

What do good teachers, good coaches, and good leaders have in common? The answer: a protégé. A protégé is a young person who receives help, guidance, training and support from somebody who is older and has more experience or influence. The Apostle's Paul protégé was Timothy. Who's your protégé, your Timothy? Do you have someone who will continue the work that you are doing, but in their own unique way? We can all find someone who can learn from our experience. If you've only been a Christian for a year or two, you can help a new Christian. If you're a sophomore, you can help a freshman.

I've been blessed over the years to have a number of men who have helped me grow while learning from them. They include my high school youth director, a couple of professors I had in college and my field work supervisor when I was in the seminary. I was assigned to a field work church in Cahokia, Illinois my first two years in the seminary. Normal Gardels was the Pastor of the church. He opened his church, his home and his life to his field work students. I learned more from him about ministry and about being a Christian than any of the professors I had in the seminary. He allowed me to be one of his Timothy's.

Timothy was a young man that Paul met on one of his early missionary journeys. Because his mother and grandmother raised him in the Jewish faith, Timothy was looking forward to the coming of the Savior. Paul taught Timothy about Jesus and then invited him to be part of the team, to join him on his missionary journeys. Timothy did and became an important part of the team. Timothy became so important that he is included in the greeting in five of Paul's letters to the early Christian Churches. Paul wrote about their relationship in 2 Timothy 3:10, **“But 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.”**

The Bible is filled with examples of people who invested themselves, their time and energy into other people who would carry on their work. Jesus had his disciples. Paul had Timothy. Before that, Paul was a protégé to Gamaliel, one of the most famous Jewish Rabbis of all time. Gamaliel was the man who warned the Jewish leaders not to fight against Christianity. Peter had a young man by the name of John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark.

In the Old Testament, Moses trained Joshua who lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land. But Joshua failed to train anyone as his successor. As a result the nation and the people suffered. Judges 2:10 tells us, **“After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the Lord or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel.”** If we don't want the same thing to happen to our nation and our children, we better be mentoring, training, investing in younger people who can learn from us and pass on the faith. And we better start doing it now, before it is too late.

So how do you grow a Timothy? First it takes patience. It may take some time to find that person who is willing to be your Timothy, your protégé. Once you find that person, they need the opportunity to learn by experience. So they have to spend time with you, watch while you do the things that you do and take assignments from you. I have had the opportunity to work with a number of young people during my ministry. They all take time. The ones who are willing to watch and listen have always learned the most. Those who think they already know it all and won't watch you or listen from you will never gain much from what you do.

The second thing you need to do with is to be a sounding board. Our goal is to create heirs, not clones. Those people who are learning from us need to be able to bounce things off of us, to try new things out on us. Their goal is to learn and adapt, not to imitate and conform. As they bounce different things off us, they develop their own unique gifts, their own style. They have to be able to do that because as our world changes, the way we do things has to change as well. Since our mission is to bring a changeless Christ to an ever changing world, we have to be able to change the way we present the Christian faith without compromising the Gospel.

Ultimately our goal, and our goal for those who follow us in the faith, is that we all become more and more like Christ. Jesus is our ultimate role model. He set the example of the perfect life and we are told to imitate it, as the Apostle Paul told the Christians in Philippi (2:5-8): **“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.”** We don't follow Christ to try to earn His love. We already have that. We follow Christ in response to His love.

The new life that we have in Christ is different, not better. We should live in a different way than the non-Christians around us. That doesn't mean that we should ever think that we are better than other people, because we are not. We are all sinful. We all need God's love and forgiveness. But we are also different people in Christ. His love transforms our lives in a way that we should stand out from the rest of the people around us who are not followers of Christ.

Because we are different, we are called to help create a different / a better world. The world is better when Christians put love and forgiveness into practice in their daily lives. The world is better when Christians help others in need, put others first. The world is better when Christians invite others to meet Jesus and to become part of God's family. I hope you will invite your unchurched friends to join us for Friendship weekend, October 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. Of course you don't have to wait until then to bring them with you to Peace.

Remember this, if we don't want to repeat what happened in Israel after the time of Joshua, we have to find our own Timothy's and invest in them so that they can continue the work that God

has given us. They need our help to learn what to do and how to do it. We can't just expect them to do it all on their own.

There is an old African proverb about a band of elephants traveling together until they came upon a raging river. The big elephants didn't have a problem stepping into the rough, dangerous waters. But the small young elephants were afraid to take the first step. As the big elephants were crossing over, one of the elephants in the middle of the river shouted out, "Brother Leader, we have some folks still standing on the banks of the river who haven't made it into the water." The lead elephants turned around, got back into the water and stood shoulder to shoulder, blocking the water so that the little elephants could cross the river.

Don't forget about those who are behind you, who may be hesitant or afraid to step out in faith. Remember the people who opened their lives up to you to help you on your journey of faith and do the same for them. Amen.