

What can we learn from what the Bible says about Paul and Timothy?

Timothy was a young man who began traveling with Paul and Silas when they visited Lystra during the second missionary journey (Acts 16:1). Timothy's mother was Jewish, but his father was Greek, so he had not been circumcised even though he had been raised to know and honor God (2 Timothy 1:5). Timothy's commitment to the Lord was so strong that he allowed himself to be circumcised in order not to offend the religious Jews they would encounter (Acts 16:3). The relationship between Paul and Timothy grew to the extent that Paul referred to his young protégé as "my son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 2 Timothy 1:2).

The relationship between Paul and Timothy is a great example of Christian mentoring. Both Timothy and Paul had to have the right attitudes for such a mentoring relationship to succeed. Timothy had to be humble and teachable. It must have taken a great deal of faith and commitment on his part to submit to circumcision. He was free in Christ. Circumcision was not necessary to have a right relationship with God (Galatians 5:6; 6:15). Yet Timothy allowed himself to be circumcised so that he could be a more effective witness for Christ. He exemplified Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:22: "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some."

Paul's role in the mentoring process was to exercise patience as young Timothy grew in wisdom and faith. He spent much time teaching him and even addressed two books of the New Testament to Timothy, who was by then pastoring the church at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). Paul included Timothy in the joys as well as the difficulties of missionary life (Hebrews 13:23) while encouraging him not to allow others to disregard him because of

his comparative youth (1 Timothy 4:12). Paul exhorted Timothy often to guard the truth that he had been entrusted with and take care not to lose his passion for ministry (1 Timothy 1:18; 4:14; 6:20).

Timothy proved to be so trustworthy that Paul sent him as a representative to the churches he was concerned about (1 Thessalonians 3:2; Philippians 2:19). Timothy became Paul's stand-in and also brought Paul news of the churches when Paul was in prison (1 Thessalonians 3:6). Paul included Timothy as an equal partner in his addresses to the churches. His salutations in several epistles began with wording such as "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:1; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:1; Philemon 1:1).

We learn from Paul and Timothy the importance of older men discipling younger men. Timothy became a pillar in the early church due to Paul's investment in his life when he was still young. Paul did not shelter his young disciple from the realities of ministry, knowing that learning to suffer well was part of Timothy's preparation (2 Timothy 2:3; 4:5). For his part, Timothy received instruction and did not shy away from the unpleasant parts of true discipleship. Because of their strong relationship, both men benefited, and the gospel spread. In the story of Paul and Timothy, we learn that discipleship is standing shoulder to shoulder in the work of the kingdom, iron sharpening iron (Proverbs 27:17), encouraging, rebuking when necessary, and sharing a common burden for a lost world (2 Timothy 3:10-15).