

**Bethel Christian Fellowship
Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Message of 2 Timothy (2):
“A Ministry of Mutual Encouragement”
2 Timothy 1:1-5**

April 23, 2023

William Tyndale was a Cambridge scholar who sacrificed his ministry and his life for the cause of the Reformation. He's best known as the father of the English Bible, because his translation of the New Testament from the Greek text was the first to be printed in England (1525). But Henry VIII was not about to let the English read the Bible for themselves. That was the “German plague” of Lutheranism; so, under the king's order, Tyndale became a hunted man and Sir Thomas More, Henry's legal scholar, argued that he should be burned at the stake.

While hiding out in Belgium, Tyndale was betrayed by a fellow Englishman, then arrested and imprisoned near Brussels for more than a year. It was during this time he wrote the following letter to the governor: *“I believe, right worshipful, that you are not unaware of what may have been determined concerning me. Wherefore I beg your lordship, and that by the Lord Jesus, that if I am to remain here through the winter, you will request the commissary to have the kindness to send me, from the goods of mine which he has, a warmer cap; for I suffer greatly from cold in the head, and am afflicted by a perpetual catarrh (runny nose), which is much increased in this cell; a warmer coat also, for this which I have is very thin; a piece of cloth too to patch my leggings. My overcoat is worn out; my shirts are also worn out. He has a woolen shirt, if he will be good enough to send it. I have also with him leggings of thicker cloth to put on above; he has also warmer night caps. And I ask to be allowed to have a lamp in the evening; it is indeed wearisome sitting alone in the dark. But most of all I beg and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the commissary, that he will kindly permit me to have the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew grammar, and Hebrew dictionary, that I may pass the time in that study. In return you may obtain what you most desire, so only that it be for the salvation of your soul. But if any other decision has been taken concerning me, to be carried out before winter, I will be patient, abiding the will of God, to the glory of the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ; whose Spirit (I pray) may ever direct your heart. Amen.”* (F. F. Bruce, The Books and The Parchments)

It's not difficult to read that letter without thinking about the remarkably similar request made by the apostle Paul in remarkably similar circumstances. It was just before the last winter of his life, while he was a prisoner in Rome and facing certain death, that he sent a message to Timothy: *“Do your best to come to me soon . . . when you come, bring the cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments . . . do your best to come before winter”* (4:9, 13, 21).

But Paul also needed *Timothy*. As he indicates in his salutation (vv. 1-2), Timothy is his “dear son” (v. 2). In his thanksgiving (vv. 3-5), he assures Timothy that he constantly remembers him, and longs to see him so that he might be “filled with joy” (v. 4). It's as if Paul were saying, “I can't bear the thought of winter without the warmth of your friendship and companionship. The words of encouragement—that only you can bring—will get me through my final and most severe test.”

But imagine how Timothy must have felt when he read this. What an encouragement to know that the great apostle was calling him “my dear son,” *and* was thanking God for him, and was longing to see him. Therein lies the significance of Paul’s opening salutation (vv. 1-2) and thanksgiving (vv. 3-5). It’s a beautiful illustration of the importance of mutual encouragement within the body of Christ.

I. The Salutation (vv. 1-2): “*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my dear Son: grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*” As in all his letters, Paul’s salutation follows the literary convention of his day: **A.** (the sender) to **B.** (the recipient), **C.** (the greeting).

A. “*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus . . .*” In God’s providence, Paul saw the risen Christ on the Damascus Road, which gave him the qualification every apostle needed (Acts 1:21-26; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8, 9). Further, this Damascus Road experience was more than Paul’s life-changing conversion; it was his commissioning as an apostle. For he later will testify what Christ had told him at that time: “*I am sending you to them (the Gentiles) to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light . . .*” (Acts 26:16-18). When the Lord said, “*I am sending you,*” the words Luke wrote were “*I apostle you.*”

This commissioning was something Paul could never forget – even now, as he languished in a Roman prison as a common criminal. Why? Because he was an apostle “*by the will of God.*” This was his unshakeable conviction, from the beginning to the end of his ministry. Paul knew that his appointment had not come from any local church, nor from any group of ordained ministers. Rather, it was due to the eternal will of God, through the historical call of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road. God’s Providence had redirected the entire course of his life.

Paul also knew that he had been commissioned as an apostle “*in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.*” He knew his purpose was to teach and preach the good news– and the good news is that God promises life to dying sinners through the Lord Jesus Christ. How wonderful that Paul should define the gospel in this way – as death stared him in the face. The gospel does much more than “offer” life; it *promises* life to all who come to repentant faith in Christ. It’s the *greatest* promise that God has ever given (John 3:16).

B. “*To Timothy, my dear son . . .*” In his first letter, Paul wrote; “*To Timothy, my true son in the faith*” (1 Tim. 2:1). Now his greeting is much stronger; “*my dear son.*” “It is not that Paul loved Timothy *less* when he wrote that first letter,” writes Warren Wiersbe, “but that he was now expressing it *more.*” As we shall also see, Timothy’s mother and grandmother had taught him the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15), which was his preparation for hearing the message of the gospel. When Paul came to Lystra on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:6-7), this was the occasion when Timothy was converted and became Paul’s “true son in the faith” – and then his “dear son” (Acts 16:1ff).

C. “*Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*” These are the three great blessings of God that Paul wishes Timothy to experience in the days ahead. “Grace” is God’s kindness to the undeserving; “mercy” is God’s compassion to the helpless; “peace” is God’s tranquility for the restless, because of His grace and mercy. All three blessings flow from one eternal spring: “*God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Timothy will need more of this grace, mercy, and peace for the work he is called to do.

II. The Thanksgiving (vv. 3-5): *“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. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”* There are several significant things to note about Paul’s prayer for his loyal friend and dear son in the faith.

First, Paul’s prayer would have had a powerful effect on Timothy. Having led him to Christ and having nurtured him in the faith, Paul never forgot about Timothy. He prayed for him without ceasing (night and day), and every time Timothy came to mind (including his “tears” at their departure), Paul was thanking God for him. It’s an example of “the Great Encourager” encouraging someone in need of encouragement – even while in chains in a Roman prison.

Second, Paul never would have thanked God for Timothy’s “sincere faith,” which “now lives in him,” if he believed Timothy had *anything* to do with that. Paul knew that God was the One who had made Timothy who he was; so, Paul thanked God – he didn’t congratulate Timothy, nor did he want to take credit for what God had done.

Third, Paul refers to both his own spiritual ancestry (*my forefathers*) and Timothy’s (*your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice*), and for good reason. Timothy was raised in a godly home where he was taught the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:15), and Paul served the God of Abraham and David with a “clear conscience.” But his faith “became richer, fuller, and deeper when God revealed Christ to him” (Stott). The same was true for Timothy when Paul preached the gospel in his hometown of Lystra (Acts 14:6-7). In the same way, anyone who is raised in a Christian home today has much for which to be thankful. They can’t put a “price tag” on the blessing they’ve received from God. (Most good biographies begin with the influence of the parents or grandparents of the person whose story is being told.)

Fourth, Paul’s humanity is evident throughout his prayer. This is a man who boldly resisted the enemies of the gospel and suffered innumerable hardships because of it. He also knew at the time he wrote this letter to Timothy that the Lord Jesus was with him and would never forsake him (2 Tim. 4:16-17). Yet he longs for the comfort and encouragement that only another Christian can give. Yes, Paul still believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was enough. But he wanted Timothy at his side because he was the primary way the Lord Jesus would comfort him. It’s not a question of *either* Christ *or* Timothy; it is Christ *through* Timothy.

Encouragement is something that *everyone can do* – including young Timothy. Encouragement is also something that *everyone must have* – including the aged apostle Paul. If we believe this, then what are we waiting for? Look for someone to encourage *today*, and look *to be encouraged* by someone else. Surely the author of Hebrews had this mutual ministry in view when he wrote to a group of struggling saints about their Sunday worship, *“Let us not give up meeting together, as is the habit of some, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching”* (10:25). Note the contrast: “Let us not give up meeting,” versus “Let us encourage one another.” For Paul and Timothy, then, “going to church” and “encouraging one another” were practically synonymous. The same ought to be true for each and every one of us – by His grace and for His glory!