

Everyone has a Calling (2 Timothy 1)

Introduction:

A few minutes of time seems appropriate for a brief introduction of myself and to provide some background for this four-part series on the Second Letter of Paul to Timothy. Like Pastor Rick, I had the privilege to study at Dallas Seminary but a few years before him. Following my coming to faith in Jesus as my savior in 1973 while in university, I was discipled by a ministry called the navigators where I developed a great hunger to study the Bible and give my life to serve people. I especially developed a concern for people where Christian workers were few. This led me to a lifetime of fulfilling my calling in missions. Seven of my formative cross-cultural years were based in Singapore with my family from late 1988 to early 1996. Most years since then I have been able to return to Singapore for ministry or on destination to various Asian countries. I am delighted and honored to be with you today. Over the subsequent weeks I will share more of my spiritual journey of seeking to live like and follow Jesus.

Turning to the Letter of Second Timothy, there are a few matters of background that will lay a foundation for our study.

1. I have heard it said that a book like this, written to a church leader, is not directly applicable to non-church leaders. When we study chapter 3 and verse 16 we can easily set this concern to rest because Paul makes it clear that ALL scripture is profitable for ALL followers of Jesus.
2. This letter was written shortly before Paul was executed around AD 67 and was his last communication included in our New Testament. Paul wrote this at a time of great public stress and persecution. It was a very hard time for followers of Jesus to be alive.
3. Because we will look at a chapter a week, detailed exposition will not be possible. I will seek to share the Big Idea Paul was trying to communicate in each chapter, what we learn about God and mankind, as well as some relevant applications that emerge from the text.

With this brief introduction, let us turn in our Bibles to 2 Timothy. Please join me in prayer.

Transition: I believe that the Big Idea that Paul wanted to communicate to Timothy, to the church then and to the church today, can be succinctly stated as:

**The Fulfilling of One's Calling
Will be Accomplished through Difficulty**

If there is one exhortation I would suggest for your remembrance from chapter one it is this:

Be Bold!

1. One's Calling: In Paul's introduction (Verses 1-7) he reminds Timothy and other readers 1) first that he was called by God to be an apostle (not appointed or chose to be, Rom 1, 1 Cor 1); 2) next he references his father-like and endearing relationship with Timothy, along with referring to the significant role his mother and grandmother played in his faith journey; 3) then he gently exhorts Timothy concerning his spiritual heritage and gifting. Vocation, affection, consecration.

Paul had a purpose in writing to Timothy and it was to challenge him to remain faithful to his calling. Paul will make statements like: stand strong in grace, entrust to others what he was taught, preach the word, and endure hardship, all of which were essential to fulfill his calling. Let's reread verses 8-9 where Paul draws the natural conclusion from what he has just said in the first seven verses: **Therefore** do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord (JESUS) or of me his prisoner (PAUL), but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who saved us and called us with a **HOLY CALLING**, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity... The focus here is one's calling.

Word Study: I would like to reflect on this topic of calling for a few minutes since it is prominent to Paul's message in this letter.

A. What do we mean by calling? We should first distinguish between a person being called to faith in Jesus for salvation and being called to a vocation. In 1 Timothy 6:12 Paul refers to the former when he says "take hold of eternal life to which you were called, and you made a good profession in the presence of many witnesses." When a person responds to God's promptings and receives Jesus as savior, this is a calling to spiritual awakening. What Paul addresses in 1:9 is a subsequent calling after salvation. I suggest that all believers receive such a calling sometime during their discipleship journey.

One of my favorite books that I have read several times is entitled, *Let Your Life Speak* by Parker Palmer. If you were to walk into my office and took more than a cursory look at my books you would see several with a blue dot on them. These dozen or so books are the ones that have most impacted my life, of which this is one. Palmer's vocation has been in education. He is closely involved with the Quakers faith community who have a strong emphasis on seeing your calling coming from God as what you do with most of your time. This book's title comes from an old Quaker saying to 'let your life speak.' Palmer understands this phrase to mean, "Let the highest truths and values guide you. Live up to those demanding standards in everything you do."

We all have an *occupation* for which some of us earn income and others, such as stay at home moms, are rewarded in different ways. But our occupation may not define us unless we are one of the few people who have a job that is well aligned with our core values. The word 'vocation' comes from the Latin word, 'voice.' Vocation is not a goal to pursue but a calling to hear. Palmer says that before we tell our lives what we want to do often influenced from some outside influence—parents, teachers, or role models—we must listen to ourselves to learn who we are. Do you know how has God uniquely designed you? Parents, teachers and influencers should help young people discern who they are so everyone can prepare to live out one's calling. A wise person will seek to discern his/her calling early in life so to live well and finish well, as we will see in chapter 4.

B. How do we discern calling? Paul had a calling to be an apostle. Timothy had a calling to be a pastor. We all have a calling but do we know it and are we living it?

As a young university student there were three statements I read that directed me to identify my calling of serving in cross-cultural missions. The founder of the navigators with whom I serve, Dawson Trotman, said, "Why do what others can and will do when there is so much to be done that others cannot or will not do?" When I reflected on that saying in my early 20s I desired to serve God where needs were great and laborers were few. British writer Arthur Wallis said, "If you would do the best with your life, find out what God is doing in your generation and fling yourself into it." I wanted to impact my generation for Christ so I looked for what God was doing in the world. Lastly, missionary martyr Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." I wanted God to use me wherever, however, and whenever, no matter the cost. These thoughts powerfully influenced my sense of calling.

What makes hearing our calling so difficult is that God's voice is not the only voice calling out to us. The challenge is to hear God's voice in a cacophony of voices. Calling involves both a look inward and a look outward. It is not merely self-interest. We can be sure that God who called us will not leave us to figure it out on our own. He is very interested in our discovering and then living our calling. How sensitive are we to God in order to discern our calling?

C. How do we live out our calling? In verse nine Paul makes clear that one's calling is not because of what work one can do but in accordance with God's purpose and grace. After writing his very famous statement to the Ephesians in 2:8-9 (where Timothy was the pastor) that our salvation is by God's grace through the means of faith, Paul makes it clear in Eph 2:10 that believers are God's workmanship for good works which He prepared beforehand. To live out our calling we must recognize that God has hopes and intentions for us. We are a part of His grand master plan! We are privileged and blessed to join Him. There is no better place to live than right where God has designed us to be.

Paul tells Timothy that this Holy Calling occurred 'from all eternity.' What does that imply? God had intentions for us from the beginning of time? Wow! He knew us then and knows us now! We are all special to Him! The God of the universe loves me!

To live out his calling, Timothy was commanded in verse 14 to guard the good deposit that was entrusted to him. The word deposit means a trust or a thing consigned to one's faithful keeping. Guard can either refer to the prior verse about sound words or perhaps the Gospel but can also refer to one's calling as in verse 11. Once we discover our calling we should view it as precious. This gift from God needs to be appreciated, protected, and utilized as God intended. A poor analogy might be when a parent gives a child what is considered a precious gift. How the gift is valued either delights or disappoints the parent.

I invite you to reflect upon your calling. One's calling can also be seen as a stewardship. We are stewards or managers of who God created us to be. Have you listened to your voice and let your life speak? Are you aligning yourself with who you were designed to be? Like Timothy, do you need to be reminded of your calling so you can stay the course amidst the challenges of life? We

have a calling from God to love Him, follow Him, and serve Him. May His intentions for us from eternity past result in Him getting much glory.

Transition: Having looked at this central concept in chapter one of calling, let us see what else Paul wanted Timothy and us to understand.

2. What do we learn about God? First and foremost, Paul references the testimony of JESUS in verse 8. Everything in the Christian's life refers back to Jesus. His testimony in verse 10 refers to His life and death. In verse 12 Jesus is the reason that Paul willingly suffers. In chapter 2 Jesus is the reason for Timothy to endure and suffer. Therefore, as verse 8 says, one should not be ashamed because Jesus, our model, was not ashamed.

Paul was telling Timothy, and we should equally understand today, three truths about Jesus that need remembering often. One, He lived life well. John 10:10 states this life He came to give is abundant. Two, He died to provide salvation. This life is eternal and an enjoyable life here on earth even before we get to heaven. Three, He rose from the dead (as is mentioned in 2:8). We can be empowered by His resurrection power. Reflecting upon Jesus often is the only means to live a Holy Calling and endure the challenges we will all face.

We also learn about God that He is the One who gives GIFTS for us to use, enjoy life, and serve Him. Timothy was told to fan into flame his gift. The tendency of fire is to go out so watch the fire on the altar of your heart. Anyone who has tended a fireplace fire knows that it needs to be stirred up occasionally. God gives one other thing in chapter one, GRACE. I am sure you have learned much about grace so let us just be reminded that this is God's means of empowering us so the gifts He gave us can be effective.

3. What do we learn about mankind? First, we have a tendency to be ashamed so Paul stated three times not to be ashamed in verses 8, 12, and 16. Also, we have a tendency to lack courage so Paul directs attention to Jesus' life and sacrificial death. The setting in the Roman world at this time was great persecution of believers and many were apparently denying their faith out of shame or fleeing for safety out of fear. Paul wanted Timothy to recognize that the Holy Spirit, who lives within us, is not subject to fear. Paul overcame fear by his conviction that when he entrusted his life and calling to Jesus he was sure God would guard it until his life ended.

Our shame today comes differently. Maybe we know that our thoughts or actions are not personally healthy. People are slipping into behaviors that if found out would cause great shame. Have you ever lied, stolen, wished bad on another, hidden truth or only told a partial truth? These and more reasons weigh us down with shame. Shame is a huge reason people live weak and frustrated lives. When Jesus died for our sin it included all shame.

Our fear today also comes differently. We may have financial fear that we won't have enough money for the lifestyle we desire now or later in life. In the US I recently learned that about 50% of people are lonely. Loneliness produces great fear. Often to avoid loneliness we choose something shameful. There is also fear of failure in school, in work, as parents, of disease, etc. Don't let what you cannot control rob you of what you can enjoy. Let me repeat that statement... Shame and fear are very real joy robbers today.

On the negative side we learn that there were people like Phygelus and Hermogenes who out of shame and fear abandoned Paul. But, these were just two examples since Paul said that all in Asia deserted him. Wow, that must have been quite discouraging to have all these so-called friends and co-workers leave. We see an insight into Paul in his great perspective. He included one verse about the negative fact of those who deserted him and three verses (16-18) about those from whom he received encouragement.

No shame—no fear. The testimony of Jesus should encourage us that we can make it through the toughest of circumstances. The forgiveness of Jesus should encourage us to confess our shame and fear and accept His provision of forgiveness. With God's help and the fellowship in our community of Christians we can live out our calling no matter how society or circumstances may attack from without or how the lies we believe oppress us from within.

Application: What kind of application can we take from 2 Timothy 1? As I suggested earlier, Be Bold! Stir up and throw logs on the fire of our faith. Follow what we have learned to be true from godly influencers, from the Bible and from wise living. Set your mind and heart on enduring through the difficulties of life. We will look in greater depth at the word endure in chapter three. Tell yourself the truth that God will guard you all the days of your life. Moreover, remember Jesus, His life, death, and resurrection. Reflecting upon Him has enabled followers through the centuries to live out a calling regardless of difficulties.

As we will see more clearly in chapter four, Paul knew that his days on earth were short. When a person gets old or is nearing death certain things grow in prominence. One is relationships. No matter what we might have accomplished or accumulated in life, these seem to become less important. People are what stands out as most important. Paul had invested his life heavily in Timothy, his disciple and son in the faith. He wanted to do whatever he could to ensure that Timothy had what was needed to continue well in his faith and calling. You see, other than God's word, people are the only thing that lasts forever. How well are we investing our life in people? How satisfied are we with the time we invest with family and with seeking to befriend and hopefully share the Gospel with unbelievers? People mattered so much to God that He sent Jesus to die for the sin of the world and to show how to live an abundant life.

In closing, listen to another statement by Parker Palmer: "Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic self-hood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks—we will also find our path of authentic service in the world." Calling is no small matter.

We live in times when life can be difficult and our faith is under growing attack. We need to be bold—not in a harsh way, not in an assertive way, but in confidence and assurance. We need to know and live our calling so today, tomorrow, and for as long as we are alive so we fulfill our privilege of being sons and daughters of God. How well are you living your calling?

Let us pray.