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After a loved one dies, I imagine many of you have faced the daunting task of sorting through all the legal issues of settling an estate. If the deceased person left a will or trust document behind, it makes the task much easier, but sometimes one might find other documents that remind us of our loved one's life. My mom, for example, left behind boxes of notes, many written on scraps of paper. Some notes contained to-do lists, things she wanted to remember to get done, with items scratched off as she completed them. As I sorted through the boxes of paperwork, I often wondered why she saved these completed lists, and I almost threw the whole collection in the recycle box. I took the time to look through the papers, and every once in a while, I came across a written note containing family memories, some of which prompted a smile or laughter.

In addition to legal wills that instruct how to distribute assets, these sentimental notes are what one therapist calls "Heart Wills," memories or keepsakes that a loved one leaves behind for family members. Before Gail died of breast cancer when her daughter Melanie was five years old, she recorded a

video tape of memories. At age fifteen, Melanie appreciates reviewing these memories from her mother, words from the heart. Her mother offered the following suggestions: "Try not to wear heels. Dyeing your hair is O.K. A little pink or purple is good. Ear piercing is O.K., at 11 or 12." Later in the video one can see "Gail, then 39, in her bathrobe, laughing and dancing to 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon,' with Melanie, then 5, clinging to one arm, and her sister, Lindsay, 3, snuggled into the other."¹

An article in *The New York Times* titled, "Farewell, With Love and Instructions," explained what other parents have done:

Some parents choose gifts or cards for future birthdays or Christmas celebrations. One mother created a tape to be given to her son on his wedding day, if and when that occasion arrives. One father left written messages behind paintings, a surprise that his children stumbled across a year after his death.

These "Heart Wills" help keep alive memories of a loved one for many years, which is what Paul might have been trying to do as he wrote letters to his younger traveling companion, Timothy. In other

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letters from Paul that we have in the Bible, he mentions Timothy as a fellow worker and as a messenger sent to check on how congregations were doing. It's not surprising, then, that Paul would write to him as a mentor, offering encouraging words as Paul sat in jail.

Paul seemed to sense that his life was drawing near to an end, for he wrote in the letter to Timothy: "I'm already being poured out like a sacrifice to God, and the time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith" (4:6-7). Paul was in jail in Rome during the time that Nero was emperor. When a fire broke out in Rome and burned about 70 percent of the city, many citizens unfairly blamed the Christians, often considered outsiders. They were an easy target for the mobs who were seeking revenge, and legend says that Peter was a victim of this rage, and later, Paul.

Before he died, Paul wrote this letter to Timothy as a Heart Will, as a way to encourage Timothy when he faced his own difficult times. Rather than leaving a will with a list of property and savings accounts, Paul left a will of wise words.

First, Paul considered Timothy a child of the faith, and he reminded Timothy about the origin of his faith—Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice.

This letter also reminds us of our role in helping pass on the faith to the next generations, to our children and grandchildren. Maybe you model prayer for your grandchildren as you offer thanks to God before eating a meal. Or maybe you read bedtime stories from a children's Bible before they go to bed. For those who have grandchildren living near you, an invitation to church offers them a chance to experience a community of faith. Even your kindness and encouraging words can offer them a glimmer of God's love, of your faith that good exists in the world.

A second word of encouragement in Paul's Heart Will reminds Timothy that life is not always easy, for suffering will occur. I think most of us can relate to this point, for how many of you have ever had to struggle. Life is not always easy, but Paul reminded Timothy and us that God's strength will get us through all the struggles as we trust in God's teachings.

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Third, in the second chapter, Paul told Timothy to avoid “wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening.” How many times do we find it tempting to argue, using a louder voice than usual just to get our point across. We may not even take time to listen to what others are saying as we plow through with noisy words that may not even connect to what the other person said. Paul wrote, “Have nothing to do with stupid and senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels” (2:23).

Fourth, be careful who you hang out with, for Paul reminded Timothy that some people are “lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive...ungrateful, unholy...haters of good, treacherous, reckless” (3:2-3). Who we hang out with can shape our perceptions of the world. Some see the world as a good place filled with God’s grace, while others view the world as evil, filled with temptations and snares. One can choose to focus on the good in

the world or the bad, and that view can shape our lives.

Paul’s letter to Timothy serves as a wonderful Heart Will, not only for his younger traveling companion, but also for us as well. Paul carried on the tradition of Jesus who left behind many Heart Wills—such as Jesus’ teaching through parables, his words of hope, and on this World Communion Sunday, we especially remember the Heart Will of the bread and cup as we come to the Table every Sunday.

On the first Sunday of October, we remember that we celebrate this gift with churches all over the world, a reminder that God’s promise of hope surrounds the globe. Even in the face of war, hurricanes, violence, poverty, and many other struggles that fill our world, on World Communion Sunday we remember that God’s love and grace circle the globe. We celebrate that God still moves in our world and has left us Heart Wills to offer hope to the world.

¹ Lizette Alvarez, “Farewell, With Love and Instructions,” *The New York Times*, October 6, 2005.