

**Pass it on**

2 Timothy 3:14 - 4:5

October 17, 2010

Paul had a vocation. What was it? To pass it on!

Timothy had a vocation. What was it? To pass it on!

I have a vocation. What is it? To pass it on!

You have a vocation. What is it? To pass it on!

This is our vocation, the vocation of every believer. This is our duty as servants of God -- to pass it on, to pass on the precious and powerful message that has been passed on to us.

Who passed on the message to you? Your parents? A pastor? A friend? Who shared with you the good news that God is love, and that God has showed us love by giving Jesus to us, to live with us and die for us and be raised to life ahead of us? Who shared with you the good news that God wants to save ... you? Thank God for all those who fulfilled their vocation by passing it on ... to us!

That's what Paul wants Timothy to do -- pass it on! You can sense some urgency in Paul's tone as his letter draws to a close. Paul is fast approaching the endpoint of his ministry and, indeed, the endpoint of his life. This letter is like the passing of the mantle to Timothy, the mantle of the apostle, the mantle of the messenger of Good News.

And as Paul contemplates this milestone, he is adamant that Timothy stay focussed, stay on task, and do it right. It's not that Paul doesn't trust Timothy. It's just that the message is so important, so vital to the well-being of each and every person, so vital to the very well-being of this planet.

And there are lots and lots of competing messages and there are lots and lots of competing messengers. There are lots and lots of teachers ready to tell people whatever they are itching to hear.

Ready to tell them the road to heaven is easy and wide.

Ready to tell them there is never any need for self-sacrifice or humility or suffering.

Ready to tell them: “Just be yourself. Just be true to yourself. That’s the only rule that matters.”

Ready to offer them the secrets to the good life ... for just \$19.95!

Ready to tell them: “Just watch Oprah. Just watch Oprah.”

In the face of so much disinformation, so much self-serving prattle, Timothy must not spare any opportunity to proclaim the truth. Preach the message! Insist upon proclaiming it, whether the time is right or not! Do your best to convince, to correct, to encourage.

And be patient. Don’t get discouraged or fizzle out. Just keep on teaching -- patiently, faithfully, expectantly. Endure the suffering that comes your way. Stay the course. Do the work.

That’s what Paul urges Timothy to do. He urges Timothy to fulfill his vocation, to pass it on. How will you fulfill your vocation?

One of the most important things we can do to fulfill our vocation is to pass on our faith to our children. How are we doing with that? How have I done with that?

Nicole Havelka, associate Iowa conference minister for youth and young adult ministries, wrote in a recent blog post:

*In this month's issue of “Yoga Journal” magazine, several articles discussed the importance of practicing yoga with your children. The cover story, entitled “Teach your Children Well” ... describes how parents should do their yoga practice out in the open so that children can observe it and join in. She also recommends that parents teach them age-appropriate things like postures and breathing to help them not only develop physically, but emotionally and spiritually.*

*In a short reflection article ... in the same issue, [the author] tells a powerful story about sharing yoga with her daughter and how it's taking root in her now that she is a teenager. She writes, “Though I had been a dedicated yoga practitioner since long before [my daughter] was born, I knew that didn’t ensure that my way of life would rub off on her.”*

*I was struck [Nicole writes] by how different her comment is from what I hear from parents about passing along their Christian faith. Even people within Iowa Conference United Church of Christ churches tell me*

*things like, "I want them to come to it on their own." Or, "They'll come back to the church when they're adults." We'd never say the same thing about teaching our children to read, cook or drive a car.*

It's not that we don't care about the spiritual welfare of our children, and it's not that we don't think it important for them to hear that Jesus loves each of them and that there is nothing that matters more than loving Jesus back. It's just that we hard time saying it.

We talk to them about going to church and making good choices and doing the right thing. We talk to them about being nice, being respectable, being polite. We talk to them about all the things they shouldn't do, trying to ensure they grow up to be good citizens, responsible young adults, kids that won't embarrass us.

But we don't talk to them about Jesus. Maybe we expect that if we get them into church, something will rub off on them, but we aren't ready to talk with them about the things -- the hopes and the fears, the gratitude, the faith -- that lie at the deepest parts of our souls.

Why? Why is that? Why do we have such a hard time telling our children what we believe? Why are we so reluctant to share with them the hopes and dreams and desires of our hearts? We easily share with them, with almost anybody, our other passions: passions for fishing or for football, for music or running or reading or golf. We get so excited talking with them about the Bears or the Beatles, about the big trout that got away or a canoe trip down the Upper Iowa. So why do we feel so uncomfortable, so unready, to share with them our passion for Jesus?

Maybe, maybe, because we don't have that much of a passion for Jesus.

Or maybe, maybe, because we are afraid of what we don't know or can't answer.

Or maybe, maybe, maybe, because we're scared off by images of fire-breathing, Bible-thumping, take-no-quarter, nobody-else-knows-better-than-me religious zealots, and we don't want to be one of them!

But you're not. You're not.

You are a believer, a humble believer, a man, a woman, who has experienced the healing power of the grace of God in your life. All you need to do is tell your story ...

And when you do, it will matter. It will surely matter to your children, to your friends, to any who hear it, because it is something real. You won't be offering them your take on the latest religious debate. You will be offering them a glimpse into your heart.

I love Jesus. Me, Timothy John Ensworth ... I love Jesus.

I love Jesus because he has been so patient with me, not leaving me behind despite my many mistakes, not giving up on me when I have been so stupid and so selfish sometimes.

I love Jesus because he has been good to me, bringing so many good things, bringing so many good people, into my life. Oh, let me tell you, I have had a rich life! Because of Jesus! And because of people who love Jesus!

I love Jesus because he has healed me, healed my spirit when it was broken.

I love Jesus because he has opened my eyes, to see people in a different way, to see the world in a different way, to see that some of the things I thought were true aren't. I love Jesus because of his astonishing wisdom and the way he resists being put in a box by me or by anybody!

I love Jesus because he gives me hope, hope for this world and for what it one day will be, hope for myself and for those I love.

I love Jesus because he opens my eyes to the wonder of what is, and to the wonder of what he is and the wonder of what he has done.

I love Jesus, in a grownup, well-informed, tested-by-experience kind of way, but also and especially with wonder and humility and eagerness and excitement ... like a child, just like a child.

That's what we need to recover -- this childlike passion for life, this childlike delight in the God gives. That's what we need to pass on, especially to our children.

Maybe you've seen it, too, in a child, when at some point, at some age, that sense of wonder and delight and eagerness and unabashed joy suddenly turns off or goes underground and seems lost forever. But it's not lost. It's just misplaced! And the message about Jesus, the message about Jesus' unending love, will bring it to life again!

So pass it on! Pass it on! Pass it on!