

**Piecing It Together**  
**2 Timothy 1: 1-14**  
**Ann Hatfield**

What does the word “Power” mean to you? Do you immediately think of the millions of people in Florida, the Carolinas, and other states who lost power after Hurricane Ian ripped through their communities? Or perhaps the military power the Ukrainian army is using to defend their country from Russia’s invasion? Is it the deadly power of firearms destroying countless lives in our cities and schools?

So many negative connotations of power immediately come to my mind: the threat of nuclear power used to intimidate and control; the destructive power of natural disasters; the authoritarian power used to silence journalists and political opposition.

Power understood in these contexts can – indeed – be intimidating and terrifying. The world has suffered from the lived experiences of power corrupting leaders – and absolute power corrupting them absolutely. The evils of unbridled, abusive power can be overwhelming – bringing us to despair. Some of us might wonder how we can trust in the promises of God, when the evidence in our lives and the world seems to contradict them.

Thankfully, scripture has a good word for us. God’s power is NOT abusive. God’s power is NOT evil. God’s power does NOT promote injustice. God’s power IS creative, sustaining, and redeeming. It is life-giving.

In this incredibly pastoral letter, the Apostle Paul writes tenderly to Timothy as his beloved child, and through Timothy, Paul addresses all of us today. Trust in the power of God, Paul reminds the church. It is a power of grace, goodness, and steadfast faithfulness. For Paul, the driving force of the gospel message is LOVE – not fear.

Paul encourages his young protégé Timothy to “rekindle the gift of God that is within you.” In other words, let the Spirit of God stir up the faith and love you have received. Moreover, put these gifts into practice. Do not be afraid to live out the Christian faith. God has not given you a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. The power of God is NEVER divorced from love and self-disciple.

When the 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian Karl Barth was speaking on the campus of the University of Chicago, and was asked by a student to summarize his theology in a single sentence, Barth responded with a well-known Sunday School song: *Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so.*

We learn about the power of God and the love of Jesus from the Bible. This love has the power to comfort and encourage, but also to transform and redeem. It is a healing and liberating force.

Biblical scholar William Barclay tells the story of a man recently released from prison after being incarcerated for his participation in violent robberies. While walking to reunite with his old gang, the man picks the pocket of a pedestrian on Fifth Avenue. Finding a remote spot in Central Park, he stops to see what he has stolen. To his disgust and great disappointment, he discovers he has stolen a pocket-sized New Testament. But since he has time to spare, he begins idly turning the pages. Surprisingly, he finds himself deeply enthralled. After several hours of reading, he still meets with his old gang. But instead of joining them in future criminal acts, he severs his involvement with them. His encounter with the gospel message changes him... forever.<sup>1</sup>

Reading the Bible is an encounter with the power of God and the love of Jesus. The gospel contains the hope of transformation, redemption, and reconciliation – for you and me – and for the world.

**Rekindle the gift of God that is within you.** Rekindle the gift within each of us individually, but also rekindle the gifts held collectively by the church. Just as a fire must be tended to keep burning, so must the embers of faith be repeatedly stirred up and refreshed. The gospel message needs to be taught, shared, and nurtured. Paul writes this letter knowing the future of the church rests upon the transmission of the faith. The strength of the church depends on Timothy's grandmother Lois teaching his mother Eunice, then teaching the next generation and the next.

THIS is why Westminster gives Bibles to third graders. If we do not share and nurture our Christian faith, the church is only one generation away from extinction. Children need to know they are loved by Jesus. They need to hear of God's life-giving power.

As Kathy Smedley beautifully declared through her biblical storytelling: "*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, God's mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is God's faithfulness.*" (Lamentations 3:22-23) What good news!

As Christians, you and I put our trust in God and in the love of Christ. But God also puts trust in each of us. When God wants something done, God needs someone to do it. If God wants a child taught, a meal delivered, homes rebuilt, a Bible shared, and comfort given, God finds an instrument to do this work. You and I are channels of God's grace and mercy. Through us, God pieces together a tapestry of hope and promise for the future.

World Communion Sunday is an opportunity to celebrate the considerable diversity that exists throughout the Christian tradition. It also is an occasion to recall the images of

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<sup>1</sup> Story adapted from William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible, The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 164.

Paul, Lois, Eunice, and Timothy – along with our own ancestors – who passed on the good news of a living faith – one that has the POWER to change and transform. The power of God's amazing grace can overcome the darkest evil and transform the deepest injustice. This is good news others need to hear.

Friends, let us continue to proclaim the HOPE we find in a worldwide family of faith – one that is loved and pieced together by our good and gracious God, from generation to generation. Alleluia!

Amen.

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