

2 TIMOTHY 1:3-7 THANKFUL FOR YOU

“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. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. 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. 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, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”¹

“I thank God ... as I remember you constantly in my prayers.” Is there someone for whom you constantly give thanks to God? Is there someone whom you mentored, or whom you instructed in righteousness, or whom you encouraged as they sought to walk in the Faith? I am grateful for the Apostle’s words to Timothy; they encourage us to invest ourselves in someone to ensure that the Faith is perpetuated and that God is glorified through the salvation of souls.

This letter is Paul’s final missive to have been included in the Canon of Scripture. Facing imminent execution, the letter reveals the Apostle in a reflective mood. As he begins the letter, he recalls Timothy’s sorrow at their parting, and he remembers the young theologian’s rich and blessed heritage. He treasures a memory of the godly heritage with which Timothy had been blessed. Then, building on that memory, Paul urges Him to act in a conscientious and godly manner to fulfil his ministry.

A PORTRAIT OF TIMOTHY — What do we know of Timothy? Though we could recite some details of where he lived when Paul met him and even draw some tentative conclusions concerning his ministry, we have only a few hints suggesting his character. Yet, those hints reveal more than we might imagine about this young servant of the Lord.

Paul begins this letter with his personal expression of appreciation for Timothy. He speaks of his gratitude to God each time he mentions Timothy before the Lord. Something in the events swirling about Paul during the days of his imprisonment prompted a memory of Timothy’s tears. We don’t know the precise reference, but that shouldn’t stop us from applying what we do know from the Word of God.

Some event made Paul remember Timothy’s tears. I know something of the frustration that comes from the inability to resolve conflict in the church. Timothy faced some great problems in the church in Ephesus, and it is possible that he had written Paul about his discouragement arising from his inability to resolve the problems created by opponents to his service. Well-meaning people can create some of the greatest disappointments in the ministry. Sometimes they are determined to have their way, even if it means harm to the cause of Christ and to His church. Such attitudes tear at the heart of a preacher. I cannot help but wonder if such was the cause for Timothy’s tears.

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Perhaps it is more reasonable to think that Timothy's tears were spilled as the Apostle was carried off to Rome. Paul had been arrested at the instigation of zealous Jewish leaders who were angered at his effective evangelism. We know that the civil authorities were not eager to release him from imprisonment. They gave every indication that they were willing to show favouritism toward the Jewish leadership by sentencing Paul to death, or at least to turn their head should the leaders arrange for his death.

Because of this, Paul was compelled to appeal to Caesar, as was his right as a Roman citizen. He was transported to Rome where he was held under house arrest for at least two years. Whether he was released temporarily and then rearrested is not clear. Multiple sources indicate that Paul was executed in Rome during Nero's reign.

Paul is writing this letter near the end of his imprisonment in Rome; his execution was imminent as he wrote. Timothy must surely have realised that his mentor and friend in the ministry faced considerable jeopardy when he was arrested, and he must have surely known his imprisonment could eventuate in his execution.

There were scant comforts afforded the old man in prison, his memories of service to Christ and the knowledge that God had worked powerfully through him to the salvation of many people being one of the few comforts afforded him. So, it seems reasonable to imagine that as he reviews the compassion and concern he had witnessed in Timothy at their last meeting that he would recall the young man's tears.

Paul had met Timothy during his second missionary journey. Paul and Silas came to Lystra where they heard of a young man that merited the praise of the brothers. Doctor Luke wrote, "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. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium" [ACTS 16:1, 2].

Timothy's mother was a Jewess who had become a believer in Jesus as the fulfilment of messianic prophecy. Likewise, Timothy's grandmother was Jewish, and she, also, had become a believer in Jesus the Messiah. Though it is speculation on my part, it is reasonable to conclude that these women had been among those coming to faith during the first missionary venture by Paul and Barnabas. Since we are told nothing further concerning Timothy's father after this brief account introducing us to the young man, we would likely be correct in concluding that he was not a believer. Therefore, I believe that Timothy had been raised in a divided home where his father was not a believer in Christ the Lord, though his mother and grandmother were believers.

At some point, Timothy had adopted his mother's faith, becoming a believer in Christ Jesus the Lord. As a Christian, he had made a favourable impression on the church in Lystra during the time between Paul's first missionary journey and his second visit to the city. He had grown in the faith, pleasing the Lord through his manner of life. Consequently, Paul and Silas did take the young man with them on the remainder of the second missionary venture, and thenceforth, he accompanied Paul in service to Christ.

During the time Timothy was with Paul, he was tutored in the faith and grew sufficiently that Paul frequently used him as his ministerial legate. He is named in no less than seven of the Pauline letters as being with the Apostle [ROMANS; 2 CORINTHIANS; PHILIPPIANS; COLOSSIANS; 1 THESSALONIANS; 2 THESSALONIANS; PHILEMON]. In two letters, he is specifically designated as having been dispatched to serve in the place of the Apostle in the churches receiving the letters [1 CORINTHIANS; 1 THESSALONIANS].

Paul's letters lead me to assume that in contrast to his mentor, Timothy was not very bold in his conduct. Paul was not at all reticent about confronting even Peter when Peter's conduct threatened Gentile Christians. Peter's reputation and standing in the mind of early Christians did not matter to Paul—if Peter's actions were wrong, he needed to be confronted. Since no one else was willing to hold Peter accountable, Paul accepted the responsibility to rebuke him. Not only did he rebuke Peter, but because the situation was serious, threatening the viability of the Faith, he did so publicly.

Paul recalls the hypocrisy Peter displayed in Antioch and his own indignation at Peter's hypocrisy. That hypocrisy had compelled Paul to rebuke the Apostle to the Jews. "When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews'" [GALATIANS 2:11-14]?

In contradistinction to Paul, Timothy appears to have been somewhat more timid, even to the point of being tempted to remain silent in the face of error. In the first letter to the young pastor, the Apostle admonished Timothy, "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" [1 TIMOTHY 4:12]. It leads me to wonder whether Timothy was somewhat hesitant in the pastoral role. Perhaps he was reluctant to wield the bishop's staff.

Even in the earliest days of the church, it appears that there were members of the assemblies that thought the role of a pastor was to be nice, to be affirming, to make church fun and entertaining. They thought that they were divinely assigned the role of opposing the pastor, ensuring that he did their bidding within the congregation. However, a pastor must be prepared to confront error, to rebuke individuals who are straying, and to remind the congregation of the will of God [see 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-11].

Among Paul's final words is a stern warning to the young pastor. "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" [2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5].

Perhaps as some contemporary texts have suggested, Paul was small in stature, with a deformed body and a voice that was not as robust and powerful as some who were promoting themselves; but no one can read his letters without realizing that he possessed a vigorous faith and that he was manly in his pursuit of life itself.

Timothy, however, was somewhat frailer. In 1 TIMOTHY 5:23, Paul encourages the young theologian, "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." Timothy was perhaps weaker—subject to dyspepsia or other stomach disorders. Such frequent bouts of illness and discomfort undoubtedly would have left him feeling discouraged and vulnerable at times.

He may have shrunk from confronting error and individuals who sought to impose their own desires on the congregation. Timothy was apparently tempted to make unwarranted concessions to people that appeared stronger, so the Apostle warned him, “Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must . . . patiently endur[e] evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” [2 TIMOTHY 2:22-26].

When Paul informed the Corinthians that Timothy would serve as his emissary, he cautioned the members of the congregation, “When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers” [1 CORINTHIANS 16:10, 11].

What can we conclude about Timothy’s character, then? He appears through the lens of Paul’s letters to have been young, weak and timid. This is in contrast to Paul who was constitutionally tough, lionhearted, mature and experienced. Yet, not only did Paul love Timothy, but he believed in him. More than loving him deeply for his work in the faith, Paul gave God thanks for the young man. God had made Timothy who he was and God was at work in Timothy, fitting him for the work God had assigned him. Paul specifically mentions Timothy’s “sincere faith.” The thought is that Timothy’s life and service were marked by unalloyed faith, or as Phillips translates the term, “genuine”² faith. Timothy was genuine in his pursuit of what was pleasing to God.

THE SOURCE OF TIMOTHY’S “SINCERE FAITH” —The Apostle points to Timothy’s grandmother and his mother as the source of the young pastor’s “sincere faith.” Paul wrote, “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.” These two women had exerted a great impact on developing the character of this young man.

Again, though speculative on my part, I note the probability that both Lois and Eunice had come to faith under the ministry of the Apostle during his first missionary journey. Paul’s practise was to go into the synagogues where he would declare the truth that the prophecies of Messiah’s advent had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. He provided sound exposition of the Old Testament Scriptures, pointing to the life and death of the Saviour and declared His resurrection from the dead. This was presented with appeal to the Word of God, urging those who heard to believe this vital truth. Paul was effective in his ministry, just as those who declare that same message today should expect results as outsiders turn to the Faith of Christ Jesus. The difference between his ministry and ours results from our failure to go, not in the message having grown stale.

What is vital for all people to note today is that these women were not culturally “Christian,” but they were transformed by the presence of the Master. For them, salvation was more than a rite of passage; they were transformed by the life of Christ. There was nothing tentative about their faith; rather they lived their faith vigorously. Living out their faith, as they did, they provided a glorious heritage for Eunice’s son.

² J. B. Phillips, **The New Testament in Modern English** (Macmillan Co., New York, NY 1958, 1960)

Throughout my ministry, I have made what is undoubtedly a controversial observation. Whenever a man comes to faith, he has a great impact on the future of his family. As a Christian, a father has great influence in leading his family to accept Christ as master of life. This assumes, of course, that he is truly converted and not simply fulfilling some ill-defined social obligation or accepting a cultural rite of passage. This is borne out in the instruction that directs fathers to assume the spiritual lead in the home. Passages such as **COLOSSIANS 3:18-21** and **EPHESIANS 5:21-6:4** make this teaching clear.

However, when a woman comes to faith, should her husband not share her faith, though she may have influence over her children, her influence on the faith of her children is often less compelling than that of a father. The influence of a mother can undoubtedly be significant on her children; however, her influence will be exerted in different areas. The influence of a father strongly influences children to follow his lead in faith. The influence of a mother is less significant in the spiritual realm, though it is perhaps greater in instilling in a child the desire to learn and to excel in life.

To be sure, my contention is anecdotal, but it is drawn from years of observation. When a mother conscientiously lives out her faith, revealing a vibrant commitment to Christ reflecting a sincere faith that informs every facet of her life, she can have considerable influence over the faith of her children. However, when she is merely directing her children to be “nice,” especially trying to make her boys socially acceptable, her influence in the realm of the Faith, and perhaps in other areas of life, will be minimal.

Sadly, I observe that our western world is becoming increasingly feminised. Educators seem determined to teach men to be sensitive, repudiating any display of masculine strength. Boys grow to manhood in this day without knowing how to be manly—lending their strength to the weak and showing themselves to be courteous. Little boys are no longer permitted to be little boys, playing hard and training for the day they will be men. Instead, they are censured if they are loud or if they are boisterous, as boys will be. If censure and caution fail to restrain, we medicate them into compliance. We create names to stigmatise boys acting like boys, and offer counselling for those who intuitively resist surrendering their maleness to the gods of feminine correctness.

Boys grow to adolescence, frustrated and uncertain of their place in society. They have been taught that the world belongs to women, and that acting manly is thoughtless or perhaps uncivilized. Society esteems the effeminate metrosexual male instead of the manly individual. Perhaps this accounts for the reaction that is revealed through brutish individuals who offer as entertainment “rap” that degrades women and expresses distaste for all authority. Perhaps this accounts for the popularity of movie stars that are portrayed as crass and brutal toward others, and who are even disdainful of women.

Instead of being gentlemen who accept responsibility to lend their strength for the weak and the vulnerable, too often young men are transformed into brutes. Undoubtedly, this tendency is a significant contributor to the growth of gangs witnessed in modern life. However, society and modern educators have trained young men to be brutish and boorish through failure to teach them that they should be strong, but that their strength is to be used for the good of society and to protect the vulnerable in society.

We have taught our youth that they are the centre of the universe, and as they grow to adulthood, they assume that society owes them that central position as their right. Those young men who have somehow managed to be manly will often struggle throughout their adult lives to shed the stigma of being male.

Churches have bought into this dreadful lie that Christianity has no place for men. We rush to demonstrate the breadth of our tolerance, insisting on placing women in positions of prominence within the contemporary congregation. Disregarding multiplied millennia of history and the clear teaching of the Word of God, we insist that we must promote women into pastoral leadership, and then we wonder why men appear to be forsaking the Faith. Perhaps it is time for us to provide sound instruction teaching men how to be manly and teaching women how to be feminine, encouraging either sex to rejoice in the differences God has designed in His creatures.

Our culture is confused and the churches—which should be repositories of divine wisdom—appear incapable of speaking the truth in love. According to the Word, mothers are to be teachers of their children. This is the reason we read in the Proverbs that sons are to avoid forsaking their “mother’s teaching” [PROVERBS 1:8; 6:20].

Mothers are to demonstrate the importance of the Faith through living virtuous lives revealing the presence of the Spirit of God. They are to walk in faith before their children, encouraging them to be righteous in all that they do and say. Most of us should have learned to pray from our mothers because we witnessed them at prayer and because we frequently heard them petition the Lord for our welfare.

Though Timothy does not appear to have had a Christian father, he was blessed in having a godly heritage, having witnessed the faith of his mother and of his grandmother. I urge mothers to think ahead even a few years to the impact of their lives on their children and on their grandchildren. Your sons and daughters will either honour you, rising up and calling you blessed, or they will live without regard for the One you profess to worship. The difference may well depend upon whether you demonstrate a sincere faith, or whether your faith is merely cultural or whether that supposed faith was lived without consideration of the impact of your life on those you love most.

LESSONS FROM TIMOTHY’S TRAINING — Our culture is witnessing a dearth of recruits to the cause of Christ. I know that some among the churches are terribly insulted should the pastor observe that our youth grow to adulthood and forsake the faith they casually followed during their teen years. Unfortunately, many blame “the church” when their children fail to adhere to the Faith. However, it is not the responsibility of the church to raise your children. You are responsible to be godly parents, training your children in righteousness and instilling in them the desire to follow hard after God.

If you are casual about the Faith and ignore the teaching you have received, should you be surprised if your children reject the Faith you profess? The primary source of character in the life of a child is the home in which that child is raised. My concern for modern youth is that few have sufficient self-discipline to assume leadership among the people of God, much less enter into service for the cause of Christ.

In an earlier era, there was a plethora of youth volunteering for vocational Christian service or equipping themselves to fill other vocations within the Faith. These youth were well-prepared before they applied for seminary training, having received training in Greek, in Latin and likely in ancient history during university or college. Such is not the case today. Increasingly, missionary candidates come from non-Christian backgrounds and have scant theological training. A depressing number of those seeking to enter into vocational Christian service come from broken homes. Tragically, character is often in short supply among those entering into Christian service.

An appalling number of servants of Christ the Lord leave His service each year because of moral failure. Though denominations seek to counsel these fallen ministers, it must be stated that psychology and psychiatry cannot replace character. Tragically, churches and denominations have forgotten this vital truth. It is relatively easy to attain the academic qualifications that satisfy most churches seeking pastoral leaders. However, character requires the input of parents long before academic training ever begins. Character demands the discipline and accountability that comes through interaction among the people of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Faith is Caught, not Taught — A mother's faith has a profound effect on the life of her children. I believe it fair to say that her influence is far greater than she could ever imagine. The character of a child is moulded by those with whom the child bonds in his or her earliest days, and commonly that someone is the child's mother. The allure of modern life draws many children away from the Faith, and too many women often react through accusing the church of failing to provide programming that would have served to attract her child to walk in the Faith. However, it is time that we speak clearly to remind parents, and especially mothers, of the importance of training their children to be godly.

As Paul writes Timothy, he is clearly speaking of the need for Timothy to stir into flame the Spirit of God that even then was becoming quiescent in the young man's life. Perhaps Timothy was tired of the fight to remain godly in the face of opposition to the Faith. Perhaps his shyness was leading him to retreat from living as boldly as his position required. Whatever the situation, the Apostle was compelled to remind him to "fan into flame the gift of God," referring undoubtedly to the Spirit within.

Timothy had adopted the Faith of his mother and of his grandmother; and with faith in the Living Son of God Timothy had received the Spirit of God. Though he had served with Paul, accompanying him during some of the most exciting days of his service to God, Timothy was now serving on his own in Ephesus. The vibrancy that had once marked his life was noticeably absent; he would need to ignite the flame once again.

Vibrant Faith Leads to Power — Paul makes a significant statement in **VERSE SEVEN**, "God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." It is a gentle rebuke to the young man that he must not permit himself to grow timid in his service. He would need courage to remind the people of their responsibility before the Lord. He would require boldness to confront the errant saints and to resist those wishing to lead the congregation in paths destined for destruction. He would be expected to "reprove, rebuke and exhort with complete patience and teaching" [**2 TIMOTHY 4:2**].

Thus, the young preacher would need power, just as we also need power, in order to serve God acceptably. The Faith Timothy had witnessed in his beloved mother was powerful, and he needed that same power that flows from vibrant faith. In the true Christian there is need for power to cope, power to shoulder the back-breaking tasks required to honour God, power to stand firm when the situation is shifting about him, power to keep faith in the face of deep sorrow and great disappointment as others desert the Faith, seeking an easier life. The Christian Faith is no place for wimps. Christ seeks workers, and not shirkers. Barclay is right when he says, "the Christian is characteristically the man who could pass the breaking point and not break."³

³ William Barclay, **The Daily Study Bible: The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon** (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA 1975) 143

Vibrant Faith is Expressed in Love — Just as the one serving Christ must know the power of the Faith, so that one who would please God through serving Him must walk in love. Our world has scant understanding of biblical love; tragically, not even believers appear to understand biblical love. To modern Canadians, love is an emotion, a feeling; however, Christian love is a choice that is exercised for the benefit of another. Timothy assuredly required love for his church and love for the people of God; no less is each Christian required to love those whom God has placed within the congregation where he or she worships. Many people want to serve within the church if serving brings them recognition, but love will lead us to serve even when no one notices. Love will not permit us to see membership in the assembly as opportunity to take without investing ourselves in others; love will demand that we care enough to intervene when those we love threaten their own spiritual well-being.

We will do well to remember the spectrum of love as provided by the Apostle. “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” [1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7].

Read that description of love slowly, noting that love is always focused outward. Love is not about how I feel; rather love is about whom I value and to whom I commit myself. Too many fail the test of biblical love; they are impatient and abrupt, irritable and irascible, insisting upon their own way, resisting the truth, always seeking the easy way in all things, unstable. Love will impel us to care enough to speak the truth.

Vibrant Faith Exhibits Self-control — The Greek term translated “self-control” in **VERSE SEVEN**, is a word that is difficult to translate into English. The concept speaks of the ability to maintain control in a moment of panic or in the heat of passion. There can be no mastery of “self” without the controlling presence of the Spirit of God. When we possess self-control, we neither run away from danger nor are we swept away by our feelings. Though such steady demeanour is not greatly valued in our world, it is still expected of those who will honour the Lord. The one who will serve others acceptably, providing leadership that honours the Lord, must first master himself or herself.

The message is nothing less than a call for Christian men and women to live godly, holy lives. The call is issued because the days are evil; and the youth of this day could well live and die without ever witnessing a godly model. Our children need the model of righteousness that only godly men and women can provide. What value can we ascribe to a child possessing sincere faith? Should that child be ever so well-educated, be strong and well co-ordinated so that he or she excels at some sport, be courteous and considerate, and yet fail to possess sincere faith, the young man or young woman will ultimately break his or her parents’ hearts and fail to fulfil the will of God.

It is the season of Thanksgiving, and the thoughts of believers should turn to God’s grace and mercy toward us. However, as you give thanks to God, is there someone for whom you give thanks each time you remember that person? It is one thing to give thanks because of the selfless act of another for your benefit; but the message of this day is to encourage you to invest yourself in some individual to the praise of Christ’s glory. The message today must serve as a challenge to glorify God through building another and through encouraging that someone to stand firm in the Faith.

Of course, it is impossible for us to live christianly until we ourselves become Christians. There is no possibility of power or of love, and certainly not self-control, until we are mastered by the love of Christ. We find that love only as we submit to Him as Lord over our life. This is the call of God, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” The passage concludes by promising, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

Though we call Christians to live holy and righteous lives, investing themselves in the life of another, we are bold to call those who are outside the Faith to receive the gift of life that is even now offered in Christ Jesus the Lord. Our prayer and our invitation is for you to be saved, even today. Amen.