

MENTORING THE YOUNG

“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young...”
—1 TIMOTHY 4:12

The encouragement of younger Christians by older Christians is vital to their wholesome development and spiritual growth. Young people do not have the experience and wisdom that comes with age. They need the nurturing, encouragement and willingness of older people to step aside and make way for them.

Paul experienced this in full from Barnabas. In Luke’s account of their first missionary journey, he reports the pair as ‘Barnabas and Saul’. Barnabas was the leader and Paul, the second man with John Mark, the junior assistant on the team. They began their journey by visiting Barnabas’ home region of Cyprus, and then worked their way through the area of southern Galatia. As their journey continues, the narrative changes significantly from documenting the activities of ‘Barnabas and Saul’ to the activities of ‘Paul and Barnabas’.

Paul’s leadership ability, preaching and debating skills were making him more prominent than Barnabas, so much so that when they arrived in Lystra, Paul was openly recognized as the chief speaker. Barnabas did not challenge it, or seek to restrict Paul so as to preserve his own reputation, but as he always did, he pushed his protégé forward, encouraging him in his gifts of ministry, and no doubt deriving great pleasure from the growth of this remarkable companion and friend.

Paul had done the same with Timothy, taking him under his wing in the church at Ephesus. Timothy was young, inexperienced, frail and easily intimidated by elders of the church who were more critical of him than encouraging. He did not have the boldness or courage of Paul, but he loved the Lord, and Paul, even from prison in Rome, knowing his days were drawing to an end, continued his mentorship with letters of encouragement and instruction to Timothy.

Sometimes the biggest discouragement for our young people comes from those who have been in ministry for years. We need to recognize underneath clumsy enthusiasm and impractical ideas is a genuine desire to serve God. Sometimes older Christians who have enjoyed being at the center of things can become defensive of their own position and fail to prepare the next generation. Young people need the protection and wisdom of older people, and the older people need the enthusiasm and adventurous spirit of the young. They are the next generation into whose hands we are entrusting the Gospel, and who, one day, will pass the same encouragement on. For many Christians creeping up in years, mentorship is invaluable and a wonderful way to serve the Lord.

PRAYER: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for the wonderful mentorship and support I have received. May I do the same for others when the time is right.

TO REFLECT UPON: Has mentorship played a key role in my work with God?