

Appendix A Sermon Sample

Words of Hope for Seasons of Distress

2 Timothy 1:1-2

By: Stan Reid

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (2 Timothy 1:1-2).

The sun broke bright and clear over Washington, D.C. on the morning of January 20, 1961. The ground was covered with eight inches of snow that had fallen the night before. It was bitterly cold, but the day was bathed in a bright aura. The sunlight reflected off the snow and the marble buildings of the nation's capital. At noon John F. Kennedy took the oath of office and became the 35th president of the United States.

Many questioned Kennedy's ability to lead the country at such a critical time. The Cold War was heating to a boiling point with the massive buildup of nuclear arsenals. The fact that Kennedy was the youngest president ever elected and the first Catholic to hold the office also contributed to the questions. Knowing that he had been elected by the slimmest of margins in the popular vote meant that his presidency was beginning with the country divided.

In his speech, Kennedy attempted to unite the country and address the world. Memorable lines from the speech include the following:

"We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage, and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

"And so my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

Thurston Clarke, author of the book *Ask Not*—a treatise on the Kennedy inaugural address—stated,

"When Kennedy said, 'Ask not what your country can do for you...,' people knew that this was a man who'd been decorated in World War II, who'd almost lost his life trying to

save the surviving crew members of the PT boat under his command. So it wasn't *Where does he get off saying 'Ask not'?* He had the credentials to make this claim on people."

In a similar way, Paul had the credentials to make claims on Timothy and other Christian leaders of Timothy's generation. Paul was in prison—again—awaiting the outcome of a second hearing. He was not optimistic about the outcome of his trial before Lord Caesar, but he was certain of his standing before the heavenly Lord as a righteous judge (4:6-8).

So even though it appeared to be a distressing time to Timothy, Paul assured him with words of hope. But, imagine how Timothy must have felt when he read these words of resignation from Paul: "As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come" (4:6).

As the letter unfolds, we get a picture of an urgent situation. I'm working from the position that the letter originated with Paul in the mid-60s at the height of Nero's malicious persecution of the church in Rome. The beleaguered apostle was passing the torch to the next generation of Christian leaders (see 2:2). In the heat of the moment, some of his delegates had abandoned him (1:15). Under threats from the state, some were defecting from the faith (4:10). I think that Paul was concerned whether Timothy would withstand the pressure and fulfill his calling (1:6-8).

Beyond the menace of *outside* harassment and persecution Paul perceived a more insidious threat from *within* the church. Teachers were presenting bad doctrine that Paul says is spreading like gangrene and resulting in bad behavior (2:17-18). Quarrels were erupting and sides being taken (2:24). It was a distressing time for the church (3:1).

In this time of distress, Paul both encouraged and challenged Timothy. In fact, it seems that at times Paul was urging Timothy to "man-up" to the distressing circumstances. The future of the church was in the balance. With Paul probably sidelined permanently, he knew the urgency of the moment. Christian leaders like Timothy could not pull back and lie low in such distressing times.

Yes, Paul definitely had the credentials to make such a strong claim on Timothy's life. 2 Timothy begins in the typical style of a formal letter commonly written in the first century Roman world. But as was Paul's practice, he finessed the standard letter opening with a distinct Christian touch.

There are two elements in the greeting that I want to highlight. Those are *authority* and *personal relationship*. Paul claims *authority* when he states that he is "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (1:1). He called on the *relationship* between himself and Timothy when he addressed Timothy as his "dear child" or "beloved son" (1:2).

In the line prior to his bold announcement that the torch had been passed to a new generation, Kennedy said, "We dare not forget today that we are the *heirs* of that first revolution" (emphasis added). As children of a revolution, the readiness to challenge authority seems to be a

part of our national DNA. Submission has never been a character trait that Americans gladly embrace. This is consequential for the church in America.

As Christians, we need to remember that we are also heirs. It is important that we not forget Paul's admonition that we need those older ones, our elders in the faith, who have lived and learned through the struggles, the successes, and the failures of confessing Jesus as Lord in daily life. Yes, we need to submit to those whose faith was forged, knowledge gained, and wisdom earned in the crucible of experience. There is an element of authority that comes with such faithfulness.

However, those granted such authority must not succumb to abusing it or misusing it. Christian authority will inherently have a gentle, loving and gracious dimension (2:24-26). Although Paul claims the authority granted to him as an apostle by the will of God, he does not attempt to beat Timothy into submission.

Rather, Paul turns to the *relationship* he and Timothy had forged over the years. Before he began to instruct and challenge Timothy, he reminded him that he loved him like a son. Deep affection and regard is embedded in this tender address. In playing the authority card, Paul tempers it with the relationship card.

Kennedy's words resonate with Paul's challenge to Timothy's generation of Christian leaders. I could hear Paul saying, "Ask not what the church can do for you. Ask what you can do for the church." As Paul passed the torch, don't you think he hoped that the next generation of Christian leaders might have said, "We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of the gospel."

Later in the letter, Paul would admonish Timothy saying, ". . . and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well" (2:2). By following Paul's instruction in general and his example in particular, Timothy would also gain the authority to pass the faith on to the next generation. Such mentoring has the potential to help others to become fine Christian leaders and capable teachers, caring friends and colleagues, gentle husbands and tender wives, respectful children, and committed church members.

I appreciate Kennedy's call for the American people to be proud of their heritage. But as a Christian, I know that the American heritage pales in comparison to the ancient heritage of the gospel and the church that bears responsibility for it until Jesus returns to fully establish his kingdom. May we give that Christian heritage due respect and readily accept the challenge to do whatever it takes to practice the faith in times of distress which are inevitably a part of living out the faith.

May we also encourage one another with Paul's words, "I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him" (1:12). Even in times of distress, Christians are assured by Paul's words to Timothy that there is reason to hope. The church would do well, in its own season of distress, to again carefully listen to these words of hope from Paul to Timothy.

Appendix B

Sermon Sample

Notice the Scarred Hands and Remember the Stories

2 Timothy 1:3-5

By: Stan Reid

2 Timothy 1:3-5 I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

I sat across from the old man in his room. My attention had turned from him to a bulletin board filled with pictures of him with four generations of his family. I walked and stood close to the board contemplating the pictures. Momentarily lost in my own thoughts and memories, I heard the familiar soft screech of him rolling his wheelchair up near to where I stood. Without looking, I assumed that he was joining me to look at the pictures. When I turned my attention back to him his eyes were fixed on me. In them, I saw weariness. He then reached out his aged and shaking hands to take mine.

Holding his hands I saw the new wounds from a recent fall. The hands also bore old scars from his days of hard work on the family farm and in the oil fields. On one side of his forehead was a fresh abrasion. On the other side, I could see the faint outline of another old scar. Nearly 40 years ago a small part of the skull had been removed and replaced during a surgery to repair a brain aneurysm that nearly took his life.

As I held his scarred hands I remembered some of his stories. He was born two years prior to the Great Depression. His family was poor and life was hard. He never said it, but they probably lived at the edge of survival. Just before World War II his father found a good job, but was killed in a work related accident not long after his employment. Today the family likely would have received a multimillion dollar settlement since the death was caused by negligence on the part of the employer. In 1940, all the family would receive was a few hundred dollars. How could the family survive that tragedy in a time like that?

As the oldest son, he took it on himself to provide for his mother and two brothers. Dropping out of school meant his formal education would end at the ninth grade. He took

whatever work he could find. Even with that sacrifice, the family still struggled along. He turned 18 in 1944 and became a soldier. During that time his mother became ill with cancer. He was called home from his Army post to be at her bedside when she died. After the funeral he returned to his duties in the military. A training injury prevented him from joining the forces in Europe or the Pacific. That left a mark on him because he was always embarrassed for not having earned his red badge of courage in battle like so many in his generation had.

Upon completing his military duty, he returned home. He lived with various relatives, worked at a number of jobs, and got married. He and his bride began to attend a church in their little hometown. He was baptized and grew serious about the practice of his fledgling faith. The preaching and teaching he heard led him to embrace legalistic ways and espouse sectarian views.

As I looked at those scarred hands, I remembered with regret a time when I looked down on him because I disliked and rejected his religious views. With more maturity, I realized that he had been a good Christian the whole time. It was confirmed in his godly life even if his views of the church and other Christian traditions were flawed.

When I glanced up from his hands, the old man's eyes were still trained on me. He was carefully studying my eyes. I felt as if he were peering into my soul. Then he said, "You're a good boy." A lump formed in my throat because, you see, that old man holding my hands and looking deep into my eyes was my Dad.

Collecting myself I said, "Dad, the only reason you can say I'm a good boy is because you are a good father. You helped shape who I am." I knew that without the guidance, discipline and love of my Dad and others, some of whom are sitting here today, I'd be much less of a man than I am today. Those old scarred hands are a reminder of the price my Dad paid fulfilling his responsibilities as a son, as a husband and as a father. When I see them I am reminded of the love and respect he has earned from me.

As I read the text for today and began to prepare this homily, for some reason I thought about that moment with my Dad. It caused me to wonder about Paul's hands as he dipped a pen in ink and began to push it across the page. From a technical perspective, Paul was most likely dictating the letter and someone else, such as his friend Luke, was writing it. However, in my mind, Paul was animated and probably, like many of us, spoke with his hands. My point is to imagine Paul's hands as this letter to Timothy, his dear son in the faith, was penned. Timothy

was certainly on Paul's mind, in his heart, and in his prayers. As I think about Paul composing that letter, I wonder if his hands bore scars. I imagine they did.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote, "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (6:17b). The Greek word translated 'marks' is *stigma*. It referred to scars left by a hot brand used to mark slaves, or it could refer to marks left by beatings and injuries. Paul's scars verified that he was owned by his master, Jesus. However, Paul's scars were also a visual record of stories about his Christian faith and the cost of his ministry.

Timothy knew the stories behind Paul's scars. In Timothy's hometown of Lystra, Paul was stoned by adversaries and left for dead (Acts 14:19). If Timothy did not witness the stoning, surely he heard about it. In addition, through nearly two decades of travel with Paul, Timothy probably had firsthand accounts of the other beatings, assaults and wrecks directly resulting from his service to Jesus. Yes, the scars could tell stories.

In verse 8 we find that Paul was in prison again. His preaching sometimes landed him there. I confess that I've preached sermons that warranted the pulpit police being summoned to lock me up for dereliction of duty. However, in Paul's case, his incarcerations were caused because his message was so faithful to the gospel. It so clearly challenged the assumptions of the world around him that it led to his imprisonment. It was a message that said Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord.

Toward the end of this letter Paul plainly states that the time of his "departure" was near (4:6). He expected to be sentenced for a capital crime. One judicial hearing had already occurred (4:16). In the aftermath, some had deserted him in his plight (1:15; 4:16), others of their own accord or at Paul's direction had returned to mission points (4:10), and still others had defected from the faith (2:17-18; 4:9). But he recounts for Timothy how Onesiphorus had faithfully and courageously ministered to him in prison (1:16-18). Although Luke was the only one who remained with him, Paul found much comfort in his company (4:11).

So Paul wanted to see Timothy one last time and urged him to come quickly (4:9). The context of the letter suggests that it was a perilous moment for Christians. The times called for courage and conviction which required deep roots. In the three of the verses in our text—which serve as the greeting— Paul uses three different words for memory. He constantly *remembers* Timothy in his prayers (1:3). He *recalled* Timothy's tears when he and Paul last separated (1:4). He was *reminded* of Timothy's sincere faith which was first forged in Judaism by the examples

and religious instruction of his devoted mother and grandmother (1:5). It appears that Timothy's father was not present and/or was not involved in his spiritual training. So when Lois, Eunice and Timothy became Christians, Paul became a surrogate spiritual father for Timothy.

Having seen the departures, desertions and defections of other co-workers, I wonder if Paul was concerned about Timothy's courage and loyalty. The letter appeals for Timothy's firm dedication and unwavering allegiance to Christ, to Paul, and to his own ministry. Maintaining that loyalty would likely result in Timothy suffering; possibly to the same extent that Paul was.

So Paul reminded Timothy of his heritage of faith. He pointed to Timothy's mother, grandmother, and himself as examples of those who stayed the course. He wanted Timothy to respect that heritage and draw on its memory to help fortify him for the struggle at hand. Luke Timothy Johnson says that Paul was from a culture that held convictions very different from our own. According to Johnson, Paul's culture believed:

"... that older people were wiser than younger people and had wisdom to share with them; that human life had certain repeatable patterns and was not invented fresh with each child or generation; that people learn values best from stories, especially real-life stories; that virtue and wisdom were best learned from the living texts of virtuous and wise persons. A moral maxim may tell us not to lie. But only when we observe the moral person in action do we learn the beauty, subtlety, and rigor of truth-speaking." (Luke Timothy Johnson, *Knox Preaching Guides: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*).

By the time Paul wrote this letter, Timothy was a mature Christian and a seasoned minister. But to face his current challenges, he needed reinforcement by *remembering* that his faith was deeply rooted in that of his grandmother, mother, and Paul.

Paul also knew that there were first-generation Christians depending on Timothy to hold out his hand to them as they took their first unsteady steps of faith in a less than affirming and sometimes hostile environment. Today it is also important that first generation Christians be gently, but firmly rooted in the faith. They need Christian models to tell them the stories of faith and show them how to live the faith.

The Big Brothers, Big Sisters program is aware of how important role models are in developing the next generation. They know that too many children do not have good examples in their immediate families.

A first generation Christian needs other Christians to nurture them in the faith. If you are a first generation Christian, and are looking for such a person, be sure and look for the scars. I'm not speaking of physical scars. Rather, I'm speaking about those psychic and spiritual scars earned by being faithful in difficult circumstances.

Then ask about the stories behind those scars. Ask them to tell you stories of the faithful ones in the Bible story. Ask them to teach you to pray. Ask them to show you how to worship. Ask them why they remained faithful through the years and what helped them to do so. Ask what they did when they failed and fell short of what God wants. Listen closely to those stories. Learn from and be inspired by their scars.

If you are a mature Christian, think of the impact God has made and/or could make through your attention to a Christian "little" brother or "little" sister. That little one might be a child, a grandchild, or a great grandchild. But in our mobile society, it might be the new Christian who is an adult, but has no roots of a family faith to draw on. Or, it might be one who has been a Christian for years, but is lost and confused in one of those life transitions that you weathered and your faith was made stronger in the crucible.

When I think about my Dad's feeble and scarred hands, I remember when they were strong and powerful. I am reminded of how they protected me, guided me, hugged me, and spanked me. I recall that those hands fed me and paid for my education. But most of all, and what I am most thankful for, is that those hands guided me into faith and into the waters of baptism. Through the years Dad showed me how an *ordinary man* with an *ordinary job* and who lived as an *ordinary Christian* could have an *extraordinary impact*. It was not until late in his life that he came to understand the doctrine of grace. But God's grace had been at work in his life all along. His accomplishments will not be recorded in the annals of history. But his work touched my life and the lives of many others with a measure of God's grace.

In Second Timothy we overhear Paul guiding Timothy in a threatening time. If we listen closely, we will also hear him calling us to *remember* the stories from our Christian roots. When we contemplate the scars on the hands of the one who composed this letter, we are *reminded* to

recall the stories. Through this we can be fortified to face the challenges of our day and find the courage to live faithfully by passing the faith from generation to generation.

Stories of faith and redemption come in some surprising ways and from surprising people. I recall preaching at one worship assembly. As I looked out over the congregation I was suddenly struck by what I saw. There in the assembly with all the saints was a recovering addict, two adults who still felt the pain of having absentee fathers in childhood, a man raising a teenaged daughter alone because he had been widowed at the age of twenty-five, and a lady who once prostituted herself to support her drug habit. Each one of these bore psychic and spiritual scars. But each one also had found that Jesus can mend and heal broken lives. Divine grace was at work in all of those people with the scars. They, every last one of them, were not only sitting with the saints, in the providence of God's grace, they are counted among the saints.

Like Paul's scars, the scars of each one of them tells a story that is part of the larger story of Christian faith. If we look at the scars and listen to the stories of those around us, we will catch glimpses of and hear the testimony confirming the work of a powerful and gracious God who goes to great lengths to save us, restore us, and empower us to participate in his ongoing mission of redemption.

I also remember the story of a Christian woman who bore the psychological scars from a rape she had endured. Long after the physical injuries healed she still suffered from the psychic wounds and flashbacks. As much as her church leaders ministered to her, no one seemed able to help her break through the pain. One of those leaders showed a good measure of wisdom when he asked, "Is there anyone in this church that you believe could help you through this time." After thinking about it awhile, she said, "Yes, I think I'd like to tell Jim my story."

Her choice of Jim was somewhat of a surprise to the church leader. Jim was a recovering alcoholic who continued to need a great deal of support himself. When asked why she chose Jim, she replied, "Jim has been to hell and back. I think that he might know how to help me get out."

Paul, wanting to bolster Timothy in a season of distress, pointed him back to his mother and grandmother. To remember those who lived faithfully and courageously serves us well as we strive to do the same. Robert Coles was a gifted teacher at Harvard for many years. He taught a popular course to undergraduate students that dealt with great literature and lives. Coles' goal was to use those stories to instill character in his students. In a book based on his class lectures and edited by two of his students (Trevor Hall and Vicki Kennedy) Coles wrote, "On certain

occasions memories come flooding back to us, and in a strange way because of those memories we become more of ourselves and more real (in some sense)” (*Handing One Another Along: Literature and Social Reflection*, p. 193).

I think that Paul would agree with Coles. Paul intentionally stirred Timothy’s memory of his mother and grandmother. He expected that to cause Timothy to tap into those wonderful sources of hope and encouragement. Paul, in his own distressing circumstances, could write such encouraging words of hope because he knew what Dorothy Sayers would say so well nearly twenty centuries later: “If we can see the strong hands of God twist a crown of thorns into a crown of glory, and in hands as strong as that we can know ourselves safe.” (*Creed or Chaos*, p.18). In such hands, we are never beyond hope.

Appendix C

Sermon Sample

Don’t Back Down!
2 Timothy 1:15-18
By: Stan Reid

2 Tim. 1:15-18: 15 You are aware that all who are in Asia have turned away from me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. 16 May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain; 17 when he arrived in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me 18 -- may the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! And you know very well how much service he rendered in Ephesus.

The letter of Second Timothy is marked by a significant degree of personal pathos. Paul, chained as a criminal and languishing under Roman imprisonment, felt abandoned and betrayed by those he depended on to be faithful to the Christian mission and loyal to him. Earlier, in verse 8, it would appear that he believed some were not only ashamed of him as a prisoner of the Lord, but were also ashamed of the message of the cross.

However, Paul stressed that he was not ashamed of his status as a prisoner, or of his proclamation about a crucified Savior. A Roman chain might confine him, but it could not stifle his testimony about Christ. Criticism from opponents would not have its desired effect of breaking his spirit. The defections of others from Christian commitment could not deter him from his mission. Each stroke of the pen in this personal letter to Timothy reinforced the stand Paul was taking. He was saying, in effect, “I won’t back down!” It would take more than a chain to force Paul to cease his witness and abandon his ministry. The only thing that would silence him was the executioner’s sword.

In our text, Paul revealed the personal nature of his deep disappointment. It was a time that demanded courage under fire from Christians. Regretfully, some were backing down. He was open about his disappointment with two men in particular.

Phygelus and Hermogenes were probably Christian leaders who had worked with Paul and would have been known by Timothy. Their defections had possibly caused others to distance themselves from Paul, and could possibly influence them to abandon the message and way of the cross. Some scholars make the case that Phygelus and Hermogenes had simply lost courage and deserted Paul when he was taken into custody or when he was incarcerated.

However, it seems more feasible that these two were actually guilty of apostasy. The word Paul used to describe their behavior is translated “turn away from” in the NRSV and “deserted” in the NIV. It is used two other times in the Pastoral Epistles. In 2 Timothy 4:4 and Tit 1:14 the word was used to warn Timothy and Titus to resist and avoid those who reject the truth of the gospel in favor of myths. Whether it was apostasy or failure of nerve, Paul was deeply troubled about implications of the defection of Phygelus and Hermogenes.

Although this was a season of distress for Paul, such moments of suffering did not surprise him. The Acts of the Apostles and Paul’s epistles reveal that he had dealt with his share of affliction throughout his ministry. He knew that it was part of traveling the way of the cross. But it was particularly painful this time since the source of the distress was not outsiders, but Christian friends, his trusted partners in ministry.

This forewarns those who serve the church to not be surprised when their suffering comes at the hands of the church. Many such stories could be told. Some of you are currently living in a season of distress and could tell your own story. But one particular story of courage under fire that led to a season of distress has special meaning for me.

Dr. Carl Spain was one of my Bible professors at Abilene Christian University when I was a student there in the 1970s. The school was well known in its church tradition for the Bible Lectureship it hosted each February. The Lectureship served as the major gathering of church leaders from that tradition. Thousands of ministers, missionaries, and lay people from across the United States and around the world were drawn together for worship, teaching and fellowship.

In February of 1960, the college asked Dr. Spain to present a lecture titled, “Modern Challenges to Christian Morals.” A month before his speech was to be presented; a young African-American man had been denied admission to the college because of his race. The college and the churches it represented clearly reflected the dominant Southern culture of a Jim Crow society. The social injustice and the hypocrisy of racism of the city, at the college and in his church had been weighing on Dr. Spain’s conscience for some time.

I believe we can learn a lesson from that situation regarding the church being relevant to its culture. The college and the church were very relevant to the dominant Southern culture holding power in the city. In fact, the college and the churches were so relevant that they embraced the Southern culture of racism over the clear call of the gospel.

Beyond its Bible Lectureship, the college was also famous for its outdoor track and field program which produced Olympic champions. The school hosted an annual track meet that

would sometimes attract some of the best teams and athletes in the nation. In the early 1960s Gayle Sayers was one of those athletes. He had reached national prominence as a football player and track star at Kansas University. I remember Sayers being interviewed a few years ago. In the interview, he recalled how surprised and frightened he was when his team visited Abilene for the track meet. Hotel after hotel and restaurant after restaurant refused him accommodations and service. Four decades after the event he still remembered his treatment in Abilene. This was in a city that was proud to have three Christian colleges and presented itself as a Christian town.

The college and the church had gone far beyond being relevant to the culture. It had been swallowed by the culture and did not even know it. The frog was definitely in the kettle. It is clear reminder that we should be very careful when we think we have to be relevant to culture in order to reach the culture. Paul made it clear in the dominant culture he encountered that his goal was to make the culture relevant to the gospel and not vice versa.

Carl Spain lived under the same conviction. In preparation for his lecture, he began to wrestle with the true implications inherent in his assignment to speak on “Modern Challenges to Christian Morals.” I am told that he began the speech in a soft voice. He started with erudite remarks on ethics and the meaning of morality. He touched on some of the typical vices that Christians should avoid and the audience expressed its agreement with him.

But well into the speech, he boldly told the truth about the immorality of racism in the nation, in the church, and at the college. He knew there would likely be a negative reaction, but the gospel’s hold on his conscience led him to courageously say, *“Whether we are willing to admit it or not, there are some dark chapters in the history of America ... vile as have been perpetrated on the face of the earth. Marching under the standard of the god of mammon and bluffing his way with ballots and bullets, the white man put his big white foot on the Negro’s neck, quoted the pledge of allegiance to the flag, and piously recited platitudes about all men being born free and equal.”*

Although there were a number of “Amens” from the audience, murmurs of disapproval began to drown out those. Dr. Spain’s speech set off a fire storm of angry reaction that lasted for some time. Thankfully, the administration of the college stood behind him.

However, it was not the same in the churches. Prior to his Lectureship speech, Dr. Spain had been a popular guest preacher and lecturer in churches. After the speech those invitations practically dried up. More hurtful than that was the vindictiveness of the personal attacks aimed at him.

Something else was even more disconcerting. The criticism and threats were so fierce that his wife’s health broke under the stress. He bore the burden of that hurt the rest of his life. As much as he suffered for telling the truth, Dr. Spain displayed courage under fire. He, like Paul, could not back down.

Our passage is one of several in 2 Timothy implying that Paul wondered if Timothy’s courage was wavering. Although it would require personal risk on Timothy’s part, Paul wanted and expected Timothy to visit him in prison. Of course Paul would benefit from the company of

his dear son in the faith, but I tend to think there was much more at stake. I suspect that Paul wanted one last opportunity to instruct, encourage, and admonish Timothy face to face in order to fortify him for the challenges ahead.

The behavior of Phygelus and Hermogenes must have fueled Paul's concern about Timothy. But on the other hand, Paul had another memory to hold on to in this season of distress. Onesiphorus, on his own accord, had done exactly what Paul was asking of Timothy. Unlike the end of Acts, Paul's place of incarceration in Rome was not easily found this time. In addition, the first criminal hearing had not gone well and Paul expected the worst. This indicates that he was considered an enemy of the state. Onesiphorus, in his willingness to be identified as an ally of Paul, was risking his own well-being. In that, he showed courage under fire. Out of his love for Paul, and his willingness to travel the way of the cross, Onesiphorus took the risk. He like Paul, did not back down under pressure to be relevant.

Paul still felt blessed each time he recalled the refreshment provided by the companionship and aid of Onesiphorus. The memory was a firm reminder that everyone had not abandoned the faith or deserted Paul in his season of distress. If Timothy was hesitant to visit Paul, he had a decision to make. Onesiphorus had charted the course. Paul expected Timothy to follow it and arrive in Rome before winter (4:21).

In light of that, I think of Dr. Spain who helped me chart my own course. It was on a hot summer day in 1988 that I last saw Dr. Spain. It had been 16 years since I first studied under him. Nearly 30 years had passed since he had delivered his speech which in the intervening years had become respected for its courageous stance.

When I arrived on the campus in 1972, the racial barrier had been broken. Dr. Spain's speech must have been viewed as distant history because I don't recall ever hearing it spoken about while I was a student at the college. Although there were others who agreed with Dr. Spain and were working to change the racist culture at the school, his speech hastened the day that the doors were opened and African-American students were welcomed on campus.

That summer day Dr. Spain and I met was hot in another way. My preaching was drawing fire from certain quarters in the church I was serving. A faction that tended to be legalistic and sectarian had grown apprehensive about the soundness of my sermons and convictions. In retrospect, I have to admit that I was not entirely innocent. My youthful idealism, Scots-Irish stubbornness, and iconoclastic tendencies caused me to have some satisfaction as I added fuel to the fire.

However, I was worn down by the incessant criticism of a few. My wife feared that I would get fired. Behind the scenes I was questioning my calling to ministry as much as my opponents were. The heat was becoming oppressive. I began to play with the thought of following some of my predecessors in ministry who grew weary of the heat and had gone to law school and were establishing successful careers as attorneys. More importantly, the stress in my life was spilling over on my wife and children in negative ways. Needing encouragement and direction, I called Dr. Spain. Although his health was failing, he graciously agreed to a meeting.

It had been about ten years since we last saw one another. It was refreshing to find that his mind was sharp as ever, and that his smile and wit were as quick as ever. After the initial pleasantries, I told him my story. Hearing my discouragement and sensing my heartbreak, he then told me his story for the first time.

As he recounted the events of 1960 there was never a trace of bitterness in his voice. However, I could see the sadness in his eyes and hear the hurt in his voice as he recalled those dark days. He had been injured by the verbal assaults aimed at him. But the deepest wound was the suffering his wife endured and how the ridicule and hate spilled on him left a stain on her and broke her spirit.

He then told me that he would do it again. The truth of the gospel must be told even when it is risky or costly to do so. Someone had to say it back in 1960. Dr. Spain could not back down for a reason. He like Paul, knew the one in whom he had put his trust, and was sure that he was able to guard until that day what he had entrusted to him.

Hearing me tell about the stress that my wife was under and remembering what had happened to his wife, Dr. Spain encouraged me to look for another church and even consider a new form of ministry. Regarding the latter, he encouraged me to pursue a doctorate with the intent to teach at a Christian college instead of pursuing a law degree. For him, teaching impressionable college students had been a saving grace. He thought it could be the same for me. But he never suggested that I should give up on the church or abandon ministry.

We never saw one another again after that meeting. I moved to a new church in another city a year later. With its blessing I continued my education in 1990 as Dr. Spain had encouraged. He died that year. I often think of him as a beloved professor, of what he did in February of 1960, and how he became my Onesiphorus on a hot summer afternoon in 1988. He brought refreshment and hope through his kind presence, gentle words, and godly example.

I recall that he never suggested that what he had done in 1960 was particularly daring or great. But I know different. He showed courage under fire and would not back down. He helped right a wrong that had been condoned in the nation, in the church, and at the college for too many years.

Through Onesiphorus, Paul glimpsed God's grace in one of his darkest moments. I glimpsed it in my own hour of distress through the gracious presence of Carl Spain. Hear again these words of hope for seasons of distress: *"May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain."*

With those words Paul showed Timothy that God's grace worked effectively and powerfully through Onesiphorus. Would Timothy back down? Or would he allow God's grace to work through him as it had in Onesiphorus? It appears that there was a good outcome. Hebrews 13:23 reads, *I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been set free!*

And finally the question comes to us. Will we let God's grace work effectively through us as we travel the way of the cross? Will we deliberately and courageously travel the way of the cross during those inevitable times that the heat becomes oppressive and the Christian calling

seems to be more than we can bear? Will we do that even when the constraint of the chain begins to limit our horizons?

We can call on the image of the great cloud of witnesses from the Hebrews. With the eyes of faith we can now see Paul and Onesiphorus and Timothy and Carl Spain and others you and I know among that throng encouraging us to not back down, but to continue traveling the way of the cross. For one it might mean trusting God to provide us with an Onesiphorus in our season of distress. For another it might mean becoming bold like Paul and asking someone like Timothy to do for us what Onesiphorus had done for Paul. And let's not forget, God chooses to use people like you and me as his gracious presence to others in their seasons of distress. May we, like Onesiphorus, be faithful and courageous in our Christian service. And, may God's grace enfold all the saints in Paul's prayer for the Lord to grant mercy to Onesiphorus on that day.