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"Pass It Along"

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2 Timothy 2:1-7

1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. 3 Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. 5 Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. 7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

These past few weeks, we've been exploring our mission, as Christ-followers, of making disciples, and we find that theme, this morning, in Second Timothy, if you'd care to turn back there with me.

This is, we believe, the last letter that the Apostle Paul wrote – the last that we have anyway, and it's addressed to his closest and most trusted ally in the faith.

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I wonder if you know the meaning of the phrase, "avoidance tactics?"

Do you know what that is? Avoidance tactics?

I can be very good at that…I'll confess.

When I have something that I need to do…something that I find demanding or difficult…maybe something that requires a lot of concentration or thought or time or effort…or all of those…it is amazing ***how many other things*** I can find to do in order to ***avoid*** getting into the project that I ***have*** to do. That's what I mean by avoidance tactics.

The honest truth is, for me, writing sermons is like that sometimes.

Maybe for you, ***listening*** to sermons is like that sometimes. (That's why you walk around in the foyer delaying entering the sanctuary.)

Most sermons don't come easy for me, so when I go to the office here or the study at home to try to read and think and pray and write, it's amazing how many other things I can find to do before actually buckling down and getting busy on the sermon.
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I take a quick look at the news --- see if there's anything happening in the world that I should know about, I clean off my desk…I might even dust it, I make coffee, I answer all the e-mails I can, I empty my Spam and Trash folders, I straighten my bookshelf…if I'm at home, "Oh, the mailman just came – I'd better grab the mail…see if there's anything important." I text one of the kids, I get more coffee…anything to delay, for another moment or two or three, the challenge that I know lies ahead of me.

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Avoidance tactics.

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Do you know what yours are? Do you know when you use them?

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The apostle Paul, here in these first verses of chapter two, is warning Timothy about just that sort of thing.

You see, Timothy had a job to do. Among other things, he was called to pass the faith…faith in Jesus…on to others such that they could assume leadership and begin to do the same…to pass the faith along.

Timothy's job … part of his job anyway … was to disciple leaders.

And he was under some time pressure to do it, too. When Paul wrote to him, Timothy was in Ephesus helping to lead, and in some ways to heal, the church there. But at the end of this very letter, Paul asks Timothy to come to Rome where Paul was being held…basically under house arrest.

Paul wanted Timothy to join him in Rome to help him, so Timothy had to train some people to take his place of leadership there at Ephesus, and he had to do it pretty quickly.

There were also, beside the time pressure, quite a few challenges wrapped up in that task of training leaders at Ephesus. There were problems at Ephesus --- immature Christians, believers who were mistaken about certain parts of the gospel…how the gospel worked. There were believers who were still very much focused on themselves.

So there were issues within the church that made discipleship, and discipling leaders especially, difficult.

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And then there was also pressures from the non-Christian world around Timothy and around the church there at Ephesus.

To be a Christian in Timothy's day involved not a little social stigma. You got made fun of for following Jesus. People called you stupid, and simple, and weak, and unsophisticated.

And you got kicked out of your circle of friends sometimes.

And parts of community life were no longer open to you as a Christ-follower … particularly if you had been a Jew.

Many of our brothers and sisters from other parts of the world know all about that sort of thing, and the fact is, we're beginning to learn more about that firsthand, aren't we?

Social pressures weighed on Timothy.

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And then there were the political pressures and even dangers that Timothy faced, with regard to evangelism and discipleship and leadership training. To openly call Jesus your king could get you in lots of trouble in the Roman empire.

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And then…there was the pressure of doing discipleship correctly…of doing it well.

Of all people, Timothy knew the potential that teaching the wrong things about Jesus had to mess up people…even whole groups of people.

Some of the reasons Timothy was sent to Ephesus was because people had been taught…and were, themselves, trying to pass along…wrong stuff about God and Jesus.

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So…to openly and vocally witness to others and disciple others…to train others for leadership in the Church…there were lots of challenges and pitfalls to that for Timothy.

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But you know…even besides all that which was ***around*** him, we know from Paul's writings that Timothy, ***internally***, was not, or at least did not see himself as, a confident, natural leader. Paul lets us know that Timothy faced internal pressures that made him rather tentative…he was, maybe, too self-conscious of his young age and how that affected others' perceptions of him.

It also seems he was a bit sickly…suffering with some sort of stomach issue. Leadership can do that to you.

So when you put someone like that…with that sort of timid temperament…into a critically important leadership role…and in a challenging environment…well, you can see how maybe Timothy might find it easy to, you know, check his e-mail, post a few things on Instagram, wash the car, clip his nails, load the dishwasher…find something else…***anything*** else to do in order to put off doing what he ***needed*** to do.

Which is probably why Paul is as encouraging and motivating as he is…why he writes what he does to Timothy. Look at what Paul says all through chapter one there particularly:

> "I constantly remember you in my prayers."
>
> "I appreciate your generational faith…how ***you've*** been discipled."
>
> "Fan into flame the gift of God."
>
> "God didn't give you a spirit of timidity, but of power."
>
> "Don't be ashamed to testify about our Lord."
>
> "Note that I am suffering, but I am not ashamed."

"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ."

"Endure hardship."

Paul may well be helping Timothy to avoid avoidance and get down to doing what he needs to do, which is, to ***disciple*** people; to disciple people ***well***, to disciple people ***faithfully***, to disciple people ***courageously…***and…***quickly***…so they might carry on the faith…so they might become Christian leaders…disciple-makers…after Timothy's gone.

You see, it was important for Timothy…

important for the Church…

important for the world…

and important for God's Kingdom…

it was important that Timothy disciple others and pass the faith along.

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And friends, let me say…the very same is true for every one of us.

This letter from Paul has not come down to us just so we can read Timothy's mail. These are truths that apply to every follower of Jesus today.

We are all responsible, every one of us who follow Christ, to help develop in faith those around us…and especially those closest to us…those we're charged to care for.

For some of us, that involves larger groups of people…classes, churches, institutions, denominations maybe.

But for all of us, it includes our families--children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, neighbors…sometimes parents…and those the Lord brings across our lives' paths.

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Can I say to you parents and grandparents here…it's not the church's job to disciple your children…or your grandchildren. You don't just dump them at the door to get their weekly dose of Jesus.

No…discipleship is ***your*** job…***my*** job as a ***parent***.

God's given the people closest to us…the people around us…God's given them…***to us***. Teaching and raising and shaping them in the faith is ***our*** responsibility, so we have to do that.

Just as Timothy did, we have to pass the faith on to them…and we have to do it ***well***.

We have to do it ***courageously because*** some around us will most certainly laugh at us for the decisions we make and the priorities we set as Christian families in our culture today and in our world today. And that's OK, because ***Christian*** priorities are ***different*** than those of the world. What's important to ***us*** and what's important to the ***unbelievers around us*** should not be the same. If it is the same, something's wrong with us.

Just as Paul knew, which is why he used the illustrations of the solder and farmer and athlete, there's a certain amount of ***courage*** and hard work involved in passing on the faith to those around us … there's a certain amount of ***courage*** and work involved in discipleship.

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And, like Timothy, we also have to do it accurately --- we have to do it intentionally, we have to do it courageously, and we have to do it accurately being faithful to the Bible.

Now, we all will make little mistakes here and there in our discipling others. But the big things…we have to get those right.

The love God has for us.

The realty of sin and the inevitable punishment for sin to come.

Our inability to save ourselves.

Our need for salvation, and the way…the only way to salvation…being Jesus.

Our opportunity in Him for repentance and forgiveness.

The availability and help and power of God's Holy Spirit.

The possibility of life free from sin's oppression and control.

We have to pass those things along faithfully…correctly.

And you know, since none of us are born just knowing those things, we have to educate ourselves. We have to study this book; we're responsible to do that.

We have to take every opportunity possible to learn what the true faith is, and then we have to do all we can to pass that along to those in our charge.

The most important thing we will do with our lives is to pass along the faith…to our kids…to our family, and to those around us whom God has put in our lives to influence…to mentor, teach, guide and advise. That is the most important thing any of us will do.

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Now…the fact is, God does not hold us responsible for the choices ***they*** make when they come of the age and they are able to, themselves, consciously choose or not choose Jesus. God does not hold us responsible for that.

There are some of us…a number of us…who've done the very best we can to pass along faith in Christ to those for whom we're responsible, and as adults, they have rejected faith…they've rejected Jesus.

At the same time, there are people who've come to Jesus having never been discipled…never having been taught one thing about God or Jesus or faith by parents or grandparents or Sunday school teachers or anyone else.

They read a Gideon Bible in a hotel somewhere or they see a vision or they hear God's voice. I know people who've come to Christ because they knew He was directing them into some church service or college chapel service. They had no intention in going, no interest is going, but they could not escape the voice of the Spirit saying, "You need to pull in here … turn in here."

Some saw a co-worker consistently stop and pray before they ate lunch and they wondered what was up with that.

They never heard a word about God or Jesus from parents or aunts or uncles or family.

So yes, it's very true that God works in ***spite*** of us sometimes.

But you know…God ***intends*** and ***prefers*** to work ***through*** us…that's His model --- really. God wants to work ***through*** His disciples to make other disciples.

He chooses to send us to other people.

Sometimes He sends us to random people.

But primarily, He sends us to those He's given us…those nearest to us.

You don't have to wonder if God wants you to pass the faith along to those closest to you. You don't have to wonder about that. He does. He wants us to and He expects us to.

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Now, just like Timothy, we all have our challenges and fears about discipling other people.

In fact, we can fall into the very same hesitations as Timothy did. We can think:

> "I'm too young."
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> "I don't know enough."
>
> "I'm not really a teacher."
>
> "I'm not brave enough."
>
> "I don't have time."
>
> "They won't listen to me."
>
> "I don't really know how or what to do."

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There's the temptation to listen to all those voices…and so wind up doing nothing…wind up using avoidance tactics.

> "Ah, I'll start discipling someone later, when they're older, when I'm older, after I learn more or after I graduate," or "I'll start after Thanksgiving, after Christmas, after the New Year, after Jesus comes back.
>
> "Let me make coffee first, check my e-mail, dust my desk and straighten my bookshelf."

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We can't do that. There's too much at stake to fall back on avoidance tactics.

There's too much at stake with our kids, our grandkids, with all the young people around us, in the church here…in our neighborhoods…

There's too much at stake with those of any age who are new to faith and who truly don't know what to do now…don't know how to study for themselves, don't know how to listen to the Spirit.
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There's too much at stake to just ignore them, because, you see…they're the leaders of tomorrow.

Yes, they have much to give even today. I understand that, but just like Timothy had to leave Ephesus, so will all of us leave where we are today.

We're all on our way out, in one way or another, and we're responsible for leaving leaders behind us to carry on the faith…the Church…the message of hope in Jesus.

If you are walking with Jesus today, you are responsible to help someone else walk with Him too.

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Paul tells Timothy here to ***choose good people***…***reliable*** people to prepare for leadership. Timothy had something of a choice about who He was to disciple.

And to some degree, so do we.

You remember how Jesus said that we shouldn't "cast our pearls before swine?"[1] That means something here.

It means we shouldn't waste the very best of our time trying to give good things to people who absolutely don't care…who, when they're old enough and mature enough to choose, just turn us off and walk away.

In fact, Jesus suggests that we really do more harm than good if we insist on hounding people like that.

But those whom God brings to us either naturally or by happenstance…***God has chosen them for us,*** and they are our responsibility.

Our responsibility is to pass faith in Jesus on to them.

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You see, all of us here…in one way or another…we all either learned the gospel…or we learned more about Jesus…from somebody else…who heard it from somebody else…who heard it from somebody else.

Someone has passed the good news of Jesus intentionally, courageously, and faithfully…so we could receive it.

And just like God's called Timothy, God is calling us to be that person for somebody else.

So, the question is: will you take discipleship seriously?

Will you give yourself to being a serious disciple of Jesus, and will you give yourself to discipling others?

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It's been said that the church is just one generation away from extinction. That may be logically true, but God has promised that won't happen.[2]

[1] Matthew 7:6
[2] Matthew 16:18
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At the same time, it is quite true that God has children, but no grandchildren. No one just becomes a child of God because they were born to one.

There is a choice involved.

And, though God promised His Church would endure, but He did not promise that every family or congregation or denomination would necessarily survive with faith intact.

The sort of discipleship that requires costs something. It costs us intentionality, courage and faithfulness.

So will you pay that cost? Moms and dads? Grandparents? Those who have kids all around you in your neighborhood? Those who have young people coming to you for counsel? Those working at the University … at the Seminary? Those working with older people who don't know Jesus?

Will you pay that cost so that those around you … so those closest to you…those God has given you---put in front of you---will, so far as it depends on you, discover and carry on in faith? Will you pay that cost?

Discipleship is mission possible, but it requires commitment.

So, don't give in to avoidance tactics.

If you know what you need to do, but just haven't done it, start doing it today with those closest to you.

If you don't know what to do…how to disciple…how to pass faith in Jesus along to those God's given you, come and talk to either one of the pastors or your ABF leader or some other Christian man or woman or couple you respect…someone in whom you see real faith, and ask them, "Tell me how I can be a better disciplemaker."

You can write "disciple" on your Welcome Card if you want, and one of the pastors will be in contact with you. We'll get you what you need.

Maybe you need someone to disciple you…we can make that happen.

Maybe you just need some resources…there are lots of good ones out there.

If you want to begin having devotions with your family, there are some of these on the Welcome Desk that you can have that will help lead you in that process.

But whatever you do, do something. It's our mission to make disciples, and it really is mission possible.

So, no more avoidance tactics…there's no need for them.

God is with you; if you're a Christ follower, His Spirit is in you, and He'll supply what you need to carry on the process of passing faith in Jesus along to those closest to you.

All those young people I have mentioned this morning, the Church, God's Kingdom…they're all counting on us to pass it along.

Closing Prayer: Holy Spirit, would you show us, every one of us--myself included, where we've been selfish with our time, where we've used avoidance tactics, where we've put off things we should have done…should be doing…in our lives with people You have given us…people who are looking for the way of faith? Would You help us fulfill the mission that You've given to your church? In Jesus' name. Amen.

Closing Song: "Lord, Speak to Me that I May Speak"

Closing Word and Benediction:

There is one more thing in that passage that's important to notice – in verse 7, Paul tells Timothy, ***"Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this."***

In addition to the way others help us and the way we help others, the Lord helps us. He, Himself disciples us. If we'll engage with Him in discipleship, He'll give us the wisdom and insight we need to do it. He'll work with you; He'll always give us all we need to accomplish what He asks us to do..

So, let's trust Him for that as we work out the mission…Jesus' mission that He has entrusted to us --- making disciples.

Thank you for coming to worship today. The Lord bless and keep you. Amen

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