

Put On Your Oxygen Mask Before Assisting Others



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The [past few weeks on the blog](#), we've been looking at the letter of 2 Timothy. Paul is toward the end of his career and writing to Timothy, his protégé, from prison.

Besides Timothy, Paul mentions about 20 different colleagues in ministry. Out of those, he identifies five by name who have either become false teachers or turned against him. Five out of 20—a quarter of them.

I've no doubt that Paul had gained a certain perspective and experienced many disappointments after years of doing work to bring others to Christ.

Likewise, if you've been doing work for God for years, you have also been let down and seen others walk away.

It's not negative or fatalistic to acknowledge that. It's just that the elephant in the room for all men is the fall. This world is not the kingdom of God; it's a difficult place, and it pulls many men away from Him.

It's with this reality in mind that Paul is giving final exhortations to Timothy—his brother, friend, colleague, protégé, and son. It is the advice of a seasoned pro. Paul's been a lot of places, seen a lot of things, and this last letter is what he wants to leave him with.

Put On Your Own Oxygen Mask First

In [2 Timothy 1:13-14](#), Paul writes:

Follow the pattern of the 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.

Like Paul knew men who'd fallen away, you likely have, too—men who forgot to tend to their own walk with God, even while doing great service *for* God. They eventually got burned out or were led astray.

I was with an 82-year-old man recently, a friend of mine from the past. He was feeling low. When we finally got down to why he was so discouraged and depressed, it was this: he had lost his sense of purpose. He'd gotten burned out. He'd gotten away from God. He wasn't doing any work for God because he no longer had a walk with God.

Paul wanted Timothy to guard the good deposit because he understood this truth: your work *for* God will always be a reflection of your walk *with* God.

If you've ever flown on an airplane, you've heard some version of this instruction from the flight attendant: "Should the cabin lose pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the overhead area. Please place the oxygen mask over your own mouth and nose before assisting others."

Why do they say that? If you prioritize assisting others before yourself in an emergency when the oxygen level drops, you'll quickly be unconscious, unable to help anyone.

Essentially, Paul is saying, "Timothy, if you want to do ministry, if you want to make disciples, you must put on your own oxygen mask first."

Many Christians, myself included, have at some point been doing so much work for God that they didn't take care of themselves. They didn't put on their own oxygen mask first. And then suddenly, the oxygen level drops. They're exhausted. They're struggling to breathe. They don't have enough oxygen for themselves, let alone for anyone else.

If you want to disciple others, your #1 priority is your walk with God. Fill up in your own relationship with Jesus; only then will you have an overflow of Jesus to give away to other people.

Here's How: 3 Best Practices

In [2 Timothy 1:13-14](#), we see three best practices in Paul's advice that we, too, can use to keep the oxygen flowing in our walk with God.

Follow the pattern of the 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.

1) Communication in Relationship

"Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me." How was the sound teaching given from Paul to Timothy? It was given through communication in relationship.

Certainly, there were written communications such as this letter, and Timothy would've watched and listened closely as Paul taught and preached. But they also hung out together. They would've spent hours in conversation over the years as they did different ministry projects together and traveled.

Men, we need to talk to each other. Really talk. It could be through a letter, a text, a phone call, or an email. But the best means is through time spent together, such as over a meal, on a hike, fishing, or some other activity. Let's remind, encourage, challenge, and counsel each other. In doing so, we will help each other stay the course.

2) An Attitude of Faith and Love

"... in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." This is the attitude with which we guard our hearts—with which we keep the pattern of sound teaching. We do it with faith and love.

What is an attitude of faith? Faith is the assurance of things we hope for and the conviction of things we don't see ([Hebrews 11:1](#)). Said another way, faith is believing God anyway in the face of impossible circumstances.

Paul wrote about love all throughout his letters—things like "The entire law is summed up in this one command: love one another as Christ has loved you" ([Galatians 5:14](#)); "[Do everything in love](#)" ([1 Corinthians 6:14](#)); and "Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love" ([1 Corinthians 13:13](#)).

As we are following what we've been taught, we are to approach our relationships and circumstances with an attitude of faith and love.

3) The Help of the Holy Spirit

"By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you." First, notice the word "us." Paul's not saying do this with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in you, Timothy, and in me, Paul, but with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within all of us.

Similarly, when we pray the Lord's prayer, we don't say, "My Father in heaven, give me this day my daily bread, forgive me my sins, keep me from evil, don't let me yield to temptation." It's *our* Father—and it's *us*. "Us" is the ethos of the Christian life.

But Paul also reminds Timothy that it's more than a communal, human "us." We can do a lot with our own human strength to the best of our ability. And we can do even more together. But when the Holy Spirit becomes part of the equation, it's a total game changer.

The Holy Spirit is called many things in the Scriptures, such as the advocate, counselor, helper, and comforter. And that same Holy Spirit dwells within us! Just as Jesus told His disciples, the Father has sent the Holy Spirit to remind us of everything we've been taught.

When we open ourselves up to [the help of the Holy Spirit](#) in guarding this deposit, He fills us up to the overflow in our relationship with Him.

Do you want to assist others? These three best practices will help you put on your oxygen mask first and keep the oxygen flowing so that you can truly be used by God in the lives of others.

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