

## 2 Tim 1:1-7 Sermon "Passing the Baton to the Family of Faith"

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What do you want your final words to be? Before you take your final bow from the grand dance of human history, what do you want recorded? Many times a person's last words reveal something of the essence of their life. The great composer Bach is alleged to have said at the end of his life, "Don't cry for me, for I go where music is born."<sup>1</sup> The great puritan theologian and preacher Jonathan Edwards said, "Trust in God, and you need not fear."<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther's last recorded words: "We are beggars; this is true."<sup>3</sup>

Well what would you write if you knew you were going to die soon? They would probably be the weightiest words you'd ever written. You'd probably speak the things that were closest to your heart. You would in fact be in the same position as the Apostle Paul. The Letter of 2 Timothy is the last writing we have of the Apostle Paul. It was written in Rome (2 Tim 2:9) while Paul was under house-arrest awaiting trial, and 2 Tim 4:6 shows us that Paul knows that he is going to die soon. And so he writes one of the most personal and weighty letters of the entire New Testament to Timothy, a young pastor serving in Ephesus. And while Paul addresses this letter to Timothy specifically, the very last verse in 2 Tim 4:22 says, "Grace be with you all" which means that this letter was to be read for the benefit of every Christian in the church. So while Paul writes to Timothy, but he is also writing to you, Christian, so that by following Timothy's example you will remember to steward your gifts with gratitude to God for the sake of the gospel's furtherance.

Please turn with me to 2 Timothy 1:1-7, which is on page 995 in the seatback bibles. As I read, I want you to listen for the key themes of **family** and **remembrance** that occur all throughout this passage:

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, 2 To Timothy, my **beloved child**: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the **Father** and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3 I thank God whom I serve, as did my **ancestors**, with a clear conscience, as I **remember** you constantly in my prayers night and day. 4 As I **remember** your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. 5 I am **reminded** of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your **grandmother Lois** and your **mother Eunice** and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. 6 For this reason I **remind** you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, 7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.[pray]

We have three points in our sermon today:

1. A Family of Faith
2. A Father Who Gives.
3. A Flame to Be Fanned

Before we dive in, let's remember who the apostle Paul was, and who Timothy was. Paul, also called Saul,<sup>4</sup> was a Jewish teacher who lived in the first century and who belonged to the group called the Pharisees, who were the enemies of Jesus and his followers. But Paul's was a sincere man; he After Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection, Paul begins to persecute Christians. Now when I say persecution, this means he put many of them in prison and cast his vote for their execution (Acts 26:10). Probably the

<sup>1</sup> While many attribute these last words to him, I have not found any trustworthy source that confirms this.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Hopkins and Jonathan Edwards, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend, Learned, and Pious Mr. Jonathan Edwards, President of the College of New-Jersey: Together with Extracts from His Private Writings & Diary* (Northampton, MA: Printed by Andrew Wright, for S. & E. Butler, 1804), 81.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers, 25th Anniversary*, Rev. Ed (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2013), 105. His final words were in half German and half Latin: "Wir sein Petter, Hoc est Verum."

<sup>4</sup> Regarding Paul's names, see <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/no-saul-the-persecutor-did-not-become-paul-the-apostle/>

closest equivalent to Saul would be a terrorist in an Islamic state who targets Christians today. But then everything changed in his life when Jesus appeared to Saul miraculously.

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

“Who are you Lord?”

“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting”

and Jesus commissions this enemy of the cross to take the gospel message to the Gentiles.<sup>5</sup>

This is how the gospel works: God takes his enemies and graciously calls them into his service, and this is why we can have great boldness in our evangelism! Saul is converted to Christ, and he devotes the rest of his life to proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and making disciples, of whom Timothy was one.

### A. Paul and Timothy

Now Timothy was a young pastor who had served as Paul’s right hand man for over a decade in gospel ministry.<sup>6</sup> Timothy is listed as the co-author of six of Paul’s letters.<sup>7</sup> Paul would send Timothy to churches to pastor them and raise up leaders. We know from Acts 16:1 that Timothy was “the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek.” The fact that his mother’s faith in Jesus is mentioned in Acts 16 and then again in 2 Tim 1:5, but his father’s faith is not mentioned at all, makes it highly likely that Timothy’s father was an unbeliever. In all likelihood, Timothy grows up without ever sharing any spiritual closeness with his father.

This is why Paul’s opening lines are supercharged with significance for Timothy. Look with me near the beginning of verse 2: “Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father...” Paul could have used a thousand different titles to describe God: God the all-wise, God the sovereign ruler, God the eternal—and these are all true. But Paul describes God as the Father, and in fact he does this in every single one of his 13 letters.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most glorious realities in the Christian life is the doctrine of adoption. All of us are enemies of Jesus Christ from our birth. But Jesus came to the world around 2000 years ago in order to bring us to God. He lived a perfect life, and he died upon a Roman cross, and he rose again on the third day. And in his death and resurrection, Jesus offers the forgiveness for the sins of all his people in order to reconcile them to God. Friend, whoever you are and whatever you’ve done, you can become a child of God by trusting in Jesus’s person and work on the cross. And when you become a child of God, you become a recipient of the “grace, mercy, and peace” that Paul speaks of in verse 2. You take hold of the promise of eternal life which is in Christ Jesus at the end of verse 1. If you want to know more about how to become a Christian, you can talk to someone sitting near you at the end of the service.

This is the Christian’s story: I was blind but now I see. I was a stranger but now I’m a son. While you were an enemy, God adopted you as his son or daughter, and He changed your identity. His disposition toward you is one of a compassionate but firm father, one who disciplines—but never with contempt—and one who delights to do us good and to give us more of Himself.

But not only was God Timothy’s father, but through discipleship Paul became Timothy’s father in Christ. Paul didn’t convert Timothy, he was already a Christian when Paul met him in Acts 16, but Paul loved him, shared his life with him, and disciplined Timothy.<sup>9</sup> Because God has adopted us, we Christians no longer relate to one another as merely friends, but as closer than friends, as beloved family members—

<sup>5</sup> In Acts, Paul recounts his encounter with Jesus three times: beginning in Acts 9:1; 22:6; 26:2. The most information he gives of the encounter with Jesus is in Acts 26:9–18.

<sup>6</sup> See the helpful character sketch of Timothy in Christopher R. Hutson, “Was Timothy Timid? On the Rhetoric of Fearlessness (1 Corinthians 16:10–11) and Cowardice (2 Timothy 1:7),” *BibRes* 42 (1997): 58–73.

<sup>7</sup> See the first verse of the following books: 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

<sup>8</sup> See Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Th. 1:1; 2 Th. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philem. 1:3—thirteen times in total.

<sup>9</sup> In some places spiritual fatherhood seems to be generally applied to exercising a spiritual care for others (here and 3 John 4), but in other places it seems that Paul speaks of spiritual fatherhood to describe the one whose gospel witness bring about conversion in another individual (Philem. 1:10; 1 Cor. 4:15).

and there is a holy love and warmth that embodies these relationships. Turn to **1 Timothy 5** and notice how Paul counsels Timothy—and by extension, every Christian—with how he ought to relate to other Christians in his church, **1Tim. 5:1–2** “**1 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.**” We read earlier in the service about how Jesus radically centered family relationships around him in **Matthew 12:50**, “**whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.**”

This is such good news! One of the best things about being a Christian is that you’re never alone in the world; you have a heavenly Father, but you also have fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters on earth in the church who care for you. You may have grown up in a dysfunctional family; you may have unsaved family members who you’ve never had a spiritual closeness with, but in the church there is a holy intimacy of family members who relate to each other, as Paul said, as fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in all purity.

Now this still takes work and intentionality. Paul is intentional in his relationship with Timothy, and he shares his life and time with him. The logic of **verse 4** is compelling to us as we move beyond a year of the pandemic: Paul’s joy is lacking while he is away from Timothy; and yet when Paul sees Timothy in Person, he is filled with joy. Can you resonate with this? But not only does Paul desire to spend time with Timothy, but he also exhorts and encourages him, as we’ll see in **verse 6**. A family that loves one another is not static; they look for ways to cultivate greater Christlikeness in each other. This is why Paul exhorts Timothy so much in this letter; as his spiritual father, he knows where Timothy is tempted, and what he needs to be reminded of.

## **B. Timothy’s Godly Legacy**

But beyond the influence of Paul, look with me at Timothy’s biological family in **verse 5**. Paul is reminded of Timothy’s faith “**that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice...**” Later on in **3:15** Paul reminds Timothy “**how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings,**” The word for “childhood” in this text refers to “infancy”; almost every of the seven other times it’s used in the NT refers to babies in the womb or who have recently been born.<sup>10</sup> From when he was a little baby boy his Jewish grandmother and mother<sup>11</sup> took an interest in his spiritual growth; they read the Word of God to him and made sure he understood it. It’s remarkable to consider that moms and grandmas are some of the best evangelists in the world.

We ought not underestimate the regular influence of God’s Word on children. You may have heard of the 10/40 window in missions—that section of the globe where most of the un-evangelized in the world live. There also something called the 4/14 window, and it describes the time period in a person’s life when they are most likely to accept the gospel. The statistics are staggering; depending on the study you look at, around 2/3 of Christians profess faith in Christ before they are fourteen years old.<sup>12</sup> Many of the Christian names we know came to faith when they were young. John MacArthur doesn’t even remember a time when he didn’t believe the Bible.<sup>13</sup> Matthew Henry, the puritan who wrote a commentary on the entire bible, was converted at the age of six. Some of my heroes were converted young. John Piper was

<sup>10</sup> All eight instances of the Greek *brephos* (βρέφος) are found in Luke 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16; 18:15; Acts 7:19; 2 Tim. 3:15; and 1 Pet. 2:2. The context of these passages points to a child in the womb or recently born; Luke 18:15 is the one exception where the context does not explicitly identify the age of the *brephos* brought to Jesus.

<sup>11</sup> I’m assuming, from her connection to Lois in the text, that Eunice is Timothy’s grandmother on his mother Lois’s side, and thus she would be Jewish.

<sup>12</sup> In the following study, at least 71% of Christians affirmed that they came to faith by the time they were 14 (but note that this includes the ages of 1–3, and not merely 4–14). See Thom Rainer, “The Great Commission to Reach a New Generation,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 1, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 44. The article that gives some of these statistics can be found online at [https://sbts-wordpress-uploads.s3.amazonaws.com/equip/uploads/2010/02/sbjt\\_014\\_winter\\_rainer.pdf](https://sbts-wordpress-uploads.s3.amazonaws.com/equip/uploads/2010/02/sbjt_014_winter_rainer.pdf). In a different online survey, 63% of respondents professed faith by age 14; “When Americans Become Christians,” National Association of Evangelicals (blog), Spring 2015, <https://www.nae.net/when-americans-become-christians/>. There is another statistic associated with the International Bible Society that indicates that “83% of all Christians make their first commitment to Jesus between the ages of 4 and 14,” but I was not able to track down any data for this study, and it seems to be an informal survey.

<sup>13</sup> John MacArthur “do[es]n’t ever remember a time when [he] didn’t believe the gospel.” See <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-33/john-macarthur-s-life-testimony>

6<sup>14</sup>. Mark Dever was 14.<sup>15</sup> All of the elders of our church except John believed the gospel truths before they were 7 years old.<sup>16</sup>

Right now, think on your own life and when you first believed. I'm going to ask you to raise your hand if you believe you made your profession of faith by the time you were aged fourteen. So raise your hand if you think you were saved by the time you were 14 years old. Look around. This ought inform our priorities in evangelism. This is one of the reasons why I'm glad our church has two supported workers who minister primarily to children: Pam Hall with Child Evangelism Fellowship and Scott and Sharon Gilbertson with RBM ministries. We may be tempted to overlook these kinds of ministries because they are not as sophisticated as Christian apologetics at college campuses, but they are extraordinarily strategic. We may learn one day in the new heavens and earth that ministry to children was the most evangelistically successful ministry in the world.

And while ministry to children is primarily through parents, this is one of the reasons why we are so eager to re-open our children's ministry. Friends, we would love for KidsQuest to be back at full capacity. But at this point, Covid has decimated our children's ministry volunteers. Friends, would you be willing to use your gifts to serve in a ministry that is both unglamorous and highly strategic? This is Children's ministry. Are you terrified of evangelism? God has provided eager four year olds and seven year olds to help you overcome your fear.

Beyond formal children's ministry, Parents and grandparents, note how your reading of the God's word to your children has a massive impact on their lives as adults. Grandparents, most of you need little encouragement in this area. But when you visit and spend time with your grandchildren, the questions you ask and *the activities you do together* models for your grandchildren what is important. Are you a grandparent who seeks to grow your grandchild spiritually? Teach your children and grandchildren the word of God, and they will have God as their Father, which brings us to our next point.

## 2. A Father Who Gives.

When Paul remembers Timothy, he thanks God in prayer. We see in verse 5 that he thanks God for Timothy's sincere faith, and his godly legacy, and also in verse 4 for his tears. Now the text doesn't say exactly the reason for Timothy's tears, but we see in Acts 20:37 and 21:13 that Christians are weeping at the prospect of Paul going to Jerusalem because they know that this will lead to his death.<sup>17</sup> These are likely the tears of a spiritual son weeping at his father's departure. So while Paul remembers Timothy's tears of love, his sincere faith, and his godly legacy, in the beginning of verse 3 Paul thanks God. Now isn't this somewhat strange? Shouldn't Paul be thanking Timothy?

What Paul is doing here is making a massive theological point about the one who is responsible for the graces in Timothy's life. Think of it this way: If I give you a big box of chocolate truffles right now, and you turn around and thank Cory what are you implying about the true source of the truffles? You're saying that even though I was the one who gave you the truffles the true source of the gift is someone else beyond me. This is exactly what's happening here in verses 3-5: By thanking God for Timothy's sincere faith, and his godly legacy, and even his tears love, Paul is recognizing that God is the ultimate Giver of these things.

<sup>14</sup> See <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/who-is-john-piper>.

<sup>15</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>16</sup> Pastor Matt said that he doesn't ever remember not believing in gospel truths, even though he doesn't know the specific age of your conversion. Sean and Dustin believe they were converted at age four. I don't know the exact age, but it may have been around age six or seven. John Moore was converted when he was 34 years old in Louisiana in October 1978.

<sup>17</sup> The word order of the Greek text supports this. Literally, the order of the clauses in the Greek text would be (using the translation of the ESV): I long to see you / as I remember your tears / that I may be filled with joy. The phrase "as I remember your tears" is sandwiched between Paul's longing to see Timothy and the joy that he will receive when he again sees Timothy. This sandwiching connects Timothy's tears to the separation of Paul from Timothy.

And God's gifts go beyond verses 3–5. In these first seven verses of 2 Timothy 1 alone, there are at least a dozen gifts that God lavishes on Paul or Timothy.<sup>18</sup> Friends, do you see how the logic of Paul's thanksgivings intersects with your own life? If you have sincere faith in Jesus, it's because it was a gift from your Father. Your love for others: that's something that God authored in you. Can you trace a godly family line up through your generations? This is just one more kindness of your Father. Brothers and sisters, what kind of God is this, who lavishes so many undeserved favors, and even our very faith in Him itself. How can we thank each other? Thank God!

And what's even more surprising is that Biblically, God is the only person that Christians are commended to give their thanksgiving to.<sup>19</sup> As you read through the bible this year, I challenge you to try to find one single place where Christians are called to thank other people.<sup>20</sup> In fact, I will give you a box of truffle chocolates if you are able to show me one place in the Bible rightly translated where Christians are called to thank other people. We are called to give honor to people and highly esteem them, but all of the thanksgiving that is modeled for Christians in the bible is a thanksgiving towards God alone. This is true even with Non-Christians. Any kindness that a non-Christian exercises towards you is a common grace of God in their life. So you might say that the "biblical" way of expressing thanksgiving is not "thank you," but "I thank God for you"—recognizing that God is the one who gives this gift of kindness of others. And God is the one who not only gives gifts, but He also empowers their use, and we see this in our third point.

### 3. A Flame to Be Fanned

Paul spends most of verses 3–5 remembering; you probably notice how he uses a variation of the word three different times as he remembers God's blessings on Timothy. And it's on the basis of these remembrances that Paul reminds Timothy in verse 6 to fan into flame the gift of God. Now Paul doesn't elaborate on what this "gift of God" is. But we do know that Timothy has this gift through the laying on of Paul's hands. The only other place in the pastorals where the two Greek words behind laying on of hands are used is in 1Tim. 4:14 "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you."<sup>21</sup>

Putting these together, it seems like there was a type of commissioning event for Timothy, where the council of elders laid their hands on Timothy for prayer. During this time a prophecy was made about Timothy that was given to Timothy a supernatural empowerment for faithful ministry. Based on the exhortations that we find in 1 and 2 Timothy, the gift likely involves a courage in his teaching and preaching ministry at the church in Ephesus. But sadly, this is a gift that Timothy has not used as he ought.

Paul tells Timothy in verse 6 that this gift of God is something that Timothy needs to fan into flame. You don't fan a healthy fire into flame; you fan into a flame a fire that is not burning as it should. And Paul gives Timothy a strong motivation for doing this in verse 7, "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." The Spirit here is the Holy Spirit. We know this because power is associated with the Holy Spirit throughout the NT and you may have noticed that "love" and "self-control" begin and end the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> 1) Paul's apostleship in verse 1; 2) the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus in verse 1; 3–5) grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus; 6) Paul's ancestors who served God in verse 3; 7) Paul's clear conscience in verse 3; 8) Timothy's affectionate tears in verse 4; 9) Timothy's sincere faith in verse 5; 10) Timothy's legacy of godliness in the women of his family in verse 5; 11) the gift of God given to Timothy in verse 6; 12) the Spirit of power and love and self-control in verse 7.

<sup>19</sup> My friend Dieudonné Tamfu was the first person to point this truth out to me, and who also withstood all of my many attempts to assail this position.

<sup>20</sup> The one place where we see Christians thanking other people is in a mistranslation of Romans 16:3–4, which reads in the ESV, "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well" (emphasis mine). The word translated as "to whom" is a dative pronoun, and these can be translated as "to whom" or "for whom" depending on context; there's nothing in the word itself that indicates how it ought to be translated. Every single other time Paul expresses gratitude he thanks God specifically, and the weight of this evidence shows us that the "to whom" in Romans 16:4 ought to be translated as "for whom." Paul is thankful (to God) for Prisca and Aquila's life-risking service—a service empowered by a sovereign God.

<sup>21</sup> In 1 Tim 4:14 and 2 Tim 1:6, the two Greek words used in the English phrase "laying on of hands" are both nouns. 1 Tim 5:22 says, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands," but in that instance the construction uses a verb and a noun.

<sup>22</sup> Beyond the argument above, Paul tells Timothy to in verse 8 to "share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God" and then he tells him in verse 14 to "guard the good deposit entrusted to you", and he is to do this "by the Holy Spirit." The Power of God and the Holy Spirit seem to be equated here as the means of empowerment for Timothy's ministry, and this becomes more convincing when one sees the association



Now note the logic of this passage. Timothy is tempted to not use his gift out of fear, and this is likely what Paul reminds Timothy that God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control—all things that Timothy will need as he exercises his ministry. Now here's what I want you to notice. Look with me at the pronoun shifts in verses 5 and 6. "I remind you to fan into the flame the gift of God...for God has given us a Spirit..."

Do you see it? Paul encourages Timothy's use of his gift, but then he motivates Timothy by the fact that God has given to *all Christians* the Spirit of power and love and self-control. Through Timothy, Paul is encouraging *every Christian* in the exercise of their gifts. The idea here is stewardship. If you are a Christian, then like Timothy you have been given specific gifts for the building up of the body of Christ; we see lists of these gifts in 1 Corinthians 11 and Romans 12. It may be a specific skillfulness in ministry, a specific station in life, or a specific interest to serve.

The ideas in this passage is this is stewardship: go use it! If you have the gift of service, serve for the glory of God. If you are a teacher, teach for His sake! There are gifts of mercy, generosity, exhortation, administration, leadership, hospitality, evangelism, and so forth. So many people don't use their gifts, or they let the use of these gifts dwindle, out of fear—fear of failure, fear of the unknown, fear of leaving what is comfortable. Through His words to Timothy, God is reminding you here to use your gifts for the building up of the church. God has given it to you for a purpose, and He expects you to steward your gift for the good of the church. Our lives are not our own. Jesus has bought us with a price, and when he did he equipped us for service, being empowered by the Holy Spirit. Don't let allow fear to keep you from the exercise of that gift.

## Conclusion

Friends, the larger issue in 2 Timothy is the continuance of the gospel message. As Paul approaches the end of his life, his great priority is the furtherance of the gospel message, and this is what informs these first seven verses. The reason why Paul uses the family so much is to emphasize the transference of the gospel from one generation to another: from Paul's ancestors to Paul, from Lois and Eunice to Timothy, and from Paul to Timothy. The reason why Timothy must fan into flame his gift is because if he does not use it, the church will not be built up and protected.

As we consider our own day and age, we consider how every church is one generation away from extinction. If there is a church of people who do not use their gifts out of fear, with mothers and fathers who do not pass on the word of God to their children, then in a short amount of time you will have no church. And yet, God has given this word to His church precisely so that we would persevere. The very last words recorded of the Apostle Paul are recorded in 2 Tim 4:22: "Grace be with you all." God's Grace has carried the gospel baton from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth here in McCordsville, Indiana.

As we look at this gospel baton, we see that it's weathered and faded and stained with the blood of the martyrs; it has been handed off on every continent from every color of hands; and in 2000 years it has not lost one bit of its power. And though great Christian leaders like the Apostle Paul and Augustine and Luther and Calvin and Edwards and Lloyd-Jones and Sproul should pass into eternity, the Holy Spirit empowers us the same today as he did in the early church. As we use our gifts, as we disciple our children, and as we love one another as adopted family members in Christ we will continue the gospel witness until our Lord Jesus Returns. Lets pray.

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of the Holy Spirit and power in the New Testament (see Rom. 1:4; 15:13, 19; 1 Cor. 2:4; Eph. 3:16; 1 Th. 1:5). If the Holy Spirit is also referred to as the power of God, then this strengthens the case that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit given in 2 Tim 1:7 to all Christians.