

Paul's Pattern of Ministry

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. It's a delight and a joy, honestly, to continue in the series together tonight.! As you know, we're in chapter 3, verses 10 to 17.

! And again, we're going to taste the richness of this letter from Paul, who's writing it from prison, fully knowing that his death is drawing near, and addressed to Timothy, who is like a son in Christ to him.

Now, Timothy, at this point, had been ministering to the church in Ephesus for around four years, and it's been nearly that long since he's received his first letter from Paul. Written from a damp, cold, and dark prison cell, this letter is one of encouragement.

Paul urges Timothy to stay strong in the face of trials and oppositions. He calls him to faithfully fulfill his ministry, to nourish believers, and pass on the unshaken gospel message, like a baton.

Because this message is so powerful, it's enough to bridge from generation to generation, regardless of circumstance. In hand with discipleship, training, preaching, and a costly ministry, the gospel baton will be passed. It will continue.

[1 : 13] Now, while this letter is especially helpful for those in church leadership or ministry, the call to discipleship and evangelism is going to apply to each of us tonight, every single Christian.

So today, here in this letter, God is speaking to you with relevance, and with a call to apply his teaching. And we've seen this relevance throughout the past few weeks of the series.

We've been on a rich journey in this letter. And so I'll quickly just stop, and I'll trace back the main points of our passage. So in chapter 1, 1-7, we saw that God equips people to pass on the baton. In verses 8-18, we saw how some accept this gospel ministry in hardship, while others flee from it. In 2, 1-17, we saw how patient, focused, and committed ministry passes the baton well, and it sees faith continue.

In 8-13, we were reminded that the gospel work often brings suffering, but also the salvation of the elect. In 14-26, we saw that those in Christ must seek righteousness and run from any faith-wrecking controversies.

[2 : 31] And in our last passage, in 2 Timothy 3, 1-9, we saw that real opponents will arise from within the church. People who, on the surface, appear godly and knowledgeable, but they deny God and love only themselves.

So we've really been on quite the journey. We've touched on evangelism in this series, discipleship, gospel training, and the cost of ministry. We've seen the call to righteousness, to patience, wholehearted dedication to ministry, even in suffering.

We've seen how this grueling mission, though tough, will show in the salvation of the elect. Because God carries it, it will not fail. And we're told to rely on Him and continue.

And so we press on tonight, in 2 Timothy 3, 10-17, where we see these same themes continuously blend. And we're going to go even deeper. Now, I'm sorry, I've made my whole sermon on the ESV translation, but they seem quite similar.

So hopefully that's going to be fine. So let's dive right in. We're in 2 Timothy 3, 10. If we remember, we're coming off a strong warning from the verses 1 to 9.

[3 : 42] And so we open today's passage with a clear pivot. You, however, have followed. Unlike those men who are corrupt and disqualified, Timothy, you have followed.

My teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, faith and patience and love and steadfastness. Well, Paul, what teaching?

What conduct? What aim in life? And how has Timothy followed these so closely? How did he know your conduct well enough to follow it in the first place?

What is going on here? Clearly, Paul and Timothy share a relationship we're not fully aware of. By contrasting Timothy against the men from verses 1 to 9, Paul highlights a visible, set-apart character.

He knows Timothy very personally. And so Paul has seen Timothy's obedience, but Timothy too has seen Paul's example and has followed. To understand this relationship and decipher the depth of the meaning in these words, we need to join Paul on his journey and see what's happened at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra.

[4 : 55] Why? Well, Timothy seems to be aware of what's happening. But we're not off the bat. They're suffering in verses 11 and throughout this text.

And so it's useful for us to, for a short while, go into Acts 13 so we can grasp the weight of today's passage once we return. So we're in Acts 13, 13 to 52, and we have quite the incident here. For the sake of time, I'll quickly overview this part before we read together about Iconium and Lystra. But it's useful to have it open so you can skim through as well. So at Antioch in Acts 13, 13, Paul and Barnabas enter the synagogue.

They read the law of prophets and prophets. And the synagogue rulers invite them to share a word of encouragement. And boy, do they take that opportunity. Because Paul stands up and before the whole congregation, he opens the scripture.

From Exodus forward, he continuously points to Jesus, his witness death and his resurrection and his return and call to repentance. He shows the people there how he is the Messiah.

[6 : 06] And he warns them strongly of denying this Jesus. After Paul finishes, some believe many, many are eager to hear more of this. And so in verse 43, on the next Sabbath, as he returns with Barnabas, nearly the whole city gathers around.

But jealousy stirs among the Jews and some begin contradicting and insulting Paul. But they boldly respond in verse 46.

And I read this because it's useful to see just how bold this proclamation is. Acts 13, 46. It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you.

Since you thrust it aside and judge yourself unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

The Gentiles rejoice. Many believe and glorify God. And the gospel quickly spreads. But again, because of this jealousy, the Jews incited devout women and men of high standing in the city to persecute the apostles and to force them out of the district.

[7 : 22] And famously, before leaving, Paul and Barnabas shake the dust off their feet as a sign of judgment and press on forwards to the Iconium. Now, there's a lot happening here. But centrally, there's a very bold evangelistic message.

Paul and Barnabas preach Jesus as the expected Messiah, the very Jesus that the Jews crucified. And this is in the middle of the synagogue. Bravely, they do this and they see fruition.

God works in their bravery, while simultaneously opposition and persecution brew. And these happen in parallel. Remember this persecution.

For us reading it, this is a brief phrase, but it carries a real, costly, and felt price. The gospel ministry in Antioch had a cost, and Paul wants Timothy to remember this.

And so Paul continues forwards. And we're brought to Iconium, where Paul and Barnabas follow their usual pattern, pressing on with a bold gospel declaration. So let's read together in Acts 14, 1 to 7.

[8 : 28] At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went, as usual, into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed.

But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.

The people of the city were divided. Some sided with the Jews, while others with the apostles.

There was a plot of foot among them, among the Gentiles and the Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them.

But they found out about it and fled to the Iconian cities of Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the gospel. I love how the NIV puts it.

Paul and Barnabas went, as usual, into the Jewish synagogue. It really is quite the strategy, isn't it? Go again into the next city and tell the Jews that they killed God incarnate, knowing that in the previous synagogue there was strong persecution.

[9 : 36] Yet what do we see? God continues to work for their bold faith. If the city divides, some believe, others reject. But this pattern continues also. And again, persecution is knocking at the door.

And clearly their evangelistic strategy doesn't change at all in the face of it. They don't change the message or soften it. They press on preaching boldly. And now they move onwards to Lystra. Here we're skimming through Acts 14, 8 to 23, where Paul again is preaching, and before him lies a crippled man from birth, unable to walk but listening. And Paul sees him, tells him to stand up, seeing his faith.

And up he jumps, beginning to walk. And how do the people react in verse 11 of Acts 14? They perceive Paul and Barnabas to be God's inhuman form.

This is a bit ironic, that the Gentiles see the wonders as God-like, but that the Jewish leaders earlier didn't, actually killing God as a coming Messiah not long ago.

[10 : 40] And so the crowd names Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes, and they react by turning their clothes off in pain of this, insisting they're just messengers bringing good news.

And even so, in verse 18, we see that they barely manage to stop the crowds from sacrificing to them. And then there's a very sharp turn in verse 19, and I'm going to read down to 22, I think.

Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city.

The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true in the faith.

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God, they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in the church and with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they put their trust.

[11 : 47] And so, Paul and Barnabas go out boldly in faith, preaching strongly in the synagogues. And they endure suffering again and again.

I mean, isn't this just jaw-dropping? They're persecuted in Antioch for preaching in the synagogue and they go on to do the same at Iconium. At Iconium, they hear of a plot to be stoned, so they head to Lystra.

And what happens? Paul is stoned, left for dead, and then they do what? That's right, they go back to preach the gospel in that city and win a large number of disciples.

But Paul, why would you do this? I mean, do you not remember the exile out of Antioch or the attempted stoning at Iconium or the actual stoning at Lystra that left you near dead?

Why would you return to these places? Well, we've read that in verses 21 to 22, because the gospel needs preached and the disciples need strengthening. This is so powerful.

[12 : 50] Paul's primary concern is not his health, it's not his safety, it's not his comfort or approval or ease or even survival. It's Christ's. His concern is for people to know Jesus and grow in him.

And this is the Great Commission taken seriously. Imagine, bloodied, bruised, fought dead, Paul gets up and walks back into the same city because the beauty of the gospel deserves to be heard, regardless of cost.

If anything, it seems for Paul, persecution is not a sign of unwise gospel presentation, but quite the opposite, a faithful presentation. The gospel is a bold message that calls for a bold messenger.

He sees the brothers that need the strengthening and he goes to them. And what an example this is, the Christ-likeness of this event. revealing a church leader to follow. And clearly, the disciples saw it in verse 22, because reflecting on this event, they say something remarkable.

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

[14 : 07] What an application. This wasn't just Paul's message, it was their realized conviction. We, the church, must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

And Timothy, he doesn't just admire Paul's faith, he adopts this costly pattern of ministry. So now jumping back into 2 Timothy 3.10, we stand on very different footing looking at this text. Remember how the disciples gathered around Paul after his stoning in Lystra? Well, so does Timothy reading these words, because he likely was one of them. He lived there, and as a boy, likely saw firsthand what had happened. At the very least, he's heard of it. He saw the Great Commission, what it looked like when it's lived out. And alongside Timothy now, we also see the richness of these words, real words that carry wounds with them. And still, Timothy chose to follow Paul's teaching, his conduct, his aim in life, his faith, his patience, his love, his steadfastness, his persecutions.

[15 : 19] He saw the transformational power of the gospel, and he didn't need the salesman pitch. He saw the boldness and the love, a living faith. He saw that being set apart is costly. It might even cost him his life. But still, he chose to adopt this pattern. He chose to follow. No special invitation. No one dragged him. And this sacrificial pattern of ministry is for Timothy and church leaders to adopt. It isn't glamorous. It holds pain and suffering. To be endured with a Christ-like character. Still, Timothy follows. So self-giving is this pattern that it always points to Christ. The people there don't see a glamorous minister. They see a suffering servant. They see Jesus. And so we can see in verse 11, we can almost feel the tears and anguish of Paul and his shaking hand as he wrote these words. We can almost see Timothy's eyes begin to tear as he remembers walking on the roads in which Paul bled. We see their close relationship, their common gospel, and their shared wounds.

[16 : 36] And there is suffering package behind these words. Persecutions felt, not fled from, but for the sake of the all-sufficient gospel, they were endured, repeatedly. For me, this reminds me of Jesus. This is Christ-like ministry. And who rescued Paul? Was it the persecution newsbringer or the informant? No, it was the Lord who rescued him. And we're not surprised by this, but imagine getting chased out of so many cities preaching the gospel, only to get stoned. It doesn't really feel like rescued, does it? Like, God, here I am preaching like you asked me to, and this is what I get? Shamefully, that would have been my cry, feeling abandoned at the first pebble thrown my way. But that's not Paul's faith. His stoning, there is no shame in it. This is not a failed mission. It's Paul's pattern of ministry. Timothy, this is not a memory. It's an invitation. This is the price of carrying the gospel boldly. This is ministry.

[17 : 42] Not the crowd's attention, appraisal, but the persecution's. And we admire bold missionaries like Paul, but I wonder if we still see a success if the result was rejection, pain, or even stones. Because this is the cost of the gospel, and the returns are God's. So now, verse 12. If we remember Acts 14, 24, where they say, we must go from many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. Indeed, says Paul, you must. If you desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, you will be persecuted. It's not a possibility. It's a certainty. So, Timothy, you want the welcome to ministry package? It's all-inclusive. You'll get on-the-job persecutions, some suffering too, sorry, no budget for a private jet. You've got it all when you have the gospel, and it's worth being persecuted for. Oh yeah, and the suffering? Of course, you're expected to have a Christ-like character for it all. Oh, and if you're curious about the expectations from the ministry role, if you desire to do well in it, and live a godly life, again, you will be persecuted.

[18 : 59] We've got quite the theme going on here, don't we? Now, while Paul is talking to the next batting carrier, he addresses all future church leaders. Adopting his suffering pattern of ministry is not an option, but an expectation. And we might nod, but let's not miss the wording here as well. All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. And actually, the suffering, that's not just the pastors. This part applies to us quite strongly. If we desire a godly life, we will be persecuted. This is a guarantee. And why? I think the reason is in the wording, because a godly life is in Christ Jesus. And we know what the world did to Christ. And so the challenge for me, for us today, is whether we are at this moment desiring a godly life.

Because if we are in Christ Jesus, the world will persecute us. If we are in Christ Jesus, like Paul, boldly, and even wisely, others will at times go out their way to persecute us.

[20 : 13] It may not be with stones here in the UK, though in some parts of the world it continues to be, but it might be social exclusion, unfair treatment, being misunderstood, or rejected, or missing out on opportunities, not because we are reckless, but because we belong to Jesus.

If the world's foundation is on sand, and we stand boldly on Christ as our rock, in word and deed, their foundation will be challenged. Let's be clear, persecution is not a badge we chase, a confirming identity.

We don't go our way to be victims, so we can earn something. We are whole in Christ. But this is exactly it. The world hated Jesus, and they hated the Christlikeness of Paul, and they will hate our Christlikeness too, if it is bold.

So if you're facing no resistance, maybe a question to ponder is, are you boldly in Christ? Because Paul tasted the gospel message so sweet, it could not hide away.

It had to be shared. Is this the gospel you know? And if you're not being persecuted today, can you suffer with those who are, in prayer, solidarity, and support?

[21 : 36] As well, notice here the word desire. This isn't passive. It isn't a, I wish to be more godly someday. It's not an empty hope, but a Christ-empowered action.

Desiring a godly life means walking into the synagogues like Paul, with a bold faith, prioritizing souls over safety or comfort. A godly life is not about the perfect moment.

It's about the perfect God who works in our bold faith, even if the moment appears imperfect. And wisdom is important, but even retrospectively, would we say Paul looked wise?

He was, because souls needed the gospel, and he was given it to share. He didn't avoid suffering. He endured for the gospel.

The message stayed strong, unchanged. So ask yourself, when is the last time I stood up for something publicly, knowing I might lose my comfort or reputation?

[22 : 39] When did I last embrace the awkwardness to proclaim the gospel? Because Paul says, if you desire a godly life in Christ Jesus, you will be persecuted.

And in verse 9, we find them, the persecutors, deceivers who by very definition oppose the truth. They are corrupted. In 10, Timothy's character and the pathway of his character is contrasted to these men.

But now also, in verse 13, we have a contrast in trajectories. The evil snowball from hating the truth into deception, from bad to worse. And on the other hand, Timothy in verse 14 is to continue in what he's learned.

So there are those who follow Paul's pattern of ministry and grow in righteousness, and there are those who reject suffering and those who turn from the call and grow in evil.

And again, church leaders or not, we're all called to grow in Christ. Growth is not just for Timothy, not just for pastors, but the whole church. We, together, as a body.

[23 : 45] We're to continue in what we've learned, firmly believed. In chapter 1, Craig showed us how Timothy's sincere faith came through his grandmother, Lois and mother Eunice.

And here's Paul, who also in chapter 1 calls Timothy his dear son in Christ. And this is a beautiful picture, isn't it? Not just of individual faith, but of faith passed on.

Paul boldly preached the gospel, his message reached Lois and Eunice, they taught it to Timothy, and now Paul is urging him to continue in it, to carry the baton forward.

And what a family in Christ this is. You've heard the famous quote, it takes a village to raise a child. I mean, it takes a church to raise a gospel worker, it looks like, in this passage.

I'm not a parent, and this might not be the central point of the passage, but it stands out to me that from childhood, Timothy was exposed to the scriptures. He was set off on the right trajectory that he's to continue in, not once, but over years.

[24 : 54] And I'm convinced that this exposure contributed to shaping his heart for Christ, for ministry. And God definitely did not waste it. And so as we think on passing on the baton of the gospel, well, maybe with a little disillusionment considering the modern context of Scotland, this verse should shine through.

Here the gospel has been faithfully passed down, consistently invested. We see a passage over time, a long trajectory. Notice how this isn't a quick baton, throw and catch.

And notice too how Paul is not the only mentor that has shaped Timothy for ministry. His family is mentioned repeatedly, and by name. If the Holy Spirit empowers this baton passing process, will he not work for every hand that's stretched out to serve, every encouragement, every prayer, every word of advice?

We all contribute to this process. We all have gifts. The parents today, biological or spiritual, is Paul. Is this something on your calendar? Acquainting your children or your mentees with the Bible? Maybe the persecutions you'll face are from within your own household as you invest in this way. From an unbelieving spouse, the wider family, the secular culture that always pushes against, or a resistant child.

[26 : 23] Maybe like me, you find that it's easier to share the gospel and invite a non-believing friend out for a coffee to study the Bible than it is with your own family.

But this isn't Paul's pattern of ministry. Like him, we're told to be bold for the all-sufficient gospel, holding faith in the transformational power that it holds, and we must endure.

Because the sweetness of the gospel message is so worth the suffering, and God works through it. Maybe you've been blessed to have this type of community to be invested in and acquainted with the scriptures from young, and that's an opportunity today to thank not just God for that, but your family and those who have invested in you.

So maybe that's an application to take away. And so we come to the final two verses, a well-known part of the Bible. We have the divine breath of God, the Holy Spirit working to create, like in Genesis, and this time working through the written words, the highest authority we have, God's word that is powerful into salvation.

I mean, we see these words, the scripture is profitable. It's so worth investing into, worth our time and attention, and not just in theory, but look at how the word of God can be angled like a sword.

[27 : 52] It can be useful for teaching, for reproof, which is exposing something that is wrong, for correction, which is taking that wrong thing and pointing it back to what is right.

It trains us in righteousness. This is the language of transformation, learning, unlearning, growing, learning, unlearning, and growing. It's a process.

And we hear of reproof or correction, and we often think outwardly. But this is especially for us. If the Bible is truly profitable, which it is, we must welcome its work in us.

It's for our good. Let's remember that this letter is written for Timothy, the next baton carrier, called to use scripture with care and love, even if it means challenge.

And it can mean challenge. A church leader adopting Paul's pattern of ministry, who after being stoned was so lovingly concerned for the church, well, this type of church leader can use scripture with care and love.

[28 : 59] And we've seen it here that this can mean reproof and correction. It might go against our comfort, but we must welcome both. Because those who desire to live a godly life will face suffering.

Have we allowed this space in our lives to be lovingly corrected? That is part of this idea of being made complete. We have a strong hint of this here, this trajectory again of sanctification, of becoming more like Christ for the Spirit's work in us.

And in this process, the Bible is central. So that we can become more like Christ, but also so that we're equipped for every good work. It's useful, it's essential in fact, but we ask for what larger purpose?

And again, because the scriptures, they help us be equipped and so that we may be complete. And then this implies that there are good works for us to do and that we must be equipped for them.

For Timothy, his call to ministry required that acquaintance with the scriptures he's had from young. We've seen that. It's central to the passages as we go through them.

[30 : 17] And the same is true of Paul and Barnabas. How could they have reasoned with those in Acts if they never knew the scriptures to reason with? There is no good work that the Bible does not prepare and equip us for.

So we need to hold it dear. And this includes the process of passing on the baton of ministry. If we want to raise faithful ministry workers, then the Bible will equip us in that task and the Spirit will empower us in that journey.

We've seen the centrality of the word in Timothy's journey, in Paul's preaching in the synagogues, in his family believing and acquainting Timothy further with it.

And now Timothy is to preach it down, to pass it down, and he's continued to do, to continue doing what he's already been doing. Regardless of our role in this process, we must all adopt Paul's pattern of ministry.

Rooted in the words, we must declare the gospel boldly to one another, as Paul is doing to Timothy, and to the world. There's this bold truth and love that we see continuously here, and suffering is part of that package.

[31 : 35] I hope tonight's passage has been both challenging and encouraging. I know it's been both for me as I've studied it. I know that today, as I'm here, I've been greatly encouraged by your investment in me across the last few years.

And I see much of Paul's pattern of ministry here at Brunsville. The discipleship and caring encouragement, I've seen those things and they're truly special. So thank you.

But I know also that God calls us to grow more, to be increasingly like him. And this is through his spirit, but we are called to obedience and to desire.

So tonight, we are challenged to adopt Paul's pattern of ministry, to boldly declare the gospel, and endure the persecutions that will come. This bold gospel calls for bold messengers.

It's all powerful, transformative, and so worth sharing. I was in Romania just a week ago, talking to missionaries about their confidence in Christ, some of which worry that if they're found out to be missionaries in the countries they're serving, their children will be killed.

[32 : 48] Decades living under threat because the beauty of the gospel is worth it. It's worth each of the stones that struck Paul and each of the dangers they faced, and each of the nails piercing Jesus on the cross for us.

I wonder tonight, is it worth the same for us? Worth losing a friendship over? Worth losing comfort or social importance over?

Or money or an opportunity? community? Paul says, if you desire a godly life, you will be persecuted. The believer in Acts said back, we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

Will we? Because if we adopt Paul's pattern of ministry, desiring a godly life, we must. God, we must I'm just going to close in a quick prayer.

Father, we thank you for today's passage and the challenge that it is to the way we boldly proclaim the gospel in our lives, Lord. It becomes so easy to just be comfortably in our schedules and in our patterns of life, but you called us to adopt, like Paul, a different pattern, one that is self-giving and one that seeks to glorify you boldly in words and lifestyle.

[34 : 17] And so, Lord, I pray that in the weeks to come, you'd shape us for this message, you'd equip us for your words, make us more like you, but also that we would be able to see those opportunities and step out boldly in them, even if there is a cost to us.

Provide for us the doors to walk through and the conversations to have. And if we are going for suffering now, Lord, let you be our comfort as you have been for Paul.

And those experiences, let them be used and passed down as Paul has done to Timothy. Thank you for your word and the encouragement it is and the joy it is to have the freedom to study it today together.

In Jesus' name, amen.