Timothy: developing as a leader

Over the Summer, we're looking at the team the apostle Paul gathered around him. And today we're going to look at his protégé, Timothy, and developing as a leader.

Now, if you go on Amazon and search for books on Leadership you'll find enough books to keep you awake, or put you to sleep, for years to come, won't you. Books about the *science* of leadership, because, it's obvious that leadership's a science. Or books on the *art* of leadership - because obviously leadership isn't a science, it's an art! Or books on the skills of a leader, or the character of a leader, or the psychology of a leader; or how to train up leaders, or manage the flow of new leaders. Books based on research, or experience, or the lives of inspirational leaders.

And given that mountain of literature, you might think, what can Timothy, a young guy, who's just trying to lead a church 2000 years ago, possibly have to teach me about leadership?

Well, by any stretch of the imagination, Timothy's mentor, Paul, was a great leader. And in two letters Paul pours his wisdom and leadership insights, into Timothy, so that Timothy can develop to his full leadership potential. And I want us to look at just a selection of that.

But before we do: when other people think about Switzerland's skyline, what do they think of? They think 'mountains', don't they. But you and I, know better. We think cranes and construction sites. Because they're everywhere. And it's hard to live round here without watching buildings going up. But before anything goes up, the builders spend weeks digging down. And what you and I end up seeing *above* ground depends entirely on those *below* ground foundations.

And as you read Paul's two letters to Timothy, you realise that he's impressing on Timothy some of the foundational principles of Christian leadership, so that Timothy's own leadership develops in ways that are healthy - and Christian.

Because, by Christian leadership, I don't mean leadership in the church. I mean that if you're a Christian you want to lead like a Christian, don't you? Whether that's leading your team at work, or your kids at home, or influence your friends in your friendship group, you want the fact that you're a follower of Jesus to permeate everything about your life. I mean, you don't want your faith in Christ to be like a coat that you hang up on a hook when you enter your workplace, or return in the evening to your kids, do you? You want it to be the core that influences everything you do - including the way you lead.

And that's what Paul wanted for Timothy. So, we're going to look at 4 foundational principles of Christian leadership in Timothy's life.

Foundational Principle no.1: Identity: or, to lead well, you need an anchor.
Turn to 1 Tim 1:1-2: 'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy, *my true child* in the faith.' And then look at 2 Tim 1:2, 'To Timothy, *my beloved child*.'

Now, think for a minute, who has been most influential in your life? Who has set you an example, especially in how they lead and influence others, that has left you thinking, 'I want to be like them'? For Timothy, that was Paul, wasn't it. And when Paul calls Timothy, *my beloved child*, Timothy knows he has a spiritual father.

He knows that as he exercises leadership, he's really standing on the shoulders of a giant. He knows that Paul, and others with him, have gone before him, and led before him. And, as he becomes a spiritual father to others, he knows others have been that first to him.

Why does that matter? Because, at this point, Timothy is leading a growing church in Ephesus. And when you're young, and things are going well under your leadership, temptations come knocking, don't they? I read recently about a well-known church leader who had enjoyed real success from the outset of his leadership, but then had fallen morally. And the writer talked about the mortal danger of underestimating the corrupting influence power and success can have on you. Because it breeds a kind of pride in us. A pride that thinks the rules that apply to others don't apply to me. A pride that thinks these great results I'm seeing at work, or in my family, are because I'm so great.

But Timothy knows he has a spiritual father. And that taught him something about his identity. That as a Christian leader, whatever innovative ideas he comes up with, whatever great results he was seeing, he's not really a pioneer. He's not really a trailblazer. He's simply the next guy in the relay team who the baton has been passed to.

And when you understand that, that in whatever leadership or influence you exercise, you're not the best thing since sliced-bread, you're simply the next in a long line of Christian leaders greater and more godly than you, then it teaches you humility, rather than breeding pride. And rather than seeing leadership as a right, you see it as a trust committed to you. And rather than seeing great results as coming from your great leadership, you see them as the ongoing fruit of others investment in your life.

But there's a second way Paul describes Timothy's identity. He calls him, 'my true child *in the faith*.' You see, Timothy's not just a spiritual son of Paul, he's in the faith, he's in Christ, he's a child of God. And think how understanding that could make someone a much healthier leader.

I mean think where young Timothy, starting out as a leader, *could* have got his sense of self-worth from. Or where you could get it from in your own leadership. You could get it from your fans, couldn't you, from those who think you're doing a great job - you're the best leader they've ever worked with. Or, you could get it from your critics - who tell you you're doing a rubbish job - you're the worst leader they've ever worked with.

But when Timothy, and you and I know that we are children of God, that because of Jesus, God the Father loves you, then that gives you an incredibly secure identity to lead from.

You see, if you're looking for your team to give you strokes, you'll always be insecure as a leader, and you'll struggle to build a healthy team. Or, if you're looking for the applause of your bosses, it lays you open to saying 'yes' to stuff you should be saying 'no' to. Or, if you're a parent and your sense of being a good person depends on your kids obeying you, or performing well in public, or at school, you'll be one cranky parent.

But when you know that God the Father loves you, independent of your results, that you are a true child in the faith, you'll know a deep level of security that will help you lead well, and with courage, *and* worry much less about what your critics say. It's why Paul says to Timothy in 2 Tim 2:1, 'you then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.' Because knowing God's grace to you - that because of Jesus you are loved in him - just has this power to strengthen you.

And Timothy needed that. Look what Paul says to him in 1 Tim 4:12, 'Let no one despise you for your youth.'

Now, there's not much you can do about being young, is there? I don't know if there's an opposite of botox, but if there is, it hadn't been invented yet. And Timothy's probably already tried growing a beard, but that obviously hadn't worked.

But whilst there was nothing Timothy could do about his age, there was something he could do about how others perceived him. You see, the danger is that Timothy will hear others criticising him for his age and think, 'yeh, they're right, I am too young to lead', and withdraw into himself. But Paul is saying, 'Timothy, your age is not what defines you. It's who you are in God. It's your character. And maturity of character comes by knowing you are loved and chosen by God.

And the same is true for you and me - it's not what you're weakest at that defines you. It's not what your critics say about you that defines you. It's not even what your fans say. It's what God the Father says, and he says, 'you're my son, you're my daughter, and I love you'.

But there's a third thing Paul says to Timothy about his identity. Look at 1 Timothy 4:6. Paul has been setting out the stuff Timothy needs to be teaching the church, and then he says, 'If you put these things before the brothers, you will be *a good servant of Christ Jesus*.'

You see, if you allow your results, or what others say about your results, to be the thing that defines you, you'll end up using your leadership - and people - for yourself, to boost your self-image or self worth. And you'll be too enslaved to the opinion of others to *really* lead. Instead, you'll just be like a weather vane, a responder, not a leader, changing direction with the wind of popular opinion. But when you know that in Jesus you are a beloved son or daughter of God, it frees you to use your leadership to serve Christ. And as you serve him, you'll serve others, not yourself.

Ok, so question to ponder: as you think about the areas where you lead or have an influence on others, ask yourself, *why* am I leading? What's motivating this? What's your identity rooted in, or anchored to? And how does that affect how and why you lead or influence others?

Foundational Principle no. 2: Stickability: or, to lead well, keep calm and don't quit.
Does anyone know who this is? It's Eddie 'the Eagle' Edwards. In the 1988 Winter Olympics he became the first Briton to compete in the ski jump since 1928. And he did really well. He came 70th, out of 70. As one Italian journalist put it, he was more of 'a ski dropper', than a ski jumper.

But the Brits loved him, because he'd refused to give up on his dream.

Now, if you want to exercise leadership in a way that serves Christ and others, you've got a much greater vision to live for than Eddie the Eagle. But you're still going to need stickability.

Look what Paul says to Timothy in 1 Tim 1:3, 'As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, *remain in Ephesus*.' Now, why does Paul feel the need to say, 'Timothy, stick it out there. Don't move on', when, to anyone on the outside, this young leader had a great thing going? Because, as you read the whole letter, Timothy clearly has people who would be happy to see the back of him; who would be delighted if he booked a one-way ticket out of Ephesus.

And Paul is telling him, don't buy that ticket. Don't move on just because it's hard.

Imagine for a moment that you're lounging on the beach, smothered in suncream. Are your muscles growing? No they're not! If you want that to happen, you've got to run mountain marathons or cycle laps round the lake before breakfast.

And the same is true if we want to develop as Christian leaders. It's not when things are easy that we grow, it's when we're stretched. And we need to stick the hard times out, because it's in those times that we're brought to the end of ourselves, and we begin to pray, and trust Christ, and realise that while we don't have it in us, Jesus does.

But, when you're a young leader like Timothy, you want to hear that everything's going to be *so cool,* don't you? You want to hear that you're going to be great and everyone - your colleagues, your team mates, your family are going to love you. But that's not what Paul tells Timothy. Instead, he repeatedly tells him to endure suffering. Not run away from it.

Look at 2 Timothy 2:3, 'Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.' In other words, Timothy, there is something about being a Christian leader that's like being a soldier. When life and work feel like a battle. But like a soldier you're to be single-minded and self-disciplined, and not quit.

And look at 2 Timothy 4:5: 'As for you, always be *sober-minded*, *endure suffering*…' And just before that Paul's been reminding Timothy that he will face opposition from people who don't want to hear what he's preaching. And when that happens, Timothy, don't lose your head, keep going.

You see, in v2, before telling him to endure, Paul says, 'preach the word… reprove, rebuke, and exhort, *with complete patience.'*

Paul knows, probably by experience, that one of the snares a developing leader can fall into is frustration - because people, colleagues, kids, students, even equipment, just don't do what you want them to do.

But if Timothy's to grow as a leader his patience needs to grow. And how does patience grow? Does it grow by everything going the way you want? Nope. It grows by us experiencing times that test it. It will never grow if we run from those times.

And look at 1 Timothy 6:12 where Paul says, 'Fight the good fight of the faith.' Now, are there times when your office, or your classroom, or your home, feels like a battlefield? Whether it does or it doesn't, it is one. Because, as Christians you and I have been enlisted in a war. And that might mean you fighting for truth, or standing up for ideas that honour God, or against projects that don't. And when that's happening, Paul is telling Timothy, don't be surprised if you face incoming missiles. Or arrows! It goes with your commission. So stay calm, and don't flee the battlefield.

So, question to ponder: how are you doing on the patience front? Are there any areas where you're in danger of quitting the field because you think life would be so much easier if you did?

Foundational Principle no. 3: Undistractability: or, to lead well, don't be deflected from your mission.
I don't know about you, but I am *easily* distracted. Especially by the cake tin. And I can be working on something, but then I see it, and suddenly what's in that tin becomes overwhelmingly important.

And that's not a problem, if what you're doing isn't important. But if it is, like you're holding a chain-saw, or you're riding a bicycle on a high-wire over the Niagara Falls, getting distracted, might just cost you.

But if *you* get distracted and drawn away from what you're supposed to be doing, it might also cost your team, or your family, or your students who depend on you.

And being older and wiser, Paul knew that Timothy was going to have people say to him, 'we want you to give your time to *this*', when the *this* was not the preaching of the gospel Timothy's been called to. But, when you're finding your feet as a leader, doing what people want you to do is appealing, isn't it. Because you want them to like you. But Paul says to Timothy, 1 Tim 4:7, 'Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.' And 6:20, 'Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge"'. Timothy, you've got people who want you to spend your time thinking and arguing and debating about *this*, they want your time and attention, but don't.

And in 2 Tim 2:16-17 Paul gives Timothy a reason for not getting distracted, 'But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene.' And v23, 'Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.'

Now, for a leader like Timothy, you're tempted to think, ok, these people are insistent, so for the good of everyone, I'll go along with them. But Paul says, no, being deflected from what you're called to do is not for the good - that's how gangrene spreads, that's how quarrels grow.

Kevin de Young, an American Pastor, recently wrote an article called, the 'Distinguishing Marks of a Quarrelsome person'. And he describes a certain kind of person for whom there are no secondary or tertiary issues. Everything is primary. And he says, such a person has never met a hill they wouldn't die on.

And Paul is saying, Timothy, as a leader, people will want to take you to that hill and have you die there too! And they're going to be convinced that this issue, or this project really matters. And you're going to be tempted to go with them. But your role as a leader is to say, 'I'm sorry, but I'm not going there.' And instead keep sight of why God has placed you where you are, and what it is he's called you to do. And sometimes refusing to be distracted will require you to say, 'no.'

So, question to ponder, do you have a core mission? How would you express what it is God has called you to do where you are now? If you're married or have kids what is that for you as a couple or family? And are you in danger of being distracted or deflected from it?

Now, the problem with being willing to say 'no' is that you can become arrogant, and you stop listening to your critics or to new ideas.

So, final point….

Foundational Principle no 4.: Teachability. Or, to lead well, be continually transformed.
Look again at 1 Timothy 4:6. Paul's told Timothy the things he needs to be teaching the church, and then he says, 'If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, *being trained* in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.'

So Paul's saying, look, the teaching about all that Jesus has done for us, through his life of perfect obedience, through his death and resurrection, through his ascension and reigning in power and pouring out the Holy Spirit - the words of the faith, the good doctrine - aren't just head knowledge. This has the power to train you. To transform you. To take you from *here* and bring you to *here*.

Now, in almost any organisation the trainee is at the bottom of the food chain, isn't he? When I was a junior doctor there were some jobs that were so bad, and so smelly, and so vomit inducing, that it was always your job, as the one right at the bottom, to do them.

But Paul says, if you want to lead as a Christian, there's a sense in which you never graduate. You never become more than a trainee. Because there's always more growth in character, more godliness of conduct, more Christ-like motivation for service to be trained in. And 'the words of the faith and the good doctrine', all that Jesus has done for you, never runs out of stuff to teach us and train us. There's always more you can learn at Jesus' feet.

It's why Paul says in 4:7, 'train yourself for godliness'. Sure, he says, *physical* exercise is of some value. Running mountain marathons and cycling laps round the lake before breakfast will build your muscle, and maybe even clear your mind. But training yourself, putting yourself in Christ's school of character and conduct is of immense value, if you want to really develop as a leader.

You see, one of the dangers for a leader is that you become content, and comfortable and then complacent with where you're at now and you stop growing. You stop being trained in character. But think about what happens when a leader falls, whether that's in industry, or finance, or academia, or christian ministry. The fault-lines where the earthquake strikes are almost always fault-lines of character, aren't they?

The leader who steals from his company has failed to address his love of money. The leader who commits adultery with a junior colleague has allowed lust to win his or her heart. The leader brought down for repeated patterns of anger has failed to deal with why he gets angry. The leader who falsifies research hasn't addressed his deep-seated desire for a reputation.

It's why having talked about the love of money that's at the root of all kinds of evil, Paul says in 1 Tim 6:11 - 'But as for you, O man of God, flee these things.' And instead, v11, 'Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.'

It's why Paul says in 2 Tim 2:22: 'flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness.' Now, what are the kind of passions a young and ambitious leader like Timothy might get trapped in? Sex for sure. And pride. And the desire to make a name for yourself. And prove yourself. And be the one in control. And get some respect. And Paul says, Timothy, flee those, and instead pursue, deliberately choose to grow in character.

So, question to ponder: has your personal growth stalled? Are you taking steps to ensure that your character is becoming more Christ-like rather than more complacent?

And what if you're not yet a Christian? *Something* is going to drive the way you seek to lead or influence others. *Something* is going to determine whether you stick our the hard times or run from them. And something, some set of values or priorities, is going to shape the person you're becoming. What are those somethings? You see, Jesus says, come to me and I'll give you life. Seek me first and everything else falls into place. But make these other things - like reputation, or power, or control, or money your thing and you'll end up enslaved to them. Christ has a much better future for you than that.