

## INTRODUCTION 引言

Our physical growth from baby to adulthood can be measured in numbers. After you were born, your parents had to keep track of what size of diapers you wore and how many ounces of milk you drank. You gradually wear bigger shoes and clothes. I knew that my boys had become teenagers when I stopped shopping at the Children's Place. When kids come to a certain age, they are eligible to drive, get a credit card and vote. Soon they think about college, dating and career. Reality sets in when you are qualified for a senior discount at restaurants. Those are some stages in our physical development. God does not only want to see us get old. He hopes that we can be mature. We celebrate Youth Sunday today. We will borrow a few themes from the letters Paul wrote to Timothy to encourage our young people. But this message is for everyone. Paul was a mentor to Timothy, a young church pastor. At that time, Paul was imprisoned for sharing the faith. He realized that he might be executed soon. Therefore, he left some final reminders to his apprentice. Timothy would face some obstacles in his ministries. Likewise, we will encounter challenges as we live out our faith in the world. We must show three marks of spiritual maturity.

## EXPLANATION 解釋

## 1. Respectable 受人尊敬

First of all, a mature believer should be a respectable person. Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:12 – **Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.** Paul urges Timothy to be a role-model to fellow Christians. He must be godly in his words and in his actions. There should not be any selfish intent behind his conducts. He needed to have a healthy relationship with church members and with God. People should aspire to become a Christian like Timothy. Allow me to encourage our young folks. Do people describe you as a respectable person? Are you an imitator or an influencer? Do you just copy the latest trends from the social media even without thinking? Do you talk and dress like your peers do just to fit in? Who do you try to impress? Your friends, your classmates or your so-called “followers” whom you do not even know? God challenges you to be a role-model to others in and outside of the church. Let your presence be a blessing to others. Let it be like a sweet fragrance in a smelly room or some ice-cold water in the hot summer. That way, people are drawn to you not because of your characteristics on the outside. For example, your height or your look. But people like to get near to you because of your character on the inside. It is just like the lyrics in the song “Live Like That,” which say: “People pass, and even if they don't know my name. Is there evidence that I've been changed? When they see me, do they see You?” Your testimony is effective when people can tell that you are a believer even before you say it.

## 2. Responsible 承擔責任

Besides being a respectable person, a mature Christian must also be a responsible person. They hold themselves accountable for their actions. Paul encourages Timothy in 2:21 of his second letter: **Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.** In

the previous verse, Paul compares articles made of gold and silver to containers made of wood and clay. There are some ordinary bowls and plates in your home for everyday use. Then there are some fine chinaware that you reserve for hosting guests. Paul applies that contrast to our conducts. If we get rid of what is trivial and even disgraceful, then we can become noble instruments for God to use. We have been sanctified by God the moment we received Jesus. However, we must choose to live a holy life. Little kids are under the supervision of their parents. Eventually, they have to make their own decisions as they grow up. For example, how to use their free time, which friends to mingle with, the websites they visit and what information to believe, etc. They will stop saying: “My dad or mom asks me to do such and such.” Instead, they will tell you: “I want to do what is right.” Such freedom comes with a price. When they make a mistake they can no longer blame their parents. Even though kids will finally go independent of their parents, they should always be dependent on God when making choices. They must use the Bible as an instruction manual for life. Then God can use them to bring honor to Himself.

### 3. Reliable 忠誠可靠

A mature Christian is not just a respectable and a responsible person. He/she must also be a reliable person. Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:15 – **Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.** AWANA kids should know this verse by heart. As a church pastor, Timothy’s main task was to preach God’s Word. Paul states three requirements for Timothy. First, he must be an approved workman. The Greek word for “approved” has its background in the money-exchange business. Coins in the ancient world were not as uniform as today’s money. Some dishonest merchants shaved off portions of the metal before using it. Money-changers were “approved” if they only bought and sold full-weight coins. Similarly, an approved Bible teacher is one who will not deviate from the truth. Secondly, he is not ashamed of what God says. For example, he is not timid to convict sins and to pronounce God’s judgment. Instead, thirdly, he will rightly handle the truth. The Greek word for “rightly handling” means cutting in a straight line. A tailor making clothes or a craftsman building a house have to cut the materials precisely so that all the parts will fit together. You may not be a Bible teacher. But you are a disciple of Jesus if you are a Christian. The world tells you to keep your religion privately. But God asks you to make your faith public. Do you feel honorable to carry the title “Christian?” Are you bold to tell people what you believe even when they do not like to hear it? Recently, a mom shared her young daughter’s homework. She talked about her faith. She wrote that she comes to realize what sin is, and she wants to become a Christian. That is great! Did I mention that she attends a public school? A reliable messenger of God’s Word will tell the truth regardless of the audience or the circumstance.

### CONCLUSION 結論

Growth is a process. God keeps refining us until we see Jesus in glory. We will definitely make mistakes along the way. But if we fail to learn, then we will only learn to fail. Mature Christians will never quit. They know that they are always work-in-progress in the hand of God. He will cut off unproductive areas and smoothen rough edges, so that His image can be more evident in our lives. Eventually, we will become a masterpiece of the Master. Hope that God’s Word is an encouragement to everyone, especially to our young people.

## INTRODUCTION 引言

我們從嬰孩到成年的身體成長可以用數字來衡量。你出生後，你的父母必須注意你穿的尿布尺寸以及你喝了多少盎司的奶。你逐漸穿更大的鞋子和衣服。當我不再去兒童天地買衣服時，我知道我的兒子們已經成為青少年了。當孩子們達到一定年齡時，他們就有資格開車、申請信用卡和投票。不久之後他們就要思考大學、約會和職業。當你有資格在餐廳享受老年人折扣時，你不得不承認你已經老了。這些是我們身體成長的一些階段。神不僅僅希望看到我們變老，祂更希望我們能夠成熟起來。今天我們慶祝青年主日。我們會從保羅寫給提摩太的書信中抽一些主題來勉勵年輕人。但這篇信息是送給所有人的。保羅是年輕教會牧師提摩太的導師。當時，保羅因為傳福音而坐牢。他意識到自己可能很快就會被處決。因此，他給徒弟留下了最後的提醒。提摩太在他的服事中會碰到一些障礙。同樣，當我們在世界上活出信仰時，我們也會遇到挑戰。我們必須表現出靈命成熟的三個標記。

## EXPLANATION 解釋

## 1. Respectable 受人尊敬

首先，一個成熟的信徒應該是一個受人尊敬的人。保羅在提摩太前書 4:12 中說：**不可叫人小看你年輕，總要在言語、行為、愛心、信心、清潔上，都作信徒的榜樣。**保羅鼓勵提摩太要成為信徒的榜樣。他的言行必須敬虔。他的行為背後不應該存有私心。他必須與教會成員和神建立健康的關係。人們應該渴望成為像提摩太一樣的基督徒。請允許我鼓勵我們的年輕人。別人會形容你是一個受人尊敬的人嗎？你是模仿別人還是影響別人？你是否不假思索地追隨社交媒體上最流行的風氣？你說話和穿著的方式是否像同輩，為的只是融入別人？你到底要討好誰？你的朋友、你的同學或是你甚至不認識的所謂「跟隨者」？神鼓勵你成為教會內外其他人的榜樣。讓你的存在成為別人的祝福。讓它像臭氣熏天的房間裡的一股香氣，或者炎熱的夏天裡的一杯冰涼的水。這樣，人們就會被你吸引，不是因為你的外表特徵。例如，你的身高或你的外貌。但人們喜歡接近你是因為你的品格。就像一首近代英文詩歌「活得像樣」裡的歌詞所說：「人們都會過去，即使他們不知道我的名字。但是他們能否看到我的改變？當他們看到我的時候，他們能看見祢嗎？」當別人在你開口之前就知道你是個信徒，你的見證就是有效的。

## 2. Responsible 承擔責任

一個成熟的基督徒除了是一個受人尊敬的人之外，他也必須是一個承擔責任的人。他們對自己的行為負責。保羅在第二封書信 2:21 鼓勵提摩太：**人若自潔，脫離卑賤的事，就必作貴重的器皿，成為聖潔，合乎主用，預備行各樣的善事。**在上一節經文中，保羅對比用金和銀製造與木頭和粘土製成的容器。你家裡有一些日常使用的普通碗和盤子。你可能還有一些精美的瓷器，留作招待客人用的。保羅把這個對比應用到我們的行為中。如果我們除去那些微不足道甚至是羞恥的事情，那麼我們就可以成為神重用的器具。當我們接受耶穌的那一刻，我們就已經被神潔淨了。然而，我們必須選擇過聖潔的生活。小孩子成長時

是受父母的監護。漸漸，他們必須學習做出自己的決定。例如，如何利用空閒時間，與哪些朋友交往，看什麼網站以及相信哪些信息等。他們將不再說：「我的爸爸或媽媽要求我這樣做。」他們會告訴你：「我想做正確的事。」這種自由是有代價的。當他們犯錯時，他們不能再責怪父母。就算孩子最終會獨立於父母，但他們在做出選擇時應該始終依靠神。他們必須把聖經當作人生的指南。這樣神就可以使用他們來榮耀祂自己。

### 3. Reliable 忠誠可靠

一個成熟的基督徒不僅僅是一個受人尊敬和承擔責任的人。他也必須是一個忠誠可靠的人。保羅在提摩太後書 2:15 中說：你當竭力在神面前得蒙喜悅，作無愧的工人，按著正意分解真理的道。AWANA 兒童聖經班長大的孩子們肯定熟記這節經文。作為一位教會的牧師，提摩太的主要任務是傳講神的話語。保羅對提摩太提出了三個要求。首先，他必須作蒙神喜悅的工人。希臘文「得蒙喜悅」這個字的背景是貨幣找換。古代世界的硬幣不像今天的金錢那樣公整。一些不誠實的商人在使用硬幣之前會刮掉一些金屬。但是另外有一些老實的兌換商。他們只買賣標準重量的硬幣。他們被視為是「得蒙喜悅」的商人。同樣，一位被認可的聖經教師是不會偏離真理的。而且，他並不因神所說的話而感到不好意思。例如，他並不膽怯地指出罪並宣告神的審判。第三，他會正確地分解真理。希臘文「按著正意分解」的意思是沿直線切割。做衣服的裁縫或建造房屋的工匠必須精確地切割材料，使所有部件都能整合起來。你不一定是聖經老師。但如果你是基督徒，你就是耶穌的門徒。俗世說你的宗教信仰是你個人的事情。但神要求你公開承認你的信仰。你對擁有「基督徒」的稱號感到榮幸嗎？你是否敢於告訴人們你的信仰，縱使他們不喜歡聽？最近，一位媽媽分享她小女兒的作業。她在其中談到她的信仰。她寫道，她開始意識到什麼是罪，她也想成為一名基督徒。太棒了！請注意：她是就讀於公立學校。一個忠誠可靠使者會忠實地傳遞真理，無論聽眾或環境如何。

### CONCLUSION 結論中

成長是一個過程。神會不斷地塑造我們，直到我們在榮耀裡見耶穌的那一天。我們在沿路上肯定會犯錯誤。但如果我們不從失敗中學習，那麼我們就只會繼續面對失敗。成熟的基督徒永遠不會放棄。他們知道自己是神的手中尚未完成的作品。神會剪掉無用的部分，磨平粗糙的邊緣，使祂的形像在我們的生命中更加明顯，使最終我們成為主人的傑作。願神的話語成為我們，特別是各位年輕人的激勵。