

## 2 Timothy 1:3-10

<sup>3</sup>I thank God, whom I serve with a clean conscience as my ancestors did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day. <sup>4</sup>When I remember your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup>I remember your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am convinced that it also lives in you.

<sup>6</sup>For this reason I am reminding you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. <sup>7</sup>For God did not give us a timid spirit, but a spirit of power and love and sound judgment. <sup>8</sup>So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Instead, join with me in suffering for the gospel while relying on the power of God. <sup>9</sup>He saved us and called us with a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, <sup>10</sup>and it has now been revealed through the appearance of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

## Fan the Flame

### I.

How many times had he woken up in the cold and dark? Probably too many times to count. It wasn't just that the power was out and the furnace hadn't kicked in. There were no light switches around. No gas range was there to give a satisfying click, click, click and then a tiny whoosh as the burner burst into a little flame, nor the glow of an electric element, either.

There *was* a tiny glow. It was the last remaining ember of the fire from the night before. To get warm, it was necessary to get out of the semi-warm bed, get some kindling, set it carefully around that ember, then blow, so it would become a flame that would eventually warm him up.

Sometimes this happened when he was camping with a tent or sleeping out under the stars. But that wasn't *always* the case. This was an every day occurrence, even when the heat of summer was beating down.

Every morning the fire had to be rebuilt to cook the day's food and warm the drinks. If a person was lucky, there would be an ember left to coax back into flame. To be unlucky meant that a fire had to be started from scratch.

How many dozens, or even hundreds, of different people had Paul watched go through the same process? He had traveled as a missionary all over the known world.

Paul wrote to Timothy: "Fan into flame the gift of God" (2 Timothy 1:6, EHV). The greatest gift of God is faith.

Unlike our modern conveniences, a fire for cooking or to keep you warm needs to be tended, or it either becomes nothing but embers or goes out completely. The same is true of the God's greatest gift. There is so much pressure on faith.

Times of great prosperity can lead to complacency. God and his Word get put on the back burner because life is good—you are healthy, your relationships are going well, your income is strong, you are enjoying everything life has to offer. With all that's going on in life, there isn't much time left over for God.

Then hard times come. Your income doesn't cover expenses, your health isn't what it once was, every relationship you had seems to have soured. Doubt causes you to take your eyes off the little ember of faith and focus on all kinds of other solutions that, in the end, just let you down.

## II.

Paul wrote this letter to Timothy from prison. Perhaps the fires in the prison didn't burn low so readily, because there was always someone on watch to keep the flames going. Despite continually burning flames, Paul would seem to have every reason to give in to despair. Nothing about his life was subject to his own whims or decisions; he was compelled to live in whatever way his guards demanded.

Paul wrote: "When I remember your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy" (2 Timothy 1:4, EHV). Timothy had visited Paul in prison. He knew it might be the last time he ever got to see Paul alive.

What had happened to Paul might have been intimidating to Timothy. "I remember your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am convinced that it also lives in you" (2 Timothy 1:5, EHV). Timothy's mother was married to a non-Jew, yet Eunice, his mother, and Lois, his grandmother, had made certain Timothy knew about the God of the Old Testament.

When Paul came to town, Timothy had learned that all God promised of old had been fulfilled by Jesus. He had a sincere faith in Jesus because his mother and grandmother had given him a solid background, and Paul had expanded on that background.

"For this reason I am reminding you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. <sup>7</sup>For God did not give us a timid spirit, but a spirit of power and love and sound judgment" (2 Timothy 1:6-7, EHV).

A timid spirit could easily let the God-given gift of faith die down into a sputtering ember. After his visit, Timothy was well-aware that boldly proclaiming the gospel might get him into the same difficult situation Paul found himself in.

Paul had installed Timothy into the public ministry. He had placed his hand on Timothy's head and given him a blessing to go about that ministry without timidity. Now he reminds Timothy of that moment. He reminds him that, in place of a timid spirit, God blesses his believers with power and love and sound judgment.

## III.

"So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Instead, join with me in suffering for the gospel while relying on the power of God. <sup>9</sup>He saved us and called us with a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace" (2 Timothy 1:8-9, EHV).

Paul was in prison, that was true, but who was he a prisoner *of*? The guards tending the fire and making sure Paul had something to eat weren't *really* in charge; Paul knew it.

Paul had been a persecutor of the Christians who followed the Lord Jesus. That one trip to Damascus to continue his life as a persecutor had changed his life forever. Jesus had appeared to him. *God* had saved Paul on that road. It certainly couldn't be said that *Paul* had been the one to choose Jesus—he had been fighting *against* Jesus. But God had his purposes. He wanted Paul to be a great missionary.

So it was that Paul considered himself a prisoner of the *Lord*, first and foremost. It didn't matter whether he found himself in Corinth, or Philippi, or Ephesus, or in some unknown part of Spain preaching the gospel, he was *compelled* to share the gospel of Jesus Christ that had truly set him free from the prison of his own misunderstanding.

"This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, <sup>10</sup>and it has now been revealed through the appearance of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:9-10, EHV).

It had been years since Paul had been led by the hand into Damascus to wait for Ananias

to restore his sight. He had seen Jesus along the road. He had heard the voice of the Savior. Years later, he could reflect on his life and see that it had all been worth it. Many, many people had been able to hear the gospel because Paul brought it to them. Countless millions he would never know about until they joined him in heaven would hear his letters and learn of Jesus through his words.

That's why Paul urged Timothy to join him. Even if Timothy would have to suffer, fanning the flames of the spark of the gospel planted by the Holy Spirit in someone's heart is worth it.

#### IV.

As you prepare to light a fire in the fire pit in the backyard or a campground, you gather leaves and twigs to serve as the kindling. You touch the match to the kindling, and slowly add more and more. Sometimes you have to fan the flames, to give the fire a little air so it can burn more brightly.

"I remember your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am convinced that it also lives in you" (2 Timothy 1:5, EHV). Do you remember your mother or grandmother, your father or grandfather, sitting down with you and teaching you about Jesus?

There were songs like "Jesus Loves Me," and "I Am Jesus' Little Lamb," and "Jesus Loves the Little Children." There were Bible stories like the Fall into Sin, and Noah's Ark, and the nation of Israel leaving Egypt for the Promised Land. There were the prophecies from Isaiah and the Psalms of David. There were the shepherds in the fields at night who heard from the angels that the Savior was born. There were the disciples staring up at Jesus, hanging on the cross. There were the shocked faces as Jesus appeared among them on Easter evening and speaking in languages they had never learned.

Maybe you heard these things from your parents and grandparents. Maybe you are the first generation in your family to ever have heard the news about Jesus. Either way, you heard them.

Now you are the parent or the grandparent or the friend who can now share these stories that are the history of God's saving activity for all people. Everyone needs to hear it, just as you have.

Years ago I wrote a note in this section of my Bible: "You are not in sales, but distribution." It's not your job to "make" believers, but to fan the flame, to share the gospel.

Maybe you know someone whose faith once burned brightly, but now is just a smoldering ember. Fan the flame. Remind that person that God promised never to leave or forsake his people, no matter what might have happened in their past. Show them the Good News that God saved them and called them, not because of their works—or lack of them—but according to his grace.

You might know someone who has never heard the message of Jesus. It might be your child or grandchild; it might be a friend. Gather the leaves and twigs—the Bible history you once heard. All that Bible history is a great place to start teaching the Good News about Jesus. Pile it carefully and fan the flame as the Holy Spirit does the work of planting faith in that precious heart.

In the Gospel for today, Jesus healed a demon-possessed man. The man wanted to come with Jesus, but Jesus told him: "Return to your home and tell how much God has done for you" (Luke 8:39, EHV). Wherever you are, whoever you know, tell what great things God has done for you. That's what fan the flame means, too. Remember the great things God has done for you, and *share* the great things God has done for you. Fan the flame. Amen.