

Pastoral Care by Samuel Stevenson

2 Timothy 1:7 "For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." (NRSV)



Early in my ministry, an older minister, whom I had never met, sat quietly as other members of his committee examined me on my readiness to practice pastoral ministry in their presbytery. As the committee was approaching closure, the older minister broke silence and, with a deeply penetrating gaze, said to me, "Young man, I don't know what kind of Christian you are, but those trousers you have on, you may as well go and buy a new pair because you're going to wear those out on your knees." Then

he burst into great laughter. I found myself laughing nearly as heartily with him. Then everybody began laughing, seemingly confirming the wisdom of the moment that reminded us of our common dependence upon God's grace. I came before the committee full of fear and trembling, but the older minister's statement and approving laugh made me feel like his son. I was enormously encouraged.

Paul is that older minister for Timothy. Paul refers to Timothy as his own dear son, his beloved child. Paul was Timothy's mentor and role model. There is a genuine sense of inseparable togetherness. One can feel the depth of membership that each has in the other. Paul is the seasoned father figure in Christ. He knows the doubts and fears that cling so closely. He knows the road to life is hard and narrow. He knows that mortals forget the power inherent in their spiritual roots and need to be reminded of the gift within them. He knows that cowardice can hold sway when one forgets that the work is the Lord's. *For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.*

What Paul does in his pastoral ministry to Timothy is useful for ministering to people with a variety of human problems, including victims of bullying.

- We can take time with people and get to know them in a more personal way, that with better understanding our practice of pastoral ministry may have greater meaning and relevancy.
- We can show a concern for the hurting in our prayers, worship, fellowship, and community partnerships.

- We can build on family strengths by calling upon the spiritual resources of ancestors to remind those who are hurting that they are descendants of a great crowd of witnesses in Christ, and that they are God's children too.
- We can be mentors and role models to those who may be abandoned, rejected, and bullied, identifying with them and assuring them that somebody genuinely cares and will walk with them along life's treacherous paths.
- We can ask the Holy Spirit to help us keep the hurting constantly in our prayers so that all of our pastoral ministry will be by the leading of the Holy Spirit.