

NCMI EQUIP South Africa 2013

Session 6a



Relationships

by Marcus Herbert

We want the values of partnering, stewardship and faithfulness to be deep in our hearts. We're going to look at these topics in 2 Timothy 1 and 2. For us to take on the bigness of what God's called us to, where it's going to break down is in our relationships and our misunderstanding of relationships; and too often, in the body of Christ, our abuse of relationships. But if we can sort this thing out in our great call and our common set of visions and values, we're going to declare a future over ourselves.

2 Timothy sees Paul at the end of his ministry. He has run the race and is nearing the finish line. He realises he has been a drink poured out on the altar of God. He's given everything and now writes to Timothy and he calls him, "My dear son." (You can see he also uses this term of affection with Titus.) You can see a passion; a compassion and desire to want to set the next generation up for victory. That's what it's about – continuity and multiplication. It's about taking on the bigness of what we're called to together, with no misunderstanding, working our relationships out and therefore getting to do what God's called us to do.

But we also see something tragic in this passage of scripture – two men who bombed. A whole region deserts Paul and he uses one man, Onesiphorus, to show us what it means to be faithful. In our partnering, there's a heart of faithfulness that God looks for.

With all this in mind, let's start to look at the passage:

2 Timothy 1: 1, 2

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

2 To Timothy, *my dear son*:

"My dear son." How many of you have wished for that? I have. My past experiences with family have been restored in my relationship with God, but there's still one thing I've always longed for and that is for someone to write to me and say, "My dear son." There's not enough of that in the body of Christ. We don't connect in a healthy, relational way today – but rather we connect to websites, to teachings,

to philosophies and a whole lot of pseudo-nonsense. Yet God has designed it that we connect in proper relationships and in partnering and connecting we take on what he has for us.

There are too many orphaned churches and too many orphaned individuals in churches. We can be in great big local churches which have a good heart, but we've got to *choose* to be sons and daughters. It's not that I must come to you and ask, "Will you be my son?" No, I have a heavenly Father and choose to be a son or daughter in this house.

You can see that Paul knew Timothy intimately. He knew he was a nervous and timid guy and said to him, "Have a little wine for your stomach's sake." (1 Timothy 5:23.) He knew details of Timothy's life. It's wonderful; I love it. This is the depth of relationship that God calls us to. I don't mean that we camp in each others' houses all the time, but I'm saying we work out these relationships properly. You know why? The relationship is not the goal, it's the partnership we're after – it's about what God has called us to do together.

Put aside that attitude of yours and work on your heart for the sake of the call of God. That's partnership. We've got great horizons in God – enormous things he's called us to do. We can't do it alone, those days are over. The days of one man and his ministry and his TV channel, heading off to his preferred future, are over. It's now the days of a nameless, faceless army of God – the biggest army of God rising, with the priesthood of all believers working together, with a healthy understanding of leadership in the whole process. See, local church is still God's vehicle that he is using in the world today.

Let's continue with the passage of scripture:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

3 I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.

Can you feel the encouragement there? Wouldn't you like that? Someone remembering you in their prayers, night and day? That's partnering. That's not me and my mission, that's not me doing my thing. This wasn't a one-way thing where Timothy said, "I'd love to be on your team, Paul. People recommended it when you came to my home town and said I can trust you." It was the other way as well – there was a genuine concern with Paul for Timothy. Paul had the heart of the Father, wanting to see his sons rise; it's not just about the son making the father look good. Rather, he's praying for this man.

Let's continue to look at this passage:

4 Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. 5 I am 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.

6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. 8 So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

There's the clear call of God today – joining in suffering for the sake of this Gospel. Not a Gospel preached for our comfort or some kind of personal gain, but a Gospel we're willing to die for. I love it – Paul calling this young man to lay his life down for this Gospel. And incidentally, history tells us that later on there was a riot in the streets of Ephesus while people were parading their idols. Timothy ran out to protest and call them to the one true God and they clubbed him to death. So this man did lay down his life for the sake of preaching the Word.

Now, from verse 9:

9 He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. 12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

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

Now Paul comes to his practical lesson, his illustration in verse 15:

15 You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.

If you're thinking of baby names, don't use these! These names mean “uselessness”. How would you like to meet them in heaven? They have one verse about them - they deserted Paul.

But here's a good name for a boy:

16 May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.

When you read about this man and how he partnered with Paul, call your son Onesiphorus. Decide in your heart to call yourself Onesiphorus. Paul says that he “often refreshed” him. How's that? I love it. When you think of those you're in a team with, think of this: we refresh each other. That's partnering! This is joy! Not vying for position!

17 On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. 18 May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

This man searched hard for Paul when he was in prison. I've been to old Rome and I've seen Paul's prison. In those days, the prison was on street level – they used to sweep up the dirt or any mess on the streets into the prisons. If you went to visit a prisoner like that they sometimes wouldn't let you out for weeks or even months, because you were associating with a criminal and maybe you were also bad news. But Onesiphorus didn't mind the shame of that.

Followership is "Come follow me as I follow Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1.) We have very shallow values when it comes to that. But this man was not afraid – he went and found Paul and served him in Ephesus in many ways.

2 Timothy 2: 1 – 2

1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people [ESV says 'faithful' people.] who will also be qualified [or able or fit] to teach others."

This is the key text – it's about faithfulness and followership; about building. So let's back up and remember the context of this lesson – first we see two men deserted Paul but then we see how Onesiphorus was faithful. Paul is trying to give Timothy some practical handles on what it means to partner.

In our context, how are we going to go forward with what God has called us to do? Faithfulness. Reliability. These are good qualities. They're not old fashioned; they're not last season! These are what God is looking for today – flesh and blood relationships that develop into partnerships and are built on faithfulness.

Let's read on:

3 Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. [Here we see more about faithfulness] 4 No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. 5 Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. 7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Paul is teaching his dear son about faithfulness and how he can build for the future. Paul's a real father. He's isn't only interested in what's happening now but looking to the future. And after he has finished with his lesson he says to Timothy that he should reflect on this and the Lord will provide insight. In other words, if there are heart attitudes that need to change, change them, for the sake of the future together.

We need to take this to heart. Too often the very thing God has called us to never happens because we have a break-down in our relationships. In the process of some of our transitions, nations were dropped. Doors into them were closed and those there were crying out, "When are we going to see you guys again?" What was that about? Relationships. No understanding, very little understanding, or shallow understanding of reliability. See, reliability is a quality God's looking for.

Remember this lesson was written under the inspiration of the Spirit – it's a revelation of God and through it God is teaching us about partnering. It's not a complicated lesson. There's one Paul and he has raised up many spiritual sons. We know he stayed in Ephesus for three years and he taught and preached the Gospel and the whole region was impacted through it. As we unpack that and mix it with a bit of church history, we know that he trained up men and women – apparently about seven, including Onesiphorus and Timothy – and he sent them out to plant churches. So Paul poured his heart into faithful men and women. He had a team that he worked with and there was a great relationship – it was intimate and he had a good knowledge of what was going on in their lives.

But did they see each other every day? No, they travelled once or twice on trips and thereafter he sent them to different regions and cities. So, with this background, we see here that his instruction to Timothy was that he spends his time with faithful men and women. See, don't just pour yourself into anything. God is going to give you insight, not only to preach the messages that raise the crowd up, but he's going to give you insight into who they are.

So we see the lesson – Timothy must entrust the message to reliable people, who in turn will do the same with others. There will be others. This father, Paul, is looking three generations down. Too many

of us are only interested in "making it" for ourselves. But the only way we're going to get to our futures is to partner. We need to have the right attitude, else we won't make it. So we look to be reliable and faithful and then we won't drop the baton.

We've seen over and over how the second or third generation see the baton drop and then we have to rediscover all over again what we've been called to. It's reliability that enables us to hand it on. So Paul hands the baton over to Timothy who must then hand it over to others.

What is the baton? Dudley Daniel's manuals? Tyrone's manuals? Cornerstone's foundation manual? No! It's the Gospel – the King and the Kingdom. There weren't any extra things added here. It's simply the Gospel.

Notice that there is multiplication in this passage. I am trusting God, in our partnering together, that we're going to see thousands saved at a time and God adding to our number daily. But we won't see that unless we work on the background stuff – it's the relationships that hold it together.

God needs more of us who are looking down the generation line and have a passion to see them rise – we may not even know who they are. Paul said he prayed daily for Timothy and he was setting him up.

Many people say, "Well at least Timothy had trustworthy men and women." Or they might say, "It's okay for you to say this in your churches - you've got trustworthy men and women." But you know why Paul had trustworthy men and women? Because *he* was trustworthy. I will breed what I am. You can say what you want and preach what you want, but trustworthiness is something people will catch and if you don't have it they won't catch it.

Here are several areas that we need to be faithful in if we want to partner together well and move forward in what God has for us:

1. Faithful to God (1 Timothy: 1 - 5)

We have no future outside of our relationship with God. We constantly need to come back to being faithful to the King in everything. We need to look for his approval in our serving. We don't serve looking for others' approval. We live in the shadow of his grace. We need to be devoted, like we see in Acts 2:42 where it says the people devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. It's out of our faithfulness to the King that we'll have the ability to do the rest.

2. Faithful to each other – our relationships (1 Timothy: 3 – 5)

Paul called Timothy his son but also his brother and faithful worker. Timothy was a partner. This had nothing to do with, “Who's your daddy?” where the church gets divided up according to who it is you're tucked under. That's nonsense! We're talking about a heart here.

Believe it or not there is a competition going on at the moment where we measure our success on how many downloads we have on our website, and so on. No, I'll measure my success by my buddies and if we can make it through the storms. Can we make it through that fourth watch of Alan's* without killing one another on the boat? Saying to one guy, “Well, this was your idea,” and chucking him out the boat?

No, we hang in there through it. We do not relate to NCMI – we relate to the people in NCMI. It's about relationships. The only reason why NCMI is registered is so that we can operate legally in countries. Can you name a Paul or a Timothy that you're connected to? God is looking for us to be connected.

3. Faithful with the gift / deposit from God (1 Timothy: 6,7)

Every single one of us has a deposit of grace and we're called to be faithful with it. Have you wrapped up your talent and hidden it away? This season is not about one man on a platform and the rest sitting there and being a good audience. It's all of us together using our gift. That's partnership.

4. Faithful with the Gospel (1 Timothy: 8 – 12)

We've got to take ownership of this. It's *my* salvation, *my* conduct, *my* message. There's no other message but the Gospel. It's the power of God; the grace of God; it's the calling to a holy life – we have our ministry identity in and through the Gospel. Paul could say that he was appointed as a herald, apostle and teacher *of the Gospel*. And I thank God for that. And then ultimately we'll be called to pay a price for the sake of this Gospel.

5. Faithful to what God has put in us through discipleship

This is where one of the true tests of faithfulness comes in. Paul basically says to Timothy, “Guard the good deposit that I put in you, that I taught you. I spent years of connecting and teaching and raising you up.”

* Also see <http://ncmigauteng.co.za/getting-to-the-other-side/>

Too many sons just grab it. Like the prodigal, they say: “Let me go and grab my slice of the pie, if you don't mind.”

No, we're called to be faithful. If everything here that's been said about partnering and faithfulness and passing down the baton to reliable people is not of God, then get out of it. But if it is then you are a steward and will be held responsible for your stewardship (1 Corinthians 4:2). You've been given a deposit and you need to be faithful with it.

Honesty

Honesty is what God has called us to and it's how we partner. We can challenge each other in love. We can work out these relationships in a robust way, where iron sharpens iron.

I'd love our relationships to be defined by a refreshing, not shame, where we're searching hard for each other and serving each other. Then, as we've seen in 2 Timothy 2:2, we replicate this faithfulness.

A simple challenge

Every single one of us is not called to go from a Paul and then let things drop with a Timothy. God, as he looks at you, is looking down the line at that fourth generation and he wants them raised up full of fire, so that we can take on the bigness of what we're called to. And he wants to multiply, everywhere, everything he is about. If he is in it, it will grow.

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