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 HCC Sermon
 1 Timothy 1:12-17

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: Andy set aside Woody for Buzz Lightyear
2. Need: Over time we set the gospel aside
3. Subject: How do we treasure the gospel?
4. Text: 1 Timothy 1:12-17
5. Preview: We'll look at a problem, solution, and application in this morning's message.

BODY

- I. [Problem] We forget how lost we were
 - A. We add rules to justify ourselves (1 Tim 1:3, 4; 4:3)
 - B. We remove rules to justify ourselves
- II. [Solution] The church reminds us God found us (1 Tim 1:12-17)
 - A. God sought us (1:12-14)
 1. Paul thanks God for finding him (1:12-13a)
 2. God's finding Paul revealed God's grace (1:13b-14)
 - B. God rescued us (1:15-17)
 1. God is on a rescue mission (1:15)
 2. Paul's rescue reveals God's patience (1:16)
 3. God deserves all the credit (1:17)
- III. [Application] Rehearse God's search and rescue
 - A. Rehearse it at worship service
 1. Each worship service element reminds us of the gospel
 2. We need each element's reminder
 3. Experience the worship service as a whole.
 - B. Rehearse it with others
 1. Recount it to other believers
 2. Recount it to unbelievers

CONCLUSION

1. Review: We forget how lost we were. The church reminds us God found us. Rehearse God's search and rescue.
2. Closing Image: The gymnast rehearsal of the gospel before her abuser is a stirring reminder of God's grace.

MANUSCRIPT

Andy's favorite toy was the sheriff Woody. Woody was a wonderful toy. He had a cowboy hat. He also had a draw string. If you pulled on it, then Woody would say: "Reach for the sky!" or "There's a snake in my boots!". Andy took Woody everywhere. He was the hero in every scenario that Andy could imagine. Woody was Andy's most treasured toy until another toy came along. This toy's name was Buzz Lightyear, Space Ranger. Buzz had these three buttons on his chest. If you pressed one of them, Buzz would say: "To Infinity and Beyond". When you pressed a button on his arm, his laser – a red light – would light up. When Andy received this new toy, Woody was put into the toy bin with all the other toys. Now Andy took Buzz everywhere. He became the new hero for very imagined conflict. **Andy set aside Woody for Buzz Lightyear.**

How many of us have set aside the gospel like Andy set aside Woody because something new had come along? When we first believed the gospel, we received it with such excitement and fervor. It was our most treasured possession. But with the passage of time and the introduction of different responsibilities, we are tempted to set aside the gospel. It is no longer our treasured possession. It might now be a boyfriend, a girlfriend, a husband, a wife, a child, a friend, a job, or a hobby. **Over time we set the gospel aside.** (*Gesture Right*)

How do we make the gospel our first love again? How do we see the beauty of the gospel once again? How do we view the gospel with awe? **How do we treasure the gospel?**

To answer this question, we'll look to someone who never lost the tingle of the gospel. We'll look at the account of a man, who always felt chills when he thought about his conversion. This man's name is Paul. And Paul didn't want the church at Ephesus to lose the centrality of

the gospel either. He sent Timothy, his understudy, to oversee the church there. Paul wrote to Timothy to remind him to safeguard the church against false teachers by teaching key doctrine. One of these doctrines is salvation by grace through faith, which is the gospel. This letter is titled: 1 Timothy in our Bible. Please turn there with me. 1 Timothy, chapter 1. 1 Timothy, chapter 1.

In this morning's message, we're going to see a problem: "why do we set the gospel aside?", solution: "what do we need to know?", and application: "what can we practically do?". We'll see a dilemma, a remedy, and an exhortation. Problem. Solution. Application. *What is the problem? Why do we set the gospel aside?*

We forget how lost we were. We have developed a spiritual amnesia. We don't recall how much sin separated us from God. We don't understand that before a holy God the way that we conducted our lives just didn't cut it. **We forget how lost we were.**

What prompts us to forget how lost we were? What makes us develop this spiritual amnesia? Why do we forget? First let me tell you a story and then two observations from it.

When my cousin Kyle was young, he asked me to play nerf guns with him. We would go up to his room, where he had all his nerf guns laid out. He had large ones and small ones, automatic ones and semi-automatic ones, ones that shot arrows and ones that shot balls. He asked me to choose a nerf gun. Logically, I would go choose the largest nerf gun with the biggest ammo capacity. As I go to grab the gun, Kyle decides to add a new rule (*emphasize*). You can choose a nerf gun, but you can only choose from those in the small section. After we choose our guns, Kyle takes a position at the top of the stairs of his two-story home. I take a position in the first floor. According to Kyle: "I can go anywhere." Whoever tags the other

person with ten darts wins. When he says: “Start!”, I charge up the stairs. But then he says: “Stop!” Kyle says: “you can only come up five steps of the stairs.” He changed the rules again. Let’s just say: “I lost 90% of the time when I played nerf guns with Kyle.” I learned very quickly one lesson. A kid changes the rules in order to win. He adds rules to help him. He removes rules to help us win. Don’t we do that with our spiritual lives too?

We add rules to justify ourselves. At the Ephesian church, the false teachers began adding to the law. Paul directs Timothy to counter such teaching in chapter 1, verse 3 thru 4: “As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculation from God that is by faith.” These myths and genealogies served as additions to the law to promote asceticism such as abstaining from food and marriage talked about later in 1 Timothy 4:3: “*who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving...*”. How often do we also add rules to the gospel to justify ourselves? If we read our Bibles in the morning, attend Bible study, participate in small group, go on short term missions, and etc, then we are more spiritual and therefore God must love me more.

If we add to God’s word, then it becomes legalism. Legalism does two things. First, it diminishes the holiness of God because we lower his perfect standards by adding new laws. Second, it removes the need for grace because we create a new standard of holiness through the laws we make that are achievable.

But the opposite is true too. **We remove rules to justify ourselves.** We may not remove the rules completely, but we may diminish them. Since we are saved by grace, then we

can remove the laws and do whatever we want. After all, we're forgiven. That is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls: cheap grace. Paul also writes about this in his letter to the Romans: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!"

When we add or remove to justify ourselves, we tell Jesus: "Take a back seat. I'll take the control of my life." This leads to a corrosive belief in the gospel. It leads to have a high view of self and a low view of God. It results in a spiritual amnesia. We end up forgetting how lost we were. That's why Paul writes to Timothy to remind him to preserve the gospel as one of the pillars of truth in the church.

What is then the solution? What are we supposed to know? **The church reminds us God found us.** When we gather together as believers to worship God, we recall that God sought us out and rescued us. Despite our separation from God because of sin, he elects us, calls us, and regenerates us. God finds us. The church awakens memories of our salvation by God's grace. If the church is responsible for guarding sound doctrine, then one of those doctrines that the church guards is salvation by grace through faith. God seeks us out because we would never search for him on our own. **The church reminds us God found us.**

What did God do? He did two things: He sought us and He rescued us. First, let's look at how **he sought us**. To highlight how God seeks us out, Paul recalls his own salvation story.

As Paul thinks about his conversion, he erupts in thanksgiving toward God. **Paul thanks God for finding him.** Read with me in 1 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 12. It says: "*I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service.*"

Note how Paul talks about Christ judging him to be faithful. In other words, God knew that Paul would be faithful to do God's work. When Paul looks back in his life, he is surprised that God would even think him to be a faithful to gospel work. Why is Paul so blown away that God would call him to be his faithful worker? Prior to faith in Christ, Paul was an opponent to the church and to Christ. Let's continue reading in verse 13: "though formerly I was to a blasphemer". To blaspheme someone is denigrate or speak a person's name with contempt. Paul didn't have nice words to say about Jesus in his past life. The next word that Paul uses to describe himself is "persecutor". In the book of Acts, Luke recounts three times how he pursued Christians from Jerusalem to other foreign cities such as Damascus to arrest them. The last word that Paul uses to describe himself is "insolent opponent." Other translations render this phrase as violent man. Both Paul's negative attitude and actions transformed his very being into one of violence toward Christians. When Paul looks back in his life, he scratches his head in bewilderment. How could such an outspoken opponent of God now be his most outspoken proponent? It defies human logic. This would not be possible unless God found us like a parent finding lost child in the midst of crowd.

God finding Paul revealed God's grace. When God found Paul, it revealed God's grace – God's unmerited favor. Paul received something that he didn't deserve much like all of us who placed our faith in Christ. **God finding Paul revealed God's grace.**

Continue with me in verse 13: "*But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*" Paul's unbelief caused him to act ignorantly to persecute the church. But God granted Paul mercy. He didn't receive judgment for the great harm done to the church. Paul also

received instead the overflow of God's grace, his unmerited favor. The word overflow should bring to mind an image of a cup overflowing with water. Paul received more favor than he could ever imagine. This grace took the form of faith and love. Faith not referring solely to belief, but also to the content of his new faith. When we place our faith in Christ, we also inherit a certain set of belief such as God's holiness, our sinfulness, and redemption. This faith then leads to a love for other believers. Likewise, Paul's hatred of the church transforms into a love for it. This only occurs in Christ Jesus. Christ makes this faith and love happen.

Not only did God seek us out as he sought Paul, but **God rescued us**. God rescued us. He sought us out in the wilderness of sin and rescued us from death. He found us on the path that leads to destruction and removes us from it. **God rescued us**.

God is on a rescue mission. He has a laser focus to save the lost. Read with me in verse 15: *"The saying is trustworthy and deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."* Paul cites a commonly known saying: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." This is Jesus's mission. His mission isn't to serve as an example of perfect moral living. If that's the case, then his example mocks us. We can't ever be like Jesus. He came into the world to rescue sinners. He came to rescue the lost from their sin and its eternal consequences. Paul wanted the Ephesians to embrace this statement. So should we. When Paul says: *"of whom I am the foremost"*, he reflects at the amazement that God would save him a blasphemer, persecutor, and violent man. He wouldn't have allowed himself to be saved. But God saved him. Do you have the same amazement at your salvation?

What does God's rescue mission reveal? It reveals God's patience. **Paul's rescue reveals God's patience.** Read with me in verse 16: *"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."* God waited a long time for Paul to eventually repent from his sin and place his faith in Christ. We see God's long patience in various examples in the OT. When Israel sins against God in the OT, God threatens to wipe them out and begin a new nation with Moses. But Moses pleads with God that on the basis of his patience and steadfast love to bear with the nation of Israel. During the time of judges, God would have justification to wipe out the nation of Israel for their many sins. But God dealt patiently with them to raise up new judges to deliver them from their enemies. How patient was God with you to bring you to faith? How long did God wait patiently for you as you wrestled with your sin before you came to a point of repentance? Although all of us deserve to experience God's wrath, God waits patiently for us to repent and place our faith in Christ. God's patience continues.

For those of you, who have not placed your faith in Christ. Take your time to try and figure out whether or not Jesus Christ is worth your belief. Examine the claims of Christ in Scripture. But don't take too long because while you have time, time is also limited.

What is this eternal life that we receive when we believe in Christ? Is Paul referring to an eternity in heaven? Yes, but that's a partial answer. Paul refers not to an eternal life that is in the future only. He refers to an eternal life or better spiritual life that we experience now. With the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, we are able to live a life that conforms to the character of Christ. The more that we depend on the Spirit, the more we become like him. For example, one can already tell that a baby looks like one of his parents. But as the baby grows, the

resemblance grows even more stronger. As we grow in spirit dependence, we become more like Christ. When Christ returns, he makes us like him.

Who deserves the glory for this? Should Paul be exalted because he placed his faith in Christ? Should we be exalted because we finally figured it out and placed our faith in Christ? No. **God deserves all the credit.** He receives the standing ovation and the applause for the work of salvation. If He never sought us out, we would have never have been rescued. **God deserves all the credit.**

Paul writes in verse 17: *“To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”* Paul makes an address to God, who he calls King of ages. It highlights God’s eternal reign. He follows the address with three qualities: immortal, invisible, and only God, which depict the uniqueness of God. We worship a God who is one, unseen, and immortal. Paul then expresses praise: *“Be honor and glory forever and ever.”* Again, this doxology written by Paul points out how amazing God is. He sought us. He rescued us.

The gospel stands as one of the central doctrinal pillars of the church. God is holy. We are not. Sin has not only separated us from God, but we have rebelled against God. Christ redeemed us through his work on the cross. We await his return so that we can be like him.

If the solution to our spiritual amnesia is remembrance, then *how do remember this truth as a church. How do we apply this solution into our lives? What is the application?*

Rehearse God’s search and rescue. Retell the gospel to yourself. Remind yourself of how lost you were. Recall how God sought us and rescued us. **Rehearse God’s search and rescue.** There are two ways we can rehearse God’s search and rescue.

First, **Rehearse it at worship.** I don't know if you know it or not, but thought goes into the design of our worship service, so that each element is carefully placed to remind us of the gospel. Hence, we craft the service so that from 9:15 till 10:45am (*Motion right to left*) on Sunday morning, we rehearse the gospel together as a congregation. **Rehearse it at worship.**

Each worship service element reminds us of the gospel. Let's think through each of the service elements for today. First, we began with a call to worship. The call to worship helps us turn from the distractions of this week to focus our minds on God to worship God. Next, we sing worship songs that exemplify who God is. These songs remind us of the character of God. Songs are powerful in shaping our theology. I've said before that people on Sundays don't remember the sermons, but they always remember the music. After service, it's more likely you'll be humming the worship song rather than recalling the main points of the sermon. Your theology is shaped more by what you sing than what you hear. We try to carefully choose songs that exemplify God's character. When we sing these worship songs, the holiness of God should strike us. We worship a God wholly different than us. It should also make us think about how short we've fallen of his perfect standard. This leads us to a contrite heart. What follows the worship songs? It is the "Corporate Confession". We confess together that we have fallen short of God's expectations of us to live as witnesses in the workplace or classroom. The pastoral prayer, which follows the confession, pleads to God that we need his help to live out these gospel truths. Prayer asks God for help us as a congregation to be a faithful witness in the world. Next, we have the offertory. When we give our financial gifts to God, it reaffirms our allegiance to God. In ancient times, countries would give tribute to the powers over them to demonstrate their allegiance. The offertory demonstrates that we are wholly devoted to

God. In the book of Leviticus, priests offer whole burnt offerings to demonstrate their devotion to God. Following the offertory, is the Scripture reading and sermon. The Scripture reading and sermon is the time that we renew our covenant with God. God reminds us through his word what is expected of us in this covenant. On the first of the month at this church, we have communion following the sermon. Communion reminds us that Christ is our head and that we are his body. But it also creates within us a longing for Christ's return. Afterward, we sing doxology expressing our praise to God. The service closes with a benediction. The benediction is not just a mere blessing over God's people. The benediction is a prayer to empower God's people to do his work. All these pieces: call to worship, worship songs, confession, pastoral prayer, offertory, scripture reading, sermon, communion, benediction, and doxology all fit together to remind us of the gospel.

We need each element's reminder. During trials, we need to remember the God that we worship. As we hear the call to worship and sing the worship songs, the greatness of our God overwhelms us so that we can say: "It is well." When we sin during the week, we need the reminder to confess our sins before God and others. Maybe the confessional time reminds you that when you leave this service, I need to reconcile a conflict with a brother or sister. Maybe you're reminded I shouldn't have yelled at my kids. I shouldn't have said those sharp words to my roommate. Maybe I shouldn't have been so curt with my spouse. When you give your offertory, you remind yourself that my highest allegiance doesn't belong to my job climbing the corporate ladder. It's not about getting a high paying salary. I don't need to be in charge. God deserves my greatest loyalty. When you hear the word of God preached, you are stirred in areas of your life that you may still need to submit to Christ. Maybe you need to submit to

God's teaching about how to love your neighbors. You may need to extend forgiveness to someone who has wronged you. Reflect on these elements. Don't just go through the motions. If we thoughtfully think through these elements of our worship service, we rehearse the gospel to ourselves.

Experience the worship service as a whole. To rehearse the gospel in worship service, it requires us to be here for all of it. Otherwise, we miss out on reliving the beauty of the gospel each week. This means getting to service on time at 9:15am. I think that preparing to attend worship service is a spiritual battle. Someone said: "Sunday service begins Saturday night". It's a spiritual battle to sleep on Saturday nights at a reasonable hour because you want to spend time with friends. Maybe you want to finish that board game or go see a late-night movie. You know that all of Sunday morning is going to be spent at church, so your free time on Sunday is cut in half. So you squeeze as much fun into Saturday that you can. It's a spiritual battle to sleep early rather than fulfill your need for leisure. Sunday mornings are difficult too. Every weekday, you have to get up early to get the kids ready for school, go to work, or go to class. You couldn't sleep in on Saturday because the kids are up to watch Saturday morning cartoons. This is the one day you can sleep in just a little bit. To be honest, my body doesn't want to get up on Sunday mornings either. I'd rather pull the sheets over my head and sleep some more. It's a spiritual battle to throw off those sheets and wake up early to make it to service on time. Maybe we need to pray for God's help to make no provision for the flesh and get to service on time to rehearse the gospel.

The second way to rehearse the gospel is to **rehearse it with others**. Rehearse it with others.

You can rehearse the gospel to believers. **Recount it to other believers.** Recount the story of how God saved you from sin to other Christian. One of the biggest blessings of attending CCF cell groups this semester is to hear a college student share their life story. It encourages me to hear how God transformed their lives.

Recount it to unbelievers. Share your story with those who haven't placed their faith in Christ. Rehearse the gospel to unbelievers. When my co-workers asked me: "why I devoted so much time to church and ministry?", I have an opportunity to rehearse my story to them. Paul rehearses his story multiple times recorded in the gospel of Acts to unbelieving rulers. **Recount it to unbelievers.**

Let's summarize this morning's message. The problem is that we forget how lost we were. The solution is the church reminds us God found us. The application is Rehearse God's search and rescue. We forget how lost we were. The church reminds us God found us. Rehearse God's search and rescue.

I want to close with a rehearsal of the gospel that blew me away. Pastor Jason posted on his Facebook feed a gospel coalition article about a gymnast confronting her sexual abuser. For those of you who didn't know, Larry Nassar, who was a USA gymnastics doctor, molested hundreds of girls, was sentenced this week. One of victims was Rachael Denhollander, who took forty minutes to address her abuser. I want to read an excerpt from her testimony:

You have become a man ruled by selfish and perverted desires, a man defined by his daily choices repeatedly to feed that selfishness and perversion. You chose to pursue your wickedness no matter what it cost others and the opposite of what you have done is for me to choose to love sacrificially, no matter what it costs me.

In our early hearings, you brought your Bible into the courtroom and you have spoken of praying for forgiveness. And so it is on that basis that I appeal to you. If you have read the Bible you carry, you know the definition of sacrificial love portrayed is of God himself loving so sacrificially that he gave up everything to pay a penalty for the sin he did not commit. By his grace, I, too, choose to love this way.

You spoke of praying for forgiveness. But Larry, if you have read the Bible you carry, you know forgiveness does not come from doing good things, as if good deeds can erase what you have done. It comes from repentance which requires facing and acknowledging the truth about what you have done in all of its utter depravity and horror without mitigation, without excuse, without acting as if good deeds can erase what you have seen this courtroom today.

If the Bible you carry says it is better for a stone to be thrown around your neck and you throw into a lake than for you to make even one child stumble. And you have damaged hundreds.

The Bible you speak of carries a final judgment where all of God's wrath and eternal terror is poured out on men like you. Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. And that is what makes the gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found. And it will be there for you.

I pray you experience the soul crushing weight of guilt so you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me—though I extend that to you as well.

This gymnast rehearsal of the gospel before her abuser is a stirring reminder of God's grace. It also reminds us how treasuring the gospel transforms us and our actions towards others.