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# **Standing the Test of Time**

**# 1225-A**

**Series: I Timothy**

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# Standing the Test of Time

There you are, standing like a tiny insect in the midst of an ocean of giants. Breathtaking beauty surrounds you. As far as your eyes can see, there are the lines of the Master Craftsman reaching upwards seemingly to eternity. You are standing at the base of those towering trees in the forests of the Great Northwest. Few treasures capture the awesomeness of God's majesty like these monuments of greatness. Just what is it that so captivates the soul? Is it their height? No. There are buildings that seem as tall, but they don't invite the same kind of awe. Is it the magnificence of their branches? No, the wingspan of great jet airplanes might invite more astonishment than that. Is it the ruggedness of their bark? Perhaps, but there is more to it than that.

What makes those trees so incredible is that they have *stood the test of time*. They have weathered life's storms and only grown more beautiful from their onslaughts. Torrential rains have beaten upon their brow. Mighty winds have hurled their fury without mercy upon them, but still they stand. And not only have they not fallen beneath the load of life's terrors, they have grown through it all. With every passing season, they reach nearer the heavens. With every year that etches its autograph in the depth of their trunk, their branches reach out still farther as if to say, "Gather beneath me all you who seek shelter, I will protect you".

The years that take their toll on the flowers, the grass, and animals in the forest only seem to enhance the beauty of these mighty, towering giants. In short, they *stand the test of time*. Time, that great enemy of us all, actually becomes their ally.

The Word of God seems to indicate that those marvelous exhibits of endurance and growth are but portraits of spiritual truths. They are what we are supposed to be...as the years go by...provided, that is, that we, too, *stand the test of time*.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the

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seat of the scornful;

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.

He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

(Psalm 1:1-3 NKJV)

The older I get the more convinced I become that there is no greater measure of a man than that. The size of the crowds that a man draws is no measure of his greatness. The amount of money he commands is no measure of his greatness. The accolades he receives at the hands of his peers might be impressive, to be sure, but even that is no measure of his greatness.

Real greatness is not measurable until the ravages of time have made their mark, and the glamour of personality has given way to the timelessness of character. Then, and only then, can we determine whether or not a person is indeed an evergreen.

Paul seemed to be looking for evergreens, didn't he? As he canvassed the Ephesian church for men who could lead it on into the next generation, he seemed to be constantly scratching beneath the facade of performance trying to find whether or not solid gold was hidden there. He wanted to know if men were so grounded in the Word that the winds of adversity would only make them stronger, rather than cause their branches to fall beneath the weight of the storm. He was looking for *a few good men*. And those would have to be men who would still be standing when the storms had passed, and the years had melted away. He was looking for men whose lives would *stand the test of time*.

And so we come to the end of Paul's questionnaire for Christian leaders. We come to the bottom line. We come to the ultimate measuring stick. We come to the portrait painted by the grains of sand as they drop ever so slowly through the hourglass of life.

We have listened as Paul asked us questions about the character of the man of God. Then he turned his emphasis to the behavior of the man of God. Finally, he reached into the recesses of our lives and tried to determine how we would look in the real world, in the marketplace, in the home, and finally, in the church. And so we have come full cycle. For that is why, you recall, the questions were being asked in the first place. Paul was

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trying to determine which men were leadership material.

The final two phrases in I Timothy 3 dealing with the shepherds of the church had to do with a man's ability to instruct, and a man's ability to endure...the test of time. And it is to those final two measures that we address this concluding lesson on Christian leadership.

### THE TEST OF TEACHING

Issue number one is recorded by Paul with one Greek word (didaktikon). Most translations record it "apt to teach". Some use the phrase "able to teach". It is a test that apparently must be applied to God's man at the church if he is to be God's man in the church.

At first glance, this would appear to limit who could serve in positions of spiritual authority in the Body of Christ. Not everyone has the same gift. A Board of Elders made up only of those with the gift of teaching would not have a balanced perspective of leadership, to be sure. So if Paul meant that, either most of us would disqualify ourselves at that point (if not before), or we would have a seemingly unbalanced view. Where would we be without those with the gift of mercy to sensitize us to hurting people, or those with the gift of prophecy to sensitize us to error, or those with the gift of giving to sensitize us to wise stewardship, or those with the gift of administration to guide us in delegating and training? If everyone was to be alike, then the whole thrust of Paul's argument in I Corinthians 12 would be invalid. He began,

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you  
to be ignorant: (I Corinthians 12:1 NKJV)

Then he added in verse 4:

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

He describes and defines those gifts in the following verses, then adds:

If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing?  
If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?

But now God has set the members, each one of them in the  
body just as He pleased.

And if they were all one member, where would the body  
be? (I Corinthians 12:17-19 NKJV)

So Paul obviously was not saying that to be an effective

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shepherd in the church you must have the gift of teaching. Yet most all commentators agree that the word used here means “able to teach”.

So the key must be what is meant by the word “teach”. A brief trip through the New Testament will give us a few clues. Let’s see what they are:

### 1- Teaching is more than communication. (Matthew 5:19-21)

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:19,20 NKJV)

(He is saying that you’ll be in big trouble.)

Now the Scribes were the super teachers. They had Master’s Degrees in instruction. They knew *how* to communicate. But they had two problems:

- 1- They weren’t teaching the “right stuff”.
- 2- They weren’t living what they were teaching.

The Pharisees were the religious authorities. They knew all about the Scriptures. But they didn’t personally know the author. Jesus said, “These guys aren’t teachers; even though they are skilled in teaching.” So it means more than communication. It means knowing truth and living the truth you know. Otherwise, you’re not qualified to teach, even if teaching is your specialty. Maybe you teach school but you can’t teach truths in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### 2- Real teaching must be energized by spiritual power or it is only academic instruction.

In Matthew 13:54b, we read:

He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, “Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?”  
(NKJV)

Matthew 7:28,29 adds:

And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching,

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for He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. (NKJV)

The Scribes were biblical authorities without spiritual authority. They had all the knowledge, but none of the power. But, ah, when Jesus taught, their spirits were stirred within them; they thought they had heard from heaven, and they had. So there is more to teaching than the ability to communicate and a knowledge of the information. *Teaching, Beloved, is Spirit-energized communication of eternal Truth.*

But must it be done in a classroom setting? Is that all teaching is? I don't think so. According to Mark 10:1-12, and Mark 12:14-17, Jesus was teaching when he was answering questions about spiritual things. According to Mark 11:17, Jesus was teaching when He corrected them for errors. According to John 8:2-11, Jesus was teaching when He was settling disputes in the church. The passage says that He taught them and that they brought to Him a woman taken in adultery and He dealt with it. Boy did He!

3- So teaching is not limited to classroom instruction. It is all forms of application of spiritual truth to daily life.

4- Communicating truth through music is teaching. Colossians 3:16 reminds us:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (NKJV)

So the act of teaching is more than Bible instruction. It is *any form of discipleship designed to glorify God.*

5- It may even be done through correspondence. Paul wrote in II Thessalonians 2:15,

Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle [letter]. (NKJV)

What you read is as important as what you hear. Paul was next to Christ, the greatest teacher ever. But his platform was a Roman prison and his PA system was the mail.

6- The crux of the teacher's role then, is that of spiritual maturity. Hebrews 5:12 and 14 say:

In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's

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word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good and evil.

(Hebrews 5:12,14 NIV)

7- A teacher is also one who lives the life he teaches. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 4:17,

For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

(NKJV)

8- A person does not necessarily need to be teaching adults to be considered a teacher. Deuteronomy 4:10c reminds us

“Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.” (NKJV)

Some of the most incredible teachers I know are those who teach children. Some of the most faithful teachers I know are those who teach children. Some of the most humble teachers I know are those who teach children. They don't get all the acclaim. They don't receive all the accolades. But they are teachers, indeed. If you want an interesting experience and some of you do this anyway, when you take your children to Sunday school walk the halls and look in on the classes of children and watch those who are teaching them. Praise God, they are reaping and have double rewards because Scripture says, “Blessed are they,” and “when you receive one of these little ones, you receive Me.”

A teacher, then, is a mature believer, who is empowered by God to communicate, by word and life, the spiritual Truth entrusted to him.

It may be done one-on-one. It may be done through exhortation or encouragement. It may be done by example, by letter, by leading in musical worship. It may be done in a small classroom with a handful of children, or in a great cathedral before thousands of adults. But it must be done by one who has a genuine walk with God, who is Spirit-empowered, who lives the life He teaches, and whose teaching is designed to change the lives of those he teaches.

And the man of God who is to lead the church must be “apt to teach”...he must be able to walk the walk, and communicate *in whatever form his spiritual gift enables him*, to others the



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living truth he has received. It doesn't mean he needs a degree in theology, though he may. It doesn't mean he needs to stand before thousands, though he may. It only means he is able and available to share the reality of how to walk with God from a life that demonstrates what he shares.

### THE TEST OF TIME

Which brings us to the final issue in our handbook of spiritual leadership. Paul writes, finally, God's man, who would be ready to lead the church,

not a novice, lest being puffed up [lifted up] with pride he fall into the same condemnation of the devil.

(I Timothy 3:6 NKJV)

Before a man can lead, Paul says he must stand the test of time. He can't be new to the faith. He can't be young in his walk with God.

It doesn't matter how old he is chronologically, or how wise he is academically, or how successful he is from the world's perspective. That's not the issue. This is a *spiritual office*, and what matters is how spiritual he is, and whether or not his spirituality has stood the test of time.

The word "novice" used in the passage is the word "neophutos". It comes from the word "neos" which means new, and the word "phuo", meaning to spring up. It was a word used of newly-planted palm trees. It literally means, "not newly planted", "not a new convert".

Whether it meant new in the sense of years, or new in the sense of maturity is not known for sure. It would appear that it meant both. Some become more mature in one year than others are in ten. But never is a "new" convert to be given a place of visibility, or leadership, or authority. Not until they have stood the test of time.

The reason is clear. "Lest they, being lifted up with pride, fall into the condemnation of the devil". The key word in the phrase is the word "tuphoo" meaning to raise a smoke screen; to smolder; to be clouded or blinded so that you cannot see clearly". The cause of that blindness is pride. It is the very same thing that caused Satan's downfall, and perhaps is still the greatest single enemy the Christian has. Real spirituality is total dependence and pride is the enemy of total dependence.

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Now what is meant by “the condemnation of the devil”? There are many interpretations, but the most likely is that Paul is saying “don’t place a novice in spiritual leadership, lest he be clouded by the smokescreen of self-importance, and fall into the same pit that Satan did.”

If you take the Old Testament and watch carefully the manner in which God destined men for greatness, you cannot help but notice one common ingredient. Some had great talent; some had none. Some had authority; they were princes and kings, others were shepherds, or farmers. Some were learned men, students of the great teachers of their age; others were taken from the back side of the desert with no education at all.

Those were all variables. But they all had one thing in common. Time. God seemingly always called them, often exposed them to failure, then let them settle into those seemingly endless stretches of time when it appeared they were washed up, forgotten, unusable. Moses was in the desert herding his father-in-law’s sheep, but by the time God got hold of him, he was a real man. Joseph rotting in prison finishing up his life message so that God could finish using him. Abraham waiting, waiting, waiting for the promise. Elijah by that drying brook. Job sitting on that rock pile, seeming to die a second at a time while the clock ticked on; his pain went on, and nothing seemed to happen. They all thought that God had forgotten them.

Mo, how’s the ministry going? Abe, where’s the promise? What promise? Joe, where’s the family. What family? Job, where is God? God was taking his tender plants and setting them in the sunlight to ripen. Sometimes the heat seemed unbearable. Sometimes the wait seemed interminable. But always the results were predictable. Once they had gained God’s perspective of time, they were ready to be placed on the firing lines of eternity. Not before.

And almost always, God’s perception of time is far different than theirs. And they didn’t live in this jet age where microwaves cook in seconds what used to take hours, and planes take us in hours where it once took us days to go. They lived in an era of slowness, yet even then God seemed to be taking forever.

But anything worthwhile takes time. And a godly man is worthwhile. So God urges his young believers to become learners before they become teachers; to become servants before they are

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exalted; to experience grace before they teach it. God wants you, young Christian, to look for ways to serve, not for ways to be seen. Look for the menial tasks where you can prove yourself faithful, not the places of visibility where you will be exposed to the condemnation of pride.

If you exalt yourself, you are sure to be abased. If others would exalt you before you are ready, you are responsible to say, “no, thank you”. Just patiently wait for God to work in you the kind of maturity that only comes when you have stood *the test of time*.

Oh, to stand the test of time  
To stay before the Lord,  
Until through gentle nurturing  
He grows you through His Word.

Oh, to wait with godly patience  
As life’s trials He takes you through,  
And to know you cannot hurry  
The test of time designed for you.

So there you have it, God’s man must be apt to teach. He must allow God to do a work in his life and work through his life communicating that message. He may teach others and he may do it in 1000 different ways. “God’s man must not be a novice, must not be newly planted,” Paul says, “lest he look in the mirror and become unduly impressed by what he sees and fall as Satan fell.” I don’t know about you but the longer I live, the less impressed I think we ought to be with ourselves, and the more impressed we ought to be that God would even save, yet alone use the likes of us. I’m also convinced that gaining that perspective takes time. It takes getting wounded a time or two in the trenches of the battle. It takes weeping at the stench of sin in our lives. It takes marveling at the awesomeness of the grace of God. It involves waiting patiently in the shadows while life’s bitter blows help train us as others observe us in the eye of the storm. It may seem like forever, but in due time the Scripture says, if we faint not God will gently one day call to us. By now, we will have stopped expecting it, that’s important. And He’ll whisper in our ears, “Now, My child, you’re ready to be used.” Not because of your talent, not because of your training, but simply because faithfully, patiently, graciously, you have stood the test of time. Dear child of God, it is worth the wait.

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Let's pray.

*Our Father and our God,*

*We thank You that Your concept of time is not the same as ours. We are in a hurry. We're in a hurry to grow, we're in a hurry to be used, we're in a hurry to be seen, we're in a hurry to be great. We forget the only great one is God Himself. Your ways, Father, are so different from the world's ways. The world says if we make ourselves known, make ourselves seen, and strive and pull and push we'll be successful. Father, You've told us that he who would exalt himself must be humble, and he that would be greatest in the kingdom must be willing to be least. And the World doesn't understand that.*

*Somehow, Father, the world tells us we're in a hurry, but the Word tells us You are not. Somehow we get the idea from Paul, even this morning, that what You want us to do is to patiently minister where we are and stand the test of time.*

*Father, for some of us it seems like time is an eternity and we're so anxious for eternity to come. And yet, Father, we just cannot see what You're doing in our lives anymore than we can see the leaves blossom on the trees, and the trees growing to the heavens minute by minute and day by day. But after the years go by and we go back and look at the tree that was once a twig, we see that You have been about Your business. And we pray that You would do that in our lives faithfully until You come.*

*Amen.*

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