

God's Hand for Servants
Big Idea: Sincere faith serves.
2 Timothy 1:5-12

Our text this morning comes from the Bible book of 2 Timothy, chapter 1 and verses 5-12. If you have a Bible, I invite you to turn there. While you are doing that, I want to thank those of you who helped clean up the church this past week in preparation for Easter. It looks great and is very encouraging to me that so many came to help!

This second letter to Timothy intrigues me because it is probably the last thing the apostle Paul wrote. Paul was sitting in a Roman dungeon waiting to be executed by Nero- the emperor of Rome. And as Paul contemplates his final goodbye, he is moved by God to write this farewell letter to Timothy- his "son," his protégé. Timothy is a pastor and this letter is personal; it is more practical than theological. And because it is practical, Paul does not spend a lot of time developing various doctrines. Instead he fires off several encouraging passages that serve as a kind of instruction book for Timothy and his ministry. So let's jump in.

► In verse 6, Paul says, "For this reason..." For what reason is Paul speaking about? Fortunately for us, Paul hasn't said much yet, so let's look back at verse 5. He says:

2 Timothy 1:5 For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well.

Paul seems to be referring to Timothy's ► sincere faith. The word translated "sincere" here actually means ► "without hypocrisy." Paul is not describing a faith that saves someone from hell. He is describing a faith that is what it says it is. It is possible to have faith in Jesus for eternal life, but not live like it. That is a hypocritical faith. But Timothy does not have that kind of faith. He has a faith that believes in Jesus Christ and his life shows it. In fact, the word ► "sure" can also be translated "have been persuaded." Timothy's life persuaded Paul that his faith was sincere.

The word ► "gift" Paul uses comes from the Greek word *charisma* and means a "gift of grace." Paul uses it to describe a specific enabling from God. Look at what he says he in Romans 12.

► Romans 12:5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Since we have gifts (*charisma*) that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly:

► This gift of grace is given to every believer at the moment they trust Christ for eternal life. These gifts include things like teaching, encouragement, hospitality, exhortation and giving. This gift gives each of us a function in the church.

But, what does Paul mean by “to kindle afresh?” ► “Kindle afresh” comes from one Greek word that means “to stir up” or “keep at full flame” or “fan into flame.” It is the other side of the same coin Paul mentions to Timothy in the first letter he wrote him:

► 1 Timothy 4:14 Do not neglect (or be careless of) the spiritual gift within you . . .

► It is also interesting that Paul uses “kindle afresh” when he could have used any number of words to inspire Timothy to continue serving. But he chose a word that implied fire. Why the imagery of a fire? The nature of a fire is to use up its fuel and burn out. A fire needs attended to. It needs fuel. I think that is Paul’s message: You have a gift. You can neglect it and burn out or stir it up and use it. If you have the gift of teaching, yet you do not teach, your gift is useless. If you have the gift of encouragement, yet you aren’t around people you can encourage, your gift is useless. And that brings me to my big idea for this morning: ► Sincere faith serves. That is what Paul is teaching us in this text. Again, I want to be clear. Whether or not I serve has nothing to do with going to heaven. Remember the big idea: sincere faith serves, NOT sincere faith saves. Service for Christians is a matter of household chores- if you will- inside the family of God. God equips us and expects us to do our part. Consider how Paul describes it in Ephesians 4:16. When speaking of how the church works, Paul writes,

► 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

► But what if we don’t do our part? Simple. You miss out on the blessings that come from obeying. You may also experience the discipline of “dad.” You miss out on seeing God work in people’s lives. You miss out on rewards in heaven. In addition, when you don’t serve, the church suffers. The church suffers the same way a household suffers when a family member is gone or their part is not being done. If you are a believer and you call MV your church home, you have a gift- given by God- not only that we could use, but that we need. Sincere faith serves.

In the next 6 verses, Paul gives us 5 things that we experience when we use our gift to serve. I call this “God’s Hand for Servants.” ► I want to illustrate these 5 things with a hand. The hand represents our service to God and each finger on this hand represents an aspect of God we get to experience when we serve Him.

According to scientists, the first digit on the human hand ► is a thumb. It is probably the most important of all of your fingers because it is opposable. That means it turns around and meets the other 4 fingers. That single trait makes our hands amazingly useful. And that works great for my hand illustration because the first thing Paul mentions is probably the most important as well. In addition, this thing we experience is opposable. That is, it works in conjunction with the other 4 experiences. So what is our opposable thumb in serving God? Look at verse 7.

►7 For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

On the thumb of our hand is the ► Spirit of God. At the moment we believe Jesus for eternal life, God's Spirit comes and resides in us. Paul reminds Timothy and us that the Spirit we have received from God is a not a spirit of fear or cowardice. Instead it is a Spirit ► of power, love and discipline. But, what does it mean to have God's Spirit of power, love and discipline? "Power" comes from the Greek word *dunamis* and means "miraculous or supernatural power." This word is sometimes translated miracles, and is also used to describe the power of God. "Love" comes from the Greek word *agape* and means "a selfless act for the sake of another." It is the highest form of love that acts instead of feels. "Discipline" comes from a Greek word I can't say, but it means "a calling to a sound mind." God's Spirit calls us to right thinking. On our own, we don't think rightly. We are fearful, unloving, selfish, ashamed. And when we think that way, it is God's Spirit that says, "NO. That's not you anymore." He call calls us to think rightly. It's almost as though Paul is saying "Through God's Spirit we have the supernatural ability to act rightly (love in it's highest form) and think rightly (discipline.) And this comes in handy as we serve. As you use your gifts to serve, there will be times where you need power you don't have or love that you can't feel or thinking that needs to change. Certainly, God's Spirit works in other areas of our life, but we experience God's Spirit when sincere faith serves.

Our next 3 fingers begin in verse 8 and are expanded upon throughout the passage.

►8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,

What does Paul mean by "the testimony of the Lord?" In short, I believe the testimony that Paul refers to is the gospel. Notice the contrast in verse 8. Here, Paul contrasts ► ashamed of the testimony and suffering for the gospel. Paul's contrast is between ashamed and suffering, while ► testimony and gospel mean the same thing. Paul uses the same contrast in verse 12. Speaking of the gospel, he writes,

►11 for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. 12 For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed;

► In verse 9, Paul begins a description of the gospel. He says speaking of God,

9 who has 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, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

When you see the word ► “saved” in the NT, you cannot assume it means “saved from hell.” In fact, the majority of times it does not mean that. But in this case, in this context, I think that is what Paul is saying. God saved us from hell and “called us” or “invites us” to live holy. You can choose to live holy or not. But, God did not save us because of anything we have done. There is nothing we can do to earn God’s favor. We can’t go to church enough or give enough or even serve enough. And he tells us why. He saved us ► according to His own purpose and grace. And that grace or undeserved favor from God only comes through Jesus. ► God’s grace is poured out on humanity in the person of Jesus. The gospel is God’s grace revealed through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. Jesus resurrection was proof that He abolished death and brings life and immortality.

► So what does the gospel or testimony of our Lord teach us about “God’s Hand for Servants.” First, when we serve, we experience the ► Salvation of God. Not our own salvation because we have already experienced that. But we get to see the salvation of God in others. There are many gifts in the family of God that do not specifically consist of sharing the gospel on a daily basis. But oftentimes in the course of serving God, the gospel comes up anyways. Whether it is serving a co-worker, helping in our high school ministry or being a part of the Easter Wrecking Crew, serving plays a role in seeing people believe in Jesus for the first time. We get to experience the Salvation of God when sincere faith serves.

Another experience in service is found in the phrase “according to His own purpose and grace.” When we serve, we get to experience the ► Sovereignty of God. That is God’s ultimate control, purpose and authority in this world. But we don’t always get God’s Sovereignty. We want it our way, especially since we don’t always know His way. Several years ago, I was asked to come candidate for a church position in VA. Jeni and I flew there and immediately fell in love with the place. We loved the people, the houses, the church- everything. But when the decision was made not to ask us to come be on staff, we were devastated. We wondered what God was doing. We decided to stop looking for a church job and serve God where he put us- which was right here at MVBC. We had not been looking for a job for several months when MV called me out of the blue and asked if I would be interested in coming on staff. That was a WOW moment for me. But, that’s why it is God’s Sovereignty, not Patrick’s. If I had my way, we would have went to VA. Two

years later, that church closed its doors. Many times in the course of serving Him (regardless of your gift), we get to see His sovereignty when sincere faith serves.

► Our fourth finger also comes from verse 8.

8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, ► but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,

Speaking of the gospel in verse 11, Paul writes,

► 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. 12 For this reason ► I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed;

Paul clearly believes that his suffering is the result of his service to God. Consider 2 Corinthians 11:24-26 where Paul chronicles his suffering:

► 2 Corinthians 11: 24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren;

► Paul suffered for his service. In verse 8, he seems to invite Timothy to suffer also. Here's a paraphrase: "Serve God and you will get to suffer just like me." Huh? Who wants to sign up for that? Is that what serving brings: suffering? As I prepared for this, it was tempting to try and persuade you that we *get* to experience suffering when we serve. But no one likes to suffer. Does serving bring suffering? Sometimes. And when it does, we get to experience the ► strength of God. What does Paul say?

but join with me in suffering for the gospel ► **according to the power of God,**

We can most clearly see the power of God when we suffer. Our suffering is different than Paul and Timothy's. Most likely, you won't get beat up for being a Christian. You won't lose your job if you go to work tomorrow and say, "I went to church yesterday." But some of you may lose credibility with your co-workers. Some may be labeled a narrow-minded bigot. Some may be ridiculed by spouses or family members. And when our service does bring suffering, we experience God's Strength.

► Finally, we come to the last finger on God’s Hand for Servants. Let’s look at the rest of verse 12.

12 for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.

Let me quickly define a few phrases in this verse. First, Paul says, “I know ► whom I have believed. . .” Notice he doesn’t say, “I know what I believe.” Jesus is a person, not a system of beliefs. Christianity is a relationship, not a religion. Secondly, the phrase, “I am convinced” could also be translated, ► “I have been persuaded.” It is the same word Paul uses in verse 5 translated “sure.” Third, “Guard what I have entrusted to Him” means “to keep or protect a deposit.” And finally, Paul knows that Jesus will keep it until ► “that day.” Paul often used the phrase “that day” to indicate the Judgment Seat of Christ where all believers will give an account for their life and service.

► 2 Corinthians 5:10 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

So here is what it seems like Paul is saying: “Jesus has earned my trust.” Paul doesn’t specifically say what he is entrusting to Jesus, but since he refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ where he will account for his service, he must have entrusted his service to Jesus. That seems to me to have 2 important ramifications. First, Jesus proved Himself faithful to Paul in this life. Otherwise, Paul could not have been persuaded. Secondly, Paul’s work would be judged by Jesus in the next life, regardless of the results in this one. What was Paul experiencing? ► He was experiencing the Security of God. He was so secure in serving Jesus, he didn’t worry about this life or the next.

If you are a Christian here today and you serve God, I trust you are experiencing his spirit, salvation, sovereignty, strength and security.

If you are not a Christian, I would invite you to trust what Jesus did on the cross for eternal life. If you are a Christian, but you are not serving, I’d invite you to rejoin the family. Virtually every ministry at MVBC could use just 1 more volunteer. If you don’t have any idea what your spiritual gifts are, drop us a note, fill out a connection card, send me an email, call the office. Because we need you and you need us. If you want to serve, but have no idea where or how to start, let us know. Feel free to call me personally.

Growing up with 2 blind parents proved to be eventful for me during my childhood. I think it may have been eventful for my parents as well, but not nearly as fun. And for some reason, the

states of Arizona, Ohio and Michigan do not give a drivers license to someone who can't see. As a result, our family did not have transportation until I turned 16. We always went to church that had a bus ministry because that seemed to make sense for blind people. But we also always went to a church that had Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, Monday night visitation, Saturday youth activities, choir practice, etc, etc, etc. You get my point. The church didn't send a bus to get us for all that other stuff. But I can't ever remember ever missing something at church that we wanted to attend, because someone always served. Sometimes it was a friend's parent. Sometimes it was a single man who drove miles out of his way to make sure we always got to church and back home. It was an elderly German woman who drove us every Sunday night and Wednesday night for 3 years before I got my license. It was the couple who didn't live anywhere near our house, but made time to drive us. My dad loved to sing, but music doesn't come in Braille very often. Every week, someone came to our house and read music to my dad so he could Braille it and be ready for choir practice. My dad couldn't teach me the fine art of men's softball. But some men in our church were willing to serve and spent time with me. God has gifted each of you to uniquely to serve the church. Sincere faith serves. Will you pray with me?