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# Motivating a Spiritual Son

# 1

**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy. For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well. (1:1–5)**

As mentioned in the Introduction, Paul's primary instruction to Timothy begins with verse 6 of chapter 1. The first five verses are motivational and constitute a beautiful and moving salutation to the apostle's **beloved son** in the faith. Yet even these very personal comments reflect principles pertinent not only to Paul's discipling of Timothy but also to Christian parents, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, pastors, counselors, neighbors, and friends—to any believer who is helping another grow toward maturity in Jesus Christ and effectiveness in ministry.

These six implicit, but easily discernable, principles of motivation are: authority (1:1-2a), altruism (v. 2b), appreciation (v. 3a), appeal (v. 3b), affection (v. 4), and affirmation (v. 5).

## AUTHORITY

**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved son:** (1:1-2a)

The first principle of godly and successful motivation is that of authority, as seen in the opening declaration by **Paul** that he was **an apostle of Christ Jesus**. As explained in the Introduction, Paul's apostleship already was well understood by Timothy. It is mentioned here by way of reminder that, despite their close and loving relationship, Paul ranked above Timothy in spiritual authority because he brought the Word of the Lord and was writing in that capacity.

Intimacy does not preclude authority. The relationship of love that parents have with their children does not preclude their authority over their children. A parent-child relationship of love without authority is doomed to tragedy for the entire family. No matter how cordial a working relationship may exist, a business cannot succeed if employees refuse to recognize and submit to the employer's authority over them.

Although they shared a deep friendship, Paul's loving salutation to Timothy carried the full weight of his apostleship. *Apostolos* (**apostle**) literally means one who is sent out, "a messenger," as it is sometimes translated (see, e.g., 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). But in the New Testament it more commonly carries the connotation of ambassador, a representative who carries with him the authority of the one he represents. It is used in that sense of the twelve disciples Jesus called during His earthly ministry (Luke 6:13; 9:10) and of Paul, whom Christ called from heaven after His ascension (see Acts 9:3-15; 22:6-14; 26:13-18). The Lord used the verb form of *Himself*, as "Jesus Christ whom Thou [the Father] hast sent [*apostellō*]" (John 17:3), and in the book of Hebrews Jesus is called "the Apostle and High Priest of our confession" (3:1).

As **an apostle of Jesus Christ**, Paul stood in the place of Christ and spoke the Word of Christ, and he did so **by the will of God** the Almighty Father. Paul writes Timothy not merely as a dear friend but as a divinely commissioned ambassador of God the Father and God the Son. He is not offering brotherly counsel but declaring divine truth with firm authority.

He does so according to, meaning “in conformity to,” the gospel, here called **the promise of life in Christ Jesus**. Paul’s calling to serve the will of God as a messenger of the Savior was to be discharged by proclaiming the saving good news that those who are dead in sin can find life **in Christ Jesus**. A favored phrase of Paul was **in Christ Jesus**, which signified his own and every believer’s union with our Lord and Savior through participation in His death, resurrection, and eternal life. Jesus is Himself “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), and He gives the divine **promise** that “whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16) and “have it abundantly” (10:10). Those who claim that promise in faith can claim with Paul that Christ “*is* our life” (Col. 3:4, emphasis added).

Every worthy father deeply desires an unbreakable and rich relationship with his children. In the same way, Paul not only desired but experienced and expressed the intimacy of bonding love that he shared with **Timothy**, his **beloved son**. And just as this intimacy did not preclude authority, neither did authority preclude intimacy. As a loving spiritual father, Paul spoke with apostolic authority to his son in the faith. That authority gave Timothy a strong incentive for obedience.

#### ALTRUISM

### **Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.** (1:2b)

Although commonly expressed as a greeting, these were not just words but the expression of a genuine desire for God’s best to be reality in the young preacher’s life. Timothy was to be motivated by Paul’s altruism, his unselfish concern for and devotion to the welfare of others. Like every believer, his young protégé was saved by divine **grace**, the unmerited favor of God’s providing forgiveness and justification. The apostle wanted his son in the faith to continually live in divine **mercy**, the inexpressible blessing of deliverance from the misery that sin deserves and creates. He also wanted Timothy to continue in full **peace** of mind and heart, the inner tranquillity produced by divine grace and mercy. He wanted Timothy to have the best that **God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord** offer to redeemed sinners: grace to cover sin, mercy to overrule misery, and peace to dominate life.

If we want to truly motivate other believers, we must, like Paul, have genuine, loving, and unqualified concern for their full spiritual blessing. In addition to their recognizing our authority under God, we want our brothers and sisters in Christ to know that they are loved by us without reservation. This, too, elicits response.

## APPRECIATION

**I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, (1:3a)**

A third principle of godly and successful motivation is appreciation. Not only was Paul a blessing to Timothy, but Timothy was a blessing to Paul. **I thank God** for you, the apostle assured him, saying in effect, "I am grateful for what **God** has done for me through you." While Paul was incarcerated in the dark, damp, dangerous, filthy, and stinking Roman prison, he nevertheless rejoiced that the Lord had given him the privilege of knowing and discipling Timothy. He was not bitter or resentful. He had no anger or hatred for those who placed him in prison or for the hardened and brutal criminals who were beside him. He did not lament the unjust and cruel execution he knew soon awaited him. His thoughts were on his sovereign **God** and on memories of his beloved son in the spirit, with whom he had spent so many blessed hours in mutual service of **God** and whom he likely would never see again in the flesh. Only the Lord could give such an unbelievably beautiful perspective!

To be appreciated, encouraged, and told that God has wonderful plans for them is a great motivation for young men and women who serve the Lord, and Paul's statement of appreciation for Timothy must have given that young servant of the Lord great confidence. Timothy knew Paul's words were not empty. First of all, he knew that Paul's integrity would not allow him to flatter. Timothy also was well aware that he and Paul had come to know each other intimately in their many years together. They had traveled together, eaten together, ministered together, and doubtless suffered together for the sake of the gospel. At the time this letter was written, Paul doubtless knew Timothy better than any other person.

The appreciation that Paul spoke from his own heart must therefore have profoundly touched Timothy and placed on him a great sense of responsibility to live up to the high expectations of his spiritual mentor. The young disciple knew that this dear friend and peerless saint in the cause of Christ was facing imminent death. Yet, even during his last painful and uncertain hours, he thanked God and held up before Him a young pastor who, although incomparably trained in the gospel, had yet to fully prove himself in the difficult areas of the Lord's service.

In the midst of unimaginable physical misery, Paul not only continued to praise God but did so with deep gratitude from a guiltless mind and heart. With full conviction and truthfulness he could testify, "**I serve** the Lord and continually stand before Him **with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did.**" *Latreō* (serve) was sometimes

used of godly worship or even priestly service. Standing falsely accused by the Jewish leaders before Felix, the Roman governor in Caesarea, Paul said, “According to the Way which they call a sect I do serve [*latreuō*] the God of our fathers” (Acts 24:14). Speaking of true children of God, whether Jew or Gentile, Paul assured the Philippian believers: “We are the true circumcision, who worship [*latreuō*] in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3).

As the aging apostle stood near death, he could testify that his **conscience** did not accuse or condemn him. His guilt was forgiven, and his devotion was undivided. “After careful self-examination,” he said, in effect, “I can say with sincerity that, although I am not perfect, I am living in holiness before the Lord.” He wanted Timothy to have no doubt that he endured his present physical afflictions, as he had countless others, because of his unswerving faithfulness to the Lord, not as a consequence of unfaithful, ungodly living.

Although even the most spiritual believer cannot know his own heart with complete certainty or understanding, it not only is possible but expected that, like Paul, every Christian have **a clear conscience**. This was a vital matter to Paul, who often refers to his conscience. When defending himself against the lying attacks he experienced in Corinth, he responded with an appeal to the highest human court, the conscience. His defense was: “For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you” (2 Cor. 1:12; cf. Acts 23:1).

In his first letter to Timothy he wrote, “The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5), and we are to hold “to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (3:9). In that same epistle he said that “the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron” (4:1–2). To continually reject God’s truth causes the conscience to become progressively less sensitive to sin, as if covered with layers of unspiritual scar tissue. Paul’s conscience was very clear and very sensitive, and he responded readily to its convicting voice.

Paul does not explain whom he meant by **forefathers**, but he obviously was speaking of godly men who had lived in former times. Unlike Timothy, Paul had no godly heritage from his immediate family. He had an impressive *religious* heritage, but he utterly discounted that as so much rubbish (Phil. 3:4–8). It therefore seems more probable that he was referring to the patriarchs, prophets, and other Old Testament saints. It is also possible that he had in mind the other apostles and the

many other godly believers in the early church who preceded him in faith.

#### APPEAL

#### **as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, (1:3b)**

A fourth element of motivation was Paul's constant appeal to the Lord on Timothy's behalf. It is hard to imagine the strength and encouragement that Paul's intercession gave to his young friend as he ministered in Ephesus and other parts of Asia Minor without Paul's companionship.

The adverb *adialeiptōs* (**constantly**) refers to that which is unceasing, without interruption. We can be sure that Paul's saying **I constantly remember you** was not hyperbole. The apostle had used the same word in exhorting Thessalonian believers to "pray *without ceasing*" (1 Thess. 5:17, emphasis added), and he was himself accustomed to doing no less. He already had assured those believers of his unceasing prayers and concern for them (1:2–3). Using the same word, he assured the church at Rome that "God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how *unceasingly* I make mention of you, always in my prayers" (Rom. 1:9–10, emphasis added). He gave similar assurance to believers in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:4), in Philippi (Phil. 1:3–4), in Colossae (Col. 1:3), and to his dear friend Philemon (Philem. 4).

**Prayers** is from *deēsis*, which in the New Testament always carries the idea of genuine entreaty and supplication before God. It was used by the angel who assured the godly father of John the Baptist, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition [*deēsis*] has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John" (Luke 1:13). Later in that gospel the word is used of the disciples of John the Baptist, who were said to "often fast and offer prayers" (5:33). It was used by Paul of his "prayer to God" for the salvation of his fellow Israelites (Rom. 10:1) and by James of "the effective prayer of a righteous man [which] can accomplish much" (James 5:16).

At first glance, the reference to **night and day** seems redundant and somewhat inappropriate. It seems redundant because, by definition, **constantly** means around-the-clock, and inappropriate because it is likely that Paul and his fellow prisoners could not distinguish one hour from another in that dungeon. But he doubtless used the phrase **night and day** in the way it is often used today, as a figure of speech expressing continuity. He simply wanted to reinforce his devotion to Timothy.

There is no better way to motivate other believers to consider their accountability to be faithful and to move their hearts in service of

Christ than to continually hold them up before the Lord in prayer—and to tell them of it.

#### AFFECTION

**longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy.** (1:4)

A fifth principle for motivating other believers, especially those we may be discipling, is to love them and to express genuine affection for them. Paul greatly missed Timothy's companionship and was **longing to see** him. **Longing** is from *epipotheō*, a verb denoting intense desire or yearning for. Later in the letter he reflects the same aching desire, imploring Timothy, "Make every effort to come to me soon" (4:9), and "When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus . . . [and] make every effort to come before winter" (vv. 13, 21).

**I recall your tears**, the apostle says, perhaps referring to their time of last parting, following a brief visit to Ephesus sometime after writing his first letter to Timothy and before he was arrested at Nicopolis and taken prisoner to Rome. Paul had a similar bond with the elders in Ephesus. When they came out to meet him on the beach near Miletus, "he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more" (Acts 20:36–38).

Although he doubtless realized he might never see Timothy again, even the remote prospect of such a reunion **filled** Paul **with joy**. Knowing the apostle's deep love and yearning to see him again surely filled Timothy with joy as well and inspired still greater commitment to follow in the footsteps of his beloved teacher and friend.

#### AFFIRMATION

**For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well.** (1:5)

The final principle of motivation Paul alludes to is that of affirmation. In the two previous verses Paul mentions his remembering Timothy in prayer and recalling his tears. Now again he reflects on their intimate association, this time being **mindful of the sincere faith** within Timothy.



*Anupokritos* (**sincere**) is a compound word, composed of a negative prefix attached to *hupokritēs*, from which we get the obviously related English word *hypocrite*. Timothy's **faith** was completely genuine, unhypocritical, without pretense or deceit. In his previous letter to Timothy, Paul had written, "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere [*anupokritos*] faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). In his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul used the term to describe his "*genuine love*" (2 Cor. 6:6, emphasis added). Peter used it in his admonition to all believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire: "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a *sincere* love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22, emphasis added). James used it as the final qualification of "the wisdom from above [which] is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, *without hypocrisy*" (James 3:17, emphasis added).

Timothy had a heritage of **sincere faith within [him], which first dwelt in [his] grandmother Lois, and [his] mother Eunice**. The reference to **Lois and Eunice** suggests that Paul knew those women personally and perhaps was instrumental, along with Barnabas, in winning them to Christ during his first missionary journey, which had taken him through Timothy's home area of Galatia (see Acts 13:13–14:21). They probably were Jewish believers under the Old Covenant who immediately received Jesus as their Messiah, Savior, and Lord when they first heard the gospel from the lips of Paul. By the time of Paul's second journey, the women had led their grandson and son to the Lord, and he already had become "well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium" (Acts 16:2). Timothy was Paul's indirect son in the faith who had come to belief through the witness of his **grandmother Lois** and his **mother Eunice**, who had been led to faith directly by the apostle. Through them, he had "from childhood . . . known the sacred writings which are able to give [him] the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Some years ago I was involved in a discussion regarding the choice of a man to take up the leadership of a well-known Christian organization. In looking over the list of prospects, I commented that it was interesting that every one of those men had a godly pastor for a father. The Lord has, of course, raised up many faithful leaders, including Paul, from ungodly and even godless families. But a high percentage of the great men throughout church history have come from godly homes. Timothy's father was an unbelieving Gentile (Acts 16:3), but his mother and grandmother were believers of great godliness. Paul commends them for the immense influence for good they had on Timothy and for the **sincere faith** that the apostle was **sure** to be **in** Timothy as well.