

## **Lesson Supplemental – The Spiritual Journey of Timothy**

“Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe” – 1 Timothy 4:12 [NASB]

In this rather popular passage from Paul’s letter to Timothy, Paul is not giving young people in the church a green light to throw a fit, or to make demands for leadership / decision making authority that they may or may not yet be ready to embrace. Neither is Paul admonishing adults in the church for their naïve view towards the skills and talents of the younger generations. The key part of this verse is not in 4:12a, but 4:12b – that “...in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, (to) show yourself an example of those who believe.” Note also that in this verse, Paul did not qualify who the “those who believe” people are, which means that they could be both young and old.

To “show ourselves as an example” is the practical definition of “influence.” In the application of “influence,” there exist the opportunity to both influence down (mentorship) or influence up (disciple-up), where the principles of “influencing” are often embraced as part of any discipleship training programs. To dissect this principle further, the dynamics of such discipleship training through “influence” should be recognized as having two parts – the one doing the influencing, and the one being influenced. Such is the case that we can see in the relationship between Paul and Timothy.

Much has already been written on the spiritual journeys of the apostle Paul, with countless character studies and commentaries on his missionary journeys and “adventures” – and rightly so. However, much can be learned about the principles of discipleship when we take a look at the relationship between Paul and Timothy -- through the life and lens of Timothy.

The purpose of this paper is to document this journey and highlight key moments in the spiritual development of Timothy through various stages of his life. Through hermeneutical observations, principles for a model discipleship program will be derived.

### **Timothy’s Background and Calling**

According to Scripture, Timothy grew up in the Lycaonia cities of Lystra, in Phrygia (Acts 16:1). He has a Jewish mother (Acts 16:1) named Eunice (2 Tim 1:5), and he grew up under the care of both his mother and his grandmother Lois (2 Tim 1:5); both of whom influenced him to develop strong sincere faith along with knowledge of Hebrew Scripture (2 Tim 3:15). His father is a Gentile (Acts 16:1).

Sometime around AD 49, two strangers came into town (Acts 14:6), preached the gospel, healed a man lamed from birth (Acts 14:8), and convinced many to come to faith in Christ (Acts 14:8-18). Timothy was likely one of those to have come into faith in Christ at that time – along with his mother and grandmother. This inference can be made since Paul considers Timothy as his true son in the faith (1 Tim 1:2), which suggests that Timothy was a direct convert from Paul’s message.

Shortly after, some Jews from neighboring towns came, stoned one of these strangers nearly to death – the one who was preaching (Paul) – and dragged him out of the city (Acts 14:19). As a result, Timothy never had a chance to meet this stranger in person at that time. This was evidenced by the fact that Paul did not know Timothy until he returned to this city two year later (Acts 16:1). Between the period when this stranger was dragged out of town, and his return two years later with Silas, Timothy evidently made a reputation for himself (Acts 16:2).

Sometime around AD 51, the stranger whose message converted Timothy came back into town, and meets Timothy for the first time, introducing himself as Paul, the apostle. Timothy had impressed Paul so much that Paul extended an invitation for Timothy to join him on his current missionary journey. However, since in their current mission, they will be visiting many cities with Jewish Christians, in order to avoid conflict and create obstacles to ministry, Paul asked for Timothy to be

circumcised, and Timothy agreed (Acts 16:3). Paul likely would have explained to Timothy, his mother, and his grandmother that this act is not a spiritual act, that it has nothing to do with his salvation (Acts 15:22-29). This is more for practical purposes in order to avoid conflict for their mission.

Before Timothy left home with Paul and Silas on their journey, he was ordained by his hometown elders (1 Tim 4:14), making him a minister of Christ by the testimony of many.

### **Timothy's Journey to Ministry Leadership**

Having now been ordained as a minister, Timothy, Paul, and Silas would journey through Asia, ultimately teaming up with Luke in Troas (Luke 16:10). The four of them then made their way across the Aegean Sea into Macedonia, where their ministry to the Gentiles would begin, starting in Philippi. After Paul laid the foundation for teaching and preaching, Timothy would be left here in this city with Luke to continue this work, as Paul and Silas heads over to Thessalonica to plant more churches (Acts 17:4,10).

Some time later, Timothy would hear of trouble occurring in Thessalonica that would lead Paul and Silas to leave that city for Berea. He was then instructed to meet Paul and Silas in Berea (Acts 17:14), where he and Silas would stay to help calm the tensions in the region, as Paul heads down to Athens (Acts 17:14). A short time after, Timothy and Silas would join Paul in Athens (Acts 17:16).

It was around this time (~ AD 51) that Paul would pen the letter of 1 Thessalonians, and he tasks Timothy to deliver this letter to the church (1 Thes 3:2). Timothy would then stay in Thessalonica for some time before being joined by Silas, where they would both head over to join Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5). Paul was evidently not yet comfortable for Timothy to journey to Corinth by himself.

Approximately two months later, early in AD 52, Paul would learn that false teaching had infiltrated the church in Thessalonica. Believers there were led to believe that the end of the world is here, Christ has returned! This prompted Paul to pen another letter to the church (2 Thessalonians), and he tasked Timothy with the responsibility to deliver that letter. Timothy, effectively, acted as the liaison between the church in Thessalonica and Paul during this period.

At this point, Scripture lost track of the whereabouts of Timothy.

Timothy would re-appear again a few years later during Paul's third missionary journey, one that spans the years AD 53-57. By this time, Paul was in Ephesus, and he needed someone to act as a liaison between him and the church in Corinth (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10). Much like his role as the liaison between Paul and the church in Thessalonica, Timothy fulfilled this same function between Paul and the church in Corinth. All told, at least four – possibly five – letters were written by Paul to the church in Corinth – but only two were preserved by the Holy Spirit for us today. Timothy did the errand runs for each of these letters.

Finally, sometime between AD 56-57, Paul would send Timothy to Macedonia with Erastus (Acts 19:22). Paul would eventually meet up with him in Macedonia, as the pair met up with six others to head to Troas (Acts 20:4-5). This is where Timothy would be stationed for some time, doing ministry with an assigned function at the local church, as Paul continues his itinerant ministry travels elsewhere.

A few years later, Timothy would learn that Paul has been imprisoned in Rome – Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, around AD 60 (Acts 27-28). It was during this period from AD 60-62 – while under house arrest in Rome – that Paul penned the "prison epistles" of Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. Timothy would visit Paul during this period, and was commonly believed to be the one who had delivered these letters to the various churches (cf Phil 2:19).

After Paul was released from prison in Rome, Timothy would visit him again and accompanied him to Ephesus, where Paul left him there to pastor the church in Ephesus. Paul then continued his itinerant ministry travels to Macedonia.

While in Macedonia, Paul would hear reports of Timothy's work at Ephesus, reports that concerned him enough to pen his first letter to Timothy (1 Timothy) as an encouragement. The letter was penned and sent to Timothy around AD 63 to assist the young Timothy in his pastoral responsibilities at the church.

Timothy would stay in Ephesus and serve as its pastor. He would not hear from Paul again until four years later when Paul penned his second letter to Timothy (2 Timothy) just before his death in AD 67. Paul's second letter to Timothy was more as a colleague rather than as a mentor. By this point, Timothy's spiritual journey have more than come full circle, as he himself very likely is involved in mentorship of others.

According to church traditions, Timothy would remain as pastor in Ephesus for the remainder of his life, and he would die a martyr's death defending his faith sometime around AD 95.

### **Key Moments in the Spiritual Journey of Timothy**

Reviewing Timothy's journey from a young believer brought up according to Jewish traditions, to become a key player in God's kingdom by the end of his life, the following hermeneutical observations can be made as stages of Timothy's spiritual journey:

- **He was raised with sovereign foundations** – Christianity was new to the world at the time, and the only knowledge of our God rests with Old Testament Scriptures. Timothy's mother and grandmother raised him from childhood to be well versed with the Word of God that was available at the time.
- **He was recruited for his teach-ability** – While still young, the community where he lived spoke well of him, inferring that he presented himself well with humility and respect for others – traits of someone who is teachable.
- **He served as a true understudy** – His training under Paul may seemed awkward in the initial stages, as their first few mission stops ended with disappointments. Once in Macedonia, however, Paul seems to start something, then leaves Timothy to "make it work" while Paul goes elsewhere. Timothy didn't bail; as he kept on working on the foundation laid by Paul. This repetitive act of monotonous activity solidified and strengthened his skills in the teaching and preaching ministries.
- **He graduated from an understudy to a liaison** – After proving responsible for the care and proper communication of the Word of God, his role transitioned from an understudy into a liaison between Paul and the various church plants. These were Paul's ministries, and Timothy effectively represented Paul to the churches in Thessalonica and Corinth; and possibly others.
- **He transitions from a liaison to an advocate** – With Paul under house arrest in Rome and no longer able to share his message to the various Gentile regions, Timothy took his message – the prison epistles – and shared it with the churches in Asia. Timothy became Paul's advocate of the message to the Gentile churches.
- **His journey to maturity ends as a colleague** – Paul's final letter to Timothy addresses him more as a colleague than a mentee. Timothy himself would live a martyr's life, living for the cause of the Gospel of Christ.

From these stages of Timothy's development, we can discern the following principles, traits and characteristics – a model for discipleship – for Christians today:

- **Step 1: Be grounded in the Word of God** – Our spiritual journey begins by being grounded in the Word of God. This does not mean that we need to know about all the theological nuances of Scripture interpretation. This simply means we need to know the Bible.
- **Step 1a: Embrace and adopt Christ characteristics of humility** – Humility is at the very heart of teach-ability. Without humility, we will not be able to learn, and thus, we will not be able to grow. In order to grow, we must be humble. This step should take place concurrent with our study into the Word of God.
- **Step 2: Find a mentor, and develop the skill of teaching** – In order to be skillful in anything, practice makes perfect. Once we know the Word of God, and have embrace the attitude of being teach-able, our training and journey continues by practicing the art of teaching the Word. We can only become good at “something” by doing the “something” repeatedly. However, the goal here is not to become a Biblical scholar and be able to engage in apologetics. The goal is simply to be able to communicate the simple message of the Gospel clearly and confidently. Find a mentor at this stage to keep us accountable and to guide us in the proper understanding of the Word.
- **Step 3: Work with your mentor to develop the practical aspects of ministry** – At this point in our spiritual journey, the goal is to translate our knowledge of the Word into practical ministry applications in life, and be able to do so with others (to influence others). Assuming that we do not yet have our own ministry calling, we learn the practical aspects of ministry by promoting the ministry of our mentor. This is what Timothy was doing as the Liaison – promoting the ministry of Paul.
- **Step 4: Become an Advocate of the Gospel** – Having enough practice teaching the Word and applying the Word in life, our final task is to become an advocate of the Word. This phase could begin by furthering the ministry of your mentor (as Timothy did with Paul) or to seek out your own ministry calling through prayers and validations led by the Holy Spirit.

Beyond step 4, each of us could pursue a deeper calling to engage in the gospel ministries more intimately and deeply. It is worth noting that not everyone will be called to be a pastor, an elder, a deacon, a teacher, a missionary, a church planter, or other formally defined roles of ministry – ministry boundaries defined by our world today. However, every Christian is called to be an advocate of the Gospel message in some way through the Great Commission mandate (Matt 28:19-20). Not all of us will walk the path that Timothy walked, ending in a martyr’s death. But all of us must pursue the path to become an advocate of the Word of God, and allow the Holy Spirit to work through the life of others through us. This pursuit – to be an advocate of the Gospel message – is the ultimate goal of discipleship training.