

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/4/98

2 Timothy 2:1-2 "The Responsibility of Training Leaders in the Church"

An event that grips the world every four years is the summer Olympic games. One of the most dramatic symbols of the Olympic spirit is the Olympic Torch. Preparation for the beginning of the games involves the passing of the torch, as hundreds of countrymen participate in a grand ceremony of running with the flame, one at a time. Each person does his or her part, and then passes the torch on to the next person. The climax comes when the final runner enters the stadium during the opening ceremony, laps the track, and then treks up scores of steps as the silent crowd watches in anticipation. Finally, he reaches the top, stops, turns, and faces the spectators. Then, in triumphant fashion, he extends his flame and lights the Olympic torch to the applause of the jubilant crowd.

It is that image which comes to my mind as I read 2 Timothy 2:2: "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

The Light of the world, Jesus Christ (John 8:12), instructed His followers, "Let your light so shine before men (Matt. 5:16)." That is what the apostle Paul had done for some thirty years. He had carried the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world of his day.

But when he penned 2 Timothy, his days were numbered. He was imprisoned in Rome because of his commitment to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Like a dangerous, wild animal, he was chained in a dungeon, awaiting execution.

During the wait, he penned his final, God-breathed letter to Timothy, his spiritual son and ministry companion for nearly two decades. Timothy was in Ephesus, hundreds of miles away from his mentor, discouraged by the difficulty of the ministry.

What final words does Paul give to motivate and mobilize his timid friend? In the midst of many stands this charge: "Timothy, my race is nearly over. I am passing on the torch of the gospel to you. Take it, Timothy. Take it, and pass it on to others. Tell them to do the same."

The question that gripped Paul's heart as he faced martyrdom was: "What will happen to the gospel after I am gone?" His final letter to Timothy spelled out what he wanted Timothy to do to ensure the future progress of the gospel.

According to Calvin Miller, the leader of a large Christian organization once said to R. C. Sproul, "I hope when I die there will be at least five of my friends who will be able to sit through my funeral without looking at their watches."¹ It is sad, yet often true, that many church leaders fail to devote attention to the things that will matter after they are gone. Things like 2 Timothy 2:2, namely, investing time into the development of leaders.

What priority items did Paul insist that Timothy must do if he was to be successful in passing on the torch of the gospel? In 2 Timothy 2:1-2, Paul highlighted two priority responsibilities: one, he must depend on the strength of the Lord (1); and two, he must develop leaders (2).

We'll explore these two responsibilities in a moment, but first an observation. Few churches give enough attention to implementing 2 Timothy 2:2. We're too busy

¹ Calvin Miller, The Empowered Leader, Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995, p. 43.

doing other things. We put spiritual reproduction on the back burner. We don't deny its importance, but it's one of those "we'll get around to it if we have time" jobs. And we never seem to have the time.

In his commentary on 2 Timothy, John MacArthur observes: "In the great majority of cases, weak churches are the result of weak leadership, especially weak pastoral leadership. Spiritual weakness makes both leaders and congregations subject to almost every religious fad, no matter how frivolous."²

As a church, we need 2 Timothy 2:2. We need to give attention to the two responsibilities Paul gave to Timothy.

I. Responsibility #1: Depend on the strength of the Lord (1).

Listen to verse one, "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." The "you" in the text is emphatic: "As for *you*, Timothy, *you* be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (my paraphrase)." The context indicates that not all ministers of the gospel were doing so at the time of this letter. Phygelus and Hermogenes had deserted Paul and the gospel (1:15). Indeed, according to Paul's statement (1:15), "You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me." The example of Onesiphorus stood in stark contrast (1:16-18), for this choice servant of the gospel risked his life to find and refresh the apostle in Rome.

The exhortation of 2:1, then, flows out of this contrast. Paul's plea to his junior-associate is: "Do not be like the crowd, Timothy! Do not merely go with the flow. Do not be unfaithful as Phygelus and Hermogenes have been. Rather, be like Onesiphorus. Be loyal, Timothy, faithful to the gospel."

Paul is not telling Timothy merely to "pull up his bootstraps." The charge in 2:1 is not a call to look deep within oneself to discover strength for the pressures of life and ministry. Rather (as the passive of the Greek verb *endunamou* indicates), the source of strength is external. A literal rendering of the imperative would be: "Be empowered," or "Be inwardly strengthened."

What was to be the source of this strength? Paul's answer is clear: "Be strong *in the grace that is in Christ Jesus* (italics added)." We need the grace of God for salvation (Eph. 2:8). We also need grace for sanctification (2 Pet. 3:18). Here we discover that we likewise need the Lord's grace for service.³

This understanding is critical if we are serious about implementing the charge that follows in verse two. The only way to accomplish the admonition of verse two is first to heed the counsel of verse one. The power for leadership training is the grace that is available in Christ Jesus. If we are going to pass on the torch of the gospel, like Timothy, we must first learn to depend personally on the Lord and His grace. The grace of the Lord is what makes leadership training possible.

That brings us to the second responsibility involved in passing on the torch of the gospel.

II. Responsibility #2: Develop leaders (2).

²John MacArthur, Jr., The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 2 Timothy, Chicago: Moody Press, 1995, p. 36.

³The writer to the Hebrews elaborates (12:28, NKJV): "Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

I am convinced that there is a great void in the American church these days because of a neglect of 2 Timothy 2:2. Consider this observation by author, Myron Rush:

Ever since I can remember, the Christian community has been complaining about the shortage of leaders in its ranks, and in recent years the complaints have turned into cries of alarm. It is the opinion of this writer that we are headed for even greater leadership shortages in Christendom unless we redefine the functions and purpose of leadership. A shortage of leaders tends to produce a more serious leadership shortage. *A shortage of leaders creates a shortage of followers. And a shortage of followers produces a shortage of future leaders.*⁴

How do you explain the prevailing lack of leaders in the church? There is no simple answer to that question, but I would suggest a key factor is our failure to give serious attention to 2 Timothy 2:2.

In order to fulfill the "torch-passing" admonition of 2 Timothy 2:2, there are three critical issues which require careful investigation: *what* (what are "the things you have heard me say"), *who* (who are the "reliable men"), and *how* (how are "these things" passed on to reliable men, particularly so that they in turn will pass them on to others)?

Issue #1: What? -- What are "the things you have heard me say"?

"And the things that thou hast heard from me among many witnesses," is how the KJV begins verse two. Here's where the first stage of the spiritual relay began. Paul handed to Timothy something that Timothy would be responsible to hand to others, who in turn would give to still others.

What was that *something*? Paul says, "The things you have heard me say." But in their times together for over fifteen years, Timothy had heard Paul say a lot of things. So which things?

"The things you have heard me say *in the presence of many witnesses.*" What authoritative message did Paul preach (and Timothy hear) over and over again? He didn't preach in a corner, and he didn't change his message. Timothy, the truths that you (and many others) have heard me proclaim are what I want you to pass on to others.

A key to understanding what "these things" are is the backdrop of 2 Timothy chapter one. According to Paul, the church possesses a "deposit" from God (1:14 "That good thing which was committed unto thee," AV). This deposit is the revelation of God concerning the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. It is the "gospel" by which people are saved (1:8).

That background sheds light on "these things" in 2 Timothy 2:2. John MacArthur comments: "The truth Paul is talking about here is beyond the basic gospel message of salvation, which is to be preached to all who will hear. He is rather talking about the careful, systematic training of church leaders who will teach and disciple other believers in the fullness of God's Word."⁵

⁴ Myron Rush, *The New Leader*, Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987, p. 7.

⁵ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 2 Timothy*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1995, p. 41.

Churches in general, and church leaders like Timothy in specific, have a deposit. It's God's truth. What are we supposed to do with it?

According to Paul's admonitions to Timothy, we're supposed to do two things. First, we're supposed to "guard" it, which is the thrust of 2 Timothy chapter one (1:14). A church leader must take steps to protect the doctrinal purity of this deposit from the onslaught of false teachers. He must hold fast the message he has received (1:13).

Yet we have a second task with the deposit, according to 2 Timothy chapter two. Paul told Timothy to devote himself to helping the church pass on the deposit (2:2). Timothy was to do more than preserve the truth. He was also to entrust this deposit to other men within the church who in turn could pass it on to still others. Paul wanted Timothy to make arrangements to insure that the truth of the gospel would be intact as it was handed on to the next generation, and beyond.⁶

The second issue pertains to the following question.

Issue #2: Who?--Who are the “reliable men” who are qualified to participate in leadership development?

Though brief, the verse possesses several key words dealing with qualifications (2:2): “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

The main verb in verse two is “entrust” (*parathou*). It is an aorist, middle imperative which means “to place beside,” or “to set before.” The Authorized Version translates it as “commit.” The word is used in another context of setting food before a guest who is being entertained.⁷ In the LXX the word appears in Exodus 19:7 (italics added): “So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and *set before them* all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak.”

The Exodus 19 text is helpful for our consideration. God gave Moses His holy Law. What did Moses do with what he had received? He did not add to it, nor subtract from it. Rather, he passed it on to the elders just as he had received it from God.

Timothy, likewise, had received a divine deposit. It was as if Paul was saying to him: “Timothy, I am not going to be around forever so I am passing the gospel torch to you. Timothy, you are not going to be around forever, either, so here is your task: find people to whom you can pass on the gospel torch, then develop them.”

Who are these individuals that are capable of receiving (and then giving) the torch of the gospel? Contrary to many, common perspectives on leadership in the world, biblically-qualified leaders are not necessarily the most talented people, nor the most educated. They may or may not be the individuals with the most charisma, charm, or influence. What type of people did Paul tell Timothy to recruit and train? According to verse two, Timothy was to identify individuals who possessed three qualifications: *character, competency, and commitment*.

Character: Timothy was to look for individuals who were “reliable” (*pistoi*). The term speaks of those who are dependable, trustworthy, steady, and faithful (as the Greek term is often translated). Here is where to begin in identifying potential leaders. Timothy was to find *faithful* men, individuals with proven character, and develop them.

⁶John R. W. Stott, The Message of 2 Timothy (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1973), pp. 50-51.

⁷William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Second Edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 622.

This observation leads to an essential question: how do you test a person's character to find out if he possesses faithfulness? The answer, according to the background given in 2 Timothy 1, is to observe how a person handles adversity. Phygelus and Hermogenes did not respond well to opposition, but deserted the ministry. They were *not* faithful. On the other hand, Onesiphorus risked his life to help Paul, not just once either, but over and over again ("You know very well in how *many ways* he helped me in Ephesus" (1:18; italics added). He was *faithful*.

Faithfulness is a revealer of character. To find faithfulness one must look for how a person responds to opposition, criticism, difficulties, and conflict. Does he keep his commitments or not? We cannot force faithfulness. We cannot make someone be faithful. Therefore, in the search for potential leaders, we must seek for individuals who have a solid track-record. Jesus put it this way in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:23), "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things."

Competency: The text again states, "Entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." The word translated "qualified" (Greek *hikanoi*) carries the idea of sufficient, fit, or competent. It appears in a related text, 2 Corinthians 3:5, "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God."

Timothy was to locate individuals who were not only reliable, but who also possessed a certain aptitude (though undeveloped) for being able to teach the Word of God. He was to identify a group of individuals who would be qualified to engage in a teaching ministry (as described in Titus 1:9).

John D. Rockefeller, the great entrepreneur who lived from 1839-1937, once said: "The ability to deal with people is as purchasable a commodity as sugar and coffee. And I pay more for that ability than for any other under the sun."⁸

Lee Iacocca was the long-time president of Ford Motor Company until he was fired, and then recruited by Chrysler to salvage it from its decline. Concerning competency in people skills for a leader, Lee Iacocca offers his perspective:

Now, there's one phrase that I hate to see on any executive's evaluation, no matter how talented he may be, and that's the line: 'He has trouble getting along with people.' To me, that's the kiss of death. 'You've just destroyed the guy,' I always think. 'He can't get along with people? Then he's got a real problem, because that's all we've got around here. No dogs, no apes—only people. And if he can't get along with his peers, what good is he to the company? As an executive, his whole function is to motivate other people. If he can't do that, he's in the wrong place.'⁹

Iacocca's insight is food for thought for potential church leaders. If a prospective leader has trouble getting along with people, he is in serious danger, and so is the church if he assumes a leadership position. The reason is obvious, to paraphrase Iacocca: "If a potential church leader can't get along with people, he's got a real problem, because that's all we've got around here. No dogs, no apes—only people."

⁸ John J. Westermann, *The Leadership Continuum*, Deer Lodge, TN: Lighthouse Publishing, 1997, p. 67.

⁹ Lee Iacocca, *Iacocca: An Autobiography*, New York: Bantam, 1984, p. 58.

Commitment: To qualify as a potential leader, a person must possess a willingness to do two things: one, to be taught; two, to teach others. The best leaders are those who realize they need to learn; they are willing to be taught. But learning is not an end in itself. They must do something with what they learn. Thus, Timothy was to recruit individuals who exhibited a commitment to become involved in others' lives through the ministry of teaching.

These, then, are the qualifying marks for potential, reproducing-leaders, according to 2 Timothy 2:2: *character, competence, and commitment*. Due to its brevity, however, this text does not elaborate on how to identify these qualities in an individual. We'll explore some other Pauline texts in our next study which will give a fuller explanation. For now a third issue.

Issue #3: How? -- How are "these things" passed on to reliable men, particularly so that they in turn will pass them on to others?

You'll notice that the task of passing on the faith (the 2 Timothy 2:2 "relay") involves four stages: Christ to Paul, Paul to Timothy, Timothy to faithful men, faithful men to still others, and so on.

It started with Paul--the faith was entrusted by Christ to Paul (1:12). That's leg #1. Leg #2--what Christ entrusted to Paul, the apostle entrusted to Timothy (1:14). Third, what Paul entrusted to Timothy, Timothy was to entrust to faithful men (2:2). And fourth, what Timothy entrusted to faithful men, these men were to teach to others.¹⁰

Yet how practically does it happen? The Bible gives some relevant guidance. In a future study we will go to the book of Acts and look for clues as to how Paul did what he asked Timothy to do.

But for now, we mustn't miss the obvious. 2 Timothy 2:2 endorses the ministry of reproduction. It is vital to the task of passing on the faith. The problem is, many churches have simply *dropped the baton*. They think that if they "preach the Word from the pulpit on Sunday morning," 2 Timothy 2:2 will take care of itself. But it won't.

Lee Iacocca shares the following story about a personal conversation he had with the legendary football coach, Vince Lombardi:

Once, at a private dinner with Vince Lombardi, the legendary football coach and a friend of mine, I asked him about his formula for success. I wanted to know exactly what made a winning team. What he told me that evening applies as much to the business world as it does to sports.

'You have to start by teaching the fundamentals,' Lombardi said. 'A player's got to know the basics of the game and how to play his position. Next, you've got to keep him in line. That's discipline. The men have to play as a team, not as a bunch of individuals. There's no room for prima donnas.'

He continued: 'But there have been a lot of coaches with good ball clubs who know the fundamentals and have plenty of discipline but still don't win the game. Then you come to the third ingredient: if you're going to play together as a team, you've got to care for one another. You've got to *love* each other. Each player has to be thinking about the next guy and saying to himself: If I don't block

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 50-51.

that man, Paul is going to get his legs broken. I have to do my job well in order that he can do his.

‘The difference between mediocrity and greatness,’ Lombardi said that night, ‘is the feeling these guys have for each other. Most people call it team spirit. When the players are imbued with that special feeling, you know you’ve got yourself a winning team.’

Then he blurted out almost self-consciously: ‘But Lee, what am I telling *you* for? You run a company. It’s the same thing, whether you’re running a ball club or a corporation. After all, does one man build a car all by himself (emphasis added)?’¹¹

What is vital for football teams and automobile manufacturers is of far greater importance for local churches. The stakes for churches are eternal. To paraphrase Lombardi’s comment: “The church has to play as a team, not as a bunch of individuals.”

That’s where leadership training fits in. Perhaps an illustration of a current church committed to the 2 Timothy 2:2 admonition would help pull things together.

In addition to being a well known radio teacher and author, John MacArthur is first of all a pastor. He has shepherded Grace Community Church for over thirty years. Listen to his observation about leadership training:

I am more and more committed to the proposition that each local church ought to be developing its own spiritual leadership rather than bringing in outsiders to be leaders. If a church is not producing competent leaders to serve Christ in a full-time capacity, something is wrong.¹²

MacArthur then cites the example of Grace Community Church:

At Grace Community Church our gifted evangelists and pastor-teachers have come from within the ranks of the congregation. God has brought them to maturity by His Spirit, through His Word. These people were ‘faithful in little,’ and God gave them a larger responsibility. The result for our church has been a unique quality of unity, fellowship, and commitment to each other—leaders and flock alike...The first level of my ministry has been to ‘disciple’ our gifted men. Our staff has grown from the soil of much time that we have spent with each one in personal fellowship, teaching, and prayer. Some have matured to the point that they have been sent out to mission fields and other churches.¹³

MacArthur continues with this disclaimer:

In fact, though we pray and work for souls to be saved, we have never deliberately sought more people to swell our attendance numbers. We have no

¹¹ Lee Iacocca, *Iacocca: An Autobiography*, New York: Bantam, 1984, pp. 56-7.

¹² John MacArthur, *The Body Dynamic*, Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1996, pp. 80-1.

¹³ John MacArthur, *The Body Dynamic*, Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1996, p. 81.

right to ask God for more people until we see progress in those He has already given us to equip.¹⁴

Beloved, 2 Timothy 2:2 is not merely good advice; it's the authoritative Word of God. I invite you to prayerfully ponder its implications for us as a church. Be thinking about what we can do as a church to see 2 Timothy 2:2 become more and more a reality.

Yes, the command given to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 was given in a specific context. It was from an apostle (Paul) to an apostolic representative (Timothy) during a time prior to the completion of the New Testament canon. The admonition was given to Timothy, yes, but it possesses implications for us.

Who are the individuals that God has gifted as potential leaders who can get on the front lines in passing the torch here at Wheelersburg Baptist Church? Who are the men of character, competency, and commitment who are potential reproducers?

Are we willing to make their development a priority as a church?

¹⁴ John MacArthur, The Body Dynamic, Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1996, p. 81.