

TIME IN TIMOTHY

Reflections on 1 Timothy for
Young Leaders

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by Murray Brown



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Foreword

What do I do when I'm doubting my call to leadership? How do I cope with feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness? How do I develop a devotional life that helps me stay close to God? How do I conduct myself in a manner that is honouring to God and what attitudes do I need to cultivate in my life to be an effective leader?

These are all questions common to young leaders today and were likely questions held by Timothy, a young leader who Paul, an older leader, was mentoring.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul addressed these questions and more, and God saw to it that his advice was preserved for us in the pages of the Bible.

This book is for young leaders like you. It is a verse by verse reflection on the book of 1 Timothy with insights, questions and applications for you to consider and put into practice.

It also contains an index of common issues and questions you might face that are similar to those listed above.

There are several ways you can use this book. You can read it in one sitting if you want an overview or, ideally perhaps, you can read one chapter a day or one chapter a week. Doing so allows you time to reflect on what you read and put it into practice.

You can work through the book alone or, ideally again, do so with a group of other young leaders with perhaps a more experienced leader or pastor to guide you. This allows you to learn from the experiences of your peers and the experience of an older leader.

Either way, read these pages with a deep reliance on God's Spirit. It is He who will lead you into an understanding of truth and how it applies to your life (John 14:26).

May God enrich you and grow you as you read.

Murray Brown
CCCNZ Youth Enabler

1

Be Who You Are

This letter is from Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, appointed by the command of God our Saviour and Christ Jesus, who gives us hope. (1 Timothy 1:1)

Andi (not her real name) was 17 when I approached her one Sunday and asked her to be part of our leadership development programme. Shyly she looked at the ground and quietly said, "Oh...no... I'm not a leader..."

I tried to encourage her by pointing out that leaders had many different gifts and personalities. "I see you as a potential leader", I said. "Why not just come and try it out?"

In writing letters to churches and individuals, Paul often began by referring to Himself as an Apostle. It was a big deal. "Apostle" was as high as you could climb on the church leadership ladder.

So why keep telling everyone? Was Paul on some ego trip, trying to impress people with his credentials?

He indeed had to say some quite harsh things in his letters and so perhaps he needed to remind his readers of his right and responsibility to lead in this way.

But perhaps the use of this title was also a reminder to *himself* of who he was. Rather than use his title to boast, I suspect he used it to keep himself humble.

Why? Because immediately upon mentioning his title he adds "*appointed by the command of God our Saviour and Christ Jesus*". Paul knew that leadership was not something he'd earned through being amazing! It was a role given to Him by God and as such he had a responsibility to "be who he is" - to act like the Apostle he was.

Like Andi (and like me) the knowledge of his calling and the reminder of who called him "*gave him hope*".

So, what is your "title"? What is God calling you?

If this booklet has found its way into your hands (and it has!), it is because someone has looked at you and sensed that you're a leader (at least "in the making"). You may not feel like it and you may be consumed by doubt and insecurity but God is calling you to be who you are!

For some, that may involve a long hard look at the way you are living. Is your conduct worthy of your calling?

For others, you need to **stop focussing on who you think you are**

You need to stop focussing on who you think you are and start courageously being who God is calling you to be.

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With some encouragement, Andi agreed to assist in the Sunday school, helping children do their crafts. The following year she started helping in our intermediate programme and then in our youth programme.

A year later she became our youth ministry intern!

It took a while but eventually, she was beginning to see herself as she really was - a leader. She was still a little shy and somewhat hesitant when her role required her to be upfront, but knowing who she was, according to God, gave her the hope to follow His lead.

Reflection and discussion

1. Think of some leaders in the Bible who didn't see themselves as leaders. What can you learn from their example?
2. Which of the following is most likely to be true for you when it comes to taking on leadership? "I lack confidence" or "I'm overconfident." Explain by giving examples of situations where you are likely to have either of these responses.
3. How do you know God has called you to be a leader?
4. In what way does being called to lead give you hope?

Application

Say to yourself, "(Insert your name here), you're a leader appointed by the command of God our Saviour and Christ Jesus, who gives me hope." Say it again, but this time look at yourself in the mirror. as you do. (I mean it - get up and find that mirror!)

2

Family

I am writing to Timothy, my true son in the faith. May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy, and peace. (1 Timothy 1:2)

I recall a conversation I had with a youth pastor whose young people would at times attend other larger, more exciting youth groups in the city. They loved the big meetings with the loud worship music and charismatic speakers.

While some stopped young people coming to his youth group others would be gone for a couple of weeks but would soon return.

When he asked why it was that they kept coming back, even though it seemed they could not compete with what was on offer nearby, the answer was simple: "family".

What they were saying was they felt loved, accepted and included at his youth ministry. They felt like they belonged through the quality

of the relationships they had developed. They were more than a face in the crowd. They were known.

It's a well-established fact that effective youth ministry is relational youth ministry. It's about developing a culture of "family" where everyone is loved and accepted just as they are. This culture doesn't happen by accident. It is modelled by the leaders who believe that God welcomes and accepts all.

Maybe you've experienced this in the youth ministry you've grown up in. Maybe it was even your primary reason for coming and continuing to come.

While it's true that being a leader can mean planning programmes, leading Bible studies and running games, your primary role is always to love young people and introduce them to God's love. You can't be a Christian leader and not get close to people.

Timothy was a young man whom Paul was mentoring. In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul referred to the faith of Timothy's mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. There is no mention of Timothy's father and so we can assume that either he was absent, had died, or was not a believer.

Whichever was the case, Paul took the role of a spiritual father upon himself. Timothy was so much more than an apprentice - a key leader in waiting. To Paul, he was a "true son in the faith" and whenever he spoke of him he did so with great affection.

Yet while he acted in the role of a spiritual father to Timothy, Paul used his position of influence to introduce Timothy to his *true* spiritual Father – God Himself.

It's important that you keep this in mind as you involve yourself in the lives of those you lead. As satisfying as it is to have young people look up to you, your goal should always be to have them look beyond you to God their Father.

You do this by demonstrating grace toward them, accepting them unconditionally and showing love for them

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even when they don't deserve it. You also do this by also showing them mercy, forgiving them when they do something wrong such as disappointing you or even hurting you.

Finally, you do it by helping them find peace in their relationships with others and, most importantly, in their relationship with God.

Your example of grace and mercy enables them to appreciate God's grace and mercy offered through Jesus and motivates them to pursue a relationship of closeness and intimacy with God.

Reflection and discussion

1. As you look back over your own experiences in youth group what are the memories that come to mind concerning your leaders? What impressed you about the way they treated you?
2. In what way was your youth group experience similar to being a part of a good family? What experiences did you have that illustrate this?
3. What do you think it means to be a spiritual father or mother to those you lead?
4. What is personally challenging for you in treating young people you lead as true sons and daughters in the faith? What makes it hard to show the depth of relationship required?

Application

What is one practical thing you can do to get closer to any on the fringe who perhaps don't sense love and acceptance?

3

Wasting Time

When I left for Macedonia, I urged you to stay there in Ephesus and stop those whose teaching is contrary to the truth. Don't let them waste their time in endless discussion of myths and spiritual pedigrees. These things only lead to meaningless speculations, which don't help people live a life of faith in God. (1 Timothy 1:3,4)

I wonder if you've ever been tempted to keep a written record of how you use your time in any given week. If you were to take out "necessities" such as school, work, sleeping and eating how would you use the remainder of your time?

I doubt that it's ever been easier to "waste time" than it is today. Most of us carry in our pocket a device crammed with apps that can so easily eat up spare time. Games, music, videos and personal interaction with friends are all at our fingertips 24/7.

While it's no sin to relax and unwind, if you were to pull out your phone now and scan your most-used apps, how many could you label as "time wasters" and how much time do you devote to these compared with Bible reading and prayer?

Paul's concern for Timothy in these verses was that he was at risk of wasting his time in "endless discussion of myths and spiritual pedigrees." These myths and genealogies were common topics for discussion in the ancient world and Paul was concerned that Timothy would lose sight of what was important and waste his time in these worthless pursuits.

While few of us are at risk of an obsession with myths and spiritual pedigrees, the threat of time-wasting is just as real.

One way to deal with this is to delete those apps or avoid those activities that waste time, but what tends to happen is that we create a vacuum that soon gets filled with other time-wasters.

If you are serious about being used by God a far more positive and productive strategy is to commit yourself to regularly invest your time in truly productive pursuits.

When I was in my twenties, I used to ride the train to work and back every day. It was about a 15 minute journey. What amazed me was the amount of reading I got through. Thirty minutes a day became two and a half hours a week which translated to over 100 hours per year, which equates to about 15 average length books.

If you decided to make the Bible one of those books you read, you would still have time to read another 7 to 8 books before the year was up!

If you are serious about being used by God, regularly invest your time in truly productive pursuits.

If you're not someone who loves reading or if your daily commute sees you behind the wheel of a car, try listening to podcasts or get an audiobook subscription. You'll be filling your mind with content that will expand your thinking and grow your faith.

What's true for reading is also true for other spiritual pursuits such as memorising Scripture or praying. Engage regularly in

these disciplines and even small amounts of regular time each day will add up and the effect on your life and growth as a Christian will be significant.

Talk to anyone who's gone on to accomplish significant things for God and you'll note they have one thing in common: they've learnt to invest time wisely.

Reflection and discussion

1. What's the difference between wasting time and simply relaxing?
2. What are the "time-wasters" you most struggle with? How do you stop these things sucking up time better spent doing other things?
3. What advice would you give to someone wanting to develop a good daily habit of reading their Bible and praying? Share from your own experiences.
4. If you read your Bible and pray every day, should you always expect to get something out of it?

Application

Prayfully decide before God how much time you'll commit each day to invest in your spiritual and leadership development. Be realistic. If you've not been spending regular time like this, start small and commit the amount of time you want to commit – not the amount you feel you should.

4

The Purpose of Bible Study

The purpose of my instruction is that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith. But some people have missed this whole point. They have turned away from these things and spend their time in meaningless discussions. They want to be known as teachers of the law of Moses, but they don't know what they are talking about, even though they speak so confidently. (1 Timothy 1:5-7)

One of the challenges that people often face as they step up into leadership is that they feel as though they don't know enough about the Bible. They are either afraid that their lack of knowledge will be shown up by a young person asking a difficult question, or they fear they will lead young people astray by teaching them the wrong thing.

Paul's concern in these verses is not leaders who fear they don't know enough, but leaders who have "missed the whole point" of studying the Bible. These people had turned away from what they'd been learning and spent their time in meaningless discussions about the law of Moses found in the Old Testament.

Their problem wasn't so much their lack of understanding of doctrine. It was more that they'd failed to realise that the ultimate purpose of what they'd been studying was not to inform their minds but to transform their lives.

Consequently, Paul condemns them with the words, "They don't know what they're talking about!" They confidently spouted forth doctrine but that same doctrine had failed to produce "love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience and genuine faith."

This then is the real purpose of studying the Bible. It's not simply to grow in knowledge so that we might excel in discussions and impress people with what we (think we) know. If that's why you study the Bible, Paul says that you have missed the whole point!

The reason we're to spend time in God's Word is that we might be transformed into leaders who not only know the faith but live it out.

You've possibly heard the saying that, "Young people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care!" Another way of putting this is that who we are is more important than what we know.

That's not to say that it's not important that we learn more about what the Bible teaches. It's *very* important!

This saying reminds us though that even more important than knowing our Bible is living it out. When we do so, people are drawn to us and in the process they are drawn to Jesus, the One who produces attractive fruit in our lives.

How do we do this?

When you finish reading a Bible passage, reflect on a simple two-word question: "So what?!"

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Ask God what He wants to say to you through what you've been reading. What needs to happen for you to be more loving and pure?

Confess any sin that comes to mind and allow Him to clean your conscience and grow your faith.

Reflection and discussion

1. How real is the fear of not knowing the Bible well enough for you? What are you most afraid of?
2. What do you do when you come across a passage you don't understand? What could you do?
3. Be honest, and ask yourself why you read your Bible. Is it to learn more or even to boast or simply to avoid a sense of guilt?
4. What do you do avoid the trap of not actually putting into practice what you read in your Bible?

Application

Tomorrow when you read your Bible as yourself the two-word question, "So what?" and listen to God speak to you about your life.

5

Shoulds and Should Nots

We know that the law is good when used correctly. For the law was not intended for people who do what is right. It is for people who are lawless and rebellious, who are ungodly and sinful, who consider nothing sacred and defile what is holy, who kill their father or mother or commit other murders. The law is for people who are sexually immoral, or who practice homosexuality, or are slave traders, liars, promise breakers, or who do anything else that contradicts the wholesome teaching that comes from the glorious Good News entrusted to me by our blessed God. (1 Timothy 1:8-11).

I recall a friend once telling me that no sermon should ever include the word "should". (When you pause for a moment and reread that statement you'll notice the irony!)

There is at least some truth in this instruction. It's easy to twist "following Jesus" into "obey a list of things we should and shouldn't do".

Not that such a list is wrong in itself. As Paul points out here, such a list is a useful way of showing wrongdoers what they are doing wrong. Without such laws and rules it's possible for us to do wrong without realising it.

The problems come when we use rules and the threat of consequences as motivation to do good. Such an approach leads to a Christian faith based on our own performance.

In verse 5 we saw that the purpose of Paul's instruction was not to simply lay out rules to be kept and sins to avoid. It was to bear fruit in the form of believers who are "filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith."

In other words, Christian faith is not just about what we do - it's about who we are. It's not just about how we behave but about how we think in our hearts.

How do you approach your Christian faith - as a set of rules to be followed? If so you'll probably be the sort of leader who looks for ways to point out to young people what they are doing wrong.

Instead, approach your Christian faith as a Person (Jesus) to be followed and you'll soon realise that the goal is not to change young people's behaviour but to change their hearts.

When we understand this we will avoid filling our messages with "shoulds" and "should nots".

Yes at times we'll need to apply the law to point out what is sin and what is not, but most of our focus will be on the "glorious Good

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News entrusted to [us] by our blessed God."

This good news is of God who loved us so much that He became one of us, dying for our wrongdoing and rising again, before filling our hearts with His presence and His love.

When our gospel is centred in God's love and sacrifice and not our own behaviour, we'll produce disciples who are neither consumed with pride nor racked with guilt. We'll produce disciples who know the law but pursue a pure heart, not because they should but because they deeply desire to. Not because they are fixated on rules but because they are in love with Jesus.

They will see wrongdoing as more than breaking rules. They'll understand it breaks God's heart.

Reflection and discussion

1. How is an emphasis on “keeping rules” different from an emphasis on “following Jesus”?
2. How do you think the people you lead predominantly see you? As someone always telling them what they should and shouldn't do? Or as someone who loves Jesus?
3. When we focus on keeping rules we either end up feeling like a failure or full of pride? Which extreme do you tend towards?
4. How do you overcome feelings of guilt and defeat when you fail to live up to God's expectations?

Application

Instead of focussing solely on keeping rules, try thinking about how much Jesus loves you. Take a pen and paper and write down what He might say to you to show you that He loves you. Include any Bible verses you can think of, and then allow this love to be your motivation to live for Him.

6

The Call to Serve

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do his work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve him, even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted his people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 1:12-14).

One of the more essential attributes you bring with you into youth ministry is the assurance that you're called by God to do His work. When we realise that we're doing more than running a programme, leading a small group or listening to a young person downloading their day, something shifts inside of us. Rather than being engaged in routine earthly pursuits, we're partnering with God in building His Kingdom one person at a time!

Because the assurance that we are called by God to share in His work is so transforming, Satan does all he can to undermine this sense of a call using two common tactics.

The first tactic is to tell us that we're not able to fulfil this calling - either we are not capable enough or we are not strong enough. Paul, I'm sure, knew the feeling, and he knew that Timothy, as a young leader, was susceptible to the lies of the devil.

Therefore, early on in this letter, he states unequivocally that it is God who gives him the strength to fulfil his calling. He's not dependent on his own ability or his own strength. When he's feeling tired, inadequate or overwhelmed he takes comfort in the knowledge that God is his strength.

The second tactic Satan commonly uses is to tell us that we're not worthy. If anyone was aware of his own unworthiness it was Paul. He never tried to hide his past, stating "I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted his people."

His defence against the devil wasn't one of denial. He didn't pretend the past never occurred, nor did he minimise his sin, except to say he did it in ignorance, thinking that he was in fact doing God's will. Instead of wallowing in guilt over his past failures, he chose to celebrate God's mercy and grace.

Perhaps Timothy is not the only young leader who needs to be made aware of these tactics of Satan. Maybe you too feel inadequate for the task you are called to or perhaps you feel you are not a strong enough Christian. It could be that your past mistakes weigh heavily upon you and you really don't feel worthy to lead.

The reality is you *are* inadequate and you are *not* worthy! Satan, however, is only telling you a half-truth.

The good news is that God knows this and calls you anyway. Your inadequacy can be a good thing because it forces you to rely on God's strength. Your sense of unworthiness can also be a good thing

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because it stops you becoming proud and judgemental toward those you lead.

If this describes you, then what you need is to be filled with the two things Paul mentions in verse 14 with no thought of any credit for himself. Those things are faith and love.

Faith in God's call strengthens you to serve God despite your weakness and unworthiness, while love to care for His people takes your focus off yourself and on to others.

Reflection and discussion

1. What aspects or roles of leadership do you find especially difficult? What makes these things difficult?
2. Do you ever struggle with feelings of being unworthy or a hypocrite? How do deal with these feelings?
3. Why do you think God calls people to lead despite their weakness and unworthiness?
4. How has being a leader already helped you to grow in your faith?

Application

Spend some time confessing your weakness and failures and allow yourself to deeply appreciate God's amazing mercy and grace! Receive His gift of faith to do His work and love His people.