

Take the “handoff”

(2 Timothy 1:1–2)

The apostle Paul in this letter and elsewhere pictures his life as a race, as a race which by the writing of this letter was soon coming to an end. To borrow on that picture, this letter communicates something like the handoff in a relay race. Paul has received the word of eternal life and has passed it on to others. Timothy is to run the “race” with it and pass it on to others who will continue the “race.” Even in what might seem like a typical opening greeting, there are indications of the importance of this task. The greeting offers six reasons Timothy should take from Paul the “handoff”, the task of passing on the word of life.

1. Paul, as an apostle of Christ Jesus, represented Jesus Himself to carry His name to the world. By taking the “handoff” Timothy was obeying the command of Jesus.
 - a. Paul’s apostleship summarized what the purpose of his ministry (Acts 9:15–16; 23).
 - b. Paul’s apostleship was the needed authority for what he would instruct in this letter to both Timothy and all the readers.
2. Paul was an apostle of Christ Jesus, not by his own choice, but by the will of God. By taking the “handoff” from Paul, Timothy was submitting to the purposes of God the Father as well.
 - a. Paul of his own will had been heading in the opposite direction until stopped and changed by God.
 - b. Some did not seem to accept Paul’s authority or the significance of his position (cf. 1:15; 2:17–18; 3:1–9; 4:10, 16).
3. Paul was called to be an apostle as part of God’s plan to proclaim the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. By taking the “handoff” Timothy joined in God’s purpose in proclaiming salvation to the world.
 - a. God promises eternal life to all who come to Him by faith through Jesus Christ (Rom 6:23).
 - b. This message must be proclaimed and proclamation is part of the means God has chosen to save those who believe (Rom 10:13–14).
 - c. This message is both simple and broad, including “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8) and anything helpful (Acts 20:20; cf. 20:21, 24, 25, 27).
 - d. The value and standard for Paul’s ministry was faithfulness to the message.

If we fail to receive and pass on that which brings eternal life in all its fulness, we have failed in the most important race in which we take part. Receive the truth and pass on the truth.

4. Timothy as Paul’s child or son had responsibilities toward Paul as his spiritual “father.” By taking the “handoff” Timothy was fulfilling his responsibility.
 - a. The term “child” or “son” was used for family relations as well as students to teachers and disciples to their masters. It implies learning from and following the teacher, master, or spiritual father.
 - b. This responsibility (as a disciple to a teacher) will come again in the letter (1:13–14; 2:2; 3:10, 14; 4:5–6, 14–15).
5. Timothy was Paul’s beloved child and was given this responsibility from a heart that cared for him. By taking the “handoff” Timothy could be assured that Paul did it for Timothy’s good.
 - a. This was important to know because of the difficulties which taking the “handoff” would mean: suffering, hardship, opposition, etc. (1:8; 2:3, 6, 25; 3:1, 12; 4:3).
 - b. But Paul knew that the crown which awaited him, would also be given to Timothy as he faithfully fulfilled his responsibilities and looked forward to the return of Christ (4:8).
6. Timothy would be given all that he was needed to accomplish the task: grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. He could take the “handoff” trusting God.
 - a. Grace and peace were more typical in the greetings from Paul. Both would be needed for the strength, wisdom, and character required for the task.
 - b. Mercy is especially added, probably because of the special challenge to avoid shame (1:8; cf. 1:16–18). In His mercy God will not allow temptation or persecution to exceed what the believer can bear. He does not count our weaknesses against us but provides what we need in light of them.

This personal, intense letter to Timothy sets a pattern for all spiritual leaders, and especially for those who shepherd in the church. Therefore, we can expect to find qualities which shepherds should have, areas in which to pray for leaders, and a reminder to pray that God would raise up faithful men who would take the “handoff” and run with it. But as elders are to be models for all believers, these qualities are goals for every believer, and the divine provision is for every believer as well. Take God’s Word which you have received, hold on to it well. By applying it you run the race well. And pass it on.