

# Mentorship

## **INTRODUCTION**

Spiritual mentorship involves disciples of Christ reaching up and reaching down in the family of God so that we might together grow into maturity (Eph 4:11-16). The ministry and teaching of the apostle Paul are instructive. He mentored Timothy and Titus, but also called them to mentor others. We see this multigenerational dynamic taught most explicitly in 2 Tim 2:1-2, where Timothy, who is described as Paul's "child", is instructed to take what he has learned from Paul and instruct others, who also can teach others themselves. This dynamic is implied in Jesus' instructions in the Great Commission of Matt 28:18-20. He commands His disciples to make disciples, teaching their disciples to observe what He has personally commanded them. This would likely include this particular command to make disciples themselves, and further continue the chain.

## **PRINCIPLES**

### **1. Biblical Pattern in Paul and Timothy**

Another simple way to think of this is that everyone should have at least one Paul and one Timothy. We are all to reach up and reach down in our shared discipleship to Christ. Paul's relationship with Timothy can be characterized as developing from spiritual parenting, to life apprenticeship, and later transitioning into ministry partnership. Paul began to "parent" Timothy in the faith starting when they met in Lystra in Acts 16 (in 1 Tim 1:2 Paul calls Timothy his "true child in the faith"; a similar phrase used in Tit 1:4 to describe his relationship with Titus). Timothy apprenticed under Paul and witnessed his life as a model to follow (2 Tim 3:10-11). Later Paul described Timothy more in terms as a peer and partner in the ministry of the gospel (Rom 16:21).

### **2. What It Means to Imitate**

Therefore we are called not just to follow and imitate Christ, but also faithful followers who are more mature than we are. This is one of the reasons the Church throughout history has lifted up certain godly persons as worthy of imitation. This is the underlying value of the traditions surrounding the saints. Though there is much to reject about these traditions, there is something to appreciate and appropriate in our lives. Surely we should not worship any human individual, nor should we have a spiritual class system. We are truly all "saints" by virtue of our union with Christ who makes us holy (1 Cor 1:2, 30; Col 1:1-2; Heb 10:10). But we should not let the aberrations and errors of these traditions lead us to discard the godly and wise path of imitating saints who are more mature than us.

Though we shouldn't pridefully and selfishly exalt ourselves, seeking to be called someone's spiritual rabbi, father, and instructor (Matt 23:1-12), we are called to instruct and teach other disciples, instructing them as fellow brothers and sisters in the faith (Matt 28:18-20). As mentioned above Paul modeled this with Timothy, but, even further, Paul explicitly and persistently called others to follow him as he followed Christ, to imitate him (1 Cor 4:15-17; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 4:9; 2 Tim 3:10-11). And Paul applies this not just to himself, but also to his partners in the gospel, calling the disciples to imitate them as well (1 Thess 1:5-7; 2 Thess 3:7-9). Since Paul and his companions imitate Christ, they are worthy models for their disciples who themselves become examples for others.

Imitation is not precise copying the exact manners and decisions of the mentor (for more on this topic, see *Imitating God in Christ* by Jason Hood). Your life circumstances, personality, gift set, and passions are different. Therefore the goal is not replication but applying their model of character and wisdom. We are to follow others as they follow Christ, not to accomplish the same acts He did, but to indwell His ethic and values, participating in His pattern of holy cross-bearing for the glory of God and good of others.

## **PRACTICALS**

### **1. Be a Paul**

#### **A. Live a Life Worth Following**

To be a spiritual mentor one does not need to be perfect (which is impossible), but it does require that your life is worth following. Our standard is ultimately Christ, but God seeks to provide accessible, tangible, visible models in human saints. The author of Hebrews presents a hall of faith models in Heb 11, and seeks to inspire our discipleship by appeal to this "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1). Therefore a maturing disciple of Jesus can and should present himself as a model for others to imitate. New Testament scholar D. A. Carson presents a convicting challenge to contemporary Christians: "Do you ever say to a young Christian, 'Do you want to know what Christianity is like? Watch me!' If you never do, you are unbiblical" (from the *Resurrection to His Return: Living Faithfully in the Last Days*). He expands on this further:

You who are older should be looking out for younger people and saying in effect, “Watch me. Come—I’ll show you how to have family devotions. Come—I’ll show you how to do Bible study. Come on—let me take you through some of the fundamentals of the faith. Come—I’ll show you how to pray. Let me show you how to be a Christian husband and father, or wife and mother. At a certain point in life, that older mentor should be saying other things, such as: Let me show you how to die. Watch me.”

So seek to live a life worth following and invite others behind you in the walk of discipleship to imitate your way of life.

## **B. Make Yourself Available to Potential Timothys**

Even if you don’t feel confident to ask others to follow you or to provide mentorship for them, just simply make yourself open and available to others who are growing in their faith. If you are seeking God and moving toward others, then eventually someone will see you out for counsel. Take advantage of it when they do. Make time for them and their questions. Don’t feel the need to have all the answers, but do consider their issues seriously and seek out wisdom through God’s word, other counselors, and relevant extra-biblical literature. Pray with them. A lot. Invite them into your life in an increasing way so that your wisdom is not merely imparted through direct discussion in a formal meeting, but also through the organic witness of your life.

### **2. Be a Timothy**

#### **A. Seek Out Mentors**

Seek out someone to provide you counsel, to help you understand and apply God’s word to your life, to provide godly advice and perspective for your complex circumstances. Look around in your community for someone who has matured beyond you in some areas of discipleship and see if they would be open to meeting with you at least once and maybe regularly for mentoring in a certain area or in general.

#### **B. Observe Their Life**

Watch them. Observe how they treat people, respond to difficulty, etc. Ask questions about why they did something or acted in a certain way. Ask about how they process through things. Try to interact with them in a myriad of circumstances (at church, at home, at restaurants, at work, in recreation activities, etc.).

#### **C. Heed Their Counsel**

This might be the most obvious but still must be stated: listen to them! This doesn’t mean that you automatically and without reservation do exactly what they say or do. But it does mean that when they give you serious counsel, give it serious consideration. Assume the best of them. Process through your concerns and questions. But don’t disparage the wisdom of your mentors.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- Do I have a Paul and a Timothy? Am I reaching up and down in mentorship?
- Am I confident to call others to follow me? If not, why?
- Do I have a mentor? Am I seeking out others to imitate? Or do I think I can do the Christian life on my own?
- What areas do I think I need counsel for right now? Who in my community is more mature in this area and could possibly mentor me?