

# The Pastor's Super Power

*Sovereign Grace Churches Pastors Conference 2025*

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Because of how we are joined together, which Greg alluded to, and because of what we are engaged in together, I'm very eager for us to stand together under a particular text of Scripture. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Paul's second letter to Timothy - 2 Timothy 1.

Addressing a group of pastors is like addressing no other group for a number of reasons. First, and what I particularly feel at this conference, and I can't believe I get to do this again, is the great privilege of addressing you men and your wives in particular. I do not have a higher ministry privilege than serving and addressing Sovereign Grace pastors and their wives. Thank you for your partnership. Thank you for your example. Thank you for being part of my life.

Addressing pastors is also different because of the nature of pastoral ministry. Other types of conferences, even conferences going on in these facilities, train. Other types of conferences inspire. We certainly pray that will happen here. But at the end of the day, this is different because we, you, all of us, are in ourselves utterly helpless in our task. That's the paradox of pastoral ministry. Pastors are weak people, called to a humanly impossible task requiring a power beyond themselves. That's not my prop for you pastors or college students, but that is a foundational assumption.

At the core of the text that we're going to explore this morning is precisely this assumption. Pastors are weak. Our task is humanly impossible, and it requires a power beyond ourselves. It's actually in light of that assumption that Paul pens these words to Timothy, and it's why I believe God had these words preserved for us. Given our utter inadequacy, and you need the "utter" in that, that we are weak, that our duty calls for a power beyond ourselves, Paul lays upon Timothy, and he lays upon every pastor a particular responsibility.

Now, it's not the typical kind of responsibility we draw from these letters. We're accustomed to, and rightly so, we're accustomed to drawing from the Pastorals what we're supposed to be doing: teaching, guarding sound doctrine, the content of our ministry. But these letters also address more than the content; they address the conduct of our ministry—how we go about it and what it summons from us. That's really what we find in our text this morning. Perhaps the most fundamental personal responsibility we have as pastors, not equal to the trust that we've been given in the conduct of our ministry, is how we go about our responsibilities and what our calling as pastors is meant to call forth from us.

Through study, experience, and diligence, you might gain a level of competence in all of your pastoral responsibilities: exegitical precision, theological sophistication, homiletical eloquence, pastoral sensitivity. You might excel in all of those things, but if you lack and neglect this responsibility, then any efforts we expend, any competence we gain, it will be in vain. Your

church might survive you, and Sovereign Grace might survive, but eventually it will be little more than a husk. The future of Sovereign Grace is not guaranteed. If we do not attend to what we're going to find in this text, we just go home. That's what's at stake.

So, let's look at our text. 2 Timothy chapter one: our focus is going to be on verses 6 to about 14, but let's begin reading in verse 3. Well, let's start at the beginning. The man's not sitting in an air-conditioned room with a typewriter. Not even sure how he wrote this, because in the ancient world, writing was an expensive task requiring expertise. That's why Paul had amanuenses. That's why he utilized other people, because you had to keep the ink and the quill, and it was a very technical skill. I don't even know how he wrote this. But he did.

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,” oh, every word just bristles with meaning, given the context. “To Timothy, my beloved child: grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers, night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that you may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now I am sure dwells in you as well. For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”

There is a lot for us to take in here, but I believe at the core of it all is this fundamental, personal responsibility of a pastor. It's to undergird his life; it's to shape and govern all of his labors. But before naming it, there's another assumption in this text that supplies the logic of the text. Not only our inherent utter inadequacy, but also the inherent hardships of pastoral ministry.

Paul is preparing Timothy for something. I challenge you to read the letter straight through, and you tell me what stands out: suffering, betrayal, endurance, perseverance, difficulties, expanding godlessness. Welcome to your future, Timothy.

Add in the context, which only heightens the urgency. Paul is at the end of his life. There's no retirement party waiting on him to celebrate evidence of grace in his life, just a death sentence. His final moments spent in squalor. I will not deter you with the conditions of ancient prisons; they were structures of misery and immorality, no food, and frostbite. No more ministry, no more sermons. He's silenced, except for his pen.

Maybe you can relate to this: the very work he's given his life to is at risk. False teachers, false brothers, fainting friends, and Rome's hammer fist. So his mind is fixed. The only thing he's got is the future, a future he will not see. He's making provision for that future. In fact, here's what

he's doing, here's the weight he's bearing: he's securing theological and ecclesiological continuity between the apostolic age, when there are apostles on the scene, and the post-apostolic age, when there are no apostles on the scene. There has never been a gospel transfer like this one. The whole future of the church is hanging in the balance.

It's in this context, then, that he assumes both Timothy's utter need and the hardships he inevitably is going to face. So, it's those twin realities that yield this responsibility that falls to Timothy and that falls to every pastor here.

Here is the responsibility, here is our call, brothers. This is the problem and it's a mouthful: The pastor must constantly access spiritual resources for courage and strength in his call to suffering for Christ. I'll say it again: The pastor must constantly access spiritual resources for courage and strength in his call to suffering. It's a call to suffering for the sake of Christ. This is how we are to conduct our ministry. This is how we are to live. You won't survive without this. If you don't believe that, you're in peril. This is not melodrama. It's not optional.

There's something in here I think we can miss. Embedded in this is really Paul's vision of a pastor, Paul's pastoral profile. I was praying and I really want young men to hear this. At root, what is Paul's pastoral profile? Well, at root, you're not a talking head, you're not an entrepreneur, you're not an administrator, you're not a scholar, you're not a counselor. You may do all those things; you're called to do those things, yes. But at root, that's not what you are. First and foremost, the pastor in Paul's mind is a spiritual man. Godly, yes, but more. Not a grim, brittle pietism, and certainly not captive to subjectivism, but a man who treasures Christ, whose greatest joy is Christ, and who lives to see him magnified. Because he does, he fights to live under the sway of, relying upon, and drawing strength from the Holy Spirit. That's a pastor in Paul's mind.

This, brothers, is a pastor's superpower. We're utterly helpless, but we have a superpower. And this is it. This is meant to give us hope. We are over our heads. We live in a war. But praise God, we're not just cannon fodder thrown onto the battlefield in helpless odds. The Pastor's College and the ordination process isn't just a conveyor belt feeding fresh victims into the meat grinder of spiritual warfare. Yeah, just throw 'em out there, they'll shipwreck, we'll send more like the trenches of World War I, sure, Russian soldiers just thrown in.

God makes ample provision for pastors, equipping us with something supernatural. The Spirit's own presence and power for a reason: for all of the inherent hardships that come with pastoral ministry. So, the call of this text is to lay hold of that. Lay hold of that.

This is a text that is intended to, I pray it will, put steel in your spine, it will put courage in your heart, it will put daring in your labors. It's a resolve-bolstering text. Let's explore it together. Paul's argument has three main parts that illuminate this responsibility. We'll see them unfold as we go.

The first part, number one: The source of our strength. Here's the foundation. Look with me again at chapter one, verse six: "For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

After the tender greetings and the poignant remembrances, Paul goes straight to the chief thrust of the whole letter, and he begins here with the first of a string of appeals in the form of a pointed

reminder. I say it's pointed because this is the fourth use of the "remind" word in three verses. Verse three: "I remember..." Did you notice that? "I remember you in my prayers." Verse four: "I remember your tears." Verse five: "I am reminded of your faith." And now, with my heart full of our history and conviction over what God has done in you and has given you, now I'm reminding you. You see the rhetoric?

Now, there's also a hermeneutical clue for us in the use of this verb. What he's about to say is both fundamental and something that requires continual recall, attention, and mindfulness. Paul knew it's something that's especially vulnerable to neglect in the face of pastoral pressures and personal pride.

Here's the reminder, here's the appeal: fan into flame the gift of God which is in you. Now, Paul doesn't specify just what the gift is, and these two verses contain all the exegetical conundrums in this passage. But I think a few factors point the way forward. The word is, as you probably know, charisma—a freely given gift. That's what it means, although it is often associated with the Holy Spirit. But here, it's in the singular. He didn't give you a gift; it's the gift of God. That's one clue.

Another clue: Paul says not that Timothy has it or uses it, but that it is in him. And then the most natural reading of the text, verse seven, seems to describe the gift: "For God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control." Finally, one more clue. Paul concludes this entire section down in verse 14, referring to "the Holy Spirit who dwells within us." Put all that together, and I think the gift is the Holy Spirit.

Now, it is possible that Paul has in mind Timothy's gifting for ministry, his spiritual enablement. But even that is not a possession under Timothy's control. If it is the gifting, the source of that gifting, the one who provides it, intensifies it, and works through it, is the Holy Spirit Himself. So you see, either way, the appeal to Timothy is not to practice and get in your 10,000 reps. Get some experience, Timothy. No. The appeal is to access resources that come only from the Holy Spirit.

Now, that's the gift. What's the exhortation? Paul uses a vivid metaphor. Timothy is to fan this into flame. It's the only New Testament use of the verb, but it's very common language. Its meaning is clear. It is to rekindle a dying fire, to bring it back up into full flame. A fire, outside of the burning bush, does not blaze continually without fuel, without attention. So it is with the Holy Spirit and his empowering presence in our lives. It requires intentional, devoted dependence. That's a phrase that if you're writing, I would write it down. Intentional, devoted dependence.

It requires an utter conviction that apart from Christ, whose presence the Holy Spirit mediates, we can do nothing. Not "pretty well," a "pretty good sermon," a "decent church," nada. That's the translation of the Greek. It actually is, *ouden*, no one thing, or nada. John 15:5. It requires a despairing of our own ability, a renunciation of our own sufficiency, looking only to him for any strength, wisdom, ability, or fruit. For something happening here, please Lord, any hope.

It's a simple image, but if you are exposed in a frozen, hostile environment and you are desperately dependent on the remaining embers of a dying fire to keep you alive, what do you do? Well, that's easy. You have no greater priority than that fire. You're protecting it, you're

blowing on it, but not too hard. It's just like, get the wolves away. We need this fire to cook, we need this fire to keep because I'm going to die if we don't get this fire going.

We are to have no greater priority than a daily posture of intentional, devoted, desperate dependence on the Holy Spirit in our lives. We've got to live that way. So, consider your priorities. I know everyone in here is busy and you carry much weight. You come to this conference carrying much weight. You carry—and this is why we love you so much—you carry the very lives of your people on your soul, their lives. If they live, you live, as Paul says. They suffer, you suffer, right? You live and die based on all these people's souls. What a lot! See, pastoral ministry is just suffering. You're called to not just tend to your family but carry souls on you all the time.

So, among all that, where does this register, this responsibility? When you enter your day, what is your focus? What emails await? What phone calls to make? What texts to send? No, what's your focus? It's that fire. Gotta get that fire going or we're going to die.

I realize this is kind of a "duh" moment. "Duh, Jeff." I hope it is. If everyone's going, "Well, of course." Great. I'm done and praise God. But I would say this: if you came to this conference thinking that we are somehow going to give unique pastoral insight, some doctrinal thought that you have never heard and it is going to make all the difference in your life—you've come to the wrong conference. We'll just simply and unapologetically accent what this book says is the plain call of a pastor.

However, there's great promise in that. We're just never going to mature beyond this. You're never going to be good enough, smart enough, wise enough, or pretty enough to get beyond this. But again, there's more than desperation here. There's also great promise as Paul goes on in verse 7. Let's get to the good news: "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

Now Paul spells out the effects of this gift, the effects of stirring it up. This is what happens when we fan into flame this gift. These are the soul-fortifying effects of an intentional, devoted dependence upon the Holy Spirit. I would suggest to you, as a number of commentators do, that the word "Spirit" here in your Bibles should be capitalized. But let's not get lost whether he's talking about the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in us, which I think he is, or the effect of the Holy Spirit upon us. Here is powerful motivation to stir up the gift within us. The effect of the Spirit in our lives, the Spirit who indwells us, verse 14, whose presence we are to stir up, the effect of that Spirit is not fear.

When God gives us the Spirit, it's not fear that He gives. Instead, He gives us power, love, and self-control. Now, this word "fear" is illuminating. Sometimes you hear "timidity." Remember those translations? God does not give us a spirit of timidity. That is not what this word means. Timidity is not in the semantic range of this word. It's a strong word. It means cowardice. It's the only time it's used in the New Testament, it's not a Paul line word, but in Paul's Greek Old Testament, of which he was a master—he was a master of the whole Old Testament, especially the Greek Old Testament and he probably had it memorized—it's a common word in that Greek Old Testament which Paul had up here memorized. It's often a battlefield word. It's the kind of fear that paralyzes you in perilous circumstances, in extreme circumstances, which Paul found. So he reaches back into his Greek Old Testament and he finds this word perfectly suited to the challenges that await Timothy, and that await every pastor on the battlefield of spiritual warfare.

So you see, it's a foil. Paul is not coaxing Timothy out of humility, saying "Come on, come on." No, he's emphasizing the dramatic difference that the Spirit makes. The negation there is emphatic in the original. The Spirit God gave us does not make us cowards. Banish the thought. Rather, and that's a strong adversative, what he gives us and what he supernaturally works in our souls, is the spiritual equipment necessary for the work of ministry, which Paul summarizes here as power, love, and self-control.

God has done something magnificent in you, Timothy. Pastor, God has done something magnificent in you. So stir it up. The trio of Spirit-imbued virtues that Paul gives us is also specifically configured to the pastor's need: power first, which stands in contrast to cowardice. We see what kind of power he means in verse 8b. Just glance down there: "Share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God." So, brothers, that's what the Spirit gives us, that kind of power. Power to banish fear. Power to bear up under pressure. Power to persevere amidst hardship, discouragement, opposition, and accusation—human or spiritual. That's what the Spirit gives you.

Love, which I think is the most undertaught virtue, maybe the most undertaught topic in the whole Bible, given its significance in the Bible. What a perfect complement to power, isn't it? The Spirit imbues our actions with self-giving concern, not bravado, vindictiveness, self-pity, or self-seeking exaltation. You're not just standing firm like you're a tough guy; you're standing firm in love—a tough, tender, self-denying, lay-down-your-life-for-others love.

Self-control. You ever wonder, "Why that one?" And what does that even mean? Because the translations go all over the place with it. Well, because in the midst of pastoral hardship, and the complexities of ministry, and the threats to our security, the accusations of our motives, the broadsides to our labors; other impulses take control. To strike out or strike back, to give in or give up, to withdraw or flee. Or maybe just the impulse to indulge my well-deserved right to chill and just phone it in. Whatever. These are not what the Spirit gives us. And if you're there, and I've been there, there's stirring up to do.

This word speaks of one who—I love this word—it speaks of one who is self-possessed, not reactive, because you can be fighting Satan but your decisions and your actions are just impulsive. You're just not thinking, you just act. No, that's not what the Spirit gives you. You're just doing stuff. No, you're not reactive, you're not impulsive, you're not governed by emotions, you don't lurch to conclusions. You're prudent and you're poised. You're clear-eyed. You're unfazed, unflappable, undaunted.

So this is where Paul begins his argument—with the source of the pastor's strength. He gives us here what we might call a functional pastoral pneumatology. The Spirit is not exclusive to pastors. We know this. Pentecost did just the opposite. But according to this passage—and I want you to hear this—according to this passage and a whole web of other verses about the Spirit's gift-giving, soul-strengthening, fruit-producing work in and through pastors, the Spirit does a particular work in pastors. The Spirit loves pastors. He loves you. He's concerned about you and your church. The Spirit is invested in pastors. He's invested in making and keeping them Christ-loving in their hearts and Christ-honoring in their lives and Christ-trusting in their trials and Christ-exalting in their ministries. He's invested in the work you do to proclaim Christ, counsel Christ, exalt Christ, strengthen the people of Christ, and gather the elect of Christ. He's all in. Isn't that good news? That's the glorious reality this text reveals and it's that reality that invites and impels us to stir up what God has provided for us.

I tell you what, this is vital to say to pastors' wives here. Ladies, you are not called to shoulder the burdens of pastoral ministry—your husbands are. However, you do share them with your pastor. No one knows them like you. No one bears them like you. This room is filled with grateful men, at least the sane ones, who have no clue what they would do without you. No clue.

So let me tell you: because you do share these burdens, this promise, this provision, is equally and generously available to you. There's only one way to thrive as a pastor's wife is meant to thrive, and that's by the sustaining, perspective-giving, faith-imparting, joy-inducing work of the Holy Spirit, which you too are to stir up, you can stir up, and it's waiting to be stirred up. Positioning yourself, like your husband, for daily intentional and devoted dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Thank you, ladies. Thank you.

Well, that's the first part of Paul's argument: the source of our strength. Now, the second part flows from the first.

Here's number two: the substance of our response. On the foundation of the great pledge of verse 7, Paul issues this charge to Timothy in verse 8: "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God."

Now here, we come to the heart of Paul's appeal to Timothy. He unpacks the implications of God's powerful provision. He does so quite demonstrably. He breaks into, at this point, a single eloquent Greek sentence of 105 words—it goes all the way down through verse 12.

Now, the thrust here—and you see it, it's right in front of you—a two-sided conclusion: "Therefore, given what God has done in you and promises to do through you, first, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me his prisoner." There was great social stigma associating with anyone in prison. Don't be ashamed of the gospel or those who suffer for the gospel. Don't avoid the shame of believing, proclaiming, and banking on a message that is foolishness to this world. God-revealed and sins forgiven through a crucified, humiliated, die-on-the-cross-naked, cursed-by-God Messiah. Yeah, that's what you're going to give your life to—the stupidest thing ever, in the eyes of the world. Impossible, in the eyes of the world. So don't be ashamed of that.

The flip side of the appeal: "but share in suffering." Paul probably coined this word. It's a single verb: "share in suffering for the gospel"—not just any suffering, suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. Embrace the hardships that come with proclaiming the gospel, the teaching of the gospel; shepherding those saved by the gospel, and reaching those who can only be saved by the gospel.

You see what Paul's doing as he braces Timothy and he exhorts him to renounce fear, diffidence, self-interest, and self-preservation? Here's what he's doing, and it's so helpful for us: he's informing Timothy's expectations and our expectations of pastoral ministry. This is what it brings, Timothy. You're not in special circumstances, Timothy, and this is what it brings. This is what comes when you give your life to proclaiming a message that offends people's pride, indict them of sin, and disabuses them of any notion that they have a single shred of righteousness that will commend them to God—any hope of a future. This is what comes when we press the claims of Christ. This is what comes to those who insist on the ethical entailments of the gospel. This is what comes to those who insist on the existential implications of following Christ as Lord:

repentance, taking up your cross, denying yourself and all your aspirations for life and all the world offers. No, say goodbye to it all and follow the Supreme Lord Jesus.

This is what comes to the vanguard of those opposing the gates of hell—the organized authority of the kingdom of darkness. So, don't be ashamed, Timothy. I think we should hear in that an echo, the same phrase, Romans 1:16, where Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel." That's actually a figure of speech there—he's emphasizing the positive by stating a negative. For Paul, "I am not ashamed" means "I am utterly confident in." He tells us why: "for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe." Ashamed? You're kidding me—the gospel is the very power of God for deliverance from God's just wrath, from everything that threatens us, and from everything that is exerting its power in this present evil age. Ashamed? Ashamed of life, light, deliverance, freedom, and unending joy? Ashamed?

But we do bear this message in a world opposed to God, his glory, and his purposes, which means, in Paul's word, two things: shame and suffering. This theme, really, and this reality, continues in the next chapter of the letter. Look over really quick to 2 Timothy. Here, we learn more about the way the pastor is to conduct his ministry. 2 Timothy, look at verse 3: "Share in suffering"—the same verb as chapter 1 verse 8—"Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hardworking farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

You see, this isn't generic Christian teaching. Paul is shaping Timothy's pastoral vision. He's informing his expectations of pastoral ministry. The metaphors describe pastoral ministry. This is what it's like, Timothy. If we had to sum it up: be prepared for a single-minded, self-denying life in the service of Christ. That's what you signed up for. So, come to the pastoral ministry breakout. You too can live a life of shame and suffering. And you might die.

So, what's it like? Here's a pastor: it's like a soldier on active duty. You can't leave your post. You're not free to indulge yourself in trivia; sorry, you've left it behind. Or an athlete—you will not win unless you embrace discipline, self-denial, flesh screaming but you say "no" and you deny yourself. Or a farmer, who gets out of bed and ploughs, sows, and harvests. My brother knows a dairy farmer—hardest working people in the world. He gets up, and he's in his eighties, he'd take any of you out. He doesn't ask—never enters his mind—"Should I get up this morning at four to milk the cows?" Doesn't matter if it's raining, doesn't matter if it's cold, doesn't matter if it's cozy underneath his blanket. So he gets out of bed, and he plows and he sows, or he preaches, or he meets with the couple at odds, or he pours over the budget to say, "What are we going to do?" This is not a normal job, Timothy. Be prepared for a calling that involves struggle, suffering, warfare, and—chapter 1 verse 15—betrayal.

Last May, I was in Germany, and I had the privilege of spending some time with Michael Ostanin. Some of you know that name. He's a senior pastor of the ARC Church in Dnipro, Ukraine. He's a graduate. I know Michael really well because he's a graduate of the German Pastor's College, so I taught him many times, and he's a dear friend and an impressive pastor. They were able to get permission to leave the country to come to this pastor's conference there in Hamburg. Over dinner, I asked him, obviously, about the war that had been going for two years—now it's coming up on four. I said, "Michael, I get every day an email from the Institute for the Study of War. I follow this war every single day and I pray for you every single day, and

your wife Lena, and Andrei, Anya, and Dan, I pray for you every single day. But I want to know, what's it like for you?" He told me stories—friends and church members who've died, and other friends traumatized by the war, and visits to field hospitals. He showed me pictures—he's got a helmet on. It's like a chaplain visiting these field hospitals with soldiers grievously injured, comforting family members, who have lost children. Every person in their church knows death.

Then he said this. He said, "But you know, despite its horrors, we've grown accustomed to war. Air raids every day, explosions most days, refugees from the east because they're not far from the front lines, every day. But in Dnipro, the cafes are full. Stores have shoppers. Life goes on." I felt at that moment, not just grief, I felt outrage. This was a thriving church—still thriving, just in a different way. Just outrage over what he's been forced to go through in his whole life and ministry and church turned upside down; he had no choice and it's almost four years now. I remember how I felt; I was screaming on the inside that a human being is not supposed to grow accustomed to this.

When it comes to spiritual warfare, when it comes to Christian ministry, which is a pitched battle for the glory of God and the souls of people, the pastor is to grow accustomed. Not callous, not indifferent, not bitter, not resigned, but unfazed, unsurprised, undaunted, and resolved.

Like this whole text, as sobering as those commands are, they come wrapped with great hope. The text—you've got to think carefully about it—it doesn't just impose obligations; it promises and anticipates provision. That's the logic. What does Paul expect to happen when Timothy stirs up the gift? What does Paul expect to happen? Well, he expects that when Timothy stirs up the Spirit's work—bringing Christ to mind, acknowledging weakness and sin, casting himself upon the Spirit's help, devoting himself to Christ's cause—when he does this, friends, when we do this, the result will be spiritual power and supernatural resolve. Internal fortitude to despise the shame, to stride into challenges, and let the devil do his worst. Supplied by the Spirit with a heart enamored of Christ, satisfied with his love, and devoted to his glory. This is what the Spirit does in pastors—giving us everything we need for all he calls us to face.

So, what are you facing? What awaits you when you return home? Or maybe it followed you here, via text. Whatever it is, you have to be convinced it does not escape God's design. I'm not going to stand before God and say, "God, they were so mean to me." He's going to be saying, "What did you do to draw upon my strength with this design that I brought into your life for your good and for my glory?" That's what he's going to say. It doesn't escape God's design, and it is not beyond his provision. It is not beyond the Spirit's Christ-clarifying, soul-strengthening work. Pray for that and expect that provision. You know what, sometimes when you do persevere, it doesn't always feel like, "Oh yeah, I'm just really powerful now." No, you just take another step. But that step that felt like it's all you could do to do it—you wouldn't have taken it if it hadn't been for the Spirit. It's not like it's always going to feel like you're Popeye eating the spinach. But what will happen is Christ-exalting power that other people look at and say, "He's still going. She's still standing. They're raising their hands. They love Jesus." That's power. That's what God promises.

Finally, the final part—and this will be shorter—the final part of Paul's argument unfolds in the last few verses, 9-12. We've seen the source of the strength. We've seen the substance of our response. Now, number three—the assurance of our hope. Again, we'll be brief, although there is glory here.

In fact, in verse 9, Paul's mood changes from sort of sober exhortation to creedal exultation. His words—just read it in the original—the words just gallop. It's a good 8b: "But share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

Here's the ultimate basis for Paul's exhortation. Here's why we're not to be ashamed. Here's why we joyfully embrace hardship. It's what each of you—it's what we together—are giving our life for. It's what we're living for, it's what we're satisfied by, it's what we're giving our lives to—it's Christ and the gospel that proclaims Him.

You see how Paul went there—the mention at the end of verse 8. Do you see that? The suffering by the power of God just launches him into this worshipful theologizing: suffer by the power of God. Oh God, by the way, the God—the very God who saved us and called us to a holy calling. In other words, the very power that God gives us to endure the hardships of ministry, is the same power that did something far greater, planning and executing an eternal design of saving sinners and reversing all the effects of the fall.

Remember what Paul does—read it carefully later, perhaps—this is not just a cut-and-paste recital of gospel facts. Paul didn't just kind of whip out what he always says about the gospel. No, Paul brilliantly selects facets of the gospel calibrated to Timothy's need and calculated to bolster his resolve. Remember who he is, Timothy. Remember what he's done.

He begins with God: He saved us sovereignly (9a). He accepted us graciously (9b). He loved us eternally (9c). Then he turns to Christ. Our salvation was eternally before times began. That's the phrase—there was no time, this was all planned in Christ. It was concretely accomplished by him (10a). When he did come in his work, he rendered death, the final enemy, powerless (10b). Through his work, he restored all that was lost in the fall, life and immortality (10c).

That's how Paul braces Timothy—by directing his gaze, by directing our gaze, away from self, hardship, frustration, and ambiguities to a salvation in Christ that was eternally planned, sovereignly accomplished, and powerfully applied. That's what he sums up: eternally planned, sovereignly accomplished, and powerfully applied. Now, what awaits us, after all your suffering, after all your hardship, what awaits us? Glory.

In other words, the power that Timothy needs, that you and I need, flows from the very gospel we trust in, proclaim, preach pastor with, and suffer for. It's the Spirit that makes these realities alive to us. In a word, the Spirit bolsters the pastor's faith. In other words, the pastor, because of this Spirit in him—he's now, it's just supernatural—now you guys are crazy because you're governed and guided by unseen realities. The Spirit gives power to see past present disappointments to a future of God's sovereign design that is inexorable in its progress and invincible in its purposes. A future where we will see God's goodness and experience his faithfulness. A future where God is exalted, and we will be filled with joy and flooded with good. That's what places every pastoral hardship in perspective.

Oh, brothers and sisters, regardless of where your soul is when you arrived at this conference—some of us came mainly aware of God's blessing, and I praise God for that, a season in which the proverbial wind is in your sails. But this is not my first rodeo, and so I know that many arrive

differently—mainly aware of challenge, disappointment, discord, heartbreak, or fear, fill in the blank. Regardless of how you entered this week, this is a precious text.

And I want to give you a paraphrased promise from this text that I think—it's a text I think should be on every pastor's short list of reminder texts: The Holy Spirit is on a mission to create an indestructible joy in the hearts of pastors, their wives, their teams, and their churches. That's what the Holy Spirit is doing so that we are not swamped by circumstances or swayed by opinion or soured by bitterness. That's the hope this text delivers to us.

We've been equipped by God, through his Spirit, for the inherent—get that word, it's inherent, built-in—self-denying, world-opposing, suffering-inducing rigors of pastoral ministry, which means you need your superpower. The pastor is called to access spiritual resources for courage and strength in his call to suffering for the cause of Christ.

Let's be real. We all have moments of fear, right? We all have temptations to despondency. That's one of my big ones. Monday morning, I'm just going to be in a ball on the floor, probably, to muster up the Spirit—self-pity, resignation—we're all weak. What do we say? Our task is humanly impossible. It requires a power beyond ourselves, but weakness and neediness need not be fragility. A consistently fragile pastor may well be a neglectful pastor, a self-sufficient pastor, or a self-serving pastor.

What our text points to, it's the opposite of self-sufficiency. It's the opposite of confident professionalism. God has given you, by His Spirit, new capacities, pastor. He's given you new capacities for courage and perseverance, precisely configured to a calling that is inherently one of struggle, hardship, and suffering.

That's what we see in the text—two things, and I'll conclude with this: the Spirit's work and our work. Central to the Spirit's work in the pastor's life is to sustain him in suffering, encourage him in setbacks, strengthen him in weakness, fortify him in persecution, exalting Christ in his heart, regardless of ministry circumstances. That's the Spirit's work.

Here's central to the pastor's work: we lay hold of that. We acknowledge weakness. We rejoice in Christ's all-sufficiency, and we draw near in daily, devoted, glad dependence. When we do, when we fan into flame our reliance on the Spirit's power, there will be—God's Word promises it—power, love, poise, clarity, resolve, and sustaining grace.

Let's pray.

Hello Lord, we're weak. And when we're in touch with reality, we feel it. And no amount of experience or intelligence or sophistication or nothing, Lord, will sustain us. You have given us your Spirit, and you, Paul, and he loves pastors, and he's given us new capacities for courage and resolve. Lord, may we be those kind of pastors and wives who live in daily, intentional, devoted, glad dependence, and who watch you work for your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.