

Title: What is your tone?
Text: 2 Timothy 2.20-26
Theme: Running from and running to
Series: 2 Timothy
Prop Stmtnt: What you run from and run to reveals where you will end up.
Aim:

Read Text:

Years ago I flew from Detroit to New York to London and then to Mumbai. Somewhere in there I lost a day. It was a blur. I gathered my luggage and stepped outside of the airport. Immediately I was overwhelmed with people yelling, hands grabbing at me, horns honking and faces I did not know in my face and really close. I walked back into the airport. Wow! What was that!? A seasoned fellow traveler told me, “Every time I make this trip I have to say to myself, “Hey Toto, this ain’t Kansas.” I remember just trying to get my bearings. It was all so new. This was a setting I had never been part of and did not understand. But, a short while later I was talking with a group of believers I had come to visit and serve and it wasn’t long before I thought, I could live here.

When you come to faith in Christ, you become, in the words of the Bible, a new creation. There is a fundamental change that takes place in you. You are no longer the same person you used to be. That change is disorienting because you are now in the kingdom of God and you have never been part of that before and you are conscious of the fact that you are different than this world. You have different beliefs, different values, different priorities, a different perspective, different ethics, different goals and a different destination. You are in this world, but you are no longer of it. Things that this world pursues, you run from and things it tends to run from, you pursue. You are different, and yet not all of your being has yet to fully embrace that. You are different, but part of you fights against it. That fight, is the struggle of Christian growth. Growing as a Christian is called sanctification. We term it, progressive sanctification. Paul describes this process as being “*transformed into the same image (of Christ) from one degree of glory to another.*” (2 Cor. 3.18). In this letter from Paul to Timothy he explores that issue of gospel fruit, or progressive sanctification, particularly in view of leadership. I’ve entitled this message, “what is your tone?” because there are two aspects of this that I want you to consider. 1) What is the tone of the leadership of our church? Do you sense the aroma of Christ or people who are just interested in using you to advance themselves and appear to be successful? 2) What is the tone of your life? The leaders in the church are called to set the mark and the church is called to keep the pace. Together, we call others to follow Christ with us, and together we help one another follow Jesus better. But, are we? Are just busy, or are we really helping one another follow Jesus better? If the tone of our lives sound like and feel like Jesus, then we will help one another follow Jesus better.

Our next begins with “now” (which is a connecting word that links what was just said to what he is about to say). V.21 begins with “therefore” which is a clue that we are closer to his point. And v.22 starts with “So” which moves us to what Paul is emphasizing, which is this:

Those who are the Lord's (v.19) will depart from iniquity. Paul gives us an analogy in verses 20-21, which is like saying, "Let me explain it this way." The point of the analogy is in verse 21. Let's start with the analogy. We just read that "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." In order to emphasize that point, Paul gives us an analogy of the two different types of vessels that are found in a great house. The question is ...

1. What kind of a vessel are you? (20-21)

A great house has expensive dishes and vessels made out of precious material such as gold and silver. These vessels are used for things such as food, drink, and personal creams. But there are other vessels made of wood and common earthenware that are used for dishonorable things. Indoor plumbing is relatively new in the history of the world. In a great house that Paul was thinking of, it had vessels that were designed to hold garbage and human waste, that in some cases, like we do with a plastic garbage bag, the vessel is so common, and so disposable that it is thrown out with the waste that it holds.

This analogy is once again rather graphic. Paul holds nothing back when he is addressing the issue of false teaching and false teachers because this is such a serious issue. The "therefore" (beginning of v.21) is there so we will know why Paul uses this analogy. The great house is a reference to the local Christian community of believers. Inside the house, there are vessels for honorable use (genuine believers) and those who are dishonorable (false converts). His point here is for us to look at the lives of the leaders. Do they depart from iniquity, or do they attempt to use their position of influence to advance themselves and get what they want? A good leader is not primarily concerned with getting his way, and being affirmed and respected and being made much of. A good leader, like an honorable vessel is there for the benefit of others.

Notice the relationship between personal holiness and focusing on others. A person who indulges in sin is indulging in self. A person who focuses on holiness is focusing on God and on those whom God loves. A leader whose life is characterized by purity is going to be more capable of truly caring for others.

Example, you see someone in a leadership position and you respect him or her. You see how others look at that person and you wish that others would look at you with that same respect. So, you aspire to be a leader so that you will get that same affirmation. That is a disaster waiting to happen. What is the goal? The goal is respect. The goal is affirmation. The goal is influence. The goal may even be power, or money or sex. What all those things have in common is that they are self-centered goals and leadership in the church is nothing more than a covering that is used as a means to get that goal. The covering is trying to hide something.

Personal holiness is essential for every believer and leaders have to set the pace. (v.21 – "*If anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable...*" what is that and what does that look like?) Do you make it a habit to confess your sins? Do you ask God to reveal your

sins so that you can confess them, be forgiven, and grow in Christlikeness? An honorable vessel is one that is cleansed from sin, which means that it is ready to be used. So, let's put this together with v.15. A good worker does his best to handle the Word properly so that he is not ashamed. He is not ashamed because he is saying what the Word says. But there is another edge to this sword, isn't there. A good worker not only handles the Word, but a good vessel is handled by the Word. This servant is affected by the Word that he teaches and is serious about keeping his heart pure and mind pure and actions pure because the gospel and the church is worth it! The word that he handles exposes areas of inconsistency, or unbelief, or idolatry.

So, what kind of a vessel are you? Is your life characterized by personal holiness? Is confessing sin a regular part of your relationship with Christ? All of this sets up these commands in vs. 22-23.

2. What are you running from and running to? (22-23)

Have you ever been so terrified that you ran faster than you can ever remember? I was working at a camp one summer and on this particular night I was assigned to security and was walking patrol. Walking security at a camp with a bunch of woods is scary enough, but we had some issues, like we found a body by the camp lake just before the first week of campers and the victim had just been killed. So, we, as the staff, were understandably a bit jumpy. I'm already a bit keyed up when me and my partner Dave came upon a skunk. All I could imagine was getting sprayed by that thing, so I took off running as fast as I could and turned around to see if the skunk was coming after me. The good news was, it wasn't. The bad news was, there was a telephone pole in front me. The good news was, I didn't hit it. The bad news was, I ran right into the steel cable that helped to hold it in position. That about knocked me senseless and took the wind right out of me. But, I want you to think of running for your life because that is the intensity of this verb "flee."

A. Run from youthful passions. (22a)

Once again, Paul uses it with the force of a command as he does elsewhere. We are commanded to flee sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6.18), flee idolatry (1 Cor. 10.14), flee the love of money (1 Timothy 6.11) and here Timothy, like all of us is commanded to flee youthful passions. I'm guessing here, but Paul addresses this issue in Timothy's life back in his first letter to him. Because of the amount of time these two spent together, or because Paul is just a seasoned veteran in the gospel ministry, he wisely cautions Timothy to guard his personal purity. But, shunning, resisting, staying away is only part of the battle for us. Running from sin must be accompanied by running to Christlikeness, otherwise, we will run from one sin only to replace it with another.

For example, we are inundated with stories of people who lost 423 lbs in 28 days on the new fiberlogic, soymango, brusselgarlic diet. In many cases, people who did not care about their bodies, now care only about their bodies. It's the only thing they talk about. If you only avoid certain sins or certain weaknesses, but in the process, you do not pursue

Christ, you will only replace one idol with another. In fact, you flee youthful passions by pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace.

What are younger, more immature aspiring leaders in the church known for? Is it not being a bit more argumentative and assertive? It seems that every new generation in the church is marked by guys who think that everyone before them has done it all wrong, and church would be awesome if we would just do it this new way. C. S. Lewis calls this attitude “chronological snobbery” and I think that this is what Paul is cautioning Timothy with. Sure, he should flee sexual immorality, but youthful passions is more than that. It is also the tendency to be quick-tempered, rather than patient, and impulsive rather than careful. This is good counsel for everyone. But, let me address those of you who are 35 and under. Look, my generation knows that just because we have done certain things in certain ways for many years, does not make them right, just as just because something is new does not make it wrong. But old is not necessarily wrong either, neither is new necessarily right. We are all tempted to only know and listen to those who think like we do and it is such a gift to the body of Christ when we take the time to listen to one another. If you are an older member of this congregation and you spend time with a younger member and you observe this younger member pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace with great intentionality, you will be glad and encouraged. In fact, if you see gospel fruit in this person’s life, then if they have a new idea about a thing or two, you really don’t care, do you?

B. Run after Christ. (22b)

When you see someone pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace, no matter what their age is, you are blessed and challenged. So, how does someone pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace? What does Paul actually expect Timothy to do? Well, whatever it is, he expects Timothy to do it with other believers. Look at the end of v.22. At the very least, pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace, means to intentionally seek to look more like Christ in these 4 areas. If I was discipling you and you wanted me to help you grow in these areas, I would have you do several things:

- 1) Read the gospels over and over and over.

I would want you to be very familiar with the life of Christ. Now, I would like to think that most of you read the Bible everyday, but I doubt it. So, here is my challenge for you for this week. Read 4 chapters of Matthew everyday this week. At the end of the week you will have read through the gospel of Matthew. But I want you to do more than just read, I want you to look while you read. Look at how Christ taught and modeled righteousness. Look at how Christ taught and modeled faith, love and peace. Take a piece of paper and put 4 columns on it and at the top of each column write, Righteousness, faith, love and peace. Then in each column write the reference when you come across an example of what it is or what it isn’t.

I read the first 4 chapters of Matthew this week, out loud and it took me 10.45. Every day read those 4 chapters and look for examples of righteousness, faith, love and peace. Put

those references in the columns and then at the end of the week, discuss what you found with another person who agrees to do the same thing. If you did this with all four gospels, you could complete this study in a month.

- 2) Pray for these areas to increase in your life.

Pray that you would grow in righteousness, faith, love and peace.

C. **Avoid unnecessary controversies.** (23)

If your child had emergency surgery this week, your life would be rightly consumed by it. Everything else would be on hold. Things that were important last week are irrelevant this week. When we are dealing with life and death issues, it has a way of putting perspective on other things. Beloved, that is really how we should be affected by gathering together for worship. We should be confronted with the truth about God and life and death and the importance and urgency of this should help us realize what matters and what doesn't.

A wise person knows what is worth fighting about and what isn't. When you fight about things that do not really matter, eventually you won't fight about the things that do. And when you fight about things that do not really matter, then the mud from the fight gets everyone dirty and there isn't anything profitable that comes from it.

This is acutely pertinent to our use of social media. Last year, a friend of mine wrote an article entitled: 12 Questions to Ask Yourself Before Posting Something on Social Media. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/12-questions-to-ask-yourself-before-posting-something-online>

I put a link to the article in my sermon notes that will be on line tomorrow. But, here are the 12 things:

- 1) Will it edify? Or significantly inform a useful conversation?
- 2) Will it be easily misunderstood?
- 3) Will it reach the right audience?
- 4) Will it help my evangelism?
- 5) Will it bring unnecessary and unhelpful controversy?
- 6) Will it embarrass or offend?
- 7) Will it convey care?
- 8) Will it make people better appreciate someone else?
- 9) Is it boasting?
- 10) Is the tone appropriate?
- 11) Is it wrong to say nothing?
- 12) What do others advise?

These warnings of things to run from and things to run to are then summarized by a series of descriptions that are to characterize the life of a leader so that the lives of the church

members and therefore the feel, and culture of the church becomes like this. I've summarized these final verses of chapter into a question.

3. What is the tone of your life? (24-26)

Notice that the person who pursues righteousness and faith is focusing on such important and eternal issues that he has no time and no appetite for ignorant controversies.

The targeting and attempted murder of congressman this week is an awful example of this reality. Basic civility seems so uncommon. Using an assault rifle is easy to condemn and we should. But, this aggressive, angry, and argumentative tone is not only out there, professing believers can have this same tone as well? And I wonder if some of our undiscerning use of technology hasn't contributed to this? Some of you struggle with making eye contact and listening to someone else for more than 40 seconds because of your constant urge to check your phone. Unplugging from your phone is worse than detoxing from heroin for some. Being constantly entertained and intrigued with clickbaiting sites harms your ability and practice to think deeply and talk deeply about anything. You live in a constant state of demanding entertainment. Conversations are short. Relationships are not really necessary. Critical thinking is short-circuited. Everything in life is supposed to be right here, right now, at the right price and with minimal inconvenience. You do not have to be kind to everyone. You can just block them. You do not have to patiently endure evil, you can just unfriend them. Correct your opponent with gentleness? There's no time for that. Just flame them and be done with it. What Paul describes here is so different than the anger and character assassination that takes place in arguments even among Christians and it is wrong. It is an affront to Christ and the church when a person is harsh and unloving because he is so determined to make his point. If we are to treat false teachers with care and deep concern, how much more should we treat one another when we are disagreeing about something that is not a major doctrinal issue? The tone of the way you disagree often says more about you, than it does the issue. Even when we have to deal with false teaching, we do so with grace. How do you live with that kind of tone in your life?

I think that Paul's use the phrase (v.24) "*the Lord's servant*" is fundamental to this entire issue. Servant could and perhaps should be translated slave or bond slave. We are owned by the Lord and therefore have no rights. I have no rights; I do not need to defend myself. I can and should defend the gospel, but even when I do that, I do so in a way that reflects the message of the gospel, meaning humble, kind, loving and deeply concerned for others. What is the tone of this person's life? Here is a person who clearly loves others more than he or she loves self. He doesn't care about being proven right as much as he cares about caring for the other person. He is not defensive and argumentative and when he needs to correct his opponents, he does it with gentleness and hope that God will rescue the person.

When I read this text, I am convicted. (explain)

But, there is more, when I read this text, it points me to Christ (explain).