

Sunday May 2nd, 2021

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Series: People We All Need in Our Lives

Sermon: "We All Need a Timothy"

I don't know about calling it a fairy tale romance, but none the less, romance bloomed in the traveling circus. The bearded lady, and the circus strong man, fell in love and got married. Soon enough the bearded lady discovered she was pregnant, and the entire circus community was overjoyed at the impending birth. One day, the owner of the circus, who was also the ring master, stopped by to enquire how the bearded lady was doing.

"How are you feeling", he asked? "Very well" she replied. "I was wondering" the ring master continued, "Do you care if your baby is a boy or a girl?" "Not at all" the future mother replied. "All we care about is that the baby is healthy and can fit into the canon." I guess the couple had hopes their child would follow them into the family business. Many of us feel the same way about our careers or businesses. We hope someone will follow in our footsteps.

But hoping this will happen, and making it happen, are two very different things. This brings us to the focus of our subject for today as we examine essential relationships in our lives, as originally outlined by Leonard Sweet in his book *11 Indispensable Relationships you can't be without*. Today we hopefully will see the importance, and value, of having a Timothy in our lives. Yes, we are using the Timothy of the New Testament as our template for today's subject.

A "Timothy" is a protégé, an heir, an apprentice, a younger less mature version of themselves. (usually, although a movie a few years ago called the *Intern* starring Robert De Niro, is turning that on its head) A Timothy is someone who knows your ways and thinking, better than most people, and maybe more so than we are comfortable with. The historical Timothy was raised by a single parent (his mother) and by his grandmother; both very devout women.

At the time Timothy joins Paul in his missionary journeys, he was probably about 16 years old. Paul had a great deal of fondness for Timothy, for he calls him "my son". It is the same term of endearment Peter uses for his protégé John Mark. (1 Peter 5:13) Timothy was a keen learner and hard worker which aided in his development. A Timothy is different than a pupil, or someone to supervise. The relationship is much deeper than mere teacher and student. And when the relationship works, it is a life enriching thing.

The idea about having a Timothy in our lives, raises a question before us today; will you have any heirs? Do you have someone who will inherit your work, your legacy? Will you have an heir, not just of your possessions, but of your life and soul? We all know that finding heirs to our money and possessions is quite an easy thing. We also know that when it comes to estates, family feuds are bound to arise. "Where there is a will there is a relative".

But does anyone clamour to take over your service to God. Who takes over the family business; I mean God's family business? Alan Jamison writes about it this way. "Like Abram, the question that we too, must consider, is whether we will have descendants. Not children in our own line, but descendants in faith and life. Will we love and care for others in such a way that they become descendants?"

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People to whom, and through whom, the lessons of faith we have learned are passed on. And the richness of our experience of God's presence and even our sense of God absence is carried." (Journeying in faith) As I contemplated Jamison's words, in the back of my mind rose up a rather unsettling thought.

I am beginning to wonder if the decline of interest, and participation in churches, can be the direct result of too many Christians, for too long, not cultivating relationships with "Timothys". For too long we thought our children would simply soak up the faith by exposure. Drag them to church long enough, and they will stick to it like glue. The problem, is that many children and teens grow up coming to church, but never knowing why.

Why do mom and dad commit to this service every week? Just because we faithfully bring them to church, doesn't mean they know what it means to walk the Christian path. Keith Green many years ago said in one of his songs, "Going to church doesn't make you a Christian anymore than going to McDonalds doesn't make you a hamburger." One of the saddest demonstrations of the inadequacy of depending on familial ties to help our children take up our faith, comes from 1 Samuel. Eli, a very devout man, was the high priest in the tabernacle, and because the tribe of Levi were the ones entrusted with such service, Eli's sons were being groomed by Eli to take over from him.

But in 1 Samuel 2 we read that Eli's sons were wicked. They stole from the sacrifices, and took advantage of women coming to worship. These guys were bad news all around. Eli pleaded with his sons to change from their wicked ways, but they refused. Verse 25 is very scary, "But Eli's sons wouldn't listen to their father, for the Lord was already planning to put them to death." Eli's true protégé, and heir, was not his own flesh and blood, but the young prophet Samuel.

Paul himself was a Timothy, or a protégé, in his early years. We might remember that Paul was apprenticed to Gamaliel, (Gam-may-lee-ole) perhaps the most important rabbi of his day. Gamaliel was bestowed the name "Rabboni" meaning "over teacher". The implication was that Gamaliel was a teacher of teachers. We also know that Gamaliel himself was a protégé to his father Hillel, who is considered one of the most important interpreters of the Torah.

One interesting story from the book of Acts, has Gamaliel counselling patience to Saul, who was bent on stoning the followers of Jesus. (Acts 5:38-39) His relationship to Timothy was very valuable to Paul. Have you noticed that when Paul begins many of his letters, he sends greetings from himself and Timothy? The reality is, Paul knew that if the church was to survive, and thrive, there would need to be a whole new generation of leaders.

I think there is some truth to something I once heard a church leader say; in that the church is only one generation away from oblivion. Meaning we must always be preparing the next generation to take over the work of kingdom building. Every great leader, and teacher, has at some point been a Timothy. The bible is full of examples. Elisha was apprenticed to Elijah, Joshua to Moses.

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But interestingly enough, Joshua did not have a Timothy, and the consequences to Israel were tragic. When Joshua died, there was no heir, and the people of Israel entered the time of Judges. A time marked of brutality, and violence without equal.

In our more modern history, we can examine the life of former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, whose political career was ended in 2006 when he suffered a massive stroke. When he was the Israeli defence minister and agriculture minister, he undertook to build Jewish settlements, and mercilessly defeat Israel's enemies. To some, namely the Israeli people, he was a hero, and to others like Yasser Arafat, he was a war criminal.

In one of history's biggest surprises, when Sharon became Prime Minister, he made an abrupt turn around which surprised everyone. He undertook to create peace with his Arab neighbours and the Palestinians, going so far as to demolish the settlements he had originally ordered built. When asked about the change of heart, Sharon said, "You see things from here that you don't see from there."

With incredible courage to admit he was wrong; Sharon began cleaning up the mess he had made. Going so far as to even leave his own party who refused to follow his lead. Just as he was making considerable progress in the peace process, his stroke ended his career, and with no protégé to step up, Israel was thrown once more into chaos.

The need for Timothys in our lives is not about getting help for our projects, although that is one benefit. But sometimes the work we are called to cannot be accomplished in our lifetime. Much like those cathedrals we see in Europe that took decades to build, we need Timothys to wield the hammer, and lay the stones after we are no longer able to carry on. Otherwise, the work can remain unfinished, and will ultimately degrade over time.

For the relationship with a Timothy to work well, an investment of time and presence is needed. Timothy was not the only protégé Paul had (Titus, Epaphroditus, Silas, Luke et al). In each case Paul invited them to travel with him, to watch what he did, and to learn the message he was spreading. Sometimes he even gave them assignments to test how they were developing. At all times, these protégés carried Paul's authority and name.

Have you noticed a pattern in the bible when God calls and sends? Most often God sends his servants out in pairs or groups. Not always, but quite often. Jesus sent his 70 disciples out in pairs. Paul rarely traveled alone. The work of God's Kingdom, seems more vibrant and dynamic as a collaborative effort with partners or traveling companions. Unfortunately, the current model of churches is one of lone wolf pastors encouraging lone wolf parishioners.

The corporate world has moved away from this, especially in the leading-edge technology world. Isolated desks, and cubicles, are replaced by open areas to encourage collaboration and creativity and to discourage possessiveness. I need to be clear here in stating that I am not talking about making clones of ourselves. Joshua was not like Moses. Timothy was not a clone of Paul. Our Timothy's are unique individuals.

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They have a different history than we have, and they have had, and will have, a different experience of God. They will have different skills, interests, and most importantly a different voice. When I say voice, I am not referring to the tone or whether someone is a tenor or soprano. I am talking about the protégé's ability to speak for themselves, to contribute to the work in their own unique way.

As a Pastor, I have had occasion to supervise new pastor's starting out in ministry. Actually, Elaine, your former pastor, was one I supervised. It is natural for many of them, to ask simple questions about how to do things, especially how to prepare sermons. A task that is very challenging even for the experienced among pastors, especially week in and week out.

One of the things I have stressed with each of those I have worked with, is that they must find their own style, or voice. It is a valuable thing to listen to, and study other more experienced preachers, but to be truly effective, one must embrace the uniqueness that is God given in all of us. Now to be fair, this finding your voice takes time, with lots of stumbles along the way, but all of us must find it.

This is essential for preaching, but it also applies to the whole picture of ministry. How I prepare for Sunday, how I craft sentences, how the bible speaks to me, how God speaks to me, is unique to me and unique to each of you. For someone else to try and replicate it is foolish; they are not me. Nor were they ever called to be like me. And that is a very, very good thing. People like to say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. No, its not!

No greater compliment can be given to us than when the next generation we have been mentoring in the faith, steps up and takes the reins, but in a different, imaginative way. Like in August 1953 when a truck driver arrived at a Memphis recording studio and announced he wanted to start a singing career. The secretary at the front desk asked, "What do you sound like?" "I don't sound like nobody," answered Elvis Presley.

One of the greatest harms we inflict on our protégés is misleading them into thinking more means "better". In our post-modern culture, we are, at every turn, being told that more means better. This is especially true with technology. More as better, means doing what we've been doing, except doing it bigger, faster, and with added value. More as better is a profit generating juggernaut. Just think about how many iPhones there have been. I think we are up to ten now.

Convincing our Timothy's, and ourselves, that more is better by stressing: more folks in the pews, more technology in worship, more focus on mass marketing; means the ministry is simply spinning its wheels. Robert Venturi noted architect, is quoted as saying "more is a bore". More as better has given us megachurches, Microsoft, and all kinds of spiritual inventory tests. This is not always a bad thing, but it stunts us.

What we need to instill in our Timothy's, and ourselves, is that more can also mean different. Leonard Sweet writes that in the King James and Revised Standard and NIV versions of the bible have translated the Greek word as "more".

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Other translations offer better alternatives which are closer to the truth. They translate “more” as “out of the ordinary”, or “unusual” or “remarkable”. I truly believe that more as different, is what Jesus had in mind when he spoke, of abundant living. A lack of appreciation and cultivation of imagination is also why Timothy's quit. They are looking for more as different. But far too often, we Pauls, stifle the imagination. We demand our Timothy's worship as we did, and minister as we do.

Lord Alfred Douglas belongs to an exclusive club, Mark Twain being another member. Lord Douglas had the rare opportunity to read his own obituary. Taking the February 4, 1921 edition of the Evening News, Douglas was halted by the following headline. “Sudden death of Lord Alfred Douglas-Found dead in bed by maid. As if this were not bad enough, what followed was worse.

“A brilliant and unhappy career is ended...The charity which is fitting at all times, but most fitting when we are speaking of the newly-dead, urges that much should be forgiven to this poor, bewildered man, who, with all his gifts, will perhaps be remembered by the scandals and the quarrels in which he involved himself.”

Douglas was 51 when he read this, and he was furious. He sued the paper for defamation. He claimed the obituary left out what he deemed significant about his life. What about his poetry, his horsemanship, his fame? Douglas won his lawsuit but history has proven the obituary to be correct. If your obituary were written today, what would be said? What legacy have you passed on and to whom? Who is your Timothy to pick up the baton?