



Rekindle Your Gift

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

“I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy. For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well. For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline” (2 Tim. 1:3-7).

A couple of weeks ago we began our study of 2 Timothy by hearing Timothy's own story. If you were here you learned something of the story behind this letter.

Paul wrote this letter as he was in prison in Rome, awaiting execution. This was “it” for Paul. His earthly journey was just about over; heaven loomed large on the horizon of his soul.

It was for this reason that he wrote to his young protégé, Timothy. Timothy traveled with Paul on his second and third missionary journeys, and then on to Rome. Later, Paul left Timothy in the city of Ephesus to help the believers there get established in their faith and form a church.

Ephesus was a challenging place to be for a young man from a small town. It was on the west coast of modern day Turkey. It was considered one of the great cities of the Roman Empire; the Roman provincial capital of Asia Minor. It was a prosperous commercial center. Ephesus had a theater with a seating capacity of 24,000 situated on the side of a hill so that it looked out upon a beautiful colonnaded street that led directly to the harbor. There were several large baths and gymnasiums in Ephesus where people came to exercise and rejuvenate. There was a stadium which staged athletic contests, chariot races and gladiatorial fights. It had a prestigious medical school. Most importantly, Ephesus was the home of the Temple of Artemis. This was the largest building in the Greek world. It was made entirely of marble with 127 columns, some rising to the height of 60 feet. The ancient historian Antipater classified it as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The Ephesians worshipped Diana, a fertility goddess, through magical rites and sex with temple priestesses. This was the place Timothy was called to serve.

The church at Ephesus had its share of problems. It was teeming with false teachers who opposed Timothy and the apostle Paul. And Timothy was easily intimidated. Timothy was

a young man. He was from mixed parentage - his father was a Greek and his mother was Jewish. He battled some kind of frequent illness. And he was timid. By personality, Timothy was more prone to lean than to lead.

One of the things that's clear as you read through this letter is that Timothy was discouraged. Timothy was flagging in his faith. In his discouragement he was at least tempted to leave his post and to bail out. Timothy was a weary soldier who just wanted to go home.

1. Sources of Discouragement.

Sometimes that happens in our walk with God, doesn't it? We become weary, discouraged, even disillusioned. We begin to think that this isn't what we signed up for, and even if it was we're not sure we have what it takes.

I once heard a story about the devil. He was having a garage sale where his tools were put up for sale. There were all kinds of things on display for people to buy: hatred, envy, lying, pride, greed, and so on. But set apart from the rest was a harmless looking tool, well-worn and priced very high.

One shopper asked the devil, “What's the name of that tool?”

The adversary looked at him and said, “Oh, that's discouragement.”

“Why is it priced so high?” the shopper asked.

The devil answered, “Because it's the most useful tool I have. I can pry open and get inside a person's heart with that one when I can't get near him with the others. Once I get him discouraged, I can make him do pretty much what I choose. I use it a lot because very few people know that it belongs to me.”

I don't think our enemy ever sold that tool because he still uses it so effectively. I tried to think about WHY we get discouraged. Three things come to mind:

The first is *exhaustion*. If you were at the retreat last weekend you know Steve Farrar talked about overcoming overload. This hit home with us. Many of us are overloaded. We're tired. We're exhausted. And that effects us spiritually. Exhaustion makes us vulnerable. Vince Lombardi said, “Fatigue makes cowards of us all.” You know, it's not necessarily always wrong to be exhausted. It doesn't always mean you've made the wrong choices. Jesus had times in his life where he was

exhausted. But when we're exhausted, we're more prone to discouragement.

Another reason we become discouraged is *opposition*. We become battle weary. When one thing after another comes at us, wave upon wave, we want out. When you decide to follow Christ you make a choice to walk against the tide of the world and that can result in criticism and misunderstanding. Maybe that comes from a family member or a coworker. Maybe it's some enemy you fight within like depression or doubt. When the opposition is relentless, we get discouraged.

Finally, we can become discouraged because of *condemnation*. Some of us are acutely aware of our shortcomings and sins. We try to believe that we're clean because of the cross of Christ, but we struggle to internalize that. We walk around with consciences that are loaded down with our failures. One of the names in the Bible for Satan is "the accuser of the brethren." That's what he does - he accuses us. He opens up your "trash file" and shows you all the stuff you thought was deleted. Condemnation brings discouragement.

If you can relate to any of this, you can relate to Timothy. Not only that, you can relate to what Paul writes to Timothy. In 2 Tim. 1:3-7 Paul comes right out of the blocks in this letter with some reminders that will help to prop up and even stir up Timothy to fight discouragement. This passage is peppered with the language of memory. In v. 3 Paul says, "**I constantly remember you...**" In v. 4 he says, "**I recall your tears...**" In v. 5 he says, "**For I am mindful (lit. "I have been reminded...") of your sincere faith...**" And finally he says in v. 6, "**I remind you to rekindle your gift...**" Paul is in a reminiscent mood and he uses that to remind Timothy of some of his own spiritual foundations. There are four foundations Paul points to in these opening words to help Timothy fight discouragement.

2. How to Fight Discouragement: Remember!

A. Remember your spiritual heritage: First, he says to remember your spiritual heritage. He does this by mentioning first his own forefathers in v. 3 who also would have been Timothy's forefathers because they both were Jews. Paul says he's following in the footsteps of these forefathers in that he serves (lit. worships) God with a clear conscience as they did. Paul sees himself not separate from but connected to OT saints like Abraham, Moses and David. He understood, as they did, that you can't separate your lifestyle choices from your worship. You can't just go to church and sing the songs and listen to the Scripture and then go out and live however you like. He learned that from his forefathers.

That sets the stage for what he says down in v. 5 about Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. He's reminded of their "sincere (genuine, unhypocritical) faith." Later in this letter we'll read of how they reared Timothy in the OT Scriptures. Remember they were Jews.

Somewhere along the line, probably during Paul's visit to Lystra on his first missionary journey, they and Timothy responded to the Gospel and trusted Christ as Savior. Calvin said that Timothy "was reared in infancy in a way that he could suck in godliness along with his mother's milk."

This should be an encouragement to you parents and grandparents. Maybe you're in a marriage where your spouse doesn't share your faith in Christ. You wonder if your kids are ever going to get it. Keep planting seeds. Keep praying for them. Keep exposing your kids to the Scriptures. Continue to be a model of a genuine, sincere faith. Be REAL with your kids. You're not perfect. Believe me, they know it. But make sure they know YOU know it. Let them see how your faith makes a difference in your life. Grandparents - don't underestimate your influence. Maybe your grand kids are far away; maybe their parents are far away from God. But you're there and you can speak into their lives like no one else can.

Not all of us have this kind of spiritual heritage. I don't have it. I can't point to one person in my family line who had a sincere faith. I was a spiritual orphan. Many of you can relate to that. But some of you can point to parents or to grandparents or to someone even further back who was godly and who prayed for you and who invested in you spiritually. Let me tell you, that's a precious gift that you should never take for granted. I run into Christians from time to time who downplay their Christian heritage; who even act like they're embarrassed by it. It's as if it's not "cool" to come from a Christian home. It's like you have a "hand me down" faith; it's not in style. Let me tell you, that's baloney! When you're in a battle; when you're discouraged you can look back to loved ones who have gone before you. They fought the same battle. You saw the outcome of their faith. And you can draw strength from that. That's a gift.

B. Remember your spiritual mentors: But if you don't have that, you can fall back on the second foundation. Paul not only reminds Timothy of his spiritual heritage but also of his spiritual mentor. Up in v. 2 Paul called Timothy his "beloved son" in the faith. As Timothy's spiritual father, Paul says he constantly remembered him in his prayers. He ached to see him, recalling the hot tears streaming down Timothy's cheeks as they parted ways in Ephesus. And he affirmed him. His first words in v. 3: "**I thank God...**" For who? For Timothy. For his sincere faith. For the reality of Christ at work in his life. Notice what he says at the end of v. 5, "**...and I am SURE that it is in YOU as well.**"

Paul gives us a great model of discipleship here. How do you disciple someone? What does a spiritual mentor do? Look at Paul's example. He's faithful in prayer. He's warm in friendship. He's affirming in speech. And, as we'll see in a moment, he's purposeful in exhortation. Do you have someone you're bringing along in the faith - a spiritual son or daughter? Keep Paul's model in mind.

I've been so blessed with spiritual mentors. The Lord MORE than made up for my lack of a godly heritage with wonderful mentors. Norm Frankenberger, Paul Robie, Jay Grimstead, Mike Dunkel, Tom Virtue, Steve Zeisler, Ray Stedman, Leron Heath, Jeff Farrar, Haddon Robinson. You don't

know most of those guys, but each one of them in different ways and at different times in my life were faithful in prayer, warm in friendship, affirming in speech and purposeful in exhortation. Without them I wouldn't be here today. Sometimes when I'm discouraged I remember one of them and it helps me to keep going.

Let me tell you what I would love to see at CPC. I would love to see a culture of discipleship and mentoring here. I'd love to see men intentionally mentoring men and women intentionally mentoring women. I'd love to see each of us with our own Paul and with our own Timothy. Someone to lean on and someone lead on. If we all had that, we would be a more encouraged church for sure!

C. Remember your spiritual endowments: The third foundation is of our spiritual endowments. Paul reminds Timothy of the "gift of God which is in you." This is something God himself gave to Timothy. And it was a gift of God's grace. The word used for "gift" is charisma which means a grace-gift. We don't know for sure what grace-gift Paul was talking about, but the fact that this gift was bestowed upon him through the laying on of Paul's hands gives us a clue. Back in the OT when Joshua took over for Moses as the leader of the people of Israel, Moses laid his hands on him as a symbol that he was being set apart for this ministry. In Acts 6:6 when the Apostles commissioned the seven deacons in the ministry of distributing food they prayed and laid their hands on them. Later, when Paul and Barnabas were sent out as missionaries the leaders of the church at Antioch did the same thing. It's clear that this gift of God has to do with Timothy being set apart as a leader and a teacher in the church. Paul wants Timothy to remember that time when this gift and calling to ministry became a reality in his experience. In 1 Tim. 4:14 we learn that it wasn't just Paul who laid his hands on Timothy but a whole group of elders. At that moment prophetic words were spoken that confirmed this was the calling of God upon his life.

A calling to full-time ministry should involve both an internal and an external call. The internal call is the desire of your heart to serve the Lord in some way. The external call is when other mentors in your life confirm your gifts and calling. Paul harkens Timothy back to the time when his external call was confirmed.

Not all of us have the same gift that Timothy had, but all of us have a gift; all of us have a calling. All of us have been given some unique God-given ability designed specifically to build up others in the faith. Someone once said your calling is the place that your heart's deep desire and the world's great need intersect. When you experience that intersection, you know it. You know you're doing what God created you to do. You know he's doing it through you. But sometimes that gets buried beneath the exhaustion, the opposition, and the condemnation.

So if you're discouraged, remember your spiritual heritage, recall your spiritual mentors, and remember your spiritual endowments. All these things have to do with what God has provided for us. He hasn't really told us to DO anything. But there is one more thing to remember.

D. Remember your spiritual responsibilities: This last foundation has to do with our spiritual responsibilities. He reminds Timothy to "**kindle afresh the gift of God...**" The gift of God is likened here to a fire. One thing about fires - they die down unless you tend them; unless you stir up the coals. Of course, when I go camping I can't even get the fire started, much less keep it going. But if you have a fire, you usually don't have to start a new one. All you have to do is poke around a little bit and find just the tiniest glow of wood or coal, stir it up a bit, add some grass or leaves, and you're in business.

There are times in our life when for one reason or another we've failed to keep the fire roaring. What do we do? Well, the good news is you don't have to start anything new. You just have to stir up the coals, fan the flickering flame. But how do you do that? I think what that means is you choose to step back into the fray. You use that gift which has been barely flickering - your gift! But what if you're afraid? Timothy was afraid. What if you don't think you have what it takes, like Timothy?

The answer is in v. 7, "**For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power, love and discipline.**" Unfortunately, my translation has "spirit" with a small "s" instead spirit with a capital "S". I don't think there is any doubt that he's talking about the Holy Spirit. Notice this gift is not just for Timothy, it's given to "us." The Holy Spirit, who is given to each of us when we trust Christ, does not produce timidity in our life, but rather power and love and discipline. Not all of us have the calling of a Timothy, but all of us have the same Spirit.

We don't have the Spirit of timidity. That word means fear or cowardice. It's a lack of courage or moral strength. The Spirit of God doesn't produce spiritual pansies! Instead, he produces three qualities: *power* - strength of character; strength to stand up to opposition; power to step up and fulfill our responsibilities. He also produces *love*. This power is not in service of self; it's in service of others. That's what love is. It's the act of giving oneself; of laying one's life down. Finally, he produces "discipline." A better translation of this word is "a sound mind." One writer says, "Paul has in mind a measure of control over one's thinking and actions that allows a balanced outlook on any situation. When everything comes unglued, this quality of levelheadedness will keep the Christian focused calmly on the power and love that the Spirit provides, and so makes perseverance in life and ministry possible."

Part of the reason we get discouraged is we feel that we don't have what it takes to fulfill God's calling on our lives, and so the fire dies down. But we DO have what it takes; God has given it to us in the person of his Spirit. Do you feel afraid? He'll give you power and strength. Are you tempted to live for self alone? He'll give you love. Do you have a tendency to "lose your cool" under pressure? He'll give you a sound mind. When God calls, he provides. Sometimes he allows us to come to the very end of our own resources

before we look for the resources of his Spirit, but he won't fail to supply what we need if we call on him. But we have to be willing to "kindle afresh" that which has died down. We have to be willing to step out in faith, to jump into the fray, to use our gift. That's our spiritual responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Mario Cuomo, former governor of New York, wrote in *Life* about a time when he was especially discouraged during a political campaign:

I couldn't help wondering what Poppa would have said if I told him I was tired or - God forbid - discouraged. A thousand pictures flashed through my mind, but one scene came sharply into view. We had just moved to Holliswood, New York, from our apartment behind the store. We had our own house for the first time; it had some land around it, even trees. One in particular was a great blue spruce that must have been 40 feet tall.

Less than a week after we moved in, there was a terrible storm. We came home from the store that night to find the spruce pulled almost totally from the ground and flung forward, its mighty nose bent in the asphalt of the street. My brother Frankie and I could climb poles all day; we were great at fire escapes; we could scale fences with barbed wire - but we knew nothing about trees. When we saw our spruce, defeated, its cheek on the canvas, our hearts sank. But not Poppa's.

Maybe he was five feet six if his heels were not worn. Maybe he weighed 155 pounds if he had a good meal. Maybe he could see a block away if his glasses were clean, but he was stronger than Frankie and me ...altogether. We stood in the street, looking down at the tree.

"Okay, we gonna push 'im up!"

"What are you talking about? The roots are out of the ground!"

"Shut up, we gonna push 'im up, he's gonna grow again." You couldn't say no to him. So we followed him into the house and we got what rope there was and we tied the rope around the tip of the tree that lay in the asphalt, and he stood up by the house, with me pulling on the rope and Frankie in the street in the rain, helping to push up the great blue spruce. In no time at all, we had it standing up straight again!

With the rain still falling, Poppa dug away at the place where the roots were, making a muddy hole wider and wider as the tree sank lower and lower toward security. Then we shoveled mud over the roots and moved boulders to the base to keep the tree in place. Poppa drove stakes in the ground, tied rope from the trunk to the stakes, and maybe two hours later looked at the crippled spruce made straight by ropes, and said, "don't worry, he's gonna grow again."

If you were to drive past that house today, you would see the great, straight blue spruce, maybe 65 feet tall pointing up to the heavens, pretending it never had its nose in the asphalt.

Remembering that night in Holliswood, I now couldn't wait to get back into the campaign.

I like that story because it illustrates what God is saying not just to Timothy but to each of us in this passage. Regardless of how discouraged we might be, we need to get back into the campaign of the Kingdom. To do that, it helps to remember. Remember your spiritual heritage. Remember your spiritual mentors. Remember your spiritual endowments. And remember your spiritual responsibilities.

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