

My Dear Son

Title: My Dear Son

Theme: Don't let fear derail you from fulfilling the call of God on your life.

Text: II Timothy 1:1-7

Series: Live With the End in Mind

Introduction

Most of you are aware and for those who are not, this Sunday represents the beginning of a three-month sabbatical for Pastor Meyer. I want to commend our Trustees for the foresight of building this into his call. As one who has had the privilege of 2, 3-month opportunities to pull away from the rigors of pastoral ministry, I can testify to its renewing power. It allows a pastor to be re-created and become a new person in the very place they are serving. I would encourage us to pray that Pastor Meyer would receive from the Lord what He needs from him, so that He can come back to us refreshed and lead us more deeply into the heart of God. May Dan, Amy and the boys have an experience as family that would be truly memory making.

In the meantime, the rest of us on staff are trying to deal with our envy. We will get over it and are committed to share with you the truth and power of God's word. I am the first up to bat. Probably, not a good analogy given that even the best hitters get out 2/3 of the time.

As I reflected on where we might go with the teaching for the next number of weeks my heart was drawn to Paul's second letter to his son in the faith, Timothy. Of the 13 letters attributed to Paul, this is his last one. It is often in a person's last words that we get the greatest insight into their heart and what was important to them.

What I want us to remember when we study this letter in six installments is that this is very personal correspondence between a spiritual father and son. We are reading someone else's mail. We get to eavesdrop on a tender relationship. Yes, this is Scripture, therefore it is God's inspired word that transcends time and is therefore foundational to us. Yet, what we see is a man who is both apostle and spiritual father writing to his son in the faith, Timothy. Paul is simultaneously an authority figure, an apostle called by God, who in the eyes of history was a monument of a man, at the same time he is a spiritual father whose heart is tied to a son.

Read II Timothy 1:1-7

Of all the letters of Paul in the New Testament, this one touches me the most. Why?

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1. Paul is lonely, languishing in prison, awaiting his execution. We meet a very needy and human Paul. We get a very different image of Paul than might normally come to mind. This is not the fearless, firebrand Paul who faces down the Roman authorities; nor is this the lofty theologian Paul who wrote the book of Romans, which is considered literature foundational to Western civilization; nor is this the traveling evangelist Paul who wore out more sandals than one could imagine. Instead in our mind's eye, we see Paul sitting alone in a *"dismal underground dungeon with a hole in the ceiling for light and air."* Legend has it that his life was concluded in the Mamertine Prison in Rome in about 67AD. You could visit this preserved site today near the Roman Coliseum. In power was Nero, the demented Roman Emperor who used Christians as scapegoats, lighting the city with their tarred and crucified bodies. Much of the city of Rome burned to the ground and Nero needed someone to blame. As the saying goes, "Nero fiddled while Rome burned".

Paul conveys to Timothy his circumstances, *"Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved the world, has deserted me, and has gone to Thessalonica, Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me."* (II Timothy 4:9,10). In the first chapter, Paul commends a man by the name of Onesiphorus, who *"searched hard for me until he found me."* (II Tim. 1:17) Paul is aware that he will not leave this prison a free man, but that his execution is near. *"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure."* (II Tim. 4:6) Legend has it that Paul and Peter were martyred on the same occasion on the Ostian Way, 3 miles outside of the southern extremity of Rome.

2. The second reason this letter touches me is that Paul is concerned with his legacy. This letter has been described as his last will and testament. Paul is affecting a hand-off to his son in the faith, Timothy. The dominant issue on his mind is the transmission of the gospel to the next generation. It is, as if, Paul does not want all of his labors to be in vain and that Timothy must now take up the charge to carry on spreading the good news that had been entrusted to Paul. *The question that hangs over this letter is, "Timothy, are you up for it?"*

This leads me to a very emotional connection that I have with this letter. When my father died on Feb. 28, 1994, with his death a dream died as well. All of my life I had longed for my father to be in the position to pass on his faith to me. I wanted a blessing from him. Not so much a blessing that said, *"Greg, hey, you turned out alright. Way to go"*, but the blessing that comes from the natural passing of the gospel from generation to the next through family lines. I wanted to hear my father say, *"Greg, all of these years I have attempted to live before you as a faithful follower of Christ. Now, son, it is your turn to be faithful to him in your generation."* My father was never able to do this for reasons that are fairly complex. About a month after his death, I went away on a private retreat

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to reflect on the death of both of my parents that occurred within a month of each other. After I had slept all afternoon, emotional exhaustion having caught up with, I found myself irresistibly drawn to Paul's 2nd letter to Timothy.

It dawned on me during my reading why this letter was so compelling. Timothy had a spiritual father who was passing the baton to him. He had a model of a faithful spiritual dad who had created a legacy for his life. The natural order of things is to pass the blessing. I so wanted that, and grieved that I was not able to have it. Fortunately, the years since my father's death, I have been able to be far more charitable, forgiving, and understanding as to why this was not possible for him. And yet, I see in the Paul-Timothy relationship that it is through the family and the church as Christians **we are about the business of creating a heritage and a legacy; we are the connecting link to the next generation.**

So Paul writes a motivational letter and shamelessly pulls out all the stops and employs every technique imaginable to urge Timothy to step up and fulfill his ministry. We will notice these motivational means as we progress through the letter.

Today we will note how Paul appeals to his intimate relationship with Timothy and to Timothy's family heritage as the basis for motivation to carry on the faith, before he gets to the exhortation in v. 6, 7 to fulfill his ministry, that serves as the central theme of this book.

Let's work through the biblical text:

Verse 1: *"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus"*

Though Paul is writing to his son in the faith, he reminds him of who he is in God's grand scheme. He is *"an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God."* It is as if Paul is saying, this apostle thing wasn't my idea. I thought I was serving the true God some 30 years ago as zealous Pharisee. This sect of Jesus' followers were blaspheming the name of the true God, for which I was zealous. How dare they say Jesus was the divine in human form; that Jesus had risen from the dead? What non-sense! On the way to Damascus, Syria with warrants for their arrest, my life was spun around 180 degrees. I was knocked to the ground by a blinding light while a voice called out, *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"* While on my backside and blinded, I said, *"Who are you, Lord?"* The voice identified himself, *"I am Jesus who you are persecuting."* It was then that I was informed that I was chosen to be an apostle to the Gentiles. An apostle literally is one who is sent. Paul had been all over the Roman Empire ever since.

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Timothy, just in case you might forget, I am not apostle because it was my idea, my life was redirected by the will of God, and I have been living out that call ever since. Do you hear the message, Timothy? **My life is not my own, neither is yours.**

v. 2 But this reminder to Timothy of his call as an apostle is tempered by his relationship with Timothy. *"To Timothy, my dear son."* In his first letter to Timothy, he writes to *"my true son in the faith."* Paul has no one like Timothy in his life. You get the impression that if Paul had a biological son, he would have wanted Timothy to fill that role. Paul was most likely his spiritual father in that he was instrumental in Timothy's conversion. In writing to the Corinthian church Paul speaks of himself as a spiritual father through whom they received the gospel. Then he says, *"For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love" (I Cor. 4:17).* Writing to the church at Philippi, Paul says of Timothy, *"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare." (Phil. 2:19, 20)* One commentator wrote that it is difficult to read II Timothy *"without finding something like a mist gathering in the eyes."*

In verses 3 and 4: Paul begins to pull out all the motivational stops. He appeals to **heartstrings** and **heritage** as the basis for Timothy to fulfill his ministry. Paul is leading to something. He is laying a motivational foundation.

Heartstrings: v. 3, *"I thank God whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy."* Remember, Paul is languishing alone. His loneliness can only be filled by the people with whom he has heart connections. They are his comfort. He has left Timothy to pastor the church in Ephesus. Paul had stayed longer in this coastal city, the ruins of which can be found in modern day Southwestern Turkey. In this nexus of the world, Paul proclaimed the gospel in a rented facility called the Hall of Tyrannus. The world came to him.

The book of Acts records an emotional incident. Paul from the port city of Miletus calls the Ephesians elders to join him. In this meeting he exhorts them to remember his model of house to house care, and now they are care for the flock under their charge. When Paul says to Timothy, "recalling your tears", he may have been referring to the parting that took place. Timothy, perhaps, remained with these elders, and returned to Ephesus. They all knelt on the beach in prayer. Acts 20:37,38 reads, *"They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship."*

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Timothy, remember how much you mean to me! You are my joy. The implicit message is, don't let me down. I have poured myself into you. I have not withheld affection. I have opened myself for disappointment. Don't break my heart. Fulfill your ministry.

Paul is the wise veteran, and Timothy his legacy. As I think about my life, I consider myself at the legacy leaving stage of professional ministry. When I look at our staff, I have suddenly become the old man amongst us, except for our visitation pastors, thankfully. I wonder, how did this happen? Are there any advantages to have gotten to this point? One of the few is that the younger generation actually looks to me as a potential mentor. One of the letters I was handed just before coming here was from a man in his early 30's who with tears wrote me about what our relationship had meant to him. We shared a weekly discipling relationship and, thank God, I was able to have a positive impact upon his life. He wrote, *"Soon you will be in Chicago. A new chapter. But as much as I can jump for joy, knowing that God has called you to this new place, I did not know how much I was saddened that you would be leaving until I burst into tears one morning thinking about it. My friend...I will miss you dearly!"* Heartstrings. Paul pulls on them to motivate Timothy.

Paul moves from **heartstrings to heritage**.

v. 5 **Heritage**: *"I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also."* Timothy most likely first heard the gospel on Paul's first missionary journey when he came to Lystra, a city smack in the middle of present day Turkey. On his second missionary journey, Paul began by following up on his previous visits. He came back to Lystra and added Timothy to his ministry team. We read in Acts 16:1-3a, *"He came to Derbe and Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along."*

Timothy had a heritage to live up to. We are told that his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice passed on the faith to Timothy. He had received a *"sincere faith"* from them. The word *"sincere"* means genuine, which is derived from the context of the theater. To be sincere is to be unfaked as opposed to one who wears a mask or plays a part. Jesus called the religious leaders, *"hypocrites"*, because they pretended to be something that they weren't. They were play acting.

This heritage of faith, Paul is convinced *"now lives in you also."* The word *"lives"* means *"dwells down deep inside"*. It has taken root. It has a life of its

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own. Now your faith is not dependent upon your grandmother and mother, it is your own.

There is a positive weight that comes from living in a family line of generations of faithful Christians.

One of our members passed on to me some correspondence within her family that conveys the heritage from which she comes. I want to read an excerpt of a letter from her great-grandfather to his daughter, Margaret, dated Feb. 16, 1883. *"My Dear Margaret, I have much joy in giving you this Bible, as a present, on your 10th birthday. I do sincerely pray that the Holy Spirit may abundantly bless the reading of the same to your precious soul. Remember dear Margaret that 'the Lord God' speaks to us from His blessed word. It is His loving voice to us telling how He would have us live and also telling us of the Dear Savior He has so freely given. I may just tell you that The Bible is the most precious treasure I have in the world. Wishing you many, many happy returns on your Birthday. I remain, Dear Margaret, your loving father."*

What a treasure! That same faith was passed on through the generations, so that the mother who gave me this note could also receive the following note from her daughter, *"You don't realize just how very blessed we are because you passed on your faith in God and his precious Son."* Quoting Ps. 16:6, this daughter concludes, *"We have a wonderful inheritance."* Five unbroken generations. I have had more than a little admiration and envy for those with a heritage to live up to and into.

If this is not your situation, then it has to begin somewhere with the faithful passing on of the faith. It has been said, *"It is a greater achievement to be an ancestor than a mere descendant."* If you have no Christian tradition to carry on, start one.

So Paul pulls on Timothy's **heartstrings** to remind him to please his mentor and then pulls out the **heritage card**, reminding him that he is to be a link to the next generation. He needs to continue the chain. Don't let it stop with him.

Why does he do this? Paul comes to the theme of this book, *"For this reason [because of what I have just said] I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and self-discipline" (1 Tim. 1:6,7).*

Timothy had received a gift or ministry by prophetic utterance through Paul's praying over Timothy. Not only was Paul present but so were the

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Ephesians elders. In I Tim. 4:14, Paul writes, *“Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.”* What is this ministry Timothy is to fulfill? You could make a good case for pastor-teacher or evangelist or both. Throughout this letter Timothy is to be one who holds to the truth of God’s word in the face of false teachings and teachers. He also is to do the work of an evangelist. Much of this letter is about Timothy not being ashamed of the gospel and preserving the gospel deposit that has been entrusted to him. So Paul exhorts Timothy to *“fan into flame the gift of God.”* The image is one of taking a poker to a fire and stirring up the flames. It could be that Paul was sensing a waning and on his death bed he is trying to get Timothy going again.

What was it that could cause Timothy to shrink from exercising his ministry? In a word, fear. *“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity.” (v. 7)* Timidity could be better translated “cowardice”. In the weeks ahead we will look at those things in Timothy’s personality and circumstance that might cause him to be fearful. But suffice it today, let’s close by reflecting on the power of fear to derail from what God would have us to do with our lives.

Do you know what the most common command is in Scripture? You might think it might be something like, “love one another”, since love is at heart of Christian faith. Perhaps the most common command would be to avoid our greatest sin, pride. The single greatest command? “Fear not”. Why fear? Because it is the no. 1 reason why people refuse to do what God asks them to do. Americans were asked in one poll to name their greatest fears. At least in this poll, fear of public speaking ranked first, followed closely by the fear of death. The pollster ironically observed that people would rather die than speak in public. If you live in fear you will never experience the potential that God has place in you.

John Ortberg writes in his wonderfully titled book, *If You Want to Walk on Water You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat*, *“Fear has created more practicing heretics than bad theology ever has, for it makes us live as though we serve a limited, finite, partially present, and semi-competent God.”* Paul said to Timothy, fear is not from God. The spirit God gives is one of “power, love (which cast out fear) and self-control or discipline”, in other words, frees us from panic. Paul can say as he faces his end, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (II Tim. 4:7)*

In other words, Timothy, I have made it to the end having faced my fears and fulfilled my call. Don’t get derailed by fear. Live with the End in Mind. See yourself in my position. What do you want to be able to say?

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To those in their retirement years, I say, there is no theology of retirement in Bible. This is your time to continue grow and serve. A former staff member with whom I served said that the challenge of the retirement years is to balance freedom and significance. Many retirees seem to do a better job as freedom than significance.

To those who are empty nesters, you finally have the discretionary time to say, where God would could you use me?

To those in the child rearing years, you have a first priority of passing on the legacy of faith to your children. Don't neglect the responsibility right in front of you.

To those in the young adults years, now is the time to live with the end in mind. Set your course today with what you want to be able to say before God as to how you have lived your life.

It is an awful thing to climb the ladder of success and realize when you have gotten to the top that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.

Let me conclude with this image this morning. Imagine in your mind's eye a poster of stylishly drawn turtle with an elongated neck. The caption reads, "Behold the turtle who only makes progress when he sticks his neck out."

Let Paul's words motivate us to live with the end in mind. *"God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and self-discipline."* (II Tim. 1:1-7) In other words, God shows up when we stick our neck out.