

## Regaining Our Confidence (2 Timothy 1:1-7)

I've got a little quiz for you this morning. How's your confidence? Do you feel more confident in Christ and in His plan for your life today than you did a year ago? Have you become more encouraged or discouraged over the past 12 months? Are you excited about what Christ has for you in the future and pressing forward or are you coasting and settling for less than you know you could have? Are you engaging with the culture for Christ or escaping from the culture? Do you find yourself becoming bolder as you grow older or are you becoming more timid and self-protective? Are you excited and fired up about your relationship with Jesus or bored and looking elsewhere for excitement? Our walk with Jesus is never static. We're always either advancing or retreating. So how is your confidence in Christ today? This morning we begin an 8 week series in Paul's second letter to Timothy and I want to talk about regaining our confidence in Christ once we've lost it. Paul's second letter to Timothy is the last letter he wrote before he was executed by Nero in 67 AD. He writes from prison but unlike the other prison epistles like Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon which Paul wrote while he was under house arrest, he writes this letter from a Roman dungeon as he awaits execution; and Paul writes to his son in the faith, Timothy, who is now the pastor of the church in Ephesus urging him to come to Rome for one final visit. The contrast between Paul and Timothy is striking in this letter. Paul has been abandoned by his closest friends and faces certain death at the hands of an insane Caesar who intends to exterminate every Christian from the empire and yet Paul is joyful and full of confidence; while Timothy lives in his own prison of fear. So Paul's letter to his disciple is more than a letter of comfort and encouragement. 2 Timothy is William Wallace in *Braveheart* exhorting his rag tag troops as they face a much larger and well-equipped English army, "They make take our lives but they will never take our freedom!" 2 Timothy is the halftime speech of a coach whose team is down by three touchdowns, "Gentlemen, I don't care what the score is. You can do this if you have the will to do it." 2 Timothy is about strength, courage and honor in the face of overwhelming opposition; which is why we entitled this series, "Be Strong" taken from 2 Timothy 2:1. And it is written especially to those who like Timothy are leaders and responsible for the welfare of others. Chapter one is about a leader's confidence because no one can lead without confidence. Chapter two is about a leader's character because a leader's character determines a leader's behavior. Chapter three is about a leader's convictions because what a leader believes determines his character. And chapter four is about a leader's charge and what Timothy needs to do now in the situation he finds himself.

Now while all Scripture is profitable, there are at least three similarities between Timothy's situation and our situation as North American Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which make this letter especially relevant for us today. First, we both live in an intimidating time for believers. Up to this point in the first century the church has suffered some local persecution but the Roman government has left the Christians alone, following an official policy of neutrality toward all religions in order to preserve peace in the Empire. But Nero institutes the first government persecution of believers, blaming them for the burning of Rome which he most likely was responsible for himself and killing and torturing every Christian he can find. It's no longer just unpopular to be a follower of Jesus, it is deadly. The temptation for believers if not to renounce their faith is to keep their heads down and draw as little attention to themselves as possible. And while today, Christians in America are certainly not being persecuted, we have lost the respect and the popular support we once enjoyed; especially in places like the Bay Area where if people know you are a believer, you are automatically considered to be a homophobic, superstitious reactionary who wants to use the power of law to force people back into the Middle Ages. In my lifetime, I have never seen a time when Christians were more intimidated by the culture and tempted to keep their faith to themselves than today. 2 Timothy is written to intimidated Christians and it is written to confused Christians. The gospel has been spreading through the Empire for over 30 years and as throughout history, wherever the truth has gone, counterfeits of the truth are sure to follow; so now there are not only attacks coming from outside the church but from the inside. Timothy faces people turning away from the Scriptures and the gospel to follow new teachings and distortions of the truth. The same is true today; Christians have not been as biblically illiterate as we are today

in my lifetime and many Christians are tolerating if not blindly accepting all kinds of harmful errors today because we live in a relativistic culture where how you feel about something is more important than whether something is objectively true. We live in an intimidating and confusing time and we also – like Timothy – live in a time of transition. This is Paul's final letter. His race has been run. The age of the apostles is coming to an end and a new generation of Christian leaders is needed to carry on the mission. Likewise we live in a time of transition as the Baby Boomers pass the baton of leadership to the Gen-Xers and Millennials. As you know, I will be stepping down as senior pastor at the end of next year and my son Jeff will be taking my place and I am so grateful for Jeff and for all the younger leaders I see emerging at Creekside. 2 Timothy is about passing the baton of leadership to the next generation of leaders and I believe it will be very helpful to us.

So Paul's second letter to Timothy deals primarily with the church's need for strong leadership in the dark days of the first century and chapter one is about a leader's confidence because no one can lead without confidence. No matter how smart or charming or eloquent a man or woman is, they cannot lead effectively without confidence. Alexander the Great said, "I am not afraid of an army of lions led by a sheep. I am afraid of an army of sheep led by a lion." I have seen more leaders fail because of a lack of confidence than because of anything else. A leader must make decisions; and if a leader isn't confident in those decisions, nobody else will be. Courage and confidence are contagious; but so are fear and uncertainty. Have you parents noticed how your children's reactions usually mirror your own? If you panic, they panic. If you stay calm, they stay calm. One thing I tell our leaders is "Don't spook the flock." A shepherd has to be careful not to make sudden or unexpected moves because he can easily cause a stampede. Sheep are timid and if the shepherd is scared, the sheep will be terrified. If the shepherd is confused, the sheep will be paralyzed. Confidence is essential in leadership because a leader's confidence and courage makes other people courageous and confident. But chapter one of 2 Timothy makes it clear that Timothy has lost his confidence. He's intimidated by his culture, ashamed of the gospel, embarrassed that Paul is imprisoned like a common criminal and worried about what will happen to him. So Paul's first task Paul is to restore Timothy's confidence in Christ, in the gospel and in the mission God has assigned him and to reignite Timothy's faith and passion for Christ. We will all be where Timothy is from time to time and this morning I want to focus on verses 6-7 and how to restore our confidence in Christ. *"And for this reason, I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and love and discipline."* (2 Tim. 1:6-7) These verses summarize Paul's purpose in writing to Timothy. Timothy is weary and discouraged, Paul is about to be executed and throughout the Roman Empire Christians are not only despised and hated everywhere but are now targeted for extinction by Rome. And besides all that, there are so many false believers in the church causing division and conflicts and bringing all kinds of destructive heresies into the body. Timothy wants to retreat into quiet obscurity at the time the church most needs him to lead. So Paul writes to rekindle his faith and his commitment to the cause of Christ and so he reminds Timothy of three things; what he already has, how to use it and why to use it.

Every Christian discovers that the fire of their faith will burn low at times. The excitement we had as a new believer never lasts because life has a way of pouring cold water on our faith. The constant pressure from the culture, this body and the devil who opposes us never lessens and every day there is a fight to be fought. Every day is game day. There are no vacations. We all get tired and discouraged, and everybody wants to quit. So what do we do – escape, hide out, or engage? The first thing Paul reminds Timothy about is that he already has everything he needs. The fire is still there; it's just burned low. That's why Paul says, *"And for this reason, I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands."* Let's focus our attention on those first four words: and for what reason? Let's read vs. 3-5 to get the context of vs. 6. *"I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, (Paul has no trouble sleeping at night, even though he is in chains and surrounded by the worst criminals in the Roman Empire because he knows he is right with God. His conscience is clear. He knows he is pleasing God even if nobody else in the world can see it) as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy. (Paul was like a father to Timothy who became the son Paul never had. They loved each other and being separated has been very difficult for both, especially now that they both know that Paul is about to leave this earth.) For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother*

*Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well. For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.*" (2 Tim. 1:3-6) Paul knows that Timothy's faith is real just as it was real in the life of Timothy's grandmother and mother. The fire still burns in Timothy; it just needs to be stoked and so Paul reminds him that he isn't the first to believe in Jesus; that he comes from a family of faith and is connected to past generations of people who trusted Jesus. Timothy's grandmother and his mother went through the same things he is going through and their faith brought them through just as it will bring Timothy through. They had to believe in what they couldn't see, trust in God's promises and believe that God is a rewarder of those who seek Him diligently; and Paul sees their faith in Timothy. You know, when life gets hard it's easy to imagine that we're unique; and nobody has gone through what we go through. But of course, that just isn't true. We're not unique. Paul writes, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man." My trials are not special. My challenges are not extraordinary. I face the same things that my forefathers faced and just as God was faithful to them He will be faithful to me. Seeing my connection to those who have gone before; and knowing that I am praying the same prayers to the same God as they prayed and facing the same temptations and doubts they faced and have been promised the same grace and rewards they were promised strengthens me to keep running the race as they did. I hate distance swimming. I much prefer short, intense sprints and then resting on the wall until I recover, and so I dread those workouts we have to swim anything more than 200 yards at a time before resting because the longer the swim, the longer the pain. But here's how I've learned to endure those swims. I remind myself that everybody in my lane is hurting and if they can do it, so can I. I think that's what Paul is doing here with Timothy. "You can do this Timothy. Your mom and your grandmother did it and so can you," because Timothy has the same sincere faith they had.

So Paul writes, *"And for this reason, I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands."* (vs. 6) Timothy already has everything he needs to do what God has given him. He just needs to get his fire back. So what is "the gift of God" Paul refers to and how is it in Timothy "through the laying on of my hands?" And why does it need to be kindled afresh? The gift of God is the spiritual gift the Spirit has given Timothy for the ministry God has assigned to him which is probably the gift of teaching. Paul says in 1 Cor. 12 that the Spirit of God gives every Christian a gift or gifts; a unique way the Spirit uses that Christian for God's purpose. Christians debate about whether we automatically receive those gifts when the Spirit comes into our lives when we're born again or whether we receive that gift when we need it but Paul indicates that Timothy received this gift when Paul commissioned him to ministry. Look at 1 Tim 4:14. *"Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery."* 2 Timothy isn't the first time Paul had to encourage Timothy to use the gift God has given to him and we're going to look at this passage in 1 Timothy more in a moment. What I want you to see now is that Timothy received this spiritual gift when Paul and the other church elders – called the presbytery – laid their hands on Timothy and prayed and prophesied over him; which means that when Timothy was called into ministry, the elders spoke words about God's will for Timothy as His Spirit prompted them. The point here is that Timothy already has everything he needs for the task ahead of him. That's the good news of the gospel. The New Testament never says, "Do this so that you can become this." It says, "You are this by God's grace in Christ – just live like it now. You've already received everything you need. Just use it," which brings us to our second step in regaining our confidence; how to use what God has given to us.

What does Paul mean by kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you? If the gift Timothy received is from the Spirit of God and God never gets tired, why does this gift need to be fanned into flame? God doesn't become weary or distracted or lose His enthusiasm but we do and because ministry is a voluntary partnership between God and I, my weariness and discouragement will directly affect God's work through me. If you have walked with Jesus, you know how your experience of His power ebbs and flows. There are times we feel close to Him and times we feel far away. There are times we're focused and times we're distracted; never because of God but because of us. That's why Paul tells the church in Thessalonica to not quench the Spirit in 1 Thess. 5:17. We can fan the flame of God's presence and power in us or we can pour cold water on it. So how do I kindle afresh the gift of God which is in me? How do I regain my confidence and courage? How do I get my spiritual groove back? Paul assumes that

Timothy already knows how to kindle afresh God's gift in him because Paul told him how back in 1 Tim. 4:14-16. Neglecting the gift God had entrusted to him was a problem Timothy had for some time and one which Paul addressed in his first letter to his friend. *"Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you."* (1 Tim. 4:14-16) I once went snow camping with a group of guys I worked with. Our boss thought it would be a great bonding experience for us and so in the dead of winter, we pack-backed into the high Sierras. Our guide provided us with snowshoes, a map, and then promptly disappeared. We were on our own. We started hiking late in the afternoon and so we hiked well into the night before we reached base camp which was just a little clearing in the woods; and by this time, all of us city boys were miserable. We were tired and cold, our feet were wet and our stomachs were empty and we were all wondering how do we camp in the snow? It turns out that you camp in the snow the same way as you camp on the ground. It's just colder and wetter. Building a fire became a high priority and it turned out to be more of a challenge than we expected because all the available wood was wet and frozen. However, once we had a fire, it was amazing how quickly everybody's spirits rose. "We're saved. We're not going to freeze to death. Bring out the s'mores!" So we're huddled around this roaring fire in the middle of nowhere, feeling a lot better and beginning to doze off but we had forgotten one thing. A camp fire isn't like the heater in your home you can turn on and forget. A camp fire goes out if we don't pay attention to it. Our fire started to burn low and we had neglected to gather more wood so we either had to get up and move our stiff, sore bodies to look for more fuel – or climb into our sleeping bags and go to sleep. We chose the sleeping bags and our fire was soon out. We can't expect a camp fire to keep burning if we neglect it nor can we expect our spiritual life to keep burning if we neglect it. How do I kindle the gift of God which is in me? Pay attention to it. Keep adding fuel. Fan the flame of your relationship with Jesus. Work on it. Become absorbed in the things of God.

There are two important lessons in this passage: verse 6 tells us that passion is the result of focused preparation; and verse 7 tells us that confidence is the result of passion. The more focused I become, the more passionate I will become and the more passionate I become, the more confident I will become. First, according to verse 6 and 1 Timothy 4:11-16, the more focused I am, the more passionate I will become. Paul says that I kindle afresh the gift of God which is in me by not neglecting the development of that gift or of my own walk with Christ but by paying attention and becoming absorbed in the things of God. What I think about most of the time will determine what I am most passionate about. If I can name all the ESPN hosts; if I know the statistics of every player in Major League Baseball, the likely draft position of every NFL team in the post season; and which high school football players the Cal Bears are currently recruiting and I can't start the day without reading all of my sports blogs, I will be on fire for sports. If I spend most of my time playing video games, I will be on fire for video games. If I'm constantly watching the stock market and reading the latest investment advice, I will be on fire for investments - or decorating or politics or entertainment. Every flame must be given attention to keep it burning bright and that is true of our relationship with God. We wonder, "Why don't I have a greater heart for God? Why aren't I more excited about the things of God? What happened to the fire I used to have?" The answer is simple. What we focus on and become absorbed in determines what we are passionate about; and that means that passion is as much about what I inhibit as what I embrace – because focus is the result of both what I say yes to AND what I say no to. Have you notice that there are days we love our job and there are days when we hate it; days when the hours fly by and days that seem like they will never end? What makes the difference? I find it is usually an issue of focus. When I'm absorbed in my tasks – regardless of whether the tasks themselves are enjoyable – it's a good day and time flies. But on the days when I'm distracted – when I keep checking my email or can't decide what to do next or waste time worrying about what might happen or grumble about what somebody said or didn't say or aimlessly flit from one thing to another and call it multi-tasking without getting the thing that needs to be done finished, those are the days when retirement looks attractive. Procrastination, anxiety, laziness, anger, our appetite – all quench our fire because they distract us from what we're supposed to be doing. Every minute of our brief life will either be dead time or alive time. Dead time is when we're really just killing time because we're passive and unfocused. Alive time is when we live all out for the purpose God has assigned to us and this is what leads to passion. That's why Paul tells Timothy, "Be absorbed in these things so that your progress may be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching for as you do this you will ensure salvation for yourself and for those who hear you." What I pay the most attention to, I will become the most passionate about. The Lord has been

talking to me for a long time about how I spend the evenings I'm not working and how much dead time I spend watching sports or surfing the net and how it kills my momentum and quenches my fire. So recently I've begun spending time reading the Bible and praying in the evening as well as in the morning; and not surprisingly, the fire in me is growing again and I sense the momentum of the previous day extending into the next. I feel closer to the Lord and more in touch with His thoughts and intentions for my life and I find myself far more confident in Him and in what He will do through me – which brings us to verse 7. Vs. 6 tells us that fire and passion are the result of focused preparation. Verse 7 tells us that confidence is the result of that passion.

Remember the reason Paul wants Timothy to rekindle the gift of God within him. Timothy's scared and discouraged. He has lost his confidence. That's why Paul tells him that confidence will be the result of rekindling his relationship with God and what God has called him to do. *"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity but of power, love and self-discipline."* Timothy will find the courage, the power, the love and the self-control he needs as he becomes absorbed in the things of God. God has already put the fire in Timothy; Timothy just needs to feed it and the more he feeds that fire, the more he will discover that God has given him everything he needs to live the life God has assigned to him to live. This is the same lesson we learned in John 15. Only Jesus can live the Christian life and the more we connect with Him, the more confident we become as we see Him working through us. I don't possess the power or the love or the self-control I need but He does; and so the more I connect with Him, the more I will see His power, love and self-discipline manifested through me. Our swim team just went through a brief but pretty emotional conflict between our board and some of the members of the team. Emails and phone calls were fast and furious and there were some tense locker room conversations – and since I am a member of the board, I was reminded again that I am by nature a somewhat timid man who often chooses to do whatever will avoid conflict and pacify contention rather than what is right. In fact, initially – as much as I love swimming, I was ready to walk away from the team because I was getting flack for a conflict I had not created and had tried to avoid and I didn't need the drama. But I knew that Christ had put me on the team to represent Him and that I needed to figure out if I could be a peacemaker and bring some good out of the situation – which only Jesus is capable of doing. So I went to Jesus with the situation, putting myself as His disposal and asked God for the wisdom and boldness to do what is right in His sight rather than to simply try to pacify contention; for the ability to act with Christ's love, and for the self-control to keep my head, stay calm and not to react in our deliberations but to act confidently and boldly and to a steady, positive force as our board met. And I discovered that just like Paul says, God is the source of power, love and discipline as He guided me in making a few suggestions which surprisingly most of the board agreed to and which seemed to resolve the issue. My natural tendency in that situation would have been to keep my head down and to look out for my own interests but when I hung on to Jesus, He gave me the ability to do what I would not have normally done. That means we don't have leadership problems or parenting problems or marriage problems or work problems or character problems. We only have discipleship problems because Jesus is the solution to all my problems and my job is to stay connected to Him. The more I'm absorbed in the things of God and the fire within me is burning bright, the bolder and more confident I become. How do you regain my confidence? Where do you find the courage and the strength to act? Feed the flame of your relationship with Jesus. Fuel the fire. Because He provides what we cannot and that is the heart of the good news of the gospel. Religion is always spelled "Do" because every religion is about what we must do to reconcile ourselves with God; rules we must keep, rituals we must practice, meetings we must attend. Religion is spelled "Do" but Christianity is spelled "Done" because Christ has done for us what we could not do for ourselves to reconcile us to God. He lived the life we failed to live and God credits His perfect record to all who put their faith in Him. He died the death we deserved to die and God pardons all who trust in His death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. And He rose from the dead so that all who trust Him as their Savior and Lord can live forever with Him. That's why Romans 10:9 says, "If we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, we will be saved."