

Phase 3: Jr and Sr. High

First Timothy 4:11-16

October 31, 2016

We are doing a series on the phases of life; from preschoolers through retirement. We are learning how in each of the phases that we have unique opportunities to grow in faith and love. And we can be a mentor and coach for those coming up behind us.

Today we cover the junior high and senior high years. It is a time when they are discovering their uniqueness and how they can matter. In fact that is exactly what the Apostle Paul tells his young protégé Timothy. I'm reading First Timothy 4:11-16. Let me give you some background first.

Paul had met Timothy on his first journey through Asia Minor, sometime around 46 AD. He was the son of a Jewish woman

who had become a Christ follower, and a pagan father. I can imagine that growing up the offspring of a mixed marriage was not easy. He was probably never sure exactly where he fit in. His Jewish neighbors avoided him because his mother was Christian. His Greek neighbors avoided him because he was part Jewish. And the Christian boys and girls looked at him with skepticism because his father was not a believer, never darkened the inside of Timothy's church.

Several years later, this traveling preacher came again to Timothy's home town of Lystra and spoke at his church. After the service, his mother Eunice invited the preacher home for Sunday supper. This quiet boy impressed the preacher; he seemed bright, mature, and had a deep faith in Christ. Everyone spoke highly of him. He was so impressed that after dinner, he said, "Timothy, tomorrow Barnabas and I leave for

Phrygia and Galatia. I'd like you to go with us."

It didn't take much convincing. What young man wouldn't jump at the chance to travel throughout the empire with one of the greatest preachers of his day?

And so the next day they departed for what proved to be the greatest adventure of Timothy's life. Their journeys took them to the major cities of those days; Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus and the jewel of them all...Athens.

You can't help but do a lot of growing up on such an adventure and the preacher watched with pride as Timothy grew into adulthood. As Paul mentored Timothy, he was beginning to demonstrate that he too has been gifted by God for teaching and leadership in the church.

They had planted a church in Ephesus and things at first had gone very well and

the church had grown. But over time some of the leaders of the church had begun to teach some doctrines that were contrary to scripture. Paul has more churches to care for and so he made the decision to leave Timothy behind to clean up the mess and give pastoral leadership to the Ephesian church.

Some time passes by and Paul hears that Timothy is having some leadership issues. So he writes this letter to give him some guidance. This letter, plus second Timothy and Titus are called the Pastoral Epistles because they deal with the qualifications and duties of church leaders. Here is what Paul writes,

Command and teach these things. ¹² Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not

neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

¹⁵ Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. ¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Young Timothy is having doubts about his leadership in the church. Some people are trying to tell him he is too young, that he is not seasoned enough. Paul says “hogwash.” If God has called you to lead, lead! Be an example in how you live your life, use your spiritual gifts to teach and preach, be accountable, and don’t give up when it gets tough. And if you do that, God will use you to bring people to faith. God wants to use young people. They are not the church of the future they are the church now!

The stages

So let’s start by taking a look at the life of the typical Junior High and Senior High student.

Junior high is a time of feeling insecure. They are asking the question “Who am I?” They are very smart. Just ask them. The answer to everything is “Yeah... I know that.” Adults however are not cool. In fact, parents...you are an embarrassment. Their peers are now playing a bigger role than you. You will notice they do everything in groups.

Eighth grade was a year of insanity for me. I was paddled by every teacher in the building. That’s when public schools still used corporal punishment. My history teacher, my art teacher, my gym teacher, my English teacher all paddled me. I was never paddled before eighth grade and never after. Just that one year. It’s kind of a crazy time.

In ninth grade they began to ask “where do I belong?” You will see past friends

fade and new ones appear. The quest for popularity fades as they connect in smaller groups—choir, band, drama, sports, church and youth fellowship.

Grades start to matter. Really matter. So it's pretty stressful.

But they will have a more stable sense of who they are by the end of their freshman year. So listen carefully, stalk them openly, know where they are finding acceptance because it will affect the next four years.

Tenth grade is huge. They gain freedom that comes with the driver's license. You will try to limit that freedom. And they will tell you that there is no other adult on the planet that limits their activities like you do. "Nobody else has a curfew. You are the meanest person I know." What we did was to network with other parents to find out what their rules were and we tried to find something in-between strict and ridiculous.

Now they are asking, "Why should I believe? They are becoming skeptical. They are realizing that adults are not perfect. They can see that you have broken some of your own standards and so when you say, "Because I say so," they will challenge that. They will ask the question, "why"? So you will need to have an answer ready.

In 11th grade things begin to get better. Their hormones are regulated; the fight for peer acceptance has subsided as well as the intensity over independence. There is less drama so you can relax a little.

But the stress goes up. Some college bound juniors will opt for AP classes. Some will get after school jobs, the college search begins, plus the ACT/SAT preparation. They will feel a lot of pressure. And because they have more freedom it is harder for you to keep up. You will need to trust them more because they won't be around the house much.

And you will need to choose your battles wisely. The question they are now asking is, “How can I matter?”

Their senior year they begin to ask, “What will I do?” They are in many ways an adult but not really. They are responsible for their actions and decisions. You will also begin to feel them pull away. We find that even in the church. We have a hard time keeping seniors in the youth ministry.

This is the last 52 weeks you will have them at home, so make the most of it. You will have lots of “last time” moments. I think Melinda spent a lot of time crying during our kid’s senior year. I cried a lot too because it’s also a very expensive year.

Near the end of the year they will discover they need adults in their life a little bit longer. The decisions they make have high stakes. And it will take a while for them to figure this adult thing out.

And then they are gone. You become an empty nester. You get more freedom. No games to attend. No forms to sign, and no forgotten books or homework to take to school. Food in your refrigerator expires before you finish it. The house gets quiet.

How they relate to God

Last week I said that elementary age kids are scientists. They like concrete evidence. They want to see clear application. Teenagers, however, are philosophers. They are looking for principles that will give their story meaning. That search is exactly what led me to faith in Christ at the age of nineteen. I was asking, “What will give my life meaning and purpose?” I was blessed that there were both peers and adults around me to point me towards Christ.

Teens are looking for a personal mission, a cause to give themselves to. They relate to a God who guides their decisions, promotes love and forgiveness, empowers

their freedom, enables them to live more fully, moves them toward a greater purpose and identity, and connects them to a bigger story.

Mobilize

So what we can do to help them grow is to mobilize them. When you mobilize their potential you help a high schooler keep pursuing authentic faith and discover their personal mission.

Listen. The average high school student over the course of a year will spend 200 hours studying math, 300 hours watching TV or movies, 600 hours using their phone, and 40 hours in church activities. That's not much. We only have so much time with them. You however, have much more time with them. So students, stop making excuses. Parents, stop making excuses for them. Don't say, "they are just kid. We can't expect much from them. Instead mobilize them.

How?

Help them find a place to use their skills to serve. That's one reason why we do Appalachian Service Project. We have been doing that since 1982. Kids learn how to live in an intense Christian community for a week. They learn what skills they have and that they can make a difference. They see a culture that is different than the one they live in now. They learn the value of sharing. They learn leadership. Some parents are really smart and go on the trip with their kids.

Two weeks ago 17 of us went to Monterrey, Mexico to serve orphans at back2back ministries. We had three moms who took their children with them. We had two families who brought a grandparent with them; three generations working and serving together. It was a great experience.

Teens also need to discover their uniqueness. You can help them by asking them questions. That helps them to

discover the answers on their own. I would find time to talk with my kids when I was driving them somewhere, just the two of us. Then one day I overheard Megan telling Christa, “Don’t get alone in the car with dad. He will ask you questions about what you want to do with your life.”

So be discreet.

Most Christ followers want to live out of a sense of calling from God. The teen years are when most of us receive that call. That’s when Timothy received his call and it’s when I received my call. Some of us, like Pastor Mark, got a call mid-life. But I’m not just talking about a calling to being a pastor or missionary. All of us are looking for a calling to our personal mission.

A lot of us still think that God calls only special people for a fulltime religious vocation, like pastors, missionaries, nuns or monks. One day you are walking

down the street minding your own business and God hits you with a lightning bolt and you are suddenly “Called by God.”

The moment you signed up and said yes to God, and were baptized, you also said “I’m willing to serve you the rest of my life.” If you are a believer, you are a minister. Not everyone’s a pastor, or missionary or evangelist but everyone is a minister.

Not only are teens called, but they are gifted. Paul says to Timothy, “*Do not neglect your gift.*”

Our teens have gifts. God wants you to discover and use your gifts to build up the body of Christ and to glorify Him. Discovering your gifts and talents helps you to figure out how you live out your calling.

How do you figure that out? Find a mentor. Our teens need mentors.

Mentoring is the cornerstone of leadership development. Its historic roots lie in the strategy of apostolic succession, when apostles passed on credibility and authority to a next generation of disciples. We need to be passing on this authority to our youth.

There is no curriculum for this. You do it by living life together. Mentoring focuses on the inner work of leaders: attitude, integrity, stress management, and perseverance through temptation, and the myriad ways leaders wrestle with the devil in their own cultural wilderness.

Not only to be our students need to be mentored, they need to be mentors. They need to be investing in helping others. Sophia Lee is one of our students who gets this. She is constantly inviting her friends to church, sharing her faith, living it out. We have a great group of students who are trying to do this in their classrooms, in the school cafeteria, on

the stage, on the sports field, or on social media.

Here are what some of our 20 something's have to say to our teens.

(video-3 minutes)

Conclusion

So what do we want our students to know? Verse 12 says, "*Set an example for the believers in speech, conduct, in love, in faith and in purity...*"

Speaking of purity, we are teaching a class called, "Parenting in a Sexualized Culture", which will be Nov. 6 & 13, 10:45-12:15. This series will help to equip you to engage your kids and navigate the cultural minefield every family faces. Some of the topics we will address include how and when to talk to your kids about sex and sexuality, why your family needs a technology strategy, and what you can do to model a life of purity for your kids.

Love is the one thing that matters most. When you think about it, every doctrine, every commandment, every principle, every parable, and every story can be easily arranged to reflect how you love God, others, and yourself. Love is why God made us in his image, so he could love us and we could love him. Jesus came to model God's love, he died to prove God's love, and he rose again to empower us with God's love.

Love is to be the distinctive mark of the church. James and Paul called it the Royal law.

This church wants your kids to grow up loving God, loving others, and loving themselves in a healthy way. While giving information to our kids about the faith is important, the foundation of our faith is a relationship, not information. That's why any content we give them should be

organized to reinforce their relationship with God.

We want them to know that they are created to pursue an authentic relationship with their creator. That they were created in the image of God to experience his love for them. And that God desires an eternal relationship with them. We want them to believe in Jesus and trust him even when life doesn't make sense. We want them to discover that God's Spirit is transforming their unique and imperfect life into the character of Jesus.

And we want them to know that they exist every day to demonstrate God's love to a very broken world. They get to participate with God in transforming this world by loving those to whom love is a stranger.

And they learn this from you...church. From you...parents. From you...small group leaders. They learn it from us.

So let's incite their wonder, provoke discovery in them, and fuel their passion for Christ.