

The Power Points of Life:
“The Power to Make a Difference”
Acts 16:1-5

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“A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove. . . but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child.” — That’s what I want us to think about today.

Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, sailed the seas of the Western Mediterranean preaching the gospel and establishing churches. He debated the finest philosophers in Athens and wrote a good portion of the New Testament. But one of Paul’s finest contributions to Christendom was a young boy he met in Lystra by the name of Timothy. Let’s see if we can glean from Timothy’s life some essential principles of forming others in the faith.

TIMOTHY WAS GROUNDED IN THE FAITH.

“Your sincere faith first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice”
(II Timothy 1:5).

Timothy’s grandmother, Lois, was a sincere believer. God invented grand-parenting as a reward for not killing your own kids when they were teenagers. In a culture that worships youth, I see why we resist that role. As one mother exclaimed, “How can I have a son 30 years old when I just recently turned 30 myself? We need to get over our pride and seize the opportunity. Grandparents now have 20 to 30 years of time after retirement. What could be a better use of that time than to shape the spiritual life of the next generation? If you don’t have grand children close, I think the Church can help you adopt a few.

His mother, Eunice, was a Christian. There is no substitute for godly parents. You can’t give what you don’t have. Become a sincere believer yourself. Don’t form an opinion about God, develop a relationship with God. Seek God’s wisdom. Accept God’s guidance. Receive God’s strength. Remember He is with you always— even when the kids are screaming, and the bills need paying, and you are trying to juggle two careers.

You don’t have to be perfect to be effective. I have always been offended by pious pictures of Christian families where a mother and father and a couple of children are sitting serenely at the dinner table with their hands folded and their heads bowed in prayer. Was it that way at your house? It wasn’t at our house. Religion was a mixed bag at Timothy’s house. His mother was a Christian; his father was a Greek. He missed the ritual of circumcision.

Invest in values that last, not fads that fade. If everybody's doing it, it's probably not that important. Your children outgrow toys, but truth endures. *"From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (II Timothy 3:15).*

TIMOTHY WAS MENTORED IN THE FAITH.

An itinerant preacher by the name of Paul came to Lystra one day. He took a liking to young Timothy. Somehow Paul made a deal with Timothy's mother to take Timothy along on the journey. There began a friendship that greatly benefited them both. Somebody said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults." A mentor is a wise advisor, teacher, coach. We all need a mentor, someone to look up to, to turn to, to lean on. Mentors can be Sunday school teachers, scout leaders, youth counselors, or simply a friend in faith.

Our minister son is moving to South Florida next month. I think his mother in time will be able to forgive him. He's going to work with a pastor who was his youth minister when Wes was in high school.

I've made my fair share of mistakes in ministry, but there is one thing I've always tried to provide. I've always wanted my children to have a safe place to run to when it got too bad to stay at home. So through the years, we've encouraged friendships, worked hard at having effective youth groups, tried consciously to provide relationships that would provide a safety net for our own. I know, it's not something you can force. But it is something you can facilitate. Are you a spiritual mentor to some young person today? Are you helping guide another along the way? Why not?

TIMOTHY WAS A PARTNER IN THE FAITH.

Timothy had the encouragement and blessing of Paul. *"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young"* (Verse 4:12). To the cantankerous church at Corinth Paul writes: *"When Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am (I Corinthians 16:10).* With support like that, how could Timothy fail?

I read some statistics the other day that I found alarming. On March 29, 2006, United Methodist News Service reported that the number of clergy under age 35 in our denomination has drastically declined over the last 20 years. The numbers are down from around 3,200 in 1985 to around—get this—850 in 2006. According to the Alban Institute, there are 350,000 active clergy serving Christian churches in the U.S. Eight percent are 35 or younger. The average age of ordination in the United Methodist Church is 43. Seminaries are as full as they ever were, but their students are older than ever and only about one third have any interest in serving a local church. I'm not criticizing older pastors, I'm one of them. Where are all the young people? Would you be happy if your son or daughter came home and expressed an interest in making ministry a full-time career? It makes me think of that old hymn Mary Thompson wrote urging us to publish glad tidings of peace, redemption, and

release. When she gets to the last stanza, this is what she says:

Give of thine own, to bear the message glorious;
Give of thy wealth, to speed them on their way;
Pour out thy soul, for them in prayer victorious;
O Zion, haste to bring a brighter day!

TIMOTHY WAS A LEADER IN THE FAITH.

“Preach the word...and keep your head in all situations” (II Timothy 4:2-5)

I was sitting in a meeting the other day that got me to pondering a question. What are the characteristics of a spiritual leader? We know about team leaders, entrepreneur leaders, charismatic leaders, dictatorial leaders, visionary leaders. What is a spiritual leader? Books abound about church leaders, most of which are adaptations of business models. But I’ve started asking another question. What is a spiritual leader?

What are the qualities of a person who can engage others in the purposes of God for their lives? I don’t have an answer. But I do have some clues. A spiritual leader has a heart for God. *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul.”* A spiritual leader has the mind of Christ. *“Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, who being in the very nature of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. .. Instead he humbled himself and became obedient even to death on a cross.”*

A spiritual leader invests in people rather than plans. The last Book of the Bible that Paul writes is his second letter to Timothy. He closes it with these words: *“Do your best to come quickly for Demas...has deserted me. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Do your best to come before winter.”*

An evangelist preaching in a park in Dublin once said: “The world has yet to see what God can do in and through and for one individual who is completely yielded to the Lord Jesus Christ.” Dwight L. Moody, a shoe salesman from Chicago with a 6th grade education, who loved to teach Sunday school, heard the evangelist and replied, “I want to be that man.” The rest, as they say, is history. D.L. Moody preached all over England and the United States until his death in 1899. Some say a million people were converted to Christ! Somebody today needs to be that man, that woman.

