

Unit Theme: Timothy, Titus, Philemon

June 9, 2024 (Lesson 2)

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

- 1. Guard Your Calling** (1 Timothy 1:18-19; 5:21-22; 6:20-21)
- 2. Intercede for Christian Leaders** (2 Timothy 1:1-4; Philemon 4-7)
- 3. Affirm and Correct Fellow Christians** (Philemon 17-21)

Central Truth: Leadership development includes relationships that involve prayer and mentoring.

Focus: Affirm and nurture Christian leaders through intercession and mentoring.

Evangelism Emphasis: Mentoring Christian leaders continues the Church's evangelistic mission.

Golden Text: "Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy" (2 Timothy 1:4).

In the real-estate business, it is said the three keys to success are "location, location, location." In Christian ministry the three keys are "relationships, relationships, relationships"—relationship with God, relationships with family, and relationships with others. This series of lessons centers on Paul's mentoring relationships, with today's lesson focusing on his mentoring of Timothy and Philemon.

A *mentor* is variously defined as a role model, teacher, coach, and confidant. Mentors tend to run a tight ship with their mentees, both supporting them and holding them accountable. There are many examples of such relationships in the Bible—including Jethro with Moses; Eli with Samuel; Elijah with Elisha; Priscilla and Aquila with Apollos; and Paul with Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

A true mentor is more than a confidant among their peers; the mentor must have enough experience, wisdom, and knowledge to be able to authoritatively impart the same to their mentee. Perhaps this is why Paul emphasized his credentials—an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment and will of God—in his introductory remarks in his mentoring letters (1 Tim. 1:1;

2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1; Philem. 8). Paul began the letters in this way as (1) an encouragement to those to whom he was writing and (2) because it was his intention that these letters be distributed in the church—far beyond the apparent audience of one to whom they were addressed. After all, Paul was dogged throughout his ministry by naysayers who antagonistically questioned his apostolic authority (see 2 Cor. 12). His salutations were worded to leave no doubt about his qualifications to mentor these men who were younger in the faith.

1. GUARD YOUR CALLING

A. Called to Faithfulness (1 Timothy 1:18-19)

18 This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; 19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.

Twice in chapter 1, Paul uses the word “charge” (*parangelia*), a military term connoting a direct command from a superior officer. He instructs Timothy to take the lead in the local congregation by charging them to teach no false doctrine or any other frivolous philosophies that do not glorify God and edify the faithful (v. 3). In verse 18, he charges him again to be faithful to revealed truth although some, specifically Hymenaeus and Alexander (vv. 19-20), have failed to do so and have suffered spiritual shipwreck.

It appears some specific prophetic words had been spoken over Timothy that confirmed his call, and Paul reminds him to faithfully fulfill those words (v. 18). We should welcome words of prophecy as part of God’s giftings to the church (1 Cor. 12:7-11). Such utterances are given for the purposes of edification, exhortation, and comfort (14:3), and we should never see such prophecies as an end in themselves. Rather, we draw strength from them (and, more importantly

from the written Word) to fight the good fight of faith to which we are called—that “by them you may wage the good warfare” and have “faith and a good conscience” (1 Tim. 1:18-19 NKJV).

§ *Why and how must we maintain a “good conscience”?*

B. Called to Purity (1 Timothy 5:21-22)

21 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. 22 Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure.

Here again is that word *charge*. Paul the mentor isn’t merely suggesting; he is issuing a command regarding the sacredness of Timothy’s ministry (v. 21). Whether in a vocational role or as a layperson, ministry is a sacred trust. As Paul instructs Timothy regarding his pastoral duties, he says neither prejudice nor partiality is acceptable to a holy God. On the surface, it might seem prejudice and partiality are the same thing, yet while they are ugly sisters, they are not identical twins. Having *prejudice* is to develop an irrational attitude or a biased opinion toward an individual, group, or race of people. *Partiality* is somewhat simpler; it is showing favoritism to someone or something based on no other viable criteria than one’s personal preference.

Timothy was not to prejudge people based on skin color, ethnicity, or social background (see Gal. 3:28), nor was he to pick and choose those to whom he would minister, or the way he would minister, based on his personal preferences. All believers are unique creations—with differing characteristics, preferences, styles, and customs—but we are all one in Christ.

Verse 22 is often interpreted as a caution against prematurely ordaining someone to ministry. It might also refer to hastily welcoming people into church membership before there is sufficient proof of their desire to be discipled. Discipleship should begin immediately after one is converted, but we should guard against being hasty in adding to our numbers or trying to

prematurely secure a commitment to church membership. When people join the church, they should know what they are joining, agree with the church's doctrines and practices, and understand its expectations. Paul's inference is that by "accept[ing] people into the service of the Lord" (CEV) too soon, we might welcome individuals who are not genuinely converted, thus introducing their sinfulness into our congregation. Rather, we are to keep ourselves "pure."

Jesus' Example

Jesus is our perfect example of not showing favoritism. He treated all who came to Him with the same level of equality—from the poor crippled man who could not help himself into the healing pool to Zacchaeus, the wealthy tax collector.—*compellingtruth.org*

C. Guard Your Faith (1 Timothy 6:20-21)

20 O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: 21 Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen.

A key word in this discourse is *trust*. The Greek word translated *trust* can also be rendered *deposit*. Paul reminded Timothy, and so should we be reminded that our faith did not originate with us—it was entrusted to us; and like money deposited in a bank, it is to be guarded, protected, and invested to produce fruit for the kingdom of God. As he reminded the Corinthians, so Paul reminded Timothy that we have nothing we did not receive from someone before us (1 Cor. 4:7). A third-generation believer, Timothy's faith was passed down to him from his grandmother Lois and his mother, Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5), and was to be guarded at all costs.

It appears Paul was addressing the infiltration of Gnosticism into the church, because the word for "knowledge" (v. 20 NKJV) is *gnosis* and refers to those who portend to understand

great spiritual mysteries. Paul addressed their messages as “irreverent and empty speech and contradictions from what is falsely called knowledge” (CSB).

Gnosticism combined ideas from oriental mysticism, Greek philosophy, and Christianity, twisting the Scriptures to make it appear they understood otherwise unrevealed mysteries. Modern versions of such false knowledge may include Christian Science, mind over matter, and some extremes of the Word of Faith movement. One modern heretic said if Paul had understood how to “name it and claim it” the way we now do, he could have avoided his *thorn in the flesh* altogether. Such an idea is heretical. Some movements have elevated what they call “other gospels,” claiming they are equal to or above the Bible. Still others utter prophetic words that become sacrosanct to them and their followers. Paul’s warning to Timothy is to guard the faith because many had fallen prey to such deceptions. The warning remains relevant for our times.

§ *Why do so many people fall prey to false doctrine, and how can we remain faithful to divine truth?*

2. INTERCEDE FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS

A. Paul’s Prayers for Timothy (2 Timothy 1:1-4)

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, 2 To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3 I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; 4 Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy.

Paul’s second letter to Timothy opens with a prayer in which he again alluded to the relationship between them. Timothy was on Paul’s prayer list, and just as a father caring for his

son, the mentoring apostle prayed continually for his young mentee. Paul, the mighty preacher, was writing from prison, where his opportunities for preaching were limited. He could not meet Timothy face-to-face, nor could he conduct a teaching or coaching session with him; but he could pray.

Perhaps in a previous meeting, Timothy had poured out his heart to Paul. The challenges Timothy faced and the heavy burdens of ministry had brought the young preacher to tears. With a mentor like Paul, Timothy could be transparent. Each of us needs a compassionate, caring confidant with whom we can be so vulnerable as to confidently bare our soul. Though they were apart, Paul remembered Timothy's tears (v. 4), which provides us a living example of what he wrote to the Galatians: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2 NKJV).

Remembering their previous conversations, Paul prayed for three specific needs that superseded all others—*grace*, *mercy*, and *peace*. Interestingly, he prayed the exact same prayer in 1 Timothy 1:2 and Titus 1:4. Could it be that, more than all the other fruit or gifts of the Spirit, Christian ministers, because of the nature of their duties, may require an extra measure of grace (or graciousness), mercy (compassion), and peace (tranquillity)?

§ *How did Paul describe his relationship with God (2 Timothy 1:1)?*

§ *How did Paul describe his relationship with Timothy (vv. 2-4)?*

B. Paul's Prayer for Philemon (Philemon 4-7)

4 I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, 5 Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints; 6 That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good

thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. 7 For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

Paul's relationship with Philemon, whom he addressed as a "beloved friend and fellow laborer" (v. 1 NKJV), was not as intimate as with Timothy, whom he saluted as a son. While Paul had sat face-to-face and observed Timothy's tears, he had merely heard of Philemon's love and faith (v. 5). This reminds us not all relationships, even in the church, will be the same. We will be closer to some fellow believers than we are to others (both Jesus and Paul were), but Christ's love constrains us to love and relate well to all believers. Jesus said this is the single most identifiable characteristic of our faith (John 13:35).

When writing to Timothy, Paul said he prayed for him "night and day" (2 Tim. 1:3), but of Philemon his prayer consisted of "making mention of thee always in my prayers" (v. 4). Three other times in his writings, Paul told others that he made mention of them in prayer—in Romans 1:9, Ephesians 1:16, and 1 Thessalonians 1:2. "*Making mention* means Paul did not pray long, intricate prayers for Philemon, but he did often make mention of Philemon in his prayers" (*Enduring Word Commentary, Philemon*).

How we pray depends on the intimacy of our relationships and our personal knowledge of another's need. Prayer should never become a timed ritual, nor is it necessary to offer detailed prayers in every situation. Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees who "for a pretense make long prayers" (Matt. 23:14 NKJV), and the pagans who "think they will be heard because of their many words" (6:7 NIV). He chastised His own disciples for stopping their prayers too quickly (see 26:40). The key is balance and being led by the Spirit. Some matters require "night and day," while others merit "making mention" in our prayers.

Interceding for Others

Worship and intercession must go together; the one is impossible without the other.

Intercessions means we rouse ourselves up to get the mind of Christ about the one for whom we pray.—Oswald Chambers

3. AFFIRM AND CORRECT FELLOW CHRISTIANS

A. Paul's Plea for Onesimus (Philemon 17-19)

17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. 18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; 19 I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

Paul's letter to Philemon concerned Onesimus, who was a slave. We find slavery to be reprehensible and grossly offensive, viewing it as a perversion of the divinely ordained dignity God imparts to every human being. We are all made in His image (Gen. 1:27), and of one blood (Acts 17:26). However, neither the Old nor New Testament words about slaves and slavery connote the same meanings we typically attach to slavery. Almost every such instance in the Old Testament refers to someone becoming a slave or someone becoming a prisoner of war. The Scriptures know nothing of that dehumanizing race-based, animalistic institution that was common until the Emancipation Proclamation of 1862. To the contrary, Old Testament Law provided certain protections for both male and female slaves. They were to be given their freedom when the debt was satisfied or, at the most, after seven years of servitude (Ex. 21:2; Deut. 15:12; Jer. 34:14).

We are not told how Philemon acquired Onesimus, but apparently he ran away from his master after stealing from him. He made his way to Rome, where he encountered Paul (Acts

28:30). Onesimus' thievery is suggested by Paul's offer to reimburse Philemon "if he has wronged you or owes you anything" (v. 18 NKJV).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul applied that truth to Onesimus, who was once "unprofitable" but was now "profitable" to both Paul and Philemon (Philem. 11). On the run from his master, Onesimus had found the Apostle Paul, who told him about Jesus, leading him to a new life in Christ. In the same sense as with Timothy, Paul embraced Onesimus as his spiritual "son" (v. 10).

Paul said when Onesimus was brought back, he should not be returned to servitude. Paul, who also wrote "all things work together for good to those who love God, [and] who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28), conjectured God had a greater purpose in this servant's escape—that he might return "no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother" (Philem. 16 NKJV). Paul was so confident in the transformation of this young slave, whom he had led to faith in Christ, that he promised to personally restore anything Onesimus may have stolen and pay off the debt owed to Philemon (vv. 18-19).

God Works Through People

Few people today know the name of Edward Kimball, the Chicago Sunday school teacher who led young Dwight L. Moody to Christ. Moody became a well-known evangelist who won many to the Kingdom, including Wilbur Chapman, who became a prolific writer and preacher. During one of Chapman's crusades in 1886, a restless young baseball player named Billy Sunday gave his life to Christ and was called into ministry.

Billy Sunday became a fiery, unconventional evangelist who led young Mordecai Ham to Christ. Ham became an evangelist who often rented a horse to ride the streets to advertise his

service for that night. When Ham came to Charlotte, North Carolina, a group of high-school students decided to go to his meeting to interrupt him. A fellow student, known as Billy Frank, went to see what would happen. That night Billy Frank was intrigued by what he heard and returned the next night, when he responded to the invitation and was converted. Billy Frank was Billy Franklin Graham, the evangelist who preached to some 215 million people during a half-century of ministry.

B. Paul's Confidence in Philemon (Philemon 20-21)

20 Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord. 21 Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

This story reminds us again of the importance of relationships. Paul and Philemon knew each other. Paul prayed for him and had been an astute observer of Philemon's life. Knowing him to be a man of hospitality who often "refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people" (v. 7 NIV), Paul now appealed to Philemon to refresh his (Paul's) heart by doing what was right by Onesimus (v. 20). This appeal underscores the importance of Christian relationships, without which Paul likely would have been unable to pull off the amicable return of Onesimus.

Some might suggest Paul was wrongly using his friendship to gain Onesimus' freedom, but that was not the case. Using one's friendship to brown-nose or bribe someone for personal gain is one thing, but Paul personally gained nothing by this transaction. To the contrary, if Philemon rejected the idea of freedom for Onesimus, Paul had obligated himself to assume his debt. In this example we not only see Christian brotherhood; we also see a vivid illustration of the substitutionary work of Jesus on behalf of all who will put their trust in Him as Lord and Savior. Jesus assumed our sin debt, and since we had no ability, He paid it for us with His life. Paul's

confidence that Philemon would “do [even] more than I say” (v. 21) reminds us of our Lord, who “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20 NKJV).

We never know the full effect of our acts of kindness or our exercise of Christian love. Paul’s short letter to Philemon does not include the outcome. Rather, it is like a sermon with no conclusion, or a play with no final act. However, secular history and church tradition says Philemon did as Paul requested and received Onesimus as a forgiven brother; and Philemon went on to become the bishop of Colossae, and Onesimus became the bishop of Ephesus.

§ *What was Paul confident about, and why?*

DEVELOP DISCIPLES

The command of Jesus is to “go . . . and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19 NKJV). We call this the Great Commission. It is not a great suggestion; it is a divine command that consists of much more than merely conducting an altar call or convincing people to repeat a prayer. While these are important as a means of introducing lost people to the saving knowledge of Christ, the church is charged with an ongoing process of teaching, training, coaching, and mentoring converts so they become genuine followers of Jesus Christ. This means deep personal relationships must be made and maintained. We are our brother’s keeper.

Discipleship development is not the task of pastoral leadership alone, but of the entire body. Every believer is to take a personal interest in and provide loving Christian care for other believers—especially those who are young in the faith. With some, we will develop highly personal mentoring relationships where we spend time with them and pray for them “night and day” as Paul did for Timothy. Others will be less formal, but still essential as we know one

another, observe one another, and serve one another, often “making mention of them in our prayers” (see Philem. 4).

Daily Devotions

- M. Establish Covenant Ministerial Relationships (Genesis 14:14-20)
- T. Intercede for Leaders in Error (Job 42:1-10)
- W. Consecrated and Called to Community (Isaiah 6:1-8)
- T. Know Christ Well, Know More (Matthew 13:10-16)
- F. Mentor Leaders in the Truth (Acts 18:24—19:1)
- S. Authority Displayed in Church Relations (1 Peter 4:17—5:7)