

# Guarding and Passing On the Good Deposit

March 12, 2023

2 Timothy 1-2

These next two weeks, I intend to bring you two messages from Paul's second letter to Timothy. This morning, it will be a message from the first two chapters, next week will be a message from chapters 3-4. I know there is much more than what I can fit in two messages, but I trust it will be acceptable that I pick two topics to probe.

As I have read the first two chapters, what has jumped out at me has been the idea of passing on the faith, almost as if it was a thing, something to be received, protected, and passed on to others. I hope we will see that most clearly this morning. It strikes me that God has so designed His world that the faith He desires all will embrace is transmitted by people. Yes, it has been written down in a book, the Bible. And yes, we study this great book to know more and more. (This will be the subject of next week's sermon). But it is usually transmitted orally, in conversation from person to person. Again, it doesn't have to be that way, but it almost always is. Rarely will someone just pick up a Bible and become a follower of Jesus. Almost always, we hear about Jesus from someone, we check it out in Scripture, and we embrace it for ourselves. Then, the plan of God is that we will go from hearer, to doer, to speaker. We become the voice speaking the faith to the next person, the next generation. This is how the system is designed by God to work.

In 2 Timothy 1-2, we see how this has worked in Timothy's life and how Paul charges Timothy to continue the pattern. I'd like to read three excerpts from the text and stitch them together. As you might imagine, they will become my three points of the sermon. So, first, hear these words from 2 Timothy 1:3-5. READ. Next, 2 Timothy 1:13-14. READ. Finally, 2 Timothy 2:1-2.

Main point: The Christian faith is designed to be passed on from person to person.

We receive it from someone, we embrace it for ourselves, and we pass it on to others. That is the way it is designed to work. As you might expect, the

question then is whether we are receiving, guarding, and sharing. Or are we content to just receive it for ourselves. Do you have a passion for passing on the faith to those God puts in your path? Or you one of those “just me and Jesus” sort of people? (3 parts)

I. Be thankful for those who introduced you to the Christian faith. 1:2-5

Never forget that someone, somewhere, at some time spent their time telling you about Jesus. Be thankful for that, for them, for your spiritual heritage.

Before I get to vv. 3-5, notice how Paul addresses Timothy in v.2, “To Timothy my beloved child.” Now, you might be embarrassed or offended by those words. Timothy was a grown man by this time. Paul is referring to him as a child. But that misses the point entirely. Even though I am confident that Paul and Timothy were not blood relatives, still there was a cherished family relationship between the two. Paul saw himself as Timothy’s father in the faith. He raised him in the faith, mentored him, educated him, took him along on his journeys. When he left Timothy in Ephesus, I’m sure there was a flood of emotions: his beloved son now pastoring his beloved church. Not only did Paul have such a role in Timothy’s life, but he now loves Timothy as a father loves his son. I know not everyone has a spiritual father-son relationship like Paul and Timothy, but some do. And if that describes us, we ought to be quite thankful. Can you imagine being mentored by the Apostle Paul!!!

1:3- 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.

Notice here that Paul thanks God for his spiritual heritage. As you must remember, Paul was a Jew, a Jew of Jews, as to the law a Pharisee. He did not grow up in a Christian home. He persecuted Christians, seeking to kill them, imprison them, persecute them. And yet, here he mentions his forefathers in this prayer of thanksgiving. They taught him the Scriptures. They lived out their faith. It may have been faulty, we don’t know. We do know that Paul did not instantly embrace Jesus as his Messiah. But it is instructive that he embraces the faith of his fathers. And in the same breath, he thanks God for the faith he has passed on to Timothy. With the love of a father, he prays day and night for

Timothy, his beloved son in the faith. Are you seeing how the faith is passed down from generation to generation?

Yes, it is possible to have a partial or messed up faith passed down to you and yet in hindsight give thanks to God for those who passed it down to you. I know I do. The type of faith I was taught by my church as a child I wouldn't recommend to anyone, and yet I am oh so thankful for my church growing up, where I learned to take the Scriptures seriously. I am oh so thankful for the Christian camp where I went every summer, the absolute highlight of my year, the godly counselors who shepherded me through those years. I have pictured in my mind this older Christian man who actually looked excited to be the counselor for a cabin full of junior high boys. I was one of those boys. The interesting fact is that later I met a missionary supported by my first church and found out he was in the exact same cabin that same year with the same godly counselor. What are the odds of two boys in the same cabin going into full-time Christian ministry, who didn't even know each other at the time? Yes, be thankful for those who spoke truth into you.

4- As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy.

Paul remembers not only the highlights but the touching moments as well. We are not told why Timothy had been crying, perhaps it was when Paul said goodbye, leaving the work in Ephesus to him. If that was not it, maybe it should have been, given all that he had to face in that church. Pastoring the church in Ephesus doesn't seem to me to be a plum assignment! But Paul remembers Timothy's tears with fondness and can't wait to be reunited so he could experience total joy. The fatherly love here just oozes out.

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.

Here we notice that unlike Paul, Timothy did grow up in the faith. He had a godly mother, a godly grandmother, who assuredly passed on the faith to Timothy. We can't help but take note of the fact that he mentions two women.

Timothy had a godly heritage of women in his life. Their influence preceded Paul's influence. Paul simply built on the foundation they laid. I'm confident there is much more to Timothy's story, I am aware that there are hints elsewhere. But for our purposes today, I trust you can see the value of Christian women nurturing their children. I know in my own home, it was Joan who had the bulk of spiritual teaching moments with our children. She read to them books, answered their questions, and led them to Jesus. She has continued in this role with our grandchildren. Yes, dad was a pastor, but it was mom who played a key role in their spiritual lives.

I am confident that many of you could tell a similar story. There is no substitute for time spent nurturing young lives, time that mothers have that dads often do not. And so I ask you, do you appreciate the role that the women in your life had in shaping you? Do you appreciate the role your wife perhaps has had in shaping the spiritual life of your children? Have you told her so? And moms, do you recognize the key role you have in building into the spiritual lives of your children? Yours is the first and most influential voice they will hear.

I hope this has sparked some thinking in you to appreciate how you have gotten where you are. No person is flawless, but God has chosen to pass on His faith through people and you are the result. Thank Him, thank them for their role.

## II. Protect the work God has done in you. I:13-14

In other words, take what has been entrusted to you and protect it, guard it, nurture it, grow it. Allow God's Spirit to work in you unfettered.

I:13- Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

You have seen it in the ones who nurtured you. Now it is your turn. There has been a pattern laid before you. Someone has faithfully taught you the faith. They have lifted up Jesus to you. They have explained the faith, shown you the faith, expressed to you the love of Christ. Now it is your turn!

Paul doesn't mind reminding Timothy of his example. It is not that he is bragging here. He is simply pointing to what has been passed down to him. In other words, Timothy having to live out his faith in the context of difficult

ministry settings is not new and unique. He has seen how this works in Paul. He has witnessed how Paul explained the faith, defended it to critics, shown love to unloving people. He has surely watched as Paul was ridiculed, persecuted, been beaten, and dragged out of town, only to see the same agitators follow him into the next town. Yes, the model for handling difficulties in living out the Christian faith has been lived before Timothy. But now it is his turn. Paul can't live it for him. His mother and grandmother cannot live it for him. He has to persevere on his own. It is his cross to bear daily. But even here, notice that Paul mentions Jesus, who provided the model for Paul, for all of us. He showed us how to handle critics, bullies, hardship, pressing priorities. Not one of us can claim to have it worse than Jesus. He showed us the way.

14 By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

There it is, "the good deposit." Notice that Timothy is not on his own. He has the Holy Spirit living in him, prompting him, protecting him, instructing him, bringing to mind the things he should say and do. God did not abandon him in his journey of faith. He sent the Helper to assist.

But we also see how he refers to the Christian faith: the good deposit. We saw the same basic reference in I Timothy 6. I find this terminology fascinating. We don't often think of our faith as a thing, a thing entrusted to us, deposited in us for safekeeping. But here it is. If you are a follower of Jesus, it means God has entrusted the Christian faith in you, deposited it in you, trusting that you will protect it. And as Paul makes clear in the following verses, not all will protect the good deposit in them. Some will turn away, give up, abandon the faith. Some will turn to false teaching, no teaching, apathy, pet causes, you name it. Guarding the faith is a charge, an assignment to fulfill for each generation.

Again, God does not ask us to do this on our own. He has sent His Spirit to guide us, instruct us, protect us. But we must be active in guarding the faith within us. No one can do it for us, it is our responsibility. For 2,000 years, a succession of people has guarded the faith before us, some guarding it with their lives. There has been an endless stream of enemies seeking to stop the passing down of the gospel message in every generation. Nothing could please the enemy more than getting the current generation to abandon the faith. But for

2,000 years it has been passed down, lived out, and passed on to the next. And yet, it is always true that the Church is only one generation away from extinction. Each generation must receive it, commit to it, and then pass it down.

Now, I know I am just one man, in one tiny spot, interacting with one sliver of the next generation. But I want you to know that I am extremely optimistic for the future. My interactions with the next generation have been a highlight of my ministry. We have some rock stars among us concerning the faith. I am blown away each week by the eagerness of the next generation to learn more about the faith. They could be doing any number of other things, but they choose to come and learn, whether that is the next generation elders on Wednesday night, or the college students late into the night on Thursday, or one on one meetings, they come, they ask good questions, they take notes, they do all the things I never did when I was their age! Yes, I am very optimistic about the future. I can see God raising up another generation behind ours.

Again, what about you? Are you actively, by the Spirit's help guarding the good deposit entrusted to you? Do you take your faith seriously?

III. Those entrusted with the faith must pass it on. 2:1-2

From my perspective, this is the weak link in the chain. This goes against so many things within us in our society. We have had people preach to and teach us. We have embraced it for ourselves. But somehow, our society has made us feel that to pass it on to the next generation is a bad thing, manipulative. NO! It is our duty to faithfully pass on the Christian faith to the next generation. Or said another way, aren't you glad the previous generation in your life didn't have that attitude? You'd still be lost!

2:1- You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,

You can see here this whole concept again laid out. Paul, the father, passed it on to Timothy, and God has been faithful to build up and equip Timothy for his generation. The process has worked thus far...

2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

So, Paul told Timothy in the presence of many witnesses. I suspect the image in Paul's mind is when they laid hands on Timothy, setting him aside for ministry, a reference we saw in the first letter. As Paul's spiritual son, Paul as one who was faithfully taught the faith, now he relays the baton to Timothy, it is now his turn to do the same thing himself and pass it on to others. Notice it even goes one generation further: faithful men teaching others. In this one verse we have 4 generations of people receiving, embracing, and passing on: Paul, Timothy, faithful men, others also. 4 generations. That is how it is designed to work. Notice how it spreads as well: Paul, Timothy (one among others, we know), to faithful men (plural), to others (plural). The Christian faith has spread, from one, to a few, to many, to even more. God has used people to reach people to reach people, every generation doing its part.

But this only happens if the current generation has the vision, the fortitude, the confidence in Christ to pass it on to the next. It must not stop with us, whether as individuals, as a family, as a church, as a generation. We must see it as our responsibility to pass it on to the next.

And so, again, I ask you, "Who are you passing the faith onto?" Can you identify those who are learning from you? From my perspective, every Christian ought to have those from whom they are learning, those of their own peers who are sharpening as iron sharpens iron, and those they are building into. Every Christian ought to have all three. How many do you have?

One of the joys I receive is hearing from former students who have taken what they have learned and used it themselves in passing on the faith to others. I think of a series of former students who served in camps, then led the camp staff using things they learned in our home. There you have the 4 generations: from us, to them, to their staff, to their campers. Can you see how this works? And then I combine it with the godly man who built into me as a young camper. What a joy it is to be involved in such a mission! This is how the Christian faith is designed to be passed on, from person to person to person.

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

I) We will see ourselves as part of an endless chain of believers.

2) We will see our faith as something precious to be guarded.

3) We will see our responsibility to pass what we have learned on to the next generations.

4) We will give thanks to God for all of it, for those who have come before, for those who sharpen us, for those we can build into.