

2 Timothy 1:3-7 | “Keep the Fire Burning”
Preached on January 8, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 1, and we will be in verses 3-7.

Last week, we looked at Paul’s introduction and greeting in the book of 2 Timothy, well now we will be getting deeper into the content of the letter. *[pause]*

How do you motivate someone to do something?

Some of us try to manipulate, guilt, or force people to do things.

Or some of us try to just bring up the matter and hope that people get motivated. *[pause]*

There’s a story of a minister who took his little child to a circus.

He says, "The clowns were particularly good and the last one of them was a little fellow wearing a very wonderful high hat.

While he was bowing elaborately to a dignified woman, his hat fell off and an elephant sat on it.

The clown gestured wildly at the elephant, but the beast sat still. He waved and shouted again and again, but the elephant never budged.

Angrily the clown stepped behind the elephant, kicked with all his strength, and hopped away with a sore foot in his hands.

Then, frantic with anger, the little clown turned back to the elephant and tried to lift him off the hat.

Defeated and in complete despair, the clown sat down and started to eat peanuts. The elephant was interested in peanuts, got up, ambled over, and begged for one!”¹ *[pause]*

That story is a reminder that shouting and trying to force people to do things usually doesn’t work well to motivate people.

Instead, encouraging them with something good often does the trick. *[pause]*

Here in our passage this morning, we find that Paul wants to motivate Timothy to faithful, active service.

But he doesn’t guilt, force, or shout at Timothy.

Rather, he encourages him first, and then calls him to do what God has called him to do. *[pause]*

We see this encouragement in verses 3-5, which shows us...

¹ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/m/motivation.htm>.

I. You have reasons to be encouraged!

Just hear the encouragement come out as I read verses 3-5. *[READ VERSES 3-5]*

The first thing that Paul does is he reminds Timothy of his own relationship with him. *[pause]*

Paul says that he's thankful to God for Timothy.

In fact, he thanks God continually for Timothy, as he prays for him night and day. *[pause]*

It didn't matter that Paul was in prison and awaiting execution, he was still going to think of others and be grateful to God for them. *[pause]*

He's not sitting in sullenness, but rather, he's appreciative of others.

For he saw Timothy as a gift from God, who he should be grateful for. *[pauseeee]*

So often we are so inwardly focused that we become outwardly indifferent to other people in our lives.

Yet it makes a difference on us when someone, even if they are going through something harder, appreciates us. *[pause]*

Timothy knew how much Paul was going through, and yet Paul was continually thanking God for him?! *[pauseeee]*

Aren't you encouraged when other people are appreciative of you?

Aren't you uplifted when you clearly hear someone pray to God that they are thankful for you? *[pause]*

You know, I'm often on the receiving end of this kind of thing as your pastor.

Regularly, in prayer meetings or when I hear someone praying, I hear them pray that they are thankful for me. *[pause]*

What a motivating and comforting thing to hear!

It makes you want to keep being faithful, for you know that you are constantly thought of, prayed for, and cared about. *[pauseeee]*

It's great that we tell someone that we are praying for them, but do we ever say, "I thank God for you in my prayers."?

That would encourage even the most downtrodden soul. *[pause]*

Paul and Timothy's relationship is the way that our relationships in the church should be like.

We are a family, remember? *[pause]*

You see this close relationship between Paul and Timothy in verse 4, where we hear Paul remembering Timothy's tears. *[pause]*

We don't know exactly what caused and led to Timothy crying, but it seems as though these tears were shed when Paul and Timothy last saw each other and departed.

Timothy was so saddened about Paul leaving that he couldn't help but cry. *[pause]*

In our culture, it comes across as though it's a shameful thing for a man to cry.

But throughout the Bible, we see strong, godly men crying - even Jesus Christ!² *[pause]*

There was such a strong, close, affectionate relationship between Paul and Timothy that Timothy cried over Paul's departure.

Do you have such close relationships with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ that you feel comfortable enough to cry in front of them?

We are called to weep with those who weep, but would we actually weep?³ *[pause]*

Paul's relationship with Timothy was so close that Paul explains that he longs to see Timothy.

This wasn't merely something that would make him smile, but he *longed* to see him, for doing so would fill him with joy. *[pause]*

Could this characterize our relationships with others in the church? *[pause]*

Imagine the difference it would make if we had these kinds of relationships with others.

Truly, other people's appreciation, prayer, caring, and affectionate relationship with us is a great motivator and stabilizer in ministry.

I can serve the Lord with joy easier when I have fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who have this kind of relationship with me. *[pause]*

When I have a shoulder to cry on.

When I have people who care and think about me.

When I have people who thank God for me and pray for me.

What a difference that makes in a church! *[pause]*

We certainly want this in our lives, but do we do this for others?

Even Paul in prison with death looming was doing this for Timothy. *[pauseee]*

² A reference to John 11:35.

³ A reference to Romans 12:15.

In order to have these kinds of relationships, we need to lower down our walls.

We can't be standoffish with everyone and never be willing to let people in. *[pause]*

We need to be thinking of others, rather than ourselves.

We have to actually care, think about, and pray for people. *[pauseeee]*

As Paul's relationship with Timothy encouraged him in ministry, so our relationships with others can do the same.

Remember what you have in your church relationships. *[pauseeee]*

Not only does Paul encourage Timothy with their relationship, but also, with the heritage of faith he had. *[pause]*

First, Paul's own faith is highlighted.

Paul thanks God, whom he serves with a clear conscience. *[pause]*

So Timothy wasn't the only one serving God.

He wasn't some lone ranger sitting on a lone island in the middle of nowhere. *[pauseeee]*

Isn't it encouraging to know that other people are serving God, even if they live hundreds of miles away? *[pause]*

One of the most discouraging things is to believe that you are the only one doing something.

Like Elijah, thinking he's the only one serving the Lord, so we often act the same.⁴

Yet we need to remember that we are all in this together, striving to serve the Lord with clear consciences. *[pauseeee]*

Paul doesn't stop with his faith and service to God, for look at what he immediately says, "I thank God whom I serve, *as did my ancestors*." *[pause]*

Paul and Timothy's faith is not made up out of nowhere.

It's a faith that goes all the way back to the Old Testament time. *[pause]*

Paul's ancestors would be people like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It would be people like David, Solomon, and the prophets of old.

The list could go on and on - this faith isn't crazily different from the faith of those people.

⁴ See 1 Kings 19:14.

They may not have seen Jesus, but they placed their faith in the coming Messiah, just the same.
[pause]

There is great continuity between the Old Testament believers and us.

We follow and serve the same God, who deserves to be worshiped, thanked, and prayed to.
[pauseeee]

To be encouraged and motivated to be faithful in serving the Lord takes remembering that this isn't new.

Like the author of Hebrews does, so Paul does here by reminding us of the great cloud of witnesses, who went before us in persevering faith.⁵ [pauseeee]

If Timothy was reminded of Paul's faith and the Old Testament believers' faith, that would be enough, but Paul adds another - Timothy's own family. [pause]

Paul brings up the fact that Timothy's grandmother and mother both believed in Christ.

Their influence most definitely impacted and shaped Timothy's life. [pause]

Women, this is such a great reminder.

As commentator Denny Burk says...

"Paul invites readers to ponder the singularly powerful impact that mothers and grandmothers can have on children..."

These women...have made their mark on Timothy.

Even though the work of childrearing can be mundane and thankless, the seeds these women of God planted have grown into an oak of righteousness."⁶ [pauseee]

Don't forget about the eternal impact that your faith can have on your children!

Now Timothy had to believe for himself, yet the influence of his mother and grandmother greatly shaped him for ministry. [pauseeee]

When I first came to pastor here at First Baptist, something that I quickly found out was how many people were related to each other.

Even a year or two into pastoring here, I would find out that certain people were related, and think, "How did I never know that!" [pause]

Let me tell you - that is not a bad thing at all.

⁵ See Hebrews 12:1, which is directly connected to Hebrews 11.

⁶ Denny Burk, "2 Timothy," in *Ephesians-Philemon*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. XI, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 459-460.

In actuality, that is a glorious picture of the impact of a legacy of faith! *[pause]*

Think with me of the Learish clan.

There are now 4 generations in this church - praise God!

May our children, great-grandchildren, and future descendants all place their faith in Christ!

May we so shape and impact our children and grandchildren that the impact is felt for generations. *[pause]*

Even if you sit here today and think, “I’m the first one in my family to believe, I don’t have that heritage of faith.”

Guess what? Can’t you be the *start* of a heritage of faith?

What if you were the grandmother or grandfather of a Timothy?

Like I said, we each have to personally believe in Jesus Christ, but we can influence, impact, and shape the lives of our family for Christ. *[pauseeee]*

Remember your heritage of faith.

A look back to your heritage of faith can encourage you to continue on.

It reminds you that there were those who went before you who were faithful, and so why not you too? *[pause]*

Even if you are someone who doesn’t have that personal family heritage of faith, you can still be encouraged.

Think of the people you *do* know in your life who had persevering faith. *[pause]*

Or for us as a church, we have a great heritage of faith in the prior generations of faithful believers who went before us at First Baptist.

This church has a 169 year history of faithfulness to the Word of God.

They went through the high’s and low’s, just like we do, yet they kept their eyes on Christ through it all.

Let that motivate and encourage us as a church to keep serving the Lord! *[pauseeee]*

Paul also remembers Timothy’s own sincere faith.

It wasn’t a fake or hypocritical faith, but a genuine faith. *[pause]*

Paul says that he’s sure of his faith, he’s convinced that Timothy has faith, just like his mother and grandmother. *[pause]*

What an encouraging thing to hear from Paul, if you were Timothy!

Timothy's faith was affirmed by none other than Paul himself. *[pauseeee]*

When other people can witness and affirm our faith, it encourages us to be faithful.

This is partly why becoming a member here is such an encouraging moment.

In choosing to become a member, you are demonstrating that you want to commit to being here, and the church is affirming that we believe you are a Christian, and we want to commit to your well-being. *[pause]*

Have other people affirmed your faith? *[pause]*

Paul is showing Timothy, "You have so much to be encouraged about."

"Remember what you have Timothy, and let that remembrance stir you on to faithfulness."
[pause]

What about you?

Do you often remember what you have?

The Christian life isn't meant to be lived alone.

Instead, remember your relationships with those in the church.

There are people here to pray for you, thank God for you, think about you, and care about you.

You aren't in this battle alone, but you have an army full of fellow comrades, who are here to support you. *[pause]*

Remember the heritage of faith you come from.

Your faith isn't new; the Christian life isn't something that no one's done before you.

But think about those who have walked before you and who have impacted you with their faith.
[pause]

And remember your sincere faith, if you truly do have sincere faith.

It's worth it to keep serving faithfully!

And that's where Paul goes next, as he shows us that...

II. You have reasons to courageously serve the Lord!

In this passage, we see that Paul gives Timothy some reasons why he can courageously serve the Lord.

Look down at verses 6-7. *[READ VERSES 6-7]*

First, Paul says, “*for this reason* I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God.”

What’s the reason that he should ‘fan into flame’ his gift? Because of his sincere faith. *[pause]*

In one sense, he *could* fan into flame his gift from God because all those with genuine faith receive a spiritual gift from God.

But in another sense, he *should* fan into flame his gift from God because he has genuine faith and genuine faith isn’t meant to sit back and do nothing. *[pauseeee]*

We see throughout Scripture that someone with genuine faith isn’t meant to sit idle, but should have an active faith, active in service.

We are continually called to use our spiritual gifts. *[pause]*

For some of you, you may not be utilizing your spiritual gifting because you don’t see the direct correlation between your faith and how it’s supposed to work out.

Yet faith is supposed to be active, not dead.⁷ *[pause]*

Your faith isn’t a tag-on to your life.

It isn’t just a cultural thing that you do on Sunday’s because that’s just how you were raised. *[pause]*

Your faith in Jesus Christ should lead to active service for His name and glory!

You are called to serve! You are called to live for Him! You are called to use your gifts!

Are you neglecting your calling? *[pauseeeee]*

Paul encourages Timothy by not only affirming his sincere faith, but also by affirming his genuine gifting.

God had given Timothy a spiritual gift, and this gift was in him, for Paul laid his hands on Timothy. *[pause]*

‘Laying on hands’ was a way to affirm someone’s calling and gifting, and to commission them to service.

So Paul is saying, “I was there, in fact, I laid my hands on you - you have a gift from God, so use it!”

“This is what God has gifted and called you to do!” *[pauseeee]*

⁷ See James 2:17, 26.

When people recognize that we are gifted in some way, it encourages and motivates us to use that gift.

If I know that I am gifted to do something, I'm more confident to do it. *[pause]*

Imagine if people kept affirming and recognizing that you have the gift of encouragement.

Wouldn't that encourage you to keep using your gift for others? Definitely!

So Paul is encouraging Timothy by affirming that he was gifted by God.

This didn't come from Timothy just being inherently awesome, it came *from God*.

It was a gift, a grace gift, meant to be used for Him. *[pause]*

If you are a Christian here today, God has graciously given you a gift to be used.

Imagine someone gifting you something valuable to be used in your life, and you just put it in the attic and never use it again.

Don't ignore and neglect your gift, for God has given it to you!

Don't neglect it, but "fan it into flame"! *[pause]*

Now what does that actually mean?

Paul uses a word that means to rekindle, revive, revitalize, or stir up a fire. *[pause]*

So imagine a fire that has died down and is now just hot embers.

What do you do, if you still want a fire?

You stir it back up into a flame.

That's the image.

God has given us each a spiritual gift, but that spiritual gift needs continually stirred up into flame. *[pause]*

Think about what causes a fire to die down - isn't it neglect?

But what causes a fire to be rekindled? Active use and attention. *[pause]*

So also, that's similar to our spiritual gift.

By neglect, our spiritual gift can sit dormant.

Our spiritual gift ends up being like a fire, which is barely there, and what use is a fire that has died down to embers?

Instead, we are called to “fan into flame” our spiritual gift!

We are called to actively use and give attention to the development of our spiritual gift. *[pause]*

There’s a story of “The great violinist, Nicolo Paganini, [who] willed his marvelous violin to Genoa -- the city of his birth -- but only on condition that the instrument never be played upon.

It was an unfortunate condition, for it is a peculiarity of wood that as long as it is used and handled, it shows little wear. As soon as it is discarded, it begins to decay.

The exquisite, mellow-toned violin has become worm-eaten in its beautiful case, valueless except as a relic.”⁸ *[pause]*

Is that how some of us are treating our spiritual gift?

We have something valuable that is given to us to be used, not stored away! *[pauseeee]*

You see, spiritual gifts are like a muscle, they need to be used regularly and developed to reach their full potential, or else they will atrophy. *[pause]*

So we have to actively use our gift.

And we develop our gift over time by using it, and being trained to use it better. *[pause]*

Even the most gifted athletes need to develop their gifting, so that’s the same with spiritual gifts.

We also pray to God for help to use our gift, we depend on the Spirit to use our gift. *[pauseeee]*

Christian, you have a gift, but you need to “fan it into flame”!

Keep the fire burning!

Don’t quench the Spirit⁹ and the gifting He has given you, but let the Spirit work mightily through you as you take measures to utilize your gift. *[pauseeee]*

Now for some of you, your hesitation to use your gift is that you *don’t know* what your gift is.

Well let me tell you the prime way to find your spiritual gift....start serving!

That’s right, the best way to find out what your spiritual gift is is to actually just start serving in different areas. *[pause]*

What you find when you start serving in different areas is, “Yeah, I’m probably not gifted in this area.”

⁸ *Bits & Pieces*, June 25, 1992. Found at: http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/s/spiritual_gifts.htm.

⁹ A reference to 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

Or, you find out, “Wow, I really do believe I’m gifted in this area, and I just love it. When I do this, it’s like there’s this joy and fulfillment that comes over me.”

And others will start noticing and affirming your gifting in that area. *[pause]*

That’s when you recognize your spiritual gift.

It may not happen quickly, but it’s worth the time to discover. *[pauseeee]*

Each of you has a Spirit-given gift and calling, but will you neglect it or step into your calling and gifting?

Let’s not sit back and neglect what God has given us and called to do.

Let’s not be fearful or timid, instead, let’s fan into flame our giftedness. *[pauseeee]*

It’s fear and timidity that may be the reason that Timothy had the temptation to let his gift sit dormant.

For look at what Paul says directly after encouraging him to fan into flame his gift.

He says, “for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. *[pause]*

Maybe Timothy was intimidated by false teachers, maybe he felt inadequate because he was younger.

Whatever it was, Paul could tell that Timothy could easily let fear reign and cower from using his gift.

Yet Paul reminds him that God has not given us a spirit of fear. *[pauseeee]*

Cowardice, timidity, and fear are not from the Lord.

But what is? Power, love, and self-control. *[pause]*

Do you see what Paul is saying?

He’s saying, “Timothy, don’t cower in fear in ministry, for that doesn’t come from the Lord. Instead, it’s time to courageously and actively use your spiritual gift, for the Lord has given you what you need.

Power, love, and self-control - you get all that from the Lord to be able to courageously and faithfully do ministry.” *[pause]*

Christian, you have all the resources that you need in the Spirit to serve boldly!

He gives power to enable you to boldly and effectively use your gift, so you don’t have to worry about not having what it takes to effectively serve Him. *[pause]*

He gives us love to love others well as we serve Him.

We don't abuse others with our gift, but the Spirit gives us love to use our gift in loving ways with others. *[pause]*

And He gives us self-control or self-discipline to know how to use our gift in self-controlled, wise ways. *[pauseeee]*

You know, you may be someone who has let fear cause you to not use your spiritual gift.

You may be thinking, "What if I start serving, and I'm bad at it?" *[pause]*

For some of you, serving in various areas pushes you out of your comfort zone, and that's a fearful thing for you.

It all looks daunting to you. *[pause]*

Let me remind you that God has not given you a spirit of fear!

That timidity and fear doesn't come from God!

Instead, the Spirit gives you power to do what He has called you to do.

The Lord has given you everything you need to serve Him! *[pause]*

Brother or sister in Christ, to be courageous and faithful, you don't need anything new, you need to remember and rekindle what you have! *[pause]*

You have reasons to courageously serve the Lord!

Remember the gift God has given you and stir it up into flame!

Remember that the Spirit doesn't give you fear, but He gives you power, love, and self-control, so depend on Him! *[pauseeee]*

Paul is showing us that you should...

Remember what God has given you, and fan into flame your spiritual gift!

Remember, remember, remember.

You have fellow believers, who can pray for you and care for you.

You have a heritage of faith to look back upon.

You have a genuine faith, if you believe in Christ alone.

For this reason, use the gift God has given you!

Don't let it sit idle, but actively use and develop your gift!

Don't cower in fear, that's not from God.

But He has given you all that you need to do what you are called to do.

So remember and use what was given to you!

Step into your gifting and calling. *[pauseeee]*

This morning, maybe God has convicted you about using and developing your spiritual gift.

You haven't been utilizing your spiritual gift, and you want to start "fanning the flame" of your gift.

Well after the service, I want you to do something...

You could come up to me and talk to me, or reach out this week, and I can help you think through your spiritual gift.

But also, if you notice on the sermon outline found in the bulletin - at the very bottom it has a place for your name, and it says...

"I would like to meet and discuss my spiritual gift and how I can discover, use, or develop it."
[pause]

What you can do is put your name, tear it off, (or there are scissors back there to cut it off), and put it in the box in the back.

And then at some point either me, or Dave, or Ed, or Kate will reach out to you and we can help you think through what you may be gifted at, or help you think of ideas of where you can just start serving somewhere to discover your gift.

Maybe it will even be, "Hey, let's sit down for a cup of coffee and discuss this," or something like that.

But let each of us not be guided by a spirit of fear, but remember that we have been given a spirit of power, love, and self-control. *[pause]*

We have so much to be encouraged about.

We have been given so much to boldly serve the Lord, so let's serve Him with clear consciences.