

THE PROS AND CONS OF MINISTRY

STUDY SIX

Making a Lasting Difference

2 Timothy 3:10–14

If you want to make a lasting difference, only one thing matters—that your life counts for eternity. Such a life never just happens. It’s never automatic. You’re not born like that. It’s the direct result of who you are, what you do, and why you do it.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

the old saying goes, “If you give a person a fish, you will feed him or her for a day. . . .” Giving a fish to someone who is starving, contributing money to one who suffered a job loss, or extending an encouraging word to a brokenhearted friend will certainly make a positive difference. Though the impact is immediate, it is often temporary.

Teaching someone to fish, however, takes much more work, but the effort makes a lasting difference!

This *Searching the Scriptures* study examines the end of the apostle Paul’s life and considers how his positive impact for the gospel of Jesus Christ has lasted centuries after his death.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Making a deep and lasting difference in others must flow out of the eternal difference God has made in us. Prepare yourself for this study by asking God to strengthen you as you seek to impact others for eternity.

Father, thank You for changing my life. If it had not been for Your mercy and Your Son's loving sacrifice, I'd still be lost in darkness. Equip me today, through my study of Your Word, to be a light that makes a lasting difference in others' lives. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The letter of 2 Timothy is the apostle Paul's swansong. As his own execution loomed over him, the experienced apostle wrote to his protégé to share some final advice on how to maintain a faithful ministry. Toward the end of the letter, Paul offered Timothy some very pointed advice on making a lasting difference by swimming upstream against this world's current.

In [2 Timothy 3:1–9](#), Paul conducts an audit of the context in which Timothy—and all future servants of the gospel—would minister. The report is pretty grim. Read what he said in these verses. What stands out to you most?

Yes, the condition of the world is hostile to the God's message, yet such circumstances are fertile soil for planting gospel seeds that will yield eternal fruit. Turn to [3:10–14](#) to see what advice Paul offered to Timothy.



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Observation: Remaining Faithful

It's natural to come to Scripture with the burning question, "What do I do?" While application is the fruit of Bible study, it must grow out of a careful understanding of the text. Observing a passage is like tilling fertile soil—the essential first step in the process.¹ Slowly and carefully read [2 Timothy 3:10–14](#), and remember that these observations will produce fruitful application.

With what transition word did Paul begin this section in [3:10](#)? What kind of logical relationship does this word create between this section and the previous one?

In [3:10](#), Paul acknowledged that he was able to maintain a posture of faith, patience, love, and endurance amid the world's hostile conditions. According to [3:11](#), how did Paul cultivate these characteristics?

According to [3:12–13](#), what bleak future reality did Paul exhort Timothy to anticipate?



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Despite the challenges that awaited Timothy, what exhortation did Paul offer in 2 Timothy 3:14?

Paul is near death, and Timothy has more years in front of him than behind him for ministry. Timothy is neck-deep in ministry in the city of Ephesus. Paul is interested in Timothy making a difference. In fact, I'm convinced he's more interested in that than Timothy is. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Remembrance and Continuance

Interpretation is like planting seeds and watering them. We must understand the meaning of the text before applying its fruit to our lives. Based on his study of 2 Timothy 3:10–14, Pastor Chuck Swindoll determined one timeless theological principle essential for anyone who desires to make a lasting difference:

A powerful link exists between remembrance and continuance.

How do you see this principle demonstrated in Paul's example and in his final advice to Timothy?



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How is this principle instructive for Christians today? What should they remember as they seek to continue in faithfulness to God?

There's a powerful link between what we remember from those who taught us, those who were our mentors, those who established us in our spiritual formation, and the way we pursue God today. That's what Paul is underscoring here. "Remember the things you learned from me, and then continue in them, Timothy." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Remembering and Continuing a Legacy of Faithfulness

Timothy probably received this letter from his dear friend with a smile, yet his smile likely sank as he read the challenging words Paul penned. Paul was handing off the torch of ministry to Timothy, and the road that lay before this young servant of the gospel would be treacherous.

Yet as Timothy continued the work of God, he could look back and remember one who faced very similar circumstances. Millennia before the time of Paul and Timothy, Moses carried the same torch of God's plan. He had delivered the Israelites from slavery and led them out of Egypt. And when Moses reached the end of his life, he passed the torch on to Joshua.

According to [Joshua 1:2](#), what responsibility did Joshua have after Moses died?



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What promise did God make to Joshua in *Joshua 1:5*?

According to *1:6–9*, how was Joshua to act in light of these promises? (Note the repetition in *1:6, 7, and 9*.)

Be strong and courageous! Remembering God's faithfulness was essential for Joshua as he prepared to lead the Israelites into Canaan. It was essential for Timothy as he carried on the apostolic work Paul began. And it is essential for anyone who desires to pick up the torch of ministry today.



Application: Qualities of Difference Makers

You may be wondering, *How can I know I will make a lasting difference for the gospel?* Pastor Chuck points out three characteristics of those who will make a lasting difference:

1. *They're not motivated by money.* While possessing wealth is not a sin, it can become an idol when it is one's primary pursuit.
2. *They're not interested in impressing others.* They recognize that their approval and applause is worthless compared to remaining faithful to God.
3. *They're not afraid of risk, hardship, criticism, or sacrifice.* Those who desire to make an eternal impact must endure and overcome these challenges.



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Which of these three characteristics proves most challenging for you to embrace? Internal desires, external pressure, and fear of the unknown affect everyone, but the Holy Spirit provides the strength necessary to overcome these obstacles!

Who has made a lasting difference in your life? Who has made you the person you are today? What lessons did these people teach you? What character qualities did they pass on to you?

Has God placed a “Timothy” in your life? How would you like to make a lasting difference in this person’s life? What would you like to pass on?

So . . . do you want to make a difference?



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Paul warned Timothy that doing so wouldn't be easy. Yet remaining faithful to God despite the struggle will be worth it. Reflect on the rich heritage of faith you've inherited. As you look ahead, be strong and courageous! Invest what you've received in the lives of others. God wants to make a lasting difference through you.



A FINAL PRAYER

Offer your own prayer to God as you conclude this series. Ask Him to use the things you've learned to equip you to serve Him in whatever ministry He has prepared for you.

Father,

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

