

MESSAGE
Daryl Bohac
JULY 12, 2026

This seemed like a straightforward bit of scripture to preach on when we gathered for a text study with Pastor Kris. But then I started to dig into first Timothy and the verses we read and began to think about the message from the writer Paul and what it might mean to me. Some modern-day biblical scholars raise questions about whether these letters were actually from the Apostle Paul, but believe they are likely from a later writer working Paul's tradition.

They are nevertheless letters of encouragement to Timothy who is a young leader in the church in Ephesus which has been described as a very religious community, but with competing communities of faith. So Timothy is facing some challenges in the church and community he lives in and the writer Paul is offering him encouragement and support as he continues his ministry in Christ Jesus.

In this passage, there are three themes – being honest with one's self, receiving God's mercy and praise for God. Lets start with Paul's honesty about his past.

Paul doesn't soften his past. He names himself, a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man. Paul doesn't excuse his sin by saying "I was young" or "I didn't know better" in a way that removes responsibility. He simply states the facts. He was ignorant, yes — acting "in unbelief" — but ignorance didn't make him innocent. It made him in need of mercy.

Before we can experience grace, we have to be honest about what we need grace *for*. Paul doesn't hide behind vague spirituality. He names it plainly. And so must we. Healing never comes to wounds we refuse to expose.

This is not easy! It is especially difficult when I believe I am the one being wronged, being trespassed upon. It is in this righteousness that I am often not being fully honest with myself. There is a reason we start worship with the invitation to Stand for Confession. And we are specifically invited and encouraged to confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

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Now I don't hear anyone, including myself, offering up sins out loud, but I am guessing if we started doing that, well it would make worship rather interesting in ways that we may not want.

But even though Lutherans tend to be uncomfortable with the idea of confession to one another, our confession to God does open the door to receive God's mercy. We are invited to Stand not just for the Confession but for the Confession and Forgiveness – Forgiveness from God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ.

And so Paul receives God's grace and, in his words, it was poured out abundantly. In the Greek language, that phrase, poured out abundantly, or in other translations, exceedingly abundant, carries the idea that God's grace doesn't just cover the sin, grace overwhelms it, so that we are free from sin.

But Paul is also witnessing his own life when he declares, confesses, to being the worst of sinners. To lift up his own life as an example of God's healing grace, that Christ Jesus might display his immense patience.

We too are called to lift up our own lives as Christians who have received God's grace and mercy, just as Paul did. Not as a demand on others, but as encouragement to others to be honest about their shortcomings, and in doing so be open to the salvation that the death of Jesus provides to us.

Perhaps you have had a similar experience as I have had. I clearly recall sitting in the student union, drinking coffee and perhaps even studying, when I was approached by a group asking if I had been saved by Jesus Christ. I responded that I believed I had. They then asked me if I knew the date I had been saved. I became annoyed with them and their expectation that I should be able to state a specific date. It felt like a test. I think I also became annoyed because I recognized my own shallowness of faith in not having a response to the question they asked and I became dismissive toward the group and they moved on.

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What I didn't experience that day was encouragement like that of Paul to Timothy. Perhaps if I would have set aside my annoyance with them, I would have heard about their own shortcomings and receiving the mercy of Christ Jesus. Perhaps there is a message for us in this experience. When sharing our own faith journey with others, it should be a model of the patience of Christ and how we experience daily the mercy of God in our own lives, and not a test.

Paul praises God in verse 17 - Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. This is what grace does for us. It erases the guilt of our sins and leads us to gratitude, from shame and hiding, to praise and sharing.

For me, there is great hope and encouragement in the letter from Paul to Timothy. It is not whether our past is too dark for God to use, but rather will I be honest enough to name it, to confess it to God my sins, be humble enough to receive mercy for it, and let it turn into worship and witness to others.

Christ came into this world to save sinners. This is an ongoing, daily salvation. Day by day I am being saved. Not something that happened in the past where you can sit back and declare I am saved! It is daily on-going salvation that we are living out and experiencing as more and more real in our lives. Its not an event.

It doesn't matter who we are, where we've come from, we can join into a life of daily salvation by Christ, being saved from all sin, habits, misdemeanors, I suppose even felonies, that have held us back from being all that God created us to be. Its having confidence in God's grace each day we are renewed.

And if you have doubts about grace, look to the Gospel of Luke that was part of today's readings. Jesus was gathering up tax collector and sinners and had the Pharisees muttering – this man welcomes sinners and eats with them. Jesus then tells three parables – the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son – as examples of what lengths God will go to be in relationship with us.

Paul has given us a model of how to live out our faith daily, not focusing on the past, although learning from it, and moving into a deeper life of faith. The call is to be honest with ourselves, be confident in God's abundant grace, and to share the good news. Amen.