

*The City Gates Church
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1 Timothy 1:12-17*

Your Past Can be Used for God's Glory

Introduction:

Good morning everyone,

I talked with Pastor Jeff yesterday. He's wrapping things up there in Mississippi doing his reserve duty. He misses everyone. His wife Madeline is in New Hampshire at a summer camp with Chris and Karissa. He'll be joining them soon. His oldest son Ben finished his first solo flight yesterday in S.C. at the flight academy. Congratulations Ben!

This morning we are going to be in 1 Timothy chapter 1. The title of my message this morning is "**Your Past Can be Used for God's Glory**". That is a title that is actually derived from verses 12-17 but I am going to start with verse 1 and we'll work our way there where we'll finish with that section.

Are you with me? So go ahead and please open your bibles to 1 Timothy Chapter 1.

Timothy was a young man from the city of Lystra (there in the province of Galatia) which is mentioned in Acts 16:1-3. You can see it up there on the screen, that's where Timothy joins Paul on his second missionary journey. In my conversation with Pastor Jeff, I told him I'd be sharing an image of Lystra because that is where Timothy was from and he asked me, "do you know what they call people from Lystra?? I said, "no". He said, "Lysterines."

We know from the book of Acts as well as second letter that Paul writes to Timothy that Timothy was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother and also a Jewish grandmother. Timothy did have a godly heritage from his Jewish side.

From the time Timothy joined Paul (which was probably in his teens) to the time of this letter was written was about 16 years. So they had labored together preaching the gospel and planting churches.

So by the time Paul writes this letter to Timothy, Paul left him in charge to oversee the affairs of the churches there in the city of Ephesus. One of the reasons he writes this letter is to encourage Timothy in his responsibility for overseeing that great work of the Ephesian churches and possibly the other churches there in the province of Asia.

So Timothy would have had a big task because there would have been multitudes of churches. So let's jump right in.

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope,

Paul is the author of this letter. Notice how it starts off with who it's from compared to today where the 'who it's from' is at the bottom of the letter.

But back in those days you read from a scroll and so rather than unraveling the whole thing to see who it's from, they start off right there with identifying the sender.

This was also a letter that was intended to be read to the church as it also deals with church conduct and leadership and it was circulated around the early church.

So don't think of it as we're reading someone else's mail here. This was intended for us and the church throughout the ages.

2 To Timothy, a true son in the faith

Notice Paul refers to Timothy as his true son in the faith. It could be he's saying that because maybe Paul led Timothy to the Lord. The bible doesn't say but it's possible. Either way, Paul had a very special relationship Timothy. It would have been like a father son relationship. Paul was about 30 years older than Timothy.

Paul invested in Timothy in training him to be a leader in the early church. Timothy would travel with Paul on his missionary journeys, Paul would even send him sometimes to check on the welfare of the churches like the church at Philippi where even Paul says of Timothy, "for I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state." Paul even felt confident that

he could even leave Timothy in charge to oversee the churches there in Ephesus while Paul could move on to Macedonia.

But I think also knowing this letter would have been read amongst the churches there in Ephesus, by Paul referring to Timothy that he was “his true son in the faith,” this was also a strong reminder to everyone that Paul authorized Timothy to act in his authority.

When I spoke with Pastor Jeff yesterday, he did not refer to me as his true son in the faith.

Continuing on in verse 2 with his greeting, he says,

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

It’s interesting that if you look at ever letter Paul writes to a church or even an individual like Philemon, he greets with the usual Pauline greeting of “Grace and Peace” but when writing to Pastors like here in Timothy or to Titus, he uses “Grace, Mercy and Peace”. I guess he knows that as Pastors and Elders, we need mercy. Paul knows we need it, the Holy Spirit knows we need it. Give us grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord, because we need it just as much as anyone else. We are also imperfect people serving a perfect God.

So quick recap, this is from Paul to Timothy and now we get into the message of his letter.

³ As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus (why?) that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, ⁴ nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.

So, Paul urges Timothy to “remain in Ephesus”. It doesn’t tell us why Timothy might have wanted to leave. As you read through the letter you can get the sense that maybe he was a little timid. Let know one despise your youth, God didn’t give you a spirit of fear.

- It could have been that he felt his work was done there, that the churches were self-sufficient and I can just mosey on out of here.

- It could have been Timothy was feeling a lot of pressure to leave, maybe internally, “I’m not cutout for this, they’re going to find out I’m not old enough, or experienced enough, they’re going to think I’m a fake. I’m not the apostle Paul, I can’t fill his shoes, I can’t do this work.”
- Or maybe he just couldn’t take it anymore because of external pressure from other people and the work and he was discouraged and afraid because the responsibility was too great - but Paul urges Timothy, to remain, Timothy “remain in Ephesus.”

Whether you’re called to full time ministry or have some other occupation (as your ministry, because we’re all called to ministry, we’re all called to serve as Christians in whatever capacity or season the Lord has us), maybe your ministry is the military or maybe your ministry is staying at home with the kids,

where ever God has you to minister in this season, each and every one of us at one time or another has felt what Timothy feels. Discouraged, afraid, I’m so ready for this to be over. I’m not sure how much more I can take.

As we can see here with Timothy, sometimes God calls us to minister in difficult places. Isn’t that the truth? I know for me I’ve worked in some difficult environments with difficult people on difficult projects, you just can’t wait for it to be over. But I’ve also seen the Lord work through me in those environments as a light in a spiritually dark place in amazing ways and I grew and matured as a believer.

I learned that He’s there with me during those seasons. “He wants us to cast our cares upon Him,” “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.”

I heard a message the other day, where someone quickly summarized the book of Job and I think it’s applicable, he said “Trust God and hold on.”

Serving in a difficult place isn’t always a reason to leave, it could also be a reason to stay.

That’s the case for Timothy, Paul said to remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine and don’t listen to

fables and endless genealogies which cause disputes rather than building up the body in faith.

It's not so much that they were some were teaching false gospels as much as they were just simply emphasizing the wrong things and if it's causing disputes, when that happens, it's clear that too much emphasis is given to these things.

The bible gives us plenty to speculate about. But sometimes we can go down these rabbit trails, and then we get into debates using scripture back and forth and then we're getting into the flesh and then at the end of the day we're not building up the body in faith.

I think when we gather as a church body, we gather for a purpose, centered around God's Word, so I think it's important to keep our focus on the subject of our study because that is where the power is (in the Word of God). It doesn't mean we can't entertain questions or talk about other things as long as they don't take the place of the study of the Word of God.

No one is going to go home from a bible study thinking, I'm glad we had that debate in our study about such and such. I'm glad we only made it through one verse and one question. Because that other topic, that was super edifying to my spirit. That's going to get me through the week.

One last point I want to bring up regarding verse 3. Is that Paul charges Timothy that they teach no other doctrine. You can think of doctrine as what we believe and teach.

We can see here that doctrine is important to God and it should be important to us. They were to continue in proper doctrine.

I remember reading an article years ago about a pastor from a church who died. He was bitten by a poisonous snake because he was handling poisonous snakes during their worship service (yeah one of those churches). The snake bite ultimately killed him. The title of that article was "bad doctrine kills." His incorrect belief and teaching of scripture led to bad actions that ended up being deadly. Doctrine matters. It's important to God and it should be important to us. There are huge consequences for incorrect doctrine.

On the flip side, good gospel centered doctrine, should produce gospel culture, gospel behavior, gospel lifestyle and actions.

I just returned from a Pastor and Leaders Conference down in Southern California. It was great, you could bring your family. But the theme for this conference was Gospel Culture.

It's that idea the gospel says something and the gospel does something. The gospel says the truths of Christ crucified, buried and risen again and returning.

What the gospel does through what it says is it creates beauty in human relationships. What we believe works itself out in our relationships with one another.

Good doctrine equals gospel culture, lifestyle, behavior. What do you mean? Well, let's just look at a couple verses really quick as an example.

Romans 12:17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men". – Rom. 12:17

ESV puts it this way "but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of ALL."

The flesh says to fight fire with fire. The Lord says do not do that but do what is honorable in the site of all, not excusable, but honorable.

Philippians 4:5 "Let your gentleness be known to all men..."

ESV puts it like this "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone"

Ray Ortland mentioned how that verse helps him think twice about responding in the moment on social media.

Forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. – Eph. 4:32

So what we believe regarding the vertical glories of the gospel spread out horizontally in the church through human relationships and this gives off the fragrance of Christ.

What is the purpose of why we should teach no other doctrine (verse 3)?

⁵ Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith, ⁶ from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, ⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.

The purpose of the commandment, the purpose of God's Word that God wants to produce in us is love from a pure heart, that is what God desires to produce in us from His Word.

If we're spending time in God's Word, it should start to produce and develop:

- love from a pure heart,
- it should produce a good conscience,
- it should produce a sincere faith

If it's not, maybe that's because I've just (as it says in verse 6) turned aside to "idle talk". I think the NLT says it better. It says, "Some have missed the point. They have turned away from these things and spend their time in meaningless discussions." We need stick to the basics. Spend time in the word, in prayer before the Lord.

So some people who were desiring to be teachers were mishandling the law and that's usually where they're trying to put people back under the law for righteousness rather than trusting in Jesus as our Savior and His righteousness that's imputed unto us. That's the wrong way to use the law. The law shows us our need for a savior.

⁸ But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, ¹⁰ for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹ according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.

So, the Word of God is good if one uses it lawfully. It's pure, it's holy, it shows us as sinners that we fall short and need a Savior, that we need God's grace.

Now he's not saying the law has nothing to say to the righteous person, but it particularly it speaks to the ungodly person. We see that from the list we just read in verses 9-10.

The law plainly says that these things are sin. Sins that were there in the culture there in Ephesus. These things are contrary to sound doctrine. This gives another reason why Timothy needs to remain in Ephesus.

¹² And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, ¹³ although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. ¹⁴ And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. ¹⁶ However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

I like how he says he was "enabled" by the Lord. In other words, God isn't so much looking for ability. You've heard that saying, "God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called". I think one of the qualities He uses or looks for (as Pastor Jeff mentions often) is availability. Are we available or are we just passively waiting to see if God uses us? Available in the active sense, not, "well I'm available if He needs me." I've got some bandwidth if He wants me to do anything. I'm thinking more in the active sense of prayerfully seeking, asking, knocking.

He says that Jesus enabled him because Jesus counted him faithful. Being faithful is just simply (in my words) walking in obedience with the Lord, which really leads to walking in fellowship with Him. You know the good thing about being faithful is? You don't need a seminary degree to be faithful, you don't have to be strong or mighty to be faithful, you don't have to be a professional, you can be faithful right where you are...today.

Maybe you are like Timothy going through a challenging season of life, you can still be faithful right now, if you're going through a season of waiting, you don't have to wait until it's over or until you get into a particular position. You can be faithful right now in the small things. That pleases the Lord. Just walking with Him in fellowship. It's a thrill.

Paul gives Timothy another reason to remain in Ephesus. When Timothy considered the largeness of the task of staying in Ephesus and doing that work, he thought, "I don't know if I'm up for this task, I don't know if I can do this, I don't know if I'm capable" but then he thought **if God can take Paul and use him then God can take me and use me.**

Paul's past didn't disqualify him from his calling, from preaching the gospel and discipling men and women.

If God can use a man like Paul, he can use any of us. And He wants to use all of us!

Just listen to who Paul was before he became who we know him to be.

- Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, - Acts 9:1
- I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, - Acts 22:4
- And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities. – Acts 26:11
- For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. – 1 Corinthians 15:9
- For you have heard of my previous manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; - Gal. 1:13

He concludes here in 1 Timothy that he was the chief of sinners. And Paul shares these details of his sinful life with Timothy to demonstrate God's

grace and mercy as an example of his patience and willingness to forgive and use the worst of sinners for his glory.

Your past too can be used for God's glory.

God uses people like us (why?) because we realize there is nothing good in us and at the end of the day, God gets all the glory.

“if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, ALL things have become new.”

Whatever you did you in your past was you B.C. (Before Christ) is covered. The bible says “I’ve been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”

Like Paul, we’re not proud of those things, but we also recognize the Lord has saved us and forgiven us and uses people to accomplish His purposes.

But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.” – Mark 6:4

Your family might not recognize the creation you are in Christ. They might still just think of you as who you were growing up. Don’t let that discourage you, even Jesus’ family didn’t believe right away.

“Think of some of the people we read of in the Bible whom God used. They were utterly unqualified by human standards. Moses was a murderer. Jacob was a liar. Rahab was a prostitute. David had an affair. Elijah was suicidal at one point. Jonah ran from God. Jeremiah was considered too young. John the Baptist ate bugs. The Samaritan woman was divorced more than once. The disciples fell asleep when they were supposed to be praying. Peter denied Christ. Timothy had an ulcer. So what is your excuse?

Understand, I am not excusing any of this behavior. My point is that God can use flawed people, and that includes us. So whatever the excuse or fears you may have, God can still use you.”

¹⁶ However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

God is long suffering, He's patient. Even though we aren't who we used to be – He's patient in this process of sanctification. Externally we can change like this. Internally it takes time, a lot of chips have to fall in order to change. Ray Ortland's book titled "The Gospel" – He has this formula: Gospel + safety + time. It's what everyone needs. A *lot* of gospel + a *lot* of safety + a *lot* of time.

Gospel: good news for bad people through the finished work of Christ on the cross and the endless power of the Holy Spirit.

Safety: a non-accusing environment. No embarrassing anyone. No cornering anyone. No shaming.

Time: no pressure. Not even self-imposed pressure. No deadlines on growth. Urgency, but not hurry, because no one changes quickly. God is patient.

This is what our churches *must* be: gentle environments of gospel + safety + time. It's where we're finally free to grow.

¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

God is sovereign, He's in control, He knows what He's doing in using people like us to accomplish His purposes. So let's be available, let's be open, let's not let our past hold us back from all that God wants to do in and through in our lives. It's not always easy but it's worth it.

Let's Pray.

Study Questions

1. Paul had left Timothy in charge there in the city of Ephesus to oversee the churches. In what ways had God prepared Timothy for this Task?
2. In verse 2, Paul mentions “Grace, mercy and peace.” Why do you think when he writes to Pastors, he includes mercy?
3. Paul urged Timothy to remain in Ephesus. What are some possible reasons Timothy wanted to leave? Do you think he was discouraged and afraid? Have you ever experienced a season in life where you experienced that and what did you learn through that?
4. Doctrine can be defined as what we believe and what we teach. Why is this so important to the Lord and why should it be important to us?
5. If we are pursuing the Lord and spending time with Him through the systematic study of His Word, then what should we expect it to begin to produce in us according to verse 5?
6. In verse 12 Paul says that Jesus enables him. Do you feel like the Lord enables you for the ministry He’s called you to?
7. Paul says he is the chief of all sinners because of his former life when he persecuted the church. He says that he is an example of God’s patience and mercy to all those who will believe. Knowing that God used a man like Paul in such a powerful way, does that give you hope that God can use you also since God uses flawed people?
8. In Ray Ortland’s book titled “The Gospel” – He has this formula: Gospel + safety + time. Which one of these do you think you need more of to grow in your sanctification and why?