

Paul and Timothy...Master, Mentor and Faithful Follower

2 Timothy 2:1-2

The ancient Greek physician, Hypocrites, the Father of Medicine, was a marvelous model of mentoring. Here are some of the words of his famous “Hippocratic Oath”:

I swear by Apollo the Physician, the Aesclepius and Health and All-Heal and all the gods and goddesses that, according to my ability and judgment, I will keep this oath and stipulation: To reckon him who taught me this art equally dear as my parents, to share my substance with him and relieve his necessities if required; to regard his offspring as on the same footing with my own brothers, and to teach them this art if they should wish to learn it, without fee or stipulation, and that by precept, lecture, and every other mode of instruction, I will impart knowledge of the art to my own sons and to those of my teachers, and to disciples bound by a stipulation and oath, according to the law of medicine. . . .

Hypocrites knew that what he had in the art of medicine was a good thing, worth passing along to future physicians. He took seriously his responsibility to form relationships with learners whom he could mentor.

That is precisely the relationship St. Paul developed with Timothy. The apostle knew that all he had learned dare not die with him. He had to be a mentor to others who could pick up the baton and continue the race. Out of Paul’s conviction came the very special biblical relationship of Paul and Timothy, a mentor and learner. Their relationship is nowhere better summarized than in 2 Timothy 2:1-2:

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

It is that mentor/learner relationship that I delight to celebrate because I have benefited greatly from such relationships. In fact, there are days when I wonder if there is anything I do as a pastor that is original with me. It

seems as if almost everything is the product of something I once learned from some mentor along the way.

I grew up in the home of a pastor. My father was pastor of the same church in Bloomfield, New Jersey, for 33 years, so I learned from him the value of long-term pastorates. My youth pastor, Robert Dugan, Jr., impressed on me as a junior high that ministry for Jesus Christ ought to be done with excellence. Seminary president Vernon Grounds, a long-time family friend, modeled an astonishing correlation between scholarship and social action and taught me that a Christian can be both credible and compassionate. The senior pastor under whose ministry I entered the pastorate and was ordained, Jack Estep, showed me what team ministry is all about. He treated me as a colleague and as an equal when I was 22 years old and just 2 months out of university.

Not that mentors are responsible for what their students do! The first time I served communion was in a little church in central New Jersey. I stood at the communion table and did what I had always seen my father do when he served communion. I picked up the linen cloth before taking the tray. What I didn’t know was that when my father did it the bread was under the cloth. When I did it the bread was in the cloth . . . and I dumped it all on the floor!

I will accept blame for my mistakes, but I must give credit for success to my mentors. Certainly that must have been Timothy’s testimony as he reflected on Paul’s influence on his life.

From their friendship we have lots to learn. So, let’s take a look at the friendship of discipleship, especially as seen in Paul the Mentor and Timothy the Learner.

Paul spoke from experience when he told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1 to “*be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*” Paul knew the kind of grace that takes the chief of sinners and turns him into the premier apostle. Paul knew the grace of God that gives words when standing before kings and comfort when beaten in prison. He

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knew the grace that answers prayers for healing in the life of others but three times refused to heal Paul's own malady. Paul knew from experience what the grace of Jesus Christ is all about . . . and that Timothy's best strategy was not to find strength in himself but in Christ Jesus.

We all need mentors who have experienced God's grace. Who can better help the mother whose child has died than another mother who has walked that same bitter path and there discovered Jesus Christ in the midst of her sorrow? Who understands discouragement or depression or turmoil like those who have been there and experienced the grace of Jesus Christ in the worst of times and come out safely on the other side? When a business is booming or busting, where better can we turn for help and guidance than to some fellow Christian who has traveled the same path before us? We all need experienced Christians who, in our weakness, tell us to "*be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*" Experienced Christians . . . those whose words are backed by their own strength in Jesus' grace!

But Paul the mentor went beyond experience to example. He knew that it wasn't enough to offer counsel. He had to show Timothy how to live by grace and how to teach the truth. Read Acts 16 and you will discover that Paul took Timothy along to Philippi to see how it happened.

Timothy saw how Paul evangelized in a place where there was no synagogue. He listened as Paul taught by the riverside. He watched as Lydia and her household was baptized. He stayed with Paul as Lydia's guest. He walked down the street at Paul's side as a slave girl shouted after them. He took it all in when Paul commanded, "*In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her*", and Timothy saw his first exorcism. He observed Paul's response as a miracle precipitated a riot and the apostle was illegally beaten and thrown in jail. He heard those in the dungeons singing hymns. He experienced the tremors of the earthquake. He watched as the jailer in the middle of the night became a Christian and a disciple of Christ. He noted Paul's brilliant use of his Roman citizenship. His mentor set the example for him.

But that was just the beginning. On to Berea, Athens, Thessalonica and Corinth they went. He was there through the best and the worst, seeing how God's man lives by God's grace in every circumstance. For the rest of his life Timothy constantly reflected back on all that Paul had showed him and, as a result, he knew how Paul would respond if he were in the situations in which Timo-

thy later found himself. Paul's example revolutionized Timothy's life and ministry.

In the movie *Camelot* there's a scene when King Arthur's kingdom is crumbling around him. The equality and justice of the Round Table has been destroyed. His knights are fighting one another. His beloved wife, Gweneivere, is in love with Arthur's best friend and once trusted comrade, Sir Lancelot. The utopia of Camelot has become a nightmare and the king doesn't know what to do. As he paces alone in the forest he remembers the mentor of his youth, Merlin the Magician. It was Merlin who taught him all he knew. So he asks, "What would Merlin do?" The solution to his dilemma was to determine what Merlin would do in a situation like the one that was destroying Camelot.

That is precisely what Timothy must have done in the years following Paul's martyrdom when Timothy was the pastor at Ephesus. When problems arose in the church he would pray and ask for God's direction, but he would also try and figure out what Paul would do. When dealing with carnal Christians in the Ephesian church, when discouraged by opposition, when faced with demons, when he, too, finally faced his own death as a martyr under Emperor Domitian, Timothy followed the example that had been set by his mentor Paul.

More than seminars, schools and books we today need mentors like Paul to show us by example what it means to "*be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*" And when you find such a mentor, follow him/her everywhere. See what she does. See how he lives. As Paul said, "*Follow me as I follow Christ.*"

But there is more to mentoring than experience and example. In order to impact the life of another there must also be expectations. This is often a key ingredient in the life of a church. When high expectations are placed on us and mentors enable us to meet those expectations there are often great accomplishments. But when there are low or no expectations there is usually little accomplished.

This is a principle for all of life. It applies to raising children, coaching sports or supervising employees. Expect a lot and enable them to meet those expectations. This creates a positive cycle because when expectations are met the followers feel good about themselves and their leaders. Then both are ready for another round of higher expectations.

Paul expected a great deal of Timothy. He expected him to take what he had learned from Paul and entrust it

to faithful men who would then be able to teach others also. Imagine the magnitude of Paul’s expectation. The man who met Jesus on the road to Damascus, who carried the gospel out of Asia and into Europe, who penned much of the New Testament and established churches across the empire expected Timothy to be the connecting link to future generations. He expected Timothy to train others. He expected Timothy the learner to become Timothy the mentor.

Early in their relationship Paul had seen great potential in Timothy. In Timothy Paul saw someone who was bright and alert, someone who was zealous, who had a heart for God. This is the responsibility of a mentor—to see potential, to see in someone what others may not see, to dream dreams and have hopes.

Modern analysts of mentoring often say that an individual may have a mentor until about age 40. Then the individual ought to become a mentor. It’s not that anyone should stop learning on his or her 40th birthday, but this is a natural changing point from primarily receiving to primarily giving

If Paul or any other mentor were to have unreasonable expectations, or expectations without providing experience and example, that would be the height of cruelty and stupidity. The three must go together! That is the point of Ephesians 6:4: *“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the lord.”* Fathers are not to have unreasonable expectations of their children without providing the corollary discipline and instruction. But, when a father or a mentor combines high expectations with enablement to meet those expectations, then we have a man or woman of God in the making!

Paul saw in Timothy the potential for greatness. Early on he sensed that this young man was worth pouring his life into. Perhaps Paul was God’s agent in evangelizing Timothy although that is not absolutely certain. The first mention of Timothy is in Acts 16:1 where he was already described as a disciple. His spiritual heritage was positive. Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:5: *“I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”*

Become a mentor who sees the potential, encourages perseverance in others and gives them every opportunity to practice so that together we and generations to come may be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

There had been a prophecy spoken in the church about Timothy’s potential. We find it in 1 Timothy 1:18-19: *“Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience.”* We see in 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6 that it was on the basis of this potential that Paul and the council of elders laid hands on Timothy for ministry.

Potential isn’t everything but it is high on the list. Mentors need to be on the lookout for those who have a heart for God and the gifts for leadership. We need to diligently seek out those whom God has specially touched and give to them our experience and example and expectations.

A few years ago I bragged to a Bethel seminary professor about how well the seminary interns from Wooddale Church had succeeded in ministry after leaving us. He quietly suggested that we had picked the kind of interns who probably would have succeeded whether they had been at Wooddale Church or not! I think he may have been trying to correct me, but I took it as a compliment . . . that we are good at seeing potential!

Imagine the impact if every church leader found just one high potential Timothy and poured in their experience, example and expectations! Then you could say, *“My son (my daughter), be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say . . . entrust to reliable men who will be qualified to teach others also.”*

One reason why Timothy benefited so greatly from this relationship to Paul is because he persevered. He hung in there with the apostle year after year and through ups and downs. He traveled with Paul from city to city and church to church. Timothy stayed by his teacher whether Paul stood before political leaders or was chased out of town. He put up with Paul’s sometimes abrasive personality and accepted with grace Paul’s lavish compliments and admiration.

Timothy was a marked contrast to Demas whom Paul describes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:9: *“. . . Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.”*

Learning takes time and Timothy took the time to learn right. He started with Paul and he finished with Paul. That's why 2000 years later we can celebrate their biblical friendship.

Roy Kruse has been an elder and a teacher at Wooddale Church for a number of years. He grew up as the son of Plymouth Brethren missionaries to Zambia. His parents retired to their native England and his mother eventually died.

His father returned to Zambia where he had long labored as a Bible translator. He wrote a letter to his son reflecting on a verse Roy had sent to his dad. The verse referred to the God of Jacob. Mr. Kruse wrote back that he "would rather be a Jacob than a Solomon. Solomon started so well but ended so poorly. Jacob started so poorly but ended so well."

That's the way Timothy was. He persevered. He finished well. That's how I want to be. I have been shaken over Christian leaders who have soared to breathtaking heights of fame and influence but have not persevered. They have not finished well. I would rather be a Jacob than a Solomon. I would rather be a Timothy than a Demas. I want to be a learner who had more than potential. Lots of people have potential. I want to be a learner who has perseverance!

Add one more ingredient to the discipleship relationship of Paul the Mentor and Timothy the Learner. Add practice. Timothy was much more than an observer and theoretician. He also was a practitioner. Paul gave him lots of opportunities. Both in Philippi and Berea, Paul left Timothy behind to work with the new churches. We can read about that in Acts 17:14. When Timothy caught up with Paul in Athens the apostle sent him off to Thessalonica to use his gifts of church building and exhortation. It is too much to call Timothy a co-author of Paul's epistles but his name is included in the greetings of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians and Romans.

Timothy was a doer and Paul was the kind of mentor who let him (made him?) do! What a fantastic combination . . . a mentor with experience, example and expectations put together with a learner who has potential, perseverance and practice!

I wonder what went through the minds of these men as the dynamics of their relationship were lived out over the years. There must have been times when Paul wanted to do things himself which he instead assigned to Timothy. Timothy must have been scared sometimes or resentful or at

times anxious as the assistant to the apostle. Surely Paul could have handled the churches at Philippi and Berea and Thessalonica better than Timothy. Or could he?

As a teenager I loved to water ski. My father had a boat and Charleen and friends and I would spend all day out on the lake skiing. I timed the turns the others took to make sure I got as much ski time as they did. When our children were old enough we bought a ski boat. I went first to show them how to do it. I showed off with the slalom while they struggled to get out of the water on two skis.

My, how that has changed! Now they do things I'd never attempt to do! Oh, I still take an occasional turn but I am more and more satisfied just driving the boat or even watching from the dock. I delight in what they can do more than in what I can do. I'm proud of their abilities.

I take the same delight in my younger colleagues in ministry. I thrill at what they can do. Their ideas are often far better than anything I'd ever think. I enjoy their sermons and am thrilled when they win others to Christ.

Was that not what Paul the Mentor experienced with Timothy the Learner? Did he not grow as Timothy grew? Did he not increasingly find greater delight in his spiritual son's accomplishments than he did in his own?

It was for Paul and Timothy a wonderful bond together in Christ. They grew together in a biblical friendship. And, it was a relationship well worth emulating! We, too, can grow . . . on both sides of the relationship. Become a mentor who sees the potential, encourages perseverance in others and gives them every opportunity to practice so that together we and generations to come may be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

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