

SUSTAINING GRACES II **II Timothy 1:11-18**

When life gets especially difficult for you, who or what do you turn to? It's helpful to identify the sources of strength which can get us through these anxious moments so that we can call on them when necessary, and find the help we need.

Last week, we began our look at what I've chosen to call "Sustaining Graces." We read verses 1-7 of II Timothy 1 and found the first three of these sustaining gifts of God's grace.

Paul knew his life here was nearly over. He was in Nero's prison. He would soon be executed, but he expected Timothy's life and ministry to continue for many years. Paul was very concerned that his churches would have good leaders in the future.

He saw the right stuff in young Timothy, but he also knew that Timothy would face tough challenges. He needed encouragement and reassurance in order to persevere.

So last Sunday, we saw how Paul begins this letter by talking about 1) meaningful relationships, 2) good memories, and 3) the ever-present opportunity for spiritual renewal.

The point I tried to make then is that these can all serve as sustaining graces in our lives—graces that we'll need when we hit the "rough places in the road"—as all of us do. Sustaining graces are the gifts God supplies to get us over the hard bumps in life.

With that, let's look at today's Scripture. As we read it, I want you to be listening for some more "sustaining graces." They're all through this little letter of II Timothy. We begin with ch. 1, v. 11:

¹¹And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. ¹²That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

¹³What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. ¹⁵You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and

Hermogenes. ¹⁶May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. ¹⁷On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. ¹⁸May 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.

Well, it certainly sounds like Paul had hit a few bumps in the road, doesn't it? But Paul's focus was not on the hardships he faced, but on the graces God provided to sustain him. He commends these to Timothy—and now, to you and me. He wants us to rely on these graces--to draw strength from them. So, what are they?

1. Well, let's begin with **GOD'S FAITHFULNESS**—one of our most precious sustaining graces, to be sure.

Verse 12 of II Timothy 1 is one of our foundational verses. Often quoted, this verse inspired the hymn we sang earlier: "...for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

What is Paul saying to Timothy and, through him, to all of us? This man who had endured so much suffering for the cause of Christ is stating as clearly as he knows how that we can count on God, that we can trust God to be faithful.

And when Timothy read those words, you can rest assured that he knew that they were coming from a man who believed them and who lived accordingly. Paul was so radical in his faith and obedience to the call of Christ that two thousand years later he continues to inspire folks like us to trust God with abandon!

When Paul speaks of what he has "entrusted" or "committed" to God, he uses the Greek word "paratheke." It simply means to place something of great value into the care of another.

If you have ever left your child with a babysitter, you have a good idea of what this word means. And I'm not talking about your seven year old, but your seven-week old. And not your fifth child, but your first—when you still care! I well remember having to convince Pam to leave our first child with a babysitter—and not with someone we didn't know either. It was family!

Now, later, she got over this hesitation quite well. But I'm talking here about first child, first time, with a sitter! That's "paratheke."

It's a "leap of faith"--the act of putting your total trust in someone else—like when you leave your little one in the care of another.

Paul is telling us that he has handed his life over to God. He has entrusted all of his life and eternity into the Heavenly Father's hands. And God has never failed him. This is Paul's conviction even though he's been beaten and stoned, arrested and imprisoned, and now he's awaiting execution.

But Paul is saying, "It's all okay—because God has hold of my life." Paul has handed his life over--"entrusting" it, "committing" it, to God. And what he wants Timothy to understand—and us too—is that God will always take good care of everything that we entrust to Him.

Paul summarizes his confidence in the Lord with these three words: "He is able." This is his faith, and he wants us to have this faith too. We're not so sure, though, so we question, "But what if this should happen?" And Paul assures us, "God is able."

"But how about this?" we continue. And Paul answers, "Don't worry. He is able." How liberating it is to know this, to take it to heart. When Paul speaks elsewhere of "peace that passeth understanding," this is where he gets it from: his complete, total confidence that "God is indeed able."

"I am persuaded," he says, "I am convinced" that "he is able..." We're not able, but God is. Friends, when this becomes our faith, there is a confidence, a security, and yes, a peace, that baffles the human mind. We don't have to understand it. It's so much better to experience it! God is faithful. He is able!

2. Well, we would be hard pressed to find a more powerful sustaining grace than the faithfulness of God; but there are others in this passage, and we shouldn't overlook them. So next, I want us to consider **OUR FAITHFULNESS**.

Now, I realize that even our very best efforts at faithfulness pale in comparison with God's, but each of us can make faithfulness our aim; and to the extent we hit the mark, our own faithfulness will serve as yet another sustaining grace.

Often when this is discussed in Scripture, it relates to some gift God has placed in our lives. Now, whether the gift seems great or small, God expects us to be faithful with it.

Maybe we have only one small gift. Don't complain—be faithful. Maybe we've received many gifts. Don't boast—be faithful. Whatever it is that God has placed into our care, we are to be faithful with it.

You remember Jesus' parable of the talents. We find it in the 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. One servant received five talents, another two, and a third servant was given just one talent.

You recall how that the number of talents was not the key to the story, but rather what each servant did with the talents he received. Each one was evaluated and blessed according to what he did with what he'd been given.

What the other servants had to work with didn't matter. Jesus was trying to impress upon us that God expects us to be faithful with whatever He entrusts to us.

I have no way of knowing how gifted Timothy was. Paul certainly saw potential in him or he would have never taken him on his missionary journeys or written him two letters to encourage him in his work.

So there were gifts present in Timothy's life. What I want you to see here, though, is that early in this letter, Paul reminds Timothy of the greatest gift of all—and the same is true for your life and mine, if we're Christians.

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

What's the gift Paul is speaking of here? It's the Gospel. It's what Paul proclaimed and Timothy heard and believed. It's the sound teaching that leads to a life of faith and love. It's God's Spirit dwelling in our lives, helping us to "guard this good deposit" of Christ Jesus in us.

God wants us to be faithful stewards of all of His gifts, but first among these is the Gospel itself--a saving, life-changing relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Sure, we should be faithful stewards of our money. If we can teach Sunday School, then by all means, faithfully use that gift. If we can sing, then sing!

If we have a servant's heart, then serve faithfully. But get this: it's all for naught if we're not being faithful in learning, believing, growing in, and sharing with others the Gospel.

Being faithful to what God has called us to do is another sustaining grace in our lives. Being successful is not what sustains. Success is a nice bonus when it happens, but faithfulness is what sustains us. Paul tells Timothy to remain faithful to this "pattern of sound teaching."

Timothy knew what this meant. He was to keep on proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ: who was born of a virgin, who went about doing good, who died on a cross for the sin of the world, and rose from the dead on the third day. He ascended to the Father; and when the time is right, He'll come again.

Stay true, Paul says, to this "pattern of sound teaching." Paul entrusted the Gospel to Timothy; and now it's in our hands. Handling this remarkable gift faithfully will sustain us. It will sustain our church. The Lord is counting on us, friends, to be faithful!

Which means—and let's just be honest—this means that God is taking a big risk! He's taking chances with us, and here's why. Not everyone is going to be faithful.

Paul understands this. He's experienced it first hand. Look at verse 15 in our text: "You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes."

Every follower of Christ needs to understand the sad truth that not everyone will be faithful to Christ or to us. We have to know this, lest the lack of faithfulness in others should lead to diminished faithfulness in us.

Paul says his friends, his fellow-workers in Asia, had deserted him. Of course, the same thing happened to Jesus, right? His friends deserted him. We still do sometimes.

In Paul's case, though, we don't really know the circumstances. In fact, the only thing we're told in Scripture about the two men mentioned here is what Paul tells us: they were deserters!

What a way to be remembered! When we read a passage like this, it should cause us to pause and reflect on how we might be remembered some day. I hope to be remembered as a person who was faithful to his Lord, his family, his church, his calling—faithful to all the significant people and responsibilities in my life.

How do you want to be remembered? Be remembered for your faithfulness. By all means, don't be remembered like Phygelus and Hermogenes—for their lack of faithfulness. That's a sad way to be remembered, friends.

I read a story about a young police officer, 27 years old, with a wife and three small children. He and his partner went to a house to serve a search warrant. They knocked on the door and called out, "Police. Open the door."

But instead, from inside that house, shots were fired. The bullets came through the door and one of them hit the officer in the chest. It ripped through an artery, and he quickly bled to death.

There's more to the story, though. A few weeks earlier, the same officer had been hit by another bullet, in about the same place. But on that occasion, he survived with just a bruise.

The difference? He was wearing a bullet-proof vest that day. But on the day he died, he decided it was too hot and uncomfortable, so he didn't put it on. It was in the trunk of his patrol car, parked about 30 feet away.

Now, this young officer had every reason to believe in bullet-proof vests, didn't he? But on this occasion, he and all those close to him, paid a terrible price for his failure to be faithful to what he believed in—which can yield tragic results in anyone's life.

Still, some will not be faithful. It's not a new problem, but it could be that it's getting worse. We certainly seem to be living in a low-commitment age. Even back in Paul's day, though, he had to warn Timothy not to let the lack of faithfulness in others discourage him.

3. Instead, Paul sought to focus Timothy on the opposite—to focus him on **OTHER’S FAITHFULNESS**. Listen again to the example he gives:

“May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. 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.” (vv. 16-18)

The Lord is always faithful to us, friends; but it’s so much easier to understand this when there are few fellow believers around who are also faithful to us. This was Paul’s experience with Onesiphorus. Here was someone he could count on!

Who are these people in your life? Who will be with you through thick and thin? Who shares words of encouragement with you when you need them most? Who lets you know that you really can go on when you’re succumbing to self-doubt?

Do you have some “Onesiphoruses” in your life? Now, don’t call them that—they may not understand; but do let them know how much you appreciate them. And thank God for these folks—because He just may have placed them close by you to be one of His “sustaining graces” in your life.

Once you identify who they are, then like Paul, you’ll want to ask the Lord to grant them a special blessing...because they have been such a blessing to you.

And remember, God may work it out for their special blessing to be you. He may give you the sacred privilege of being a sustaining grace for them when it’s their turn to experience hard times.

Faithfulness is one of God’s sustaining graces in our lives:

- 1) His faithfulness to us; 2) our faithfulness to Him; and also,
- 3) our faithfulness to one another.

Let’s make this our prayer and our sincere commitment—that the Lord will always find us faithful. To Him, and to each other, be faithful!