

“Pass *IT* On!” (2 Timothy 2:1–2)

I had a very sobering thought this past week. How many people would *really* care if I died? Before you think I’m too terribly morbid, let me set the context. This past Thursday evening, Lori and I were reading the Bible together and we came across Psalm 37:36a: “Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more.” For some reason, this verse struck me and I ran with it in my mind. I told Lori, “It’s very humbling to know that if I died I wouldn’t really be missed. Honestly, people might be sad for twenty–four hours, but life must go on. You would need to remarry, the kids would need to return to their normal routine, and the church would need to hire another pastor.” After my little philosophical rant, Lori said, “Pookie (uh, I mean Keith), that verse is talking about the wicked man, not the righteous man. Furthermore, Psalm 37:37 says that the righteous man will have a posterity—kids, disciples, mentorees.” I said, “Baby, don’t try to use rules of context on me! What have you been doing listening to my sermons or something?”

Seriously, God used this discussion to remind me once again of what’s really important in life. My life, in and of itself, is not is not terribly important—it is making sure that I have something that outlives my life. That something, Lord willing, is a whole bunch of someone’s—people young and old who have been impacted by my life and ministry. Just stop and think back for a moment on your church experience. If you were raised in the church, you may have attended Sunday School, VBS, Awana, and other children’s ministries. You probably don’t recall various crafts, Bible lessons, and field trips, but you may remember your Sunday School teacher who faithfully taught you God’s Word. If you entered church in your teen years, you may have attended church and youth group. During those formative years, I’m sure you remember those peers and adults who reached out to you. If you started attending church as an adult, you most likely recall a greeter who made you feel comfortable, a loving member who listened to your story and deeply cared for you, or a small group leader who shepherded your soul. Life and church itself is about people. When all the memories fade away, people are all that remain. As you think about the defining moments of your life most often they center on a person—a parent, a grandparent, a teacher, a pastor, or a friend.

At Emmanuel, we are all about Jesus Christ and people. Our goal is to bring the two together. We want to impart a legacy in your life and we want you to pass your legacy on to someone else. During my tenure at EBF, I have wanted to have a vision statement—a catchy memorable slogan that epitomizes our church. Our staff and elders have discussed this for years. We have talked with many of you about this as well. Finally, we have arrived at our vision statement. It is this: *Transferring truth to the next generation*. How do you transfer truth to the next generation? In 2 Tim 2:1–2, Paul shares two steps.¹

1. Appropriate grace (2:1). Paul states that the only way you can transfer truth is by experiencing and appropriating the truth yourself. He puts it like this in 2:1: “**You therefore, my son,² be strong in the grace that is in³ Christ Jesus.**”⁴ The command that Paul gives Timothy is translated “be strong” in most English versions.⁵ However, the Greek verb is not in the active voice, it is in the passive voice. So a more accurate translation is “be strengthened” (ESV).⁶ This may seem unimportant, but it is a significant detail. The passive verb means Timothy should receive the verb rather than do it. The difference is akin to the difference between “Bob hit the ball” and “Bob was hit by the ball.”⁷ Timothy is not called to stand strong, but rather to receive strength! Paul commands Timothy to literally “be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”⁸ And the command carries with it the idea of a minute-by-minute, day-by-day strengthening that Timothy must receive to be a man of character. It is also important to notice that the word grace is used in the sanctification process. We are not only justified by grace through faith, we also live our sanctified life through God’s grace as well. Grace is the key component in all of Christianity.

The sense is continuous: “Keep on being strong—understand that you are to do this through God who is

actively strengthening you.”⁹ How was he to keep on being “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus?” By constantly calling to mind that he had this grace, Christ’s grace—“grace upon grace.”

Think about your car...you drive up to the gas station when you are low on fuel....you put the gas in your car...your car’s engine is “strengthened” by power from a source that is outside the car.

“Recognize your own weakness so that you rely completely on His strength.” To the extent that we think that we are strong, we will not rely on God’s sufficiency and power.¹⁰

The command here is translated “be strong.” In other words, you don’t get strong by trying harder or drawing from your own strength. Being strong in this sense is not a matter of gritting your teeth and flexing your biceps. This kind of strength comes from outside of ourselves, from the grace found in Jesus Christ.

Every person is like a power tool with an electrical plug. When we’re plugged into Christ and His resources, those resources flow into our lives to empower us to do that which we could not do on our own. The love we need to care about people, the patience we need when we’re frustrated, the courage we need in the face of fear...all these things come from being plugged into Christ’s grace. Lives that don’t plug into Christ’s grace won’t have the resources to leave a very significant mark.

Lives that refuse to plug into Christ’s grace are self sufficient lives, lives that rely on self and ego. It takes humility to admit that we’ve sinned against God and to trust in Christ for our salvation, but until we do that we can’t plug into God’s grace. We’ll find ourselves being like a power saw trying to cut wood without a power supply. Only lives that are empowered with God’s resources will leave a mark that lasts.

I don’t know if you have ever tried to lift weights or work out in a serious way. The first time you work out with weights, it’s not going to be fun because when you come back home, you’re going to hurt. So if you limited your decision to work out to that one experience, you’re probably going to quit because you are going to say, “This hurts!” The reason it hurts, of course, is that you are using muscles that have not been exercised. The way to get over the pain is to work those muscles more and make them ache more. You have to go back and lift more weights, and keep at it. You have to keep working out because eventually, you will get used to it and the pain will be replaced by the feeling you get when your body is in good shape. You cannot go to the gym or health club once and expect to come out looking like the people on television. That is simply not going to happen. If you want to be an Arnold Schwarzenegger looking Christian, then you have to be an effective spiritual weightlifter. Obedience has to become a way of life. If you want to see the power of God, living in His presence has to be a way of life.

I can’t just wish I could be physically strong and muscular. If I want to be “buff” I must hit the weight room and start pumping some serious iron. The same is true spiritually, God expects us to work out in His grace and become a strong disciple.

One reason we meet together each week for church is to be empowered by God’s grace. To admit that we can’t do it alone, that we need God’s powerful grace operating in our lives to be the kind of people God wants us to be. Our worship breaks the spell of self-sufficiency, so we can embrace a sense of God-sufficiency. This past week, but we decided as a family to have “church.” So we invited two sets of neighbors over and we sang worship songs, read the Christmas story, prayed, and celebrated the Lord’s Supper.

This is a call for us to be strong in our personal discipleship, in our daily life with the Lord. Paul doesn’t mess around. He tells us flat-out that we are the ones who must be strong. God isn’t going to be strong for us. But He gives us His grace, which is all that we need to “be strong.”

By placing "you" at the beginning of the sentence Paul is adding emphasis to Timothy's responsibility. During times of great stress and hardship we have an uncanny ability to rationalize away our responsibility to faithful discipleship. Thus, like Timothy, we need to be strongly reminded that WE (not our money, prayer, etc.) are to be involved in the battle for conquering men's souls. It is our "bodies" that God asks to be laid upon the altar of sacrificial service. (Rom 12:1) "Therefore" is probably referring back to more than just the immediate preceding verses (15-18); rather it seems to include all of what was said in chapter 1. In light of Paul's own example (1:1,11,12),-Timothy's sincere faith (1:5), his personal responsibilities (1:6-8, 13, 14), the greatness of the gospel (9, 10), and the responses of contrasting Christians (1:15-18); Timothy is to fulfill 2:1,2.

Having exhorted Timothy to remain steadfast in the face of open hostility (1:6-8, 13, 14), Paul now exhorts Timothy to move forward in the battle of winning and making disciples.

We don't know anything else about the two men named Phygelus and Hermogenes that Paul mentions, but my guess is that their abandonment was unexpected and especially hurtful to Paul. These men, and the others in Asia, should have had the courage to stand with Paul in his time of need, but instead they stand for all time as a bad example of abandonment and denial. Thankfully, though, not everyone abandons Paul. Not only do we get a glimpse of a poor example, but we also get a wonderfully positive one in the case of a man named Onesiphorus (1:16-18). Similarly to Phygelus and Hermogenes, we don't know anything else about this man, but what a contrast he makes with those deserters! In 1:16, Paul tells us that Onesiphorus refreshed him often. I also notice that he was not "ashamed" of Paul's chains. We've seen that word "ashamed" several times in 2 Timothy, and here Onesiphorus serves as a great example of a man who is unashamed. Timothy knew Onesiphorus well; in verse 18 Paul reminds Timothy that Onesiphorus served well in Ephesus, so he at least spent some time there. At any rate, Paul wishes for God to bless him and his whole house for his service. In verse 17 Paul tells Timothy that when this man came to Rome he searched long and hard for Paul¹¹, and he serves as a positive example of what character looks like.

[Having exhorted Timothy to be strong, Paul now exhorts him to...]

2. Duplicate yourself (2:2). "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust¹² these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

Now just to review what's happening behind this letter, remember that the author Paul is in a Roman prison cell. He knows the time of his execution is nearing, that his life on this earth has reached its end. Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to help the church in Ephesus recover from a major crisis. So Timothy is in Ephesus when he gets this letter. But now there's a bigger crisis: Paul's impending death. So in chapter 4 of this letter Paul is going to ask Timothy to come to Rome quickly, so they can be together one last time before Paul's execution. So here in v. 2 Paul gives Timothy a plan for how to help the church in Ephesus before he leaves for Rome.

Be clear on sound doctrine.¹³ affirm the existence and importance of absolute truth in the spiritual realm. You can't impart to others something that you're fuzzy on.

FAT men (Faithful, Available, Teachable). "Entrust" is the verb related to the noun that means a deposit (1:12, 14). It refers to entrusting your valuable treasure to a trusted friend to guard for you during your absence. Believers have entrusted their lives to Jesus Christ, being convinced that He is able to guard that deposit until the day of judgment (1:12). In turn, Christ has entrusted the precious treasure of the gospel with us, and we must guard it with our lives (1:14). We cannot compromise the truth of the gospel or we are unfaithful to guard the deposit. But not only are we to guard this deposit, also we are to hand it off or entrust it to FAT men: command in v. 2 is to "entrust."

Suppose that two boys had a very rich father. He made them an offer: they could choose to receive either \$100,000 per day for 31 days, or one penny the first day, doubled each day for 31 days. If one boy chose the \$100,000 per day, at the end of 31 days he would have \$3,100,000. But the boy who chose the penny doubled each day would come out with \$2,147,483,648!¹⁴

To apply this verse to your life, ask yourself two questions: *First, who is my Paul?* If you are a woman, who is my Pauline? In other words, to whom do you look as a spiritual mentor? A word of caution: Don't sit around with your spiritual umbilical cord in hand, waiting for the opportune place to plug it in. *Second, who are my Timothy's?* I don't know of a female variation of Timothy for the ladies, but Titus 2:4 commands the older women to train the younger women in the things of God. If you have been a believer for at least a year or two, you should be looking for someone younger in the faith that you can hand off God's truth to. If you're not doing that, I strongly encourage you to get involved in the lives of other believers, to help them grow and to grow yourself.

In this verse Paul gives the formula for spiritual multiplication: Paul was the first generation, Timothy the second, faithful men the third, and others the fourth. Notice the four generations mentioned here. It began with Paul, who was chosen by Jesus to be an apostle. Paul had a message that he communicated consistently wherever he went throughout his ministry. This message was passed on to Timothy.

Now the immediate context is the preservation of the Christian message in the church in Ephesus after Paul dies. Yet we also find a principle here that applies to living a life that's built to last

You could argue that Paul's most effective years in ministry were the years he was locked up in a Roman prison. This is because Paul had learned how to multiply his influence through people like Timothy, Silas, Titus, Luke and other coworkers he invested himself in. So even though Paul is locked up when he writes this letter, his ministry is still active through the people he's multiplied his influence through.

Maybe you've seen the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus*. It's a movie about an aspiring composer named Glen Holland who takes a job as a high school band teacher to pay the bills. His real passion isn't teaching, but it's to compose a symphony. But life has a way of edging out our dreams, and he spends the next 35 years teaching high school band, never finishing his symphony. When he retires, all of his former students gather together to honor their high school music teacher. One of his former students is now a governor, and as she takes the podium she says, "We are your symphony, Mr. Holland. We are the melodies and notes of your opus. We are the music of your life." Glen Holland learned to multiply his influence through other people.

We multiply our influence through our children. Although we must resist the urge to project our own dreams onto our kids, we multiply our influence by instructing our kids in biblical values and equipping them to live Christ centered lives. In fact, part of the legacy we leave our world is our children and grandchildren.

We also multiply our influence through our involvement in Christian service. Whether it's by serving as a volunteer on our youth staff, serving in children's ministry, or leading a care group, we multiply our influence through other people.

Learn from someone more mature in Christ: First Timothy is reminded about "the things you which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses." The rest of this verse makes no sense whatsoever if Timothy has not sat under the teaching of a godly man! The first step in the discipleship process is finding someone farther down the path with Christ and using their walk as a means to stay out of trouble. We can call this person any number of titles, but the one I prefer to use is mentor. A mentor's

responsibility is to encourage us, to lift us up and help us see things from a biblical perspective. That's why they need to be mature, so that they have years of seeing things and knowing how to apply biblical truths to everyday life. And we have to be humble and transparent enough to open our lives up to them to let them lead us. Timothy had Paul; who do you have in your life who is leading you in Christ?

"Pay it forward": The rest of this verse is summed up by the title of the 2000 movie starring Haley Joel Osment called "Pay It Forward." Though the movie didn't (as far as I know) get the idea from this text, it nevertheless exemplifies what Paul tells Timothy here. Timothy is to take the discipleship that he received from Paul and in turn entrust the lessons he learned to others. What kind of men should he entrust them to? Paul says he should entrust them to "faithful" men. That means Timothy has to take the time and commit the energy to invest in these men, check their heart and nurture them in the faith until they can be trusted to carry the torch of the gospel. In other words, instead of paying Paul back, Timothy must take the gift and "pay it forward." The second part of the process of discipleship is passing it along to someone else. We are certainly called to come to church on Sunday morning and be nourished by the word of God, but what happens to our bodies if all we ever do is eat? We become obese and unhealthy, and if we do it long enough it can kill us. Likewise in our spiritual walk, if all we ever do is come and receive we will be unhealthy and sick. The only way to be healthy is to use what we have been taught, and that means passing it along to others!

Every man or woman God has used significantly has undergone a period of intense spiritual preparation. Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Paul among many others spent a significant amount of time being prepared by God before He sent them forth into divine service. Thus we also must not neglect the time of our spiritual training and preparation. It is only by allowing the spirit of God to hone and sharpen us that our lives will have the keen cutting edge which God can use in His skillful hand.

It is important to note that those who "teach others" are to "be able" to do so. The word for "able" (*hikanos*) means worthy, qualified, adequate.

Function as a surrogate grandparent. Our children aren't able to see their grandparents as often as they would like, but the Lord has blessed our family with several surrogate grandparents. Blythe and Joyce Stanton have taken an interest in our children. Even though they have sixteen grandchildren, they reach out to our kids. Andy Schwartz, Cary Cooper.

Serve as a big brother or sister. Do you know any single parents who could use some additional help raising their children? Could you reach out and meet a need?

Invest in fewer people for greater impact. Andrew Pratt,

Marriage mentoring.

Honor legacy pioneers. There are countless seniors who have served as models of *transferring truth to the next generation*. Through their lives, marriages, families, and church commitment they have inspired us and motivated

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Every year, I teach eschatology at Ecola Bible School. One of the questions I'm always asked is: "When I die will I be immediately judged by Christ or will I have to wait for the judgment seat of Christ?" This is a logical question. It would seem that when we die and go up to heaven that we are immediately judged by Christ. Why would it be necessary to wait for what could be hundreds or thousands of years until Christ returns to rapture His church? Well, at least one reason is that a man's influence does not cease

when he dies. It continues for years and years beyond his death.¹⁵

Scripture References

2 Timothy 2:1–2

1 Timothy 4:11–16

Psalm 71:12–21

Deuteronomy 4:1–14

Deuteronomy 6:1–25

Psalm 22:22–31

Psalm 78:1–72

Study Questions

1. Why is it so important to be “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2:1)? Am I feeling strong as I prepare to enter into a new year? Why or why not? How can I ensure that I am strong in my relationships with Christ and others? What does the word “grace” mean to me? How would I explain this concept to an unbeliever or a new believer? What role does grace play in salvation? How should grace affect my spiritual health and growth?
2. Who has spiritually invested in my life (2:2a)? How have these individuals helped me grow in my faith? Have I been fortunate enough to have a discipler or mentor? If so, have I expressed my deep appreciation and gratitude to this person? What difference has this person made in my life? What have I learned through this relationship?
3. Who have I spiritually invested in (2:2b)? How have I seen this person grow spiritually? What I have done well in my discipling/mentoring? Where can I improve? If I have never disciplined/mentored anyone, will I commit to do so today?
4. Why is it so critical to seek out faithful people (2:2b)? What makes a person faithful? Would others consider me a good candidate to be mentored? In the past, what criteria did I use to decide who to invest in? In the future, how will I discern who to invest in? What commitments will I ask my disciple or mentoree to fulfill?
5. How can my church reproduce more disciples? What ideas can I share with my church leadership? How will I commit to being a part of God’s solution to make disciples? Am I presently seeking to disciple my spouse, children, and close friends? What responsibility do I assume for the spiritual growth of those God has placed in my life? Read Psalm 71:12–21. How can I practically ensure that I pass on the faith to the next generation?

Notes

¹ 2 Tim 2:1–2 is a single sentence in the Greek text with 2:2 beginning with the word *kai* (“and”).

² The word translated “son” (*teknon*) is an endearing term that can be translated “child” (2 Tim 1:2; cf. 1 Tim 1:18).

³ The preposition “in” (*en*) is probably referring to the means by which Timothy is to be strong. Thus, it is better to render the verse “You therefore, my son, be strong BY MEANS OF the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

⁴ These words recall Titus 2:11–14 (written earlier than 2 Timothy), where Paul informs what the grace of God “teaches us.” Walter L. Liefeld, *2 Timothy*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 246.

⁵ E.g., NET, NASB, HSB, NRSV, NIV, NLT.

⁶ See also the NJB which renders this phrase: “take strength from the grace which is in Christ Jesus.”

⁷ John P. Correia, “A Commission to Character” (2 Tim 1:15–2:7): unpublished sermon.

⁸ Paul uses this word five other times and all but one time refers to God being the provider of strength.

⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1984), 238.

¹⁰ See 2 Cor 12:9–10 and 1 Cor 16:10.

¹¹ The word “eagerly” in the NASB translation is based on a Greek word that encompasses the idea of haste as well as thorough and conscientious fulfillment of a duty. It appears that Onesiphorus had a hard time finding Paul (perhaps because Paul was imprisoned with hardened criminals [2:9]), and therefore had to look long and hard to make contact. Paul’s encouragement at Onesiphorus’ efforts is clear.

¹² “Entrust” (*parathou*) is related to *paratheke* (2:12).

¹³ There is a noticeable emphasis on the themes of “sound doctrine,” teaching, and truth in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 1:3–5, 10; 3:2; 4:1, 6, 11, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:2, 3, 20. 2 Tim 1:13; 2:2, 14–16, 18, 23–26; 3:7–8, 10, 13, 15–17; 4:2–4, 15; Titus 1:1, 9–11, 14; 2:1, 3, 7, 10, 15; 3:9).

¹⁴ Steven J. Cole, “Handing off the Truth”: <http://www.fcfonline.org/content/1/sermons/101506M.pdf>, 8.

¹⁵ This insight is attributed to Dr. W.A. Criswell in Bobb Biehl, *Mentoring: Confidence in Finding a Mentor and Becoming One* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 155.