

## The legacy of what you pursue

We are picking up where we left off in our series on 2 Timothy - which is the last letter the apostle Paul ever wrote. He wrote to his partner and younger apprentice in the ministry - Timothy - while in prison awaiting his execution.

In the first part of the letter up to 2:13 the apostle Paul focuses on charging Timothy to remember to see his entire life & calling in light of the gospel. He was saying to Timothy *and to us...* Don't let the difficulties or the distractions or the mundane every day things cause you to forget that your life can have eternal impact. There is a bigger picture and a greater story that our life stories are meant to reflect and point to. Our impact is most powerful and lasting when we risk and are willing to suffer so others can know and grow in Jesus.

2 weeks ago, Brad picked up in 2:14 where Paul makes a shift from reminding *Timothy* of the call to conform his life to the gospel, to helping Timothy persevere in reminding and helping *others* live out their lives and calling in response to the gospel.

So in this 2nd section Paul is coaching Timothy in the situations he is facing at his church... as he does this he touches on different aspects of a life that leaves behind a gospel legacy. We've divided up this section into 4 main headings - 4 things that will make up a person's life legacy. The legacy of what you say, what you pursue, how u endure, what u learn.

Today we'll focus on the legacy of what you pursue...

*There are two kinds of people in the world - people who love Trivial Pursuit and people who hate it. I happen to be on the love trivial pursuit side, getting that pie piece gives me such a thrill and makes me feel like a genius. My mom would always whip us growing up so my goal was to defeat my mom - but that blasted pink category always got me... people who hate Trivial Pursuit wonder would they would want to win a game that proves you know a lot about stuff that doesn't matter...*

The main thrust of this passage is that if we live our life pursuing trivial things, even trivial things that seem & sound spiritual then we'll never mature enough to leave behind anything more than a trivial legacy...

Paul outlines a way for Timothy to continue to move beyond the trivial things to pursue the things that matter - and to leave behind a lasting legacy for Jesus.

(One point sermon!)

### 1. We are trained by pursuing good in community (v22)

This passage is picking up on the preceding context (v14-21 - that Brad walked us through two weeks ago) where Paul said that In order to be a useful instrument in the hands of Jesus, you have to learn how to speak about Jesus to other people.

Spiritual growth happens when people bring the words and wisdom of the gospel into their relationships and into daily conversations with friends in and out of the church, family, co-workers, our children, people in our community group etc...

But there is a crucial difference between conversation that brings spiritual health and useless conversation/speculation that brings spiritual disease...

So in v22 the apostle Paul gives us the prerequisites to being a person who can rightly and usefully engage in gospel conversation - 1) there is something you need to flee, run from and 2) something you need to pursue, run toward.

1) Flee youthful passions. What does that mean?- our first instinct is probably to think of youthful passions as things like sex, drugs and rock n roll - but all the commentators agree that would be completely out of the context here which is true/false teaching; of healthy and harmful conversation.

So, we aren't to think about the *parties* that we had in our youth here but more about the *arguments* we had with our parents in our youth ... The context here is still focused on our communication and conflict - youthful passions are the desire to be right, to win an argument, to refuse to listen to the thoughts and ideas of others, passion for ideas over care for people... That is what Paul is telling Timothy to flee.

I know in my own life and what I have seen time and time again in ministry is that there is a stage in many people's spiritual journey - some more intense than others depending on personality - but we all come to places of excitement and passion over what we are learning about Jesus... we come to "it's all about" stages - it's all about ... and we take our new knowledge and become God's chosen instrument to point out all error and restore truth to the world - we critique, we evaluate and we judge ... I have been there - its a natural stage for many of us to go through as we learn **BUT the people who do the most damage in the church are the people who never mature out of this stage.**

The only way to gain the maturity necessary to become someone that brings life to others with our words is through fleeing from the immaturity of the passion to be right and fleeing into a *community* that is seeking to live right in response to the gospel.

2) We can only learn this maturity when we pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace **along with** those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. To gain the maturity and wisdom needed to communicate the gospel in everyday life you need to pursue a gospel-formed life **along with others in community.**

This community is not pursuing being right, having all the answers, intellectual knowledge as an end to itself- this community is pursuing good in relationship to others out of hearts cleansed by the gospel, that's what Paul means when he piles up these words - righteousness, faith, love and peace - he is describing all the beautiful and good things that a gospel changed heart pursues. The defining mark of this community is their living and genuine relationship with God" they together call upon the Lord out of a pure heart."

*I remember when I was getting ready to go to seminary and leaving the church I was serving at in college ministry to move to FL. It was a pretty large church and on one of my last days there - a pastor I rarely spoke to saw me and we talked about me heading off to seminary and his last words to me were "Don't let seminary destroy your heart for ministry". I was like thanks that's encouraging...Not sure why he said that but I think it was b/c of what Paul is saying about how we are trained for ministry...*

that it never just happens in a classroom or in a library but only with a living, breathing community pray with, worship with and pursue good together with...

Application:

You cannot learn the maturity needed to communicate to others for their spiritual health through blogs, twitter and FB. Those things are not bad - but we only learn maturity in a community that is not **just talking** about the gospel but is **living it out** from the heart.

A community that is all talk - pretty soon becomes a community that is only pursuing the next quarrel.

This is the reason our liturgy of baptism includes a congregational covenant. Because the pursuit of spiritual maturity and equipping for ministry requires a real-life community that is pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace. Baptism means we need the whole family, the body to move from immaturity to maturity. Anytime we witness a baptism it is a great time for us to remember our need for and our responsibility to each other.

### **A. By Learning Servant-Communication (v23-24)**

Being a part of a community that you are helping pursue good and that is helping you pursue good is the best training ground to learn... servant-communication - I know that sounds a little awkward, another way to say it is that maturity is Learning that how we communicate is as important as what we communicate. If we communicate truth in the wrong way, it will not be received.

Let me show you what I mean from the text:

In v23 - Have nothing to do with foolish and ignorant controversies because they only produce quarrels. Controversy and quarrels are produced by people who are serving themselves and their agenda --- Paul contrasts this to the way a servant of Jesus communicates with others in v24 with kindness, the ability to teach and patience.

v23 shows us that *what* we talk about is important - some things are just foolish and sometimes we talk about things that we really know nothing about. Some of you problem suffer from the same syndrome that I do - which is "never say I don't know syndrome"... Amelia has been loving enough to me to show me I suffer from this syndrome when I lecture on things I have no idea about... Paul says some controversies, arguments should be avoided and some of us should avoid talking in certain controversies/discussions until we learn more...

But v24 shows us that a servant of Jesus learns not only *what* is worth is talking about and what matters but also how to approach communication as a servant of Jesus.

Paul gives us 3 traits that make up servant-communication - 1) Kind to everyone 2) able to teach and 3) patiently enduring evil...

1) *Servant communicators are kind to all* - this word comes from a root used of assuaging, soothing medicine - being kind to all means you are a soothing, inviting person to all kinds of people. If we want to talk to people about Jesus and help others grow we need to be people who are easy to approach - this is about approachability. In his comments on this passage, John Calvin says we should have "mildness and humanity dwelling in us" - "drawing those who come to [us] as to gain their affections." That is so good. Humanity - the people who can best serve Jesus in their words/conversation are people who all kinds of people can say - he/she knows what its like to be human. Isn't this why all kinds of people were drawn to Jesus?

I came across an great article by Ken Sande - president of Peacemakers ministries. In this article he argues that being kind to all, approachability should be considered the "passport to real ministry and leadership". He says:

A passport is an authorization to go somewhere. There is no more difficult place to enter than the inner life and deep struggles of another person. If you want people to welcome you into their world—their real, messy world, not the smiling façade we all put up—you must earn a relational passport.

He gives 3 main questions to help us gauge our approachability -- Can I trust you? Do you really care about me? Can you help me?... If the people in our lives can't answer yes to these questions, your spouse, your kids, your friends, your co-workers - then the you don't have a relational passport into their lives for gospel influence and service.

2) *Servant-Communicators are able to Teach* - The **ability** to teach is different than book knowledge or knowing a lot of information. The ability to teach involves having something to communicate (truth), knowing the person/people you are communicating to, and how to communicate this truth to be most helpful to the particular person or people in their situation/needs.

So, being able to teach means you care just as much about what you want to say, as the person you are talking to and how they will hear what you have to say given their needs/situation...

So, Servant communicators know that the communication is more than just the words they say -

3) *Servant Communicators Patiently endure evil* - The word Paul uses is found only here in the NT. It means dealing with disagreements and being wronged by others - without becoming irritated or resentful.

In conflict, in disagreement and especially when someone misconstrues or disagrees or disregards something we say... all of a sudden we go into battle-communication mode, we lose sight of the other person and we choose whether to defend or attack in order to win the battle.

The only way out of battle mode, relationships stuck in battle-communication mode is to learn servant-communication - to see conflict as opportunity to grow in your own pursuit of righteousness, faith, love and peace and to communicate so that instead of winning or defending you are helping the other person along in that same pursuit.

Let's flesh this out a little using two examples - communicating as parents and as co-workers:

#### 1) Parents

*This week while I was reflecting on this specific verse I had the privilege of making dinner and watching our 3 oldest boys while Amelia went out with a friend - so while I was grilling... we had couple big fights break out, we had cups flying across the room and had a room clean-up for the 3rd time that took 45 minutes to clean. I was thinking kind, able to teach, patient... kind, able to teach, patient.*

As parents we often struggle - I do - with parenting by the unholy opposite trinity of communication we can be harsh & severe not kind, able to command/control (instead of teach), impatient with their mistakes as we expect our kids to have come preprogrammed to never mess up.

Serving Jesus as parents means Control and compliance are not our goals instead our goal is that our kids would become people who pursue good out of living relationship with Jesus. If we parent with this goal, we will have to mature/grow in servant-communication.

2) Co-workers - How about servant-communication at work? Are you approachable - do you have relational passport with your co-workers , able to teach - do you offer your knowledge to serve others in their jobs, and do you patiently endure wrongs or do you hold grudges and get even?

Your servant-communication in the context of your work can open up a door in your relationships at work to talk about Jesus and invite people into a community that is pursuing good because of Him.

## **B. By Learning Intellectual Repentance (v25-26)**

When pursuing good in the context of a gospel-changed community, we also learn the 2nd important lesson in our training - intellectual repentance. We learn how God changes our mind and intellect and the minds and intellects of others.

Paul has been and will continue to remind us in 2 Timothy that there is no legacy for Jesus without talking about him because through His Word Jesus shows up in people's lives. Communication, questions, conversations about Jesus are the atmosphere where ministry happens.

So, why is it so hard for us - even among our best Christian friends - to bring Jesus into the conversation? I'm a pastor and it is hard for me too. Why? I think in our day and age - 1) we are so cautious, careful about coming across as self-righteous or super spiritual...2) We are insecure, unsure about our own grasp of truth or our own living out of the truth that we find it much more comfortable to stay in the safe conversational realms of sports, weather, our kids, our jobs, our vacations, etc...

I think what Paul says here in v25-26 will free us up to have renewed freedom to engage in spiritual conversation...I see two foundational principles here:

### **1) It's never just a two-way conversation**

At first it may seem strange why Paul brings up the devil here in the context of ideas, communication, and truth but he clearly describes the process of learning the truth and the right as the forefront of the spiritual battle. The Bible teaches that the main tool for the forces of spiritual evil are ideas & words that trap and capture people into ways of thinking and living independently from God...

So any conversation we have about Jesus is never just a two-way conversation between two people because God is also present in these conversations to set people free from the lie that life can make sense apart from him.

1) If you are seeking answers/struggling with questions about God from God- seek them in dialogue with a Christian that you trust.

The best way to learn and to deal with questions not by yourself but by talking to someone who fits the description of the person we've been talking about - this is saying God shows up in real ways spiritual conversation.

2) If you are helping someone seek answers - remember that it is not all up to you and your having all the answers, the questions/struggles are evidence that God is at work to turn this person to Himself. And that is his job - your role is to be kind, learning to teach, patient even in disagreement, to gently direct your friend to Jesus and his word.

## **2) It's never just an intellectual matter**

Some of you here are not Christians because you have intellectual barriers that stand between you and faith. Many of you here are Christians and still have intellectual issues that nag you and cause doubt and struggle. Going to seminary doesn't solve all questions and answer all issues, I still have intellectual questions and come up against things I wrestle with...

Paul tells Timothy a big part of his ministry will be talking with people who disagree, people who misunderstand the gospel and even who actively teach things in contrast to the gospel but the conversation is always worth having because God uses questions/doubts/objections to bring people back to Himself.

Paul is saying all intellectual questions/issues must be approached at two levels

1) First intellectually, He tells Timothy to serve others by "gently correcting" the word for correct means not just tell people where they are wrong but to educate, train, instruct people in the truth claims of the gospel. Thinking, reasoning, dialogue, discussion are all crucial and necessary to knowing the truth.

2) Second spiritually - he tells Timothy that reason, thinking, intellect, discussion *alone* cannot lead to the knowledge of the truth - because the truth cannot be known apart from repentance. What ultimately stands in our way in knowing the truth is not lack of information/answers, it's that our reason is one of the main tools we use to try and live independent from God.

Intellectual repentance doesn't mean repenting of the desire to know truth, to seek answers it means turning from intellectual independence to intellectual dependence. It means repenting that God answer and address our questions on our terms.

It means realizing that our questions/doubts/intellectual struggles are windows of opportunity to a new or renewed relationship with God.

*There is a story of Jesuit philosopher, John Kavanaugh. In 1975 he went to work for three months at the "house of the dying" in Calcutta with Mother Teresa. He was searching for an answer about how best to spend the remaining years of his life. On his very first morning there, he met Mother Teresa. She asked him, "And what can I do for you?" Kavanaugh asked her to pray for him. "What do you want me to pray for?" she asked. And he answered with the request that was the very reason he traveled thousands of miles to India: "Pray that I have clarity." Mother Teresa said firmly, "No. I will not do that." When he asked her why, she said, "Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to and must let go of." When Kavanaugh said, "You always seem to have clarity," she laughed and said, "I have never had clarity. What I have always had is trust. So I will pray that you trust God."*

We cannot come to know God if we are clinging to something else as God - reasons, answers, or anything else. Some of you are clinging to answers that you feel God owes you and you are saying to Him I will trust you after you give me answers. But answers will only come after trust.

This is why we say in all questions always start with Jesus and the gospel. Because You can't see the truth (lowercase t) until you see the truth (capital T) -CS Lewis said this another way when he said - "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the *sun* has risen, not only because I *see* it, but because by it I *see everything else*." (Lewis).

When are willing to look at our questions and doubts through the gospel it brings light to everything else and shows us that He is worthy of our trust for the things we still don't understand.

## **Conclusion**

This is why Paul keeps reminding Timothy to always see his difficulties and his ministry in light of the gospel b/c Timothy struggled like us to pursue service in his community, communication and the questions of others.

We need to go back to the larger context of our passage...In 2:14 - Keep reminding them of these things, Warning them before God against quarreling. What things was he supposed to keep reminding people of... v8-12 The gospel. Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead, descendent of David according to my gospel.

At the heart of Timothy's ministry was the very thing he needed to keep remembering... that Jesus has pursued us - that he came as man, he died and he rose again and that even in when we are faithless, he is always faithful to pursue us.