

THE WHOLESOMENESS OF BEING ORDINARY

1 Timothy 1:1

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We begin today a new study in the Bible, 1 and 2 Timothy. Timothy will be our concern for the next number of weeks. Rather than read a specific text or beginning with a specific examination of a text, instead I'd like to this morning introduce Timothy to whom the letters are addressed. Just a background about this letter and correspondence. Then I'd like to do something different—introduce Timothy who will speak to you this morning. Would you receive it as if Timothy were speaking? I won't conjecture too much. I would try to put together Timothy as he might be as the Scriptures reveal him.

First and 2 Timothy and Titus are Paul's pastoral letters. They're so designated because they refer to advice, which is given to pastors and young churches. And indeed the persons working under Paul and Timothy and Titus are regarded as young men. The setting for 1 Timothy appears to be at a time following the Book of Acts. The best guess is that 1 Timothy is written following the imprisonment of Paul in Acts 28. Evidently there came a time when he was released from that Roman imprisonment and he went back to Macedonia and ultimately to Ephesus. While at Ephesus, Timothy joined him. He left Ephesus, went down to Crete, ministered on the isle of Crete, left Titus at Crete, came back to Ephesus in Asia Minor, ministered for a short time and left. He went again to Macedonia, and from Macedonia or Corinth he writes Timothy who is now the pastor or the head of pastors in the city of Ephesus.

Certainly when we compare the circumstances in Acts 19 when Paul and Timothy had been at Ephesus together on that earlier occasion, Paul had sent Timothy on ahead. Then Paul came later. Here Paul has gone on ahead and Timothy is here until such time as he'll be needed, indeed the

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close of Paul's second letter to Timothy which is written from his last imprisonment in Rome. Paul was expecting imminent death and he is urging Timothy to be with him. Certainly the circumstances of his imprisonment of his second letter appear to be much different than his imprisonment in Acts. In Acts he is in a house where he is under a kind of house arrest. He lives at his own expense. Probably the imprisonment described in 2 Timothy 3. Paul is bereft of his books. He's bereft of the Scriptures. Bereft even of a warm cloak to keep him during the coming winter months. So he asks Timothy to come.

Therefore when we look at Paul's life we understand that there were some delays in his life. Originally he had wanted to go to Rome. But he took a three-year detour in order to be imprisoned in Jerusalem and Caesarea. He had also expressed the desire to go to Spain. But somehow evidently he had been deterred from that desire. We never find him going to Spain, but perhaps he did. Instead, we find him having gone back over the ground where he had founded churches on the second and third missionary journeys and winding up in prison again.

With that in mind I'd like to introduce you to Timothy, who for nearly twenty years served as an associate of Paul's in ministry. I'd like for Timothy to tell his own story.

Timothy speaks...

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ whom God raised from the dead. I bring you greetings from the churches at Lystra and Derbe and Iconium and Antioch, at Philippi, at Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth and at Ephesus. Also from the church at Rome and finally from the church at Jerusalem. These churches, though separated from you by centuries, nevertheless join with you in like faith and hope.

I see upon my being here that things have changed considerably from the time I ministered at Ephesus. I see that the men and the women are sitting together, and as you will recognize from

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Paul's letter to me at Ephesus that was not the case. The women were sitting on one side and some of them had the habit of interrupting the service—something which I'm sure will not happen here today. I see also by looking over the audience that by and large the children are absent. I wondered where they were and, inquiring, found out that they were at Sunday School during this time and there was children's worship. I bemoaned the fact that if Paul had been able to secure someone with the talent to work with children how much better it would have been in getting the children. However we might have had it better because we kept the families together. I see also there have been some things come about since my time. Piano, organ, even something to amplify my voice, which Paul would have loved. And you have not only the Scriptures, but you have now the new Scriptures. You have all of Paul's correspondence together. We never had this advantage. And neither did we have the advantage of having what you call the Old Testament in a volume together. Ours were kept in the synagogue. You have such an advantage. I can hardly recognize it. You have something called chapters and verses. And you have hymnals. But, much to my chagrin, everything has been written since I ministered, and I didn't know one song. The faith that is reflected by your writers is a faith that is consistent with the Scriptures, that which has been revealed to us.

I see you even have a building, something we didn't have the opportunity to have. We met in homes. Our church in Ephesus was scattered over many congregations meeting in homes.

Another thing I notice is your services are so very short. I suppose this is one of the improvements that you have brought to the church of our Lord.

It might be well if I start at the last of my life and proceed to the beginning of it. My testimony is not dramatic, as you will see. It was always Paul who shared his testimony. You will recognize as I stand before you today that, although Paul refers to me as his child and talks about persons

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not despising my youth, you must recognize that of course I've already been with Paul about seventeen years. I am now in my middle to late thirties. As I stand in your presence I'm certainly not a child.

The things that Paul has written to me in what you call 1 Timothy, I obviously knew most of the things that are there. I couldn't have traveled with him for nearly two decades and not have recognized the principles by which the church was founded. It was written not so much to inform me what to do but, as it is, to give me the kind of credibility from Paul that I need to really address some problems that are in the Ephesian church. He reminds me of some things I know perfectly well as well. Most of the things I'm already cognizant of.

You'll see one feature in the correspondence that may strike you as missing. That is, in the correspondence you don't find any concern of the apostle for church growth. I find that by returning to this century and seeing what is happening now there is a whole plethora of literature on church growth. How to have bigger churches. We seem to have never had that problem. Our churches just seemed to grow. Our concern was not on making it grow. Our concern was that it grow in the right way. We knew that where the gospel was truly preached there would be persons who would respond. The concern was on the quality of response and the quality of the Christ-life that emerged. That is the focus certainly of Paul's correspondence to me.

The church at Ephesus had grown, and Paul tells me to do the work of evangelist. That he is concerned with the kind of growth that it has. You will of course recognize that when I came to Ephesus I encountered some problems. Some of you, I understand, have called for a return to the New Testament church. That's fantastic! We'd want you to be as we are. But you must remember when you look at the New Testament church that it was not some idealistic organization. We too had our problems and limitations.

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Some of our problems were that there were people in the congregation given to speculation.

There were individuals who were always at work advancing some sort of new doctrine. They weren't content to stay with the principles and spiritual disciplines, which had been articulated.

Instead it was always, "What's the latest? What latest thing can we occupy our mind with?"

What's the biggest thing that we can draw a crowd with?" So the speculators were talking about

"Where did we come from?" And they were constructing genealogies. They were also wildly speculating about the future. They were speculating about the separation of the body from the

spirit. Some were saying the body is worthless, so indulge it. Others were saying the body

doesn't mean anything, so deny it. We had persons who were forbidding marriage. Others saying

to indulge the body. All of this was the result of a group within the church that gave themselves

to a continual promotion of speculative doctrine rather than emphasizing the things that are basic

and important. They were forever on the peripheral fringe.

So that was something that had to be dealt with, and Paul had to give his position that it should

be the object of the church to lead a quiet and peaceable life. Indeed you'll find Paul writing me

saying it's important to know how to behave in the household of God.

Another problem I found at Ephesus was that there were in the church those women who were

both unsettled and unsuffering. You will find, for example, some of the women of the church

who did not know how to conduct themselves in public worship. There were constant

interruptions. You'll find also the problem with immodesty. You will find also the problem that

some of the younger women had in really settling down to love their husbands and to perform

the obligations of a mother. Paul, who insisted in being more frank than I, called some of them

idlers, gadabouts from house to house and gossips and busybodies. And anyone who knows Paul

knows how frank he could be. This was a real problem.

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It seems in the twentieth century that you don't have the office of widow. This is one of the things that had gone wrong at the church at Ephesus. They had an office for women who were sixty years of age and older who were enrolled in the office after they had lived a righteous life before God, and their task was to train the younger women to love their husbands and to care for the children. I find this missing. In fact I find your society very fragmented. You have youth groups and Sunday school groups and senior citizen groups and middle-age groups and young married groups, and I wonder, are you crossing over and getting to know people in the other groups? This was a problem of women in the congregation who were most unsettled and unsuffering.

I find also the need for stable leadership. In our churches at Ephesus and beyond there were many home churches. They each needed a pastor. I was pastor to the pastors. I found the characteristic of some of the churches who select pastors who might equip you with a flamboyant type of personality but if you stayed around them for a while you'd find that they weren't in fact what they projected in public. Paul, of course, found it necessary to remind me of what I already knew, that when it came time to select the church's leaders the church needed to select persons who were down-to-earth, who were living the life, whose head was screwed on right, whose family life was proper, and who had a good reputation in the world. If you were to select this kind of a person the church would be much better off with stable leadership.

I found also at the Ephesian church some unsettled poor Christians who, upon being converted, found that their boss was also a Christian and thought that surely they didn't need to work for him although he should pay them. I had to tell them to get to work and don't take advantage of your boss just because he's a Christian and would be lenient on you.

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I also had to tell some of our wealthier Christians that they should not live for the pursuit of money but have concern for others and be generous.

These are some of the problems that I found. The purpose for which my ministry existed at Ephesus was like in other places that Paul had assigned me. To really bring stabilization to the church that it might continue to grow. When the apostles passed from the scene you'll recognize that I was one of the first leaders of the church who had never eyewitnessed Jesus Christ or been an eyewitness to His resurrection. A whole new generation of leadership was coming into existence, of which I was one.

Paul told me in regard to my ministry that I must be an example. That I must teach and I must bring a good administration to the personal relationships of the church so that there would be peace and harmony and growth within the church. All of our ministry within the sphere of the New Testament church falls on this thing, that you must first be something before you can speak it to others. We were taught to do this in the ministry at Ephesus.

Being a pastor of Ephesus for nearly two decades, I was associated with Paul as his companion. I'll never forget when I first became associated with Paul in ministry. We were called to Lystra, my hometown. We got to the edge of Antioch, and there Paul said he believed he had a call for Asia so he headed in the vicinity of Ephesus. We started walking. It's about a four-hundred mile walk from Antioch to Ephesus. As we were walking along, the closer we got to Ephesus the more unsettled Paul became. Finally he said, "The Spirit says I'm not to go to Ephesus. I don't know where I'm supposed to go." So we started to go north. I turned to Silas and said, "Do you know where Brother Paul is going?" He said, "No. He's a missionary, but appears not to know where he's going." We kept on with Paul. That's one of the great lessons I learned, that in the

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beginning of our ministry with him I would learn to trust him even when he didn't seem to know where he was going.

We finally wound up at the city of Troas. He received the vision to go there. We get there and there's just a group of ladies meeting by the riverside for prayer on the Sabbath Day. Paul didn't let that stop him and he brings the gospel. Some of them are won to the Lord. From there we went to Thessalonica then to Berea. Paul decided to leave me at Berea and he took off for Athens. I stayed to help stabilize the church at Berea. He called for me from Corinth. I helped Paul in the start of the church at Corinth. Paul decided to leave and he went back to Antioch in Jerusalem. I stayed at Corinth. Paul came back on his third missionary journey and founded the church at Ephesus. He called for me and I came over. We started the work and helped him in the work there.

Then Paul said I could go back to Macedonia and then down to Corinth. I didn't want to go to Corinth. He knew I didn't. I was apprehensive. I wasn't the kind of person the Corinthians were looking for. In fact, I had been with Paul from the start in the work there, but they never talked about forming a party after me. They had more dynamic personalities like Paul and Peter and Apollos and the Lord. But me, Timothy, there was no party for Timothy. For my personality and nonspectacular type of ministry I knew I probably wouldn't draw a crowd at Corinth. That's why, no doubt, Paul says, "When Timothy comes put him at ease for he is doing the work of the Lord as I am. Let no one despise him."

Finally I wound up being with Paul himself at Corinth and going with Paul to Jerusalem where he was imprisoned. I was always in the background. I was with Paul in Philippi when he and Silas were thrown in prison, but not me. When Paul was in Jerusalem and was arrested I was with him, but I wasn't arrested. In fact, I could even slip through to him when he was in prison.

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I suppose, in summarizing my relationship with Paul, one needs to draw some observations. I've found, as I've reviewed my life, an incredible kind of an observation as to how I came to experience the will of God for my life. Many of you are concerned about the will of God. I suppose that one of the things we could realize is that God individually leads us in His will. You know how I find the will of God for my life? I've always found in my ministry that I find the will of God for my life by taking directions from another person. Not a direct call, but simply aligning myself with someone who had a purpose and vision for the work of the Lord whom I was willing to come in under. I suppose that I've been known as the person who did the best job playing the second position well. When Paul said, "Stay here," I stayed. When he said, "Go here," I went.

I see emerging in the church today a great deal of individuality. That has a good side to it. But there is also a bad side. If in an expression of individuality we all do our own thing, and we only will do something if God tells us directly to do it, and if we won't submit ourselves to others, then the whole work of God will collapse. I wanted you to know that when I found the will of God it was by listening to someone, and under his authority I existed. Paul certainly taught us, and we tried our best to never be motivated by a desire for a position, but, instead, by a desire to serve the Lord. Even when Paul was in prison in Rome and some took his imprisonment as a sign that there was a vacancy in leadership and they began to strive to be the person who replaced Paul, I felt that was not the appropriate time. It was never an appropriate time to strive for a position. We were to grieve that Paul was in prison. Perhaps that is why Paul said of me to the Philippians that he had "no one like me who would be genuinely anxious for your welfare. But they all look after their own interests and not those of Christ's."

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As God is my witness, I have tried to serve first the Lord, secondly the church, and thirdly the apostle and his ministry. I have found that in these nearly two decades of being associated with Paul that there is a value to long-lasting loyalty. You Americans move so often. You change churches so frequently. You don't get a chance to really know persons on a long-term basis. Our relationship that we had and our ministerial team was a long-lasting duration, and it grew richer and deeper as the years progressed so that the opportunity came to not only know a person by name but to know him in depth. I valued that in my association with Paul.

Since there are many young persons here, I guess I should talk a little bit about my youth. I'm one of those kind of people who never had a dramatic youth. I never did anything that will be remembered or noted in anybody's history book. In fact I always felt embarrassed at testimony meetings. People would stand up and talk about how they had done this or that. I had never done anything. I always felt like maybe I missed the boat. Since I have had a lifetime to look back, I guess now I can say I thank the Lord for the Christian mother and the influence of a synagogue and concerned people. I feel just as fulfilled at having lived a life that never wandered off into the extreme or tasted the world. I'm grateful to God for the people He saved who had tasted the world. But I'm also grateful to the Lord that He had the power to not only save me from the world but the power to keep me from the world. I regard that now as just as great a miracle that He can save some from the world and keep others from the world. Those of you who have grown up in homes and in a church and you've always had kind of an experience that you've never done anything dramatic as far as sin, don't worry about it. There are others of us who had the same experience.

In my early life I was in a family of divided religious loyalty. My father was Greek, and my mother was Jewish, and my grandmother Jewish. I remember the divisions this brought. Dad

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tried to let my mother's wishes be adhered to in regard to religious instruction. He did allow her to take me to the synagogue school where I was instructed in the sacred writings. He allowed Mother to tell me of my Jewish heritage. But on the other hand, Dad himself never became Jewish in his faith. In fact, the normal thing for Jewish boys shortly after their birth was to be circumcised, but Dad would not allow that in my case. He would let me come of age, and when I got of age I could decide whether I wanted to be Greek or Jewish. He grew up with the myth of gods of the Greek mythology.

But I began to read the Hebrew Scriptures, and I found in them the description of a God for whom Greek literature has no comparison. My heroes became Moses and David and Hosea and Amos and Isaiah. I was exposed to the Scriptures. I suppose in your culture today you have a great deal of discussion like we did in ours about how it is that a religious group such as our synagogue could be relevant to its young people. What is it that makes something relevant? I remember that in our synagogue we had good news parties and great outings.

I came to recognize later in life that what was the most relevant to me was the church. The Scriptures—the thing that bored me the most in synagogue school that I had to attend every Saturday morning, the thing that many times I had gone to sleep over—someone had diligently tried to explain to me what was in the Book. That became the most relevant thing to me because I began to recognize that truth is there. God is there. I can experience Him and there is nothing more relevant than having an experience with God.

In looking back, I thank God He permitted my exposure to this sacred writing. I came to the Lord on the basis of witness of others. I never saw the Lord personally. I had talked to people who had seen the Lord. I identify with you in that I too came to Christ never having seen but having believed.

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I can never forget the circumstances of my conversion. I was in synagogue at Lystra on Saturday morning. Guests by the name of Barnabas and Paul were coming through town. They stood up and began to declare out of the sacred Scriptures that someone by the name of Jesus of Nazareth had come and ministered. That He had fulfilled the sacred writings of Isaiah in giving His life as a sacrifice for the people's sins. That in fulfillment of David's word He had risen from the dead and that He was the appointed Messiah. I remember being stirred by an impulse that I can never adequately convey to you that the truth was being proclaimed. I followed Paul and Barnabas. I recall being with them when they came across the man you read about in Acts who was crippled from birth. Paul simply looked at him and said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, stand up and walk." I remember how awed I was. It was the first time I'd ever seen a miracle. Of course my faith had always talked about miracles, but I had never seen any. Here was one before my eyes. Then just hours later I go to the edge of town and my own town has turned against this man Paul and are stoning him. I shall never forget creeping into the house that Paul himself crept back to after his stoning. Being absolutely enthralled at the courage of this heroic individual after being stoned. That he would get back up and crawl back into the very town he had been stoned in. I thought if there is anything which is true it must be this message which he preaches. For nothing else could make a man behave like this.

I don't know whether it was his message in the synagogue or seeing the man healed or seeing how Paul faced persecution. But all those things coming together, I became a believer. When Paul left our town my mother and grandmother had become believers before I had. In fact, Paul himself had personally counseled with me and brought me to an understanding of my decision so he could refer to me later as his child.

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When he left, many of the church wondered about me. I was very young at the time, around sixteen years of age. They were wondering whether or not I would hold out. Like so many Christians, they were afraid that when a young person makes a commitment there may be temptation in the world that would pull them away. But I decided I wasn't going to fall away. I decided I wasn't going to have a superficial experience. I decided I was going to grow in my faith. So, when the opportunity came to share what Christ had done for me, I shared. We made much looser meetings than you do. I was able from time to time to even stand up and share in the congregation what the Lord was doing in my life. But you Americans are so very brief and ordered.

When Paul came back he called me to become associated with him. I was still a teenager, just a year or two short of being twenty. What a thrill! Then Paul said, "Timothy, there are going to be situations that will arise when it's going to be important that you be identified not only as a Christian but also as a Jew. You have a Jewish mother and a Greek father. And your father told you, you could make up your own mind when the time came. Therefore, Timothy, in order to make the gospel witness more effective among your own people, in order for you to be with me, I require that you become circumcised."

I argued at first! "But Paul, I just read what you wrote to the Galatians when you said circumcision is of no account. That the old covenant is dead. Now what are you saying?" Paul replied, "It has nothing to do with salvation. But it has to do with becoming all things to all people." If Paul were here today, he'd say if the length of your hair stood in anyone's way of coming to the gospel, it's immaterial. There are some things that Paul taught me could be set aside without the sacrifice of one's spiritual life in order to more effectively relate to another person. I learned in that lesson when Paul ordered me to be circumcised that one thing I needed

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to do in my life and that is to come under spiritual authority. If I were to be with him I would need to do that.

Just before I left Lystra they had an ordination service for me. I shall never forget the brethren from the churches gathered around and had the ordination service for me. They don't do it like you do it today. You do it kind of assembly line; they come up and hands are laid on them. When I was ordained, I was brought forward. There was a time of worship. Prayers were offered for me. Then, in the course of setting me aside for my ministry, some of the brethren in the congregation began to prophesy over me and say that God had given to me a teaching ministry and that ministry would be powerful in the Kingdom and I could exercise it because it was a gift from God.

I knew that within me already that teaching had emerged, but this was a tremendous confirmation from the Body itself that was praying for me. That's why Paul would later remind me in his letters that prophetic utterances pointed to me that I was not to neglect the gift that I had that came from prophetic utterance when the elders laid hands upon me. And that I was to rekindle the gift of God which was in me from the laying on of the apostles' hands.

You today need more closeness to one another so you can take the time to be as concerned with your Timothys as the church at Lystra was with me. I went forth from its midst a beloved child. I suppose there's a basic simplicity to my experience. I became a Christian because Jesus rose from the dead. Not only that, I became a Christian because somebody came and told me that He had risen from the dead. I am the product of missionary activity. I am the product of witness. I did not see it for myself, but someone came and told me and I believed. Therefore I tried it and I believed and found the experience true for myself. I can identify with you because although I never saw the living Christ I nevertheless have believed. Later you'll see that I was put in prison

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and was released. I do not know what the future holds. But I know that when we follow the Lord Jesus Christ and commit our ways to Him we'll never be disappointed.

As one ordinary person from the pages of the New Testament, a person never known for extraordinariness, I never had the testimony of Paul. He and I would go to the same town, and I was always the afternoon speaker and he, the evening speaker. Even with all of those limitations, I found in Christ the most extraordinary thing that could ever happen to an ordinary person. I would want you to enjoy the same fellowship that I myself have been privileged to be a part of.

That's what I think Timothy would say if he were here.

Closing Prayer

Lord, the church really hasn't changed all that much. We still have those who are dramatically changed in our midst. The Pauls of Tarsus. The Nicky Cruzes. We still have the basic flow of the life of the Spirit that flows to ordinary places, to ordinary people, to ordinary churches and young persons growing up being taught the Christian faith by their parents. Learning the Christian faith in church school, and through that process being won to the Lord. Seeing the example, which you set before them by their elders. Lord, how important it is that we be the kind of people who are examples. I pray for those within our church, both guys and gals, who sometimes, looking at the world, wonder, *Am I just too ordinary? Should I try something that is not part of my Christian belief and practice?* Lord, You're showing us through this example of Timothy in Scripture that it can be a joyous life just to stay true—to never err from the path, but to be loyal, to be committed, to be right in heart and conscience. That subtle determination that Timothy had as a young person, those ruts that he traveled in that were good and wholesome, those routines and habits that were right—all stood him in good stead later in his life when he had to minister and work with persons who were undisciplined, always carried away by fancies and extremes, who

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could be very upset, who had lack of rootage in their life. Lord, You brought this young man Timothy and placed him as a steadying hand upon the helm of Your church. We thank You, Lord, for carefully taking care of him and preserving his life and testimony for us. I just pray that something of the quality, something of the winsomeness, something of the healthiness of growing up right in You and being rightly related to You would be a living part of our daily experience. So that we, being rooted and grounded in the faith, may grow up to be pleasing to You and to be winning to our world. In Jesus' name we give thanks. Amen.