

# A Christ-Centered Leader is Called by God and Formed by Family

2 Timothy 1:1-7

Last week I introduced the book of 2 Timothy and framed our study of the book as showing us the making of a Christ-centered leader. The book is actually a letter written by the Apostle Paul to his mentee Timothy.

I discussed Paul's imprisonment in Rome, Timothy trying to lead beyond his capacity, and how Paul's preoccupation in writing the letter was to pass on the gospel.

Today we come to the text itself, beginning with chapter 1, verses 1 through 7. These opening verses show us that a Christ-centered leader is called by God and formed by family.

I'll read the verses, then talk through 2 major points.

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus,

<sup>2</sup> To Timothy, my beloved child:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, <sup>7</sup> for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

## Called by God

The first thing we notice in Paul's opening is that he identifies himself as an Apostle of Jesus by the will of God. Since most of us know that Paul was an Apostle, that doesn't stand out to us that much. But think about what Paul's claiming by saying that.

To be an Apostle of Jesus meant that you were commissioned by Jesus himself to teach and guard the gospel he came to proclaim. It meant you would receive special inspiration from the Holy Spirit to remember, record, and teach Jesus' Way.

Paul saying he's an Apostle of Jesus is his way of saying that he received a special commission by Jesus, which we read about in Acts. In Acts chapter 9, Saul, which was Paul's name before becoming the Apostle Paul, encounters the resurrected Jesus in a light so bright it was literally blinding. I say that because Paul was actually blind for three days after this happened.

While Paul was being led to Damascus by his travelling companions, the Lord then appears to a believer named Ananias. The Lord tells Ananias to go to a certain street and find Saul of Tarsus, who apparently had received a vision of Ananias coming to him and praying for his sight to return.

Now, Ananias is do dummy. He knows who Saul of Tarsus is. He's the Jewish leader that's been hunting down Christians to put them in jail or have them killed. Understandably, Ananias says, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name" (Acts 9:13-14).

He was saying, "Are you really talking about *that* Saul? The one who's persecuting my brothers and sisters in Christ, and who has authority to put any Christian in jail? You want me to go and pray with *that* Saul?"

To which the Lord replied, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:15-16).

There's Paul's commission by Christ—he was to carry the gospel to the Gentiles and to the kings and children of Israel. If you've ever tracked the story of Paul's life, then you know that's just what he did. He started out reasoning with the Jews, but when they wouldn't listen he finally wiped his hands clean of them and focused on taking the gospel to the Gentiles, which can be translated as “the nations.” Paul was the Apostle to the nations.

You also heard something very important at the end of that commission. Specifically tied to Paul's commission was the promise of suffering. God said, “For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name”. Paul made Jesus suffer by persecuting his church; now Paul was going to suffer on behalf of Jesus.

That seems like revenge, doesn't it? Like Jesus is just doing to Paul what Paul did to him.

To really answer that question you'll have to wait until we go through the rest of 2 Timothy where Paul deals directly with the topic of suffering. But for now, it's important to note that Paul never looked at his suffering as retributive. He never saw it as God taking vengeance on him. As you'll see next week, Paul saw suffering as a byproduct of his call and sharing the gospel.

And we know the other Apostles viewed suffering in the same light. After some of the Apostles left a public hearing and interrogation at the hands of the Jewish leaders, we're told “they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (Acts 5:41). That name was the name of Jesus.

Paul's writings make it clear that he viewed suffering for Jesus the same way—as an honor.

But let's go back to the opening of 2 Timothy. Paul says that he is an Apostle of Jesus by the will of God, which means he was called by God to be a leader. In verse 6, which I'll get to the rest of in a few minutes, Paul recounts when he laid his hands on Timothy, which would have been at Timothy's ordination, or commissioning, as an elder in the church.

Both Paul and Timothy, then, were called and set apart by God to lead. That's the foundation of a Christ-centered leader; that they're called by God to lead.

What about you? Were you called by God to lead?

Well, you're leading now, so you were called to lead, whether through a call God placed on you or a commission you received from myself or another group leader. So for now, today, you're called by God to lead the people in your group.

And if you're overwhelmed by that responsibility, you're in good company. So was Paul. Did you catch what he said at the end of the first sentence in the letter? He wrote, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God *according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus*" (2 Timothy 1:1).

Paul is saying, "Yes, I know I was called by God and commissioned by Christ to be an Apostle, but the power to keep going comes from the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. It is because of the eternal life with Christ I was promised that I keep pressing forward, enduring beatings, imprisonment, humiliation, and now death."

If you haven't already, you will face times in leadership where you want to give up and walk away. You know what God has called you to, but it just doesn't seem worth it.

In those moments, remember the crown of life that is being prepared for you. Remember that Jesus himself is preparing a room for those who are faithful to the end. Yes, it might be difficult today, and it might be more difficult tomorrow, but we keep leading and teaching and shepherding the people God entrusts to us because eternity with him is worth it.

A Christ-centered leader is called by God.

## **A Christ-centered leader is formed by family**

The second major point of this opening section of 2 Timothy is that a Christ-centered leader is formed by family. Hang with me on this one. Part of

it will be obvious, the other part less so, but you'll see where I'm going once I get there.

Verses 3 through 7 say:

<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, <sup>7</sup> for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Paul begins by saying he serves God with a clear conscience. I want to stop right here and ask you a question: Do you serve God with a clear conscience? When you think of how you live your life, spend your time, treat your family, or do your job, is there anything that comes to mind that would prevent you from saying that your conscience is clear?

If so, then hear this quick pastoral word. Repent from whatever that is, ask God for forgiveness, then move on with a clear conscience, knowing that the blood of Jesus makes you white as snow. Stop tolerating sin in your life and deal with it. The Bible calls that "repentance." It means to stop living your way, and to start living Jesus' way. Once you've turned from sin, then ask God for forgiveness, knowing that he is faithful to forgive (1 John 1:9). Then, move forward with a clear conscience, which you can only do through understanding and believing that Jesus' blood truly covers your sin.

If you want to really see what that looks like, spend some time meditating on Psalm 51, which records David's prayer of repentance after his affair with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband to cover it up.

Paul goes on to tell Timothy that he knows how sincere Timothy's faith is, and how his faith was handed down to him by his grandmother and his mother.

There are a couple of things to think of here. First, that Paul was sure of Timothy's sincerity in the faith. Paul said, "I am reminded of your sincere faith," and that he was sure faith dwells in Timothy.

Are you sure about your group's faith in the same way? Do you know with sincerity if those in your group who profess to believe actually do? You can look at someone's life, listen to their speech, and observe how they treat people and see if their faith is sincere. Do the people in your group who say they follow Jesus look anything like him?

If you don't know, I would encourage you to grow closer to them so you know where their heart is. Ultimately it's about helping them. The better you know their heart and faith, the better you can encourage, challenge, and exhort them.

The second thing about this section to point out is that Timothy was the result of a lineage of faith. His grandmother and his mother were both believers. Timothy's faith was in part formed by his family. It was passed down from one generation to the next.

Now, there are all kinds of qualifications to this, I know. Not everyone raised in a family of sincere faith will come to know Jesus. The time my wife spends working on memory verses with my children and teaching them biblical principles does not guarantee they will be saved. Only God has that power.

But I think all of us would admit that a child raised in an environment with exposure to Christian values is more likely to become a Christian than one raised in an environment devoid of any. That just makes sense.

And that's the heart of Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs is a collection of wisdom sayings, and that's important to note. The sayings in Proverbs are not guarantees, they're wisdom. Promises are guarantees that Y will happen if you do X. Wisdom says if you do X, most likely the outcome will be Y.

So, if Timothy was raised in at least a somewhat Christian setting, then it was no surprise that he came out a believer. But it also wouldn't be entirely surprising if he didn't.

Why do I tell you of that?

Well, for a couple of reasons. If you're a parent, you should know that your faith can and should form your children. Your faith was given *to* you so that it could be given *through* you. God wanted and desired to save you, yes, but he also wants and desires to save your children, and you're one the primary influence he's put in their life.

Depending on how you're raising your child or children now, that's either an exhortation to start pouring your faith into them, or it's an encouragement to keep pressing on. Your faith is formative in the life of your child, and the investment you make in your child's faith can have ripples across generations and eternity.

I want to say a special word of encouragement to mothers listening to this. We don't know if Timothy's grandfather and father were believers or if they just weren't influences in Timothy's faith. What we do know is that the grandmother and mother's influence was so profound that Paul honored them by name.

I don't know what your family's like; I don't know the role you play as a mother. But I know that you have the potential to impact your child in ways that exceed your wildest imaginations.

Do you think Timothy's mom knew that going over his Parent cue from MecKidz was going to lay a foundation so strong that he would lead a church? Do you think Timothy's grandmother had any idea that telling little Timothy stories of David and Goliath over and over would build a foundation so strong that he would become one of the leaders of the early church?

Your daily life and investment in your children might feel mundane, but it might be laying the faith foundation for mighty works of God that you can't even imagine.

By the way, fathers listening to this, take note that Paul honored them by name. If your wife pours out her life for your children, teaching them the ways of the Lord day in and day out, honor her by name in front of others. Not in a way that brings her glory, because that would defeat the point; but in a way that points to God and the work he's doing through her in the lives of your children.

Okay, let me get off my soapbox and back to the text.

Paul points out the formative influence Timothy's family had in his faith, but what if you weren't raised in a household of faith? Can you not be a Christ-centered leader?

That's not what this is saying. While Paul makes it a point to honor Timothy's faith heritage, he also points out his own influence in Timothy's life.

Paul says he remembers Timothy constantly in his prayers, and that he longs to see him so his joy can be complete. In verse 6 he points out that Timothy was commissioned and ordained by him for ministry. Paul calls Timothy his "beloved child."

Clearly, Paul's influence on Timothy's faith was significant, as you'll see throughout this letter.

But this points to a greater reality about the church—that the church is a family.

Have you ever stopped to think about why Christians are referred to as "brother" or "sister?" It's such a part of the narrative of Scripture that we can easily miss the significance.

Brothers and sisters are family. Think about that. If you have a brother or sister that was or is very close, you know what significance those titles can hold. Even if you didn't have a sibling or one was that that close, you surely have an idealized version of what that kind of relationship would look like in your head.

Now, think about the people in your group and the people you know from church. Do you look at them like that? Like they're your brother or sister, with all that implies?

If something were to happen to my brother and he lost his job or his house, I wouldn't hesitate for a second. I would say, "Don't worry about that right now, move in with us and we'll help you get back on your feet." If he needed money, I would give it to him. If he needed a ride, I would lend it.

Do you think of your group members the same way?

Paul referred to Timothy with a different term—child. This wasn't a demeaning term, but an affectionate term, at least the way Paul was using it. He means that Timothy is his child in the faith. That Paul was somehow the vessel through which Timothy came to saving faith in Christ, then Paul took responsibility for his growth and maturity.

Do you think of your group members like that?

Jesus looked at his followers like they were his own family (Matt. 12:46, Luke 14:26). We're called to do the same.

That's why the early church was so attractive. They were caring for everyone's needs, sacrificing for one another, meeting each other's needs. They were laying their lives down for their brothers and sisters because they believed that through Jesus they had been made sons and daughters of the living God (see Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-34).

So if you weren't raised in a family of faith, have no fear, because you were adopted into a family of faith. That's what the church is—a family of faith. Whether you're formed by a family of origin or a family of faith, you're formed by those around you encourage you on in your faith.

Who encouraged you? And who are you encouraging?

## Fan into flame

Paul wraps up this section with an incredible line that really shows us the fruit of a leader being called by God and formed by family. He says,

“<sup>6</sup> For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, <sup>7</sup> for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

When Paul says “for this reason” he’s referring to Timothy’s call from God and his faith that was formed by his family. Because of those two things, Timothy should fan into flame the gift of God, because God didn’t give us a spirit of fear and timidity, but one of power, love, and self-control.

There are some specific and general applications here.

These exhortations come out of Paul’s understanding of Timothy’s specific weaknesses, which we discussed in episode 10. Paul knew Timothy had a tendency to be timid, weak, and reluctant, so he focused on specific traits of godliness that would meet Timothy where he was at.

But my guess is you or someone else feels a lot like Timothy. You’re unsure of yourself, unsure of your ability or or gifting, and you need to hear these words as much as he did.

A leader that has been called by God and formed by the family of the church is one that has no need to fear. You have no need to fear; you have no reason to shrink back or play it safe.

God did not give you, just like he did not give Timothy, a spirit of fear and timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control.

You’re not powerless; you have the Spirit of the living God inside you.

You’re not a slave to frustration and anger; the fruit of the Spirit inside you is love.

You’re not hopeless to control your thoughts, body, or schedule; the fruit of the Spirit inside you is self-discipline.

If Jesus rose from the dead and put his Spirit inside you, then it is time to fan that Spirit into flames. If your love for Christ and leading his people is

all but gone, come to Christ and find new kindling. Set ablaze the love you once had; keep it going if it's still fresh.

God does not want you to shrink back, but to rise up.

And I pray that you will.

Next week we'll dive into the gospel that Paul so fervently proclaimed, and how that gospel is linked to suffering. And, like Timothy, you'll see what it looks like to be courageous in Christ.

Talk to you next week.

Take care.