

LIVES THAT REMIND US ABOUT GOD - Meeting Yourself In The Sacred Text Part twenty-three - Sunday, July 21st, 2024
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TIMOTHY - Becoming a Dependable Follower of Jesus While You're Still Young

- 1) **SOME BACKGROUND** - Paul found Timothy in *Lystra* (a small center in inner Galatia - now known as *Asia Minor*). They first met in **51 A.D.** Paul wrote his last letter to Timothy in about **64 A.D.** All of the events in today's lesson take place between those two dates. Probably the last letters Paul ever wrote were written to Timothy from Roman prison.

- 2) **TIMOTHY'S START IN MINISTRY** (**Acts 16:1-5, 2 Tim. 3:14-15**) - The passage in **2 Timothy 3:14-15** stresses the *behind the scenes training for future public ministry* - **"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."** This early teaching in the Word probably came on the knee of his *mother* (Eunice) or his *grandmother* (Lois), neither of whom probably recognized the potential for fruitfulness in their patient, faithful ministry.

There are two important teaching points here. First, there is encouragement for all who labor to get God's Word into lives in embryonic form. You don't always see the fruit of your efforts. It takes time for young lives to **practice** everything you're teaching them right now. This is an important point for all who are involved in parenting, leading small Bible study groups, ministering behind the scenes to children, etc.

And second, while you are still young, don't **undervalue** what seem to be very common sources of wisdom and direction. The instruction from parents and Christian Education teachers can take your life much further and bear more fruit than you can see right now.

The passage in **Acts 16:1-5** illustrates something in the heart of Timothy himself - **“Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. [2] He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. [3] Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. [4] As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. [5] So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.”**

Notice his ***willingness to submit to Paul's instructions in order that the Gospel may be more easily accepted by the Jew.*** And this even though Timothy knew that he didn't have to be circumcised to be born again! Here we see such an interest in the extension of the Kingdom of God. Personal concerns were quickly put behind.

- 3) **TIMOTHY'S MISSION IN CORINTH** (1 Corinthians 4:14-21, 2 Corinthians 7:5-11) - These events take place about three years after the events mentioned in the previous point (Acts 16:1-5). Paul has embarked on his ***third missionary journey*** and is temporarily residing in ***Ephesus***. It is while there that he hears disturbing reports from the church in ***Corinth***.

The church is rampant with doctrinal and personal problems. There is immorality, drunkenness at the Lord's Table, and different split factions following their favorite leaders - **1 Corinthians 4:14-21** - ***“I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. [15] For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. [16] I urge you, then, be imitators of me. [17] That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. [18] Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. [19] But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. [20] For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. [21] What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?”***

Into this situation Paul sends young Timothy. Again, Timothy's ***willingness to be used in very unattractive situations*** comes to the fore. From what we can guess from the Scriptures, Timothy's first assignment wasn't all that successful. Later on, ***Paul was forced to send Titus to finish the job in Corinth.***

Titus brought back a most positive report of the spiritual work accomplished in Corinth - **2 Corinthians 7:5-11** - **“For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn— fighting without and fear within. [6] But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, [7] and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. [8] For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. [9]As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. [10] For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. [11] For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.”**

While we're happy for Corinth and Paul, it's easy to overlook how Timothy could have felt. It seems that his presence and ministry in Corinth were somewhat overlooked. ***Perhaps that's why Paul, in later years, would write to Timothy and tell him not to let anyone "despise him for his youth" - 1 Timothy 4:12 - "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."*** Timothy was forced to learn early that it's important to persist and move on in ministry in spite of set backs to our own egos. The work of Christ must always be bigger than any of the persons carrying it out.

Timothy learns while still young that the ***direction*** for his life and the ***measurement*** of its success must be sought in terms of faithfulness to God's assignment and call rather than the applause and pull of the crowd or the visible rewards from his efforts.

So start life while you're still young with a sense of divine assignment or you'll constantly be pulled around by the pressure of the approval and praise of man. Nothing makes any ministry more vulnerable than the power of human ego. And nothing purifies it like knowing you're doing what God wants you to do.

- 4) **TIMOTHY'S CHARACTER ASSESSED BY PAUL - Philippians 2:19-24** - "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. [20] For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. [21] They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. [22] But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. [23] I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, [24] and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also."

While all are equal in terms of receiving God's grace, ***all are not equal in terms of effectiveness in Christ's Kingdom***. Paul praised a trait in Timothy that we have already seen in previous passages - ***his selflessness in obeying Jesus***. As Paul surveyed the religious scene in Rome he noticed that most Christians ***professed*** a much deeper commitment to Jesus than they were willing to actually live out. You can sense the disappointment in Paul's words in **verse 20** - "For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare."

- 5) **INSTRUCTIONS TO TIMOTHY - 1 Timothy 4:12-16** - "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. [13] Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. [14] Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. [15] Practice these things, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. [16] Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers."

- a) ***He must live out what he expects to develop in others (12)*** - The teacher must always give ***example*** as well as ***information***. This will be the standard for stricter judgment on his own life - **James 3:1** - **“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”**

Paul seems to be telling Timothy that it's easy when you are young to want to change the world. From that intense desire usually erupts passionate but ***short-lived*** enthusiasm and ministry. It's another thing entirely - and a much ***wiser*** thing - to start with your own heart. Be tough on yourself and gracious with the failures of others. That's the path to long-term fruit and influence in Christ's kingdom.

- b) ***He must give his time to study and a knowledge of the truth of God's Word (13)*** - Paul stresses this as a ***main priority*** in Timothy's life. He mustn't be consumed with the administrative. This fits with the example laid down by the leaders in the early church - **Acts 6:1-2** - **“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. [2] And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.”**

- c) ***He must recognize and strive to excel in the specific area of his gifting (14).*** It would not be to anyone's profit for Timothy to work to be the jack-of-all-trades. No one is gifted in all areas. Labor most intently where you are fruitful.
- d) ***He must not only plan and start with enthusiasm, but continue and persevere in his ministry (15-16)*** - If Timothy wants to develop faith and strength in the congregation he must develop it himself. **Verse 16** is especially important - **“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”** It is in the ***continuing*** of his ministry priorities - his ability to endure without getting sidetracked - that there will come the real ***"saving"*** (the fullness of the work of God) in the lives of both himself and the church.