

The Words We Need to Hear

(Family Matters, part 1)

II Timothy 1:1-14

I cannot think of a better place to be than here this morning. If you stop and think about it, every Sunday is a new beginning for us: the good news of the gospel is God has given us a second chance. Whether you are 9 or 99, God's love is for you.

Turn to your neighbor this morning, and tell them, "I'm glad you're here." Worshipping God is for an entire community, not just one or two. Your presence is a gift to us, a holy and pleasing sacrifice to God. Let's pray.

Lord God, you are awesome in this place. Let us never forget that. Speak now your words to us. Let us hear your still small voice. Lord, if there is any part of us that needs to change to conform your will, we ask that you give us the desire, power, and discipline to do it. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Today we are beginning a series called, "Family Matters." Families do matter. We all come from one. Last week, my extended family met for our annual summer vacation. It's pretty crazy with 12 of us in one house. Even if you don't have a large family, we all know people who live in families. Strengthening and growing families of faith should be every church's priority, including here at Grace UMC. So whether you're a mom, dad, son, daughter, aunt, uncle, or unrelated mentor, God has a role for you to play in encouraging all the families God places in your path.

The first step in strengthening our families has to do with our words. See if you can sing this line with me. "Home, home on the range. Where the deer and the antelope play. Where seldom is heard....." Right, "A discouragin' word, and the skies are not cloudy all day." Now, I'm not asking you all to become cowboys this morning (although that would be cool), but I am asking you, when was the last time you were in a place where "seldom was heard a discouragin' word"?

Words have power. They say, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Sorry, that's not true. Discouraging words will always hurt us and our families. I've been told, the power of one insult has the same strength as seven compliments. Seven. That means, if two people hurt you with their words twice this morning, it's going to take 14 affirmations to bring back

your joy. When your neighbor turned to you a moment ago, I pray those won't be the only positive words you hear today.

This is our simple truth this morning: We all long to hear words of encouragement. If we want our families to be strong, we need to use encouraging words with each other. It's easier to achieve our goals when we are encouraged. I know this firsthand. My journey to be a pastor certainly is easier because of the encouragement I have received. When I think to how discouraged I was as an engineer, I shudder. I was not productive. I was not filled with joy. And it took affirmations from many around me to help me answer my call. I'm not perfect, but I want to be the biggest cheerleader in the lives of those around me, especially my family and my children.

We all long to hear words of encouragement. And I submit to you, those words need to come from our families, from our friends, and from God. Do you want to live in a place where “often is heard an encouraging word?” Me, too. So let's open our Bibles to 2nd Timothy and find encouragement from God.

Here we encounter Paul and Timothy. Paul was possibly the greatest missionary the church has ever known. Half of the books in the New Testament are attributed to Paul. And everywhere Paul went, he was encouraging and admonishing the churches to follow Jesus.

When Paul was traveling, he met Timothy (you can read about it in Acts 16), and brought him along as he strengthened the churches. Timothy was an intimate travel partner with Paul. Timothy heard Paul's sermons, he saw the mobs and riots firsthand, and he visited Paul in prison to help him. Eventually, Paul appointed Timothy to oversee the work of those churches, and hence, we have his two letters addressed to Timothy in the Bible.

The question I was to tackle this morning is, what did Paul do for Timothy? If Paul was Timothy's ultimate cheerleader, what practices can we learn here? You notice in verse 2, Paul calls Timothy, “my dear son.” Timothy is not literally Paul's son, but a fellow pastor and helper to Paul. Verse 3 says that Paul constantly prayed for Timothy. Do you constantly lift up your family in your prayers? Is it your habit not only to pray with each other, but also for each other? Think about how Timothy must have felt to read this letter and know that Paul, his father in Christ, was constantly praying for him.

When we pray for our families, what do we pray for? When I pray for my children, I don't pray that they will grow up to be millionaires. I pray that they will be strong in their faith. I pray they will make wise choices and learn from their mistakes. I pray, if they choose to be married, that they will find spouses who also have a heart for God. And I pray that God will show me how I can constantly encourage them.

It's not easy to pray for your family, especially if you don't get along with them. But in prayer, God changes our attitudes. It's awfully hard to be discouraging or angry with someone you constantly remember in your prayers. I don't think Paul and Timothy agreed 100% on everything, but I'll guarantee that they constantly prayed for each other. Prayer is the number one way to strengthen and encourage our families.

The second way Paul encouraged Timothy was by reminding Timothy of his legacy. Timothy had great examples of faithfulness in his grandmother and mother. Paul reminded him, “You're not alone in this. This faith lives in you, too.” If becoming a Christian was simply a family heritage, why would Timothy need this reminder? Individually, we all must decide to follow Jesus Christ. We cannot choose what our children will believe. Yet if we are to encourage our children to follow Christ, we must show them examples in our own family. If you want to encourage another family to grow stronger, point out to their child how much it means to be in church with their mom or dad. Anyone can do this. Paul pointedly reminded Timothy that his faith was shared with the whole family. That was encouraging.

So Paul prayed for Timothy and reminded him of his family's legacy. What else?

Paul reminded Timothy of his calling. In verse 6, Paul talks about “the laying on of hands.” That is a commissioning. We're are going to model that in a when we do the baptism covenant with the Goke family today. Laying hands on someone is a symbolic way to transfer your strength, your encouragement, and your blessing onto someone. You empower them to go forth in your place. You encourage them with your touch. When I was commissioned, the bishop laid hands on me. My family has prayed over me. Let me tell you, it is powerful.

Throughout this letter, Paul is battling any discouragement Timothy might feel. Paul knows, it is tempting to be afraid of what others might say about you. That’s why Paul says in verse 8, “Don’t be ashamed of the gospel.” Memorize that verse. Against all those voices that would discourage us, God speaks the ultimate word. If an insult is worth seven compliments, then a word from God must be 7,000 positives. Even though Paul suffers for the sake of the gospel, his overall tone is optimistic. Why? Because God spoke into Paul’s life, and out of that relationship, Paul encourages Timothy, other leaders, even you and me.

Paul was in a literal prison when he wrote this letter. Discouragement can put us in a figurative prison, too. Prisons of depression, despair and pessimism. Words can chain us down and make everything seem impossible.

Yet Paul is not ashamed. He is not depressed. Look at verse 12. He knows whom he has believed. This is what God’s word is trying to tell us this morning. Do you want strong families? Then realize that there is power in placing Christ in the center of our lives. Do you want a spirit of encouragement to strengthen our families? Put Jesus in the center.

Paul knew redemption and peace. He knew a future of hope and eternal life. Paul was so convinced of these things, not even prison could stop him from sharing this good news. This Paul’s legacy. He’s saying to Timothy, “You can do it!” He’s saying to all of us today, “You can do it! You can live for Christ!” We are not alone.

Listen once more to verses 13 and 14. “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.”

Paul is saying, “Put into practice what I’ve told you and shown you.” This is not just instruction for Timothy, it is for us all. We must commit to always use encouraging words, just like Paul did for Timothy.

I want to be transparent for a moment. This might be really hard for you. It is for me. To always speak encouraging words does not mean we must agree with everyone. It doesn’t mean we become pushovers. What it means is, we choose to see the best in everyone around us. Our families want to hear good news from our lips. As Dale Carnegie once said, “Never criticize, condemn, or

complain." It's not easy to do that. But we can. And we can start with our families. They should always hear praise and blessings from our lips. Even if we disagree or fight, we can choose to be calm, level-headed, and use loving words.

Look around you for a moment. These are the people who need to hear encouragement. And if any of you are thinking, "Pastor, I'm not sure what I'm getting myself into. I'm not sure I can do this," remember our memory verse. God has not given you a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline. The Bible says you can do this. Are you really going to argue with God?

Please extend your hand out to the person nearest you. Put it on their shoulders, if you can. Let's pray for our church families, that as they put Christ in the center of their lives, they will have a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline, and together, we will all make disciples of Jesus Christ.

(Pray a blessing on the church.)

MEMORY VERSE:

2nd Timothy 1:7 "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Who has encouraged you in your life?
2. How good are you at encouraging others?
3. Do you feel that God speaks encouragement to you? How?
4. How can you encourage and support the families of our church in 2022?