

“Fulfill Your Ministry”

2 Timothy 4:1-7

Introduction:

Written communication:

- Letters - paper and pen, envelopes and stamps
- E-mail - PC, laptop, hand-held, and a good connection
- Text messages - cell phone

What do you do if you receive written communication from someone you'd rather not hear from?

- Letter - lost in the mail
- E-mail - junk file
- Text - ?

Well, that wasn't the case with the letter we're going to take a look at this evening. Take your Bibles and turn to 2 Timothy.

MOVE #1

Timothy was always glad to get notes from the Apostle Paul. They were friends from way back. Paul was Timothy's

spiritual father,
mentor,

teacher,
guide,
model,
example.

But Paul had been in prison for a while, so it was all the better for Timothy to receive the letter. It meant his spiritual father and friend was still alive.

However, as Timothy began to read the letter, he realized that it was different from all the others. Paul was more personal, more intimate, more vulnerable in the letter than he had been in the others. And as he read the words from his mentor, Timothy was moved, encouraged, challenged and ready to act. Paul wanted him to visit him in Rome, in prison. And to bring some books and a coat when he came. And to get there before winter, to get there soon.

So, while Timothy was getting things together for the trip, something from the letter kept going over and over in his mind.

Toward the end of the note, Paul wrote [or read 2 Timothy 4:1-5]:

Preach the word
Be ready
Reprove, rebuke, exhort - with great patience
Be sober in all things
Endure hardship

Do the work of an evangelist
Fulfill your ministry

What was Paul thinking when wrote that? Why was he giving Timothy those kinds of instructions - those commands, really? Hadn't he proven himself already? Didn't Paul know he was a faithful minister?

Timothy thought back to the day Paul came to his hometown of Lystra. He had seen the miracles Paul performed in Jesus' name, and Timothy, his mother Eunice, and his grandmother Lois all became followers of Christ. Timothy went on to be Paul's partner in ministry, travelling the roads of the Roman Empire, willing to do whatever it took to tell people about Jesus Christ. Sometimes they worked in tandem, sometimes solo, but they were always together in spirit.

Paul knew Timothy almost better than he know himself, so why the "to-do" list about his ministry now?

Well, he looked the letter over one more time, and then he saw it. [Read 2 Timothy 4:6-8] Paul was getting ready to die and he wanted Timothy to take up where he was leaving off. Paul had been doing everything on the list, and he had helped Timothy learn how to

do those things, too. But someone needed to carry on, to tag-team the wrestling match, to grab the relay baton, to fulfill what God had called them to do. Paul's call had come first; Timothy's followed a few years later. Paul's life was coming to an end, but Timothy's life was just beginning a new phase.

Timothy could tell that Paul didn't want him to wait until he got to Rome to get started. He didn't want him to wait until they could arrange a commissioning ceremony. Paul didn't want Timothy to put off until tomorrow what he could do that day.

So, he looked at the list one more time:

Preach the word
Be ready
Reprove, rebuke, exhort - with great patience
Be sober in all things
Endure hardship
Do the work of an evangelist
Fulfill your ministry

There it was . . . the last phrase said it all: *fulfill your ministry*.

Be and do what God has called you to.

Timothy already had his hands full. In fact, he was in Ephesus while Paul was in Rome because that's the way Paul wanted it. He

had appointed Timothy to be overseer - bishop - of the Church in Ephesus. His ministry was well underway.

But somehow the words rang true in new ways that day: *fulfill your ministry. Be and do what God has called you to.* What that looked like in the future, Timothy didn't know for sure. He just knew that he was to fulfill his ministry today and tomorrow would take care of itself.

MOVE #2

Fulfill your ministry . . . what do those words mean to us?

Most of you know I have the privilege of teaching Introduction to Christian Service at NBC. In the class we spend some time talking about our calls to ministry and how God has equipped us to fulfill those calls. And when we talk about the calls, most people say "God's called me to preach," or "God's called me to be a pastor." Others will say God has called them to be a counselor or a teacher or a missionary or a musician or a youth pastor or a children's pastor. Sometimes students say, "God's called me to NBC. I don't know what

He has in mind for me after this, but this is where I'm supposed to be now." And we all marvel at the grace that's brought us to this place.

That said, God is leading us all to very different places, to very unique ministries. In fact, there are some things on Timothy's list that don't apply to some God-called ministers. God has gifted them and equipped them to serve in ways other than preaching and evangelism. They'll teach, they'll counsel, they'll sing. They'll bind wounds and build houses. They'll painting paintings and start businesses. They'll install water pumps and pull teeth. But the one phrase in Paul's letter that applies to all of is this: *fulfill your ministry*.

So, how do we make it happen?

First, by being His . . . by being fully, totally, completely, entirely His. It is impossible for us to fulfill the ministry God has called us to if we don't belong to Him. Remember Jesus' words?

No one can serve two masters;
For either he will hate the one
And love the other;
Or he will be devoted to one
And despise the other.
You cannot serve God and wealth.
(Matthew 6:24 NASB)

Second, by being us . . . by being as holy and whole and healthy as we know how to be, and taking the steps to make that happen. A quote of Neil Wiseman's comes to mind here. "God enables the called beyond their limitations. However, he seldom fixes an inadequacy that we can fix ourselves." ¹

Third, by being here . . . by being fully, totally, completely, entirely here. Now, for campus students that means Colorado Springs; for online students that means wherever you live; for every student, every member of the NBC family, it means fully embracing where God has called us to serve now.

One of the reasons why students don't fulfill their ministry at NBC, and often don't fulfill their ministry at all, is that they look too far ahead. They're already planning what they're going to do for God then, that they don't do what He wants them to do now. And the distraction often costs them their call.

CONCLUSION

We don't know if Timothy made the trip to Rome or not. If he did, we're not sure if he there before Paul was beheaded. But if he

made the trip, and if he saw Paul before he died, chances are he saw Paul die, too.²

But evidently none of that changed Timothy's determination to be and do what God had called him to, none of that changed his determination to fulfill his ministry until the end of his days.

In fact, if the legend is true, fulfilling his ministry is what ultimately took Timothy's life. One account puts it this way:

At Ephesus the pagans made a feastday in honour of their idols (Diana some say) and they carried them through the city, accompanied by impious ceremonies and songs. The holy Bishop Timothy, zealous for the glory of God, attempted to halt the procession and reason with the spiritually blind idol-worshipping people, by preaching the true faith in Christ. The pagans dashed angrily upon the holy disciple, they beat him, dragged him along the ground, and finally, they stoned him to death.³

That day, too, Timothy fulfilled his ministry. God is calling us to do the same.

[Close by singing: "Here I Am to Worship"]

[Alternate ending: Show "A Thousand Questions" DVD.

Available at: http://www.willowcreek.com/wca_prodsb.asp?invtid=PR31699.

Can be seen at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiNBmNI88Pk>]

¹ Wiseman, Neil. Unpublished notes. Introduction to the Ministry, 1998.

² Lenski, R.C.H. *St. Paul's First Epistles to Timothy*. Augsburg, 1937; Lutheran Book Concern, 1961.

³ <http://www.holytrinityorthodox.com/calendar/los/January/22-01.htm>