

How True

Leveling With Our Best Worst Self

October 18, 2026



Today we're leveling with ourselves regarding how our best worst witness measures up!



How true are you? I'm gonna give you the answer to a follow-up question. Okay? The answer is: I AM! Ready? The question is: **Who's the worst sinner you know?** "I AM!" Now, on a scale of one to five, how good is your example of Christ on an average daily basis? Now let's hold up our number on our fingers ... or finger.

Paul, who Jesus chose to write half the NT, wrote to timid Timothy:

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

If we put that on our car mirror, and glance at it and ourselves as we get out to wherever we go, think of the impact it'd have on the grace we offer to others. **It's not about beating ourselves up, but truing ourselves up.**

In construction, when something is true, it means it's straight or level or square or properly aligned. And **when something isn't true, you have to true it up**, by bringing it into alignment with a reliable standard. So, I'm not simply asking how honest you are with others, but if you're leveling with yourself about **how your visible life aligns with the example of Christ**. Because, as we saw last Sunday, you can fight the frustration of living out of alignment with your created purpose and design, or **you can live out your level best as your true self**.

And we true ourselves by allowing the Carpenter to measure us against His own reliable standard, and adjust us as needed. So: **How true are you?** Because it depends on that by which you measure yourself. And we tend to move the bubble till we see what we want. Therefore, writes Paul:

[I urge you] in view of God's mercy, [to you] to offer your bodies as ... your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform [align] ... to the [puffed up] pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing [truing up] of your mind. ... For by the grace given me [the worst] I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but ... in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. – Romans 12:1-3 NIV

Believers use that line as an excuse for not pushing themselves into stomach-upsetting territory. But, "The measure of faith God has given you" is an incredibly thought-provoking statement.

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

He doesn't limit the measure. We do! So, **any lack of true is only limited by me and you.**



And you *can't* be *true* till you *level* with yourself about the *measure* that you're allowing the Lord to *use* with you, through His **Word** and **prayer** and **worship** and our **conversations** and **accountability** with other *believers*. Because *all* things are *true* only to the *degree* they *align* with the *One true God*. Which is *why* we must *daily adjust* our *thoughts, words, and deeds* to *align* with our *Lord's*. And **being true also means leveling with the Lord and our loved ones**. But *that's* a *problem*, because *most* of us really *enjoy* thinking of ourselves more *highly* than we *ought*. And **un-true minds reflexively embrace ever-increasing self-centeredness**. So *beware* of the *puffed-up pattern* of this world. Because *inflated egos* are *destructive* to the *soul*, but they're *big business* down here. Here's this world's *pattern*: *first* there's *LIFE*, a celebration of every *aspect* of *living* down here. Then comes *People*. The most *important part* of *life*. Then comes *Us*. Cuz *who* wants to *waste time* thinking about *them*? And finally, *SELF*. Know what I'm *waiting* for? *JUST BRUCE*. Notice how Paul *models* the *mindset* he *calls* for, by saying, "by the *grace* given me [the worst of sinners] I say to *every one* of you." He *could've* said, "By the *authority* given me by Christ *Himself*!" But Paul has a *firm grasp* on the *grace* Christ gave him to *save* him, while he was *destroying* God's *flock* as *Saul*.

[You see] Saul [later called Paul, *ignorantly*] began to *destroy* the *church*. Going from house to house, he *dragged off* men and women and *put* them in *prison*. – Acts 8:3 NIV

[In *fact*] Saul was *still* breathing out *murderous threats* against the Lord's *disciples*. ... [When Jesus *stepped in* to *deliver* them from the *hand* of *Saul* on the *road* to *Damascus*] A *light* from *heaven* flashed around him. ... [and] A *voice* [said] to him, "Saul, Saul, *why* do you persecute *Me*?" "Who *are* you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am *Jesus*" – Acts 9:1-5 NIV

Then, we're told, the *once-violent Saul* was *sent* to the *Gentiles* to *fulfill Psalm 18*. (Rom 15:9)

[Which *begins*] The Lord *delivered* ... from the *hand* of *Saul* ... [And *ends*] the *violent man*. Therefore I *will give thanks* to *You, O Lord*, among the *Gentiles* – Psalm 18:48-49 NKJ

And so, the *most militant Jew*, *saved* and *sent* to *give thanks* among the *Gentiles*, says to *Timothy*:

I *thank* Christ Jesus our *Lord*, who ... considered *me* *trustworthy*, appointing *me* to His *service*. Even *though* I was once a *blasphemer* and a *persecutor* and a *violent man*, [like the *Saul* in Psalm 18; but] I was shown *mercy* because I *acted* in *ignorance* and *unbelief*. [That gets *mercy*? Yep. *Disobedience* gets *discipline*. *Rebellion* gets *wrath*. But the *ignorant unbelief* of *dirty-jar sandwich-hammers* (had to be here) gets] The *grace* of our *Lord* [which] was *poured out* on me abundantly, *along with* the *faith* and *love* that are in Christ Jesus. ... [Because] Christ Jesus came *into* the *world* 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 *unlimited patience* as an *example* for those who would *believe* on Him and *receive* eternal *life*. – 1 Timothy 1:12-16 NIV



So, on that *scale* of 1-5: **How good of an example are you of God's grace and Jesus' patience?** Hold up your *fingers*. Another 100%? Feel *better*? Turns out, the Lord *loves* to *display* His *incredibly merciful, longsuffering grace*. And turns out, **you're a perfect example of His unlimited patience!**



Because **turning us around and setting us free is comparable to how a tugboat turns a tanker around: one bump at a time.** So the *best* thing we can *show* and *tell* those *around us* is the *unlimited patience* the Lord *has* with *us* when it comes to *tugging* on the *heart* of someone like *me!* The *worst* of *sinners*. Paul *planted* the *church* in *Ephesus*, a *coastal city* similar to *Miami*, but with a *larger* population. It was their *Rome* away from *Rome*. Here's Miami's 21,000-seat arena. And here's the 25,000-seat theater in *Ephesus*. Which looked like this. It's 4,000 seats *bigger*. And it's *immortalized* in Scripture, when:

A silversmith named *Demetrius*, who made silver *shrines* of *Artemis*, brought in *no little* business [i.e. **big business**] for the *craftsmen*. He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said ... "This fellow Paul has convinced and *led astray* [to *Jesus*] large numbers of people here in *Ephesus* and ... He says that man-made gods are no gods at all." ... Soon the whole city was in an uproar ... [and rushed] into the [25,000-seat] theater. Paul *wanted* to appear before the *crowd*, but the *disciples* would not *let* him. Even some of the *officials* ... sent him a message *begging* him *not* to venture into the [25,000-seat] theater. ... [Cuz Paul was *champing at the bit*, like "Let me at 'em!" as] 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 young *Timothy* to visit the churches he'd *planted*. And at *Ephesus*, Paul finds *false teachers*, *swindlers*, and *selfish overseers*. So he *urges* a very *reluctant* Timothy to *stay behind* and *straighten* things out. But *after a bit*, Tim wants to *bail*, so Paul *writes* to *re-urge* him, saying:

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

Imagine being left in Miami to straighten out the believers. No wonder Timothy is *immortalized* in Scripture for his *bouts* of *diarrhea*! We'll get to *that* in a *minute*. But This theater (already 200 when *Timidly*, I mean *Timothy* was left in charge of *Miami*, I mean *Ephesus*) is one of two existing places where Timothy sat. The other is this 50-seat public toilet. Which looked like this. A very modern convenience and likely an answer to prayer for *insecure* Timothy, who had to be *urged* and *re-urged* to remain there as the *true*. And Paul goes on to say:

Don't let anyone *look down* on you because you are *young*, but set an example for the believers [to be the true] in *speech*, in *life*, in *love*, in *faith* and in *purity*. ... Be *diligent* in these *matters* ... so that everyone may see your progress. ... Because [that's your witness, and] if you *do*, you will save both *yourself* and your *hearers*. – 1 Timothy 4:12-16 NIV

[Here's the *diarrhea* part] No longer drink *only water*, but use a little wine [to purify it] for your *stomach's sake* and your *frequent infirmities*. Some men's *sins* [like *Demetrius the silversmith*] are clearly evident ... but those of some men *follow later*. – 1 Timothy 5:23-24 NKJ



Like *drinking contaminated water*. Because like a *bodybuilder* who *tans* up, *oils* up, and *pumps* up to *show off* his *muscles* at *peak* performance, **our pride likes to present our faith as a polished product**, rather than *reveal* any *weaknesses* that *preceded* it, or *remain* to *work out* in *spite* of it. **We fear that past failings and current flaws will discredit our faith and God's power;** but the *opposite* is true.

They need to see our struggles to know it's true. So Paul encourages Timothy to stop holding things in (so to speak) by going first (so to speak) and being *brutally honest* about his own past as a blasphemer and pride-filled persecutor and murderously violent man. And even now, he says:

I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ... [And he wrote half the NT!] Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? [Well] Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! – Romans 7:19-25 ESV

[For] He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for [My] power is perfected in [your] weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about [draw attention to] my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. – 2 Corinthians 12:9 NAS



Paul means small as in not powerful. What's better: telling someone they need Jesus, or sharing how you did, and still do? **Know why ex-addicts make the best sponsors? They relate.** And when those struggling know it, **they want to hear your story and your struggles.** So let 'em in. Cuz **when humility meets transparency, it's powerful.** Plus, it's the most interesting thing about you. Plus, **we can't true up till we fess up what we mess up.** So, if Christ is your measure, how do you measure up? Don't be afraid to look the answer square in the face.

[For] the knowledge of the glory of God [is] in the face of Christ. – 2 Corinthians 4:6 NIV

A true measure won't say what we want to hear, just what's out of true. What you then do, is up to you. So, **are your beliefs and behavior aligning more and more with Jesus?** If not, how not, and most importantly, why not? **Do you excuse compromises in yourself that you see as sin in others?** I'll level with you. If you're out of line, you and God gotta straighten things out. Because:

It is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose ... so that you may [be an example as you] become blameless and pure, children ... in a crooked and depraved generation ... as you hold out the Word of Life – Philippians 2:14-16 NIV

Like a level. For all to see your progress. Cuz, **only God's Word can straighten us out.** Because:

[Only] Wisdom will save you from the ways of [the] wicked ... who leave the straight paths ... and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked – Proverbs 2:12-15 NIV

Which is why **they need to watch us make progress on the straight and narrow.** So:

Examine yourselves [according to the measure of faith you've allowed the Lord to give you] to see whether you are [even] living in faith. – 2 Corinthians 13:5 NAB

“Pay attention to what I say; listen closely to My words. ... [And] Keep them within your heart; for they are life ... [and just as you do when mowing a straight path in the grass] look straight ahead, [and] fix your gaze directly [on the goal] before you. ... [And] do not swerve to the right or the left” – Proverbs 4:20-27 NIV

[For] The path of life is level for those who are right with God – Isaiah 26:7 NCV

Cuz when it comes to the ups and downs of those crooked paths, level heads shall prevail!