



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

LifeGroup Study

July 7, 2024

2 Timothy 1:3-14; Isaiah 54:10-17

Community

THEME FOR TODAY

As Paul writes to Timothy he is languishing in a dark, damp prison cell. We know from Paul’s writings and from history that he is lonely and fully expects to be executed soon. And yet Paul’s words are filled with tenderness, encouragement, a focus on others and the mission of the gospel. How can Paul be so full of gratitude, focus and encouragement? And how can we, when times are tough? The answer lies in Paul’s focus on Christ and not his circumstances, and his complete reliance upon the Spirit who gives us power, love and self-discipline.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

We want to learn how to remain tender and other-focused in tough times. Paul is about to be executed and has every right to be despondent and totally focused on the pain he is experiencing. We can learn three important lessons from Paul: expectations, focus, and investment.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

We want to live with new expectations of what life in the Kingdom of God means. We want to focus on God’s Kingdom agenda instead of our own. We want to invest ourselves in people through planting seeds of faith (evangelism) and developing new leaders (reproduction).

ICEBREAKER

What’s your definition of “tough times?” Have you ever experienced the tenderness of another during tough times?

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, work in us and work through us. Rearrange our expectations so that, when tough times come, we can live through them with hope and confidence. Give us a new focus for each day so that we can clearly see your Kingdom’s agenda and the places you are calling us to serve. Help us invest our time and energy in other people so that your good news is proclaimed and your Kingdom will grow. Amen.

Content

WHO IS TIMOTHY?

Timothy was born and reared in Lystra in Lycaonia. Timothy’s mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, were devout Jews who had converted to Christianity. Timothy’s father, however, was Greek.

Because of Timothy’s growth in the faith and his spiritual gifts, Paul chooses him to become a partner in spreading the gospel on

the second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3). Paul also may have seen Timothy as one who was free from the prejudices of many Jews, coming from a “mixed” family. To avoid a problem with the Jews in the area, Paul circumcises Timothy before they leave and then ordains him for ministry.

Although Paul trusts Timothy completely and expects him to be a strong leader in the church, Paul is also very aware of Timothy’s weaknesses. Timothy is very young and, evidently, shy and hesitant. So Paul warns him against being intimidated by his opponents and their teachings. As instructed, Timothy leaves his family in Lystra to travel with Paul. On that journey Timothy helps establish the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Timothy is also deployed by Paul to strengthen the church in Ephesus and to train local leadership there. Most scholars agree that this second letter from Paul was sent while Timothy is serving in Ephesus.

DISCUSSION Have you ever felt like you were too young, shy, or hesitant to take on a project? Have you ever had a mentor or been a mentor to someone?

WHAT’S UP WITH PAUL?

Paul writes his second letter to Timothy during his second imprisonment around 66-67 A.D. While Paul’s first imprisonment had been a reasonably comfortable house arrest, this second imprisonment is anything but comfortable. The Roman prison is dark, damp, dirty, and difficult to find. In his first imprisonment, Paul had awaited trial with the privilege of a Roman citizen. In his second imprisonment, he waits for death as a condemned criminal. Paul still is allowed to write and read, but he is lonely and cold.

A few months after writing this letter to Timothy, according to tradition, Paul is beheaded on the Ostian Way outside Rome. This occurs shortly before Nero’s own death, by suicide, in 68 A.D., just as the Roman senate is declaring Nero “an enemy of the people” because of the atrocities he has committed. Peter is also martyred during Nero’s reign. Paul’s purpose in writing is to challenge, inspire and motivate Timothy to carry on his ministry for the sake of the gospel. Paul seems to know that his end has come, and now he’s focused on how things will continue through others. (Read 2 Timothy 1:3-14.)

DISCUSSION If you were in Paul’s shoes, what would be going through your mind? How can Paul be so full of gratitude, focus and encouragement? How can we be like Paul when we encounter tough times?

GOING DEEPER:

3 CLUES FOR STAYING TENDER IN TOUGH TIMES

1. Expectations. Paul fully expects to suffer for his faith. In fact, Paul sees his suffering as a sharing in Christ’s sufferings, and he is honored to suffer for Christ. In Philippians 3 Paul writes, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death.” Paul invites

Timothy to join him in suffering for the gospel in verse 8. While suffering, by definition, is never pleasant, it is much more difficult to bear when it is unexpected, and seems purposeless and unfair. From Paul's perspective, his suffering is none of these. In the same way, childbirth is painful, but it is purposeful and expected, which makes it somehow more bearable.

While much of our suffering is not a sharing of Christ's suffering (persecution for our faith), we know that we live in a broken world and Jesus warns us to expect trouble (John 16:33). In addition, we're promised that God can redeem our hardships and use them for God's purposes. In fact, sometimes our most difficult days are some of our greatest opportunities to bear witness to our faith and hope. Consider examples like these from the Bible:

- The persecution of the early church served to spread Christians and the gospel throughout the known world.
- Peter bore witness to his jailor when an earthquake set the prisoners free.
- Stephen pointed to God's glory as he was stoned to death.
- Jesus proclaimed God's grace and forgiveness from the cross.

DISCUSSION What are your expectations in regard to suffering for your faith? How has something completely negative in your life turned out to be something God redeemed for a good purpose?

2. Focus. While most of us live focused on our own agenda and therefore see suffering as an interruption to our plans, Paul lives focused on God's Kingdom agenda and sees suffering as just another circumstance in which to serve. Paul reminds Timothy that God has "saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace." Paul does not see his life or his time as his own. He belongs to Christ, is a servant of Christ and lives to please the master. Who is he to complain if his master sees fit to allow him to suffer?

This focus is so out of sync with our cultural focus on personal rights that it offends our sensibilities. And yet we honor and celebrate the focus of Mother Teresa, who lived with this kind of focus and saw her own suffering as inconsequential. When we claim to be Christ-followers, people called to take up our cross, how can our focus be otherwise? This focus anchors us against the winds of bitterness, self-pity and despair in tough times.

DISCUSSION What do you think a Kingdom agenda looks like? What's on the list? How does our personal agenda often get in the way of the Kingdom agenda?

3. Investment. Paul is a remarkable investor with a high-yield portfolio. Paul is a man who invests in people. He spends his last years investing himself into new Christians (evangelism) and potential leaders (reproduction). Paul loves Timothy like a son, but Paul also recognizes Timothy's potential as a Kingdom leader. So Paul invests himself into Timothy, encouraging and training him as well as praying for him. While Paul has a passion to know Christ, his love for Christ compels him to see the bigger picture of Kingdom expansion, which mandates equipping leaders. Even while

linguishing in prison, Paul continues to pour himself into Timothy, knowing that the impact of just one gifted and anointed leader can literally change the world. So Paul expresses his love for Timothy (verse 4) and writes this letter to fan the flames of Timothy's gifts and passion for the work of the gospel (verse 6).

When you consider Paul's expectations, focus and investment strategy, you begin to understand how he can be tender even in tough times. There is far too much at stake to wallow in self-pity.

We'll all experience tough times in life, and the time to decide how we'll respond is now, before we find ourselves locked in a prison of hardship. Paul's example challenges us to consider our own expectations, our focus and the investment of our lives. Today's text calls us to some serious self-reflection, and perhaps repentance, for the sake of the gospel.

DISCUSSION What does this mean for us? How do we invest in others?

Application

We want to live with new expectations of what life in the Kingdom of God means. What specific new expectations will you live with this week? We want to focus on God's Kingdom agenda instead of our own. What are some new Kingdom agenda items for you to live into this week? We want to invest ourselves in people through planting seeds of faith (evangelism) and developing new leaders (reproduction). Who will you invest in this week for the sake of growing the Kingdom of God?

PRAY TOGETHER

Lord God, help us to live differently this coming week. We expect our lives to be free of trouble. Help us to see how you can redeem any situation or circumstance. We focus on our own agenda instead of your agenda. Open our eyes to the work of your Kingdom around us. We invest our time in our own self-centered interests. Lead us to the people we can invest ourselves in for the sake of the growth of your Kingdom. Amen.

ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

Biblical Foundation

2 Timothy 3:14-17

When people talk about having a strong Biblical foundation, they generally refer to having a good grasp on how to use the Bible: how to read it, how to navigate around in it, and how to make some sense of it. Paul encourages others to hold on to scriptural truths they'd been taught and to use them for teaching, reproof and admonition, correction and living lives that reflect the character of Christ. How does a strong Biblical foundation assist you in these things?

2 Timothy 1:3-14 NLT Timothy, I thank God for you—the God I serve with a clear conscience, just as my ancestors did. Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. (4) I long to see you again, for I remember your tears as we parted. And I will be filled with joy when we are together again. (5) I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. (6) This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. (7) For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. (8) So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, either, even though I'm in prison for him. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News. (9) For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. (10) And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News. (11) And God chose me to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of this Good News. (12) That is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return. (13) Hold on to the pattern of wholesome teaching you learned from me—a pattern shaped by the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus. (14) Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you.