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What Kind of Air Are You Breathing?

II Timothy 1:13-2:2

The last couple of weeks I was fighting one of those deep in the chest, crud-filled colds. It was exhausting. I was tired all the time. My motivation level was very low. My body was putting all it's energy into fighting that illness, that invading and marauding virus. It's interesting how many people have their cures and remedies for the cold virus. From high doses of vitamin C to Echinacia and Golden seal. To chelated trace minerals to powerful anti-oxidants. I was exhorted to drink lots of fluids, get plenty of rest. Try some Grapefruit seed extract. Zinc lozenges. From Thera-flu to flu shot. From Niquil to Contact cold capsules. Just go to any drugstore and the shelves are lined with sure-fire remedies for our health.

What do you do if you have been fighting a long term, crud in the heart spiritual flu? Stop by a Christian book store and you will find plenty of remedy options from. "If you are poor you are in sin." To "quote these poems, read these prayers, really want this...and all your needs and greed's will be covered." Books that are filled with Christian psycho babble offering to hand out discount-relief to our guilt and sin and problems induced by our ungodly choices. We have a plethora of Christianize remedies for our spiritual illness and too much of it is getting more and more bizarre and human centered. What do we do when we have a case of spiritual flu. It would be easy to cover it up. To escape behind a remedy that attempts to mask the symptoms, cover the pain.

We have plenty of ways we fail to experience God's best. We have plenty of sin viruses that threaten to sneak in our hearts and steal our joy. From Sinful ignorance to selfishness, to unbelief, fear, rebellion, idolatry, pleasure consumed me-ism, pride, anger, laziness, business, failure..the list of viruses go on and on that threaten to cause us exhaustion, defeat, rob us of any spiritual joy and motivation. Cause us discouragement and dry times. Have you become weary? Weary of the fight? Weary of doing good? Weary of the Lords' work. Are you feeling

tempted to give in and just float along in the worlds game of "if it feels good do it?" Are you tempted to water down the message of the gospel in exchange for acceptance...are you coming up empty? Maybe you are still coming to church, but know you are a Christian drop out, or in danger of it. Do you need some refreshment? What would you recommend for a remedy? There are plenty of guys of TV this morning preaching spiritual remedy's some good some not so good. What kind of remedy does God have to offer us?

Turn with me in your Bibles to II Timothy chapter 1. Aged Paul is near death, lonely and writing to young Timothy. I think we would be wise to listen more to those who have trudged through life and walked well. The elder ones around us have so much for us...so much wisdom we fail to acknowledge, fail to seek out, fail to follow. These are new times now pops...that was your day this is now. Get with it. As Paul looks at the influences and power brokers of the day, his tone carries an urgent message. Timothy, Guard the gospel. Keep it pure but don't hoard it, pass it on. Listen with me as we read II Timothy 1:13 to II Timothy 2:2. (READ)

Did you catch the urgency in the message of an older man passing on the baton to a younger runner. Retain, Guard, Be strong. Look with me at verse 13. Retain the standard of sound words. Those sound words are in the Greek healthy words. To be sound is to be healthy. This was the same word used to describe Jesus healing people. He made them sound of body. They were once filled with disease, maimed, crippled, broken, racked with sin...and Jesus came and made them whole and healthy. If you are fighting a sin-virus. If you wish to return to spiritual health...don't run off to inject imitation remedies into your soul, into your values system. Breathe in spiritually right on truth that has never changed. Breathe in pure air. That is point number one. When fighting a sin virus breathe in pure air. Breathe in the sound words of truth given to us in the Word, from the righteous God Almighty.

Paul says to Timothy and to us. You must retain these sound healthy, pure air words. Why did he exhort Timothy to retain and then next verse to guard? Probably because he saw how prone they were to others distorting the truth. Other coming in and polluting the pure oxygen of Gods word...subtly, slowly denigrating the health of all who

blindly breathe the smog of subtle falsehood. Retain it Timothy! Hold it in place. We have retaining walls that hold back dirt from where it and gravity wants to landslide and cover up a road or destroy a house. A dental retainer holds teeth so they don't drift out of place and go crooked. Why retain? Because slippage is the norm. A stronger retainer must hold it in place. That retainer is the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Paul is concerned that the truth is retained, but he is also concerned in the way that the sound words are retained. In faith coupled with love. When you are guarding a truth. When you are attacked by those who wish to distort, to dilute, to twist and pervert the message...sometimes we Christians forget the ground we stand on and forget the way we stand...in love...in faith. Through the power of the Holy spirit who dwells in us..v. 14.

Paul exhorts Timothy. Don't breathe in spiritual pollution. That's not healthy. Don't believe a lie...it will vitally affect you. Don't be tempted to lower the standard, don't let them twist the truth, to dilute and weaken the sound words. There will be people who are all too ready and eager to try and change the message to suit their own needs and props up their own failures. II Corinthians 11:4 They will preach another Jesus. Galatians 1:6-9 Why? Because the cross is scandalous to those who are perishing. The gospel message may well jar the politically and culturally sensitive contemporary ears, yet we can not afford to water down and capitulate to the culture so they can sit back and enjoy a religious back scratch on Sunday morning. II Timothy 4:3 "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled.." The cross is a powerful stumbling block to those who do not believe. Media heavyweight Ted Turner was quoted saying, "I don't need and don't even want anybody dying for me"

Our faith is based on a standard. Know it well. Know Him well as Paul has just proclaimed a great statement of faith. I know whom I have believed. Be so familiar with the genuine the righteous so that when the fake comes along it is immediately recognizable. That is not the standard, that is a counterfeit religion. That's off base. John 16:13 The Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth. Breathe that pure air, the truth buoyed by the holy spirit in the middle of our pollution filled, spiritually smog choked world. This last week I read in the Colombian that actor Woody

Harrelson has opened up a financially successful business in air-challenged, Hollywood. People are lining up outside his oxygen bar that sells pure oxygen via plastic masks for 12 dollars a hit. 15 bucks for an added slice of lemon. It's amazing what people will pay for pure and healthy air. Spiritual health will come when we come expectantly and consistently to God's Word to take hits of the Spirit's truth and power. Spiritual health to fight sin viruses comes when we suck in and breathe the pure air of righteous truth and the Spirit. The standard of sound words..in faith and love.

Paul says in verse 14 we need to guard the treasure, the deposit which has been entrusted to us. We must do with the truth, the gospel, the sound, healthy words what a bank does for our money. When we give our deposit, our treasure to a bank. We expect that it will be kept safe. We expect that it will be protected. We expect that anytime we want it we could go and take it, use it and it will be in the same pristine condition, the same amount that we deposited. Even that they have invested and caused it to grow. That money is not the banks but entrusted to them so that whenever we need it, that money will be ready for us to use..not wasted, not squandered away, not diluted, not forgotten or lost in some dusty cubby hole. The gospel message of truth is not ours to start with. We have no right to change its message. We have been entrusted a good deposit. Guard that message from the more subtle and obvious attacks.

To do that we must not only know what the message is, but we must experience it. Truth that is not experienced is no better than error and maybe fully as dangerous. The scribes who say in Moses' seat were not the victims of error, They were victims of their failure to experience the truth that they were taught. We must couple knowing with doing if we ever hope to find a cure for our spiritual illness. Our dry times with God will remain dry, increasingly so if the amount we know grows out of proportion to the amount we live out. Do I know the pure air of truth? Can I recognize spiritual pollution when I see it? What are those irreducible minimums I cannot deny and still be a Christian in truth? What are those truths you are willing to take a bullet for. Point a gun at me and tell me to change my views on eschatology, I'm going to become a post-trib guy pretty quick...but if you demand that I deny Jesus, his Divine character, His work on the cross, the truth of His message, I'd

have to let you go ahead and pull the trigger. Paul says to Timothy and to us. Retain the sound healthy words, Guard the treasure. Breathe the pure air of truth.

Paul then continues to describe the discouraging landslide of desertions in Asia. V. 15 all in Asia have turned away from me. He then names a couple of deserters who are remembered for all history as deserters. Phygelus and Hermogenes. Probably a couple of guys that had been friends of Paul. Guys he never expected to give up and turn on him when things became tough. But here they are, named for us all to read. Deserters of Paul. One thing about deserters. They are more interested in what they are getting than what they are giving. You may have a Christian dropout that leaves the church, but an even more dangerous nuisance is a dropout that stays in the church. Soldiers who are not involved in the battle will eventually start shooting at each other. They will lose sight of the enemy. They will begin to major on the minors. They are unwilling to risk, to get their shoes dirty. Don't feel like you can blow off steam. Don't put on your critic hat if you are unwilling to do anything about it yourself. Don't argue about the color of paint unless you show up on Saturday morning with a brush in hand. Such wasted energy will suck you dry and discourage others around. I've heard people say, That's not my style of songs. That sermon didn't meet my needs. I sure didn't get much out of that service. The worship was flat and the sermon weak. Those statements are symptoms of a dry and poor worshipper. Should we do all we can to encourage and enhance worship. Absolutely. But instead of walking out of the this room and asking, "What did I get out of that service." The worshipper needs to be asking, How well did I worship? How much did I pour into our worship time? When my kids lounge around home stating dramatically "it's so boring around here." I ask them why are they so boring people. We love to blame the environment. Certain times and places are more exciting than others, but if you are a true worshipper of God, you will be able to worship in a dungeon like Paul. While deserters like Phygelus and Hermogenes are more concerned with what they can get. We see in verse 16 an incredibly encouraging verse, Onesiphorus the encourager is far more concerned with what he can give.

This brings us to point number two. Breathe out fresh air. Encourage others by being a breath of fresh air to those around you. Shouldn't those who have breathed in the healthy pure air of truth and righteousness be the best able to breathe out fresh air to others in need? Good air in, good actions out. Onesiphorus was more interested in what he could give than what he was getting. There is something very healthy in that. In verse 16 it says he often refreshed Paul. Literally he was a breath of fresh air to Paul. Are you ready to be that breath of fresh air to those who have been rejected, possibly ignored, by the majority. What can you do to be a refresher rather than a deserter?

Several thoughts from this verse come to me. Everyone gets discouraged and down at times. It's easy to think that I am unspiritual if I'm feeling down...but even Paul became discouraged and needed to be refreshed. Here it says that Paul needed to be refreshed often. He must have had dry times. Satan will target leaders with discouragement. If you are a leader in the church, in your home...you will be on Satan's most wanted hit list. He will want to pick you off. Be aware and don't try to slug through it alone. The word saint singular is mentioned only once in the NT. But the word saints, plural is used 61 times. The idea of the independent Christian forging ahead through dry times all by himself, herself, is a foreign concept in the Bible. We need each other. There are no lone ranger Christians that are so strong they have no need of Christian fellowship, no need of church corporate worship and prayer.

We can be refreshers. We can be a breath of fresh air to others when we find out their needs and meet them. Even if it may be inconvenient for us. Look at 17. Onesiphorus was a guy who was not ashamed of Paul's chains. He had to look hard to find Paul in the Roman dungeon. Eagerly searched for Paul. He was not afraid to stand in the Roman prison and say. He and I are friends. We stand for the same things. We serve the same master. Not ashamed. His eyes were not looking to what was popular for honor. He was devoted to refresh and be with Paul during his tough time.

Alvin Straight age 72 lived in Laurens, Iowa. His brother age 80 lived several hundred miles away in Blue River, Wisconsin. According to the Associated Press. In 1994 Alvin's brother suffered a stroke and Alvin wanted to see him, but he had a transportation problem. Because his

eyesight was poor, he didn't have a drivers license and apparently struggled with an aversion to taking a plane, train or bus. But that did not stop Alvin. He climbed aboard his 1966 John Deere tractor lawn mower and drove it all the way to Blue River, Wisconsin. He loved his brother and love will find a way.

Onesiphorus was a refresher, not a deserter. What can you do this next week to be a refreshing breath of air to a friend in need. It may not be convenient in this busy holiday season, but love will find a way. Do you need to spend some time with someone you know is lonely? Take time to right a note to that friend that is discouraged? Write a missionary? There are some sweaters that you can knit. Maybe some sleeping bags for the homeless that you can sew. Maybe you feel like refreshing a leader. Maybe you want to offer to listen to some verses on AWANA night. Maybe you feel like tearing down the rest of the cubby house or building up the home of a single mom. How can you be a refresher to someone else this next week? Winston Churchill was misquoted, "Never has so much been left by so many to so few" What will be your refreshing breath you can blow encouragement to someone in need?

Not only must we be breathing in pure air of sound truth and breathing out fresh air of encouragement to others in need, we need to model our breathing techniques to others. That would be the third point that comes out of the first two verses of chapter 2. Pass it on to others. Guard it faithfully. Keep it pure. Spread it strategically. If Paul had stopped at the end of verse 18 we might be tempted to think we are to batten the hatches and hide out in our spiritual bomb shelter. But you can almost picture an aging Paul leaning over to Timothy and get right in his face. Timothy I'm entrusting this message to you. You have heard it from me, in front of many witnesses. It hasn't been a message that has changed in the ever shifting winds of culture. Entrust this message to those who will be faithful to pass it on pure. Don't hoard the treasure. Give it away! Don't devalue it, don't cheapen it. Don't dilute it or desert it. Enliven it by multiplication.

Paul is passing the torch on to Timothy. Galatians 1:11,12 Paul received it from Christ. Then Paul to Timothy. Timothy to faithful men and faithful men to other faithful men as well. This verse has been

worked over and over but I think we can never hear enough of the truth of this message. This verse is the very heart and soul of discipleship. Pass it on. Teach others what you have learned. Model your breathing techniques.

When Nathaniel was a couple months away from world entry. Erin and I were intent on learning the very best way to do birth. We both attended a class to instruct us on the fine art of birthing a baby naturally. The anthem of this rather energetic teacher was that we could minimize the pain involved yea verily some have learned to nullify the pain by learning certain breathing techniques. I confess though I listened attentively about all I can repeat for you now is the mantra like phrase "He He Who" This very kind teacher attempted to pass on to us breathing techniques that had helped her and others, but when it came to pain and crunch time...he he who quickly changed to find that anesthesiologist. give me an epidural now.

Paul says to Timothy. You have heard the truth. Be different. "You therefore my son be strong!" Being different is not only helpful but it is essential. We are not called to be conformed to the world, but different. never mind that others are deserting. Forget your inherent weaknesses, Ignore your tendency to be timid. You be strong. Not in knowledge. Not strong in talent and skill. You be strong in grace. The power for forgiveness and the power to live righteous lives for God.

You be different from the rest of the crowd. Not all believers will be beautifully balanced people. If you read much about the reformers you will find them to be some of the most unbalanced people alive, but they got the job done that God wanted them to do. If you have received the truth than you are in debt up to your eyeballs to pass it on to another. Who will that be so that you are not accused by God of hoarding the treasure? Who will you be discipling this year? Maybe you feel like you need to know more of the truth? Then go after it. Go get it. Get the tools you need to pass it on to others. Become one of the faithful who can pass it on.

If one wanted to become a great fisherman, I would find the best fisherman around and say. Teach me. Take me fishing. I can only learn so much from a book. I can only learn so much by trial and error. But to have a guy who knows how to read the river, knows the best places,

knows the best lures, can teach you to tie the right knots. That is discipleship. Far more than just bringing you over a fish to barbecue from time to time. Taking past the step of handing you the pole when he's hooked a big one so you can feel what its like. To the ultimate delight of hooking a monster steelhead all by yourself. The joy of discovery and bringing it in. Nothing is more exciting to a teacher than the delight in the eyes of one who has been infected for like. One who can read the truth from the Bible, glean those insights, real them into his own life and apply it. When you see the pure milk of the word going down into the life of another. It doesn't get any better than that. It all starts with the kind of truth you are taking in. What kind of air are you breathing. Spiritual health begins with pure righteous truth and then spreading on to others.