



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

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### First Things First: A Grandma's Faith

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Dr. Matthew J. Hook

2 Timothy 1:5 - 7

This fall, we've been looking at some of the famous "firsts" in the Bible: *After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week [she found the resurrected Christ]... the first commandment: No other gods. The wisdom that comes from God is first of all pure; then peace-loving, full of mercy and good fruit... whoever wants to be first must be your slave... But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first... You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye... I urge you first of all that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made... Love the Lord your God, and your neighbor as yourself. This is the first and greatest commandment... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness... I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last (it's the middle that's up to you), if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,... First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*

If there was ever a time to put first things first, it is now. Listen to a few people's comments:

- My life is hectic! I'm running all day—meetings phone calls, paperwork, appointments. I push myself to the limit, fall into bed exhausted, and get up early the next morning to do it all again. But I'm getting this feeling inside that says "So what?"
- I feel like I'm being torn apart. My family is important to me; so is my work. I live in constant conflict, trying to juggle..."
- There is simply too little of me to go around...
- I don't feel in control of my life. I try to figure out what's important and set goals to do it, but other people—my boss, my work associates, my spouse—continuously throw wrenches in the works. What's important to me is getting swept away in the current of what's important to everybody else.
- Everyone tells me I'm highly successful. But I'm not happy. Way down inside I have this empty feeling.

Add to that the stress that comes with the Christmas holiday season, and it's no wonder this is the most difficult month for many people. Putting first things first is at the very heart of your life. Almost all of us feel torn by things we want to do and demands placed on us. And the day-to-day, moment-by-moment decisions we must make regarding the best use of our time. It's not usually deciding between good and bad, but between good and best. Maybe that's you too. Living in the gap that's created from being ruled by your clock and not your compass.

Stephen Covey uses this quote: "*Between stimulus and your response to it, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom.*" In the spaces is where the power to make a difference lies. But that's the space I keep trying to eliminate: I react before there's even an opportunity to consider an alternative. I fill that space with noise. I run my life out to the margins. But that's where God says we have power to make a difference. Listen to what Paul chose to do: He was facing imprisonment and death, for creating communities of faith in the Roman Empire. He was slated to die. Yet in his imprisonment, he chose to write a letter expressing encouragement and teaching Timothy. But listen to what Paul points out to Timothy as a key aspect of his faith...

2 Timothy 1:5 *I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in*

*your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*

*6 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. 7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

I love this. The way to fan into flame the gift of God in your life, is to remember

**First things first: know that you are not the first!** When we face all the stuff we face in our lives, we tend to forget that we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, who have faced their own world wars, their own depressions, their own crises, their own loved ones deaths, their own terror, their own struggles with their children. We talked last week about how easy it is to reduce God's story to our size, when God is the Alpha and Omega, first and last. It reminds me of what my Grandma Hook used to say. She was 10 years old when she came forward in her little Swedish Methodist Church just south of the Wisconsin border and gave her life to Christ. That evening a number of other youth did the same. I believe God opened that door for them through her. 2 years later, when Grandma was 12, her mom, my great-grandma died. And God saw her through that time. She had 2 years of God's Holy Spirit with her during the time her mom was ill and even in death. And she died the year before we came to this church. But Grandma always said "In all my life I've never been alone. Either God has made me strong enough, or He has put someone in my life to get me through it."

And that's what Paul's talking about with Timothy. Timothy came to faith in Christ through his Grandma Lois, and his mom, Eunice. And Paul is telling Timothy to claim the spirit of power and love and self-discipline that he had witnessed day in and day out growing up: Grandma's faith.

**It's a daily faith.** It's not just for Sundays. It's not just for show. It's every meal. It's when you wake up saying "Good morning Lord," first off. It's not perfect. But even when you miss the mark, you don't go too far away, because it's daily.

**It's a faith you live out in your own culture.** Sometimes it's easier to start over with your friends. To re-invent yourself. But a grandma's faith is one you live out right here, where everybody knows you, and your background, and what you did and said in school. You live out grandma's faith **In your own home**. You don't have to go far away. You don't have to move away. And Paul seems to suggest that the power of that faith-lived-out with those who know you best can have a generations-long legacy. A deep spiritual impact. And you can do this, even here. Remember what we say: Becoming a Christ-follower doesn't make you better than anybody else. It just makes *you* better than you once were.

**A Grandma's faith is a reminder that faith isn't always fancy, or earth-shattering, just faithful.** It's the power of the flywheel that business author Jim Collins talks about. A little bit of forward progress each day. Darcel Tolle has really nice gardens. People ask his secret. He calls it "the coffee cup method." He goes out in the morning with a cup of coffee and pulls weeds, and drinks his coffee, and when the coffee is gone, he goes in. That's it! Then the next day, he goes out with his cup of coffee in one hand and pulls weeds with the other. And so on. It's the same with our faith. A bit each day, nothing fancy or earth-shattering, and pretty soon you'll be far along that path. Just read one chapter a day. Just a bit of livin' each day. Just a few moments of good prayer time or good conversation with that difficult person each day. Just a few minutes of healthy activity each day. And that faithful response each day will move you miles when you take a bit each day. (Think how many years some grandma's have been at it! ☺) Quit trying to do so much in a day. Just be faithful! Remember, you don't have to impress God. You can't. So give up on the fancy stuff, and stick to the faithful, daily living. If you're living it for God, you're performing for an "Audience of One." Don't get swayed by the TVs, or those with the news-making witnesses. Just be faithful right where you are. My grandmas were good at waiting on you, whether it was Thanksgiving, or laundry. That's not fancy. That's not news-worthy, but it's also not for sissies. Can you be faithful right where you are? When you do so, Paul says it will fan into flame the gift of God. It's not a spirit of timidity, but a Spirit of power, love, and self-discipline, no matter what you are facing. (Remember what Grandma faced!)

These days, it is easy to lose sight of our real source of a future and a hope. The prophet Habakkuk offers a wonderful word for our present day: *"Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold,*

*and there is no herd in the stalls, YET I will rejoice in the LORD; I will exult in the God of my salvation.”*  
Habakkuk 3:17-18

This Christmas is a wonderful time to be a **“YET person.”** Grammatically, “YET” is a conjunction. It didn’t make it into the School House Rock Conjunction Junction song, which means *we* can claim it. And, but, and or can get you pretty far, but yet is the word of faith you claim when you *don’t* seem to be getting very far. You be the one that affirms and trusts and even finds joy when everybody else is stumped. Find it in God’s care – even when life seems uncertain and you’re anxious. Shift your attention and focus from the uncertainties and anxieties in your life. Be a YET person.

In my office I have some pieces of the Berlin Wall and some chain link from the Iron Curtain that separated Czechoslovakia from Austria. (Some of the high school youth group were looking at them, never having heard of the Berlin Wall.) I treasure them, for the reminder of my visits there, but mostly I value them for the Christians I met in old East Germany and Prague. They shared this story:

Joseph Stalin is quoted more than once as saying “When the babushkas (that is, the old grandmothers) die, Christianity in the USSR will be dead, and communism will have won.” The Christian church in the former Soviet countries was terribly persecuted. Many pastors and active lay persons lost their lives. The church could not put anything outside their buildings, could not invite anyone to their church, or talk about it, lest the government informants would hear and the person in question would be deported. The worship services were government-sanctioned events devoid of most of their meaning.

But those babushkas, those old grandmothers, who faithfully went to the old churches, weren’t just dusting off the altars. Those old grandmothers, most of whom were only little girls when communism took over, were praying. And those praying grandmothers were praying for a day when the church could once again openly share the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Well, in November of 1989 the Wall came down in Germany, and the Velvet Revolution happened in the Czech Republic (named “Velvet” because no lives were lost). Stalin had long ago died, Communism fell, and those old, praying grandmothers kept right on praying. The churches, all together at noon, rang their bells that had been silent for decades. The minister of a small church put out the first sign he was ever allowed to hang, hand written, in front of his church in Prague: “The Lamb won. The Lamb won.”

It was handed to you through the ages. And if we live our lives putting first things first, we’ll declare, in spite of the clock, in spite of everything else clamoring for first, that the first and foremost, the church of God is faithful to declare the truth: The Lamb won. The Lamb won. The Lamb won. Amen!

## STUDY GUIDE

**Monday: Review your sermon notes.** Name in your mind the people that God most worked through to bring you to faith. Write them a note of thanks today.

**Tuesday: Read all of 2 Timothy 1.** Notice that Paul is facing some rotten times. He’s been deserted in Asia, yet he’s still pouring himself into Timothy. Find one or two people that you can give yourself to who need you. Bring out the best in them. Go beyond the usual encouragement of an email or facebook note.

**Wednesday: Read 2 Timothy 2.** This is some practical teaching of Paul. Notice what he compares being a disciple to: a farmer, a soldier, and an athlete. Take a look in your “spiritual mirror,” and see if there is some training you can do.

**Thursday: Read 2 Timothy 3.** Has an external show of religion taken priority over your heart’s condition? How can you nurture the proper heart condition God desires for you this Christmas season?

**Friday: Read 2 Timothy 4.** What barriers to faithful living do you run into the most? What myths about Jesus have tickled your own ears lately? What lie have you been telling yourself? Pray for clarity and discernment. And take time to be close to God.