

The Bond

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2 Timothy. We continue our study through this New Testament epistle. 2 Timothy 1:2-5 for this morning. 2 Timothy 1:2-5.

Quickly let me say this, I, I have remarked before how did it take me so long to go through the pastoral epistles with all the work we do with pastors, and I think God told me studying this text, it's because I couldn't grasp nearly as well as I do now years ago, if I was preaching it years ago, the weightiness, the wonder, the glory, if you will, the holiness of this apostle, this apostle to the Gentiles, on death row in a Roman prison, writing the last thing he'll write to his dearest associate. That means more to me now after being in the ministry for 40 years.

Verse 2,

2 To Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3 I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, 4 longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy. 5 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.

No doubt deep emotion flows through the pen of the Apostle Paul as he writes these words to Timothy. Paul is writing full of emotion but it's not raw emotion. Raw emotion is when you fly off because you've already been hurt, upset in the past, and something triggered it. No, this isn't a fleshly raw emotion, this is holy emotion. Again, Paul is on death row, he knows his execution is just ahead, he's unsure if he'll see Timothy again, Timothy, his closest and most trusted disciple, the one who is like a son to him, but more than just any son, it's richer, it's deeper than that, a son in the faith and a son in the ministry.

I call this "The Bond" because we're on somewhat holy ground as the apostle to the Gentiles pours his heart out and expresses his love and his union and his oneness with Timothy, his son in the ministry. So let's unpack the bond in these four ways from this verse.

I. Let's notice the spiritual affinity and the chain of witness. Spiritual affinity and the chain of witness. In verse 2 he simply says, "To Timothy, my beloved son." One scholar said you could write it this way, "my dearly beloved son." Rich emotion and cherishing in that phrase from Paul to Timothy. Agapetos is the word for "beloved" there, of course, that's the word from "agape" that exists in all of us, the, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, the Bible says, and it's, it's a new thing put in there, a new type of love, a God love, and he's saying, "Timothy, I have a, a fatherly love for you in this agape you and I both share together."

In 2, rather 1 Timothy, he called him "my true child," so when you think about Paul's experience with ministry associates, you can understand something of why he has such emotion for Timothy because Paul had a lot of folks along the way who fell out on him, who didn't stay faithful. We, we all know the story of John Mark and Paul had to leave him behind, and fortunately he comes back in the picture later on in his ministry. We all know his statement of Demas, "Demas has forsaken me," Paul said, "having loved this present world." And later in this epistle, Paul will refer to his time brought before the Roman judge and he says, "When I was brought before my accusers, they all deserted me." So no wonder Timothy, who never deserted him, was so precious and dear to him.

Now here's Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, he's a lead minister, if you will. An apostle. That office does not exist anymore, of course. And this is God's will for Paul, he made that very clear in the first verse, "I'm an apostle according to the will of God." And he's writing to this one who is closest to him, Timothy. I got to thinking about that as I've been a minister now for 40 years and I'm a, a lead pastor in a church, and I got to thinking about how that compares and parallels to my experiences. Paul's writing to this Timothy who was so loyal and so faithful and I thought one of the greatest challenges of being a lead pastor is finding a, a staff of associates who are true and faithful and who are loyal, and trust me, it is such a joy to have a team of brothers who are really brothers in arms together, associate ministers like I have in this congregation who are godly, and who are faithful, and who are humble, and who are loyal, and there's always human reason not to be. Anybody that wants to be an independent spirit and a rebel can find a reason because we're all human, but Timothy never found a reason to dishonor or disavow Paul, and I know that kind of loyalty and it's special to me. Timothy was that kind of associate to Paul and even more. He became a dear beloved son.

I would just like, just like to say in context here that, um, my staff is very dear to me. Now if you've been around a long time, it hasn't always been this way, but for many years now we've had such good relationships on our staff. We really like each other. We really like to be around each other. We, we cut up sometimes and have a lot of fun together but we really are a band of brothers. I know they love me and they serve under me out of a deep love for Christ and a deep love for his church, and that's exactly what I did for my former pastor, Brother Bob Pittman, and he would tell you that.

What we have at Grace Life Church as I think about being a lead pastor and having these faithful associates is quite unique. It's, it's quite rare. And it's interesting, in, in an elder's

meeting not long ago, we were talking about some things as, uh, you don't remember this but 25-30 years ago, we all voted on a policy manual and we looked at a bunch of other churches and put together policies about raises and about, uh, uh, uh, staff bonuses at anniversaries and those kind of things, and, uh, but our staff has been here so long we're getting out of the, out of the policy. We didn't have policy for people who are around 30 and 40 years and what would you do for them. So it's been, been a unique problem. I'm saying all that to say, I, I, I know something of what Paul is saying. I'm not an apostle to the Gentiles, I'm certainly not a Paul, but I know what it means to have brothers you love and you know love you and you forgive each other and work together because Christ in the church is worth it.

And so we see this spiritual affinity just oozing out as Paul says, "my beloved son." In 1 Corinthians 4:17 Paul writes, "For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is," here he goes again, "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord," like he just can't say enough about Timothy. This spiritual bond should always be in Christ's churches. Now you just saw Chris Shepherd's testimony at Grace Life Church of Brookhaven, MS. What he did not tell you was that they've had some tough days also. They've been getting blessed but, well, actually the tough days are blessings too, to be honest. They had some people that had to be disciplined. They had some people who had to be removed from the church and that's tough when you've got a small congregation. But now listen to me: I've never seen a true healthy church that did not go through some of that. It's almost like it has to happen. I tell all of our church planters and all the guys that we mentor, I say, "I hope you're the exception but don't be surprised if you don't go through a series of purgings before you get to where you have the sweetness and the unity that you see at Grace Life Church of the Shoals." You see, they get around you guys and you're so sweet and you're so encouraging and you're so loving and they think, "Boy, that's the way my church is going to be." Then they go back and they have people that don't treat them so sweet and so loving, and so they think, "What's wrong?" Well, it's just t-i-m-e, it takes time to get there.

But all spiritual churches should be like that and I'd just like to throw out a word of practical application here. That's what we want to see in all of our small groups, and in two weeks everything's back on again in small groups, and I want you to throw yourself in there. Do not hold back. Do not resist what God wants to establish in there. Your Timothy or Timothyette, if you're a lady, may be in that class. Your Paul may be in that class. And you get together around the word of God and you, you share your struggles and you share your trials and you encourage each other, and you care for each other, and body life happens and as the bond comes together, then you become more transparent, and after bonding and transparency, then there can be correction and accountability and we all grow together. That's body life in a true, normal, healthy, local church. And we've had a lot of that through the years but it doesn't just happen, you've gotta put something in it. So I'm charging you this morning, grab yourself by the nape of the neck and say, "When those small groups start back, I'm gonna be in there for the glory of God to serve my brothers and sisters and help us be this Paul-Timothy type affinity that Christians should have one for the other."

Well, verse 3. He builds on this spiritual affinity with what I call the chain of witness. He says in verse 3, "I thank my God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did." So you know, I thought, I meditated on that a long time. What's Paul saying when he's writing to Timothy and he's talking about how dear and, and how affectionate he feels toward Timothy in the Lord, and then he says, "Now Timothy, I've served the Lord faithfully with a clear conscience just like my forefathers did." I think what Paul is doing, he's showing how deep the spiritual brotherhood is, the spiritual bond between believers. Here, of course, Paul the Timothy father and spirit, and Timothy the spiritual son, and that they are a part of a continuum of believers, forefathers, he calls them, faithful witnesses for God in the earth. Remember Hebrews 11 that gives us all of those faithful witnesses that we've had in our past? The Bible says in Hebrews 11:13, they were men who saw and welcomed them from a distance. They were under the old dispensation. They didn't have the revelation of Christ we had, but the Spirit of God had guided them through the word of God to where they knew the Savior was coming. So they looked ahead in a distance and embraced Christ and honored him in the earth, and Paul said, "I have also like my forefathers embraced Christ and been faithful in the earth. And Timothy, I have a clear conscience that I am God's genuine child and by grace I've been a continuation of this witness in the earth just like my forefathers were before me. Now Timothy, you are God's choice among others to continue to carry the torch of God as God's light in the world until he returns." So think about this. "Timothy, I'm on death row. I'm executed at any time. But Timothy, I've carried the torch like my forefathers did and now, Timothy, you're going to carry the torch." It just deepens the affinity they have one for another. The special, I don't have the vocabulary to tell you how wondrous that is, what kind of emotion and passion is going through the heart of Paul and then Timothy as he reads and think we're in a lineage, a continuum of these faithful witnesses in the earth. It's powerful. This makes the union and the fellowship between Paul and Timothy all the more special and all the more heart-stirring as they affirm their affinity one for another and that they are a part of God's call to bear his witness in the earth, and that torch must not be dropped.

Well, secondly, let's notice in this bond that is being so expressed between Paul and Timothy the intercession for and the celebration of grace, mercy and peace. This is a common greeting but he says there in verse 2, "To Timothy, my beloved son," we unpacked that, then he says, "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." Now you know good and well I can't read the three words grace, mercy and peace and not pause to unpack the glory of the doctrine there. So we're going to do that just a little bit about grace. You say, "Pastor, you tell us about grace all the time." I'm gonna keep telling you about grace and we're gonna keep singing about grace and preaching about grace. Grace, as you know, is divine favor and it's, it includes the divinely imparted desire and power to serve God and serve his church faithfully. Grace didn't just put you in a right standing with God. It did but grace continues in us to help us have holy affections and new desires to honor God and serve God faithfully. I think that's why he's telling Timothy, "Now you just keep having the grace of God to give you that desire and that power." So it's likely Paul's not really emphasizing strongly in this context but the, the, the grace that comes out as justification, that's your right standing though it's

included, but it's more the grace you need to keep on for God in sanctification and service until God gets through of you in this earth.

Now grace always includes that we are the object of God's favor and blast, and blessing, rather, through no merit of our own. Now this includes, number 1, the lavish love and provision of Christ's death, burial, resurrection and intercession on our behalf. It includes, number 2, the favor of his indwelling presence and his support in this life in our service to him. And number 3 – are you listening – say amen if you're listening. Number 3, it includes God-sized reservoirs of forgiveness and restoration when we fail. The grace that saves you includes God-sized reservoirs of forgiveness and restoration when we fail.

Well, this is something of what Paul is praying for. When he says "grace, mercy and peace," it's an intercession, it's a prayer but at the same time it's an affirmation or a celebration of, "Praise God, Timothy, we have these. We want more and more but we are to have it too." That's why I used the phrase the intercession for and the celebration of grace, mercy and peace.

So let's go to the second one: mercy. Grace, then mercy. Mercy is God's pity and it includes God's emotion, his feeling of pity toward the most undeserving. God favors us with grace but mercy's a different twist, but God looks on us in our condition and has pity for us. Psalmist said in Psalm 103:14, "He is mindful," or rather, "He Himself knows our frame; and He is mindful that we are but dust." He looks at us and says, "You ain't much, you're pitiful, but My heart goes out to you." His mercy means he feels pity for us. He's ever-mindful of our frailty. He is ever-mindful of our faulting. He's ever-mindful of our, our failing and our pitiful weak condition. And he has sorrowful concern for us as he contemplates this wretched, sinful, lost state that we all are in.

Two thoughts on that. God's mercy mean God, God, God sees us just as we are in deepest need and, secondly, it means he possesses the desire to meet our need and he's adequate in righteousness to do it. You can feel sorry for somebody and your heart go out to somebody and sometimes you can't do anything about it, but God feels pity for sinful wretches like us and he has the power to do something about it. Mercy. Mercy.

So Paul adds mercy to grace and that's his common order when he gives a greeting, grace first and then mercy, and you know, I think that's the flow that should always be there because, in one sense, God's favor includes mercy, which is God's pity for us, and desire to help us. But it's hard to unpack this sometimes. Maybe we should see them as two sides of the same coin, but grace and mercy from God is an abundant river that we literally float in as Christians. I want you to get the bigness of that. I want you to get the, the grandeur of that. We float in this river of grace and mercy and we do nothing to receive it but we enjoy the abundant supply.

Romans 5:20 reminds us, "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase." What does that mean? Well, among other things it means that you knew you were a guilty sinner but when God wrote it out in the law, then your guilt greatly increased. You know the depth of your guilt now. There's no excuse, and you can't keep the law. If you

were to keep all of it but one of the commandments, the Bible says if you fail one of the commandments, you're guilty of all of them. But he said when transgressions increased, where "sin increased last part of Romans 5:20, "grace abounded all the more." It's as if God just flooded more on you when you needed more.

I, this, this will show you how weird I am, but when I was a child, I could literally sit for hours and read the World Book Encyclopedia page after page, so I just liked to look stuff up. And do you know, I found out that in 1969, the Niagara Falls stopped flowing, did you know that? In 1969, there was no water for a period of that year flowing over what we call Niagara Falls. What had happened, the engineers actually built a great dam and diverted the waters around to the Canadian falls so that they could observe the erosion problems with the United States Niagara Falls. Got to thinking about that. There's a little frog in New York state and it's called the cricket frog. He only gets an inch big. Those cricket frogs love moisture. I bet you there were cricket frogs living right underneath around the edge of Niagara Falls, just moisture all the time, plenty to drink. But what do you think happened to the little cricket frog when they dried the falls up? Probably did okay for a few days but then he began to get parched, then he got to the point where he just got on his hind legs and reached his arms to, toward the top of that falls and opened his mouth and said, "I need water." And I thought, that's the way we are. We get a glimpse of our own hearts and we put our hands up and we open our mouths and, "I need grace and I need mercy." And God says, "Well, will this do? Is that enough for you?" I love that. And that little frog when those guys moved that dam, you can just imagine what happened then. He just went tumbling through that water and that's where you and I are, we're just caught up in the deluge of grace and mercy.

So Paul intercedes and celebrates, "Timothy, praise God for grace and mercy that God has given us." Aren't you impressed with our multimedia presentation this morning? But I just couldn't help but show you. When I saw that water I thought, "Man, we gotta look at that together." Young preachers out there, be careful with doing funny stuff at church. When you've preached 40 years, you can do it twice a year.

Grace and mercy. Then we come to the third word, peace, and that always follows. Because of God's grace, he's, he's chosen to favor us when we don't deserve it. Because of God's mercy, he looks on us and says, "You're woefully pitiful! Actually, you're wholly offensive, you're holy, rather, offensive to Me but I desire to help you." Then because of that grace and that mercy, we then have peace.

The word "peace" Paul uses here is a word that means "to join." It's a simple idea of unity or union that's used in Matthew 10 of union between men. It's used in Luke 14 of union between nations. It's used in 1 Corinthians 14 of unity among churches. But here, it's the peace, the harmony, the union between God and man. It's like Ephesians 2:17 that tells us, "He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near."

Now this peace is certainly vertical to begin with, the peace we have is peace with God, but it flows over to the horizontal unity of peace among the brethren. Psalm 133:1

reminds us, "how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity!" Grace, mercy and peace. You know why these things are not preached so much anymore? You know why these things are not embraced and people are drawn to them? It's because today in our world, men are so arrogant and they're stupid. You say, "Pastor, you've used that word a couple of times lately." It's a biblical word. People are stupid. Proverbs 30:2, the writer says, "Surely I am more stupid than any man and I do not have the understanding of a man." Now here the writer of Proverbs is just getting honest. He's saying, "If I were left to myself, I would be so stupid." It means brutish. He means, "I'd be just like the beast of the field. I would just follow my instincts and my desires without no thought of consequence." And the writer of Proverbs says, "That's what mankind is left to himself. He's, he's brutish. He's blind and he's stupid." Generally men do not see much wrong between them and God. Jeremiah reminds us again in Jeremiah 51:7, or 17, rather, "All mankind is stupid, and devoid of knowledge."

The Bible says we're blind and we have utter stupidity of the imminent danger and the raging fire of divine wrath that is yearning to engulf and consume us. We are held by a cord over leaping flames of divine indignation and should sovereign justice decree, we would be instantly consumed without hope, but through Jesus Christ, grace and mercy, the fire of judgment is quenched. It was burned out effectually in the body of Jesus as he hung on the cross. This is grace and mercy. The death of Christ for us has tamed the lion of divine wrath. Now he's rolled over on his back, paws in the air in deep restful sleep, and we are with our heads nestled on his breast, safely cuddled into his side, also fast asleep. The beast of fierce wrath has been transformed. The ferocity that was once against us for wrath is redirected and now the complete force of the Godhead is to protect us and to preserve us. Are you okay? How can you take that in and just sit there and look at me? The complete, the composite force of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is directed to your safety in eternal perseverance.

That's grace and mercy. That's peace. There's harmony now between us and God. There's peace between us and God and as a consequence, peace between brothers who are in Christ. So Paul writes this to Timothy and literally to all of us as he's interceding and celebrating the glorious grace gifts of grace, mercy and peace, and we have all of these in God the Father and in Christ Jesus our Lord, and Paul is in this brief moment of emotional penning and bonding to Timothy, celebrating that, "Timothy, it all centers in Christ and in God the Father and the grace and the mercy and peace that we have in Him."

3. The thanksgiving for the sincerity and the sovereignty of Timothy's faith. Paul is saying, "Man, it's just glorious that you're so sincere in your faith and it's glorious the way God got you there and got us together." He says in, uh, verse 3, "as I recall your tears." As I recall your tears. What he's saying there to Timothy, "Your tears reflected the deep inner conviction of your heart, of a deep love and gratitude for Christ and for the grace and mercy you've received in Him." And by the way, Tim is, Timothy possessed those things and those things possessed Timothy. Paul says, "I remember your tears." Not just tears. Now, now mommas can get all bent out of shape when their babies cry over

anything. This isn't just that. He said, "I remember you weeping." The context means, "you wept over the great things of God. I saw the sincerity there."

This was Timothy's consuming focus. It's like being glory-of-God focused that I try to talk about a lot. This was the simple, central theme of Timothy's heart, everything else in his heart served this central focus. Paul is where he learned this. The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:13, "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead." Listen to me, child of God, listen to me: you must never quit fighting to let go of that which does not matter and keep focusing on that which does. That was Paul's focus and that was Timothy's focus and it should be our focus, and connected to it being a consuming focus. This was the controlling factor of Timothy's heart and life.

The grace of God and the love of God held him on course, controlled him, kept him steady in the race. Paul said it this way about himself, 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ controls us." That's what makes a great church right there. When it's not about rules, it's not about regulations, it's not about laws, but the people of God serve faithfully because of the love of Christ controls them, holds them on track, keeps them on course. There is something to the threatenings of God but more powerful is the love of God that is unconditionally yours. And you say, "How can I not serve Him? How can I not honor Him?"

The word "controls" there in that verse is the idea of just holding together, keeping us on the task. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:16, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel." He's not saying, "God's got a stick over me threatening me." He's saying, "I've just seen too much. I, I've experienced too much. The Spirit of God has allowed me to grasp too much of the wonder and the glory of this grace and this mercy and this peace, I can't hold it in. I'll explode if I don't preach the gospel."

Well, he says he's celebrating the sincerity of Timothy's faith and this picks up even further as we talk about the sovereignty involved in Timothy's faith. Look at verse 5, he says, "I am mindful of the sincere faith within you," there it is again reaffirmed, but he said it "first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well." Three times now he's made an expression of the sincerity of Timothy's faith but very interestingly and that's just so unusual. Paul brings out Timothy's grandmother and mother. No doubt in my mind that these were godly Jewish ladies who fervently studied the Scriptures and taught them to Timothy. So when Paul came to their region preaching, boom, it all made sense. Immediately the Spirit of God illumined all that scriptural truth that Lois and her daughter Eunice and her grandson, uh, Timothy had been taking in all those years and when they heard the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, the light came on and they embraced it and Timothy kept growing, and you know, the Bible says he was just had a great reputation in the churches of that region and, uh, Paul eventually takes him along as his associate, but Paul was ever-mindful, "A key to your salvation and your godliness is you're godly grandmother and your godly mother."

Well, a lot of application for us there, is it not? Moms and dads, are you listening to me? Nothing wrong with your child being a great ball player but they need to know more important to my daddy and my mom is that I love Jesus. Nothing wrong with your child being a great musician but they must know in my momma's and daddy's heart, that's second to loving Jesus. Are you listening to me, moms and dads? Listen to me now. It was hard when I had kids in school. It's harder now. You know why? Because the world screams at you that all these things are vital and all these things are essential, and you can tag church on when you get through with all this other stuff. They're only young once. And the Holy Spirit says, "Yes, that's why you pour Me into them while they're young. That's why you pour the truth into them while they're young."

Now again, I'm not gonna be your Holy Spirit. I'm not gonna judge you for what you do, but dads, there'll be times when you'll have to say, "We don't do that one. We're not going to that one. We're going to church." You just gonna have to decide are you a disciple of Jesus Christ or are you gonna float with the world and tag him on? That's the new evangelical way, by the way. That's why churches are reduced to Sunday morning showboat, uh, church meetings and nothing else. If you're gonna be a disciple like Paul was and like Timothy was, and none of us are called to do what they did, well, some of you may be called to preach or pastor, but none of us are called to be an apostle or apostle's associate, but we're called to be genuine and faithful in this thing. We need to teach our children so that when they hear the gospel, they'll say, "My daddy loves that gospel. My momma loves that Christ."

And God uses that. That's the sovereign path God used in Timothy's life, and by the way, there's something in the Bible about this, that this is a general, a general path to God for most people. I should say many people because I can't dogmatically say most. The word, the word "oikos" is the word "household" in the Bible, and it meant more than just mom and dad and a couple of kids and a dog. It, it usually meant the household. It could be work associates in that. It could be slaves and servants and, and extended relatives, but it was called a household. It's your, your, your web of relationships in life. Listen to these, I'll just go through them quickly and in John 4, the nobleman and his whole household were saved. In Acts 11, Cornelius and all his household were saved. In Acts 16, Lydia and her household were baptized. In Acts 16, the jailer believed in God and his whole household believed.

There's something to that but it's not absolute. Let's be balanced. There's some exceptions. If you love Jesus, sometimes the people who will hate you the most for it are people in your household. Are you willing? Are you okay with that? It could be. Hopefully not but it could be. Jesus said in Matthew 10:36, "A man's enemies will be the members of his household." Jesus said, "I didn't come to bring peace, I came to bring a sword." In other words, he said, "When I, when I throw My peace out there in this world of error, it's gonna chop up and cut up and mess up a lot of stuff and make a lot of people angry."

Paul's thankful for the sincerity of Timothy's faith and he's thankful for the sovereign provision through his grandmother and his mother to bring him to that point of believing

on Jesus Christ. Let me use this time to say to you again, don't you ever give up on a spouse that's lost. Don't ever give up on a child that's lost. Don't ever give up. Or grandchild. Or an uncle. Or a work associate. Just don't. Believe and pray and witness again. You don't know what God's gonna do.

Our fourth insight into the bond between Paul and Timothy, we see the deep longing for spiritual fellowship, and you could add on the end of that, in Paul's final days. These are Paul's final days. Notice what he says down in verse 4, "longing to see you." End of verse 4, "so that I may be filled with joy." Well, you can only imagine the apostle to the Gentiles in basically solitary confinement in a Roman prison and he says, "Timothy, I'm writing to you," he doesn't say this but in effect, "this may be the last thing I'm able to write. Well, I long to see you." You know, it's interesting to me there's no record, and I'm sure it was true, but there's no record of Paul saying, "I long to see my brothers according to the flesh, or I long to see my family members according to the flesh." No, he wants to see Timothy, his spiritual brother, his spiritual son.

Paul had a passion for his regular, earthly, fleshly kinsmen. Romans 9:1-3 he says, "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." He's saying, "I, I could even wish that I was accursed by Christ if I might win my family to Christ." But at the end here he says, "What's precious to me and dear to me are those who love my Christ and know my Christ." The spiritual family is what Paul is thinking on now, the eternal family that had been built by his ministry through the years. He longs to see his brother in arms. He longs to see his most trusted associate, the one who never let him down, the one who was ever-faithful, the one who proved over time the genuineness of his faith. He longed to see his son, even his beloved son in the Lord, Timothy.

It made me think that, you know, in principle all of us need a Paul or two, and all of us ought to have a Timothy or two. And I was thinking about this in my study this week about the number of people I know in this church that have basically done that. They've always had somebody they were trying to bring along. Ladies, can I say to you: our young girls and our young ladies desperately need godly mentoring. The world is violently deceiving ladies today. Deceiving them, trying to destroy them. Men, our young men, men desperately need mentoring and discipling. All of us ought to have a Paul and all of us ought to have a Timothy or two, and the place to do that is your small group. Before you go in there in two weeks, you ought to say, "Lord, who can I help encourage to go on in the faith? Who can I be something of a Paul to?" You'll not be a Paul. I can't be a Paul. There's only one, but in principle you can be a Paul to somebody. "Who can I help along in the faith a little bit? And Lord, who can I look to that I would let, I'd give permission to correct me, hold me accountable and be a Paul over me?"

Well, that's healthy to have that in our lives because it's probable that when your days or months from death, you're gonna know it, and what's gonna matter then is Jesus and those that know and love Jesus if you know and love him. I'm on holy ground here but I, I

thought back on Brother Aaron Singleton, Tommy Singleton's daddy, Donny Singleton's daddy that we know so well and love, and Aaron was a, an elected, um, official here in Muscle Shoals and loved by everybody. I'm convinced Aaron Singleton loved Christ. I went and visited him after he had been diagnosed as terminal and, um, that happened to be the day a, a, a lot of his old buddies that he hunted with and stuff were there, and not Aaron but some of the hunting buddies kinda let me know that I didn't need to be there, and that's fine. That was a special time for them and that was a good thing. So I left and I don't know, a few days later I came back to check on him and he was weaker, didn't know it then but not too many days after that he would be departed. I don't know how the conversation went but somehow before we prayed, he looked at me and he said, "Brother Jeff, all that matters now is Jesus. It's, it's like everything else, it, it just, I thought it ought, it just don't matter now." That's sort of what Paul's telling Timothy here. I just want to be close to Jesus, I want to be thinking on Jesus, and I want my brothers around me who love Jesus too because we're all coming to that day when all that matters is what we did for Jesus, how we honored Jesus, how we served Jesus. Hopefully on my deathbed and hopefully on your deathbed we can think of some Timothy's or Timothyette's, people we've influenced and encouraged to go on for God in this world. It will be worth it all when we see Jesus. It will be worth it all.