

2 Timothy 1:1-7 - Fanning the flame

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[0:00] Chapter 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. To Timothy, my dear son, grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I thank God whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience. As night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy.

I'm reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice. And I am persuaded now lives in you also. 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 the Spirit of God gave us. The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. Amen. Great. Thank you so much, Rebecca, for reading for us.

But we're going to be looking at those verses in 2 Timothy this morning. Let me pray as we come to God's Word. Heavenly Father, we do pray now and ask for your help.

[1:12] We thank you that you're a good God. We thank you that you're a God who loves to speak to your people. We thank you that you have not entrusted salvation to our works, but you have done all that needed to be done through the work of the Lord Jesus.

So that gathering in his name, we come as forgiven people to a loving Father, expecting you and asking you to speak to our hearts that we might love you and trust you and live for your glory.

So bless us. Bless our time in your word this morning, we pray. Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Well, as you look down at those verses, you'll perhaps notice that there is only one instruction in the verses. It's there at the beginning of verse 6. Just take a look at it. It's the instruction to fan into flame. For this reason, says Paul, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God.

Literally, it's just one word there, and the word is kind of put life back in the fire, to rekindle, perhaps. Now, one of the downsides of living in London is that you're not actually allowed to burn stuff to stay warm in London, are you?

[2:24] So this is perhaps a bit lost on us. This would be like keep the gas boiler going or keep the electric fan heater on, whatever it is. But the sense is, don't let it get cold.

Don't let it go cold. The other thing to notice about the command as well is if you look at it, it's not actually just a one-time instruction. Instead, this is a reminder.

Notice it says, for this reason, I remind you to fan into flame in verse 6. This is an ongoing responsibility that Paul is giving to Timothy to keep it warm, keep fanning into flame.

This is, if you like, a responsibility that's being given to Timothy, not just a job. This is his duty. His duty is to keep it warm, to keep the fire burning.

It's not just a one-time job. Which means the important question is, what is the fire? So have a look at it. Again, look at all of verse 6. 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.

[3:32] Now that is perhaps a little bit more complicated. I think it's deliberately vague in order to give it a broad application for us this morning. But just remember where Timothy is. Timothy is the pastor of the church in Ephesus.

He's working there as an overseer to take care of the church and its ministry. Paul gave him that role, that job. A job which, if you look at 1 Timothy, seems to have been given to Timothy by the laying on of hands.

Now if you bring that back to verse 6, you'll see that the fire is in some sense this gift of ministry. It's the responsibility that Timothy has in the church for pastoring.

It's this calling to lead, to encourage, to preach, to serve, to love, to care for the church. It's a gift which has been given to him by God through the laying on of Paul's hands as he commissioned Timothy to that task.

Now just bundle all this together with me for a moment. Here's the one instruction in the passage. Something like this. Remember your duty not to give up in the work God has given you to do. Remember your duty.

[4 : 39] Now you might be sitting there this morning thinking, well this is all very interesting Steve, but that sounds very specific to somebody in pastoral ministry. You know, I'm not Timothy.

I'm not pastoring a church in Ephesus. I'm not even an elder or a leader of the church here. Steve, are you just preaching to yourself this morning? Does it matter that any of us are here? Well, in a sense, I am always preaching to myself.

I hope you know that. I don't sit above God's word. I sit under it like you do. But this morning actually has something to say to all of us. Because I want to suggest to you, if you're an honest Christian this morning, you will have to admit that you also need encouragement to keep going. Don't you? If you're an honest Christian this morning, you will know that you have at times been tempted to give up, to give in, and to tap out.

All of us have felt like that. I was talking to a friend from out of town a few months ago who was trying to come to terms with the bad behavior of some church leaders and Christian friends of theirs. They'd let her down.

[5 : 43] And she said to me, she said, it just makes me feel like giving up. What is the point when people who call themselves Christians behave so badly?

What is the point? Do you know how she feels? Perhaps you felt like that. Perhaps you two have been badly treated by a church. Or perhaps you know what it's like when the Sunday school wrote her and the kids are a nightmare in Sunday school.

You just think, what is the point? Or when you're running a community group and that string of WhatsApp messages comes just like half an hour before it starts.

Oh, I can't come tonight. Can't come tonight. Can't come tonight. Can't come. Oh, goodness.

What's the point? Or maybe you spend a week of annual leave running a camp only for the parents to pick up their kids and be ungrateful.

Or for the camp leader to be a tyrant. I remember one Sunday in our church in Liverpool, we were, at the time, the church had about as many children as it had adults.

[6 : 42] So we did the thing of sending the adults out for the sermon instead of the kids out for Sunday school because that was just much easier. So we used to walk down the road to another community hall for the sermon.

And that room was quite tightly packed. So what it meant was that I was preaching to a group who were very close by me and I could see pretty much everything that was going on. I think if you're in a church, you perhaps don't realize that the person preaching can tell quite a lot about what it is that you're doing and what you're perhaps thinking.

You don't know that, do you? But let me let you into that secret. And in this room, it was particularly pronounced because we were all so close together. So I could literally see the phone screens of the people who were sat there in front of me.

And so as I was pouring out my heart, preaching God's word, I could see that the guy on the front row, and I always tempted to give you his name, but I won't. He was shopping for shoes on the clerk's website.

What's the point of pouring out your heart and preaching God's word? I mean, who buys shoes online anyway? You don't know whether they're going to fit. What's the point? And Paul says, listen, in the midst of all that, Timothy, in the midst of all those discouragements, don't let the fires go out.

[7 : 57] Keep doing your duty. Your duty is to keep going. There is a nuance to this that we must take notice of, though. So turn over the page to chapter 4, and notice in chapter 4, verse 9, that Paul says to Timothy there, do your best to come to me quickly.

Do your best to come to me quickly. In other words, put these things together, because you've got this instruction for Timothy to fan into flame, to not give up, to do his duty, to keep going, to not be discouraged.

Whilst at the same time, Paul is writing to Timothy to tell him to come to him in Rome and to leave behind the ministry in Ephesus. It's interesting, isn't it?

I think what it means is this instruction to fan into flame is not an instruction to keep going in one particular task, never giving up and never moving on.

It's not an instruction to say you must never change church or you must never step back from leading a camp. You must never retire from youth work. You can never retire as pastor. It's not saying that.

[8 : 59] The fire is not so much one particular task as it is really, in a sense, your identity as a servant of the Lord Jesus. Someone zealous to please Christ.

Someone working in the harvest field, wherever that might be, to follow his leads. Now, of course, that means, doesn't it, not giving up on individual tasks just because they're difficult. We're not to be flaky like that.

But still, there's no contradiction for Paul to say to Timothy, fan into flame, keep fanning into flame and also leave Ephesus behind and come and join me in Rome.

I wonder, actually, if that's a little bit more difficult, isn't it? Because sometimes it is just quite easy to keep going with a job, especially if you're one of those duty driven kind of people. But that's not the instruction.

Keep the fire going does not mean don't ever think about what you're doing and just keep doing what you're doing or keep mindlessly carrying on in a certain manner. That would be easy. Rather, this is about where your heart is.

[9 : 57] The sense here is more like keep your zeal alive. Even if that means leaving Ephesus, even if it means standing down as a pastor, even if it means retiring from camp, watching someone else do what you were doing, still keep the fires burning.

Perhaps you could summarize the instruction as something like this then. Remember your duty to not lose heart as the worker God has made you to be. Keep going. Don't lose heart.

Fan into flame. Don't let the fires go out. Now, with that in mind, let me just give you two headings for the rest of our time in our passage. I want us to see the challenge of Christian living and I want us then to see the fuel for Christian living.

So let's start firstly with the challenge, the challenge of Christian living. We've thought about this in general terms, but Paul here is quite specific. He outlines, I think, two big challenges to Christian zeal and enthusiasm.

Two things which, if you like, pour water on the fires of Christian ministry and Christian living. And the first one is circumstances. Take a look at verse three. Let me read it to you again.

[11 : 03] Paul says, Now, there is a pattern to those verses that I'm going to try and show you.

It's called a chiasm, if you're interested in the technical words. It begins and ends with ancestry. So if you notice at the beginning, Paul starts off with his own ancestry.

He says that he stands in line of the prophets of old. He says, I serve the same God, the same gospel as my ancestors. There is no difference, says Paul, between his New Testament ministry and the ministry of the Old Testament in terms of the God who they're worshipping.

And then at the end of the section, you find Timothy and his ancestry. He's standing in line with his mother and his grandmother. They were believers. Chapter 3, verse 15 tells you they taught Timothy the scriptures, even from an early age.

Next thing you hear about Paul's clear conscience. Might be a slightly weird comment, but the point seems to be that Paul has no qualms about following Christ, being the fulfillment of the Old Testament law.

[12 : 26] Therefore, the freedom that Paul has in Christ is consistent with an Old Testament believer. It's remarkable when you think about it, isn't it? That faith in Christ has given Paul a clear conscience about the law.

Faith in Jesus has satisfied the moral requirements of the Old Testament. So Paul is not hung up with guilt. And that's mirrored, I think, with Timothy's sincerity of faith. A faith which is consistent with the faith of his mother and his grandmother, but is now his.

You know, he's not a Christian because his mother was a Christian or a Christian because his grandmother was a Christian. He's a Christian because he now has a sincere faith of his own in the Lord Jesus.

After that, you have the clear consciences. You have the reminder. Paul remembering and being reminded. Remembering in prayer and reminded of his faith.

Which leaves right in the middle the focus of these verses, which is Timothy's tears and Paul's desire for joy. It seems that the last time Paul saw Timothy and said goodbye to him, there was lots of sadness.

[13 : 32] Timothy was weeping. And Paul was sad. So much so that the anticipation of seeing him is an anticipation of great joy. But I long to see you because I want to be full of joy and not the sadness of our parting.

And that means, doesn't it, that in the context of this instruction to keep going and to fan into flame, it's in the context of sadness of parted friends.

Paul's point is fan into flame. Keep going in ministry. Don't lose your zeal. Because part of following me and living for me will involve saying goodbye to people you love and care for and would love to be with.

And weeping over the loss. Perhaps we could put it this way. Your duty is to not lose heart in the work God has given you to do. Because that work in itself will bring relational pain.

Relational pain that will make you want to give up. This relational circumstances all the way through the letter. Paul and Timothy weeping at their parting. Onesiphorus searching long and hard for Paul in Rome.

[14 : 43] Philegius and Homogenes deserting Paul. Demas falling in love with the world. Alexander the metal worker doing him much harm. So let me speak to you if you're a Christian this morning.

Can I ask you whether you've ever experienced this? Have you seen that zeal for Jesus? Passion for the gospel. A commitment to live for Christ and his glory.

Will not only be in the shadow of ordinary relational pain that everybody feels and faces from time to time. No, there will be a particular aspect to that because you are following Jesus.

There will be a relational cost to keeping the fires burning. Timothy has to say goodbye to Paul. Demas fell in love with the world and caused Paul great pain.

Because Paul didn't fall in love with the world. And maybe you're not a Christian this morning. And perhaps I'm doing a really bad job of commending the Christian life to you. It seems to me, Steve, as if you're saying become a Christian and it will be really difficult.

[15 : 42] Well, let me tell you, there is here a window into what being a Christian is really about. The Christian is somebody who has discovered that following Christ, living for his glory, is worth more than even the great treasures of this world.

It's not someone who is kind of just running at a brick wall over and over again trying to hurt themselves. No, they have found in Christ something so precious and so wonderful that they can keep going even through the relational pain that is caused by it.

So perhaps for you this morning, and you're not a Christian, and you think, being a Christian makes perfect sense to me, Steve. I can see that Jesus is alive. I can see that the Bible is worth trusting. I can see that I need a saviour. I can see that I am guilty before God and I need salvation. But do you not realise the thing that's stopping me becoming a Christian is that it will be costly for me relationally.

I will lose friends. Maybe even family relationships. I'll lose a lifestyle I would enjoy. And Paul says it's always like that.

[16 : 55] It's always like that. But that doesn't make the gospel untrue. In fact, being a Christian is finding in Christ great treasure that keeps fanning into flame even through the relational cost.

That's what Paul is anticipating when he says about a day when the Lord will put right all wrongs. It's what he says about Alexander the metal worker in chapter 4, verse 16.

But if you look down at chapter 4, verse 8, you'll see it there in great detail. He says, Paul says, Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day.

And not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearing. There's a life to come, a glory to come. An end to all the goodbyes. So don't give up.

Keep the fires burning. The other challenge, I think, then to enthusiastic Christian living here is cowardice. Cowardice. If you look at verse 7, I think that's the implication of it, where timidity, or literally cowardice, gets mentioned.

[17 : 59] It's the opposite of fanning into flame. Let me read it to you again. For the spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline.

Now, we don't actually know how this worked out for Timothy. Some have suggested that Timothy was a kind of timid kind of guy. But I don't think Paul is making an accusation here, is he? He's giving a warning. The point is that fanning into flame the gift of God will take courage. It will take courage. Courage that will not come naturally, and we'll consider in a moment where courage comes from.

But before we consider that, it's worth just pressing into this, that keeping going in the Christian life will be requiring courage. It will be in the face of timidity or cowardice.

That not only will living zealously for Jesus involve relational pain and relational cost, it will involve saying goodbye to people that we love as we follow the calling of the Lord Jesus to live and work and praise him somewhere else.

[19:00] It will also involve a personal cost because it will be done against an internal difficulty as well as an external one. I'm kind of waffling a little bit, but what I'm trying to say is that as well as being counter to some relationships, it will be counter to some internal instincts as well.

There is a part of us that does not want to persevere in the Christian life. You know, giving up, checking out, dropping out, those things will be natural to us and seem to make sense. And again, if you're a Christian this morning, I wonder if you've reckoned with this, that it's not an error in your Christian life, that it's hard.

It's not a mistake in the gospel that means perseverance requires courage. It's a feature. It's not a bug. Gospel service, fire-burning passion for Jesus will pull against an internal desire to give up. Martin Lloyd-Jones, the great London preacher of the 1940s and 50s, used these verses to diagnose what he called spiritual depression.

He said spiritual depression is unlike ordinary depression because it is unique to a Christian. This, he said, was not some sort of general feeling of malaise that comes on all of us at times, some of us severely.

[20:17] Rather, this is a spiritual malaise for the Christian, a sense of discouragement, that the Christian life is too difficult, that progress in the Christian life is not being made, that it wasn't worth carrying on, that Christian joy is sort of disappearing behind the clouds of discouragement and despair.

And you can see how and why he'd use these verses to expose that, wouldn't you? Christian living takes courage, power, love and self-discipline, says Paul, and that implies that it's going to be difficult.

It's not a walk in the park, is it? It's a marathon up a hill. I will come to the cure in a moment, but just let's stay in triage for a moment. It's worth thinking if you're a Christian this morning and you're struggling emotionally, it's worth considering that what you might be feeling might have a spiritual element to it, as well as just a psychological one or a physical one.

It might not just be that work is hard or the kids are complicated and the future is uncertain. It might also be that it is a battle to live the Christian life.

It's difficult to keep going with Christian zeal. It might be that you're not just down or depressed. You might also be discouraged.

[21:31] Discouragement is a genuine and real thing. That perhaps deep down you know that your Christian life is not what it once was, or not perhaps what it could be, or not maybe what it should be.

We've all been here. I've been here on more than one occasion. You know, that kind of failure of courage at moments when the Christian life has been hard. When I realise that I've not made as much progress as I would have liked to have done, or as even I felt I should have done.

The battles with sin that I thought I'd have put way behind me are still present with me. When the relationships are hard and the cost of Christian living is biting. Perhaps that's you this morning. Perhaps the circumstances that you find yourself in are not ones that you would have chosen or can easily change. Jesus, I've followed you. I've lived for you. And now this is what is before me. Perhaps you've not had the opportunities that you would have hoped to have had.

Perhaps the gifts that the Lord has given you are not ones that you'd wished for. Perhaps it all just seems too hard. Well, listen, if that's you this morning, Paul says first, listen, that does not mean your Christian life is broken.

[22:39] It's not broken. It's because the Christian life requires courage to live it. Which means the important question that we need to ask this morning is where is courage going to come from?

Look with me then next at the fuel for Christian living. Look again at verses six and seven. Let me read them to you again. 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 the spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. What I want to show you here is this brilliant combination between Timothy's responsibility to keep fanning into flames, the ministry, but also this promise of God to help and to give him the resources. If verse six tells Timothy, listen, don't give up. Keep going. Press on. It's your duty. Keep fanning into flame the gift that's been given to you. Then verse seven tells you, no, God's involved in this. God is with you. Now, really, the NIV doesn't translate verse seven very well. It gives the impression to you, I think, on first reading that it is the spirit of God, as in God, the Holy Spirit, who is not timid, but is powerful, loving and self-discipline.

[23 : 51] Which, of course, is absolutely true, isn't it? Praise God that he is like that. But it's not actually that helpful, and it's not, I don't think, Paul's point. Instead, the word spirit in verse seven should be, as it is, I think, in almost every other translation of the New Testament, should be in the lowercase s.

So that God is at work in us. A work that he does do by the power of the Holy Spirit, yes, but it's our spirit that's in focus. It's not that God, the Holy Spirit, is not timid, he's powerful, he's loving and self-disciplined.

It's that God makes our spirit full of courage, full of power, full of love, and full of self-discipline. It's that God fuels in us what we need to keep fanning into flame, our passion and our zeal to live for him.

In other words, this task of keeping going, of maintaining enthusiasm, of persevering through difficult circumstances, and strong internal desires to give up, that is a task that God has equipped you for as a Christian.

What is it that God gives you? Well, it's not timidity, says Paul. The failure of courage, the timidity that we feel is not a work of God. It's not his fingerprints, that's ours.

[25 : 09] Instead, God gives power and strength. The word is dunami, it's literally ability. He is able. God has made us able to live the lives that he has called us to.

It's brilliant, isn't it? Because it means this instruction to keep going is a possible instruction, not because we can do it in our own strength, but because God has given us the power to make us able to keep fanning into flames.

You are able to keep going because God makes you able. He gives you love. Love here, a noun describing what God has given you. So love is a characteristic of us, implanted in us by God, so that when we are pressed and squashed and under pressure, it's love that comes out of us. Love for God and love for others. It's the ability to respond to difficult circumstances and difficult people in love and not aggression. The divine strength not to lash out, but to love with kindness and gentleness.

And then self-discipline. I think here in the context, it's the idea of Timothy as a leader in the church, being given a self-discipline in his use of the authority that God has given him in the church.

[26 : 22] He is to use it with restraint and with kindness and with generosity to others. It implies, doesn't it, that the work of God in us helps us to know ourselves and restrain ourselves from being who we would be, left to ourselves.

It means that what is going on in us is more than just our impulses of our old natures. God has given us a God-powered self-control that disciplines us to be gracious to others, to throw off hindrances and to keep persevering.

This is our hope, isn't it, as Christians? This is our hope as a church. We want to keep fanning into flame what God has given us. We want the fires of enthusiasm to keep building and keep going. Fires of enthusiasm which are doused, aren't they, by the waters of conflict and timidity. We want to keep going in the strength that God gives. That doesn't mean, though, does it, that we just sit back and God does this in us.

It looks like remembering, right? Remembering to fan into flame. Remembering to take the gifts that God has given us and to use them for his glory. There's going to be sweat.

[27 : 35] There's going to be tears. And the power to endure will come from outside of us. Perhaps I can just finish with an illustration taken from somewhere else in the Bible.

I think perhaps you know the story of the feeding of the 5,000. It's coming to the evening. Jesus has been teaching all day. Told it's in a remote place.

It's too difficult for this crowd of people to get food on their own. The disciples have already told Jesus, send these people home because we've got nothing to give them. And Jesus turns to the disciples and asks them to do the impossible, doesn't he?

He says, you give them something to eat. You do it. The disciples look at Jesus and say, this is crazy, Jesus. Literally, where are we going to find that kind of food? Where are we going to find that kind of money to feed this group of people?

Jesus says, well, what have you got? And they offer five loaves and two fish, don't they? Not saying, hey, look, this will do it. I think just to demonstrate the ridiculousness of what Jesus is asking them.

[28 : 35] Look, come on, Jesus. This is crazy. And what does Jesus do? Well, you do realize, don't you, at that point, what Jesus could have done is make bread and fish appear in front of everybody in the crowd.

But he doesn't do that, does he? Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell you that Jesus made the disciples give it out. And then at the end, he made the disciples come back and get whatever was left over. You ever thought about why he did that? Why did he do that? Jesus had given the disciples an impossible task, right? He told them to feed this great crowd. And they said, no, Jesus, we can't do that.

And then he says, no, you go and do it. Keep coming back to me and I'll give you some more. Keep coming back to me and I'll give you some more. They over there have got nothing. Yeah, come back to me and I'll give you some for them.

And Jesus supplies them with all the bread and all the fish that they need to feed this vast crowd.

And then as if in a lesson, you know, like a kind of like, let me cement the lesson.

[29 : 37] You collect 12 baskets full of leftovers as well, disciples. You know, don't you, says Jesus, that I have called you to do something which is impossible. Live for me in a fallen, broken world.

Live for me at great relational cost when you're misunderstood, misrepresented. And when following me involves saying goodbye to people you love and care for. Follow me even though your strong internal desire is to rebel against me.

When this instinct of yours will be to say, this isn't really worth it, is it? I've called you to do that. But you do know, don't you, if you keep coming back to me, I'll keep giving you everything you need to do that.

So just keep coming back. There's plenty more. There'll be baskets left over at the end. I will give you everything you need. So remember, don't lose heart, brothers and sisters, in the work that God has called us to do.

Let's keep doing it in the strength that God gives. Let me pray as we close. Let's just take a moment of quiet and we can pray in our own hearts as we respond to God's word.

[30 : 49] Let's. Let's pray.

Let's pray.

Please, Lord, I pray. By your spirit, give them courage to keep living for you. And if there's someone here this morning, Lord, who's thinking of not becoming a Christian because they can't bear what that would mean for their relationships at home, in their community or their family.

Give them the courage, we pray, to trust in Jesus and find that you give them all that they need.

Even as we pray in his name. Amen.

Amen. ■ ■ ■ ■