

# By the Grace

## *Our Example to the World*

April 18, 2021

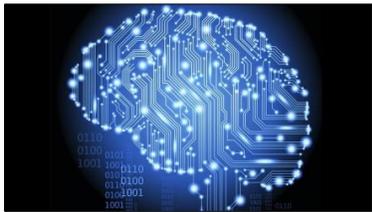
Welcome to where we're leveling with ourselves regarding our example to our world.

I'm going to give you the answer before I ask today's question. Ready? The answer is: "I am!" Here's the question: **Who's the worst sinner you know?** Now, on a scale of one to ten, **how good of an example for Christ are you on an average daily basis?** Be brutally honest with yourself.



The Apostle Paul, who was used mightily by the Lord, says:

Here is a *trustworthy* saying that deserves *full* acceptance: [In other words, every believer should consider it, adopt it, and repeat it as their own] Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. – 1 Timothy 1:15 NIV



If we all put *that* on our car mirror, and glanced at it when we got out to wherever we go, I can only imagine what an incredible impact it would have on the grace we offer to *others*. Now **this isn't about beating ourselves up, but beating our pride back and down to where it belongs.**

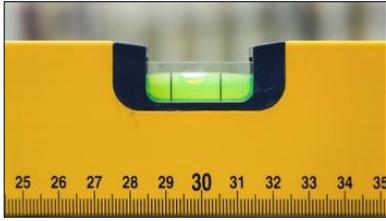
I urge you [writes Paul] ... in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy [dedicated to serving] and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform [be shaped] any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. ... For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. – Romans 12:1-3 NIV

This doesn't mean that God supernaturally implants some kind of faith-chip in our heart that programs and pre-determines our level of belief and trust in Him.

For God does not give the Spirit by measure. – John 3:34 NKJ

Therefore **any and every limit placed on God's Spirit is on us**. So we need to take a hard look at the measure of faith we've allowed the Lord to give us (which includes the freedom – that comes from embracing His grace – to be authentic, transparent, and honest about our broken self with our self and God and those He's placed around us), and judge ourselves by *that*.

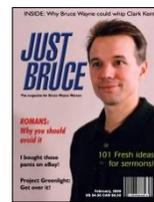
Because **a renewed mind desires genuine humility**. Not false humility. Not self-condemnation. But a realistic appraisal based on "the measure of faith" He's given us; because **it directly relates to the time we've given Him, in His Word, in prayer, in worship, and in our conversations with others**. That's how we *true* ourselves up and *keep* ourselves true.



In construction, **when something is out of true it means it's not correctly aligned or positioned.** And you true it by leveling, squaring, or measuring. And there's only one true God, the measure of all things, which means **all things are true to the degree they align to Him.** Which is why we must daily adjust our thoughts, words, and deeds to be more like Him.

But **if you want to be true, you gotta level with yourself,** and the Lord, and others. And that's the part of the process we seem to find the most unpleasant if not painful. *Most of us enjoy thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought;* which is why Paul says: **"I say to every one of you"**. Although inflated egos are destructive to the soul, they're big business in this world.

An un-renewed mindset reflexively embraces ever-increasing self-centeredness. So be aware of the pattern of this world's untrue, unconscious influence on *you*. First there was LIFE, a magazine that celebrated every aspect of living down here. Then came People, after all, they're the most important *part* of life. Then came Us, I mean, who wants to waste our time reading about *them*? And finally, SELF, in all-caps. Know what I'm waiting for? JUST BRUCE.



It's interesting how Paul sets the example of the attitude he's calling for, by saying, **"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you"**. Paul has a lot of bragging rights. He could've said, "By the power and authority given me as verified by miraculous demonstrations". But instead of "by the power" or "by the authority" he says, **"by the grace"**. Because, he has a good grasp of the grace and mercy of God that got him to where he is, as undeserving as he was. I want to give you the context – before and after – Paul writes this to Timothy. He begins by saying:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that He considered *me* trustworthy, appointing *me* to His service. Even though I was once a *blasphemer and a persecutor* [a.k.a. Christian killer] *and a violent man,* – 1 Timothy 1:12-13 NIV

Notice *that*. Because *this* is *cool*. Last week we saw where Saul (a.k.a. Paul) quoted Psalm 18:

Christ has become a Servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth ... so that the *Gentiles* may glorify God for His *mercy*, as it is written: **"Therefore I will praise You among the Gentiles;"** – Romans 15:9 NIV

But take a look at the beginning and end of Psalm 18:

A Psalm of David ... on the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies *and* from the hand of Saul. ... You have delivered me from the violent man. *Therefore* I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles, – Psalm 18:48-49 NKJ

[Paul goes on encouraging Timothy] Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a *violent man*, I was shown *mercy* because I acted in ignorance and *unbelief*. [That's what gets mercy? Yes. Disobedience gets discipline; revolt gets wrath; but ignorance and unbelief get mercy – an opportunity to know God's grace; what you then do determines what comes next] The *grace* of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the *faith* and *love* that are in Christ Jesus. [Now] Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance [by those who assess themselves with sober judgment]: Christ Jesus came into the world [for one *huge* reason] to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But *for* that very *reason* I was shown mercy *so that* in *me*, the *worst of sinners*, Christ Jesus might display His immense *patience* as an *example* for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life. – 1 Timothy 1:13-16 NIV



The Lord loves to display His incredible, merciful, longsuffering patience; because **turning us around and setting us free is comparable to how a tug boat turns a battleship 180 degrees: one bump at a time.** So the best thing we can show this world is how much patience the Lord must have tugging on the heart of someone like *me!* With *that* in mind let's ask that question again: **scale of 1-10, how good of an example for God's grace and Jesus' patience are you, on an average daily basis?** Now, Paul had established the church in Ephesus, a seaside megacity in modern-day Turkey. It was at its prime in Paul's day, second only to Rome, with a bustling population larger than Miami! It was their Rome away from Rome. This is the 21,000 seat arena for the Miami Heat; whereas this is the 25,000 seat arena for the Ephesus heat. You see:

There arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all." ... Soon the whole city was in an uproar ... and rushed as one man into the *theater*. Paul *wanted* to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message *begging* him *not* to venture into the *theater*. ... they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" – Acts 19:23-34 NIV

About eight years later, Paul is traveling with Timothy, revisiting the churches Paul has planted. And when they get to Ephesus, Paul finds false teachers, swindlers, inappropriate overseers, and a serious lack of superintending. So **Paul, being on a tight schedule, persuades the timid and reluctant Timothy to stay behind and take charge.** Later, in 1st Timothy, he even has to write:

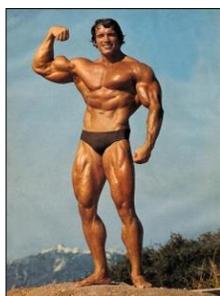
As I *urged* you when I went into Macedonia, *stay* there in Ephesus ... – 1 Timothy 1:3 NIV

How would you feel if God said: **“How about you go to Miami and get her straightened out.”**

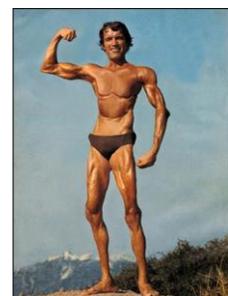


No wonder Timothy’s about to be immortalized in Scripture for his bouts of diarrhea! This 25,000 seat public theater – which was 200 years old when Tim was put in charge of Miami, I mean Ephesus – is one of two places we’re pretty sure Timothy sat. The other is this 50 seat public toilet; a very modern convenience – and perhaps answer to prayer – in Tim’s day.

<sup>1:3</sup> As I *urged* you when I went into Macedonia, *stay* there in Ephesus so that you may *command* certain men not to teach false doctrines ... <sup>3:14</sup> Although I hope to come to you soon, [he doesn’t] I am writing you these instructions so that, <sup>3:15</sup> if I am delayed, [he is] you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household ... <sup>4:11</sup> *Command* and teach these things. ... <sup>4:12</sup> Set an example for the believers [you be the true] in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. <sup>4:13</sup> Until I come, [which he won’t because of prison; hence *2nd Timothy*] devote yourself to the *public* reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. ... <sup>4:15</sup> Be diligent in these matters; *give yourself wholly* to them, so that everyone may see your progress. <sup>4:16</sup> Watch your life and doctrine *closely*. *Persevere* in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. ... [Oh, and] <sup>5:23</sup> No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities. [Abstaining might’ve had an appearance or holiness; but it’s like going to a 3rd world location and drinking straight from the bucket. Not smart. The regular folk mixed acidic wine in their water to kill the stomach bugs. Paul goes on to use Tim’s embarrassing condition as an illustration] <sup>5:24</sup> Some men’s sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but [as with stomach bugs that stem from bad water] those of some men follow later. <sup>5:25</sup> Likewise, the *good works* of some are *clearly evident*, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden. [Like you-know-what] – 1 Timothy selections NKJ



But like a bodybuilder who oils up, pumps up, tans up, and Speedos up, in order to showcase his muscles in peak performance, **our pride likes to flex our spiritual strengths to present a polished product, rather than reveal any embarrassing weaknesses that preceded it or remain in spite of it.** We’re so afraid that our track record of failings will somehow prove that God won’t use damaged goods like us, when exactly the opposite is true.



So Paul encourages Timothy by going first and being boldly, brutally honest about his past. “I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man ... I’m the worst!”

But for that *very* reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life. – 1 Timothy 1:16 NIV

What has more value when having a deep conversation: **telling someone how much they need Jesus, or letting them see how much you did, and still do?** That’s why ex-addicts make the best counselors at rehab centers. They can relate. They know what another addict is going through.



And when addicts know they've been there, and still struggle, **they want to hear their story, and their victory, and their process, and any ongoing struggles.** The power of your story comes from letting us in and letting us know *why* you needed God's grace, and *how* you received it in the first place, through faith in Christ, and *what's* happened since, and *where* you're at now.

**When sincere humility meets bold transparency the result is inspiring.** And we accomplish this by leveling with ourselves, confessing to our Father, and sharing with others our story: our historical faults and flaws as well as our future hopes of overcoming those that remain.

**It's not thinking poorly of our value, but rightly of our condition.** We tend to think way too highly, or way too lowly of ourselves. The enemy doesn't care which. Both are sin. Because both are untrue. But sober self-analysis considers the full spectrum of our faults and flaws, along with strengths and skills, and then, most importantly, **our true value in the eyes of the one true God.**

In the big picture, **sin was never intended to keep us *from* the cross, but to drive us *to* it.** And then to help others find their way by our example ... of God's grace and Jesus' patience. Why else would Dad put up with it? So, **how true are you?**

Because it's now up to timid li'l you and me to fight the good fight, and show *our* mega-city the one and only faithful and true source of security, identity, and victory.