

Real Faith 2 Timothy 1:1-5

(Show slide 1 as soon as Bible Reading ends)

Every 10 years there is a **census** in England and Wales that seeks to get accurate information from every household on a variety of topics.

One of the areas of interest is **our religious belief**.

The last census was carried out in 2021 and for some people it caused major alarm bells to ring when the percentage of people claiming to be Christians was released.

In 2021, less than half of the population (46.2%) described themselves as Christian. This was down from 59.3% in 2011.

What do you make of those numbers?

If only it were as high as that! Can you imagine how many more churches we would need in Scarborough if just under half the population attended corporate worship on a Sunday?

There is a disparity between those who identify as Christians and those who genuinely have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In a society consumed with personal opinion, what I've just said is very controversial. Surely no one has the right to question someone else's self-identification? If someone says they are a Christian, is that not the end of the discussion?

Look at verse 5. **Read verse 5.**

Change to slide 2 Today we begin a new teaching series on this New Testament book of the Bible. In the weeks to come we'll hear more about how to communicate our faith, what it feels like when we do and how we can ensure the truth is passed on accurately to the generations to come.

However, as we begin our focus is on **genuine faith** in Jesus.

I want to answer **three** questions.

- Where does genuine faith come from?
- Why should we want it?
- How do we know we've got it?

First, where does genuine faith come from?

Look at verse 1. **Read verse 1.**

Ancient letters had the format of our modern day emails.

They begin with who it is from and then they identify who it is for.

I like that format very much as you don't have to wait until the end of the letter to see who it is from.

2 Timothy is from a man named Paul, or to give him his fuller designation, Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

2 Timothy is definitely a **personal letter** between Paul and Timothy and, as such, it is full of highly emotive language. However, it was never intended to be a private letter only seen by Paul's close friend and companion.

If it was, how odd for Paul to have begun by headlining to Timothy that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.

When I write birthday cards to my children I don't include that I am the Senior Pastor of Trinity Church Scarborough and one of the bishops in the Anglican Mission in England.

Why does Paul start with his formal status as an apostle? It's a reminder to all who read these words that the ultimate author and authority behind them is **not Paul the man, but the God-man Jesus Christ.**

The God of the Bible is **a speaking God**. He is not playing a cosmic game of hide and seek. Throughout history he has communicated his words to the human race through his appointed representatives

In the **Old Testament** this was primarily through the prophets and in the **New Testament** it is primarily through the words of Jesus Christ and his chosen apostles.

The story of God speaking to us is vital to remember as we contemplate where genuine faith comes from.

It's not something we are just born with or that we somehow manage to conjure up without any basis.

Richard Dawkins, Faith "...means blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence."

That's not right. Faith is a response to the words God has already spoken.

It's not a blind leap into the darkness. No, it's a response of trust based on our conviction that the person who has spoken is reliable.

That's not an irrational decision if there is good evidence that the person is trustworthy and is telling the truth.

Genuine Christian faith is a response to the trustworthy words God has spoken and which are preserved in the Bible.

If you want to have faith then start with what God has said in the Bible and see if you trust it.

If you find it credible then trust it and follow through on the implications of what you now believe.

As we do this let's debunk the myth that says just because something is old and not visual then it must be dodgy.

We look at the writing on its own terms and see if it passes the test of truth.

Second, why should we want it?

There are **two** reasons that emerge in these verses.

- It gives us access to life
- It gives us access to a family

Let's take these in order.

First, it gives us access to **life**.

Look at the end of verse 1. **Read verse 1.**

This is a remarkable statement to make given the place where Paul wrote these words and what was just around the corner for him.

2 Timothy 1:15-17, “You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me.”

2 Timothy 4:6-7, “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

It's this Paul who writes about the **promise of life** that is in Christ Jesus.

Contrary to popular belief, **God is not like some heavenly vacuum cleaner** determined to suck the life out of every party.

No, he is the God who longs to bring light, life and love into a world characterised by darkness, death and disconnection.

There are many promises of life found in the Bible but there is none more clear than perhaps the most famous verse of all.

John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

There are two different kinds of life. **Bios life and zoe life**. We all have bios life by default but we only experience zoe life by faith in Jesus Christ.

It's not a life without **pain, problems** and **pressure**. But it's a life of knowing God now and enjoying him forever.

Why should we all want this genuine faith? We need life. And faith in Jesus is the only way to get it!

Second, it gives us access to a **family**.

Look at verse 2. **Read verses 2 to 4.**

These verses are filled with the **actions** and **emotions** of a healthy close family.

There is **care, concern** and **support**.

Notice how Paul describes Timothy. **My dear son**. He's not his biological son but his spiritual son. This probably means that Paul had a direct impact on Timothy coming to believe in Jesus. Paul treasured that privilege. Timothy wasn't just a statistic to him. No, he cared for him like a son.

One of the ways that cashed out in practice was through **prayer**.

For some people prayer is a waste of time, like mindlessly talking to the ceiling. **But for Paul prayer has a real impact on real lives.**

And so we're told that night and day he constantly remembers Timothy in his prayers.

Wow. This is a beautiful example of love in action.

Prayer can be a wonderful way to build our family affection for one another. I know we all have different abilities for remembering who people are but let me tell you prayer is a great help. If we pray for people regularly then it is inevitable that we will remember who they are!

As well as his prayers, I also love Paul's desire to be in Timothy's presence.

Look again at verse 4. **Read verse 4.**

It will be a mutually beneficial experience!

Lord help me to be a Timothy when I gather with my spiritual family. Look at people through the eyes of faith. This is not a room of strangers but a gathering of the family!

Why should we want this genuine faith? It gives us access to the best family in the world, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It won't be perfect but our zoe life isn't to be lived in spiritual isolation. No, faith in Christ instantly gives us millions of brothers and sisters. The bond is deep and real!

Third, how do we know we've got it?

Or using the words of **verse 5**, how can we be persuaded genuine faith lives in us?

As well as Timothy, Paul was persuaded that Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mum Eunice also had a sincere faith. They were Jews by birth and throughout their lives they were committed to the Jewish Scriptures, and were deliberate in passing on the Scriptures to young Timothy.

At some point, it seems that all three heard the gospel about Jesus and decided to put their faith in him as the promised Jewish Messiah.

This didn't mean they abandoned their Jewish beliefs. Not all all, this was about finding the person they had been waiting for all along!

How did Paul know Timothy had a genuine faith in Jesus?

Genuine faith leads to identifiable change.

This doesn't mean perfection but it does mean transformation.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts will not leave us the same.

What are the markers to look out for?

Here are three examples.

- The words we speak
- The people we meet
- The passions we have

What should we say about the person who never speaks about Jesus, never meets up with God's people and shows no desire to extend the kingdom of Jesus? They might tick the census box but they probably don't have a sincere faith in Jesus.

Let me remind us why this matters.

If someone went into a **doctor's surgery** to get test results and before hearing the results they give their own verdict of clean health, what should the doctor do? What does the evidence say? Why upset them? Because they want them to experience life.

In conclusion

Let's not miss out on eternal life. Let's ensure that we have the genuine faith that unites us to Jesus. **Let's pray.**