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1 Timothy 5:1-2; 6:1-2

Eleventh Message

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# STRENGTHENING FAMILY TIES

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

The television show *Survivor*, like many popular shows of its kind, inserts the highest level of competition into the mix of relationships. Surviving on a remote island for 36 days demands not only guts and athleticism, but also relational savvy to develop secret alliances based on intimacy and trust, coupled with shrewd deceit for those you hope to eliminate. What amazes me about the “game,” is that it is just that – a game. Yet, when the jury of eliminated contestants assembles to cross-examine the few remaining survivors, they readily vent their outrage over having been betrayed. Instead of being “just a game,” it sounds more like *Divorce Court* as some take their rage to very personal levels. This reveals that, whether we admit it or not, intimacy is not a “game.” When we are vulnerable and extend trust to others, no matter what the context, we expect to be treated with the respect and dignity that one gives to a family member. So whenever relationships are involved, it’s not “just a game” and, contrary to Donald Trump’s phrase, it’s not “just business.”

This is where we Christians come in. We have what the world longs for. The church derives its pattern of living from the Triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The metaphor that becomes the over arching paradigm for how we relate to one another is “family.” As the church feeds on the life of God, we mirror the love of the Godhead, and then in turn we are to transform the world into God’s family. As a father, I have found it an awesome responsibility to build a healthy family in an immoral culture. As an elder, it has been an even a greater challenge to help heal difficult marriages or wounded families. But imagine how daunting it would be if you were given the mantle of restoring an entire community suffering the trauma of betrayal and abuse, and you were just an upstart consultant. Think of the courage needed to confront erring leaders and partisan parties, while simultaneously admonishing wounded victims to forgive.

Having a similar personality to Timothy, I can imagine those disquieting butterflies within his soul turning into eagles as he entered a lion’s den of controversy. For those of us who are fearful of confronting negative emotions in strong individuals, it is easier to be passive and say nothing, or when finally pushed over the edge, to shoot from a safe distance with an angry e-mail. But Paul would insist that neither approach fosters healthy relationships. Even when serious correction is needed, erring parties need to be treated with the dignity and respect shown to a family member. So in the following chapters Paul spells out “the manner” in which Timothy ought to speak the truth in love, so that family ties are not damaged but strengthened.

The apostle opens with a general summary (5:1-2); he then gives more detailed instructions for the care for widows (5:3-16), and management of the elders (5:17-25); and concludes with a word to slaves (6:1-2). Throughout the text, Paul’s chief concern is “that no one may be open to blame” (5:5), and “that God’s name and our teaching may not be slandered” (6:1). Therefore, if we are not fostering healthy relationships within the church family, we might as well close our doors because we will have nothing to say to our community. This morning we will examine Paul’s introduction and the outer frame, which focuses on strengthening family ties in the workplace.

## I. All in the Family (1 Tim 5:1-2)

**Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. (1 Tim 5:1-2 TNIV)**

### A. Appealing to the older generation

Timothy is to intentionally treat every member in the body with the kind of intimacy and respect he would give to a family member. A *presbuteros*, which can be translated either as “elder” or “older man,” is to be given the same respect one would give to his own father. In the ancient world, fathers were owed complete respect. In Israel, the commandment to “honor your father and mother” was foundational to all other relationships. Parents were, in essence, a child’s first encounter with the living God who created them, nurtured and sustained them and taught them in his word. Therefore children were to grow up with a keen awareness that they owed their very lives to their parents. Thus they were to give weight to their words and grant them dignity of place in all situations. Such honor is also given to older men and women in the extended family of the church.

In giving correction to older men, in particular, leaders who had strayed from the truth, Timothy must never be harsh or severe. This implies that outbursts of anger or angry threats are never appropriate in the implementation of church discipline. Any kind of authoritarian behavior communicates disrespect to an older person, isolating rather than restoring him. Rather, Timothy “is called to on to treat even older men in need of correction with a certain deference and politeness that will ensure that the correction is unifying rather than divisive.”<sup>1</sup> In Paul’s final letter to Timothy, he states that it is the rare quality of gentleness, not harshness, that acts like a powerful cleansing agent to soften hard hearts that have been captivated by the devil (2 Tim 2:25-26; also 2 Cor 10:1):

Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (2 Tim 2:25-26)

That same spirit should apply to Timothy’s appeals to older women. They are to be given the same deference and respect he would give to his mother. With utmost consideration and graciousness they are to be held in the highest esteem, as Paul exemplified in his appreciation of Rufus’s mother:

**Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. (Rom 16:13)**

Timothy needed only a gentle reminder of this, as he had been shaped by the faith of his grandmother Lois and equally by his mother Eunice (2 Tim 1:5). But in our day we could devote a whole sermon to this subject. One way we can facilitate this respect is to create a stage for the older folk to tell their stories. Several years ago during a retreat, I invited one of the older men to share his story with the group. Though he intimated that he was shy and not used to speaking in front of groups, we urged him on, and he told his story — the whole story! As he reached

back and unlocked the memoirs of his memory, a sense of family came over the whole group. It was as if a father was speaking to his fifteen sons. For years afterwards, whenever he came to our weekly Bible study, he would enter the room with the sense of delight and dignity of a father coming to meet with his sons.

So Paul exhorts Timothy to treat the older folk with the same respect he would show his parents. Even when they needed correction he must never violate the dignity that age deserves.

### B. Appealing to the younger generation

If the older men are to be appealed to as fathers, the younger men are to be treated like brothers. The fact that one occupies an office of leadership does not give him authority to dominate, intimidate, or be condescending to those who are younger. Jesus was adamant in applying this principle to his apostolic band whenever they sought to upstage one another:

**“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”** (Mark 10:42-44).

**“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers.”** (Matt 23:8)

In the early church, we never find leadership monopolized around one charismatic individual but spread among a team of equals. It is an extremely inefficient way to lead, since everyone’s opinion matters, and coming to one mind can seem like an endless exercise at times. But if it’s a family we’re creating, then success is not measured by the amount of tasks we accomplish but by the mutual love and respect among the members. Further, when there is mutual trust and equality in relationships, leaders don’t have to spend their time micromanaging one another. The apostles extended freedom to believers to use their gifts without their permission or regulation. Instead, believers were taught to follow the direct leading of the Lord.

Philip, a layman, was the first to break into Samaria with the gospel. Later, following the apostles’ laying on of hands to seal that work, the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, not the apostles, directing him to evangelize an Ethiopian eunuch in the Gaza desert (Acts 8:26ff.). In the book of Acts, it seems as if the leadership was often playing catch-up with what the saints were doing.

The same can be said of Paul. Though called as an apostle, he refused to dominate others by imposing his agenda upon them. Regarding Apollos, he wrote, “Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity” (1 Cor 16:12). Though Paul had strong feelings about the matter he refused to violate Apollos’s freedom to make up his own mind as to the timing of his visit to the Corinthians.

Turning to the younger women, Paul writes, “treat...younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.” Like the younger men, so also the younger women are to be granted dignity as equals within the family. They are to be treated like sisters, but with the added caution, “in absolute purity.” In Ephesus, this word was especially needed, given the influence of the “new Roman woman” who cultivated a free and independent spirit outside the cultural norms and considered sexual purity as old fashioned as today’s godless world. The influence had evidently captivated several young widows in Ephesus who were leading lives of self-indulgence and whose wealth was enabling the false teachers to propagate their heresies.

Sexual dangers were great, therefore Timothy is to be especially resolute that there be no sexual impropriety in his relationship with younger

women. It is extremely easy for young women who do not have good fathers as role models to cultivate unhealthy affections with a spiritual leader. It is equally tempting for a leader to become dangerously lightheaded over the attention of these youthful beauties. Like a flame to kindling, soon boundaries are crossed and emotions manipulated. Therefore Paul insists that younger women are to be cared for like “sisters with absolute purity,” which implies that if a leader misuses his office for sexual advancement, it is a betrayal as serious as incest.

Remember the horrifying act of King David’s son, Amnon, who was so consumed with lust for his half-sister Tamar that he became ill. When Amnon’s deplorable desire was made known to David’s shrewd brother Jonadab, rather than rebuking Amnon, he crafted a wicked scheme to help him fulfill his perverted desires. Amnon dramatized an illness, and the innocent and unassuming Tamar came into his private chamber to feed her sick half-brother. Once they were alone he pleaded with her, “Come to bed with me, my sister.” Horrified, Tamar tried in vain to reason with him to at least postpone his lustful gratification for a lesser crime:

**“No, my brother!” she said to him. “Don’t force me! Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don’t do this wicked thing. What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you.”**

**But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her. Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, “Get up and get out!”...And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom’s house, a desolate woman.** (2 Sam 13:12-15, 20)

J. P. Fokkelman outlines the horror:

He ruthlessly degrades Tamar to an object of desire, a total dehumanization which leaves someone behind as a ruin...[and worse yet] Amnon gives Tamar a lifelong sentence by expelling her, i.e., the social, psychological, and moral isolation of a *somema* [a “desolate woman”]. This is why Tamar’s expulsion is an even more serious crime than the rape.<sup>2</sup>

This abominable deed set off a fiery violence between brothers in the family, and ultimately a civil war in the nation. Sadly, we are all too familiar with how sexual exploitation of younger women by church leaders can destroy entire communities. Instead of exploiting young women, pastors are to provide the kind of protection afforded to younger sisters in a family, as is beautifully expressed in the Song of Songs:

**We have a little sister,  
and her breasts are not yet grown.  
What shall we do for our sister  
on the day she is spoken for?  
If she is a wall,  
we will build towers of silver on her.  
If she is a door,  
we will enclose her with panels of cedar.** (Song 8:8-9)

If she is a “wall,” impervious to male advances, her brothers will decorate her beautify by magnifying her good character with praise. However, if she is a “door,” and easily seduced, they will barricade her with planks of cedar, creating impenetrable walls of protection around her. A healthy home, and by extension a healthy church, is characterized by safety, protection, and praise that adorn young women.

Having dealt with relationships in the broadest context, Paul now gives special attention to a specific class of women, the widows (which we will address next week). We will conclude with his words to slaves, which in many respects parallels how we should approach our work.

## II. Taking the Family Spirit to Work! (1 Tim 6:1-2)

All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. Those who have believing masters should not show them disrespect just because they are fellow believers. Instead, they should serve them even better because their masters are dear to them as fellow believers and are devoted to the welfare of their slaves. These are the things you are to teach and insist on. (6:1-2)

### A. The extent of slavery

Slaves constituted a large proportion of the population of the Roman Empire. It's estimated that about one-third of the population of the city of Rome, and up to 60 million people in the Empire, were slaves. These individuals became slaves through a variety of means—as prisoners of war, condemned men, through debt, kidnapping, or being sold into slavery by their parents. Added to that number were the thousands who had been born into slavery. William Barclay gives us a window into their world:

It was not only menial tasks which were performed by slaves. Doctors, teachers, musicians, actors, secretaries, stewards were slaves. In fact, all the work of Rome was done by slaves. Roman attitude was that there was no point in being master of the world and doing one's own work. Let the slaves do that and let the citizens live in pampered idleness. The supply of slaves would never run out.

Slaves were not allowed to marry; but they cohabited; and the children born of such a partnership were the property of the master, not of the parents, just as the lambs born to the sheep belonged to the owner of the flock, and not to the sheep.

It would be wrong to think that the lot of slaves was always wretched and unhappy, and that they were always treated with cruelty. Many slaves were loved and trusted members of the family; but one great inescapable fact dominated the whole situation. In Roman law a slave was not a person but a thing; and he had absolutely no legal rights whatsoever. For that reason there could be no such thing as justice where a slave was concerned.

Aristotle writes, "There can be no friendship nor justice towards inanimate things; indeed, not even towards a horse or an ox, nor yet towards a slave as a slave. For master and slave have nothing in common; a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave."<sup>3</sup>

### B. The Gospel's appeal to slaves

Consider the power that the message of the gospel had upon these unfortunates, for the good news was that Christ had "redeemed" them by his blood and had set them free from the "yoke of slavery":

**It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Gal 5:1)**

Upon hearing this wondrous news, thousands of slaves turned to Christ, rejoicing that their Creator and Redeemer valued them as real persons possessing worth and dignity. In contrast to their oppressive masters, Jesus was "gentle and humble in heart." His "yoke" was easy and his burden light (Matt 11:29-30). In Christ there neither "slave nor free." As such, they were invited to worship at the same altar, to eat at the same agape feasts, and partake of the same elements in Holy Communion. And as persecution became the universal lot for those early Christians, many faced martyrdom, united with their free brothers and sisters.

### C. A slave's new freedom

What are Paul's instructions to slaves now that they are Christians? Rather than fomenting a violent revolution or endorsing the status quo, the apostle says their slave status, rather than being a handicap, was actually a unique platform from which they could engage in a quiet

revolution in the work place. Just as Jesus "did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant" (Phil 2:6-7), in like manner, though they are free, they need not consider their "equality" as something to be used for their own advantage. Like Jesus, they can willingly continue in their roles as "slaves," which will give them unlimited opportunities to serve God.

Many Christians today are embarrassingly clueless about God's "way" of influencing the world. In the kingdom of God, influence does not come from the top down but from the bottom up. If you doubt this, ask yourself why Jesus took on the role of a servant. We tip our hats to the concept of servanthood, but deep down we prefer other "ways": the seductive and patented ways that the world goes about getting things done – the Terminator way, the Trump way, the Corporate Way, or the Conservative way. But, as Eugene Peterson writes, "God's way, always, is to use servants":

Servants: men and women without standing, without accomplishment, without influence. The core element in a servant identity is not being God, not being in charge, not taking the initiative. Or, to put it positively, a servant enters into what has already been decided by another, what is already going on, alert to the gestures and guidance of the Master (Psa 123). The servant doesn't know the whole story, doesn't know the end from the beginning. The servant's task is to be competent in the immediate affairs that have to do with what he knows of the desires of his Master. All the while he is also aware that there is far more going on, both good and evil, than he has any knowledge of. He lives, in other words, in a mystery but not in confusion. A good servant is ever eager to trust and obey and honor God as the sovereign who always personal and present – Yahweh: God here and now.<sup>4</sup>

Paul turns to this special class of servants, saying that they hold the true positions of power and influence. Their task is to take the family atmosphere of dignity, love, and acceptance that they enjoy in church and infiltrate the whole world with it, transforming oppressive and demeaning work environments into ones that resemble our Memorial Day picnic. The transformation begins with their attitude toward their masters. They are to give them the same respect that they would give to their parents. Likewise, we "slaves" of Silicon Valley should work with integrity and industry, doing more than is expected, always seeking the welfare of our employer. And if our employer is a Christian, we should serve him or her all the more, because they are "family." Rather than dragging ourselves to work thinking, "it's just business," we should dance into work thinking, "this can be a new family."

### D. The impact of God's servants

Many Christian slaves took Paul's words to heart and as a result had a great impact for the kingdom of God. In a world where Aristotle writes, "master and slave have nothing in common," slaves were becoming loved "sons." A number served as teachers in Roman households, even the households of the emperors, and many of them took the opportunity to teach the gospel to both their students and masters. Michael Green, in his book *Evangelism in the Early Church*, observes that it was through the agency of Christian slaves that many aristocratic families were eventually reached with the gospel:

Take the *gens Acilius*, for instance, whose eldest sons regularly carried the cognomen *Glabrio*. This was an illustrious senatorial family, one of whose members, Acilius Glabrio, was consul with Trajan in A.D. 91 and was forced to fight with a lion by Emperor Domitian... There must have been some strong reason to induce even so unprincipled a tyrant as Domitian to take such an unprecedented action against the highest office bearer in the Sate! Dio makes it clear that his "atheistic and Jewish ways" were the primary cause, though Suetonius adds



that the Emperor suspected him of revolutionary tendencies. This suggests strongly that he was a Christian, whose loyalty to Christ forbade him to call the emperor by the blasphemous titles which he imposed upon the senatorial families of addressing him as “Our Lord and God”. At all events, Glabrio killed the lion, was released, but wisely went into voluntary exile. This did him no good however; the Emperor had him executed...He was buried in a family vault which not long afterwards became a Christian catacomb.<sup>5</sup>

This man who held a high position in the Roman Empire had been reached for Christ through a slave in his service. We should be encouraged to see that our greatest ministry lies in the workplace. Many are advised, however, that “real” ministry lies elsewhere. Thus they merely pay their dues at work and are pressed to leave that natural setting to join some artificial program for outreach. But when Christians do this, everything suffers: work suffers because it is half-hearted; ministry suffers because it is half-baked; and the family suffers because the head of the home is over-extended. Your greatest arena for ministry is where you work, so turn your workplace into a family setting.

As a young man, I would never have found Christ were it not for the example of two of my high school teachers who lived what Paul taught. They transformed lives in a secular high school by giving students value in their own right. One of them was John Heydenreich, my gymnastics coach. John was a former football player at USC. Though he was no expert in gymnastics, he turned out some outstanding gymnasts because he treated us like sons. Outside the gym, he took us on ski trips. He listened to our stories and dreams and laughed at our silly jokes. I flourished under his care. During my senior year, I discovered that the secret beneath his reservoir of love was Jesus Christ. My new faith brought us closer, and he spent extra hours working individually with me to prepare me for my final competitions. At the end of the last workout, I took a final tumbling pass for my free exercise routine and landed on my head, resulting in a concussion. As my high school dreams were instantly dashed, John picked me up and spoke wise, sage-like words deep into my heart.

We continued our friendship through my college years. After Emily and I were married, John visited us on several occasions. In 2000, I had the privilege of renewing John and Gina’s wedding vows for their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. One year later, May 28, 2001, John died of cancer. I will be forever grateful to this servant of Christ who brought the family spirit into the workplace.

In appreciation, to John Heydenreich,  
a true “servant of Christ.”

I dedicate this sermon to him.

Coach,  
I love that name,  
a serene splendor that takes my breath away.  
How can I ever forget him?  
His tall frame and sauntering gait  
with that caverned voice  
that drenched up thunderous echoes  
of directed care and countless stories,  
everything for which a young boy dreams,  
to be yoked and trained and drained  
until there was no more sweat,  
and pain was gain.  
Lift me coach and let me fly  
will you catch me when I crash and cry?

You taped my wounds, rubbed my sores,  
lifted my head and applauded my scores,  
but there was something deeper  
something more.  
A tender touch buried deep inside  
breathed on me and I came alive.  
It is impossible to lose  
when you’re competing under a father’s eye.

You filmed my fame,  
and shouted my name  
and I never felt more like a son  
then when the routine was done  
the judges lifted their scores  
and I looked over at you.  
Lift me coach and let me fly  
will you catch me when I crash and cry?

And when it suddenly came to an end  
and my dreams shattered upon that chalky floor,  
you lifted my injured head  
with those gentle hands  
and said, “My son,  
there are hills and there are valleys.”  
A tender touch buried deep inside  
breathed on me and I came alive,  
it is impossible to lose  
when you’re competing under a father’s eye.  
Lift me coach and let me fly  
will you catch me when I crash and cry?

Where are you now, my coach,  
why can’t you stay?  
Is the view from the hills as beautiful as they say?  
Can you see all your sons in the valley  
as they laugh and beckon you to play?  
Lift me coach and let me fly,  
take me to that other land  
where sons and daughters never cry.

1 Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 331.

2 J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), I:106, 108.

3 William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 210-211.

4 Eugene H. Peterson, *The Jesus Way* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 174.

5 Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 212-213.