

The Books of 1 and 2 Timothy

Lesson 8: Guard the Good Deposit -- 2 Timothy 1:1-18

Picture an old man in a cold cell, chained to a Roman guard, the light from a small window crawling slowly across the stone floor. He has been here before, but this time feels different. The friends who once crowded around him have thinned out. Some have run off to easier places. The trial ahead will not end with release. And yet, with a pen in his cuffed hand, the first thing the old man writes is not a complaint but a tender word to a young friend far away: "To Timothy, my beloved child." This is Paul, near the end, writing the last letter we have from him. And his heart is full, not of bitterness, but of love and of one great concern, that the gospel he has carried be carried on.

Paul remembers Timothy's tears, probably from their last goodbye, and he longs to see him again so he might be "filled with joy" (v. 4). He remembers Timothy's faith and traces it back through the generations, to a grandmother named Lois and a mother named Eunice, two women who quietly loved God and passed that love down into the heart of a boy. Faith, Paul knows, is not invented fresh in every generation. It is handed down, like a family treasure, from those who held it dearly to those who will hold it next. And now it is Timothy's turn to hold it, and to hand it on.

But Timothy is timid. He is gifted, ordained, loved, and afraid. So Paul reaches across the miles and says, in effect, stir the coals. "Fan into flame the gift of God" (v. 6). The fire is not gone; it has only settled into embers. And then comes one of the most quietly powerful sentences a frightened Christian can ever read: "God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (v. 7). The God who saved us did not hand us a spirit of timidity. He gave us courage, and a calling, and a gospel worth any chain.

So Paul charges his young friend to do the hardest and most important thing of all: to guard. "Guard the good deposit entrusted to you, by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us" (v. 14). There is a treasure that has been placed in Timothy's hands, the apostolic faith, the pattern of sound words, the saving message about Jesus, and Timothy is to keep it whole and pass it on undamaged. As we open this chapter, ask yourself what has been handed to you, who handed it, and whether you are guarding it well. The fire that warmed Lois and Eunice can still warm us, if we will fan it into flame.

Group Discussion: Paul traces Timothy's faith back to his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Who are the people who handed the faith down to you, and what did they do that made it real? How are you handing it on to someone else?

Personal Reflection: Paul tells the timid Timothy that God gave him "a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (v. 7). Where is fear quietly shrinking your obedience right now, and what would it look like to fan the gift of God back into flame this week?

Study Questions

1. Paul says God “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” (v. 9). What does this verse teach us about why and how God saves, and how does it hold grace and a holy life together?
2. Paul reminds the fearful Timothy that “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (v. 7). When you feel the pull of timidity in your faith, where does it usually show up, and what would courage look like there?
3. Paul says Christ Jesus “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (v. 10). What does it mean that Jesus has abolished death, and how does the gospel bring life and immortality “to light” for us now?
4. Paul is not ashamed of the gospel even in chains, and he urges Timothy not to be ashamed of “the testimony about our Lord” (v. 8). Where are you most tempted to be quietly ashamed of Christ, and what helps you stand unashamed?
5. Paul declares, “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” (v. 12). What is the difference between knowing about God and knowing the One you have believed, and what gave Paul such confidence facing death?
6. Paul recalls Timothy’s “sincere faith,” the same faith that lived first in Lois and Eunice (v. 5). What part of your faith did you receive from others, and what are you doing now to keep it sincere rather than secondhand?
7. Paul tells Timothy to “follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (v. 13). What is this “pattern of sound words,” and why does Paul speak of the faith as something with a fixed shape to be followed?
8. Onesiphorus “often refreshed” Paul and “was not ashamed of my chains” (v. 16), while Phygelus and Hermogenes turned away. Whose presence has refreshed you in a hard season, and whom could you refresh by showing up unashamed?
9. Twice Paul speaks of guarding: he is convinced God can guard what was entrusted to him (v. 12), and he charges Timothy to “guard the good deposit entrusted to you, by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us” (v. 14). What is the “good deposit,” how do God’s guarding and ours work together, and why does this rule out any notion of improving on or adding to the faith?
10. Look back across this whole chapter, from the faith of Lois and Eunice to the grace that saved us, to the deposit we must guard. Name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to form you, and one concrete step you will take because of it.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 2 Timothy 1:13-14, the pattern of sound words to be guarded; Ephesians 2:8-10, saved by grace through faith for good works; Titus 3:4-7, saved not by works but by His mercy; Jude 3, the faith once for all delivered to the saints; Acts 16:1-3, Timothy's faith and heritage.