

Philippians 2:19-24 says:

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PRAY.

When I was seventeen years old I preached my first sermon.

The youth pastors at the church I attended had just resigned from the church and the leadership had asked one of the dad's in the student ministry to step in and the first thing he did was gather our student leadership team together and give us – the students - some specific responsibilities to help keep the student ministry together as they walked through the transition.

My first task was to deliver one of the first sermons since our youth pastors had left. And I can remember it clearly. I worked on that sermon for at least ten days straight. I poured over my text. I used texts from multiple different locations in the Scriptures. I thought about my peers as I wrote and what it was that I thought God was telling me they needed to hear.

My sermon that day was about the Lord's Prayer in Matthew chapter 6. In fact, I still use the same Bible that I used that Sunday morning, and my notes are still written in the pages from that sermon.

Some of my family came to the student ministry area of our church that morning to hear me preach – but my brother was so nervous for me that he couldn't come in the room - but I could see him pacing outside the windows.

The sermon was written out in manuscript form – and it was seven pages long – not a super long sermon by any stretch of the imagination, but not necessarily short on content either, at least I didn't think so.

But, when I stood up to preach the message... 7 minutes later.... I was done. 7 minutes!

In fact, halfway through that seven minutes, one of the pages of my sermon fell off the podium, and I couldn't remember which order it went in my message, and I ended up preaching one of the pages twice!

Here is what I can tell you: When I had imagined how the end of my sermon would go... And the impact that I expected that it would have on my peers and my leaders in the room.... I had some pretty high expectations.

I'm not saying that I expected EVERYONE in the room to be so moved that they submitted their life to Christ, or re-dedicated their life to Jesus, or confessed all their sins to one another... *But let's just say... I expected the vast majority of them too.*

But as I left the podium after about 7 minutes... to re-take my seat in the front row... You could pretty much hear crickets in the room. And it wasn't because I had left everyone speechless... In fact, I don't think the dad who was in charge of the youth group at the time was even back from taking a bathroom break yet... So, everyone just sort of sat there in silence until he got back in the room and figured out what to do with the remaining fifteen minutes we had left that morning.

Now, for those of you who have been here the past few times I've spoken on a Sunday morning, you know that things have changed a bit.... Because I'm pretty sure my last two sermons have been about 10 minutes too long...

And we're going to try and not let that happen today...

But listen - It would have been easy for anyone in the room that morning – myself included - to have seen me give that sermon, and to have thought to themselves. Well... I guess that was fine... a little short... and probably a little all over the map as far as keeping it focused... *but that was fine...* And to have never thought twice about me and that sermon again. I was able to fill in the gap for the leadership until they could figure out what to do the next Sunday.

And for most of the people in the room that morning... *that is exactly what happened.*

As far as I am aware, no one came to know Jesus as Lord and Savior that morning. But there was one guy in the room that morning, who I'm not even sure heard most of my sermon.... Who, for whatever reason, maybe because I was one of the only students who was willing to get up and give the sermon that day.... But he saw something in me that could be cultivated and nurtured and refined.

Now, I'm not saying that he necessarily took me under his wing... That he started mentoring me on a weekly basis... or that he started teaching me everything he knew.... He never had this

deep visionary conversation with me about how seventeen years later I would be on staff at a church, leading teams of people, and preaching sermons regularly...

But that wasn't what this particular guy was called to do in *that season*. He simply let me keep *servicing*. He simply gave me some more opportunities. And just a few months after I gave that first sermon, as I entered my spring semester as a high school senior... I enrolled in the professional internship program through my school and started *interning* at that church.

The following summer a new youth pastor was hired, and he actually did take me under his wing and begin mentoring me. He invited me to stay on as an intern through college and to help plan Sunday morning services, and to plan events and trips and slowly gave me more and more leadership responsibilities.

He disciplined me and had deep conversations with me about what God was doing in my life and how God would use my gifts in ministry and talked to me about how I was good at certain things at how I could improve on other things.

And for the next four years that is exactly what I did until my senior year of college came and that church came to me and invited me to join the staff as a full-time graduate resident. And then, a few months later I was actually hired full-time by another church, in another state, to come and be their Pastor of Student Ministries.

And the church that had just spent four and a half years cultivating me and nurturing me and refining what it was that God had put inside of me and pouring into me had a wonderful celebratory party for me and sent me off to my new season of ministry with cards and gifts and hugs and a couple of years' worth of experience doing ministry under my belt.

Why do I share this? What does any of this have to do with you?

Over the past year and a half, as I've had the opportunity, I've used my time with you here on Sunday mornings to talk about the 7 Core Practices of First Presbyterian Church of Edmond. For those of you that don't know what it is that I'm talking about – these are 7 statements – 7 actions – 7 principles – by brother-in-law calls them 7 pillars - that our elders here at First Pres were led by God to establish several years ago that sort of serve as a framework or a filter for why we do what we do... they are 7 commitments that we make to one another, as believers, about how we will do life together as a church.

And over the past year and a half I have been able to cover 6 of those. And finally, this morning... we have reached the end... and while the core practices aren't in any particular order this is the last one that we haven't covered.

And if you can't tell by the story that I just shared with you about my journey into ministry... This last of the core practices here at First Pres is by far the one that really gets me excited.

It's why I saved it for last. I knew that if I talked about it early on you would be able to tell the difference in my enthusiasm about them...

Don't get me wrong. I love all of our core practices here. The seven core practices are: Pray Together. Read and Practice Scripture. Serve Community. Share Who You Are. Invest in others. Care For One Another...

And today as we wrap up the 7 Core practices, I want us to take a look at the core practice of "Create and Send Leaders". And let me just acknowledge from the outset here:

Church – First Pres - this is something we have gotten a lot better at over the past several years! We're not perfect. We have a lot more that we can learn and do... and I believe God has some big things on the horizon for us.

But as a body of believers, gathering together and worshipping together, and doing life together... This is one of the core practices that we have really been investing in and I am so proud of what God has been doing here.

I arrived on staff here in October of 2017... And that first year that I came here there was no specific budget that we as a church had set aside to specifically invest in young leaders in the different departments of our church.

Now, that's not to say that leadership development wasn't happening – it was. It just wasn't something we had taken specific and intentional steps to build into our DNA at that point.

And over the past five years, you have given me the privilege of investing the resources of First Presbyterian Church of Edmond into more than 25 interns that have come through the ministries of this church, from student ministry, to worship ministry to communications.

And today, First Presbyterian Church of Edmond has *sent* leaders all over the United States.

Adam
Anna
Josh
Kat
Hannah
Cooper
Trace
Jake
Travis
Chase
Christian
Brynnan
Dillon

Ben
Faith
Paige
Chuck
Ben
Will
Abbey
Kurt
Brayden

I know that as I read those names, for many of you – faces flashed before your eyes! Just from those interns alone, we have sent leaders to Clinton- Oklahoma, Central Alabama, Tulsa - Oklahoma, St Louis-Missouri, Norman-Oklahoma, Nepal, Charlotte-North Carolina, Dallas-Texas, Stillwater-Oklahoma, Guatemala, Denver-Colorado, Kentucky, and all across the Oklahoma City metro.

And that's just the *interns* you have invested in the past five years. There are so many other areas of leadership investment that I could talk about as well. From missionaries to new Sunday school teachers, to one-on-one mentoring that you have done.

And this year, church... you budgeted over forty thousand dollars to invest in and to create and send leaders here at First Presbyterian Church.

And people ask me all the time... *But what if we had kept all those leaders!* Can you just imagine the young adult ministry we would have here at First Pres! Can you just imagine the impact we could be making on our community here in Edmond!

Yes! *Yes I can!*

I promise you I can imagine the huge crowds that could gather if only we kept all the leaders we had poured into! In fact, if it were just up to me – left to my own devices – that is probably exactly what we would do! We would just develop and keep them!

In fact, I tell people all the time – *creating leaders* is one of my favorite things that I do! I love to invest in the next generation of leaders. *Sending leaders* – not so much! In fact, I have thought about petitioning our elders here at First Pres to change this core practice from Create and Send to Create and Keep.

But let me draw our attention back to the Scripture that we read this morning. This is Paul writing here – the writer of most of the books in the New Testament – and he says this:

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to **send Timothy** to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For

they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to **send him** just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

So – just as some background info about what happening here. Paul, the author of this book – Philippians – is writing this letter from prison. It is estimated that he is likely writing the letter from a prison in Rome or is at least being transported to Rome as a prisoner – although we don't know for certain.

But if that is the case it means that Paul is sending Timothy to Philippi – from Rome.

Which is a distance of about a thousand miles... Now, to be clear, Paul does say here that he may come when he is able. But the truth is that right at this very moment – Paul *cannot* go to Philippi. Not only is he clearly in prison somewhere... So he is physically unable to go there... But Paul, by nature, soaks up every opportunity to minister to the people of his current context and doesn't move on from that location until he is led by God to do so. And so, he cannot go to Philippi simply because of physical reasons, but it's also not the right time for him to go spiritually.

But as Paul often does for us – he models for us what it looks like to live a life that expands the Kingdom of God. Not just in his words, but also in the WAY in which he lives. See, Paul has been DOING LIFE with Timothy.

If you are not familiar with the relationship between Paul and Timothy in the Scriptures, it's important to understand that Paul and Timothy serve as sort of the pre-imminent model of creating and sending leaders. Timothy begins to travel and share the Gospel with Paul at a very early age – some scholars estimate that he may have been as young as sixteen years old.

And we see the first time that Paul and Timothy meet in Acts 16:1-5:

16 Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ² He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

And it is estimated that for the next 20 years Timothy and Paul are going on these missionary journeys all over the world together. Often times going together – but also at least on occasion

and at certain points Timothy is either *sent* as Paul's representative – like we see in Philippians - or he is put in charge of a situation or a church as we see in the books of 1 and 2 Timothy.

We see in 1 Timothy that Paul is writing to Timothy because Timothy has been entrusted with leading the church in Ephesus as they battle against false doctrines, and we see Paul call Timothy:

“My true child in the faith” in 1 Timothy 1

And *“you man of God entrusted with righteousness, godliness, faith, love and gentleness”*... in 1 Timothy 6.

My point is this: Paul realized early on in his ministry that if the Gospel of Jesus was going to be spread all around the world... If the message of grace and hope and love and mercy was going to reach the ends of the earth.... If sound doctrine about the person of Jesus Christ and the life of the believer was going to be guarded and protected and preached and shared....

Then it was not going to happen simply by him *demanding* that it happen. It wasn't going to happen simply by him writing letters to all the churches he had gone and established and demanding those letters be read aloud before the congregation. It wasn't going to happen simply because he had “good intentions” of making it happen. And it wasn't going to happen “sometime in the future” once the people in the churches he had preached to finally grew up and reached spiritual maturity.

The only way that it was going to happen was that Paul was going to have to invest and entrust what it was that God was doing in him to someone else. He was going to have to pour his life into someone else's.

He was going to have to *cultivate* and *encourage* and *foster* and *call out* and the spiritual gifts of another person. And it was clear to Paul that Timothy was that person.

And as a result, all throughout the New Testament we have this example of these two men either directly or indirectly influencing a huge section of the globe. In fact, it says in Acts chapter 19 verse 10 that at one point during their journey the entire residents of Asia – both Jew and Greek had heard the word of the Lord because of their work.

And this is where I want to pause for a moment this morning... Because I know that it can be easy to hear about all the work that Paul and Timothy did...

All the lives that were changed and the churches that were started or strengthened or the miracles that happened or the people that were reached with the Gospel because of these men...

And to think...Wow. That is incredible. One man... Paul... he invested in this young guy Timothy... And then they dedicated their lives to traveling all over the globe spreading the Gospel. And to think...

But that's what *they did!* That's what they DID FOR A LIVING...

They were *missionaries*. That is what THEY were called to do...

To GO and SPREAD the message. To protect the church and her doctrines.

And it's easy sort of think to ourselves...

I'm a banker...

I'm a mechanic...

I'm a teacher...

I'm an artist...

I'm a musician...

I work at a coffee shop...

I'm not called to be a missionary.

I don't make my living travelling and spreading the message of Jesus...

So this idea of "Creating and Sending" leaders is not really all that relevant to me.

I mean don't get me wrong Brett-

I love what you're saying... I think this is important.

I think this is awesome... I think this is needed...

And I'll do my part of sharing the Gospel with people as I might encounter them in the work that I do.

Brett I love that *YOU* get excited about this...

But is this really *required of me?*

Can you show me where the Bible says that I have to create and send leaders?

Well, the truth is no... I can't.

And so if you are looking for an out this morning... I just gave it to you. The Bible doesn't say you have to do this. I can't point you to a specific Scripture that says: *thou shalt invest in someone else so that someone else helps you expand the Kingdom of God to the next generation*. And if a written commandment is what you're looking for... on this one... you are off the hook.

But then again...

I can't find where Paul had a written commandment to invest in Timothy.

As far as I can tell – there was nothing specific in the laws of Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament or in Jewish tradition that Paul would have seen that would have explicitly told him that he had to pour his life into Timothy so that by default Timothy would then help him double or triple or quadruple the size of the impact he would have.

Paul just knew that Jesus said: **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.** Which, by the way is written in Matthew 28:19... if you do want a Biblical reference for this...

But it seems as though Paul understood that as one, singular person, the reality of making disciples of all nations... was impossible.

Now, certainly some of those realities have changed a bit for us in 2022. We have the ability to travel by plane and be in multiple cities, states, and even countries in a matter of hours... We have technology that links us up visually with the other side of the world – with potentially millions of people in a matter of seconds.

We have YouTube and Facebook and Instagram that reach billions of people every day. So, certainly one person today can make a massive impact.

And listen – I have listened to some amazing sermons and podcasts and read some incredible blogs and books of people that I have never met before. I've watched countless church services and messages of pastors that I will never have the opportunity to sit down with and pick their brain. They will never personally disciple me. And to a certain degree those messages and those writings will *influence* me.

But **nothing** will ever compare to the five years I spent doing life arm in arm with the guy who knew me and invested in me.

Who knew my spiritual gifts and called them out.

Who knew my weaknesses and helped me see how to improve upon them.

Who gave me opportunities to lead, when I wasn't fully sure I was ready.

No amount of books or podcasts or online messages can compare to someone sitting down with you, one on one for countless coffees and lunches.

Psalm 71 verse 18 says:

So even to old age and gray hairs,
O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another generation,
your power to all those to come.

And church if we want to be a people who declare the might and the power and the message and the hope and the redemption of Jesus to another generation... We can't simply use the excuse of: well, I'm not a minister.

I'm a doctor. I'm a businessman. I'm just _____.

No, you are a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I am a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And we are called to take his message to the nations.

2 Timothy 2:1 says this:

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,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

In other words – this is the model for reaching the nations! What you have heard from me... What you have learned from me... What you and I have just spent years doing together...

Now you do it with others.

You see, Mike, the guy who invested in me... He could have just said to that first church that I went to after he had been mentoring me, when they called him as my reference...

He could have just said to them –

Hey listen.... I'll come. I know you really need someone to come and to live in your community. To be among you and to do life with your students. Someone that will be available to disciple your students and to walk with them as they grow...

But I've got some time in September and I'll swing through there and give you a couple weeks and then next June I'll be back through...

No... I can't leave the church I work for... see my time there isn't done yet...

But I can work you in...

No.

He said.

I can't come to you.

But I'm sending Brett.

He's proven himself worthy of the Gospel.

I'll vouch for him.

I've been doing life with him for five years.

I know where he's strong and where he's weak.

And if he needs anything – he will call me.

I'm sending Brett.

First Pres – I am so proud of you.

We have come so far in the past five years when it comes to creating and sending leaders. But what if we were just getting started? What if all over the world – First Presbyterian Church of Edmond was known as a church that not only spent significant portions of their budget on creating and sending leaders –

But was known as a people who did life with the next generation of leaders in such a way that we said –

Hey:

We can't come.... We still have work to do here in our own community...

But were sending... Will.

We can vouch for him.

We've been pouring into him the past few years... We've been doing life with him...

We know his strengths. He's going to be perfect for you.

Yeah, we know his weaknesses too...

Here's where you will want to invest in him some more.

And if he needs anything...

He'll call us...

Talk about declaring the power of God to the next generation....

Church – I stand before you today, because someone, a man, a ministry, a church invested in me... *Cultivated* what God was doing in me... and *SENT* me. And listen – I am more than happy to keep doing life with the young leaders of this church that come here.

I am more than willing to keep going to coffee with them and taking them to lunch and inviting them over to our house for dinner and card games around the dinner table. I have absolutely fallen in love with what it is that I do here at First Pres.

But my question is this... What if you did it too? What if you went to coffee and lunch with a young leader too? What if you sat with them and listened to what's going on in their life and just showed up as a steady presence that helped them figure out what God was doing in them?

Can you imagine the impact we could collectively make?

Several years ago I remember Brian Horner standing up here on this stage sharing about how each month he gets his credit card statement in the mail... And how he looks at that statement each month and thinks to himself about all the things he's bought that just don't matter... How he looks around and hardly sees any evidence of the credit card statement...

But that when he see's how he's financially given to the church... He doesn't feel that way. He see's how God is taking that money and using it to advance the Kingdom.

And I loved that thought.

But what if we weren't just talking about money.... What if we were talking about something so much more. What if we were talking about people...Who were invested in.

And then they invested in someone.

And then they invested in someone. And before you know it you can look around and see how your investment in an individual has had a generational impact.

And so, Church, I ask you.... What would it look like for you...

To be a part of "creating and sending leaders"?

PRAY.