

## THIS IS MY STORY, THIS IS MY SONG 1 TIMOTHY 1:12-20

A friend recently said how much he enjoyed reading the Bible. He said, "Everybody in it is on the move, going somewhere! And they all get to chose where that will be and who they will take with them!" From that perspective, I see the Bible as a story of hope, hope for every one of us! We all want to be headed somewhere.

The story of the relationship of Paul and Timothy highlights that view, and we can see how Paul makes the most of this friend to friend or MENTORING relationship with Timothy. *"I give you this instruction," he says, ...."that you may fight the good fight."* Timothy was a young man headed somewhere with all the world stretched out before him. Paul wanted him to have every opportunity to do his best.

One of the most impressive statements of Paul to this young man as he heads out is about how he has experienced God in his life. *"God's always been MERCIFUL to me!"* Paul was making it clear to Timothy as he started out just exactly who God really was. Here is my rendition of how Paul might have expressed it in our day:

*" Timothy, I want you to know the heart of my faith. It is that God sent Jesus to reach everyone who had lost their way. He came with tender care and careful intention. I can attest that He reached me when I least deserved it, or I wouldn't be here today. As wrong and off God's track as I was, He was not demanding and harsh as I had expected of a righteous God. No, He was **MERCIFUL**, or loving and kindly persuasive in my life, and I learned this lesson that I want to pass on to you.*

*You see, I was zealous for doing all things right. So zealous, in fact, that I became a law and rule unto myself. I had the right*

*slant, and I had figured everybody else had the responsibility to get it right. I was bound and determined to make it right, and to make them right. Boy was I wrong! But that's precisely when The Lord came seeking me, right when I was most wrong. I wasn't an easy nut to crack. No one is, when they think they are right and everybody else needs straightening out!*

*"You see, Timothy, when I was sure I was right, God couldn't use me to bring Glory to Himself. He came upon me as a rotten, misguided sinner. That's when He wanted to use me most. When I was the biggest fool, God took pleasure in being patiently with me. Here is new truth, God uses us best not just when we are the shining stars but when we are the most misguided and wrong, when we flub-up and make our biggest messes. Right there He lets the world watch as He loves us anyway, standing with us persisting with His MERCY. He wants the world to see His **"UNLIMITED PATIENCE."** Through His patience he proves to all who want to see that He is loves his creation and believes in us all the time. Through His patience observed, he proves He will never leave us or abandon us. Everyone can change, and He never stops trying."*

Paul gave a good sending off to Timothy: Everyone can change. God never gives up on us, neither should we give up on each other! It is the calling of the church, the holy mantel left upon our shoulders. It is what we are to practice here. It is what we get up in the mornings and put on as we "put on Christ" and go off to school, to work, and as we run our homes and our households. It must be just as much a part of who we are and what we do as brushing our teeth, filling the tank, or stopping to ask for daily strength and daily bread. We put on PATIENCE as a robe, large and flowing in unlimited size and measure.

But it doesn't always come easy, as Paul acknowledged, he wasn't an easy nut to crack! I believe the key for Paul and for us is found in His acknowledgement that at the LOW POINTS he had found God's Mercy. Looking back he could acknowledge that of all of God's challenges, he was indeed the WORST. That led to his greatest discovery. *"For that very reason I was shown mercy!"*

Let me form this as good theology for us all here.

***First, (v. 15) Our God is Creator, and is still creating.*** With great intention, God is reclaiming, redeeming all of His creation and all of those he has created. The Bible calls us the "Crown of Creation," as God is focused and purposefully pursuing each individual in their personal soul. **God Wants YOU!** God is pursuing you within your circumstances....

+through the daily frustrations,

+through your job opportunities,

+in your school relationships,

+within your homes.....that still small voice or nudge, that coincidence, a serendipitous surprise, an unexpected insight....

These are God's Spirit working with your spirit with "UNLIMITED PATIENCE!"

Because you are His treasured possession, God is reaching toward you in love, demonstrating His PATIENCE with you as you grow and mature, sometimes slowly and painfully as a Christian!

***Second, (v. 16) The church is God's Workshop,*** a place where we all are a work in progress. That calls for the Christian grace of "Unlimited Patience" from each of us toward one another and our working together. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians in chapter 13, *"Love is Patient!"* Unmistakably, this characteristic patience is evidence that we are doing God's will, as is the absence of patience is the evidence of something else besides love.

At God's workbench, the work of patience would be an unnecessary admonition when we are only Sunday pew warmers. His workshop is also OUR workshop as partners with Christ. Each one of the family of God are expected and gifted to share in the work.... and expected and blessed in order to support the ministries of God's workshop.

***Third, (v. 18) We as the church are brought into relationship.....*** in this very church family by the intentional will of God. Each of us has specific relationships of influence, people we alone can effect, some by a close friendship, some by associations through working side by side, some by special giving of offerings beyond our tithes, some by direct prayer commitments, and many other ways. How often I have seen a church be highly influenced through someone's suffering, one who allowed the church to know, help and support them, one who leaned on Jesus, (and we are His body,) leaned on Jesus for comfort, healing and help.

Paul had that special calling to influence Timothy. In our scripture today he offers a word of wisdom and testimony: *"Timothy, This is my story, this is my song. Take this with you as you go!"*

***Fourth, (v. 17) Paul had a story, likewise he had a song.*** He didn't hold back to sing out the praises of his Savior as he restated the Gospel Message and the discovery of how God was using his life. Do you have a song? Has anyone heard it lately? Have the people who most need it heard it? These are stressful days full of economic downturn, drought, difficult family challenges, even church changes. God loves to show His "Unlimited Patience" in us when we have nothing else but Him to lean on and still sing His praises. As the poet said, *"The singing bird sings because he has a song."*

I believe these special relationships to which we are called in God's family are HOLY. They are part of God's intended blessings, running 2 ways, to those who receive as well as those who give. How often Paul shared this kind of instruction with Timothy. But just as often did Paul stop and reflect how much JOY he received in caring about and watching Timothy "get it!"

***We have special relationships in God's plan.*** Barbara Batchler shared one of those moments with us in our Wednesday Bible Study this week. The traffic had been terrible the day when Barbara was caring for her tiny granddaughter. In a moment of weakness she had leaked out a word not usually heard from a child's saintly grandmother. A moment later her granddaughter repeated the word in the same fashion! She was 3 years old!

Barbara gave her a stern warning! *"Don't ever let me hear you say that word again! If I do I will stop this car and spank you good!"* The message hit its mark...but a moment later her granddaughter thoughtfully asked, *"Who spansks you when you say it?!"*

Yes, we all have special relationships in which we alone are allowed the privilege of influencing someone for growth in God's Kingdom. Let's be faithful! Let's be faithfully alive to our opportunities and limitlessly patient as God is patient with us.

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