
Three Leadership Lessons from Timothy & Paul

As leaders we cannot successfully walk through ministry alone. We must be connected to people who are ahead of us in the journey, people who are right behind us, and people who are walking alongside us.

Paul described this kind of multigenerational mentoring relationship in 2 Timothy 2:2: *“You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others”* (NLT).

Paul and Timothy modeled three kinds of relationships all Christian leaders need in order to grow and serve effectively. Their relationship showed us that:

1. We need a spiritual father.

Paul calls Timothy *“my true son in the faith”* in 1 Timothy 1:2 (NLT). We first meet Timothy in Acts 16 when Paul is heading out on his second missionary journey. He stops in Lystra to pick up the young disciple who accompanies him, assists him, and serves as a sort of apprentice under him. Paul becomes a spiritual father to Timothy.

My heart hurts as I see the number of young pastors and leaders who are enthusiastically serving with big dreams but lack spiritual fathers. I’ve been fortunate: I’ve had many spiritual fathers in my life—from my biological father to other Christian leaders who have taken me under their wings. I wouldn’t be where I am without them.

I believe we can learn and be mentored from people who died long ago. For example, I recommend that at least 25% of a church leader’s reading be spent in pre-Reformation era writings and another 25% from the Reformation to the modern missionary age. Another 25% of our reading should be drawn from the generation just previous to ours, and only the remaining 25% should come from contemporary authors. We need to hear from voices that have gone on before us. Those voices connect us to centuries of church history. We must always be learning from our past.

2. We need to be a model for others.

We need to be an example of what mature ministry looks like. In Paul’s second letter to Timothy, he points out that, *“You, Timothy, certainly know what I teach, and how I live, and what my purpose in life is. You know my faith, my patience, my love, and my endurance”* (2 Timothy 3:10-11 NLT). Paul provides Timothy with a powerful example for the younger leader to emulate. Timothy knows Paul. He’s watched him. He’s seen how Paul handles the challenges of ministry. We don’t just need a “Paul” in our lives, we need to be a “Paul” to others.

3. We need a partner.

In Romans 16:21, you’ll find that Paul’s relationship with Timothy has changed.

Paul writes, “*Timothy, my fellow worker, sends you his greetings*” (NLT). Timothy has gone from being a son to a student and now to being a colleague and a co-laborer.

We spend plenty of time desiring and praying for more laborers, but perhaps not enough time investing in those with the potential to become our partners in the mission.

Do you have partners in the mission who cheer you on? Do you have other Christian leaders that you can lean on during tough times? Timothy became that for Paul because, for years, Paul had served as a spiritual father and a model for Timothy. Maybe one of the reasons so many pastors feel so alone in ministry today is that they haven’t spent enough time investing in younger leaders.

We need to follow the examples of Timothy and Paul. We need a spiritual father, and we need to be one for the next generation. We also need to partner with others so that we can serve more effectively and finish the race.

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