



“Encouraging the Next Generation” (Selected Scripture)

Josh Harris – GS3358

1 Timothy 4:12, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.”

This is the verse Pastor Danny has asked me to teach from and it is very fitting seeing that this service is being led by the Middle School Ministry Leaders to highlight the launch of our Weekend Services for Middle School Students.

The obvious message of this verse is pointed towards young people, telling them that it is never too early to serve God and to even be examples, leaders if you will, in the church. But what I want to do in this study is look behind the obvious message to see the heart and the background of this message and its messenger, because in doing so I believe there is great encouragement for young and old alike.

This letter to the young minister, Timothy, was written by the Apostle Paul during the later years of his life and ministry. In the letters of 1st and 2nd Timothy, Paul is in a sense passing the torch of leadership onto a younger generation. To get some background of Paul’s experiences that brought him to this point we are going to look at some events recorded in the Book of Acts.

The background to Paul’s conversion

We get our first introduction to Paul in the record of the stoning of Stephen in **Acts 7:57-8:3**, **“At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.”**

Here we are introduced to Saul of Tarsus, a young man who seemed to have found his niche in life as a brutal persecutor of Christians. But as we know, God looked down on this ambitious, angry young man and had other plans for his life.

Shortly later, Jesus revealed Himself to Saul on the road to Damascus and he was converted to Christ. This young man began to preach the very faith he once tried so violently to destroy. He changed his name from Saul which means “Asked for” to Paul which simply means “small”. He gave up his ambitions to advance self and spent the rest of his life in selfless pursuit of advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Ministry of the Apostle Paul

Paul was made an apostle by Jesus Christ, though Paul himself would describe his being made an apostle, “*as to one abnormally born.*” Why would Paul describe himself as an abnormally born apostle? It was because he was not made an apostle at the same time and in the same manner as the other apostles.

You see, the other apostles walked with Jesus during his earthly ministry. They heard his teachings. They saw His miracles and were eyewitnesses to His death, burial and resurrection.

They were in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost and experienced that historical outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

They led a great awakening among the Jewish people, seeing thousands upon thousands come to faith in Christ and experienced a time of unparalleled unity and giving in the early years of the church.

All this while, Saul was a young man hating on Christianity. He missed out on this great movement of God among the Jewish people. I’m sure he heard the stories of those who had been a part of this great movement of God as they reminisced about that wonderful time in the history of the church.

Although Paul missed out on that great movement of God among the Jewish people, Paul was going to find himself right in the middle of a new movement of God among the Gentile people.

As we read the Book of Acts we see two major movements of God in the church:

1. Among the Jewish people in recording in Acts Chapters 1-8.
2. Among the Gentiles recorded in Acts Chapters 9-28.

During the first movement among the Jews, we see Peter as the apostle and spokesperson God used. During the second movement among the Gentiles, we see Paul as that apostle and spokesperson.

Galatians 2:8, “For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.”

Being that Paul had a major part in pioneering a movement that was new to the church, he became very familiar with the fact that not everyone in the church was eager to embrace a movement of God that was new to them and different from how God had moved in the past.

Paul ran into a lot of trouble and hardships as a minister of the gospel to the Gentiles and some of that came from those who had been a part of God’s first movement among the Jews. Many of these Jewish believers were not willing to accept God’s moving among the Gentiles. There was a time when even Peter was a hindrance to God’s work among the Gentiles.

Galatians 2:11-14, “When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of all of them, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

Peter was drawing back from the very people that God was doing a new movement among because he had become stuck on what God had done in the past among the Jewish people. He lost sight of the fact that God was moving among a new group of people in a way that was different from how He had moved among the Jewish people. Peter was found being a hindrance to God’s moving rather than a help.

I believe Peter fell into this snare because was looking backwards to God’s moving rather than looking forward. Instead of being a mentor and encourager to the next generation of Christian leaders, Peter was being a hypocrite and a stumbling block to them. Thank God, Paul had the courage to rebuke him to his face in front of them all.

Paul recognized and appreciated the fact that God had moved powerfully before he had begun walking with the Lord.

Paul also knew that Jesus was moving powerfully during his lifetime.

In addition, Paul was confident that Jesus was going to continue to move powerfully among the generations after him.

When Paul wrote the letters to Timothy he was no longer the young man we saw in Acts Chapter 7. Paul would write during those same late years of his life in ***Philemon 1:9 saying, “I then, as Paul – an old man and now a prisoner of Christ Jesus – ”***

Paul was able to avoid the snare of getting stuck in the past even as an old man; and here's how I believe he was able to do that. Through the record of Paul's life and through his own writings it is clear that he was a man who in regard to God's moving in the church: appreciated the past, embraced the moment and continually invested himself towards the future.

1. Appreciated the past.
 - a. In Paul's teachings, he would often recount Old Testament stories and use them as reminders and lessons for us today. Paul appreciated the fact that there is much to be learned from the past.
 - b. **1 Corinthians 10:6, "Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did."**
 - c. Paul would often share his salvation testimony of how he was once a violent man and a blasphemer; but that God, in His grace, saved him to use him as an example His love and patience.
2. Embraced the moment.
 - a. **Philippians 1:21-22, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me."**
 - b. Paul was a man who realized that his time on earth was short and he made it his goal to make the most of every opportunity.
3. Invested himself towards the future.
 - a. Paul's vision for the church extended beyond his own lifetime and this allowed his work in the church to impact others beyond his own lifetime.
 - b. **Acts 20:25-32**
 - c. Paul invested himself in discipling, training up, sending out and continuing to support and encourage young Christian leaders who would carry the torch of leadership beyond his own lifetime. This is very evident in letters like Titus and 1st and 2nd Timothy.

Present Application

How can we learn from Paul's example in these areas and apply them to our lives today?

1. We should learn to appreciate the past, without getting stuck in the past.

Many of us here are aware that Calvary Chapel was birthed out of a great movement of God during the 70's that has been called *The Jesus Movement*.

While I wasn't there personally, I have benefited greatly from that movement of God in many ways.

- 1) You see, my parents and grandparents were saved during the *Jesus Movement*.
- 2) My parents met and were married as a result of that movement and so I wouldn't even be here otherwise.

- 3) I have been richly blessed by the godly example and Biblical teaching I have received since childhood from my parents and grandparents.
- 4) I am certain that my coming to faith in Christ was connected to the Scriptures they taught me and the prayers they prayed for me.
- 5) I have been tremendously blessed by being part of this local Calvary Chapel as well as being blessed by our affiliation with Calvary Chapel's around the throughout the country and around the world.
- 6) All of these blessings in my life can be traced back to a movement of God that happened a decade before I was born.

While I have been blessed by this movement in more ways than I even realize I have to admit that during my teenage years I grew sick and tired of hearing stories about *The Jesus Movement*. I heard so many stories and testimonies from my parents that I came to a false conclusion that *The Jesus Movement* was a one-time event that I missed by 10 years. It was like, "Man, Jesus really moved during the 70's but he got tired and took a nap during the 80's and 90's. The 70's got Jesus and all the 80's and 90's got was the A-Team and MacGyver"

There is a danger to elevating a past movement of God to the detriment of present and future movements of God.

This happened when Ezra was building the second temple in Jerusalem.

Ezra 3:10-12, "When the builders laid the foundations of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with their trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy."

God responded to this reaction of the older people through the prophet Haggai.

Haggai 2:3, "Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you? Does it not seem to you like nothing?"

Haggai 2:9, "'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house.'" Says the Lord almighty.'

God is not going to allow His work and movements among mankind to diminish. Biblical prophecy is very clear that God's moving in this world is going to increase, leading up to the climactic return of Christ.

In 1998 I came to find out that Jesus' moving and God's glorious work was not just a thing of the past. Jesus moved in my life and I was wonderfully saved! I had the privilege of seeing quite a handful of young people around me being saved and set on fire to serve Jesus in ministry as well.

While I was blessed and continue to be blessed in a general way by the *Jesus Movement* of the 70's, it took a personal movement of Jesus in my life to be blessed with personal salvation.

Every generation, every individual needs a Jesus movement of their own.

While we need to recognize and appreciate God's moving in the past, we also need to realize that all people, especially those who do not yet know Christ personally, need a fresh movement of Jesus in their lives. There is a fine line between appreciating the past and getting stuck in the past.

2. We need to embrace the present.

Our God's not dead, He's surely alive.

God is moving today. Somewhere, in someone's life, God is moving powerfully today. The key is to be in line with God's will so that we can move where He is moving. Otherwise we can become a church that gets stuck in the motionless reminiscings of the past.

Alice Morse Earle once wrote,

"The clock is running. Make the most of today. Time waits for no man. Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why it is called the present."

Like the Apostle Paul, let's make it our aim in life to please God, to make the most of every opportunity, to not grow weary in doing good; so that every day we spend in the body will mean fruitful labor for us.

God is moving today, the question is, are we moving with Him? Otherwise we may find ourselves stuck in the past.

3. We need to invest ourselves towards the future.

It is very tempting to look at this generation and say with little hope, "What is our nation coming to?" Let's face it; from an earthly viewpoint things aren't looking very promising. Morally, financially, spiritually; our nation is in trouble.

But the outward appearance of our nation's state should not quench our hopes for a great movement of Jesus. On the contrary, they should fuel our hopes for a great movement of God among us.

God moves and He moves the strongest when circumstances appear the darkest.

Who looked at Jesus' shameful rejection and expected a glorious resurrection?

Who looked at the young and violent persecutor Saul and expected the old and gentle Apostle Paul?

Who looked at the hippie movement of the 60's and expected the Jesus Movement of the 70's?

God is going to move among this generation of young people and it is going to be glorious. Some of the people God is going to use tomorrow are those we would least expect today. It is going to happen with or without me, and with or without you. But you know what? I would prefer to be a part of it.

I believe the best way to be a part of what God is going to do among this generation of young people is to invest myself into the lives of young people; to be an example in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Like Paul, I would like to be found faithful in discipling, training up, sending out and continuing to support and encourage young Christians who will carry the torch of leadership beyond my own lifetime.

But for that to actually happen there are a lot of obstacles that will have to be overcome, and the greatest of them all is simply my own self-centeredness. I am naturally inclined to focus on my life, my ministry, my movement; and if I don't use the gospel to put my self –interests to death, I will find that time has slipped by and I have missed His life, His ministry and His movement.

Conclusion

Young people –

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young but rather realize that God has called you to be examples in the church now. Even though you may not yet have an official title as a leader, be a leader in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

Leaders are already leaders before they are recognized as leaders; and humble positions are the greatest training grounds for great leaders.

There are young people and then there are: "Getting older" people, "old" people and "really old" people –

For those of us in those later categories, let's appreciate the past, embrace the present and invest ourselves in the future of the church. Let's be encouragers to young Christians. Let's not allow ourselves to get so stuck on God's movement in the past that we miss out on His movement in the future.

I remember our dearly loved Pastor Viv used to refer to the “graying” of Calvary Chapel. While it is inevitable that we must gray we don’t want to become known as the “graying church”; the “praying church” maybe, but not the “graying church.”

Can you just imagine that on our sign, ‘Calvary Chapel, “The graying church.”?’

There are enough of those out there. The problem is that graying churches soon become dying churches.

As we become more gray let’s pray for, and invest ourselves more into those who are yet to be gray. Let’s use age and wisdom to be a blessing this young generation rather than a hindrance.

Like I shared before, my greatest obstacle to living like this, and I’m sure it is yours as well, is simply selfishness. That is why we need to have a funeral for our fleshly nature on a regular basis. We can’t live the life God has for us unless we are active in dying to our natural pull towards self-absorption.

For many of us, over a period of time, our thoughts, our goals, our dreams, our endeavors, our investments and even our ministries have become self-focused. We have slowly become nearsighted and unproductive in our knowledge of Christ Jesus.

That has got to change if we are going to have the privilege of participating in a fresh movement of Jesus Christ. How can we see a complacent heart that has been years in the making changed?

We can simply, through faith in the gospel, accept the fact that we have been crucified with Christ and we offer Him our bodies as living sacrifices in response to His great mercy towards us. Christ can untangle the messiest heart in a moment if we are willing to offer it to Him on His terms, laying down our own terms.

Luke 9:23, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

1 Corinthians 15:31, “I die every day – I mean that, brothers – just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

To be faithful till the day of his death, Paul had to die every day; and so it will be with us.

Ephesians 3:20-21, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

Closing Song: Came To My Rescue