



*“Let no one despise your  
youth...”*

*(1 Timothy 4:12)*

***Introduction: Why Pick on the Youth?***

*“Let no one despise your youth,”* wrote Saint Paul to his disciple, the young Saint Timothy, the appointed bishop at Ephesus, *“but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity”* (1 Timothy 4:12).

Being a youth is difficult. We are caught between the stages of childhood and adulthood, and because of this, it seems that we can easily be despised by our elders. For instance, a youth might be despised in the sense that an adult will think a youth lacks the maturity and is too young to carry on any kind of responsibility. At the same time, some youth are expected to measure up to the mindset and maturity of an adult, so when they fall short, they are also easily despised. In other words, sometimes we feel like we’re caught between a rock and a hard place.

Also, sometimes the youth despise their own youth. Think about the call of the prophet Jeremiah: *Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: “Before I formed you in the womb I new you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.” Then said I: “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.” But the Lord said to me: “Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’ For you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you,” says the LORD (Jeremiah 1:4-8).* So, sometimes the youth think that they cannot do anything because they are only youth, but the Lord tells those who feel this way that they ought to take courage.

Saint Paul instructs Saint Timothy to overcome this tendency to despise the youth by telling him to be an example in six ways. These six ways are not just chosen randomly. These six aspects of a youth’s life are often the aspects in which we fall short and therefore become subject to criticism. Let’s see how we can become an example to all in these six ways.

***Saint Paul’s Relationship to Saint Timothy***

Saint Paul wrote 14 epistles, 4 of which were to individuals while the rest were to churches. Saint Paul wrote two Pastoral Epistles to the young Timothy, bishop of Ephesus.

Who was Saint Timothy? The name “Timothy” (*Gk. Timotheos*) means “the honor of God.” Saint Timothy believed in Christ through Saint Paul during his first missionary journey in Lystra of Iconium in 46 A.D. Saint Timothy’s father was Greek, but his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, were devout Jews, who raised Saint Timothy and taught him the Holy Scriptures.

We have many verses in the bible that show Saint Paul’s fondness for the young Saint Timothy. “*But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly,*” writes Saint Paul, who continues, “*For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state*” (*Philippians 2:19-20*). He also refers to him as a son, “*But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel*” (*Philippians 2:22*). He also refers to Saint Timothy as “*son Timothy*” (*1 Timothy 1:18*), “*Timothy, a true son in the faith*” (*1 Timothy 1:2*), and “*Timothy, a beloved son*” (*2 Timothy 1:2*).

As Saint Paul carried on in his mission, he found that he could entrust Saint Timothy with greater and greater responsibilities. Although he had not yet been with Saint Paul for a year in the mission, he sent him from Athens to Thessalonica for a needed pastoral visit (*1 Thessalonians 3:1-5*). He also sent him to visit the Macedonians as well as the quarrelsome and spiteful congregation at Corinth.

The lesson from this is that because Saint Timothy was loyal to Saint Paul and fulfilled his responsibilities in the little things concerning the faith, he was eventually entrusted with a larger responsibility as bishop of Ephesus.

Let’s examine how we can fulfill our day-to-day responsibility as Christians by being an example to the believers in word, conduct, love, spirit, faith, and purity.

### ***In Word***

This simply refers to what we say. The language of today’s youth is often the source of an adult’s lack of respect for a youth. God entrusts us with the gift of speech and He expects us to use it wisely. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “*But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned*” (*Matthew 12:36-37*). You can read more about the sins of the tongue in James 3.

The sins that we fall into through our speech are the following:

- Pride – when we speak highly of ourselves
- Lying
- Sins against love (malice, cruelty, false accusation, blame, etc)
- Unchaste and impure words; this can also lead to a kind of hypocrisy, for as Saint James says, “*Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter*

*from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh” (James 3:10-12).*

- Loss of self-control – we cannot take back words once they are uttered
  - o Saint John Chrysostom further emphasizes this point by saying, “Therefore, guard the tip of the tongue, for it is like a majestic stallion. For if you put a bit in its mouth and teach it to walk in order, it adapts to this and is satisfied. But if you let it run wild, it becomes the vehicle of the devil and his angels.”

How can we be examples in Word?

- Be slow to speak and quick to hear
- Consider that silence is often useful. Know when to speak and when to keep silent. *“Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips” (LXX Psalm 140:3).* *“In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise” (Proverbs 10:19).*

### ***In Conduct***

An example of a youth in the Old Testament, who was an example of good conduct, is the young King Josiah, king of Judah. He was only 8 years old when he became king of Jerusalem, where he reigned for 31 years. *“And he [Josiah] did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images” (2 Chronicles 34:2-3).*

What does it mean that Josiah neither turned to the left or to the right? Turning to the left means falling into sin through breaking the commandments of God or through disobedience. Falling to the right means becoming “overly righteous” in a sense, or becoming self-willed, and these are called the presumptuous sins. The prophet David prayed in Psalm 19 (LXX Psalm 18), *“Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression” (v. 13).*

There is a story from John Cassian’s Conference Two on Discernment that illustrates this idea of the presumptuous sins. John Cassian founded monasteries in the West (in France) after studying monasticism in Bethlehem in Egypt. He records the story of a monk named “Hero.” This monk remained fifty years in the desert, keeping to the rigors of abstinence with a severity that was outstanding, loving the secrecy of solitary life. However, he preferred to be guided by his own ideas rather than to bow to the advice and conferences of his brethren and to the rules laid down by his predecessors. He practiced fasting so rigorously that he even refused to join his brethren for the Easter meal. He would not come to the church to assemble with his brothers on the feast; he didn’t want to take food that he might give the impression of having relaxed from what he had chosen to do. This presumptuousness led to his being fooled. He couldn’t tell that when an angel of light appeared to him, it was actually Satan. He yielded to him and as a result he

through himself into a well. The devil told him that on account of his virtues nothing could harm him.

One thing is needful in order that our behavior and conduct would be an example to others. We need wisdom and discernment. The lack of discernment was the cause of Hero's downfall. Saint Antony the Great regarded discernment as the greatest among the virtues. We need to know what's right and what's wrong and then follow that course of action. We need to judge our own thoughts and behavior and determine whether they come from God or not. When Solomon became king, God said, "*Ask! What shall I give you?*" What would we have asked God for, knowing that He is ready to grant us anything? Solomon, knowing that he was a youth with a great responsibility (an entire kingdom), answered, "*...Give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours*" (1 Kings 3:9)? We make major decisions in our youth, but because of our young age, we lack experience, and therefore also, understanding and wisdom. So every time we are encountered with a dilemma, great or small, we need to ask for discernment and wisdom. How do we gain wisdom? "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him*" (James 1:5).

### ***In Love***

Our love toward others is demonstrated in these two words: service and sacrifice. "*This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends*" (John 15:12-13). These two actions are especially difficult for the youth who starts to become wrapped up in himself or herself. The best example of this kind of love is our holy mother Saint Mary. She was but a youth when she went to serve Elizabeth while she herself was pregnant. She was but a youth when she gave birth to our Lord Jesus Christ in a manger. She was but a youth when she took a long and hard trip to Egypt in order to flee the wrath of Herod. Many of us would have complained in doing these things, but Saint Mary showed perfect love and perfect humility in offering this great sacrifice of service and love.

### ***In Spirit***

This is that aspect of man that develops a relationship with God. The question for all of us to ask is whether we are spiritually minded or are we wrapped up with the affairs and concerns of this world? "*For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace*" (Romans 8:6). A spiritually minded youth is one who is an example and one is well respected by his or her elders. Why? Because this youth has a sense of purpose and is not wrapped up with the cares of this life, but is on a mission to strengthen their relationship with God and to bring others into that relationship as well.

### ***In Faith***

A youth in the Old Testament who was an example of faith and trust in the Lord was the prophet David. When David told Saul that he would fight the Philistine, Goliath, Saul despised David's youth by saying, "*You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth*" (1 Samuel 17:33).

When David told Saul about how he delivered his father's sheep from the attacks of a lion and a bear, he attributed these victories not to himself, but to the Lord (17:37). When he went out to meet Goliath, he said confidently, "*But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts...*" (17:45). Here, David did not despise his own youth, but had great faith and trust in the Lord. Likewise, we who suffer from low self esteem, should find confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom we can do all things. Also, those of us who suffer from pride in our youth, ought to attain humility and realize that without the Lord we can do nothing.

### ***In Purity***

The example of Purity in the Old Testament is the young Joseph, who was probably about 19 when he was a slave in Potiphar's house in Egypt. When he was seduced by Potiphar's wife, Joseph fled and maintained his purity. Joseph probably had every excuse to lose his purity: 1) He could have been bitter against God, since he was sold into slavery, 2) he was alone with his master's wife and no one would have known about it, 3) there was no Mosaic law at that time against adultery. Rather, Joseph said, "*How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*" (Genesis 39:9). God rewarded Joseph for his purity by making him Pharaoh's right-hand-man in Egypt and saving his family from famine. Purity of heart and sexual purity is a difficult virtue for youth to attain, and society has given us so many options and excuses in the form of birth control and otherwise, to cave in and lose our purity. Let us stand strong and strive for purity, and be an example to others, demonstrating our true freedom in Christ. Let us follow the examples of the fathers and mothers who contended with this temptation until they defeated the devil (*From the Paradise of the Fathers: They used to say that Mother Sarah contended against the devil of fornication for seven years on the roof of her house, before she vanquished him*).

**Glory is due to our God unto the age of all ages. Amen.**



In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God. Amen.

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## *#1. WORD*

*“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37).*

*“Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh” (James 3:10-12).*



## *#2. CONDUCT*

*“And [Josiah] did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images” (2 Chronicles 34:2-3).*

*“Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression”  
(LXX Psalm 18:13).*

### *#3. LOVE*

*"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:12-13).*



### *#4. SPIRIT*

*"For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).*



### *#5. FAITH*

*"But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts..." (1 Samuel 17:45).*

*"I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).*



### *#6. PURITY*

*"How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9)*

*Glory is due to our God forever.*

*Amen.*

