

Faith Handed Down

2 Timothy 1:1-14

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Prayer: *Gracious God, by your Spirit, open our ears to hear and our hearts to become what you would have us be, through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Amen.*

*I know not why God's wondrous grace to me he has made known.
Nor why unworthy Christ in love redeemed me for his own.
But I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able
To keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.*

These words from the hymn "*I Know Whom I Have Believed*" come straight from today's passage in 2 Timothy. Behind this beloved hymn lies a powerful story of faith.

During the *Battle of Vicksburg*—one of the bloodiest in American history—Union officer Major Daniel Webster Whittle was severely wounded and lost his right arm. While recovering as a prisoner of war, he grew restless. To pass the time, he began reading the New Testament his mother had given him when he joined the Army.

As he read, Whittle felt the tug of Christ on his heart. But he held back. One night, an orderly woke him and asked him to pray with a dying soldier. Whittle refused. "I can't pray," he said. "I'm a sinner." But the orderly insisted. He had seen Whittle with his Bible. Whittle later remembered what happened next:

I dropped to my knees and held the boy's hand. In broken words, I confessed my sins and asked Christ to forgive me. I believed He did. Then I prayed for the boy. When I rose, he was gone—with peace on his face. I cannot help but believe God used him to bring me to the Savior, and used me to lead him to trust Christ. That night changed Whittle's life. His faith grew deep and strong.

Years later, he wrote the hymn "*I Know Whom I Have Believed*." In it, he affirms a simple truth: we can trust Christ even when we do not understand everything.

That is simple faith. My grandfather had it. My mother had it. They trusted Christ without having all the answers. And they passed that simple faith on to me.

My first Sunday School class was in our kitchen. My mother opened our home to a small group of Christians from the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. They were trying to start a church in our town and needed a place to worship.

Our living room was large enough for a dozen adults and their children. So, they met there until they could build their own church. In time, the little group grew. Families of means joined and gave generously. One family even donated a piece of land. Soon, the church had a building of its own.

I grew up in that small village church. I remember with joy how my faith grew there—through my pastors, my Sunday School teachers, and most of all, through my mother and my grandfather. They passed their simple, faithful faith on to me.

Both are gone now. But the memory of their devotion to Christ and the church still lives in me.

In our passage today in 2 Timothy, we hear these words: *I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, lives in you* (1:5).

Here, the writer—speaking in the voice of Paul—reminds Timothy that faith is not invented; it is *inherited*. It is *handed down*. Timothy's faith came first from his grandmother, then from his mother.

He didn't become a Christian at a weekend conference in some fancy hotel. His faith was formed slowly. Day by day. Year by year.

And that's the point Paul is making. He reminds Timothy to hold fast to his faith—a faith passed on from those who had come before him.

Why this warning? Because in Ephesus, false teachings had crept into the church. Rival teachers—the Gnostics—were spreading confusion. They claimed to have hidden knowledge, secret codes, and spiritual shortcuts known only to a chosen few.

But the truth of the gospel isn't hidden. It isn't secret. It isn't reserved for the elite. In contrast to the Gnostics, the good teachers had no secret tricks. They had only the plain witness of Scripture. They had the shared confessions and the tested doctrines of the church.

The false teachers offer a flashier gospel—one that sparkles with adventure and promises escape from ordinary life. It's a free-form spirituality that sounds exciting and easy.

On the other hand, the true teachers preach a different kind of gospel—a messier one. An incarnational gospel, grounded in flesh and blood, in the stuff of daily life. It's about finding God's redemption in the hard work of raising children, nurturing marriages, and building a church community where imperfect people learn to trust, forgive, and love one another.

The rival teachers have a fancier interpretation of Scripture. As one Bible commentator says, they were like magicians showing off cheap trinkets—glittering glass beads that break when you hold them.¹

The gospel, on the other hand, is like real treasure—tested, lasting, and priceless—passed from one faithful generation to the next.²

So Paul tells Timothy: *You are the heirs of the true faith. You've been entrusted with the crown jewels of the gospel. Hold fast to that faith.*

So, what about us? Are we passing on the faith we've received?

In the 1990s, a team of sociologists studied the attitude of Baby Boomers toward Christianity. They were raising their children then.³

The study showed that for many, religion had become something like an *accident of birth*. They just happened to be born into Christian homes. It could have been otherwise. But they felt it would be presumptuous to impose that faith on their children. Many parents believed their children should grow up free from religious pressure. They believed in letting their children choose for themselves—Christian or not, religious or not. Their

¹ Thomas G. Long, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 2016), 189.

² Ibid.

³ Donald A. Luidens, Dean R. Hope, and Benton Johnson, "The Emergence of Lay Liberalism among Baby Boomers," *Theology Today*, S1/2 (July 1994), 249-55.

motto is this: *As long as they were happy. As long as they were basically good people.*⁴

So what happened to the children of these Boomers? The researchers found a broad and flexible approach to religion. Some called it *moralistic therapeutic deism*. In this view, God created the world and watches over it—but only interacts when there’s a problem. Otherwise, God stays in the background, wanting people simply to be good, fair, happy, and feel good about themselves.

To be sure, these findings are trends. There are exceptions. But Paul, looking at these results, might say: it’s time for new Loises and Eunices. It’s time for faithful parents and grandparents to step up and form Christian faith intentionally—to hand down a faith that is clear, steady, and strong.

That is how faith has always been transmitted—from person to person, through love and relationship.

We see this pattern through Scripture. Jesus formed his disciples. Paul mentored Timothy. Families like Lois and Eunice’s nurtured faith at home. What all these examples have in common is this: *faith is relational*. It is passed on to others through loving relationships. It is passed through care, love, and example.

And faith isn’t taught once; it’s lived daily. It is caught through example as much as it is taught through words. A nurturing home—and a caring church—reflect the self-giving love of God.

The good news is that many Loises and Eunices are still in our churches today—including ours. I heard of one grandmother who teaches her grandsons the Bible and how to pray. I know parents who make time each night to share Scripture and gratitude with their children.

We thank God for these modern Loises and Eunices. May their tribe increase. May their faith continue to be handed down—strong, steady, and sincere.

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

⁴ Ibid, 253-54.