



World Christian Fellowship

www.wcflondon.com

wcflondon@gmail.com

Five Characteristics of a spiritual son!

Lessons We Can Learn from Timothy

1 Timothy 1:2 (NKJV)

"To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord."

The Crisis of Succession

In **1955**, the great preacher and theologian **A.W. Tozer** wrote with a prophetic clarity that still echoes today: ***"We are sending out thousands of preachers but very few true spiritual fathers."*** His words proved tragically accurate.

Consider what happened to one of the great missionary organisations of the twentieth century. For decades, it was a powerhouse of the gospel planting churches, sending missionaries, and translating Scriptures. At the helm was a man of God whose fire, doctrine, and commitment to Christ were absolutely uncompromising. He died having poured himself, without reservation, into the ministry.

But he had never invested himself deeply into a person. He had built a great organisation, but not a spiritual son. And when the next generation of leaders came in, the vision subtly

shifted. Programmes replaced passion. Budgets replaced prayer. Within two decades, what had once been a blazing torch was reduced to a smouldering wick.

The problem was not a lack of talent in the next generation. The problem was the absence of a true spiritual son, someone who had caught not just the vision.

But the spirit not just the methods,
But the heart not just the title,
But the character of the man of God who had gone before.

The Apostle Paul understood this danger more than anyone. He planted churches across the Gentile world **Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica** and as he neared the end of his life, his great concern was not buildings or budgets. It was this:

Who will carry the mantle?

Who will be me in the next generation?

Out of all the men he disciplined, trained, and travelled with **Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Titus**, and dozens more only two did he ever call "a true child in the faith." One of them was Timothy.

"To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord." — 1 Timothy 1:2

What made Timothy a true spiritual son?

What does it mean for us today to be or to raise up true spiritual sons and daughters?

Let us walk through five characteristics that marked Timothy, drawn from the pages of this great epistle.

1. Saving Faith.

A true spiritual son begins with genuine salvation. This may seem obvious, but it was not a given in the church at Ephesus. There were those in positions of leadership who had never truly been born again.

Paul makes this striking observation later in the epistle:

1 Timothy 6:20-21, *O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—²¹ by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen.*

The word "strayed" here is powerful. These were people who claimed faith professing believers, church members, even leaders but who had missed the mark entirely when it came to saving faith. Their faith was not genuine.

Timothy was different.

1 Timothy 6:10, *But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.*

Paul calls him "***O man of God***" a title reserved in the Old Testament for the most uniquely called prophets and servants of the Lord.

His faith was unfeigned without hypocrisy, without performance, and without pretence.

2 Timothy 1:5, *"when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also."*

Timothy had been raised in the Scriptures by a faithful mother and grandmother.

When Paul arrived in Lystra preaching the gospel, Timothy witnessed extraordinary things. A lame man healed, a crowd that thought Paul and Barnabas were gods, and most remarkably, Paul stoned and left for dead, only to rise and walk back into the city to continue preaching.

That dramatic encounter with the gospel planted the seed of genuine, lasting faith in Timothy.

At his baptism, Paul writes, Timothy **1 Timothy 6:12**, *Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

His faith was public, declared, and real.

Modern Illustration.

Picture a young man who grew up in the church.

- He was baptised at ten,
- Sang on the worship team at fourteen,
- Went on three mission trips before he turned eighteen, and
- could quote more verses than most of the adults in his small group.

By every visible measure, he looked like a model believer. Then, in his first year at university, a professor casually dismissed the resurrection in a lecture, and the young man realised he had no idea why he believed what he believed only that he had always believed it.

That crisis did not destroy his faith, but it exposed that he had never truly possessed one.

Months later, alone in his dorm room, he stopped performing and actually surrendered to Christ for the first time. He did not need new information. He needed new birth.

This happens constantly in churches today.

Church attendance, a Christian upbringing, worship-team involvement, even years of ministry activity can all exist quite comfortably alongside a heart that has never been regenerated.

Genuine salvation is not inherited from parents, absorbed from a youth group culture, or assumed because of religious activity that it is a personal, Spirit-wrought new birth (**John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17**).

Application

Then: You cannot be a true spiritual son or daughter without genuine salvation. Not a cultural Christianity, not a form of godliness, but a living, transforming encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. Before anything else can be built, the foundation of saving faith must be real.

Now: In an age of nominal, cultural, and even 'Instagram' Christianity, ask honestly:

- **Would my private life look any different if I stopped attending church altogether?**
- Am I trusting in my baptism, my church membership, or my Christian family heritage or in Christ Himself?
- **Have I ever consciously repented and personally received Christ, or have I simply never known anything else?**

Like **Lois and Eunice** poured genuine faith into Timothy, parents and grandparents today have the same opportunity and the same danger.

It is possible to hand down religious habits without ever handing down the gospel. Make sure the faith you are passing on is one that could survive a hard question in a university lecture hall, not merely one that survives inside the four walls of a church building.

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anything else can be built, the foundation of saving faith must be real.

2. Continuing Obedience

Genuine faith is always proved by continuing obedience. A single moment of decision is the beginning what follows is the measure of whether that faith is true.

1 Timothy 4:6, *"If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed."*

The phrase "which you have carefully followed" or "which you have always continued to observe" is one of the most beautiful things Paul says about Timothy.

It speaks of a consistent, unbroken pattern of walking in the truth. Not perfect, but persistent.

Paul contrasts this with others in Ephesus who had departed.

1 Timothy 4:1, *"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons."*

1 Timothy 5:15, *"For some have already turned aside after Satan."*

These were not people who had never known the truth.

They had known it and they had walked away.

Like seed sown on rocky ground, they sprang up with enthusiasm but had no root. When the heat came, they withered.

Timothy did not wither. Even when things were deeply difficult and in Ephesus, they were he stayed. He obeyed. He continued.

1 Timothy 6:12, *"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."*

Modern Illustration

Think of the difference between a **sprinter and a marathon runner**.

- A sprinter can look spectacular for a hundred metres and then collapses.
- A marathon runner trains quietly for months, often with no one watching, because they understand that the race is won over distance, not in one burst of adrenaline.

Every January, church altars fill with people newly on fire for God after a conference, a camp, or a New Year's resolution. By March, many of the same seats are empty again.

The Christian life is not measured at the January high, but it is measured at the June plateau and the November discouragement the seasons no one applauds.

This is also the age of the 'deconstruction' movement, where public figures who once seemed solid in the faith walk away after years of ministry, often citing disillusionment, doubt, or hurt.

Timothy stands as the counter-testimony: not someone who was never tested, but someone who, when Ephesus became genuinely hard, stayed anyway.

Application

Then: Any Christian can be on fire for six months.

The question is: **Where are you five years later? Ten years later?**

The mark of a true spiritual son is not the height of their early enthusiasm but the depth of their long obedience in the same direction.

Now: Continuing obedience in 2026 often looks unglamorous and practical.

- A daily Bible reading plan you keep even when you don't feel like it.
- Prayer that continues through a dry season, not just a crisis.
- Showing up to church and small group in the ordinary weeks, not only the exciting ones.
- Guarding your time recognising when endless scrolling or streaming has quietly replaced the time you once gave to the Word.

Ask yourself:

What is one area where I have drifted this year not dramatically, just quietly?

Continuing obedience does not mean never drifting but it means noticing the drift and turning back before the roots die altogether.

Consider inviting a friend or accountability partner to check in with you weekly, not to police you, but to help you keep walking when the initial excitement has faded.

The mark of a true spiritual son is not the height of their early enthusiasm but the depth of their long obedience in the same direction.

3. Humble Service

True spiritual sons are not marked by their desire for prominence, but by their eagerness to serve.

In a congregation filled with people climbing upward, Timothy stands out precisely because he is willingly going lower.

Philippians 2:20-22, *For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. ²¹ For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. ²² But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.*

"All seek their own" — Paul writes this with profound sadness.

Paul has invested in many, and when he looks for someone to send to the Philippians, someone who will genuinely care for their souls, he can find only one. Timothy.

Paul uses a remarkable phrase: *"as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel."* The picture is of a son working beside his father willingly, without resentment, without demanding recognition, without negotiating terms.

Consider what Timothy was willing to do.

Acts 16:3, *Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.*

Paul asked him to be circumcised a painful and difficult thing so that he would have greater access to Jewish communities for the sake of the gospel. Timothy submitted without argument. He was willing to endure personal discomfort for the sake of the mission.

- He went on difficult missions to **Corinth and Thessalonica**.
- He accompanied **Paul to Jerusalem**.
- He sat with **Paul in prison**.
- He accepted assignment in **Ephesus** one of the most difficult ministry environments imaginable and he stayed.

Paul warns against appointing new converts to leadership too quickly.

1 Timothy 3:6, *not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.*

Pride was clearly a problem among some of the Ephesian leaders they sought the office for the status it afforded, not the service it demanded.

Timothy was the counterweight to all of that. Not a man reaching upward for position, but a man bending downward in service.

Modern Illustration

We live in an age that rewards platform. Social media has taught a generation to measure significance by followers, likes, and stage time.

In that climate, the parking lot volunteer standing in the rain, the person running the sound booth every week without a single 'thank you' post, the small-group leader who never gets asked to preach, and the couple who quietly host the youth Bible study in their living room for a decade are living **Philippians 2:20-22** in real time.

They are '*all who seek their own*' turned upside down the rare ones who genuinely care more about the flock than about being seen. Every healthy church runs, ultimately, on the people no one is watching.

Application

Then: A true spiritual son serves his spiritual father's vision before he advances his own.

He does not wait to be honoured before he commits to work.
He finds the job no one wants and does it faithfully.

If you want to know who your true spiritual sons are, watch who shows up when the work is hard and the cameras are off.

Now: Take a practical step this month:

- Volunteer for a role with no title and no spotlight setup, clean-up, childcare, hospitality.
- If you lead others, ask yourself honestly: am I building people who serve the mission, or an audience that follows me?
- The next time recognition is given out, and your name is not mentioned, notice your own heart's reaction that reaction will tell you exactly how far Philippians 2 has gone in you.

4. Sound Doctrine

The fourth mark of a true spiritual son is perhaps the most critical in our age of doctrinal compromise: a commitment to sound doctrine.

Ephesus was drowning in bad theology. The false teachers there were sophisticated blending elements of Judaism with pagan Hellenistic philosophy to create a complex, impressive-sounding system of error.

They debated endlessly, but they produced no godliness.

2 Timothy 3:7, *always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

They were always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 6:3-4, *If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,⁴ he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions,*

Paul's remedy for this crisis was not better programmes or more creative approaches. It was a man who knew the Word and taught it faithfully.

He commands Timothy plainly.

1 Timothy 4:13, *"Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."*

1 Timothy 4:16, *"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you."*

Paul's statement to the Corinthians years earlier says it all.

1 Corinthians 4:17, *"I am sending Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ".*

Timothy carried Paul's doctrine so completely that sending him was the same as sending Paul himself.

- He did not dilute the message.
- He did not soften the edges to avoid conflict.
- He taught the whole counsel of God, even in a place where that made him unpopular.

Notably, the false teachers in Ephesus appear to have been questioning core doctrines. Possibly even the deity of Christ.

1 Timothy 3:16, *"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory."*

A true spiritual son does not shy away from the great doctrines of the faith. He does not trade the mystery of godliness for the popularity of compromise.

Modern Illustration

We are the most biblically resourced generation in history. There are more Bible translations, apps, podcasts, and online sermons available on a single phone than the entire early church possessed in written form.

Yet biblical literacy is falling, and doctrinal drift is rising.

The difference is not access, but depth.

A five-minute algorithm-fed clip of a popular online teacher can shape someone's theology far more than a lifetime of shallow exposure to the Word.

Ephesus's problem was sophisticated-sounding error. Ours is often bite-sized, emotionally compelling error, optimised by an algorithm to keep us watching rather than to make us godly.

Application

Then: Every true spiritual son must be a student of the Word. Not merely a consumer of other people's insights, but a man or woman who digs deeply into Scripture for themselves, who can defend the faith, who can stand before a congregation or a generation and say with confidence: 'Thus says the Lord.'

Now: Practically, this means:

- Choosing a Bible reading plan and a season of personal study not only sermon clips and Christian influencers on social media.
- Testing every online teacher against Scripture itself, the way the Bereans tested even Paul (**Acts 17:11**), regardless of their follower count or production quality.
- Joining or starting a small group built around genuine doctrinal depth, not simply fellowship and refreshments.
- Teaching children and young people not only what to believe but why? So their faith can survive contact with a university lecture hall or a persuasive video essay.

5. Courageous Conviction

The willingness to stand when others sit down.

To speak when others fall silent.

To hold the line when everything in the culture and sometimes even in the church is pressing you to yield.

1 Timothy 6:12, *"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."*

Paul does not say, "Hold on." He says, "Fight."

The Christian life and especially the life of a spiritual son given a difficult assignment is a battle.

In the Ephesian situation, Timothy needed courage on every front.

He needed courage to confront elders who were sinning publicly.

1 Timothy 5:19-20, *Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.²⁰ Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.*

He needed courage to rebuke those who were teaching false doctrine.

1 Timothy 1:3, *As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine,*

He needed courage to exercise authority in a church that had apostates among its leadership. He needed courage to stand against sophisticated philosophical error that may have made him feel intellectually outmatched.

1 Timothy 5:20, *"Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear."*

Paul gave him the most solemn charge possible to undergird that courage.

1 Timothy 6:13-14, *I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing,*

History records that Timothy remained in Ephesus until his death. Tradition holds that around A.D. 97, in his old age, he was martyred beaten to death for opposing the vile and obscene processions in honour of the goddess Diana.

He refused to compromise, even to save his life.

This is courageous conviction. Not the bravado of someone who has never been tested. But the quiet, settled, deeply rooted determination of a man who has decided:

- I will not move.
- I have been placed here by God.
- I will stand.

Modern Illustration

Courageous conviction today rarely looks like standing before an emperor.

- It looks like a believer in the office quietly declining to laugh along with a joke that mocks their faith.
- It looks like a Christian student in a seminar holding a biblical view of marriage or the sanctity of life when the entire room disagrees and doing so with grace instead of either silence or anger.
- It looks like a parent who will not outsource their child's worldview to a screen, even when it would be easier to hand over the tablet and avoid the conversation.
- It looks like refusing to pile on in a social media pile-on and refusing to stay silent when a friend is being genuinely wronged.

None of this trend.

None of it is applauded.

All of it costs something small, repeatedly, over a lifetime which is exactly the kind of courage Timothy modelled.

Application

Then: The church in every generation needs spiritual sons and daughters who are not shaped by the culture, but who shape it?

Who carry the conviction of the Word of God so deeply that they cannot be moved by pressure, by popularity, by persecution, or by the fear of man.

Now: Ask the Lord to show you one place this week where you have been silent out of fear.

A conversation at work,
A comment in a group chat,
A moment with family.

Ask for grace to speak the truth in love, gently and firmly, the next time it comes up.

Courage is rarely loud. It is usually just one honest sentence, spoken at the right moment, by someone who has already decided in advance that they will not move.

Conclusion: The Mantle and the Man

In **1947**, a young man from rural North Carolina was ordained into the ministry. He had grown up poor, had faced spiritual battles of his own, and had been disciplined deeply by a man named **Mordecai Ham** and later shaped profoundly by his relationship with veteran evangelist **Chuck Templeton** and especially by his time under the mentorship of **Dr. Henrietta Mears** and, in a defining season, in the shadow of evangelist **Jack Wyrzten**.

His name was **Billy Graham**.

What made Billy Graham more than a gifted communicator was the depth of what had been poured into him by those who went before. He did not just receive a platform, he received a spirit, a doctrine, a conviction, a standard of integrity. He became, in the truest sense, a true spiritual son.

And he in turn became a spiritual father. He poured himself into men like **Leighton Ford, Cliff Barrows, and many others** not merely imparting skills, but character, doctrine, and conviction. The fruit of his spiritual fatherhood outlasted his own ministry.

Paul had that same legacy. Nearly 2,000 years after his death, we are still reading the letters he wrote to his true spiritual son. We are still being challenged by the standard he set. We are still measuring ourselves against the pattern of Timothy, who bore the image of Paul, who bore the image of Christ.

2 Timothy 2:2, *"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."*

The chain of spiritual fatherhood from Paul to Timothy to faithful men to others is the chain that has carried the gospel through every generation. You are on that chain.

The question is not whether this chain will continue. It will.

God will always preserve a remnant. The question is whether you will be a link a true spiritual son, a genuine child in the faith, who receives the mantle and carries it faithfully to the generation that comes after you.

Personal Commitment: Becoming a True Spiritual Son

As we close, take a moment to honestly examine yourself in the light of Timothy's life. A true spiritual son is marked by five things:

- **Saving Faith** — Is my faith in Christ genuine, personal, and publicly confessed?
- **Continuing Obedience** — Am I walking consistently in the truth, or have I been drifting?
- **Humble Service** — Am I serving the vision God has placed me under, or waiting to build my own?
- **Sound Doctrine** — Am I growing in my knowledge and defence of the Word of God?
- **Courageous Conviction** — Am I willing to stand for truth even when it costs me something?

If God has placed a spiritual father or mother in your life a pastor, a mentor, a leader who has poured truth and character and vision into you, will you honour that investment?

Will you carry the mantle with faithfulness?

Reflection

- ☐ Who has been a spiritual father or mother in your life? Have you thanked them recently?
- ☐ In which of the five characteristics do you feel most strong? In which do you feel most challenged?
- ☐ What does "continuing obedience" look like practically in your current season of life?
- ☐ Is there someone God is calling you to invest in as a spiritual parent — someone who needs you to pour your life into them?
- ☐ Where do you need more courageous conviction in your walk with God right now?