

3Rs: Renewal * 2 Timothy 1
October 2, 2022 * Langford Church * Graham Gladstone

A few years back, Jeff Balfour shared with me an illustration that Don Wonnacott used to use. He said: “The church is like the coals that make up a campfire on a calm, summer’s night. When the coals are gathered together, they burn brightly and light a light for all to see. When they are scattered though, the embers fade and unless they come back together, they’ll go out.”

That’s a very fitting illustration for us to begin with because last week, we talked about the importance of gathering together. One coal by itself risks flickering out but if we keep gathering together, then we can keep the fire going and fill the world with heat and light.

That was last week; this week, we’re going to extend the metaphor a little and talk about the importance of keeping our own personal flame going. Just like you need to keep stoking a fire, we need to keep renewing our faith.

That’s the third of our three R’s – renewal. And that’s probably something we all need. Over the course of the pandemic, with so much uncertainty and so much to do, we’ve probably let our faith dwindle a little. We’ve let our faith cool a little. So as we begin a new ministry year here at Langford, we need to talk about renewal – fanning our faith into flame.

And to do that, I’d like to take you to a passage of Scripture that’s very near and dear to my heart. That’s 2 Timothy 1:6-10. 2 Timothy 1:6-10 is the passage I preached on the very first time I was invited to preach in my hometown, and immediately before it is the passage that always make me think about my mom and grandma – remember Lois and Eunice? They appear just before this passage.

Let’s pick it up with them and then see what the rest of the passage tells us about renewing our faith.

So, 2 Timothy 1; oh, I should probably say: 2 Timothy is the second letter that Paul wrote to Timothy. Paul was a mentor to Timothy, a bit like Doug Martin is to me, and so this is a committed mentor writing to a beloved student. And he says:

3 I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.

4 Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy.

5 I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

Ok, that much we talked about this past Mother’s Day; Timothy is the third of three generations of people who loved the Lord – Lois and then Eunice and then Timothy. Paul gives a shout out for this spiritual legacy but he doesn’t want Timothy to simply coast on his family’s faith. And so he says:

6 For this reason [given that you have this spiritual legacy of faith] I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Now on one hand, the gift of God that Paul is talking about here is a spiritual gift of preaching and teaching. And given verse 7, it looks as though Timothy was a little reluctant to use it, a little shy about

sharing his gift. So Paul reminds him, we Christians are not church mice, cowering in the corner, we are spiritual giants, full of power and love and self-control through the Holy Spirit. So, Paul says, given that reality Timothy, fan your gift into flame.

Now that's exactly what that means in context, but on the other hand, there's another way we can look at this that makes it apply to all of us. Because what is the gift of God that all of us as believers have received? It's faith. Ephesians 2:8 – "8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." Faith itself, the capacity to turn from self to trust in God IS a gift from God. And so Paul says to each of us who have received that gift – fan that faith into flame.

Now you might be asking – 'how exactly do you do that?' – and I'll come back to that – but let's keep going to see what else Paul has to say before we make any application.

So, verses 6-7 – Fan your faith into flame because God has given us a spirit of power and love and self-control – and you're going to need it, because the Christian life can be challenging. Anybody who says following Jesus fixes all your problems needs to take a closer look at the Bible, because Paul was following Jesus, and he was in jail for it. Look at 8:

'8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.'

Shortly after I came to faith, I started playing the drums in the worship band for the Laurier Christian Fellowship's Church in the Concourse. It was this wide open worship service right in the middle of campus, right out in the open, and one of the things I had to come to terms with was that if I was to do this, I'd be outing myself as a Christian. Anybody could walk by and see that I was a believer.

I had a choice to make: am I going to be ashamed of God and hide away so that no one knows? Or am I willing to let others see that I am a follower of Jesus? It took me a while to get over it, but in the end, it was a no-brainer. God is too good to be ashamed of. Too good to deny, even if it leads to opposition; even if it leads to suffering, just like Paul was experiencing. God is too good to be ashamed of.

And Paul tells us just how good He is in the next verse. He says – v. 9 –

9 [God] ... has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,
10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2Ti 1:3-10 NIV).

That's one of my favourite passages in the whole of the Bible because it says two very important things.

First, God has saved us freely. Look at verse 9 – [God] ... has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.

I spent a lot of years thinking that I had to earn God's favour, that I had to prove my worth to God before God decided that I was good enough for Him. I thought I had to be sure that my good deeds outweighed the bad. And I'll tell you, it was exhausting. It was unbearable, never knowing if you'd pleased the sovereign judge of the universe.

Oh how I wish someone had told me about this verse. Because Paul says, in at least three ways, that I had gotten it wrong. That our culture had gotten God all wrong. That God was far more gracious than I could ever imagine.

I mean, just look at it. First: God has saved us – WHY? Not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. You can't get any clearer than that. God has loved us and embraced us not because of the good deeds we've done, but because He Himself is good. It was HIS purpose and HIS grace that motivated Him to rescue us from sin and give us life. There is no 'earning of favour' to be done here; God simply GAVE IT because of His mercy.

And second, WHEN did He choose to do that? Once He knew we'd do enough good deeds? Once we'd proven our worth to Him? No, v. 9 again, 'This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time...' Charles Stanley puts it like this: "The grace of God did not begin with us—it did not even start at the Cross. The Lord's plan for our salvation was established before He **ever** created the world."ⁱ Before you or I took a breath, before we could do anything, good or bad, God looked on us with love and said – 'I will save you and call you to a holy life' – before the world began.

And that right there is the key to the third way that Paul tells us that God has saved us freely – He saved us and called us *to* a holy life. Just think about the order of events there. Does it say we were holy and THEN God saved us? No, *before* we were holy people, God saved us, and then, having saved us, He said 'Now that you are my children, live a life that's consistent with my character.' He saved us, where we were and then called us *TO* a holy life. "It is the call of the believer to salvation, to membership of God's people, and then to live a distinctive life, set apart for God's service."ⁱⁱ

So in three different ways here, Paul tells us that God has saved us freely. As a gift, to be received by faith. God has saved us freely.

And not only that, God has saved us forever.

Let's pick it up in v. 9 – [God]... has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

God gave us grace before the beginning of time, but we didn't fully receive it until Jesus appeared. He came from Heaven to put God's saving plan into place, to die on the Cross, to forgive our sin, so that God could save us fully and freely.

But He didn't stay dead, did He? No. He rose again. He destroyed the power death had over us, meaning death is not the end for us but the beginning of a new and better life. Our natural bodies will be supernatural; our mortal bodies become immortal. God has saved us not just for this lifetime but forever.

God has saved us freely and forever.

Given that knowledge, what do you do? You fan your faith in Him into flame. You take the knowledge that God has loved you freely and saved you eternally and fan your faith in Him – your trust in Him, your love for Him - into flame.

How exactly do you do that? Well, let's think about it. How do you fan a campfire into flame?

First we need fuel. We need kindling, something for the flames to consume. I'd like to suggest that your Bible is the kindling. No don't rip out the pages and burn them. But what I mean is, every day, give your heart and mind something to chew on. Give your faith something to process. Spend time reading the Word and then spend the day reflecting on what it means. If you're only putting network news and social media feeds into your mind, that's not going to fan the flames, but if you give your faith Bible verses to reflect on, you'll have a fire in no time.

So fuel, kindling; we also need heat. Maybe your faith has grown cold and you need a spark. Let this passage speak to your heart. Do you know how much God cares for you? He didn't wait for you to live a holy life; in fact, He knew that you'd be so tied up in sin that you'd never get free. And so He decided to come and make things right Himself. He came to deliver YOU. To make YOU His beloved child. And not just now, but forever. Jesus has already demonstrated that God is greater than death and even death cannot separate you from God. He will raise you up on the last day to live forever. God's eternal love, freely given - let that ignite a fire in your heart for God.

We've got fuel, we've got heat; what else do we need? You know how at a campsite, you're down on your knees huffing and puffing on the fire? Or you've got an old piece of cardboard waving it back and forth? Why? You need oxygen right to get it going. You need air.

Two quick observations –

1. You're flapping the cardboard, you're blowing on the fire – you're putting in work. Same with faith. You gotta put in the effort. You gotta actively stoke the flames by investing time and thought into your relationship with God. Back in the 4th century, a guy who was such a good preacher they called him 'John Golden-Mouth' – John Chrysostom said:

“... it requires much zeal to stir up the gift of God. As fire requires fuel, so grace requires our [eagerness] ~~alacrity~~, that it may be ever fervent.... For it is in our power to kindle or extinguish this grace.... For by [laziness] ~~sloth~~ and carelessness it is quenched, and by watchfulness and diligence it is kept alive. For it is in you indeed, but you must [stir it up urgently] ~~render it more urgent vehement~~, that is, fill it with confidence, with joy and delight...ⁱⁱⁱ Put in the work.

So on one hand, fanning the flame takes effort from you, but on the other –

2. There's that air, there's that breath. And that's where God Himself comes to stoke our faith. The Holy Spirit is the air that rushes in to ignite the kindling and the spark to light a fire again in our hearts. So ask the Spirit to come and do that work; invite Him in and welcome Him, listen to Him, participate with Him when He comes.

God has saved us freely and forever, so fan your faith into flame.

If I were to ask you right now to describe your faith, what would you say? Is it a little pile of glowing embers, left over from a fire long ago? Is it like a little campfire, struggling against the rain? Is it a blazing bonfire, lighting up the sky for all to see?

Wherever you are, fan your faith into flame. Let it warm others who come into your life and give them light to light the way. And as we come together as the church, to fan our flames together, we'll be a brilliant light, each of us magnifying the other, for all the world to see.

ⁱ "The grace of God did not begin with us—it did not even start at the Cross. The Lord's plan for our salvation was established before He ever created the world" (Charles Stanley, *Life Principles Study Bible*, 2 Timothy 1:9).

ⁱⁱ It is the call of the believer to salvation, to membership of God's people, and then to live a distinctive life, set apart for God's service. For Timothy, that will mean especially accepting the call to be known as belonging to Jesus Christ and associated with his people, and it will require him to be willing to accept the shame and suffering that such association may bring. (Jonathan Griffiths, *Teaching the Bible: 2 Timothy*, 2 Timothy 1:8-18 'Working through the text,' OliveTree digital).

ⁱⁱⁱ John Chrysostom, 'Homilies on 2 Timothy,' *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 2 Timothy 1:6).