



## A Life That Counts

*SERIES: A Life That Counts: Studies in 2 Timothy*

---

I'm pleased that your pastor has seen the significance of the letter I received about 2,000 years ago from the Apostle Paul. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Timothy. I understand that you're going to be studying this letter over the coming weeks. I thought maybe it would be helpful for you to hear a little bit about my story and what this letter meant to me before studying it.

For some of you this letter is nothing but ancient history. But I know that many of you are like I was - you want your life to count for something more than the trinkets of this world. You want to make a difference for generations to come. You want to make a difference for eternity. But it's not always easy, is it? There are things that get in the way. Things that make the price seem too high.

I know a little bit about that. That's why the Apostle Paul wrote me this letter. It would be his last. He was a prisoner of the Roman emperor, Nero. In my day, the emperor was more than just a ruler. He was worshiped as a god. But Nero didn't act like a god. He murdered his own mother. And Nero had this thing about us Christians. He blamed us for lighting the fire that burned much of Rome. For entertainment, he would tie our brethren to posts, cover their bodies with pitch and burn them as human torches to light his garden parties. Paul knew that as Nero's prisoner his days were numbered. And so, as a kind of last will and testament he wrote me from that cold and dark dungeon they called the Mammertine prison. You see, Paul knew that more than anything else I wanted my life to count like his. But Paul knew me almost too well. He knew that there were days I just wanted to forget it all and quit. He knew how close I was to just wasting my life. But you don't know about all that. Let me explain.

### 1. Timothy's youth

You see, from the start I wasn't really cut out for this.

I was from a small, country town called Lystra. We called the region Galatia. You call it southeastern Turkey. Like much of the Roman empire, it was filled with a mixture of people - Romans and Greeks and Jews. I was a mixture myself. My father was Greek. He worshipped a multitude of Greek gods: Zeus and Hermes and countless others. But on my mother's side we were Jewish. My grandmother, Lois, and my mother, Eunice, never let me forget that. From the time I was small they would sit me on their lap and teach me the Scriptures; stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; stories of how God used Moses to lead his people out of bondage in Egypt; and stories about the coming Messiah and how he would restore our people to our former greatness. To be perfectly honest it was all rather confusing for a young boy - my father speaking into one ear and my mother into another. It didn't help much with my friends either. To the Greeks, I wasn't quite Greek enough. To the Jews, I was worse than a Gentile.

Maybe that's why I was attracted to Paul. Oh, he was Jewish through and through. But when he and Barnabas came to town on their first missionary journey they spoke to us about things we'd never heard. They said that the Messiah had come and his name was Jesus. They said he was the sacrificial lamb who had died on a Roman cross to make payment for our sins. They said he had come not just for Jews, but for all people. All we had to do was put our trust in him and we would become full fledged children of God. I have to tell you that was the best news I'd ever heard, and it rang true. Along with my mother and grandmother I became a follower of Jesus.

I guess even then I should have seen the writing on the wall. I saw the price that Paul had to pay. I

watched as the people of our city stoned him and ran him out of town. I knew it wouldn't be easy to be a Christian, but Paul left behind a little group of us whose lives would never be the same. We began to meet together to worship and study the Scriptures. Sometimes we would even get together with believers from nearby Iconium. Those were good days. I grew in my faith. I felt like my life was beginning to count for something.

After a few years, Paul came back. This time he was with Silas, and the two of them were visiting the churches, trying to bring encouragement to those of us who had become believers. It was then that I really got to know Paul. He began to ask around about me, and my friends there spoke well of me. Paul said he wanted to take me with him as a kind of assistant. Me! A half breed kid who had never been beyond the mountains of Cappadocia. One night before we left, as our little church was gathered in prayer, Paul and the elders came and put their hands on me. As they prayed, it was like God was speaking through them to me. He was calling me to leadership, confirming within me gifts of teaching and shepherding. I was excited, but I was afraid. You see, by nature I'm an introvert. I'm one of those guys who likes to blend in with the crowd. I'm more prone to lean than to lead. My mother always called me shy. Others have called me timid.

Immediately we made preparations to leave. That's when Paul inquired about my...uh...status. He wanted to know if I was circumcised. Of course, this was always an issue in my home. As a Jew, my mother wanted this ancient mark upon my flesh, but my father had forbade it. Now I had to choose. An uncircumcised man is not allowed to take a single step inside a Jewish synagogue, and I knew that traveling with Paul this would limit my ministry with the Jews. So I consented. Oh yes, there was a price to pay for my life to count. The pain was great. I could not travel for a week, but finally we set out.

## 2. Timothy's journey's with Paul

I'll tell you, keeping up with Paul was no piece of cake! For the next 15 years I was at his heels. I've never seen a man with such passion and energy. We started out and I thought we'd travel a bit around Asia Minor, but Paul had bigger dreams. He had a vision in the night where he saw a man calling him across the Aegean Sea to the region of Macedonia. This was a place the Gospel had never been preached. But the Lord had prepared hearts there. Wherever we went, Philippi, Thessalonica, we found people eager to follow Jesus. But there was trouble too. In Thessalonica the Jews formed a mob against us and set the city in an uproar. They arrested some of the brethren and we had to escape by night. We came to Berea and found more who were hungry for the Gospel. But the Jews came from Thesalonica and stirred up more trouble for us. It was really Paul they wanted, so the brethren sent him away, while I stayed in Berea. Though Silas was with me, I've never felt so alone. No more Paul to lean on. I wanted my life to count, but I was beginning to wonder if I was cut out for this.

A few years later, when I was with Paul in Ephesus, he sent me to Corinth. The church at Corinth was like a hornet's nest. Immorality was rampant! There was even a man there sleeping with his father's wife! They brought lawsuits against each other in the secular courts. Some of them said, "I am of Paul." Others said, "I am of Peter." And then there were the super-spiritual who said, "I am of Christ." Paul sent me into that mess with a tough letter he had written! But Paul knew my fears. And so in that letter he told them, **"If Timothy comes, see that he is without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work...let no one despise him."** (1 Cor. 16:10, 11). Even with that, things didn't go well for me in Corinth. Not only was I timid, but I was young. In those days you were considered a youth until you turned 40. There were men in that church twice my age. I returned to Paul defeated and discouraged. The next time he sent someone to Corinth, he chose not me but Titus.

But Paul stuck with me. And I guess you could say I

stuck with Paul. When Paul set sail for Rome under house arrest, I was on that ship. What a ride! We left in the fall, a dangerous time to sail on the Mediterranean Sea. And sure enough, we ran into a storm to end all storms. I thought for sure we'd end up at the bottom. If you've ever experienced rolling off the top of a great wind-driven wave, feeling the water flow out from under you and drop like a roller coaster off its tracks, you know what I'm talking about. We were driven by the wind for 14 days. We were drenched, beaten and battered, but somehow we made it to Rome. And it was worth the trip. Oh, what a sight it was! Men and women from every nation filled the streets, dressed in exotic garb. There were temples of native and imported gods, towering pyramids from Egypt, statues and paintings from Greece. I saw the great Colosseum where athletes competed and gladiators fought wild beasts. And there were Christians in Rome. They embraced us like long lost friends. For two years, Paul was under house arrest, waiting for trial. It wasn't all that bad. We had our own rented quarters. We were free to take visitors and saw many come to faith.

And then one day they just said we were free to go. Rome was like that. Things were always changing. So off we went again. We traveled for a time and finally Paul left me in Ephesus to help that church get established, while he went on. Some even say he made it all the way to Spain.

### 3. Timothy's ministry in Ephesus

It wasn't much better for me in Ephesus than it was in Corinth. Ephesus was a port city and YOU know what that's like! It was where the great temple of Diana stood, and cult prostitutes came down into the city every night to ply their trade. But that's not all. False teachers threatened to dilute the true message of the Gospel. Some of them like Hymenaeus and Alexander said Paul was a fake. I wanted my life to count, but I didn't want this. To make matters worse, I had a problem with my stomach. It had started in my travels with Paul. Some kind of bug that wouldn't go away. I wanted out!

And that's when Paul wrote me the first letter from Macedonia. It's funny how some things stick in your mind. I

didn't get more than a few lines along before I read those words: "**Remain on at Ephesus...**" (1 Tim. 1:3). I must tell you, that's the last thing I wanted to hear. I was too young, but Paul wrote, "**Let no one look down on your youthfulness...**" (1 Tim. 4:12). I was sick, but Paul wrote, "**Use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments**" (1 Tim. 5:23). Every escape route I tried to find, Paul had an answer.

But Paul had his own problems. Sometime after that first letter, Nero began his vicious campaign against Christians. Paul was arrested and taken back to Rome. He didn't have the luxury of rented quarters or frequent visitors this time. It was cold and dark and lonely in that prison. Paul was at the end of his rope, awaiting execution. And it was from that place that my old friend wrote his last recorded words, to me of all people. This letter was different from the first. It was more urgent. It was more personal. This time he wanted me to finish my work and come to see him in Rome before the chill of winter filled his dungeon. He asked me to bring the cloak he left at Troas, as well as his books and parchments.

Paul knew his time was up and so he spoke to me as if the future of the Gospel depended on my actions. It was like he was handing me something; something precious that I was to keep and guard and pass on to the next generation. As a matter of fact he used those very words. He said, "**Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us the treasure which has been entrusted to you**" (1:14). He said, "**Preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season**" (4:2). He said, "**And the things you have heard from me...entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also**" (2:2). And most of all he reminded me, "**For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline**" (1:7).

I'll be honest, I didn't know if I could pull it off. I wanted my life to count, but if anyone was unqualified for this job, it was me. My family heritage was mixed. I

was too young. I was too frail. And I was too timid. But somehow my mind kept coming back to those opening words. You know, the ones you normally skip over when you're reading one of Paul's letters. He said, "**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.**"

"**Paul, an apostle by the will of God.**" It wasn't Paul's idea. It was God's idea. Paul was every bit as unqualified as I. He persecuted the church of God. And yet God chose Paul as an apostle.

"**Paul, an apostle...according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.**" Death was staring Paul square in the face, yet it was the promise of life in Christ that consumed him. A promise that was for him and for the whole world.

Even for me. "**To Timothy, my beloved son.**" Paul wrote that about me! I was Paul's son in the faith. He had shared that "promise of life" with me, and I had embraced it, and nothing I would have to give up was too great in order for me to hold onto that promise.

And here's the best part: "**Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.**" When I read those words, I knew that my life would count. I would pay the price. Not because of what was in me, but because of what was in him. Grace, mercy and peace; that's what I needed. That's what he offered; a threefold stream: Grace for the undeserving; not just saving grace, but continued grace for living, for serving. Mercy for the needy and the distressed. I was needy. Peace for the restless in the face of many trials. I could use some peace. I knew then that my life would count, not because I counted on myself, but because I could count on God.

I don't know, maybe your situation is like mine.

Maybe you want your life to count, but the price seems high. Maybe you feel like the last person in the world he should have entrusted this treasure to. Maybe you grew up in the wrong kind of family. Maybe you're too young or even too old. Maybe you're too sick. Maybe it's your personality - you're more prone to lean than to lead. Maybe the place he's called you to serve is hard. I know about all that. And I want you to know that if you want your life to count, you will have to pay a price, but if you lean on him he will provide everything you need to do just that. Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. Don't count on yourself, but on God.

© 2003 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA