Jesus in the world, the more the evil men and imposters will try to persecute us in this world. We must expect it and not be surprised by it.
2. Know God promises to rescue the righteous. Just as God rescued Paul many times from certain death, he promises to rescue us. This doesn't mean we

won't experience persecution and suffering, but God will carry us through and protect us in the persecution and suffering. Nobody can take our lives until God says our days are done. Even though they stoned Paul and thought he was dead, God saved him. He opened his eyes, got up and went to the next town.

3. Know that when it comes to suffering well we need to find and follow godly Christians who lived before us and copy the example of their lives when it comes to suffering, living and pastoring. All of us need the example of godly men and women who have gone before us to encourage us in our walk with Christ.

This week, find and follow heroes in Christ who lived before us who will help us handle the hard times in life and the sufferings for Christ well.



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