

Message #1

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1 Timothy

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TIMOTHY'S CALLING, OR HOW TO MAKE YOUR LIFE COUNT

1 TIMOTHY 1:1-3

INTRODUCTION

Victor Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist who survived three years in a Nazi concentration camp. He saw some of his fellow inmates persevere in the midst of horrible conditions. He saw others give in to the horror and die. The difference Frankl observed was that the survivors found some kind of meaning in life beyond themselves. He discovered that **“you have meaning only when there is something in life more important than your own personal freedom and happiness, something for which you are glad to sacrifice your happiness.”** (Keller, *Walking with God*, p. 71)

A century ago there was an explorer who took out an ad in the London newspapers to recruit a team who would go with him on a great adventure to Antarctica. His ad went like this: **“Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.”**

I don't know if a marketing expert would approve of such an ad today. But there were thousands of men who responded to the request. A primary reason was the individual who put out the ad. He was Sir Ernest Shackleton (PROJECTOR ON--- ERNEST SHACKLETON), the famous English explorer of the Arctic. Many people were eager to participate in a cause that went beyond themselves and that was led by a famous and glorious explorer.

If Jesus Christ put an ad in the paper for Christian workers, His appeal might not sound all that inviting either. (PROJECTOR OFF) Perhaps it would go something like this: **“Wanted. Men and women to build church. Great retirement plan, but low wages, no insurance, and long hours. Will face constant attack from an invisible enemy. May not see results of labor, and reward will not come until after work is completed. Leader of project was killed for his contribution. No educational or physical requirements but must have faith.”** Most people would, and do, pass that invitation by. Yet because there is an appeal to a cause beyond ourselves, and because there is a great adventurer who signs it, many others do apply for the job.

In fact, over the centuries millions of people have responded to the invitation to follow Christ. They have been different kinds of people. Many of the ones who come to our minds were dynamic and powerful leaders--- people like Paul and Peter and William Carey and John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards and Amy Carmichael and Billy Graham. These characters were fearless, untiring, and dynamic Christian leaders.

While we think of these people as heroes, most of us may not identify with their personality types. Most of us aren't all that bold or dynamic or charismatic. We don't have hundreds or thousands of people who show up to hear us talk or to read our books. We don't arrive in a new place and soon have everybody talking about us or about our Christian message.

Yet God uses other people who don't have this same kind of "in your face" boldness, who have less dynamic personalities. That is clearly evident in the life of Timothy, whose New Testament book we are going to begin to study this morning. As we look at the book named after him and gain glimpses of the character and personality of this godly man, I suspect that many of us will be able to relate to him.

Today we are going to introduce the New Testament First Epistle of Paul to Timothy and look at some of the characteristics that Timothy displayed. In the process many of us may be able to see something of ourselves in him and see how the Lord used his personality and how he can use our personalities to accomplish something of significance. We will also look at the kind of encouragement that Timothy needed, and the kind of encouragement that we often need as well. The author of the letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul, will also tell us important things that we should know about how to do church and how to be Christian leaders.

I.

Let's consider then TIMOTHY'S BACKGROUND. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. TIMOTHY'S BACKGROUND) Acts #16 describes the Apostle Paul's first encounter with Timothy, which took place during Paul's second missionary journey, which brought him to south central Asia Minor. Luke, the author of Acts, tells us about it in v. 1 of #16 (ACTS 16:1): **"Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek."**

Timothy's Greek name means "honor of God." He was a product of a mixed marriage, in that his father was a Gentile, and his mother was a Jew, who was also a believer in Jesus.

Second Timothy #3 v. 15 (2 TIMOTHY 3:15) gives us this additional bit of information: “...**from childhood you [Timothy] have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.**” The sacred writings are the books of the Old Testament. Probably his mother was a devout Jew, although we learn from v. 3 of Acts 16 that he was not circumcised. Perhaps Timothy’s Gentile father had kept that from happening.

We are told from Acts 16:1 that Timothy was from Lystra in Asia Minor (LYSTRA MAP) That was a small town in what we know today as Turkey about 80 miles from the Mediterranean Sea. It was a Roman colony, which meant that there were retired Roman soldiers living there and that it had a Roman form of government. Lystra was small and not commercially significant. The non-Roman natives worshipped the Greek gods, especially Zeus and Hermes. There were also Jews living in Lystra.

(FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY) When Paul went on his first missionary trip in about 47 AD, he stopped at Lystra. When he healed a lame man there, the people began calling Paul the Greek god Zeus and tried to worship him. He stopped them from doing that, but soon Jews from out of town came and stirred up trouble that forced Paul to leave Lystra. It could be that Timothy was converted during this first visit of Paul.

(SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY) Chapter 16 of Acts describes part of the second missionary trip of Paul when the apostle returned to Lystra and other cities in Asia Minor which he visited on his first trip. We are told in this chapter that Timothy was well spoken of by the brethren. So Paul decided to take him along with him on the rest of his trip.

Timothy is mentioned several times on the rest of this second missionary trip. During much of the rest of Paul’s life the Book of Acts indicates that Timothy was with the famous apostle. On one occasion the younger man is left with another missionary to do some preaching and teaching in a Greek town. Soon after this he rejoins Paul for the rest of the trip.

(THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY) Timothy was also with Paul on the apostle’s third missionary trip. This trip included a two to three year stay at Ephesus, on the west coast of Asia Minor. At the end of this trip Paul was arrested in Jerusalem by the Romans. Eventually he was sent to Rome to await a trial before the emperor’s court. During the two years that Paul was in Rome awaiting this trial, he sent several

letters that are included in the New Testament. These are collectively known as the Prison Epistles. In these letters Paul mentions that Timothy is with him.

So we get the picture that Timothy is a loyal, dependable guy. The rest of what we know about Timothy comes from these two letters of First and Second Timothy.

II.A.

(II. THE BACKGROUND OF FIRST TIMOTHY) Next we are going to consider THE BACKGROUND OF FIRST TIMOTHY. What were the circumstances which led to the writing of this letter? We will look first at PAUL'S SITUATION at the time of its writing. (II. THE BACKGROUND... A. PAUL'S SITUATION)

After Paul's trial at Rome, he was found innocent and freed. This was about 61 or 62 AD. A couple of years later the Romans arrested him again. Second Timothy makes reference to Paul being a prisoner. Perhaps 1 Timothy was written during this second imprisonment. Some scholars think that it was written before that. We don't know for sure. First and Second Timothy and Titus are known as the Pastoral Epistles, because they were written to individuals who were involved in pastoring churches, and they contain advice about how to do things in a church.

B.

(II. THE BACKGROUND... A. B. THE SITUATION...) We are going to consider next THE SITUATION AT EPHESUS, which was where Timothy was located when he got the letter from Paul. Timothy had been with Paul ten years earlier when the apostle preached in Ephesus. (EPHESUS MAP) Many people became Christians during Paul's two to three year stay there. The Christian leaders also faced much opposition. The worshippers of the Greek goddess Artemis, known by the Romans as Diana, eventually ran Paul out of town.

Ephesus was a wealthy city. It was a seaport. The temple to the goddess Artemis (EPHESUS TEMPLE ARTEMIS) was an attraction that brought religious worshippers from all over the Roman world. The building was regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Artemis was regarded as a hunter and a protector of pregnant women and a defender of Ephesus. Her image supposedly fell from the sky centuries earlier. Perhaps it was a legend that related to the fall of a meteorite. In the Book of Acts there is also reference to occult activity that happened in the city.

Timothy knew the town and the church from his earlier visit. But replacing Paul as a leader of the church would be a hard act to follow. I once became the pastor of a church where I was following the founding pastor. People compared me to that previous pastor, and I was reminded frequently about how the other guy did things. Timothy perhaps faced some of that.

Timothy was also a young guy. In #4 of this letter in v. 12 (1 TIMOTHY 4:12) Paul writes, “**Let no one despise you for your youth...**” Bible scholars guess that he was no older than 35. Then there were some significant problems in the church at Ephesus at this time, as we shall see. The biggest problem was that there were teachers who were teaching wrong doctrines. So Timothy had his work cut out for him. Paul was the one who sent Timothy to be his representative and to function as a kind of pastor in the church.

C.

We come then to III. C. in the outline and THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER. (III. A. B. C. THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER) There seem to be three things that Paul was trying to do in this letter. **First**, he was seeking to encourage Timothy to persevere in the leadership role to which he had been assigned at Ephesus. **Second**, he wanted to give instructions to Timothy and the Christians in Ephesus about the proper operation of a local church. **Third**, Paul wanted to give advice to Timothy about the proper conduct of a Christian leader.

Chapter 1 contains encouragement for Timothy. Chapter 2 through #3 v. 13 focuses on the proper operation of the local church. Chapter 3 v. 14 through #6 concentrates on Timothy’s personal conduct. So in this sermon series we will hopefully learn things about encouragement in the face of adversity, principles about the proper operation of the local church, and priorities which we should have in our individual Christian lives.

III.

Let’s look then at THE INTRODUCTORY GREETING (III. THE INTRODUCTORY GREETING) of 1 Timothy. The letter begins, “**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope.**” If Paul was writing to his friend and companion in ministry, why does he talk about being an apostle? When I write or send an e-mail to my friends, I don’t say, “Kurt Hedlund, pastor of Bethany Baptist Church in Boulder City, ordained to the ministry in 1982 by the elders of such and such a church.” What is the deal here?

The answer is that Paul was writing to his close friend Timothy, but he was also expecting that the letter would be read by a much wider audience, which indeed proved to be the case. At the very end of the letter he says, **“Grace be with you.”** In the original language he uses the plural form of “you.” So Paul wants to convey authority behind this message, which has application to the entire church of Ephesus, and still has application to us today. Paul expected that the letter would be read to all of the Christians at Ephesus.

The word “apostle” means “sent one.” In its narrowest usage in the New Testament it referred to the small group of men who were witnesses of Jesus and who were personally commissioned by Him to be His representatives. In Ephesians #2 Paul says that the church was founded upon the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus serving as the chief cornerstone. Once the foundation of a building is laid, there is no further need for foundation stones. So I am skeptical about people who claim today to be prophets or apostles of the church. The New Testament contains the doctrine and teaching of these first apostles and prophets. It seems to be sufficient for the the needs of the church.

The Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy indicates in #18 that the test for a prophet of God is 100% accuracy. Anyone claiming to be a prophet of God who makes one wrong prediction was supposed to be executed. (18:20-22) I don’t see people today who claim to be prophets and apostles being willing to submit to this test. I suspect that we would get rid of much false teaching in our churches if these people were willing to submit to that test. My guess is that most of them would have second thoughts about their claims.

Paul had been given a specific and personal commandment at the time of his conversion on the road to Damascus to bring the Gospel to Gentiles as well as Jews. The author of that command was God our Savior and Christ Jesus our hope. Usually the term “Savior” is used of Jesus. Here it is applied to God the Father. This same usage also appears in #2 v. 3 and #4 v. 10.

Perhaps God the Father’s role as Savior is best explained in 1 John #4 v. 10. (1 JOHN 4:10) There the Apostle John writes, **“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”** In the sense that God the Father is the author of the plan of salvation--- that He sent the Son of God to rescue us--- He is our Savior, as in another sense is God the Son.

Paul uses the term “Savior” a lot in the pastoral epistles, perhaps because it was being used a lot in Roman society. (PROJECTOR OFF) Greeks used it often of their gods. It had also become a popular term

to describe the Roman emperor. Julius Caesar was the first of the Roman emperors to be called God and Savior. By Paul's day a popular sign of patriotism was the declaration "Caesar is Savior." The Apostle Paul objected to that. He was claiming that title for Jesus Christ, and sometimes--- as we see here--- for God the Father.

In v. 1 of our passage Paul also calls Jesus Christ "our hope." Roman Gentiles had little confidence in their destiny after death. A Roman grave marker from this period had this epitaph: "**I am of good courage, I who was not, and became, and now am not. I do not grieve.**" (Mounce, *First Timothy*) Such would be an honest expression of the belief of the materialists of our day. The current flu pandemic has reminded us all of the uncertain nature of this life. But we Christians have hope because we trust in Christ and God the Father, who is sovereign over all that happens in this world. Jesus has conquered death and paid the penalty for sin, so we can have confidence that we will have a meaningful life beyond the grave, if we have trusted in Him as our Savior. We have hope.

In v. 2 Paul calls Timothy "**my true child.**" Paul was older and more mature than Timothy. But Timothy had been a devoted disciple and understudy. He may also have come to know Christ through the preaching of Paul.

Paul adds, "**Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.**" "Peace" was the usual greeting that Jews would make in writing a letter or meeting someone on the street. Still today they will often say "Shalom." "Grace and peace" was the way that Paul greeted the churches at the beginning of his letters to them. Here he adds "mercy." I suspect that he includes this term because he is aware of some of the challenges that Timothy faces at Ephesus and also because Timothy has some health difficulties. We will learn about them later.

Then at the beginning of v. 3 we see the primary mission that Paul has for Timothy. He wants him to stay on in Ephesus. Timothy's position in that church is not really that of an elder or deacon or even a pastor. Instead, he is an apostolic delegate. Timothy is a special representative of the Apostle Paul. He is expected to provide leadership for the church on a temporary basis. As we shall see next week, he is tasked with the job of confronting false teachers and their wrong doctrine. In coming weeks we will see why his leadership is needed and how it was to work itself out.

IV.

We come then to THE APPLICATION section. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE APPLICATION) First, consider THE EXAMPLE OF TIMOTHY'S CHARACTER. (IV. THE APPLICATION A. THE EXAMPLE OF...) This young Christian leader has qualities worth emulating. In 1 Timothy #4 v. 12 Paul writes (1 TIMOTHY 4:12), **"Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity"** So Timothy was a younger guy. But physical age is not a cause for disrespect, whether it is younger age, as with Timothy, or older age. From God's perspective the thing that counts is maturity, godliness. God can use younger people to accomplish good things. He can even use teenagers and grade schoolers.

Then also Timothy was a bit on the timid side. He was a lower key kind of guy. In 2 Timothy #1 vv. 7 & 8 (2 TIMOTHY 1: 7-8) Paul says, **"...for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord..."** Be confident. In 2 Timothy #2 v. 1 the Apostle also writes (2 TIMOTHY 2:1), **"You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus."**

The Apostle Peter in his earlier years was always putting his foot in his mouth. He declared that everybody else might desert Jesus, but he never would. He was an emotional guy. He was an extrovert. He was bold. He was self-confident. That boldness and self-reliance sometimes got him into trouble. But with maturity he became a great Christian leader. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The impression that I get about Timothy is that he was a calmer guy. He was not so emotional. He was more subdued. He was less vocal. But God can use somebody like Timothy. Not everybody has to be like Peter, or like Paul.

The Apostle Paul seemed to relish the slightest opportunity he had to stand up on his soapbox and start preaching. I don't think that Timothy had a natural bent toward street preaching. He wasn't the John Wayne type or the flaming evangelist like Paul. Perhaps he had some fears and insecurities. But that was OK.

Perhaps he was more like Sam in the *Lord of the Rings* story. Those of you who have read the book or seen the movies know that the main character of the adventure is Frodo Baggins. But in the end it is Frodo's low key friend Sam who helps win the day by his consistency and steadfast faithfulness.

The encouraging thing is that the Lord needs and uses Sams and Timothys as well as Peters and Pauls. Timothy was a faithful, dependable, steady kind of guy. He was willing to brave all of the dangers that were involved in being a close companion of the Apostle Paul in his missionary exploits. He was willing to accept the responsibilities of Christian leadership.

Listen to what Paul himself says about Timothy in Philipopians #2 vv. 19-22 (PROJECTOR ON--- PHILIPPIANS 2:19-20): **“I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. (PHILIPPIANS 21-22) For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.”**

Timothy was faithful. He was dependable. He was genuine. He was steady. He was a guy that you could count on in a pinch. He was the guy you would want with you in a foxhole. We need people like Timothy in the church. We need bold, aggressive, emotional Peters. But we also need calm, more reserved, steady Timothys. We need to appreciate both kinds of people.

B.

The second lesson which comes out of this overview of the life of Timothy has to do with THE NEED FOR PERSEVERANCE. (IV. A. B. THE NEED FOR PERSEVERANCE) Timothy was the only individual in the Bible to be the recipient of two letters which became part of the Scriptures. In both of them the author encourages him to hang in there, to persevere. There were problems in the church at Ephesus. False teachers were threatening the unity and doctrinal purity of the church. There were persecutors outside of the church who hated the Christians. Attendance at church meetings was perhaps down. Maybe giving was off. Timothy may have wondered if it was time to move on. Maybe there was someone else better suited to provide leadership. Maybe there was another church that would be better suited to utilize his temperament and gifts.

Paul's encouragement to Timothy was the kind of encouragement that we so often need. Hang in there. Persevere. Don't give up the ship. William Carey, who is known as the "Father of Modern Missions," spent seven years in India before he gained his first convert. Imagine what a loss it would have been if he had gotten discouraged and went home before that. For eventually he planted numerous churches, started a couple of colleges, began other schools, translated the Bible into several Indian languages, and had a tremendous impact on India for Christ.

For those of us who can relate to Timothy's personality type, we also need that encouragement to persevere in our Christian responsibilities, We need it in our parenting when our kids are driving us crazy. We may have kids who are making lousy choices in life, and they don't seem to want to listen to us. We need to persevere. Some of us may have a husband or wife who just shows no interest in spiritual things, and it is terribly frustrating. We need to persevere. Sometimes carrying out our job at church doesn't seem to produce results. We need to persevere. Sometimes our daily Bible reading and prayer time seems boring and unproductive. We need to persevere in our devotions anyway.

There was a blind and deaf girl from the town next to the one in which we lived in Connecticut. This girl was something of a brat. Anne Sullivan tried to teach her how to communicate. A lot of people told Anne that it wasn't worth it to spend so much time with her. But Anne persevered in spite of temper tantrums from the girl, physical abuse, mealtime madness and even thankless parents. (KELLER AND SULLIVAN)

Within two years, however, the girl was able to read and write in Braille. Ultimately she graduated with honors from Radcliffe College. And that girl--- Helen Keller--- eventually devoted her life to the productive mission of helping the deaf and the blind. Anne Sullivan persevered in her work with Helen Keller, and it paid off.

Perseverance pays off in the end. Timothy needed that encouragement, and many of us need it, too. The Apostle Paul (GALATIANS 6:9) tells us in Galatians #6 v. 9, **“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”**