

Under Pressure but Unashamed

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[0 : 0 0] Good. Well, let's turn to our Bible reading for this morning, and Josh is beginning a new! series in the letter of 2 Timothy. Now, if you don't have a Bible with you, we do have various visitor Bibles scattered around, so do grab a Bible if you need one. And 2 Timothy, page 995, if you have the visitor Bible. 2 Timothy chapter 1, and then I'll also be reading from the end of the book as well. So 2 Timothy 1, and we'll begin in verse 1 there. All the T's come together in the New Testament, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, so if you can't find it, if you find a T, you're close. So 2 Timothy, I'm reading from verse 1 of chapter 1.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus. To Timothy, my beloved child, grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now I am sure dwells in you as well.

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 God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control.

Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. But when he arrived in Rome, he searched for me earnestly and found me. May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day. And you well know all the service he had rendered at Ephesus.

[3 : 4 6] Just flick over a page to chapter 4, and we'll read from verse 9. Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Thalmatia. Luke alone is with me.

Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all, the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he has strongly opposed our message. At my first defense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Greet Prisca and Aquila and all the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth and I left Trophimus, who was ill at Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Lannus and Claudia and all the brothers. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Amen. Amen. May God bless his word to us this morning. We'll do open once again to 2 Timothy chapter 1.

Now, a very wise friend once said to me that it's a very good idea to learn what is hard about work before learning what is hard about ministry. Because there's an element of truism to saying that ministry is hard. It's almost a given. And so it's easy if you're working in ministry or even closely bound up with it to assume that whatever is hard must be hard because it's ministry.

[6 : 27] But my friend's point is helpful. Work is hard for many people. Long hours, extra hours. And ever since the fall, work is laden with frustration. And yet there are things that make gospel work, ministry in particular, very hard indeed. And what's more, those hard things are not unusual. They're normal. Normal gospel work. Not reserved for a special class, but rather part and parcel of ministry. And so that's the title that we have for our series through to Timothy, normal gospel work. Now, some have taken Timothy to be something of a weakling. Timid Timothy is a little moniker that's caught on. It's a punchy phrase, but it isn't really rooted in reality. Timothy, after all, was one of Paul's best guys. He was his right-hand man. He was the one Paul sent into the most tricky circumstances. He was sent with a letter to the Corinthians. And he was held up in that church, which was so at odds with Paul. He was held up as the living model of Paul's ways.

In fact, Timothy wasn't really a minister or pastor as we might think of them today. Up to this point, Timothy has been an apostolic delegate, representative of Paul and his apostolic authority in the churches. And so as well as Corinth, Timothy's been sent to the Thessalonians.

And through Acts chapter 16 to 20, we see him join Paul's missionary party. So Timothy wasn't some sort of bumbling pastor, not fit for the task. No, he was Paul's emissary into real situations, bearing the cost, witnessing suffering, facing increasing opposition, bringing order and gospel clarity to all manner of churches. He wasn't weak and timid. He was just doing normal gospel work. And that matters because the focus of this letter isn't an imagined timidity in Timothy, but rather it's the toughness of ministry. Just notice a few of the realities that Timothy's facing.

First, real physical threats and hardships. His spiritual father is in prison, chapter 2, verse 8, bound as a criminal, discredited, alienated. And more than that, Paul is soon to be executed.

Chapter 4, verse 6, the time of my departure has come. Real physical threats and hardships, but secondly, relational perils and heartbreaks. Fellow workers' abandoned ship, no longer wanting to be associated with a shameful apostle and perhaps a shameful gospel. Not just one or two, but verse 15, all who are in Asia turned away from me. Chapter 4, verse 10, others fall away because they fall in love with the world. Well, thirdly, there's also rogue preachers and their harm. There are direct threats from those who have sat under genuine ministry, but now oppose it, doing harm to the flock and to the weary pastor. Chapter 4, verse 14, Alexander has done great harm to Paul. That stretches back into 1 Timothy even, 1 Timothy 1.20. And you also find there Hymenaeus. He's at present, still in 2 Timothy, still at work, maybe two to four years later, still there. Chapter 2, verse 17, drawing others into a rogue ministry, luring in the weak and vulnerable, creeping into households.

[10 : 19] Chapter 3, verse 6, with duplicity. And Paul sums it all up, chapter 3, verse 12. All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. The cost of ministry, the suffering of a Christian servant, is one of the prominent themes in this letter. And Paul says, that is normal.

So that's one thread through this letter. But before we dive into our passage, notice the other threads running through the whole letter. This is also Paul's preparation for post-apostolic ministry.

Paul's death is on the horizon. He's soon to be poured out. And Paul writes to prepare Timothy and the church for normal ministry in the post-apostolic age, just like we see in the letter of 2 Peter.

The days of the apostles, their unique authority in and over the church, they were going to end. And what would rule the church then? Well, it would be the apostolic gospel.

Both Peter and Paul point not to something new that is needed, but to what must be remembered and held fast. Chapter 1, verse 13, follow the pattern of the sound words you've heard from me.

[11 : 34] Chapter 2, verse 8, remember Jesus Christ as preached in my gospel. 3, 16, all scriptures profitable. The authoritative word of the prophets and the apostles given for the church from then until now.

And so ministry is always to be characterized by preaching the words, chapter 4, verse 2, in season and out of season. But also, chapter 2, verse 2, by training others who pass it on to others also for generations to come. And on top of all that, even under pressure, this gospel must still be declared with salvation in view. Do you see chapter 1, verse 10? Jesus has appeared as Savior.

Savior. Paul endures everything, chapter 2, verse 10, that the elect may obtain salvation. Chapter 4, verse 5, Timothy is to do the work of an evangelist.

Hardships, says Paul, are never an excuse to duck the gospel, especially never an excuse to quietly drop evangelism as a priority. So these are the threads through this letter. But one thing, final waggle on the T before we dive in, how do we apply a letter like 2 Timothy today?

I think there are three key lines of application. First, Timothy most plainly applies to ministers and those training for ministry, those called to carry on normal gospel work. That's fairly plain and obvious. But second, it's written for the church. It's addressed to Timothy, yes, verse 2, but the church is listening in. The closing greeting that we read, chapter 4, verse 22, in Glaswegian would be, grace be with you.

[13 : 38] Any church needs to be clear what real ministry is and what real ministers look like, so that we know who to support, who to submit to, and who to seek to appoint in future.

And third, it speaks to Christians in general. In a real sense, every Christian is engaged in ministry. According to Genesis, we were made to multiply and fill the earth, to extend God's kingdom from the garden to the world. And now in Christ, our ultimate purpose must be shaped by the priority of Jesus' kingdom, seeing it extend to the far reaches of this world. In 20 years' time, what will really matter is not the graduate job that we got, but the way we served Christ's people. Not our hobbies, but the deep Christian friendships that help one another press on. Not the house we lived in, but the children we raised as warriors for Jesus' kingdom. And so for all of us, our life's purpose is aligned with gospel ministry and with the church's ministry. The steel that Paul seeks to put into Timothy's spine is steel that we all need, so that in 20 years' time, this church is still standing as a vibrant and genuine witness to a city in darkness. And so that our life achievements are the kind that truly do ripple into eternity. And so the first thing we see then that gives us steel and clarity is in verses 1 to 7, the timeless gospel and tender relationships. Timeless gospel, tender relationships. The gospel has deep roots that can be trusted, and it makes deep bonds that must be treasured. Paul's saying to Timothy in these verses, the gospel has deep roots that will hold you, and it produces deep relationships that will help you. So press on in ministry with courage.

So notice first, Paul speaks of both his own ancestors, verse 3, and the generations of Timothy's family, verse 5, Lewis and Eunice. One of the perpetual pressures that ministries and churches face, indeed Christians face, is the pressure to conform in some way to the patterns and morals and understandings of the present day. We know it well in our own day, don't we? 10 or 15 years ago, Christians were just a little bit stupid. But now, Christians are dangerous because we won't conform to progressive ideals. And so there's a perpetual pressure that the church faces to go along with the flow of the world. Don't rock the boat. Instead, file off the sharp point of the gospel, the point that really exposes and confronts the world. And how often also is there an enticing pressure to favor things that are new, to move along with progress? That was Timothy's current plight.

Chapter 2, verse 14, he's facing quarrels about words, speculations, minutia. Or chapter 4, verse 4, the myths that were present in 1 Timothy linger on, newfangled falsehoods. Indeed, isn't Paul bang on when he says, chapter 4, verse 3, that people with itching ears will accumulate for themselves teachers who suit their own passions, those who tickle the ears? But Paul knows that fads pass, passions change, history waxes and wanes. And so what counts is something timeless, something that has stood the test of time. And that's what he's saying here to Timothy. I've served God just like my ancestors, faithful Israelites of old, and have done it with a clear conscience. Now that phrase, clear conscience, matters. Because in 1 Timothy, there are those whose consciences are seared, those who embrace what Paul calls deceitful demonic teachings, those who twist spirituality so that it fits the world.

But Paul says, no, don't fall for these things. We can have a clear conscience about the historic gospel that has stood the test of time. It is coherent, it's consistent, it's clear. It's the faith once and for all entrusted to the saints. And he says, you can see it in your own family, verse 5. Your sincere faith is a faith passed on from your mum and her mum before that. Now, of course, as long as there's been a gospel, there has been a perversion of it all the way back to the garden. It was the same, wasn't it?

[18 : 34] There's reassurance in that. There's nothing new under the sun. And yet, that changeless gospel is still bearing fruit. You've seen it in your own family, Timothy. And so, Paul is saying that we have a deep-rooted gospel that can hold us, that endures. But notice, Paul speaks about the timeless gospel in the context of a tender relationship with Timothy. Verse 2, he calls him my beloved child. Verses 3 and 4, he says, I remember you constantly. Remember your tears. I long to see you that it be filled with joy.

And love is a genuine oeuvre spill of gospel life and work. It's what makes ministry painful at times, but it's also what makes ministry possible. It's painful when those you've invested in and prized, verse 15, turn away from you. It's jolly painful when you've invested in someone and they turn against you and seek to harm and destroy you, like Alexander the coppersmith. It's painful too when you know the struggles that people dear to you are going through. You see, Paul knows of Timothy's tears, verse 4.

I say, these are the tears of bearing the burden of ministry, vitriol, insidious attacks, and all that with the weight of the church bearing upon you. Investing in relationships always comes with the possibility of pain, disappointment and hurt, or the pain of watching precious people suffer.

I wonder how often there is pain for a wife seeing what her husband is subjected to for the gospel. But relationships are also the fruit of gospel ministry. They are what make it possible.

It's hard not to be deeply caught up with those who share the gospel, who share your savior, your church, your ministry. Paul calls it, verse 4, joy. I've got a quote up in my office. Deep Christian fellowship is more likely born in laboring together than lounging together. And it's true. How can deep relationships not form around shared loves, shared prayers, and shared service? And it's true for the fruit of ministry too, isn't it? When you've invested in someone and you see the gospel bearing fruit more and more in their lives, it's hard not to be bound up with them. We can't avoid deep relationships if we're serious about gospel work. We can't help it, can we? It's what keeps us going.

[21 : 20] In fact, it's often when a minister goes horribly wrong that you discover they didn't really have any close friends who truly knew them. Listen to C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves* with his customary clarity and insight. He says, to love it all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to be sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries.

Avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken.

It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, and irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation, he says. The only place outside of heaven where you can be perfectly safe from the dangers and turmoils of love is hell. We shall draw nearer to God, not by trying to avoid the sufferings inherent in all loves, but by accepting them and offering them to him, throwing away all defensive armor. If our hearts need to be broken, and if he chooses this as the way in which they should break it, so be it. Friends, when it comes to ministry, to gospel work and service, it cannot be the case that we see love, that we see deep friendship as something that is too costly.

Love will cost you, but not nearly as much as lovelessness. Paul's relationship with Timothy then means that Paul's support and confidence isn't just a single moment at his ordination. You see verse 6, it's ongoing. Paul is behind him, encouraging him to fan into flame the gift of God which is in him through the laying on of his hands, through his ordination. But there's confidence that comes with that because of the depth of relationship. And ministry relationships matter because we don't always see ourselves and our situations rightly. And sometimes others don't see either. So Paul brings clarity and confidence.

That may be a word to some this morning. It is in the context of the church that service and ministry are recognized and encouraged. If the local church and leaders who know you well don't think you should be doing ministry or a particular ministry, that should probably be heeded.

[24 : 04] But equally, if they do encourage you towards it, if they do think this is a ministry just for you, that's not something to casually brush off. Paul says, Timothy, I knew you and I love you. I ordained you.

I pointed you to this service. So don't fade away. Don't let fear get the better of you. Yes, it's hard, but don't be shaped and shifted by those things. Remember the calling that is yours because of my hands.

And remember that this service comes with God's Spirit. Timothy is up against it. He mustn't be trite about that. Fear may be at the door, but Paul says, press on. We need that encouragement.

Often the draining aspects of ministry are unseen. Sleepless nights over the believer who's fallen away. The bitter root that threatens to tear a church apart. The rogue elder seeking a platform.

The pressure to tone it down. Don't kick up a fuss. The decisions that need to be made for the church's health and growth. Decisions that won't be popular. And all the fallout that is energy sapping.

[25 : 13] And yet, if you're not a minister, don't switch off. Because you know your own version of this, don't you? Quiet pressures to go silent at work.

To blend in with friends. To stop praying for non-Christians. To stop speaking. To stop serving. Because it would just be easier. But Paul assures Timothy, and so us, to varying degrees, that what God has called and appointed you to, he'll equip you for. Do you see verse 7? God gives a spirit not of fear, not of shrinking back, but rather a spirit of power. Verse 8, which is power to endure suffering.

And a spirit of love. The love that hurts and the love that makes ministry possible. And a spirit of self-control, so that we don't swing wildly, but can stay clear-headed and steady.

Do you see what Paul is saying? To the genuine gospel servant whose faith is sincere and whose love is evident, there is help for you, a divine supply. It's ours as we press into God's purpose, whether as ministers or as gospel servants laboring in the church, or whether it's us seeking to reach our colleagues for the Lord Jesus, or as we seek to cast all other cares aside for our children, except that we bring them up in the Lord. Jesus never expects more from us than he grants us help to do. He said to his followers under immense pressure, do not be anxious, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

And when we worry about real needs, Jesus says, your Father knows. He says, fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

[26 : 59] And so we can trust him. Even when ministry feels like it's got the beating of us, even when we serve in ways we think we cannot manage, if those who knew and love you are sure that this is the right work for you, then trust that God will enable you.

For God gives not a spirit of fear, that what is hard about ministry should beat us down, but a spirit of power, of love, and self-control.

And that matters for all of us, ministers and members alike, because there will always be pressure to be ashamed of the gospel and gospel servants. And that's what we see in verses 8 to 14. Verse 8 to 14, unashamed workers, undying hope.

The power of God and the promise of life give us everything we need to suffer without shame and stay loyal to Jesus and his gospel. Normal gospel work brings with it the pressure to be afraid.

Afraid of this world, afraid of losing out in it. And fear, when left alone, doesn't stay as fear. It turns into shame. Ashamed of Jesus is gospel.

[28 : 12] Now, of course, the temptation is rarely to go the whole hog at first, to renounce Jesus outright. No, much more likely is that there will be certain aspects of what Jesus teaches, certain parts of his words that we feel uneasy about, may want to remain silent on, because we know that they'll draw tension and vitriol from the world around.

But that is merely setting a path that ends with a sanitized, compromised gospel, ashamed of Jesus in all the ways that matter.

For Timothy, that temptation was to step back, to distance himself from Paul, from suffering, and from an uncompromising pattern of ministry that could bring terrible consequences.

You see, Timothy was surrounded by a spirituality that was visible already in 1 Timothy, that treated Christianity as an escape from ordinary creaturely constraints. A kind of high religion.

Hungry for comfort, caught up with riches, determined to enjoy everything in the here and now. You can still see it in this letter. Chapter 2, verse 18, Hymenaeus, a corrupting influence for years, teaches that the resurrection has already happened.

[29 : 31] In other words, the great day when the Lord raises his people, rights all wrongs, and brings his kingdom in fullness, that day is being dragged into the present. And once you believe that, once you start living as if glory is meant to be enjoyed now, it leads to all manner of problems.

In fact, it produces what Paul describes in chapter 3, verses 2 to 4. People who are lovers of self, lovers of money, and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Oh yes, there'll be a veneer of godliness to it, but it's hollow because it denies the very power of God. And in this letter, God's power is not mainly there to make life comfortable.

His power is what enables us to suffer without shame, verse 8. Paul says, Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.

Later he says, verse 12, I am not ashamed. Except notice what he says. He doesn't say, I'm not ashamed for I know what I believe. He says, I am not ashamed for I know whom I have believed.

[30 : 47] To be ashamed of Jesus' words, to be ashamed of Jesus himself. They're inseparable. That's a present temptation today, isn't it?

Fear can rise, pressure can swell, when we have to kneel our colors to the mast with what the Bible plainly teaches about certain sins, that this world would want to redefine, excuse, allow, and celebrate.

The Bible's clarity about the sin of homosexuality. Or the Bible's clarity about the sanctity of life, and thus the sin of abortion and euthanasia.

Or the Bible's insistence that all other religions are false, and that Jesus alone is the only way to be saved. Or the Bible's unwillingness to make light of judgment and hell.

Or the Bible's insistence that men and women are different by design, and thus it's exposing of the harm of feminism, never mind of trans ideology, and many other things besides.

[31 : 49] A minister can feel that fear, knowing every sermon may be clipped and shared online. But the rest of us feel it too, don't we? Tempted to keep quiet in the staff room.

But Paul is clear. God's power is given so that we will share in suffering for the gospel, unashamed of all of Jesus' words, unashamed of the whole counsel of God.

But friends, that is far easier said than done. And we mustn't be trite about the cost. Timothy's association with Paul could spell a similar fate, prison, even death. And that can just trickle off our tongues.

But think of the anguish bound up in imprisonment, locked away indefinitely. Perhaps your absence causes your family to suffer dreadfully.

People are urging you to be smart. Find a form of words. Don't deny the truth. Just blunt it. Nuance it. Think of your family. Think of your little daughter or son.

[32 : 54] Similarly, the prospect of death. It's very easy for us to think we'd be fine in the face of death. We'd stand firm, be unshaken. But it's a lot easier to think that when there hasn't been a devastating diagnosis, much less a death sentence passed.

Thomas Cranmer, a key British minister in the Reformation, knew that fear. Faced with pressure and looming threat of execution, he wavered. And he signed recantations, more than one.

Because fear is real. In the end, he was lined up to preach a sermon that would make those recantations public, undermining all of his Reformation work, stalling the spread of the gospel in Britain.

But as he stood up to preach, he recanted of his recanting. And once again declared the true gospel, knowing it would lead him to be burnt to death. And as he walked to the stake, he held the hand that signed those recantations into the flames first.

Fear is real, but God gives power when it counts. Listen to James Philip. This is something to think of when we are trembling and shrinking from Christian duty.

[34 : 09] Our calling is rooted in the midst of eternity. The sovereign, electing grace that all through life has brooded over us, long before it ever appeared likely that we'd be saved at all, is the grace that will be near at hand to bless and help when we are called to bear costly witness to Christ.

But more than God's power enabling us, we also have God's promise envisioning us. Verse 1, Paul talks about the promise of life that is in Jesus.

And then verse 10, he fills that out for us. That promise of life is the life and immortality that is brought to light through the gospel. Verse 9, it's a promise conceived before the ages began, sheer grace that saves and calls, now manifested in the appearing of Jesus Christ our Savior.

And that's why this false teaching is so toxic. If normal gospel work means suffering and cost, then the promise of the life to come, immortal life, that's not a side issue.

That is the very means of perseverance. You see, Paul is chained, he's soon to die, going to be executed. So what could matter more than this? Verse 10, death has been abolished.

[35 : 30] The undying hope of the gospel is that there is life to come, imperishable, immortal life. But when Hymenaeus and Philetus spread a message that effectively drags the future into the present, that treats this life as the place for obvious glory, it robs gospel work of its nerve and its impetus.

Paul says, no, this is the gospel I declare. This is the faith you've been called into. It promises a life that is not here yet, a life that truly overcomes the worst that this world can throw at us.

Jesus the Savior abolishes death. That doesn't mean death is eliminated completely. Paul will still die, but death is defanged.

It's ultimate power removed. Listen to James Philip again. He says, death has been stripped of its authority as the king of terrors. It's been demoted, registed to the ranks, and is now, as has been said, no more than a porter at the gates of eternal life, made to usher God's people into the glory of his presence.

To put it another way, death, that once dark and terrible prison of mankind has now itself been put in prison, unable to do any further harm to men.

[36 : 48] That's how Paul can suffer as he does, verse 12. He's not ashamed because he knows this Jesus, and he has confidence that what has been entrusted to him, God will keep until that day when he experiences that full, everlasting, eternal life.

And so, friends, amidst the temptations that face us, whether in teaching the Bible and leading the Lord's people, our personal witness among friends and colleagues, our raising our children in the Lord, or whatever it is, God's power is at work to enable us, and his promise stands firm, drawing us on towards the day when we will taste it all.

So Paul says, follow the pattern of sound words, verse 13. He says, guard the good deposit, verse 14. And when it comes to the gospel, we don't guard it by hiding it.

We guard it by declaring it. By declaring the gospel that stretches out that promise of life to all who receive it. Well, finally, with all that said, we see verses 15 to 18, the discouragements and delights of ministry.

The discouragements and delights of ministry. Relationships in ministry reveal where ultimate allegiance lies, bringing either pain or pleasantness.

[38 : 15] Do not be ashamed, says Paul. Follow the pattern of sound words you had from me. Guard the good deposit. You might think those are words no gospel worker should ever need to hear.

And yet, look at what is happening around Paul. Verse 15. All who are in Asia turned away from me, including Phagellus and Homogenes, names Timothy would likely recognize.

Paul is speaking of people who at one time stood with him, fellow laborers, those who shared in the work, and yet they've turned away. It's a living illustration of what shame looks like.

It's so discouraging, isn't it? When we think of people we've served with, perhaps on CU committees or in church ministries, perhaps even those we've trained with or helped to train, who now edge away, ashamed of the gospel, perhaps ashamed of being associated with you.

Well, notice here, the shame that's present in these men is shame directed particularly toward Paul.

[39 : 25] Do you see the thread? Verse 13. Follow the pattern of sound words you have heard from me. Verse 15. All in Asia turned away from me.

Verse 16. Onesiphorus was not ashamed of my genes. I take it that as Paul is preparing Timothy for the post-apostolic age. Something key to that transition and for the future of the church is loyalty to Paul.

Not being ashamed of him in particular. Not because Paul is Paul, but because Paul is Christ's apostle. And to be ashamed of the apostle, the apostle in chains, is in the end to be ashamed of the gospel he carries.

Back in 1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 3, Paul tells Timothy to remain in Ephesus. But now in 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 9 he says, Come to me.

What has changed? I take it that now more than ever amidst all of the grief in Ephesus, amidst all those who are ashamed of Paul's chains, and in light of the apostolic era coming to a close, I take it that it is more important than ever that Timothy is associated with Paul, loyal to him and publicly.

[40 : 45] And that is still true today, isn't it? Not in the sense that apostolic authority is vested in living persons. The apostles are gone. But apostolic authority is vested in their words, in the scriptures.

The apostolic gospel remains the barometer of whether a ministry, a church, a pastor, a person is genuinely Christian. And it's still the case that Paul is often the hardest for people to stomach.

His clarity on the things that chide our world is deeply unpopular. If we find ourselves squirming at Paul's words, we won't be the first. But Paul says, Follow the pattern of sound words you have heard from me in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

And so relationships, loyalty, still matters. And so we do have to ask ourselves the question, when we want to edge away from certain preachers, perhaps in our own circles, maybe in our presbytery, maybe even our own ministers, when we want to distance ourselves from costly decisions, from clear teaching, from public stands, is that simply prudence?

Or could it be shame? Could it be fear? Is it that the gospel is hitting a cultural nerve and suffering has come a little closer to our door?

[42 : 17] Of course, no minister is infallible. I know that all too well. But the question is still worth asking. Is our impulse to disown, to distance, to go quiet, actually what Paul has been addressing all along?

Would he be saying to us, verse 7, God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control? Would he be saying, verse 8, share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God?

Remember how Jesus speaks. He says, whoever is ashamed of me and my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory. But he also says, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge.

You can almost picture the tears that would be rolling down Paul's face as he thinks of those who once stood with him but are now ashamed. Love is hard. Relationships in ministry bring pain and heartbreak, but they also bring delight.

Look at verses 16 to 18. Onesiphorus was not ashamed. He refreshed Paul again and again. Oh, to be an Onesiphorus, a refresher, an encourager, a loyal friend.

[43 : 37] Well, here's why I think we can do that today. Not blindly, but as our leaders lead by the word. I think we do so by heeding the writer to Hebrews who says, obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account.

Let them do this with joy and not with groaning for that would be of no advantage to you. What does that look like? It looks like pressing on in the Christian life, responding to the Lord's word Sunday by Sunday.

It looks like making wise and righteous decisions about our families, about our work, about our lives. And it looks like persevering in service. Being loyal to the gospel, particularly when it's costly to you.

And being loyal to genuine gospel servants, particularly when they're under fire for gospel faithfulness. That's the ministry of Onesiphorus. Friends, normal gospel work is hard.

It's costly. And we all in our various ways have a stake in it. But, Paul assures us that it is empowered by God himself.

[44 : 55] It's rooted in eternity past. And it promises life everlasting. Normal gospel work is hard. But it's laden with an unbreakable hope.

So Paul says, press on. Press on. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we read these words.

And we say, who is fit for such a task? We're so conscious of our need and our lack. When we see our calling, our commission, we look at this world and all it is is sealed against us.

And we could beat our breasts and say, we are not worthy. that we bring ourselves to you in faith. And we ask that you would grant us all the grace we need so that we would avail ourselves of your power.

And we ask that you'd be pleased to use our church to bring many to eternal, unbreakable life. Help us that we would never allow anything to become a greater prize to us than the very life we proclaim.

[46 : 11] grant us still, we pray, for we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Thank you.