

PASSING THE
FAITH
To the Next Generation



“Counterfeit Christianity.”

May 3, 2026

Text: 2 Timothy 3:1-15

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BIG IDEA

Real faith is revealed not by what it looks like on the surface, but by what it loves, what it seeks, and what it costs.

Introduction

In 2023, a German church hosted a full worship service planned and delivered entirely by Artificial Intelligence. Hundreds attended and found it “meaningful.” An AI Jesus avatar was later installed in a Swiss confessional booth.

- The question: **Was that a real encounter with God — or a counterfeit simulation?**
- AI can imitate the words of godliness, but it lacks the power of the Holy Spirit.

“...having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.” —2 Timothy 3:5

Paul's question for Timothy — and for us — is urgent: **Is your faith real ... or counterfeit?**

Context: Are We Living in "Savage" Times?

"But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty." —2 Timothy 3:1

"Difficult" (Gk. *chalepos*) = savage, fierce — the same word used of the Gadarene demoniacs (Matt. 8:28). The "last days" span from Christ's resurrection to His return.

- **The American family is in danger** — marriage and birth rates in sustained decline.
- **The mind is being weaponized** — AI threatens reality; absolute truth is contested.
- **The church faces attack from within and without** — fewer than 10% of self-identified Christians hold a biblical worldview (Barna).

Movement 1 — Real Faith Is Known by What It **LOVES** (vv. 1–5)

"For people will be lovers of self...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power." —2 Timothy 3:2–5

- "Lovers of self" heads the list — every sin that follows is fruit of disordered self-love.

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- The exchange: love of pleasure replaces love of God (Luther: love "curved inward").
- "Appearance of godliness" = a spiritual costume — credentials without true conversion.
- When you make yourself your own savior, you deny the power of the Gospel.

Application: *Am I wearing a spiritual costume? Does my heart match my head knowledge?*

Movement 2 — Real Faith Is Known by What It SEEKS (vv. 6–9)

"...always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth." —2 Timothy 3:7

- False teachers target the spiritually immature — their tactics are predatory and deliberate.
- "Always learning ... never arriving" = curiosity without surrender; questions that avoid commitment.
- Jannes & Jambres (Egyptian magicians, Ex. 7) — folly that opposes God is always exposed.
- False gods (money, sex, power) promise answers but lead away from Jesus.

Application: *Real faith doesn't keep searching indefinitely — it surrenders and arrives at the truth.*

Movement 3 — Real Faith Is Known by What It COSTS (vv. 10–13)

"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." —2 Timothy 3:12

- Paul's model: teaching, conduct, aim, faith, patience, love, steadfastness — and suffering.
 - Antioch → Iconium → Lystra (Acts 13–14): Paul was stoned and left for dead. This was personal for Timothy.
 - Persecution is a universal declaration, not a conditional threat. Godliness draws opposition.
- "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." —John 15:18*
- If your faith has cost you nothing ... examine whether it is real.

Application: *What would you sacrifice to follow Jesus? Real faith costs something.*

Conclusion: Continue and Pass It On (vv. 14–15)

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it..." —2 Timothy 3:14–15

In MBC's 175th year, the faith has been passed down through generations of real believers. It is our turn to receive it, live it, and hand it on.

- Aimee Huber & First Choice Women's Resource Center — a 9–0 Supreme Court victory this week. Real faith knows what it loves, seeks, and costs.

Three Questions for This Week

- **What do I LOVE?** — A question of the heart and motivation.
- **What do I SEEK?** — A question of action and pursuit.
- **What will it COST?** — A question of eternal significance

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