

Bound Together

Jonathan K. Dodson | 2 Timothy 1:1-7 | January 2, 2021

This is St. Paul's final letter. He's been tried, imprisoned, and awaits execution in Rome. Many of his companions have left him. Demas abandoned him for the love of the world, others for various reasons. So he writes a letter from what many think is the Mamertine prison, an underground chamber with a single hole for light and air. He's isolated, lonely, and longing for help. As Stage 5 Restrictions clamp down, hospital beds fill up, cultural division rages, where will we look for help? Paul looks to the church: To my beloved child, *I long to see you* that I may be filled with joy; Onesimus often refreshed me; bring Mark with you. Paul looks *to the church* for joy. He leans into the *eternal* ties that bind for help. God wants to give us strength and joy *through the church*, bound together in divisive times. How? *People, Prayers, Power*

People

God has called every single of us to minister to *people*. Now while Paul is often recognized for his intellect, faith, and church planting, all of that is in *the service of people*. He mentions people *by name* 36 times in these four chapters; the same number of names found Romans, a letter five times the length. Timothy, Lois, Eunice, Pudens, Linus, Claudia. Names, struggles, virtues. Some he is in anguish over; others bring him joy, but *all of them* matter. Paul thinks beyond himself. Even his prayers are filled with people. He begins by thanking God but quickly recalls those who went before him, *I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors*. In prayer he recalls *Timothy* and the important role his *mother* and *grandmother* had in passing on the faith. Mothers, your calling is tremendous not just in raising kids but in passing along the faith. A faith that *dwells* in them. It isn't indoctrination, a kind of cold, combative, cultural Christianity like we're seeing on our screens; it's a regenerative, warm, lively Christianity. Christ has *noticeably* moved into the lives of Lois, Eunice, and Timothy. And it's in that indwelling faith that we see why Paul's prioritizes people. People and the gospel are linked. In the gospel *Jesus Christ was manifested and appeared* (10). He did not extend salvation from heaven on the end of a stick, but came *in the flesh*. What does that say about how *God* views people? He values us so deeply he became one of us, and that in turn should affect the way *we* see people, *treat* people, *respond* to people online or in person.

See, it's not just that Paul values people; it's that Christ values people; he values *you*, deeply, so deeply he's willing to tell us, *show us on a cross, that we're dead and in need of his life* (1). This faith got into Lois, Eunice, Paul and Timothy. The gospel lived in them so vibrantly they passed it on to people. It yielded, as Paul says in v. 2, spiritual children. How about you? Is the faith so dwelling in you it puts you in *the service of others*? Is the gospel so alive it produces spiritual children/relationships? How do we do that, especially when contact is limited? **Words:** Paul says, *I long to see you*. The word *long* means "to have a strong desire for something, *with implication of need.*" Paul longs for, needs, Timothy. Paul! Church, you need one another, and you need to hear that from one another. Over the years men I've invested in have said to me, I never heard my father say, I love you. Not once. *Grown men* longing for affectionate words. Now your biological family might not have done this, but you're part of a new spiritual family, and have a new capacity to serve others with your words. So you can say affectionate things because Christ has been affectionate toward you. Be specific, sincere. Send texts, cards, emails, say it aloud. As a pastor, I have the privilege of being intimately involved in births and deaths. And in funerals people will get up and say such moving, affectionate things about their deceased ones. Inevitably someone will come up to me and say, I had no idea they *felt* that way. Don't wait til death. Don't be stingy with your affection. Outdo one another in brotherly love. Serve one another with *your words*. Paul also remembered Timothy's **tears**. It wasn't all rainbows and sunshine. He got close enough to Timothy to be on the inside of his sorrow. To see a tear trickle down his cheek. Peter Craig has seen me cry, and it's not because I'm a baby. It's because he's invested in me, because he swung by the house to check on me in a painful time. He knows my tears. Serving people in tears will lead you into uncomfortable, painful places. And it is there that we are *tightly bound together*. So don't pull away from tears. Whose tears will you remember at the end of this year? Who will receive that extra text, spontaneous phone call, a drop in visit to share words and tears through masks six feet apart? *Live in the service of people because the faith lives in you.*

Prayer

A second way we're *bound together* is through prayer. Paul transcends separation by countries, chains, and prison gates by praying *constantly*, "*I remember you constantly in my*

prayers night and day.” Now, you might think Paul didn’t have much else to do in prison. But doesn’t that make his constant prayer *for others* more noteworthy? When you suffer, when you’re lonely, do your thoughts go to others or yourself? Your prayers? But here is Paul, only a hole for light and air, and he’s interceding *for others*. An example not only of serving people but praying for people. One commentator notes, *His whole waking being was in a spirit of intercession* (Chapell). Praying like that is difficult, and a reason for that was predicted in Wired magazine twenty years ago when Michael Goldhaber said one day the internet would drown us in information, making attention so scarce it would form an “attention economy.” He further predicted that when this economy matured its “increasing demand for our limited attention would keep us from *reflecting, or thinking deeply...*” When you get in your car, what is one of the first things you do? Check your phone. When you get on the road, what do you do? Dial in a podcast or artist. When you’re waiting in line? Check Instagram. When you go to bed—reflect, pray, or doomscroll? There’s a war for our attention. Who and what fills the latent moments of your life? In-between spaces. Will you say no to passive consumption and yes to active intercession? To be a waking, praying being? How? Create space and listen. Notice when Paul remembers Timothy in prison, he turns his memory into a prayer. When someone pops into your mind in the in-between spaces, pray for them. Don’t dead-end in nostalgia or despair. *Follow your memories into prayers*. When you’re longing for community, pray for people in your community. When you think I sure miss so and so, pause to pray for them, send them a text. Cultivate this habit and you’ll find yourself praying constantly. You may even like Martin Luther turn *images into intercessions*. Lord, as I move this box move our church to love you. As I clean these dishes, cleanse my heart of sinful attention to myself. *Turn images into intercessions. Follow memories into prayers*. May it be said of us as it was said of Paul, his whole waking being was in a spirit of intercession.

Power

How can we be bound together in difficult and divisive times? Through words, tears, and prayers. But what if we struggle to live in the service of others? To give words, enter tears, say prayers? What if your faith isn’t dwelling so vibrantly you’re investing in others? Well, Timothy also struggled so Paul told him [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 (6-7). For this reason. What reason? Look back at the end of 5: Paul knew the faith indwelt Timothy. Even though he was fearful and timid, Paul knew that wasn't his true self. He knew the true Timothy, the new life-from-death Tim, indwelt with the gospel. What's the Radiohead lyric? *Just because you feel it doesn't mean it's there.* Just because you feel afraid/indifferent doesn't mean that defines who you are. It just means you need to fan into flame your true self. So what exactly do we fan into flame? *The gift of God.* Could be spiritual gifts (administration, service, tongues) but I don't think that's what he's talking about here. He says the gift is "in you" not with you; it came with the laying on of hands. When Paul laid hands on people in Acts, the Holy Spirit indwelt them. Paul exhorts Timothy to fan into flame something fundamental to who he is—the Holy Spirit. The Spirit-indwelt Timothy, which is why he says for God gave us a "[S]pirit" not of fear but of power, love, and self-control. Will you *be your new self, your Spirit-self, the person who indwelt with immense power, love, and discipline—to serve people.* You ever see someone putting along at 60 in a sportscar and think, Man they should be gunning that thing. It's designed, outfitted for more, indwelt with power, and they're just plodding along. Church, you have the Spirit of God under the hood. You're designed to love, to serve one another with words, in tears, and prayers. You just need to punch it. Step on the pedal *with conviction.* You're designed for this. *City Life let's live in the service of one another because the Spirit of God lives in us.*