

Entrusted with the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Ah, this fall, the lectionary, which is the set of readings for corporate worship, Old Testament, Psalm, New Testament, Gospel.

! Work through a three-year cycle where you read the whole Bible. The lectionary has taken us through the pastoral letters of 1 and 2 Timothy in New Testament.

And if you're not familiar with these letters of 1 and 2 Timothy, they were written by the Apostle Paul to Timothy, a young leader in the church of Ephesus.

And Timothy was a leader that Paul had somewhat mentored as a bit of a protege for many years, as someone who could one day serve in his place.

And so Timothy spent many years traveling with Paul, being disciplined by him, being mentored by him, being trained by him.

[1 : 01] And so Timothy was in a place of being an apprentice for many years. But now, many years later, Timothy is in the role of leading the Ephesian church.

And this is a role in which, as we begin to read this letter, we realize that it's a role that Timothy feels very inadequate in. It's a role that he feels really out of his depth.

He's now leading the Ephesian church, of which he would later become the bishop. And Paul is writing this letter from prison. It's the second time that Paul has been arrested and imprisoned.

And Paul knows that he is likely to eventually face death by execution from the Roman authorities. And so Timothy is in this place where he feels really inadequate and he feels stretched far beyond his own natural abilities.

In addition to the heavy responsibilities of leading a church, he also faced several additional challenges. One was his youth. By his age, a lot of people would have thought that Timothy was far too young to be leading a church.

[2 : 13] We see this in 1 Timothy 4, where Paul encourages him to not let anyone look down on him because of his age. We might imagine the kind of external criticism or perhaps the own sense of personal inadequacy that Timothy probably felt because of his age.

Another challenge that Timothy experienced was his temperament. Again, sort of deducing from things that we see in the pastoral letters, Timothy was naturally timid and shy by his personality and temperament.

As you can imagine, this created a challenge in a ministry in a role that often demanded from him. That was very public in nature.

A lot of teaching and preaching and leading is done in public, and he was very shy and timid. One of the third challenges that Timothy faced was his own bodily weakness from 1 Timothy 5.

And we see that apparently he had some sort of chronic illness related to his stomach. And so Paul just encourages him to remember to take care of himself and to take care of his illness.

[3 : 25] And so John Stott, in his commentary on 2 Timothy, says this in a kind of summary fashion. He says, And if you can imagine what it would be like to be in his shoes, I mean, it probably felt like things could probably fall apart or collapse at any moment if he failed.

I mean, we have 2,000 years of church history to look back on. But Timothy was in the first century. He only had a couple decades of this thing called the church. And he was probably thinking, if I fail, all of this is going to collapse.

But you don't have to be a pastor or in a leadership role in a church to imagine what it's like to feel your own sense of inadequacy.

To feel out of your depth. Perhaps you experienced that this week in your own workplace or perhaps as a parent or in your relationship. So we've all been there. We've all felt inadequate.

We've all felt out of our depth. And I think that regardless of where you are, whether you've been a Christian for a long time or whether you are not sure what you believe, I think this letter can offer profound encouragement to us today.

[5 : 05] So imagine yourself in Timothy's shoes. You're this young leader of the church. You're facing all these challenges. You feel this profound sense of inadequacy. You feel this profound sense of feeling out of your depth.

What is the kind of encouragement that you would want to hear? How would you want to be encouraged? What is the kind of encouragement that you would need to hear?

What would you want to hear from a mentor who you love? Well, here in chapter 1, the apostle Paul, writing from his prison cell, likely awaiting his own execution, encourages Timothy amidst all of the external challenges that he is facing and amidst all the personal anxiety that he is experiencing.

And he reminds Timothy of three things here in the opening chapter, the opening verses of 2 Timothy. He reminds Timothy of this story. He reminds Timothy of his gifting and he reminds Timothy of his calling.

His story, his gifting, and his calling. So first of all, Paul reminds Timothy of his story. Look with me in your bulletin or in your own copy of God's word at verse 5.

[6 : 24] He says, I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now I'm sure dwells in you as well.

Paul recalls the story of faith in Timothy's life that began with his grandmother, that continued with his mother and is now present in him. We don't know a lot of details about Lois and Eunice and who they were, but we knew that they were incredibly godly women who had a vibrant, active faith and who diligently passed on their faith to their grandson and to their son.

We see later in 2 Timothy chapter 3 where Paul is encouraging Timothy in his task to publicly preach and teach the word. He reminds him that he has been acquainted with the Bible.

He has been acquainted with the scriptures from his infancy, from his infancy. From his earliest days, he had a grandmother and a mother who taught him the word of God.

And that formed Timothy in such deep ways that would prepare him for the ministry that God would later call him to. As a missionary and as a pastor and as the first bishop in Ephesus.

[7 : 38] And Paul is saying to this young pastor that he mentored and trained. Hey, I know that ministry in Ephesus is hard right now. I know that you're dealing with false teachers who are trying to come in and distort the gospel.

I know that you're dealing with criticism. People are saying you're too young to lead this church. You're dealing with the ever-looming threat of persecution from Roman authorities. I can't even visit you to encourage you personally because I'm in chains.

I'm in prison. And on top of that, you're facing your own insecurities. Your own weaknesses. Your own sins. Your own limitations. But you can imagine Paul saying, Timothy, in the midst of all of these things, I personally am encouraged and optimistic about your ministry.

Do you know why? Because I see Eunice. I see Lois in you.

These two godly women. I see them alive in you. I see their godly example of faith. Their legacy of lifelong sacrificial endurance.

[8 : 51] Friends, I see their faith in you. And you can imagine how this would have encouraged Timothy. He would have probably thought back to countless memories of his grandmother and his mother diligently teaching him the Bible.

Bringing him to worship. And he's praying with him. Facing difficult circumstances with hope and courage. Caring for the poor. Serving the church.

And what Paul is saying is, brother, the same grace, the same power that was in these women that you so deeply respect and admire is in you. So keep going.

Keep persevering. Like Timothy, I think we all need to be reminded of the legacy of faith that has shaped our own story. Who are the people in your life that have most impacted your faith?

That have most impacted your spiritual journey? Perhaps it's parents or grandparents. Friends. Classmates. A pastor or a campus minister.

[9 : 56] For me, it's probably all of those things. But I, as I was thinking through this passage, I especially thought through, thought back to my grandfather on my dad's side.

My grandfather was born on a farm in southern Pennsylvania in 1928. This was a year before the Great Depression. So that tells you a little bit about his upbringing.

He was one of 14 children. And after World War II, as a young man, he was on track to have a really successful business career in sales.

But he had a powerful experience. Where the Lord kind of undeniably, over several years, called him to be a pastor and to do local church ministry.

And at the time, this meant incredible sacrifice. It meant foregoing a successful career and earning potential and making less money while still having to feed the same number of kids.

[10:55] At the time, he had four kids with one on the way. And I was talking to my dad about this story this week. And my dad said that in the 1950s, he was making \$60 a week with four kids.

One on the way. And this was one of many challenges that he would face over the years. The kind of financial limitations. Partially because of finances, my grandfather never actually went to seminary.

All that he knew about preaching and teaching came from hard-earned personal study with the Bible and with other books that he could afford from time to time.

And like Timothy, my grandfather always felt just a little bit inadequate. He always felt just a little bit insecure that he didn't have a fancy theology degree like all of the other pastors.

But my grandfather was incredibly faithful to the gospel. With which he had been trusted by God's grace. And he was incredibly faithful to the churches that he pastored. And he was incredibly faithful to his family.

[11:59] And over many years, he had an incredible impact across the number of churches that he pastored. But also, to this day, on my own life. I wish that every person in this room could have had the chance to hear my grandfather pray.

He was an incredible man of faith. And as I think about all of the challenges that he faced, all the sacrifices that he made, all of the inadequacy and insecurity that he probably felt.

As I think about the legacy of faith that he left his family so that I could one day know the gospel. It deeply encourages me. At times when I feel my own sense of inadequacy.

If you're feeling out of your depth this morning, remember the Loises. Remember the Eunices in your life. Remember the people who have impacted you.

And remember that the same power, the same spirit, the same grace from God that was in them is in you. Is in you.

[13:09] So keep going. Keep enduring. Keep persevering. That's the first thing in the opening verses that Paul reminds Timothy of to encourage him.

The second thing that he encourages him in is his gifting. His gifting. Look with me at verse 6. Paul says, For this reason, I remind you to fan and flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

This reference to the laying on of my hands refers to Timothy's ordination. To the gifts of the Holy Spirit that were given to Timothy as his ordination as a pastor.

We believe that in ordination, not only is pastoral authority conferred to the one being ordained. But also the gifts and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. And this is a New Testament practice that our Anglican tradition, I believe, has beautifully preserved.

If you've ever been to an ordination service for a priest or deacon, or perhaps if you attended Bishop Jeff Bailey's consecration service last weekend, you will notice an ordination service.

[14:16] In an Anglican ordination service, the Holy Spirit is all over the service. It's everywhere. From the beginning to the end, the Holy Spirit is everywhere. It's everywhere.

Now, just to be clear, this isn't saying that the person being ordained didn't have the Holy Spirit before. It's quite the opposite.

Rather, it's an invocation of God's promise to further empower those he calls to ordain the ministry with a renewed gifting, a renewed empowerment of the Holy Spirit. And the link between these two verses here in verse 67 and the ones before it are the phrase, for this reason.

If you ever see the word, the phrase, for this reason, in the Bible, you should immediately ask, what reason is for this reason, therefore?

If the word therefore is in the Bible, you should say, what is the therefore, therefore? And here in this text, it's this. It's because of the verses that precede it. It's because Paul is confident that the Holy Spirit dwells in him that he reminds Timothy of the continual need to live a spirit-filled life.

[15:55] And he reminds him of this through this powerful encouragement, this wonderful encouragement to fan and to flame the gift of God.

To fan and to flame the gift of God. He's saying, Timothy, I know that there are places in your ministry and life where you feel out of your depth, where you feel inadequate. You feel weak. You feel discouraged. You feel afraid. You feel insecure. But guess what? You don't have to rely on your own natural strength and ability and resources.

Look at verse 7. Because God has given you a spirit, not of fear, but of power, of love, and of self-control.

This is an incredible promise. That the Holy Spirit empowers you in your weakness. Empowers you in your sense of inadequacy. The Holy Spirit empowers you with courage when you feel afraid.

[16:57] Empowers you with love in situations where you find yourself with people who are, on average, harder to love.

The Holy Spirit empowers you with self-control when you're finding it hard to maybe restrain your own sins and temptations and worst tendencies. Remember, Timothy, this is how the grace of the Christian life works.

You didn't come to faith on your own. You didn't come to faith on your own natural strength and resources, but through God's power and grace at work in you. You weren't even ordained as a pastor in your own strength and resources, but through God's power and grace that were present in the laying on of my hands and the laying on of the hands of the Ephesian elders.

So, Timothy, why would you try to live the Christian life and face these challenges as your pastor in your own resources and strength? Rather, fan into flame.

Give oxygen to the gift of the Spirit that is already in you by God's grace. And watch the Spirit work far beyond your own natural abilities.

[18:11] Now, of course, not all of us are pastors, but like Timothy, we all need to continually fan into flame the gift of the Holy Spirit that is in us by grace.

While the Holy Spirit is a gift that all Christians receive by faith, it's also a gift that we have to continually rekindle. We have to continually give it oxygen through spiritual disciplines by using and developing our spiritual gifts.

Otherwise, as Paul says elsewhere in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, if we don't do that, if we don't give oxygen to the Holy Spirit in our lives, once we quench, we stifle, we can shut down the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

One of the most common ways that we do this, one of the most common ways, I think, that we stifle or quench the work of the Holy Spirit is, especially when we feel inadequate, especially when we feel insecure, out of our depth, is we begin to fall back while we begin to rely on our own strength, to rely on our own resources and abilities.

Where in your life do you currently feel the most inadequate? Where in your life do you currently feel most out of your depth?

[19:43] Where in your life do you feel anxious? Do you feel afraid? Do you feel weak? Where do you feel discouraged? And friends, it's precisely in that place where we're called to fan into flame the gift of God, rather than relying on our own strength, we need to ask the Lord to fan into flame His power, His love, and His self-control.

To pray, to be able to pray prayers like this, Lord, I can't do this on my own. I can't do this in my own strength. I can't face this situation at work in my own strength.

I can't have this conversation in my own strength. I can't love this person. I can't overcome this temptation in my own strength, in my own natural abilities.

Lord, would you ignite, kindle, would you fan in the flame the Holy Spirit in me? Would you kindle the Spirit's work in me? Would you empower me to do what you have called me to do?

Friends, this is one of the great secrets of the Christian life. That Christ lives His life through us by the Spirit. And all that we do in terms of prayer and worship and spiritual disciplines is we are giving oxygen to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

[21:18] So that's the second thing that Paul encourages Timothy with. Timothy, don't rely on your own natural resources, but remember your gifting.

Remember your gifting by the Holy Spirit. Paul reminds Timothy of the story of his gifting. And finally, Paul reminds Timothy of his calling. Of his calling.

Look at verse 8. Verse 8. Paul says, Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.

Share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God. Following Paul's arrest and imprisonment for the second time, there were many who abandoned Paul and his ministry.

Some perhaps out of fear of Roman authorities, but some out of shame. If you look in verse 15, the verse that comes after our passage, Paul's going to say that most of the believers in Asia have deserted me.

[22 : 23] And Paul isn't just telling Timothy here to stick by his side. Paul is rather exhorting him to do what every pastor and what every Christian is called to do.

To be prepared to suffer for the sake of the gospel. That's the calling. That's our calling. Suffering for the gospel isn't...

It's not a bug. But... In Timothy's calling as a pastor, it's a feature. It's a feature. There is a spiritual enemy who opposes the advancement of the gospel.

There are false teachers who come in and try to restore the gospel. And there are cultural pressures that tempt us to water down or to even distort or even neglect the gospel.

The Lord Jesus himself said, No servant is above his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you as well. To suffer for the gospel is simply part of being insightful of Jesus.

[23 : 27] It's a... Feature. Not a bug. A couple years ago, a missionary I know, some missionaries that I've prayed for in Asia, shared this email update in their email newsletter.

And she writes this. She says, While the COVID-19 pandemic only brought slight relief from persecution, in the following years, religious persecution has been back in full force.

Pastor Chen, a fellow staff member currently in our city, recently brought a group of church and campus leaders to a nearby suburb for a local underground house church retreat.

It was a refreshing time for everybody for a few days with Bible teaching and training and fellowship. Up until the moment that police officers started banging on the door.

And all of the local leaders at the training were detained at the police station for two or more hours more of interrogations. They were warned repeatedly that all religious activities outside of government churches were illegal.

[24 : 34] And everyone's local IDs and foreign passports and computers and phones were all confiscated. Pastor Chen shared with us that he was called to a meeting with a senior officer who interrogated him about his unwanted foreign religious influence.

The officer followed with more threats of taking away his passport, denying future visas to him before finally letting him go. When he returned, Pastor Chen was shaken up and asked us for prayer to have faith to persevere amidst the harsh persecution.

Opposition to the gospel is not only something that Timothy experienced in the first century church. It's something that many of our brothers and sisters around the world experienced every day.

And Timothy's calling to suffer for the gospel despite opposition is still our gospel. And our brothers and sisters around the world, like the one in the story, are a model, an example to us in this. And in a world of opposition to the gospel, Paul tells Timothy that the primary reason why he should share in suffering for the gospel, in verses 8 through 10, the primary reason why he should share in suffering for the gospel, is the gospel message itself.

The gospel's power, its truth, its beauty. Look at verses 8 through 10. But share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

[26 : 18] Friend, if you're here this morning and you are still trying to figure out what you believe about Jesus, maybe you remain unconvinced about the Christian faith, maybe you have legitimate questions about whether Christianity or whether the Bible makes sense, I just want to offer you a couple things.

The first of that is that this is a great community to be part of, to be in process, to ask questions, to learn, and to try to figure out what you believe. There's no pressure here, and there is no question that is off limits.

You're welcome to be here and to explore. But another thing that I would offer you is this. Tell me better news.

Tell me a better story than what's here in verses 8 through 10. Tell me a better story than this, that to a world that was originally created good, but is now hurting and broken and suffering, that there is a God who has offered healing and rescue and restoration, and that this salvation comes not as a result of our works, not as a result of our own moral or religious performance, but by God's own eternal purpose and grace, which he has revealed in Jesus Christ, who has come to abolish death, to abolish death and sin in our place.

But the good news and story of the gospel isn't just what God has come to rescue us from, it is also what he has called us to. In verse 9, he has called us to a holy calling.

[28 : 00] Now this might sound like some super religious language, but this isn't meant to sound super religious, because our holy calling isn't about us becoming more externally religious.

Rather, holiness is about the complete healing and restoration of our human being, so that we, in ever-increasing ways, become people of love, people who experience the love of God and who extend God's love to the world.

And this transformation and healing begins in this life through the power of the Spirit, and it continues into the new heavens and the new earth with the glorification of our humanity in Christ in our resurrected, healed bodies in a restored creation.

Tell me a better story. Tell me better news. This is the gospel, and this is at what's at the heart of the Christian faith.

And Paul is entrusting not only the leadership of his ministry to Timothy, leading the Ephesian church, but he is entrusting the very gospel message itself. Look with me in verses 12 through 14.

[29 : 15] Verse 12, But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me and the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

And by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you. Guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

Timothy, my leg of the race is coming to an end. And now I am putting the baton in your hands. And it's time for you to run.

It's time for you to run your leg of the race. So guard the gospel message. Keep it safe. Don't let it be distorted by false teachers.

Don't let it be lost to the next generation. Don't let it be watered down by shallow or superficial theology.

[30 : 16] And don't let it be neglected by the winds of culture. Guard the gospel. This is an incredible responsibility. But in the midst of this incredible responsibility that Paul is trusting Timothy with, don't miss the incredible grace.

Don't miss the incredible grace that's here in this passage. Verse 12. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

Timothy, you have been entrusted with great responsibility. Not only to be the first bishop of Ephesus, but to safeguard the message of the gospel, and what you do with that is going to set the trajectory for the church for centuries to come.

But Timothy, remember, the baton is ultimately not in your hands, but in the hands of God. He is the one who ensures the gospel is guarded from one generation to one another.

He is the one who ensures that the gospel is preached to all the nations of the earth. Jesus is the one who said, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

[31 : 38] Paul reminds Timothy of his calling to guard the gospel, but also of the grace in his calling, the grace that is available to him. And it's true, those called to ordain ministry like Timothy have a particular distinct calling to safeguard the gospel in ways that are assigned to their particular office.

But at the same time, this is also the calling in another respect of every Christian believer. To receive the gospel message is to be entrusted with the gospel message.

The gospel has come to you on the way to someone else. The Lord has placed people in your life, friends, family, coworkers, so they might know and hear and receive the gospel through you.

This is an incredible responsibility. The baton is in your hands. You have the incredible privilege of running your leg of the race, and at times it's true.

It may involve opposition. It may involve suffering. Like Timothy, this is a weighty responsibility that most of us, I think if we're honest, we probably don't feel qualified for.

[32 : 59] We probably feel very inadequate. We probably feel way out of our depth. God has entrusted the gospel message to a broken and perfect, frail human being like me?

That's crazy. Why would he entrust the gospel to us? But don't miss that safeguarding the gospel isn't dependent upon what we can do in our strength, because God himself is ultimately the one who preserves and protects the gospel in our generation and throughout the centuries.

Jesus is building his church, and even the gates of hell will not prevail against it. So in the moments when you feel inadequate, moments where you feel insecure, moments where you feel anxious, out of your depth, you're keenly aware that you cannot live the Christian life in your own resources.

That is exactly where God loves to empower you. It is exactly where God loves to remind you that it's his power, it's his grace, it's his spirit at work in your life.

Remember your story. Remember your story. Remember those whom God has used to impact your life, and remember that the same grace that was in them is in you. Remember your gift.

[34 : 31] Remember that you have access to the Holy Spirit, fan into flame the gift of the Spirit that is in you by Christ. Give oxygen to his work in your life.

And remember your calling. Remember that you, your primary calling is that you have been entrusted with the best news in the universe. You have been entrusted with the gospel. It's an incredible responsibility.

It's an incredible privilege. But the weight of that calling isn't dependent upon you. The weight of that calling isn't dependent upon me, but on God himself. Friends, this is what encouraged Timothy in the midst of his own inadequacy.

And this is what will encourage us, especially when we feel out of our depth, and especially in the places where we feel like we can't do it in our own strength.

Let's pray together. Our Father in Heaven, thank you that we have such human examples like Paul and Timothy to learn from.

[35 : 42] Thank you that we have this letter of a young man who felt his own sense of inadequacy. Lord, would you encourage us today, wherever we are, to run our leg of the race and the power of your Holy Spirit.

We pray this in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.