



THE STEWARDSHIP OF DISCIPLESHIP
2 Timothy 1:3-2:2

Good morning, church. Let's worship our Lord through the teaching and receiving of His Word, 2 Timothy 1. If you have a copy of the Bible, let me invite you to turn to that place, and if you came in today and don't have a copy of the Scriptures, I just encourage you to look real lonely toward the person next to you and I'm sure that somebody close to you will let you look on. I want you to see this: 2 Timothy 1. Let me read God's word over you, beginning in verse 3.

"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.

"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

"You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

"You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 1:3-2:2).

When your pastor invited me to come and preach he said, "I want you to preach from a text that has been a defining passage in your own life and ministry. Preach one that comes," as

Dennis said, “between these times: the departure of our Lord bodily from this earth back to heaven and the time that He will come again to take us to be with Himself.” In other words, a passage that has defined your life and your mission as one being left on this earth between those times. This is one of those texts of Scripture—one that I trust speaks into our hearts and lives with regard to why we have been left on the planet.

When I thought and prayed about the text to land on, I asked myself a question. What is it that the faith family at Brook Hills won’t have heard too much about? Maybe something that they don’t talk about a lot? So I landed on two things in this passage of Scripture: one, the Gospel, and two, disciple-making. So this is new information for most of you, I understand that. So I hope you’ll listen carefully—and you know I speak sarcastically.

Any Olympic fans in here? You guys looking forward to the Olympics, just out of curiosity? I’m pumped. July 27, I think, is opening ceremonies. Kind of got a little taste last night before I went to bed, watched a few of the Olympic trials to kind of see who the people that were going to go and represent us are. And this is a really cool time, I know at least for me, to think about this on the Sunday before July 4th, because you really kind of get your appetite whet for a lot of what the Olympics are about. In my estimation they bring together two very important things. One is patriotism. We’re thinking about that as we look at Independence Day coming up. And the other is just that competitive nature that a lot of us have. We just like the spirit of competition and we like winning—let’s just go ahead and admit that—and both of those things come together; they converge in the Olympics. You get to want to win and see the victors, but you get to do it under the umbrella of patriotism, so I’m very excited about the Olympics.

Now all of us probably have our favorite events in the Olympics. I certainly do—probably got several of them. But one of my favorite events is in the track and field area, and that is the relay race. I know that most of you are familiar with what a relay race is. It’s a race in which there are normally four runners and they each run a segment called a leg of the race, and they run around the track, or run that leg of the race, and then they have the responsibility of carrying—during their leg of the race—and then passing to the next runner an instrument like this one that I hold in my hand. It’s called a baton.

That makes the relay race kind of unique for a couple of reasons. One is that the relay race is a team sport, and I love team sports. It’s not just one individual that’s striving to win, but you got some guys or some ladies that got to work together. They’ve got to cooperate. And they’re all in it—they’re all making a contribution. So that’s one thing I love about the relay race.

The other thing, with regard to the relay race, is that it really is interesting to think about the fact that the relay race is not won necessarily by the team whose last runner crosses the finish line first. Let me say that again. The relay race is won not necessarily by the team whose last runner crosses the finish line first, but the relay race is won by the team whose last runner crosses the finish line first carrying the baton.

There’s a difference in those two things. Because you see, you can run the relay race and actually have your final runner cross the finish line first—in other words, you got the most speed and you get there the fastest—but in a relay race, if you’re not carrying the baton when you cross the finish line, you don’t win. And another thing that’s part of that is that between each leg of the race, between one runner and the next, they have to pass this thing in a required zone or you’re disqualified.

Maybe one of the most disappointing times in United States Olympic history was in the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, Korea, and it involved the sprint relay team. We went into the '88 Olympics highly favored. There weren't very many people on the planet that thought anybody could beat the United States in the relay races. We had the fastest guys and they were sharp and they were skilled and we were just the overwhelming favorite in that event.

But the fact of the matter is the United States did not win the 400-meter relay race in the '88 Summer Olympics in Seoul, Korea. It was between the third and fourth handoff between Calvin Smith and Lee McNeil that the United States was actually disqualified in a preliminary race. Lee McNeil apparently did not provide a stable target for the baton to be passed into and Calvin Smith was a little shaky in his handoff, and although they ultimately made the handoff, they actually made the handoff outside the allowed zone and the United States was disqualified in a preliminary race—never even ran in the finals.

It's interesting to think about that you can have all of the fastest runners and you can be the overwhelming favorite but not win the race and not even make it to the finals because you didn't handle the baton correctly.

I don't know if you noticed or not, but when I read this text a moment ago, I read to you about a relay race. Did you catch it? The Apostle Paul said, "I'm in this race." If you look at in verse 3—I want you to look down at your Bible there for a minute—he says, "*I thank God whom I serve,*" and you could insert the word run in there. "I thank God for whom I run." But then he says, "*...as did my ancestors.*" So the Apostle Paul starts this text off by saying, "You know what? There was somebody that ran before me, and they gave this thing to me, and right now I'm running my leg of the race."

And he goes on to bring Timothy in that by saying, "I handed this baton to somebody." If you look down there at verse 5, he says, "*I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice.*" If we had time this morning, we'd go back to the book of Acts and we would see where the Apostle Paul came to Lystra and Derby where Timothy's family lived and he preached the gospel. And obviously Lois and Eunice heard the gospel—I don't know in what order—but maybe the way he says it there indicates his grandmother heard the gospel and she got it and she passed it on to Timothy's mother. But then notice what he says. He says, "And I am sure, I'm convinced, I'm certain it dwells in you as well."

So early on in this text we got this picture of Paul's ancestors running this race and they hand this baton to Paul and Paul says, "I'm running it, and in the course of me running it, I handed it to your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I know, Timothy, that they handed it to you as well."

Now let me tell you why this is so important for the Apostle Paul, because he's talking to a young man who apparently is thinking about not running his leg of the race. You see, Paul was in a Roman prison cell from which he would never be released. And so these are kind of like his deathbed words—the last book in the New Testament that Paul wrote before his death. And he's writing to a young pastor who's incredibly discouraged—he is fearful and he's thinking about quitting.

You see, in the early 60s A.D., the Roman Emperor Nero had begun to sense that the empire was beginning to crumble and it threw him into a little bit of a panic. He was looking for places and people to blame, and one of those targets was the Christians so he had turned up the heat of persecution. This is what got Paul thrown in prison. And so there was all this assault against the Christians.

Timothy was feeling some of that heat as a pastor in Ephesus and in addition to that, he had physical problems. 1 Timothy, Paul's first letter to this guy, he prescribed some medication for his stomach problems. He was apparently timid. We see several references to that. So he wasn't just naturally bold at this gospel thing. And on top of all of that, Timothy was facing the very real prospect that became a reality, and that is that his mentor—those tail lights in the darkness and in the fog ahead of him—were about to disappear. The Apostle Paul wasn't going to be there anymore and Timothy was going to be all alone.

So you put all those things, and probably some more, together; you've got a young guy that is absolutely scared to death and he's thinking, "I'm not sure I want to do this anymore. I'm not sure I want to run this race anymore. I think that I might like to just go and sit down for a while." And the Apostle Paul takes his pen under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and he writes to Timothy and he says, "That is not an option." It's not an option. And so he reminds him of this relay race. He says, "Man, there's been people that have run this thing before I ever got here and they handed this to me. And I'm doing my best to run this thing. My leg is about over, but in the course of it I've passed it to your grandmother Lois, your mother Eunice, and Timothy, they handed it to you."

Paul's description of the relay race doesn't stop there, because he goes on, and you'll notice toward the end of the passage that I read, right at the beginning of chapter 2, he says this to Timothy. He says, "*and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men.*" You not only keep running, but in the course of your running, you make sure that you identify some people that you can hand this thing off to. And Timothy, you need to be so purposeful and so intentional in this that you pass this on to some people that will think the same way, they will see the same race, they will understand the same deal, and they will be able to do what? They'll be able to pass it on to some other people. So that's what you got. It's just a relay race. And the Apostle Paul is using that picture—he's using that picture to say to Timothy, "Quitting is not an option."

Now, when the United States was disqualified in 1988, it wasn't because of their speed or lack thereof. It was because they didn't navigate the baton like they were supposed to. Everybody held onto it and that was good, but the problem was they didn't make the pass in the allowed zone between the third and the fourth leg. Their disqualification had everything to do with this instrument right here. And when you read this passage of Scripture, you get the idea that Paul understood that from the Greek games—the original Olympics, the Isthmian games of the time—that he understood a little about the relay race. And that is that sometimes it's not just about how fast you run the race, but it is how you navigate the baton and the passing of the baton.

So I want you to think about that with me for a little bit this morning. I want you to think about that picture. It begs two questions from us that we need to let this text answer. One is really about the identification of this baton, and that's really important. What is it? In other words, what is it that we are responsible for? What is it we have been entrusted with? And then the second question is how do we do it? How do we go about being faithful with this stewardship? And thus the label that I've put on this particular study—The Stewardship of Discipleship. So that's what I want us to think about. What exactly is this? And then how do you and I run our leg of the race, holding onto it, and then making sure that we pass it on to those who come behind us?

What are we responsible for?

So let's start with this issue of what are we responsible for. What is this baton? You know the answer to this. In my sarcastic comments at the beginning, I said something this church would never hear much about disciple-making and the gospel. And that's the stewardship. The stewardship is the gospel. I don't know if you picked up on it as we read it a moment ago, but the Apostle Paul, he spends a lot of time describing this baton.

I think there's incredible wisdom in that because, you see, he understood that if Timothy really understood what was at stake here, if he really got his arms around the stewardship, what had been entrusted to him—and Paul mentions in this passage that it had been entrusted to him by his ancestors and now had been entrusted to Timothy—but if he really understood the nature of it, the importance of this and the fact that, look, it really doesn't matter how fast you get around the track. If you don't carry this, if you drop it along the way, or if you don't pass it in the time that is allowed to you—your time, the time you're on planet Earth—if you don't do any of those things, then your speed doesn't matter. But Paul understood that if Timothy really understood how important this thing was that it would go a long way in motivating him to stay in the race.

Let me just give you some examples. There's probably a lot of ways from this passage of Scripture, a lot of places we could draw descriptions of the nature of this gospel, but let me just throw about four out to you.

The Good News of Salvation

One comes from the meaning of this word "gospel," and that is what? It's good news, right? That's what the word means. So that's the place we start. The Apostle Paul reminds Timothy that, "Man, you're not carrying something that is bad news. You're not even carrying something that's neutral, that's amoral. You are carrying the good news of salvation." Paul used the word gospel at least twice. He uses it in verse 8, *"share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God."*

Then in verse 10 when he's talking about the work of Christ who *"who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."* He's speaking about the good news, because he understands there is bad news. And the bad news is not just the stuff of this life that's been created by the presence of sin. The bad news is worse than that. It's more personal than that. The bad news is that we are sin sick, as individuals born into this world, and our sin separates us from a holy God. And not only that, it's worse. We are the objects of God's wrath—a holy God that must punish sin and must remain separated from anything affected by sin. So when Paul uses this word, he's not just picking some theological term that's familiar out there. He's talking about good news, and we know that when we preach the gospel and when we sing the gospel and when we celebrate the gospel.

We are reminded that we have been handed something that is the only chance that people have of having goodness spoken into their really, really bad situation. And Paul got that. He understood that he had been handed the good news of God's salvation, and he had handed it to Timothy's grandmother and mother, and they had handed it to him. And he said, "Timothy, this is a really, really important thing that you have been given."

The Story of Jesus Christ

You notice what this good news speaks to is God's salvation. He saved us from our sin. He saved us from the wrath of God. But notice down there that He saved us not only from those things, but He saved us to a holy calling in verse 9. He saved us to the life that we had originally been created with. He saved us to the likeness of God Himself. He saved us to a freedom from sin. And Paul said, "Timothy, this is really, really good news, because it is

the news of God's salvation. Not only the good news of God's salvation, but this gospel is described as that simple story of Jesus Christ that you and I know. The story of Jesus Christ."

Do you see it there in verse 8? *"Therefore do not be ashamed [he says to Timothy] of the testimony about our Lord."* You know, what we've been given isn't real complex. There are a lot of mysteries about the gospel and obviously about the God we serve or He wouldn't be God, but what He has entrusted us with is pretty simple. This is why Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 wrote to the Corinthians and he said, "You know, what I counted of first importance, most importance, I gave to you, and that's this gospel." And then he described it like this, *"that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."* Period. That's it. There's the gospel. Story of Jesus.

Let me tell you something. Have you ever heard the phrase, "familiarity breeds contempt"? Do you know how we have a tendency sometimes, the things that we're most familiar with become the most neglected things? There's a danger in our Christian culture that that which we are most familiar with, because of its simplicity, is something that we end up neglecting the most. We think that we've got to find something deep or something more profound, something that is more complex, something that will wow the age. And the whole time God is saying, "I've given you a simple message, a simple gospel, simple good news. It is about Me coming in the person of Jesus Christ, taking on flesh, human flesh, and living a life that you couldn't live, and taking that life to the cross where I would satisfy My own wrath and be My own sacrifice. And then overcoming the grave in order to give you back the life that I created you to have." It's a pretty simple story.

I'm certain Timothy being in a place where he was tempted to throw in the towel and say, "You know what, I like being a part of these Olympics and I love being on the winning team, but I sure would like to just go up and sit in the stands for a while and let somebody else do this deal." I'm certain at those points in life when our life seems so complex, filled with things that we didn't sign up for and we didn't see coming, that this simple message, this stewardship of the story of Jesus Christ has a tendency to get lost in the fog. And Paul says, "Timothy, you don't dare set it down. It is simple and it is the only hope that people have."

The Sovereign Work of Grace

So you have the good news of God's salvation. You have the simple story of Jesus Christ. But then Paul describes this as the work of sovereign grace—the work of sovereign grace. Hey, let me ask you something. Aren't you glad this morning that this thing that you and I have been entrusted with is not something that we had to bring about on our own? Isn't that good news? Isn't it good news that what you've been entrusted with—and commanded to go and proclaim to the nations and share with your neighbor and give to your family and pass on to the next generation—is not something you not only didn't have to dream up yourself, but it is not the description of a work that you could in any way, form or fashion have anything to do with?

Notice what he says there. This is the way he describes it. He says in verse 9, He *"saved us and he called us to a holy calling."* And it's almost like he called time-out so that Timothy didn't forget, and his mind didn't wander. Not because of our works, but because of His own purpose in grace. Not because of our works. Let me tell you something. You want to know the times that you and I will be most tempted to quit on the gospel? And I'm not talking about saying, "Oh, I don't believe in Jesus. I want to give back my salvation." We know that's not it. I'm talking about giving up on the gospel with regard to the stewardship that we've been called to—to be disciples and to make disciples.

I'll tell you the times for me that are most tempting. It's when I begin to think I can't do this. I can't do it like this person over here. I can't endure. I can't hold up. I can't, I can't, I can't. It is when I begin to think this thing is dependent upon me. And I'm wondering... I've got to wonder if Timothy's not in the midst of the heat and all of these things that are crashing in on him there, beginning to think, "I got to hold up, I got to endure this, I got to..." And when that happens, his focus begins to get off of the big picture of this deal and get on his little microcosm, his little slice of the world.

Let me tell you something. Come in here real close on this. When you and I take our eyes off of the big picture of this deal, we lose sight. We lose sight of what it is that's going to sustain us as individuals, as families, as congregations in staying in this game and on this mission. Because I'm telling you, just in my little slice of the world, it's way too small. Way too small. Way too short. If one guy that's running one leg of the relay race begins to look at just his leg, yes, he's got to do his job and he's got to run his leg of the race, but his is connected to somebody behind him and somebody ahead. And if he loses sight of the big picture, I want to tell you, that's where problems begin.

Do you know what the Apostle Paul does here? He steps back. He says, "Let me remind you about something. You didn't get yourself into this mess and you're not the one that will get you through it and out on the other side." Look at it. Look at what he says. There's purpose and grace there in the middle of verse 9, "*which he gave us in Christ Jesus.*" When? When the gospel intersected my life? No. He says, "*Which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.*" Are you kidding me? This is way bigger than me.

It's way bigger than this challenge, this family struggle, this strained relationship, these financial challenges. This goes back a long way. This could get really, really exciting, really, really cool when you and I begin to see ourselves as part of something that's so much bigger than us. And not only is it so much bigger than us, it is so beyond our ability to have started and so beyond our ability to sustain.

The Apostle Paul says, "He started this deal in Christ Jesus before you were ever a twinkle in your parents' eye, long before time began, before this whole creation was here." And then he says, "Okay, yeah, it's history past, but it does involve history present." Look at it: "*which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus.*" It includes the here and now, at least the physical history of man when Jesus showed up on the planet. God is just continuing His deal.

Listen, what you and I are a part of doesn't just go back to the life of Christ. It doesn't just go back to the cross and the Christ event on this earth. God's plan of redemption goes farther back than that, but it includes that and is part of that. God said, "You're part of history past and you're part of history present." But let me tell you something, he doesn't stop there. He says, "This goes so far beyond your leg of the race, Timothy. This is why you've got to keep going in this deal." He begins to talk about history future. Look at what he says there. He talks about Christ Jesus, toward the end of verse 10, "*who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*"

It's a reality now, but you know when that's going to show up? It's going to show up when your life on this earth runs out, your body wears out, my leg of the race is over here. It's going to show up when Paul describes what he describes in the fourth chapter of this book when he says, "I've run my leg of the race, I finished the race, I fought the good fight." That's when this reality is really going to materialize, because that is when we understand that Jesus Christ abolished death and gave us immortality. That's when we really get that,

you know what, for the Christian, these bodies will wear out, return to dust, but we're just going to keep right on going. Right?

It's what many of you have held on to in a season of cancer or another terminal illness. It's what you have held on to when you have held a dying a child in your hand. It's what you have hoped in when you've attended the funeral of a loved one, a saint who has worshipped God and followed God and served Him. It is the hope that we have in Christ Jesus that says we are part of something—not only from the past, not only in the historical time of Christ Jesus in our life—this is something that is going to carry us far into the future. Paul says, "Man, this gospel is too good. It is too good for you to quit on it."

The Key to Spiritual Health

It's not just the sovereign work of grace, but he ultimately describes this gospel as something that is the key to spiritual health. Did you notice it? Look down at verse 13. He says, "*Follow the pattern.*" In the language of the New Testament this is a word—it would be the same thing, those of you who are artists or painters, or you like to draw things. You kind of put out a sketch of that and then you flesh it out. It's that sketch that you start with. It's kind of that outline.

Some of you are writers, and maybe before you sit down and write something you kind of outline it and you have your major divisions or movements in a story if you like to write. So you've got this sketch and everything is built around it. Everything hinges on this. Well, Paul uses this word and he says, you follow this artist's sketch, this framework, this pattern, on which everything else is fleshed out. And what he describes as being fleshed out.

Look at it now, this "*pattern of sound words.*" In the language of the New Testament this word "sound" is the idea from which we get our idea of health, and it implies health-giving as a source. So you put that together and Paul says, "You follow this sketch, this framework. That is the only thing that has the chance of giving people the health that God intended them to have." And he's not talking about the health of these bodies in this one leg of the race that we run in this little time. He's talking about the real deal. He speaks of health forever. He speaks of health in eternity. He speaks of health in the way God designed us. And he says, "This gospel is the only thing that has the chance of putting any meaning, any flesh in peoples' lives, any purpose. Everything that they have, everything they do is tied to this. This is the framework."

When we read our Bibles we understand that every part of our lives is to be defined by this gospel. Everything in this life, everything in the created order comes back to this. One of the things that plagues us in contemporary Christianity is too many of us are adding the gospel to the other stuff of our life. We just want it to be one of many components. We got our families. We got our careers. We got our hobbies. And, oh yeah, I got that gospel thing that Platt keeps talking about and they talk about at their church and I want to insert that in the deal.

And Paul says, "No. Timothy, what you've been given, if that's what this is, there is no time for this. I don't have time to just add this to real life. No, Timothy, that's not enough to keep you in the game. That's not enough for this gospel to define everything you're doing. That's not enough for you to go and preach it every week or to sit and listen to it every week. The stakes are not high enough. This is not something to be added to everything else that's going in your life. This is something that is the framework. It is the design. It is the divine artist's sketch of everything on the planet. Timothy, that is worth staying in the race for."

That's worth it, because that is the only thing that has a chance of giving marriages meaning, parenting meaning. It's the only thing that has a chance of giving meaning to getting up every day and going to a monotonous job or to pursue a career or to develop healthy relationships. This is the only thing, because this is the divine artist's sketch on which everything else is built. And he says, "You follow that. That is worth staying in the game."

I'll tell you, I think about a church like this, and I know some of you, you have to wonder sometimes. Gosh, that's all we talk about, the gospel, and making disciples and passing it on. There's a reason for that, because there is no meaning to anything else we do if we miss that. But maybe in this context right here, the times that we're weary and we want to hear something else, or we want to do something else, or we want to move on to something else, or maybe we just want to stay as part of the Olympics and part of the winning team, but it sure would be nice just to crawl up in the stands and watch for a little while. The Apostle Paul says, "No, this gospel is way, way too precious and the stakes are way, way too high." That's what we're responsible for.

How do we be faithful to it?

So how do we do it? How do we run this race? How do we be faithful? Let me point out to you five exhortations that Paul gives. I just want to comment on them briefly and then we'll be done. This is where we take this and we apply it and we answer the 'how to.' How is it that we run our leg of the race holding tight to the baton? And we run it with diligence and prudence, but we make sure that we hold onto it, and we make sure that in the allotted time that we have—because we're just running one leg of the race and we just got a specific time—in that time that we pass it on to the next generation. Paul uses five imperative commands to challenge Timothy, to exhort him, to plead with him to stay in the race to run his leg of the race.

Nurture the Gospel

Here's the first one. He says to him, "*you nurture the gospel.*" You nurture the gospel. I want you to listen to me very carefully, okay? Let me show you this and then I want you to hear what Paul is saying. You see it in verse 6. Here is imperative No. 1. "*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.*" This is where we know Timothy apparently was timid. He was scared. He was thinking about quitting. Listen, Paul says, "God didn't give you that spirit. He didn't give you a spirit of fear but he gave you a spirit of power. He gave you a spirit of love. He gave you a spirit of self-control. So Timothy, fan this thing into flame."

Really quickly let me just tell you something about fire, okay? You know this. Fire, if it doesn't have two things, is naturally going to go out. The tendency of fire is to go out unless it has number one, fuel, and number two, some oxygen. My state, right now where I live in Colorado, is on fire. There are forest fires going on everywhere. People have lost homes. There's been death. Let me tell you why that's happened. There are two things. There's a whole lot of fuel there because there's forest, there's woods up in those mountains. And the second thing is there's lots of wind. If those two things weren't present, do you know what? We wouldn't need any helicopters, we wouldn't need any water, we wouldn't need to do anything. We'd just wait because the fire would go out. But because there is fuel and because there is wind, we've got this massive, massive destruction going on.

Paul knew this about the fire of the gospel. And listen to me very carefully. Its tendency, by virtue of human flesh, is to go out. Left unattended it goes out. Paul wouldn't use an imperative command to say, "Timothy, you got to fan this thing," if it was natural. Let me tell you why that's important, because there are some of you that come to a house of worship like this and a gathering like this. You hear the preaching. You hear the testimonies. You see the teams going out. You see all this talk about disciple-making, but when you put your head on your pillow at night you think, "I just don't feel it. I'm not motivated like that guy over there or that lady over there. I'm not motivated like that family. I just don't feel it." But you think that if you keep coming and you keep sitting that somewhere along the way something's going to zap you and you'll have this feeling.

Would you hear the Apostle Paul today under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit tell this young pastor that this is not going to burn vibrantly if you are passive about it? Nurture it. Nurture it! Hang out with people that love the gospel. Keep coming and hearing the gospel sung and preached, but take steps to fan this flame. There is a human responsibility in this global disciple-making thing that reminds that this won't keep happening naturally. We cannot be passive about. Nurture the gospel.

Own the Gospel

The second imperative command tells us this: own the gospel. Own the gospel. We find this in the repetition in this passage of the exhortation 'not to be ashamed.' The imperative command is in verse 8, "*Therefore do not be ashamed.*" Paul repeats it twice more, once about himself, in verse 12 when he says, I suffer like this, "*but I am not ashamed.*" And then he mentions it a third time when he mentions the guy after whom all of you want to name your grandkids, Onesiphorus, way down there in verse 16. No, not going to be on the top 100 popular baby list, but maybe it ought to be. Do you know why? Because Onesiphorus was not ashamed. Three times.

Do you know what the opposite of being ashamed of something is? Owning it. Some of you have kids, so you've raised kids. You remember those times you came around the corner and there was something broken on the floor. The kids were sitting there and you said, "Who did this?" And they start looking at each other, looking down at the floor. And whether you use those words or not, you said something to them to the effect, "Somebody needs to come clean here. Somebody needs to be honest. Somebody needs to own this."

Paul's not talking about something we broke or something that's bad. He's talking about that precious stewardship, and he says, don't you shy away from owning this thing. And you understand our natural tendency is going to be in the other direction, right? The fire, you remember, its natural tendency is going to be to go out. These fleshly bodies that we have, the natural tendency is, in that moment of witnessing opportunity, to shy away. In that time when we have the opportunity to take a stand for the gospel, to shrink back, and maybe in those times when our lives are actually on the line and it's going to cost us everything, to say, "Gospel? What gospel?" That's our natural tendency. And the Apostle Paul says, "You, you own this. And you let it define everything that you are, every place you go, every decision you make. Don't shrink back from it."

Live the Gospel

The third one grows out of that. It's connected right to it. And that's in the third imperative command. The Apostle Paul says, "Live the gospel." You find it in verse 13 in that word "follow." Do you remember this pattern of sound words, this artist's sketch on which everything in life is fleshed out? The Apostle Paul says, "Follow this. Let it affect everything you're doing."

Brook Hills, listen. Come in here real close. We cannot afford for the gospel to be an academic body of information that we memorize and that we know and we can even articulate. It's important for us to do all of those things, but the gospel was never intended to be a body of knowledge that remained right here. It was intended to find its way into our hands and our feet and our mouths and affect everything that we possibly are and everything that we do. And the Apostle Paul says, "You follow this thing. You live this gospel."

So we live it in our marriages and understand that marriage wasn't given to us just as companionship or for the sexual relationship involved. Marriage wasn't given to us just so we wouldn't be alone. Marriage was given to us primarily—first and foremost—as a picture of the gospel. And that's why, men, Paul says, "You love your wives like Christ loved the church, because you are a running video of Christ in this gospel story."

He says, "Ladies, you align yourself under your husband's loving leadership, because you are a picture of the church in this gospel story."

He says, "Parents, you raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, not primarily so you can have good kids when they grow up, but because your activity in raising them is a picture of the gospel and a picture of Christ."

And kids, when he says, "You obey your parents." He's not just saying it so there'll be order in the family and because your parents make all the right decisions. He is saying it because you are a picture of the church of Jesus Christ in this gospel video, and the stakes are really high, so he says, "You let the gospel define everything."

This is why you get up in the morning. This is why we speak like we speak. This is why we act like we act. This is why we go where we go. This is why we give up what we give up. Because the gospel defines everything in our lives.

Let me just quickly tell you about John, just this one illustration. I wish I had time to tell you the whole story. I don't. But I got to tell you about a guy who let the gospel define him. I met him in a prison, maximum-security prison on the eastern plains of Colorado.

We have a team that goes out there from our church every week and I drive an hour and a half out there and minister, and then I drive an hour and a half back. So they planned this evangelistic event and they were gracious to invite me to come and preach. It was going to be on the prison yard, so we put that all together and we got there on that Saturday. We were hanging out in the yard waiting for the prisoners to come out. The band was kind of warming up. And then finally they opened the gates and prisoners came out and they gave us a few minutes to mingle before we started the program.

One of the first guys that walked up to me—we'll just call him John. John walks up to me, a guy in his early 30s, and he sticks out his hand and he calls me by name. And he says this: he says, "I just want to thank you for your book, *The Passion Driven Sermon*. It's had a big impact on my life."

Now, did you get the part that I'm in a prison on the plains of Colorado at a maximum-security area? I'm looking at a guy that will never see the light of day, metaphorically, and he says he read a book that I wrote on preaching. My mouth's hanging open. And finally, when I mustered the words, I said, "You read that?" He said, "Yeah, I read it."

I said, "John, I got to hear your story." He said, "I got the gospel in a county jail waiting trial for murder. They had assigned me two lawyers and an investigator and they told me, based on the evidence, they felt like I could get 20 years and then I'd be done. But when I heard the gospel and I confessed Christ, I knew I had to own this because I was guilty, and I went to my team and I said, 'I need to confess.' They pleaded with me and they begged me not to do it, but I told them, 'The gospel demands that I own this.' I went to the judge. I confessed. He sentenced me to life. I'm here for the duration."

You understand, I'm looking at a guy in his early 30s that will never be married, he'll never have kids, he'll never go on vacation, he'll never have a job. And he said, "The gospel calls me to this." And then he said, "I just decided if I was going to spend the rest of my life behind these walls, I was going to spend it on mission for Jesus Christ, and so I read everything I can get my hands on that will help sharpen me as a disciple-maker and a proclaimer of the gospel."

I stood there in front of that guy in his early 30s thinking, "I pray that the gospel defines my life to that degree. Whatever the cost, whatever it means, that I would live the gospel."

Protect the Gospel

The fourth imperative command, "protect the gospel," I won't camp here long. Paul says it there when he says in verse 14, "*By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard this good deposit.*" It's like something put in a safe deposit for safekeeping that we're to preserve and protect. I just want to say to you, church, on the days that you do get weary of coming in here and hearing about disciple-making and the gospel and you hear it in your small groups and your children are talking about it—those times when you're tempted to grow weary, let me just remind you that the way that we protect this gospel is to keep reminding one another about it. Keep articulating it. Keep preaching it. Keep singing about it. Keep it on the front burner. Keep it on the tips of your tongues. Keep it dear to your heart.

Don't let yourself grow weary because this baton is to be protected, and if it gets neglected in any generation, it will get dropped, it will get tainted, it will get neglected, it will get perverted. You be the disciple and you be the church that says, "No, we'll preserve this thing because we have a stewardship to pass it on."

Perpetuate the Gospel

And then that's the last one, and that's perpetuate the gospel. You know what it means. Continue it, multiply it, keep it going. The fifth imperative command comes in chapter 2, verse 2, when Paul says, the things "*you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*" It's an exhortation of intentionality. In fact, did you notice that before Paul gives the exhortation he gives two examples? He says, "There's going to be all kinds of people in your midst. Some of them are going to bail when the heat is turned up, and those are those Phygelus and Hermogenes," back there in chapter 1, verses 15-18. They're going to bail when the going gets tough and when they get tired of this thing. But there are other people you're going to find around you, and those are the Onesiphoruses. Phygelus and Hermogenes represent desertion. Onesiphorus represents devotion.

Beloved, let me tell you something. You've got a church full of devoted people that are here because they say regardless of the cost—regardless of what it takes for us to take the gospel to the nation, regardless of what it means for my family and the sacrifices we're going to make—we are going to nurture this thing. We're going to own this thing. We're going to live this thing. We're going to protect this thing. And we are going to perpetuate, and we're going to identify people like that who can be trusted with this gospel. We're going

to pour it into them and we're going to say, "Now you run your leg as we've run ours." We do it in our homes. We do it in our small groups. We do it in worship services like this, because we have been called to be devoted people and pass the gospel to devoted people.

God is serious about this thing, so serious that He beckons us, every one, to participation. Do you know one of the interesting things about the '88 Olympics and the United States team being disqualified in the 400-meter relay? Our fastest man didn't even run in the race. His name was Carl Lewis, then considered the fastest man on the planet. He was our number four runner, the anchor leg. He would have run in the finals had we made it. But teams like the United States were accustomed, when they had so many good players, to sometimes let their substitutes run some of the legs in the preliminaries. They would qualify for the finals and then we'd put the heavy hitters in. The fastest man on the planet never got an opportunity to run that event in the '88 Olympics.

It causes me to wonder sometimes when I think about it and its parallel to this. Who are the Carl Lewises among us that we may never know about if we don't be good stewards of this gospel and the disciple-making process? Who is the next David Brainard among these young men? Who's the next Lottie Moon among these young women? Who's the next Hudson Taylor? Who's the next Matt Chandler or David Platt that will shape a generation? Who are the boys and girls in these children's groups, the middle-schoolers and high-schoolers? Who are the young couples? Who are the senior adults that are sitting among us in our areas of ministry today who may never get on the track if we don't beckon them to the race and hand this baton to them?

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