

Passing the Torch: The Call of the Church to Train Up the Next Generation

Not too long ago, Pastor Don spoke on “Living for the next generation”. He spoke from Judges 2 where he highlighted the need to live out your Christian faith for more than just yourself, but also for the generations that are under you. If you remember, Judges 2 outlines a scary reality of what happens when a group of people forget to invest in future generations. Judges 2:10 says “And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.” Tonight, I want to share a few practical steps to investing in the next generation, using Timothy as an example.

We are going to be looking at **2 Timothy 1:5-7** “**5** I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. **6** For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, **7** for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control”

1. Timothy is shaped by the people in his life

There is no doubt that we are all shaped by those around us, but even more so in our early age.

A) His family

First, we see that Timothy’s life was built upon his familial foundation. We see that in the 5th verse: “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.”

Timothy’s preparation for ministry started as a child through the teaching and the guidance of his family. He grew up in a household of “sincere faith”, which Timothy ends up finding for himself too.

We know from later on in 2nd Timothy that his family surrounded him with the word of God in his early years. **2 Timothy 3:14-15** “**14** 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.”

Timothy’s foundation for his life was fostered and built up as a young child, and it started within the walls of his own house. Parents, I want to encourage you today to not lose

sight of the call that has been placed on your lives. You have the opportunity to raise up members of the church.

Now, I don't have kids of my own yet, but I know that as parents, one of your goals is to invest in the future of your kids. You want to use money to invest into their futures. You work hard to provide for them, some working super long hours to make ends meet. You make sacrifices for their sake. You choose to celebrate their achievements and milestones rather than your own. Investing in your kids is something that brings you great joy.

As a parent though, I see in these verses that there's a special call to invest the word of God into your kids - to teach them and train them at a young age. Think about it, I bet Timothy's mother and grandmother never knew all of the lives Timothy would touch with the gospel in the future. They would've had no idea that he would be a well known person that we still read about in the bible today. They just invested and taught him, little by little, sowing those seeds in any way they could.

That's one of the beautiful things about children and youth.....they're at an age where they might not really know where they'll end up one day. You don't know how God is going to use them for His glory. You don't know whose lives they'll impact. But your job is to just keep sowing those seeds little by little. Teach them the truth of the bible. Instill values and character into them. Model what it means to serve the Lord with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. You just never know what God might grow those seeds into one day - it's worth your efforts.

B) Paul (his mentor)

Secondly we see here that Timothy is shaped by his mentor, Paul. **2 Timothy 1:6-7** "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, **7** for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control"

Paul plays a crucial role in the life of Timothy as his mentor. He helps to train and prepare Timothy for his ministry. He encourages him amidst the various difficulties and trials that Timothy encounters. He checks in on Timothy and gives him words of wisdom. He empowers Timothy to use his life for the glory of God. He tells Timothy to "fan into flame" the gifts that Timothy has been blessed with.

What a beautiful picture of discipleship this is. Paul, yes the Paul from the bible whose books we read, he took the time to invest in the life of a young man. Paul stood beside Timothy, ready to help him live out the calling that God had placed on Timothy's life.

I heard this quote recently from a podcast I listened to on youth group discipleship. It was a podcast advocating for small group time as a means to allow for discipleship to happen in a larger youth group. It says “church is not always done in rows, but rather in circles”. I take this to mean that while attending church is extremely important, there is a level of interaction and community that we can’t forget about. Discipleship doesn’t happen in its fullest form through a message like this. It doesn’t always happen in programs or events. It happens in small pockets of discussion. It happens in community and conversation with others, and I think this leads us to a more full picture of what “church” is.

This may sound strange coming from me, the youth pastor, but hear me out church. Our young people need mentors. You might say “well isn’t that your job as the youth pastor?” and my answer of course is yes, but unfortunately, I am only one person. The youth leaders and I work hard to connect with the youth, and we are implementing new things this fall to continue to allow for opportunities of discipleship, but we need you, the church, to join with us. We need people who are passionate about sharing their knowledge, who will encourage and empower the next generation. Youth groups are great, and I love that students have their own place to go with people their age to learn and worship, but discipling them and mentoring them is a whole body effort.

2. Timothy is given a purpose within the body of Christ

I see this in **2 Timothy 1:6-7** where it says “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, **7** for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control”.

I love this encouragement from Paul. He’s empowering a young Timothy to use his gifts for the sake of the gospel. He’s challenging Timothy to confidently live out his calling, and to bring glory to the name of the Lord. I don’t know how that lands with you, but as a young person, having someone speak empowering and encouraging words over you makes a difference. Paul shows us that there’s a difference between recognizing the gifts of the next generation, and encouraging them to use those gifts.

It can be easy to overlook these young people, assuming that their maturity maybe isn’t quite there, or that they don’t have enough knowledge of God to be able carry out different tasks or to be able to serve in different ways, but that doesn’t seem to be the heart of Paul by any means. Rather than counting Timothy out, he chooses to give him opportunities to learn and develop.

We have this verse up on the wall in the youth room... **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." I tell our youth all the time that it doesn't matter that they are young.....they can make a decision right where they are at to live for Jesus, and He will use them in ways they may have not thought possible. They don't need to wait for 5 years, or 10 years, but God can use them right now. Youth have such a unique opportunity to be used by God within the body of Christ. There's something very special about seeing young people serve the Lord with all their heart. There's a special type of encouragement that brings to our hearts. Are we actively finding ways to make room for them to do so?

For those of you who may not know, we have a student leadership team in junior high youth - it's called the Junior Youth Council (or JYC if you wanna sound cool). The JYC consists of 7 students, and they get to make the really important decisions within the group, like what desserts we should have for our Christmas banquet, or the types of pizza we should order for our overnighter. Secondary, but almost as important, they are my go to youth when someone new walks in the door. They are the ones who get to share with the group a little more. They are the ones who are seen as role models and leaders among their peers.

During our meetings, I started to teach them some of the skills that are required of leaders within both the youth group and the church as a whole. I gave one little lesson on the importance of welcoming new people who walk through our youth room doors. It was a funny discussion - we acted out different scenarios, we talked about how to approach people, we talked about the impact of a welcoming environment. And then I told them that from now on, when someone new walks in the doors, I will do my part to introduce myself, but afterwards, I'm coming to them with this new person to take in and welcome.

My heart was challenged and encouraged when I saw this group of students take this little lesson and put it into practice. One of the JYC members in particular had this incredible way of making new youth feel at home - youth who may have never stepped into a church before in their lives came back on a weekly basis. This group of students took this challenge and ran with it, they exceeded my expectations to say the least.

I pray that our church continues to look for ways to use the youth we have. I've seen it over and over again: all they need is an opportunity, a little bit of guidance and direction, and they will take whatever is at hand, and blow you away. Young people are looking for purpose in their lives...why not help them find it here at the church?

3. Timothy is humble and teachable

I wanted to quickly speak to the young people here....those of us who are in the young adults range and under. We have a responsibility in this whole picture as well. We could have all of the resources we need, we could have people lining up to disciple and train us, we could have God open the doors for opportunities to find our place within the church, but if the posture of our hearts is not right, it could all go to waste.

I was struck by these words in Acts 16 because they show the posture of Timothy's heart. **Acts 16:1-5** says "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."

This is Timothy's first encounter with Paul. Paul hears good things about Timothy, and he wants to bring him on board to join him in spreading the gospel.....or in other words, he involves young Timothy within the body of Christ. Now imagine for a minute you were in Timothy's place here....maybe you've heard of this guy Paul before, but he comes up to you for the first time, wanting you to join him in sharing the gospel to these Jewish people. Sounds great right? Until he then tells you that in order to be able to carry out this mission with him, you need to be circumcised....yikes!

Immediately, my mind goes to the verses in **1 Corinthians 9:19-23**, where Paul says "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. **20** To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. **21** To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. **22** To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. **23** I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings."

Pauls calls for Timothy to humble himself in this situation. His call is for Timothy to, just like these verses say, "become one under the law" even though the old covenantal sign of circumcision is no more. He calls Timothy to become a servant to others. I love that Timothy doesn't argue with Paul, he doesn't try to convince him that Paul was just old

and wasn't up to date with the next generation, he doesn't seem to hold anger or frustration in his heart. He simply humbles himself for the sake of the gospel - what a beautiful picture that is.

Please hear me when I say this, and know that I am also reminding myself of this too when I share it - God calls us to be humble and teachable towards those who are more spiritually mature than we. It can be so easy, and I know because I'm guilty of it too, to be dismissive of people who are older than us. It can be easy to disregard their way of thinking and living simply because "times are different now". We can chalk things up to the fact that older generations just don't get it....they didn't have technology like we do, their struggles as a young person are different than ours, and they're just too far removed from our age to understand what life is like.

But when we think like that, we miss the essential truth that the gospel never changes. Yes things may be different in the world around us, but God **never** changes. If we are unwilling to be humble, to be teachable, and to give ear to those who are wiser, we miss out on endless amounts of opportunities to learn about God. His truths don't change, the bible and its instruction hasn't changed, and the wisdom needed to apply it all to our lives hasn't changed. You may disagree at times, but we must be humble enough to at least consider what they have to say. It takes wisdom to recognize that it is impossible to be right in every single way of thinking.

I pray that this church will train up young people who are hungry for the wisdom of generations prior, and humble enough to accept it when the time comes.

In closing, I want to say that Timothy's faith and ministry didn't just appear out of nowhere. He was shaped by his family, he was mentored by Paul, he was given a place and purpose to live out his faith, and he was humble and teachable along the way. So here's the question we are left with this evening: will you help to raise and train up the next generation in our church? Investing in the next generation HAS to be the mission of the church as a whole.

Imagine 10/20 years from now....some of the young people here will be leaders, pastors, missionaries, parents, Sunday school teachers, and Christian witnesses wherever they go. They will be the ones with main roles as the church, as the body of Christ. What they will be depends, in part, on how we invest in them today.

Pastor Don famously says "if you're here and you're under the age of 30.... But if you're here and you're over the age of 30, I want to ask, what can you do to invest in the next generation? Can you pray for them, can you encourage them when you see them

...serving, can you get to know them when you see them here week after week, can you mentor or guide or teach them, can you be a listening ear to them, can you create a new opportunity to use them within the church?

As I was writing this message, I was thinking back on all the people who have played a part in my faith journey. Countless people have prayed over my life, so many teachers and pastors have taught me from the bible, my parents have demonstrated what it means to value Jesus, I've had the opportunity to serve in the church, and I've been mentored by different church and youth leaders along the way.

My life, although not perfect by any means, is a result of many people making little investments into me. I'm so grateful that I have had a church to come alongside me, and one that still does to this day. I look forward to seeing how God will continue to use this church to pass our faith on to generations to come.