Entrusted

2 Timothy 1:1–18 and 2:1–7

November 4, 2026

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Background: Paul and Timothy

Paul first met Timothy in Lystra. Timothy's father was Greek, but his mother Eunice was of Jewish heritage and a believer in Jesus. The people of that community spoke well of Timothy, and so Paul invited him to join with him and Silas — and Timothy said yes. He proved faithful. Paul used him extensively, sending him to churches that needed encouragement and stabilizing. Both the book of Acts and Paul's letters mention Timothy being dispatched to Berea, Macedonia, Philippi, Corinth, Thessalonica, and Ephesus. He became a critically important leader in the early church.

If you read Paul's letters closely, you will notice that many of them are not from Paul alone. Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and both letters to the Thessalonians are also from Timothy — his name appears alongside Paul's in the opening address. Consider Philippians 1:1:

> *"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons."*

Timothy is a co-author of portions of our New Testament. And two books of the Bible bear his name — 1 and 2 Timothy — both of them letters from Paul to this man he clearly loves dearly.

In the first letter, Timothy has been sent to the church at Ephesus while Paul is in Macedonia. Reading 1 Timothy, it becomes clear that the situation there was difficult. There were false teachers promoting heretical doctrine. There was disorder in the congregation. There were spiritually immature people angling for positions of authority. And the surrounding culture of Artemis worship was bleeding into how God was being worshiped. It was a mess — and so 1 Timothy is a practical book, full of instructions on handling false teaching, ordering a congregation, identifying qualified elders, and maintaining theological clarity.

But 2 Timothy is different. It is written a few years later. Paul is now in Rome, in prison, in chains. And this time, what he sends Timothy is not a manual for fixing the church — it is a letter about Timothy himself.

Reading between the lines, it appears the problems addressed in 1 Timothy never fully resolved. The false teachers are still there. The internal power struggles continue. Spiritually

immature people are still grasping for control. Getting the structure right, it turns out, did not fix the church. And on top of everything that persisted, new problems had emerged. People were leaving — not just transferring to another congregation, but leaving altogether, abandoning the faith and returning to their former ways of life. Part of what may have driven this was the dark cloud gathering on the horizon: the threat of Roman persecution. In 1 Timothy, suffering for the gospel barely comes up; in 2 Timothy, it is a constant theme — written, we should note, by a man who is himself in chains.

All of this — the persistent false teaching, the power struggles, the immature believers, the defections, the coming persecution — had taken its toll on Timothy. He is, by all appearances, discouraged. Burned out. Quietly asking himself whether any of it has made a difference.

And so Paul writes him this letter of encouragement.

What Paul Actually Says

Now, what would you say to someone in Timothy's position? What words of encouragement would you offer? We tend toward things like, *Trust in the Lord. Have faith. Be of good courage.* These are not wrong things to say. But they are not, interestingly, what Paul says.

Paul's primary word of encouragement to Timothy is not "trust God with your situation." Rather, Paul reminds Timothy of what he has already been given — what God has already entrusted to him. The heart of 2 Timothy is this: *be faithful to what God has entrusted to you.* That is the message. Paul is calling Timothy — and calling us — to recognize what God has already done and given in our lives, and to be faithful stewards of it.

Listen to chapter 1, verses 1 through 14, paying attention to the things Timothy has been given:

> *"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.*
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> *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.*
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> *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who 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, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for 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. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you."*

The Gifts God Has Entrusted to Us

Paul works through a remarkable list here. Let us take each gift in turn.

The Gospel Message. In verse 8, Paul tells Timothy not to be ashamed of the testimony about the Lord. We have been entrusted with the gospel — the message of what God has done in this world through the sending of his Son Jesus, who reveals God to us and dies for us so that we might know God. We are sitting here today because people who came before us were faithful to this message and passed it on. And now it has been given to us. God did not entrust the gospel to the internet, to academia, or to religious professionals. He entrusted it to the church — to ordinary believers.

A Part in His Redemptive Work. When Paul calls Timothy to "share in suffering for the gospel," he is not simply bracing him for hardship. He is inviting him into something larger — God's redemptive work in the world. The church is the body that God has called out (*ekklesia*)

and ordained as the primary vessel of that work. As Christ suffered in accomplishing our salvation, so we will suffer as we carry his work forward in the world. And that suffering begins, most basically, with the death of self — a surrender of our own agendas that leads, paradoxically, to a fearlessness in the face of the world's opposition.

Salvation. Verse 9 is simple and staggering: *who saved us.* We have been given the gift of salvation. We are saved from the penalty of sin — from death and condemnation. We are saved from sin's bondage, from the grip of deadly habits and practices. We are saved from the defining weight of past wrongs and failures. We are saved from a life of separation from God, from despair, from the particular darkness of living without him. That is what we have been rescued *from.* But we are not merely saved from something — we are saved *to* something.

A Holy Life and Calling. Paul says we have been "called to a holy calling." We are called to a new life, a changed life. The NIV renders it plainly: *"who has saved us and called us to a holy life."* This is not an add-on to salvation; it is part of the gift itself.

Life and Immortality. Verse 10 speaks of Christ having "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Notice those two words — life and immortality. There is a fullness of life available in Jesus Christ, and it is a life that is imperishable, that does not end. This is what has been given to us.

The Holy Spirit. And finally, verse 14: *"By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you."* The same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead dwells within believers. This is not incidental. It is the power by which any of this becomes possible.

So here is Paul's inventory of what God has entrusted to Timothy — and to us: the gospel message, a share in God's redemptive work, the gift of salvation, a holy life and calling, life and immortality, and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Paul is not saying, "Trust God with your problems." He is saying, "Look at what God has already trusted *you* with."

What Do We Do With It?

Which naturally raises the question: what are we supposed to do with all of this? Bury it in the ground? Hoard it, build a wall, and keep it for ourselves? What does it mean to "guard the good deposit"?

Paul's answer begins at chapter 2, verse 1:

> *"You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."*

We guard what has been entrusted to us by entrusting it to others. We give it away. The Greek word Paul uses here carries the sense of setting something before someone — placing it in front of them. You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink. Our calling is to set before others what God has set before us.

But how? Paul gives us three images, drawn from three professions that dominated the Roman world he and Timothy inhabited.

The Soldier, the Athlete, and the Farmer

> *"Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything."*

The soldier, the athlete, the farmer — all three were highly respected figures in the Roman world, and all three were professions at which Rome excelled. What they share is obvious: hard work, dedication, persistence, and perseverance. But it is in how they differ from one another that Paul's teaching becomes most instructive. Each image carries a particular temptation to resist and a particular instruction to follow.

The Soldier. Rome invented the professional army. Before Rome, virtually every military force in the ancient world functioned the way our National Guard functions today — a person would hold a civilian occupation, and when war came, they would be called up, fight, and return home. Rome changed that. Roman soldiers were professionals; the army was their life, their occupation, their entire focus. It was this professional discipline that made the Roman military the most formidable fighting force the ancient world had ever seen.

The temptation Paul identifies here is distraction — becoming more absorbed in civilian affairs than in the mission. Jesus spoke of this repeatedly. Do not worry about food and clothing and all the things that dominate the world's attention; seek first the Kingdom. In the parable of the soils, one of the unfruitful soils represents seed choked out by the worries and concerns of ordinary life. The soldier image is Paul's way of saying: stay focused on who Jesus is, what he has done, and where his Kingdom is going. Live kingdom-minded. Follow Jesus.

The Athlete. Romans were passionate about sports — arguably as passionate as we are today. If you search for the highest-paid athlete in human history, the answer is a Roman charioteer named Gaius Appuleius Diocles, who raced for twenty years around 100 AD. His recorded winnings of 36 million sesterces translate, in today's terms, to roughly 15 billion dollars.

Sports were enormous in that world. Every city of any size had facilities for competition — not just theaters, but gymnasia and stadiums. The events included not only chariot racing and gladiatorial combat, but also boxing, wrestling, running, swimming, and ball games.

And all of these events had rules. We tend to imagine Roman sport as lawless spectacle, but that is not accurate. Roman boxing, for instance, had regulations: competitors wore gloves, could not hold or trip an opponent, could not strike below the belt or use head-butts. If the fight dragged on too long and both fighters were spent, the match could be concluded by having them stand face to face and trade blows until someone yielded. The rules were real, and violation of them meant disqualification.

The temptation Paul identifies here is cheating — cutting corners, playing by different rules than the ones God has established. What are the rules of the Kingdom? Patience. Forgiveness. Compassion. Care for those who are hurting. Prayer. Faith. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not advanced when his people abandon these. When a church or a Christian operates through manipulation, coercion, or dishonesty, they have disqualified themselves regardless of how much activity they produce. How we live shapes and determines the message we carry. The athlete image is Paul's way of saying: live by Kingdom principles, by Kingdom culture — what Paul elsewhere calls the fruit of the Spirit.

The Farmer. This image is, to me, the most interesting of the three. Rome had a romantic relationship with farming. Cicero called it the noblest of professions. And while we tend to emphasize the Roman military as the engine of the empire, that empire could not have existed without an agricultural system capable of feeding millions. Rome brought significant advances to farming — crop rotation, irrigation, and even early mechanization, as evidenced by mosaics depicting farming equipment.

But here is what strikes me about farming, and what I think Paul is getting at. I grew up working on farms — strawberries, watermelon, tomatoes, wheat, barley, peas. And one thing farmers often joked about, though they were only half joking, is that farming is a form of gambling. A farmer invests thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours into preparing and planting a field. He does everything right. And then he waits — dependent on things entirely outside his control. The weather. The quality of the seed. Pests. Frost. Fire. The availability of workers. No matter how hard he works, no matter how faithfully he follows the rules, there is a portion of the outcome that he simply cannot determine. The harvest is not entirely his to produce. The farmer is dependent on God.

And this is exactly where Paul is pointing. The temptation here is not only sloth — not only burying the treasure in the ground and doing nothing. It is also discouragement. It is looking at the state of our world and asking why we should bother planting. It is investing in someone's life for years and seeing no visible change, and concluding that our labor has been wasted. It is the temptation to demand immediate results, or to believe that if we just work hard enough, we can manufacture growth on our own timetable.

The instruction embedded in this image is simply this: we have a God who is faithful. He is so faithful — so utterly reliable in who he is — that you can build your life on his faithfulness and not be disappointed. That means that despite how disordered our world appears, God is at work in it. That means that when you are living compassionately, forgiving patiently, praying faithfully, and you see no visible growth — it does not mean nothing is growing. He is at work. The farmer plants and trusts the God who governs the harvest.

Conclusion

God has entrusted us with his Word, his gospel, his redemptive purposes, a new life, and his Spirit. That is what we have been given. So how do we live faithfully out of what has been entrusted to us, and how do we entrust it to others?

Live kingdom-minded — as a follower of Jesus, not as someone primarily shaped by the concerns of this world.

Live by Kingdom principles and Kingdom culture — by the rules of grace, the fruit of the Spirit, the way of the cross.

And live dependent upon the King for the results — because he is at work, even when we cannot see it.

Amen.