

Mission, Values and Vision

*⁸To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.
(Ephesians 3:8-10. ESV)*

Message 8

Developing Christian Leaders

March 9th, 2014

2 Timothy 2:14-26

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 2 Timothy 2:14-26. We're looking this morning at one of the passages that informs our 7th Core Value. Let me read that to you:

We deeply believe that the local church is the ideal context for and primary agent in the development of Christian leaders.

Leadership development is a very important subset of our primary mission which is to make disciples by preaching the Gospel. Just like Jesus taught the crowds but then would withdraw and teach the 12, so the church needs to have a focus on the congregation in general and on leadership development in particular. We see this most obviously in the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Paul was a church planter. He would go into a city like Ephesus and he would plant a church. Half of our New Testament consists of letters that Paul wrote to churches. He clearly had a primary concern for building up churches in their most holy faith but within that general concern he also had a deep and abiding passion for leadership development. He always took a couple of young men with him when he travelled, many of his letters are written alongside of one or two of these young men, after planting a church he would often install one of these young men as their first pastor and then later he might move that young pastor to another church after the first church had developed one of their own people to be their pastor. Paul was in the business of leadership development in the church and for the church. There are many places within the Pastoral Epistles that we could go to find a passage that would offer useful insights on leadership

development, but for this morning we are just going to zero in on one of these. We won't be able to say everything that might be said about leadership development, but hopefully we will get our thinking pointed in the right direction. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

2 Timothy 2:14-26 (ESV)

¹⁴ Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.

¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

¹⁶ But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness,

¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,

¹⁸ who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

¹⁹ But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

²⁰ Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.

²¹ Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

²² So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

²³ Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,

²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,

²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

In my Bible this section of text is given the heading: "A Worker Approved By God" and I think that is a very useful title, so we'll just steal it and use it for our discussion this morning. My plan is to walk you back through this passage in order to make 6 observations about the worker approved by God and then to ask at the end what kind of church we would need to be in order to develop young leaders like this. First of all then, what can this passage tell us about the worker approved by God?

The Worker Approved By God:

The first thing we notice in the text is that the worker approved by God:

1. Emphasizes faithfulness over innovation and controversy

Paul says to Timothy in verse 14:

¹⁴ **Remind** them of these things

Timothy's job is not to receive fresh revelation from the Lord and to pass that on to the church in Ephesus, no, rather his job is to remind them of what they had already been taught by the Apostle Paul. Timothy is not an Apostle, he is a pastor and an elder but pastors and elders are not Apostles. The Bible says that the Apostles laid the foundation of the church, with Jesus Christ as corner stone, and what elders and pastors do is build on that foundation. When you build on a foundation you are not adding new rooms or changing the design, you are simply adding in line with the pattern and plan that has been laid. That's what pastors do. Pastors and elders are called to faithfulness not to innovation. Here in verse 14 he is reinforcing the instructions he has already given back in verse 2:

2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV)

² and **what you have heard from me** in the presence of many witnesses **entrust to faithful men** who will be able to teach others also.

Christian leaders are not in the business of innovation, they are in the business of passing on the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Paul said that to Titus as well. When Titus was putting elders in place in Crete, Paul reminded him what he was to look for; an elder must be a certain type of person:

Titus 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ He must **hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught**, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

The worker approved by God is not a theological innovator; he is faithful and holds fast to the Apostolic Gospel as taught.

Secondly, the worker approved by God:

2. Strives for the approval of God and the good of God's people

We see that in the contrast at the end of verse 14 and then the positive instruction in verse 15:

not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.

¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

The Greek word translated as “do your best” is the Aorist Active Imperative of *spoudazo* which means “you must be diligent”. The KJV gets the sense of it by translating it as “Study to show thyself approved”. The idea is that the worker approved by God is very diligent in his study of God’s Word seeking God’s approval rather than man’s. Paul’s concern is to develop leaders who care more for the approval of their God than they do for the applause of their people. That is a rare quality indeed. Many are the men I’ve met in pastoral ministry who are absolutely addicted to the love of their people. They are constantly shaving and softening their words for fear of offending or wounding their people despite the fact that the Word of God is described as a sword that cuts and wounds and divides in order to heal. As pastors we face a constant temptation to whitewash the devastation of sin in order to avoid disturbing our sheep and losing their affections. Paul is not interested in such leaders. He wants people who have only one master and who will work hard in order to handle well the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

Lord save us from pastors who love the sheep more than they fear the Shepherd! The worker approved by God is diligent in his study so that he can rightly handle the word of truth. Some of your Bibles will have that as rightly divide the word of truth. The verb there is *orthotomeo* and means “to cut straight”. It means that God is pleased when pastors and Gospel leaders feed God’s people with a straightforward exegesis of the text. Don’t play games with the Bible. Just open it up and say: “Thus saith the Lord”. Preach what is there not what you want to be there and not what your people want to be there. Straightforward exegesis is the highest goal of pastoral leaders.

This is in contrast to what Paul belittles as “quarrelling about words”. Preaching isn’t about duelling rhetoric, it is about opening the word of God. Whatever the content was of this sort of bad preaching that Paul is referring to, he doesn’t tell us, but he does tell us the effect; it “does no good, but only ruins the hearers.” (v. 14b)

The word translated as “ruins” is actually the Greek word *katastrophe* from which we get our English word “catastrophe”. It literally means “to tear down” or “to turn upside down” and in

Greek it is the opposite of the word translated in your Bibles as “edify”. Edify is to build up, catastrophe is to tear down. Paul is saying that bad preaching tears down a church, good preaching, which is characterized by straightforward exegesis, builds up a church. That kind of preaching is something you can only do if you study hard and if you fear God more than you love people, but in the end it’s the best thing you can do for your people. One of the strange paradoxes of Christian ministry is that we can only do good for people when we seek glory for God.

Thirdly, the worker approved by God:

3. Is discerning in his associations and inputs

Paul warns his young student to avoid:

Hymenaeus and Philetus,

¹⁸ who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

Hymenaeus we know and Philetus we don’t know. Hymenaeus was mentioned in a previous letter that Paul had written to Timothy. In 1 Timothy 1:20 he says:

1 Timothy 1:20 (ESV)

²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Paul had apparently excommunicated Hymenaeus back when he was planting the church in Ephesus but it appeared that he was still around and still teaching his false doctrines and Paul tells Timothy to have nothing to do with him. His false teaching was some form of what scholars call “over realized eschatology”, meaning that he felt like we were already living in the time of full resurrection promise. Over realized eschatology has to do with thinking that the things we are promised on the other side of the Return of Christ can and should be our present possession now. Its about telling people that they can live their best life now, rather than telling people that like Jesus, we will likely have to suffer now, die and then be resurrected to enjoy our best life now. That slice of stupid has been around for a very long time and Paul tells Timothy: “Don’t listen to it. Don’t download the podcast and don’t be seduced by the megawatt smile. You are

not living your best life now son, you have been called to suffer on behalf of the Name.” The worker approved by God is discerning in his inputs and in his associations.

Fourthly, the worker approved by God:

4. Is honest about his weaknesses and frailty

Paul talks about how there are in fact honourable and dishonourable servants in the house of God and they tend to reveal themselves, over time, by their growth in holiness and Christian character. That’s Paul’s version of “you shall know them by their fruit”. He goes on to encourage healthy cowardice in young Timothy with respect to sin and temptation:

²² So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Run away Timothy and cling to Christ. That’s the game plan! That is still the best advice you could give to any young person, particularly a young person pursuing ministry. As soon as the devil detects an interest in pastoral ministry or elder level service he will absolutely assail you in all the weaknesses of your flesh. Do not think that you can handle that. You can’t. Run away and cling to Christ. Don’t play with fire! Don’t think you can watch that movie and fast forward through the bad parts, don’t think you can go to the party and not partake in the pleasures, don’t think that you can dance with the devil and not be changed. When you dance with the devil the devil don’t change, the devil changes you, so don’t dance with the devil. Run away and cling to Christ.

And do that, he says “along with those who call on the Lord with a pure heart”. You are going to need a purity committee if you want to crucify the flesh and avoid disqualifying yourself from ministry. Young men interested in pastoral or elder level leadership listen to me: be a coward and seek accountability. Run away and cling to Christ in community.

Fifthly, a worker approved by God:

5. Seeks a balance in his teaching between boldness and kindness

Look at verses 24-25:

²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,
²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness.

There is an assumption of boldness there because the worker approved by God is assumed to be teaching and correcting people but there is also a command to patiently endure evil and to do the correcting ministry with gentleness. I've told you many times that I preach these messages to you on Sunday but I preach them to myself on Tuesday and this one hit me pretty hard. I don't think I'm very good at this. Boldness I get, teaching I get, correcting I get, but this bit about patiently enduring evil and correcting with gentleness I am probably pretty horrible at. I tend to punch back pretty hard when I am attacked. I have essentially no flight instinct, I have all "fight instinct". I've had to apologize to one of our elders before because he made a joke about me having toothpaste and deodorant in my office closet and I almost put him in a headlock. I grew up with an older brother and if you didn't punch back hard you wouldn't survive the weekend but that is a poor attitude and demeanor to bring with you into ministry. I want to be bold. Canada suffers under the burden of a weak, effeminate and excessively polite body of clergy. That is the first thing you notice when you move from the U.S. back to Canada. I'm a Canadian obviously, but I've lived and studied in the States and when you come back that is the first thing you notice about the Canadian church. Our pastors are weak, effeminate, people pleasers by and large and I don't want to be like that. BUT. I really do need to work on gentleness and I confess that I have sinned many times in the pulpit and in person in this regard. I ask for your forgiveness. I am not surrendering boldness, but I am asking for your prayers in the area of patient endurance and gentleness. A worker approved by God is bold and kind. He endures patiently and he corrects gently. I want to be that person and I covet your prayers toward that end.

Sixthly, and lastly, the worker approved by God:

6. Is patient, prayerful and dependent

Look at verses 25-26:

God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,
²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Paul tells Timothy to teach and correct with patience and kindness and then he doesn't say: "If you do that then everyone will be saved, your methods will be vindicated, you'll have a megachurch and everyone will go to heaven". No, he says: "God MAY PERHAPS grant them repentance, they MAY come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil." That's a lot of may and perhaps for people who serve an Omnipotent God. What happened to name it and claim it? What happened to the Word of Power? What happened to speaking into being things that are not? Where is all of that? I don't know but its not here. Maybe because Paul serves a Sovereign God:

1 Timothy 6:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.

We don't know everything we'd like to know about God and how God saves sinners; but here is something we know. God is not obligated to prosper our efforts, even when our efforts are faithful and obedient to his Word. We cannot obligate God. So drop the triumphalism, drop the pragmatism, stop inviting people to your "how to" conference and just serve the Lord with patience and with prayerfulness and understand that outcomes belong to God alone. Do your best, be faithful, study hard, work on your character and then fall on your face and pray like crazy for the Lord to have mercy.

Romans 9:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

The worker approved by God works hard and remains prayerful and humble before the face of a Sovereign God.

That's the text and that is a picture of the worker approved by God. That is a picture of the sort of leader we want to develop in this church. How can we do that? What kind of a church do we need to be to partner with God's grace in the development of that kind of Gospel worker? Using what we know of Paul and Timothy from other parts of the Bible, let me take just a few minutes and suggest three characteristics of a church that produces workers approved of God.

What Kind Of Church Develops Workers Approved By God?

1. A church where parents and grandparents teach their children the Word of God

In chapter 3 of this same letter Paul makes reference to Timothy's early and extensive education in the Word of God:

2 Timothy 3:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it
¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Timothy has been taught the Word of God from childhood and he knows from whom he learned it. We know too because back in chapter 1 Paul says:

2 Timothy 1:5 (ESV)

⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

Long before Paul began teaching Timothy he had already learned the faith through the patient instruction of mother and grandmother. Do you want to be a church that develops Timothys and Tituses? Don't look to your elders alone to do it. Don't look to your pastors to do it. Don't think that you can put your tithe into the plate and devote a portion of the budget to it and that should do it. It starts way earlier than that. It starts with parents and grandparents laying the foundation of Bible knowledge and Gospel faith around the dinner table. It starts with a little boy and a little girl sitting at the table with Bibles open and eyes fixed on mom and dad, grandma and grandpa seeing their love of God and their trust in Holy Scripture. 80% of leadership development happens right there. Start now and build a strong foundation in your home. Before leaders are leaders they are little boys and little girls sitting around your table.

Secondly, the kind of church that produce workers approved by God is:

2. A church where the people are gracious and forgiving

One of the reasons I am a pastor today is because I came from a church full of very gracious and forgiving people. Its hard to become a leader as a young man in a church that remembers who you were as a slightly younger man. I am humbled and amazed that my church offered me an internship when I was in university despite the fact that my church remembered who I was when I was in High School. I've always been one of those all the way in or the all the way out kind of people. Luke warm Christianity seems like the worst of all the options to me. For half the cost you get none of the benefits; it just didn't make sense to me. I was going to be either a full Christian or a full pagan and I experimented with both in High School before finally settling on full Christian. I embarrassed myself royally and publicly and boldly – boldness has never been a problem for me as we've already discussed – and it amazed me that these same people who witnessed my aggressive experiment with paganism so quickly forgave and forgot and affirmed me as a candidate for leadership development. That's a good church. You need to have really short memories with your kids if you're going to be a church that develops leaders. God tends to recruit strong willed, hard headed, passionate people to tend and defend his flock. Think Moses and Jacob and David and Peter and Paul. Three murderers, one liar and one guy who would have been a murderer if he knew how to use a sword. That's a motley crew, amen? If you don't have short memories with your young people you will miss out on those type of leaders.

Lastly, the kind of church that produces workers approved by God is:

3. A church where the leaders are capable of thinking in terms of multiple generations

So many churches today seem to have no sense of the kingdom of God beyond the life of their present day leaders. Part of that is the cult of personality that is so characteristic of the Evangelical church, part of that is the hangover of Rapturemania that spread through the Evangelical world in the last decade of the 20th century and part of that is just a consequence of living in a drive through, microwave world. We think very much in terms of now. James Montgomery Boice is often quoted as saying: “People tend to overestimate how much they can accomplish in five years, and underestimate how much they can achieve in twenty.” I would paraphrase that to say that Evangelical churches often overestimate how much they can accomplish in one generation and underestimate how much they can accomplish in three. The Apostle Paul was not like that, he said to Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV)

² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

What YOU have heard from ME – generation one, entrust to faithful men – generation two – who will be able to teach others also – generation three. That’s the kind of thinking you have to have in your church if you want to develop leaders. So few pastors and elders think that way. As pastors we tend to overestimate what we can accomplish in our own careers and care too much for who gets the credit for the harvest and so we try to do too much too fast and as a result we drive the bus into a ditch.

Do you know what I’ve noticed in my reading of the Bible and Christian history? There are very few examples of three generational thinking that I can point to. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but God’s people tend to be very narcissistic and short sighted. There are a couple of examples of two generation thinking. There is Moses and Joshua, there is David and Solomon and there is Paul and Timothy. But, what happened after Joshua? Chaos and disintegration. What happened after Solomon? Division, rebellion and exile. What happened after Timothy? Who was the great Christian leader trained up by Timothy? We don’t really know. Some say Onesimus pastored in Ephesus after Timothy but he wasn’t a disciple of Timothy, he was another disciple of Paul. Who were the third generation leaders? We don’t know but I can’t help but wonder what would happen to the City of Orillia if we could think like this and plan like this and pray like this over three generations of leadership.

That calls for humility, that calls for patience and that calls for the help and mercy of God; so let’s turn to him now in prayer.