

# 1 Timothy 1:12-17 - The Power of a Dangerous Testimony

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Date: 21 September 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] Educational forum, I'm not sure what that is. If you have a Bible, you can go ahead and open it. We are in our second week of our series called Dangerous Church.

And what we've been saying so far is that when the gospel is distorted, the church becomes dangerous in all of the wrong ways. It wounds instead of heals, it hurts people. But when the gospel is guarded and is treasured, when it's proclaimed, it makes the church dangerous in all of the right ways. Dangerous to sin, dangerous to darkness, and even dangerous to hell itself.

And so today we're going to talk about the power of a dangerous testimony. So let me start here and ask you, what story are you telling about yourself?

Because every one of us is telling a story. Think about social media for a second. Every day, millions of people post pictures, captions, stories online.

[ 1 : 08 ] A young mum is posting a picture of herself on a morning hike with the caption, finding peace in the quiet. Wishful thinking.

But she's managing it. A man shares a selfie at work with the comments, grinding hard, making things happen. A teenager posts a video of themselves performing a skill with the message, fire. If you're not down with the lingo, don't worry. All of these stories, they're narratives about themselves. They're carefully curated versions of life, highlighting wins, masking struggles, and often shaping how we look at each other.

Every one of them and every one of us does this. Like whether we are on social media or not, you can't bow out and go, well, you know what?

I don't have Instagram. I don't have TikTok. I don't have whatever else. Therefore, it doesn't apply to me. Clearly, that's nonsense. We're all carrying a narrative about ourselves, whether we are talking to friends and family, we're telling a story about who we are, what we've accomplished, how we've grown, about what makes us look good, capable, or interesting.

[ 2 : 32 ] But here's the thing. In our section today, Paul doesn't tell his story the way we tell ours. He doesn't edit it.

He doesn't put a spin on it. He doesn't apply a filter to it. He doesn't make himself the hero. His story is dangerous precisely because it's not really about Paul.

Here's what he writes. Verse 12, 1 Timothy chapter 1. He says, I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service. Though, formally, I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who are to believe in him for eternal life.

[ 3 : 51 ] To the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen. Now, that's our text. But before we get into our text, what we see is, in those few verses, is a dangerous testimony that isn't about Paul.

It's ultimately a story of God. And Paul will mention a word in this section that he repeats.

He almost bookends it. And the word is mercy. And he mentions it twice in our text, so it's important for us to understand what that word mercy means.

And here it is. Mercy is the compassionate heart of God towards us. Mercy is the compassionate heart of God towards us.

[ 4 : 57 ] Now, put that into a little bit of context. We might ask why we need God to be compassionate towards us. Like, for what purpose? Why do we need that? And so you remember from last week, that in verse 8, Paul explained that God's moral law, the Ten Commandments, are good for a purpose.

Right? So the Ten Commandments are good for a purpose. Verse 8, he says, Now we know that the law is good, and here's the purpose, if one uses it lawfully.

And he goes on to write about how the law is designed to expose our sin. Right? It's designed to draw that out so we would know. It shows us what sin is, and it shows us that sin happens within us, and works its way out through behavior.

It might be helpful, as we saw yesterday morning in our men's Bible study, that the law is a mirror. It's not just a list of rules, but it's a mirror that shows us really what's going on in our hearts.

Take anger, for example. I know this doesn't apply to any of you, but imagine you cut someone up in traffic, and your blood starts boiling, right? I know you don't know what I'm talking about, but it happens, apparently.

[ 6 : 23 ] And maybe you don't swear, but maybe you want to. Maybe you don't crash, but maybe you nearly do. Behind anger reveals a pride and a self-centeredness that says, I'm more important than this person.

I deserve respect. I deserve control. It's a mirror to what's going on in your heart. What about jealousy? A co-worker gets a promotion, and you smile politely, but seethe inside.

On the surface, you're fine. Everybody asks you, how are you? You're fine. You repeat, repeatedly, during that week. But God's law exposes discontentment and covetousness.

I deserve more than God's given me. What about lust? The law exposes idolatry in the heart, which is worshipping pleasure, possession, or power over God himself.

The point is, that Paul makes, is that sin isn't just the bad things that we do. Sin is anything in your heart that either prevents us coming to God, or turns us away from God, and towards ourselves, or to the world.

[ 7 : 44 ] Now, here's the problem. And there is a problem. If you think all of that is a problem, that's not the problem. Here's the problem. The problem is, God's law doesn't just identify obvious sinners like Paul.

Now, you may say, well, unpack that for me. I don't understand how that is a problem. Well, look, it reveals that all of us sin in one way or another, and need God's compassionate heart towards us. That's what it reveals. Like, even the respectable Christian, who looks like they have it all together, is just as separated from God without the mercy of God.

Because, and I think this is important, that sin is not just an act of rebellion. It's anything that turns our hearts away from the Father. I mean, think about someone who's never committed a violent crime, or publicly harmed anyone, but builds their life around their identity, around their achievement, or control, or self-reliance.

Maybe they're proud of their reputation, their job, their church involvement, or the image that they project to the world. On the outside, they look very respectable, but on the inside, they wrestle with pride, self-ambition, or selfish ambition, bitterness, envy, anxiety, or secret compromises.

[ 9 : 21 ] Paul is going to tell us about his past, and about how dramatic his past was. But rather than imagine Paul, who most of us can go, well, God is a big God, and God is a generous, forgiving God, I get how he could forgive Paul, because his sins were so bad.

Imagine not Paul, but imagine a man or a woman in an office job, career climbing, outwardly successful, but inside, they're empty, anxious, and desperate for approval. And left to their own devices, they are trapped by pride and legalism.

They are a sinner, even if the world wouldn't label them as bad. That is the spiritual equivalent of Paul before Christ.

Because whether sin looks public and violent, or hidden and subtle, the result is the same, which is separation from God, and a lostness that Jesus talks about.

Think of Luke chapter 15. where Jesus highlights different reasons for being lost, separated from God. The sheep that has become distracted and wandered off into the world, the coin that has been injured by someone else, the younger brother who is just simply in rebellion, or the older brother who is self-righteous and religious, all lost, all because of sin, all needing God's compassionate heart towards them.

[11:01] So that's the problem highlighted in chapter 1. And so Paul now moves to talk about mercy. And in verse 13, and again in verse 16, he's primarily referring to the compassionate heart of God towards us.

Not just in a legalistic sense, in a legal sense, like someone has done something wrong, I'm going to have mercy, I'm going to forgive them. That is one aspect, one perspective, if you like, of mercy. The first time we see mercy in the New Testament is where Jesus says, blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy. It's not simply about having, in a legalistic sense or a legal sense, judicial sense.

Paul is talking about God's compassionate heart towards people who are lost. So he's going to say five things.

Settle down. Five things. Five things. Five things that Paul is going to say in this short passage about God's compassionate heart towards lost people.

[12:15] And the first is in verse 12. He says, I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful appointing me to his service.

There are two radical truths right there and I'd just like to note it under one heading and it's this. that God's mercy changes people.

God's mercy changes people. He says that Jesus gives strength to and entrusts responsibility to. They are to those who are least deserving of it.

Paul is not really saying where I was weak God kind of just topped me up. Right?

And look, I think there's probably some truth into the fact that when we're weak God gives us strength. I think there is truth to that. That we have a God who we can draw strength from. I think that's absolutely true. But I actually think that in the context of the chapter it's more likely to mean that it's an astonishment.

[13:27] It's a marvel. It's to be quite astonished that God could transform Paul's life to such a degree that now he is serving God.

Right? He's expressing this idea that look how far God has brought me. I haven't just stepped one foot into the kingdom. Look, now God has he's not only given me strength but he's judged me faithful appointing me to his service.

It's almost like Paul is saying if you'd known me when my name was Saul you'd never believe that verse. Look how far look how far God has changed me.

And look he doesn't say that this radical change was down to him. He says I thank him who has given me strength Christ Jesus our Lord because he judged me faithful appointing me to his service.

Like he is far from trustworthy in human standards Paul. But God appointed him to service anyway. Do you get that?

[14:37] Like we'll see in a minute that Paul's life demonstrates God's mercy but it's not only about rescue it's about using those those rescue to accomplish his purposes.

That's the astonishing thing that God does. He doesn't just rescue people he doesn't just save people as wonderful as that is he then goes you know those those broken beaten up prideful selfish arrogant people they're the people I'm going to use to build my kingdom.

And Paul goes that's nuts. Paul's testimony is a is a a lifeline if you like to those who think that they could never be used of God.

Saved maybe rescued yes but then changed to a degree that they can actually have a meaningful part in the people of God called to mission unlikely. but God equips and empowers the unlikely and the broken and the doubting and the ashamed and the Bible is full of stories like that showing us time and time again that our past failures do not disqualify us from service his mission is a gift and not a burden.

Think about think about it this is a man Paul who hunted Christians who plotted murder in God's name and now he's the very instrument God chooses to spread the gospel to the nations and that's not a mistake that's mercy and so the first thing that we know about God's mercy is that it changes

us right it changes us the second thing we see in verse 13 is that God's mercy confronts sin we've got to get this God's mercy doesn't cover up sin it doesn't forget about sin it doesn't say well you know it doesn't matter no it confronts sin in probably the most beautiful way that I know right notice how honest Paul is in verse 13 he says though formerly I was a blasphemer persecutor and insolent opponent like that's not the testimony you'd expect from a minister right or an apostle or a church planter right he's not pulling any punches about his past life again remember the story was that [17:10] Paul was at one time called Saul and he was employed by the Jewish high court to find Christians and bring them to justice his desire was to finish the church to wipe out the church before it started and the person who wrote most about him in terms of his life was a guy called Luke and this is what Luke says about him in Acts chapter 9 verse 1 it says that he was breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord like what imagery that is threatening and killing had become the very breath that Saul breathed later Paul described his own behavior to King Agrippa recorded by Luke in Acts 26 he said this he says I used to believe that I ought to do everything I could to oppose the very name of

Jesus the Nazarene indeed I did just that in Jerusalem authorized by the leading priest I caused many believers there to be sent to prison and I cast my vote against them when they were condemned to death many times I had them punished in the synagogues to get them to curse Jesus I was so violently opposed to them that I even chased them down in foreign cities that's all Paul doesn't say I grew up in the synagogue went to the right schools climbed the ladder did everything right he says I was violent I hated Christ I hated his people I did damage and look this is so important because he doesn't minimize his sinful life he doesn't try and add a filter he doesn't edit it he names it why because he wants people to know how bad he was no and we've all heard testimonies like that right not because he wants us to know how God is either how good God is either that's not the primary reason why Paul is saying this he's not saying I want you to know how bad I was and how good God was he's not saying that the reason that Paul is being so honest is that Paul knows that God doesn't deal with the fake versions of ourselves do you know that he doesn't deal with those he's not blessing the cleaned up Sunday morning Instagram version of you he's dealing with the real you the ones that's a little bit kind of like short circuiting every now and again right the one who's stuck the one that you don't want anyone else to see he's after the real us the real you the one that wrestles with pride the one that masks loneliness with busyness the one that hides insecurity with a mortgage behind a mortgage and a smile that's the real you the one that feels exhausted and anxious all the time listen

God cannot heal who we pretend to be so we need to stop pretending he only meets us in the honesty of who we really are sin and all and it's only then he'll pour out his mercy and that's what Paul is doing he's not saying oh look how bad I was I win and again we've all been to those kind of like meetings where you've got one person stands up gives a testimony thing and then the next person goes oh well I'm going to trump that right and it's almost like they're paying trump card testimonies right he's not he's not he's not going down that route he's he's he's saying look be you it's okay to be you it's okay for you to be broken and come to the Lord so that he can heal you because he's not going to heal the Instagram version of you

Jesus Jesus really doesn't divide the world into really bad sinners and decent people who just need Jesus a little bit on a Sunday morning Romans says that all have sinned everyone Isaiah says that our righteous deeds are like filthy rags that's the good stuff that we do that means pride and self reliance and gossip and lust and greed and indifference those are the things that are just as much rebellious in God's eyes as Paul's violence Paul's story is dramatic and maybe yours isn't but listen sin doesn't always look like throwing rocks at Christians it can it can look like putting your kids success above God or numbing your pain with shopping and Netflix or trusting your private pension more than Christ those don't make headlines do they

[22:38] Paul is not rocking up and going Paul a former Netflix addict but listen the sin is the same they separate us from God just as much as Paul's past did which means that we need God's compassionate heart towards us just as much as Paul so don't try and tidy them up don't skip the ugly parts the shameful parts and the sinful parts because if you erase the darkness you erase the mercy if your testimony is just I was a pretty good person and then I added Jesus on top guess what that's not a testimony that's a resume right and nobody gets saved by your resume by your CV by how well you've done they get saved by his mercy so be honest the third thing the second thing was

God's mercy confronts sin the third thing is that God's mercy magnifies grace look at verse 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus now look it's said that the difference between mercy and grace is that mercy is not getting what you deserve and grace is getting what you don't I like to think of it is that mercy is the compassionate heart towards us from God and grace is the generous heart of God towards us right see Paul isn't just talking about a little pat on the back from God is he he's talking about mercy that doesn't just stop our forgiveness and then leave us there mercy saves us yes mercy pulls us out of the pit of our sin yes mercy forgives us when we don't deserve it yes but the story doesn't end there mercy is not an end point it's the launch pad for something what is that thing well Paul describes it as the grace that overflows for me

Paul is describing grace so full and so obedient abundant so poured out that it transformed his whole life that grace overflowed he says into faith overflowed into love overflowed into his existence so that it overflowed into his living every day into his obedience into his church planting into his discipling people into changing the world the mercy he received became a river of grace that carried him from killer to apostle from enemy to servant of Jesus and here's the truth is that God doesn't just slap a plaster on your life and says well have some compassion here sit down there there I'll make you a cup of tea he pours out grace in such abundance that it can't be contained by a single life that's what he's saying this grace that he was given overflows from him to others and that's what grace is supposed to do it's supposed to spill into your marriage it's supposed to spill into your friendships it's supposed to spill into your work it's supposed to spill into your neighborhood which means grace is not for your comfort but it's for your mission grace is supposed to be visible it's meant to be it's meant to shake people awake it's meant to show the world that God is bigger than your failure stronger than your shame and more patient than your despair so look if God has shown you mercy it's not just for you to sit quietly and feel thankful

I mean be thankful but that's not the end point he pulled it out so that grace would spill through you so that the world sees not just your story but his mercy in action so firstly mercy it saves us from sin secondly grace transforms our lives now here we have this next point which I believe we're at number four grace God's mercy creates a testimony and again look Paul's testimony is dangerous why because it doesn't hide his sin it shows mercy in action that's the kind of story that shakes the world isn't it I mean when we think about it we have more in common with the people around us than Paul had in common with the people around him like not everybody could go out he couldn't go into a synagogue and go oh well

I found all of the other disciple killers I'm glad we can now start a bible study of former disciple killers no he was like on his own he had less in common with the people that we have in common around us our testimony whether you have a dramatic testimony like Paul's or whether you grew up in church and you had these secret sins let's call them they weren't you didn't kill anyone right you have more in common with people around you than Paul did that testimony but it's this kind of story that actually shakes the world it's not actually Paul's story it's your story then he says look verse 15 this saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Jesus

[ 29 : 08 ] Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost and that's the kind of gospel boiled down to its essence isn't it that Jesus didn't come to give good advice although his wisdom is incredible he didn't even come to provide a moral example although his life was perfect he didn't come to boost our self-esteem or to tweak your already decent life he came into the world to save sinners to rescue rebels to grab people who are drowning in sin and shame and pull them out of it and Paul highlights here that mercy isn't just something God gives you to sit quietly with this mercy is something that breaks out of your life his life became evidence that God keeps his promises but would you also notice that Paul confesses that had it not been for Jesus he'd still be in trouble because he he doesn't say I was the foremost sinner back then do you notice that

Paul isn't kind of standing on some kind of pedestal wagging his finger at those people who don't know Christ he says I am Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am not I was even after all that Paul had done in the name for the name and fame of Jesus he is still deeply aware of his own worth unworthiness apart from grace now he doesn't he doesn't say for a minute if you read Paul you'll notice he doesn't say for a minute well I'm just in the same camp as everybody else he's saying look had it not been for Jesus I'd be lost had it had it not be for Jesus I would be in darkness I wouldn't I wouldn't have anything I wouldn't have this testimony and in verse 16 he takes it a little bit further he says but I received mercy for this reason that in me as the foremost

Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life so Paul is saying look the reason he received mercy wasn't just for his own sake it was so that his life would become a living breathing display of Jesus's perfect patience as a testimony of God's good work now look don't let that sound soft patience perfect patience simply means that it's Jesus never giving up on you no matter how many times you stumble no matter how many poor choices you make no matter how long you hide from him or run from him he doesn't throw up his hands in frustration like we do he doesn't he doesn't say you know finally I've had enough instead he pursues and he waits and he forgives and he calls that's the mercy that Paul experienced Jesus patiently relentlessly faithfully working in a life that seemed hopeless and that same patience is being extended to everyone today which means that our failures are not too big our doubts are not too loud and our past is not too stained

God's perfect patience his commitment to never giving up is the heartbeat of the gospel Paul is saying my life is proof that Jesus doesn't just save sinners in theory he saves the worst of them in practice he saves me he can save you he can save anyone who comes to him now listen carefully because this is important the gospel doesn't only rescue people who are obvious sinners like Paul like I'm glad the gospel came I'm glad Jesus came because like it needed God to come to rescue Paul nothing else would do that the gospel doesn't only rescue people who are obvious sinners like Paul it rescues everyone who is a sinner and that includes the respectable ones can I say like us people who check all the right boxes who look good on the outside that's a compliment by the way for most of you you're alright who are polite you laugh at the right time well done you are successful church going and mostly law abiding as your driving lets you down look your sins might be quieter pride that goes unnoticed comparisons that poison us worry and anxiety that distract us secret bitterness towards whoever chasing security and money or achievement instead of

Jesus their sins too their sins that harden our hearts their sins that if left unchecked separate us from God just as surely as blasphemy or violence separated Paul and so the difference between you and Paul isn't the weight of your sins sins it's it's whether you've experienced mercy simple Paul reminds us that no one is too good for the gospel and no one is too bad either and as Paul kind of thinks about this and writes about this then in verse 17 it's almost like I want to put in like a little gap between verse 16 and 17 where Paul is just kind of thinking about this and we see the next thing is that finally he stops writing about himself and his experience with God's mercy and he kind of erupts into worship and praise to God and points all the glory to where it belongs so that finally God's mercy leads to worship where he says to the king of the ages immortal invisible the only [36:14] God be honor and glory forever and ever amen now look think about what he's saying here he's talking to oh he's talking about the king eternal the one who has always existed long before we did no matter how old we might be feeling this morning the Lord was previous long before sin ever entered the world the Lord was previous he's eternal not bound by time not surprised by life's twists and turns not surprised by your sin not surprised by your thoughts like he's not wandering around in heaven going oh I didn't see that coming how are we going to do with Simon now he's the king of the ages he's a mortal which just means the one who cannot die the one who cannot fail he cannot be undone he's invisible he's not a figure that we can control he's not a deity that we can manipulate he exists on his own terms and then

Paul nails it where he says the only God doesn't that like uncover our sin our respectable ones that he is the only God he's not one among many and listen also he's not a backup plan he's not a backup plan when the economy fails when health fails when our kids aren't walking right God isn't a backup plan he's the only God he's not a second option just in case things go wrong I'll turn to God he's the one and only the one who saves the one who redeems the one who does not just forgive but transforms and we might we might look at verse 17 and go well that's nice that's a strong theological statement but it's more than that this is our lifeline every time your past screams louder than your hope every time shame whispers that you've gone too far every time doubt convinces you that God would never really love someone like you do what

Paul does and remember that God's character isn't your character he doesn't give up like we give up he doesn't view us like we view us he doesn't have patience like we have impatience he's the king eternal immortal the invisible the only God which means that our past just like Paul doesn't define us it doesn't set the course of the future Jesus does his mercy is bigger his power is stronger his patience is unending and the glory Paul says goes to him and so this mercy the compassionate heart of God towards us and the question is have we met the compassionate heart of

God do we know that when was the last time we we sat and meditated on God's heart towards us that it's good that would be a good thing for us to do John Jenny are going to come up lead us in a couple of songs or a song and as we do that let's just remain in prayer thanking God for his mercy for his compassionate heart towards us father thank you lord that you love us lord we might say that and hear that so many times being church people lord we want to thank you this morning lord that when you look at us your heart is one of compassion towards us lord we thank you lord that your compassion extends to the bad and the really bad and lord we don't want to leave this morning downcast about our badness lord we want to praise you for your goodness lord we want to be like Paul who knowing his need and knowing our need gives you the praise and the worship because of your heart towards us and lord we do pray lord that as we've just read that your grace would be abundant in us and overflow through us to the point where we are worshipping and praising you for your love towards us and so lord as we join together in singing lord may these words be absolutely real but lord may our confession be real to you as well lord may we come to you maybe for the first time warts and all the real version of ourselves not the i'm fine version lord your word says or david calls out and he says search me and know me know my heart and lord we would say the same thing this morning lord lord if there is undealt with sin in our lives lord we we know that that will be a barrier to knowing you and walking with you and experiencing you lord and we ask again lord would you reveal those things to us would we bring them to your feet would we have the confidence that you have already dealt with them at the cross and that when we come to you you are a compassionate god you don't send us away but you invite us to your table and so we pray this morning lord as we sing lord we pray that we would be able to sing because we've been completely honest with you and we don't need to make a song and dance of it we don't need to create banners to say we've done it and heaven forbid we don't need to post it on social media but we're thankful lord that you deal with our hearts the inner place the secret place lord and so we come to you this morning in the secret place that we may abide under your shadow that we thank you this morning that you saved us thank you that you have rescued us thank you that you welcome us today lord we come to you lord with bowed heads broken hearts bowed knees lord and we say thank you for saving us thank you for your love thank you lord that we didn't have to be as bad as paul for you to save us thank you that you've saved us anyway we praise you in jesus name amen Thank you.