



“Stir up the Gift...”

- 2 Timothy 1:1-6

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, 2 To Timothy, a beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3 I thank God, whom I serve with a pure

conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, 4 greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, 5 when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also. 6 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

This second letter to young pastor Timothy, was penned by the apostle Paul from a jail cell in Rome. It would be the last letter the apostle would write...his last before he was executed for his faith in Christ. Paul would now join the ranks of the martyred...all those who had preceded him, and countless that have come after. Paul would receive the rare prize: He would “*finish well.*” His life would embody that of faithful steward and a still humble one at that, reflecting the words of Jesus in Luke 17:7-10 “*And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat?’ ‘But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink?’ ‘Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. ‘So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”*

Nothing about Paul’s life *post-salvation* had been easy...little if any of it had been ‘comfortable.’ Yet he understood...and moreover he seemed to even inexplicably embrace, the truth that few who call themselves Christians today are willing to even entertain: Jesus died to redeem my soul from hell, and therefore I now belong to him. I am His servant. All that I am and all that I do is now for His kingdom furtherance and glory.

Apparently, Pastor Timothy received this letter when he was living and ministering in Ephesus, the home of Priscilla and Aquilla that we know from the pages of the Book of Acts. Ephesus was far from the “bible belt” and was *anything but* receptive to Christ, his teaching, or for that matter, really any holy or even moral path of living whatsoever! Ephesus was a city that was heavily involved in a false pagan religion, one that granted the fulfillment of every pleasure and every self-absorption. Hmm...that’s convenient! Despite the vast odds against Timothy, the church not only eventually *grew*, but went on to wield a great influence and strength. Clearly God is not intimidated. He does not bow to the world’s “impossible.”

Everything about this letter seems to reflect the idea that Paul knew his end was near. Yet in his love for Timothy, even with death knocking on the door, he was still relentless in answering his call and in the task that

was his to fulfill. He would herein take one last opportunity to warn, and instruct, and exhort Timothy, the 'next generation' to whom the mantle of faith would fall.

There was a great difference between Paul's first and second letter to Timothy. Time had passed since that first letter, and as the church had grown in number and age, the design and order that he wrote about in his first letter had begun to deteriorate.

Even in Paul's day, many churches had begun to veer from the pure Word of God...the simplistic yet emphatic gospel and the living out of true and dynamic Christianity. It all was sliding into worldly doctrines and manmade religious ideas. Yet still, even in the closing days of his life, Paul continued undeterred; fighting the fight for the kingdom, even if that meant from a jail cell. Even if it meant death...

Paul never accepted any attempt to pervert the scripture, but he knew that the heart of man was wicked. Without faithful diligence, the average believer *would* and *will yet* move away from the straight and narrow into the broad path of destruction. Why? Because it is our fallen nature to be drawn to our flesh and to the ease and pleasure of the world.

There is a large section of the greater church today that is looking for a great worldwide revival that has no evidence within scripture of ever occurring. The bible teaches instead a truth that man will become "worse and worse" as time marches on toward the end of days. An even cursory read through the local newspaper will manifest that such is a fact. Certainly my own ministry career has seen much decay. Truth be told, I believe we are in the "sweeping up" stage.

We are in fact told in scripture that the greater church will *not* corporately be a strong church in the last days, and most certainly it is not a strong church today. For the greater church today is distracted by a multitude of issues and causes that have nothing to do with the "great commission" of Christ, nor the call to further the kingdom of God. We are clearly instructed to go forth and make disciples. Yet the greater church is far too busy seeking worldly acceptance, an ecumenical peace, an easy Christian living, and of course a political clout. How can I seek the furthering of the kingdom through new conversions to Christ and the discipling of those redeemed, when everything is about me?

Paul wrote this letter, perhaps even unwittingly, as a picture of the world in the last days. As he wrote this letter, he, in many ways, stood alone for the gospel...and he did so alone in prison. Incarcerated for his faith, he was in many ways quite alone in his zeal for Christ and the gospel. Yet despite it all...he remained unmoved in his determination. Clearly Paul never knew the 'candy land Christianity' that is so prevalent today. He never sought the 'Santa Claus Jesus', nor did he accept the 'Jesus lite' version of the faith that is so readily embraced in our modern church.

Our downfall today is that we so quickly forget. We forget, and then of course we then cease to be thankful. We forget what Jesus did for us and the condition we were in when He found us. We forget the love this community expressed on our behalf... how it stepped up for you and put up with you. Paul however was different. He didn't forget. Perhaps that is clear evidence of true salvation?

Paul always wore the Damascus Road experience on his heart-sleeve from that day on. He never forgot how Jesus found him...a wretched man of pride and sin, and transformed him into a new man...reborn and renewed...a new life, a new mission, a new path. It was an immense, if not an impossible occurrence, and yet there he was...a front-line soldier for the living God. Everything that he had, and everything that he was, he owed to Jesus Christ, and moreover, he would take that truth to his grave. He knew who and what he was, and

he willing surrendered it all back to Christ. His life was no longer his own. He was now a bond-slave...just “doing what was his duty to do...” For Paul, Jesus was not just *first*, He was *everything*.

This letter would be Paul’s “swan-song.” His “last will and testament.” His final “shot across the bow.” What would he feel is so important as to rise like cream to the top? What would he have to say on his way out the door?

Chapter 1

1:1

1 John 5:12 tells us a great truth: **“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”** How often I am confronted by people whose life is in the sewer...not as in mere difficulties or testing, just trashed by personal choices and priorities, and yet they still want me to believe that they are good with God...they are born again, and Jesus is ‘front and center.’

For Paul, his life *...at least the latter half of it*, had been only about Jesus. Christ had promised in Mark 10:29-30, “*...that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property — along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life.*” Paul gave it all, but got it all back in spades. A hundred fold.

How different is our version of Christianity, one wherein we seek to generally not be inconvenienced. For 35 years I have had countless conversations with frustrated people who want on some level to blame the church for their issues...their lack of “life” as John put it. The church is just asking for too much of my time and commitment. And each time we then walk the road of calendars and schedules, only to come out the other side with a rather embarrassed church goer. If you come to church here each week, go to Wednesday bible study and serve in covenant community, you spend approximately 8 hours or .047 of your week here. Statistics tells us that the average American watches TV 21-28 hours a week, leisure activities between 30 and 60 hours, 17.5 hours eating and drinking, and roughly 45 hours sleeping. If we are *way* off of those stats in your case, you still will be *way* off blaming Christ and church for lack of time and an overwhelming life!

Paul, beginning now one of the greatest farewells ever written, was ‘to the end’ unflinching stating his position...his ‘calling card:’ an *apostle*...an *ambassador*...for Jesus Christ.

It all had happened because it was the ‘will of God.’ Not because of his talent or ability...nor because he sought such. It was all because God had sought him out for a task, just as assuredly as He seeks each one of us out for our individual mission.

History records Paul as a man of small stature and a naturally weak demeanor. Not much to look at, and no great charisma or special talents and abilities. He clearly knew that it was Christ in him that made him what he was.

Paul’s life was not lived for the advancement of religion...a mere domination, or even a particular movement. He lived quite simply to further the kingdom of God, through the gospel message of grace, repentance, and redemption. It was not complicated nor exclusionary. The call was made to “all men” and still is.

Paul had elsewhere referred to himself as a “bond slave of Christ.” There was nothing held back. It was a life “sold-out” to Jesus Christ. A life not his own. He was a “vessel made for the master’s use.”

1:2

Nothing had been able to cause Paul to compromise his message or quit his ministry. And now, after years of traveling and ministering in close companionship with Paul, “Timothy the disciple” receives this last message from his mentor, one who was like a father to him.

No one could say they knew better than Paul, the grace and mercy of God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. Having so vividly experienced such first hand, he knew also the peace that came with that grace and mercy.

In a nutshell, this was Paul’s mission: That Timothy, and all those who would follow after, would know firsthand that same grace, mercy, and peace that he had experienced. It is not a worldly peace that is contingent upon circumstance and possessions, for even now as he sat imprisoned in a jail cell, it was a grace, mercy and peace that he was still experiencing!

“*To Timothy... a beloved son...*” There are many believers that attempt to exclude the “human element” within the advancement of the faith. They reject man’s counsel, human leadership and participation in the act of discipling. But Paul did not. Nor did the great men of scripture who sought to pass on the torch of passion to the young who would follow them in ministry. Paul had invested himself in others, for the sake of the kingdom of God on-going. It was always about more than just Paul...it was all about God and kingdom advancement.

1:3

What prolific words from a man who sat in Roman prison! A cell that was much different than our modern incarceration! It was a place of unbearable heat, void of all light and water. Little if any food was provided in an environment that was full of disease, all the while everyone was chained together with heavy rough iron shackles.

Paul was a man who knew what it was to suffer, and yet he had sacrificed ALL for the sake of the kingdom! No emotional outbursts of entitlement and personal gain. Despite at times getting essentially kicked in the head by the world, he would still jubilantly thank God, and would spend his time praying for Timothy and others!

Furthermore, it was always more than just a verbal affirmation, for Paul continued to serve God despite the hardship. Again, so often our own faithfulness is wholly contingent upon our earthly conditions...what God gives us and how we are blessed in the earthly realm. For those in that latter camp, it takes but a stiff spiritual wind to cause them to fold up shop and head back to the temporal comforts of the world! Many have sought to be included in the community of Christ, only to cut themselves off when a better deal came along, or when things got rough or the cost got too high.

But Paul was in love with his Savior. For him, it was better to be in a prison cell with God than to be in a luxurious mansion without Him! Apparently, *that* decision was no contest at all!

1:4

What Paul *did* desire in the flesh, was not comfort, ease, or even basic human needs. Clearly he desired fellowship with his brother Timothy. That was the value and the connection he held to with other believers of like passion!

Body-life fellowship and community for Paul...throughout his writings in the New Testament, was his lifeblood. Critical even to his survival spiritually! He *wanted* others. He *needed* others! He knew that no man was an

island and that we honestly need each other for comfort, support, prayer, accountability and counsel. Paul was no “solo flyer.” No Christian can effectively survive as a Christian alone. It defies all of scripture!

Despite his position within the greater church, Paul remained steadfastly humble. Such a stance is mandatory to actually being part of a body and a community, not to mention being greatly used by God. Paul prayed for Timothy “without ceasing.” Maybe that’s why his love for him was also “unceasing.” It’s hard to not love someone who is constantly in your prayers!

1:5-6

When Paul would think of his friend Timothy, what he would remember was Timothy’s genuine faith. What a testimony! I wonder what we individually will be remembered for? Because we *will* be remembered for something. Quote: *“Our lives are not our own. From womb to tomb, we are bound to others. Past and present. And by each crime and every kindness, we birth our future.”*

Paul says that he first saw the faith in Timothy’s mother and grandmother, who despite living in a pagan city, seemingly without a father and in an unbelieving generation, raised Timothy in house that “served the Lord.” It *can* be done! Yet few will so center their families and child-rearing in order to see it actually happen!

Paul knew better than most what things that Timothy would face in the years of ministry to come. So he never failed to diligently pray for him, encourage him, and teach him. No doubt by this time Timothy would have experienced some difficult times, the pain and trials of ministry also. If so, he had reason to fear and feel alone! Paul felt it important to remind him of the “gift of God that was in him.” To acknowledge that even though Paul had “laid hands on him,” consenting, and joining him in the spiritual gifting that Timothy had received, the real power and gifting came from God.

Timothy was encouraged to “stir up” the gift of God. Some have described this as “fan’ing the flames of zeal...to keep the fire burning in his heart.” We all need that. Our fire of passion for God has a way of slowing burning out if we fail to fuel the flames and fan the love we have for him through service, prayer, and community.

I wonder as we read and commented on these first verses of 2 Timothy, the thought crossed your mind that Paul’s version of Christianity...Timothy’s version...was very different than yours, and you wondered how you could know that kind of passion and power. Paul says to “stir up the gift” that you have been given...fan the flames of your love for Him. The old saying goes, if you have two dogs, which dog gets the biggest? *The one you feed the most.*

The Greek word translated “stir up” denotes the kindling or fanning of a fire. Anyone who has ever tended a campfire knows that stirring up the glowing embers of a dying fire can cause those embers to flame up again and burn more brightly. Timothy was to see to it that his spiritual gift did not grow cold through disuse or marginalizing its place in his life; he was to “stir it up” and keep the fire going.

All believers receive the gift of the Holy Spirit at authentic salvation, and the Holy Spirit brings other gifts with Him when He comes! Paul was keenly interested in the life and ministry of Timothy, and he wanted to make sure that Timothy used the gift he had been given effectively, for the glory of God. The gifts we receive from the Lord through the filling of the Holy Spirit are not given to us fully developed but need to be strengthened and matured through use. The only way we strengthen these gifts...the only way we “fan those flames” is engage. We stir up the gift by using the gift we’ve been given. Why was Paul so committed and unflinching even as he faced death? Because Paul was still “stirred up and on fire...” How about you?