

I was scrolling through my phone recently and stumbled across what has become one of my favorite pictures. It's a picture of my dad, myself, and my three sons; three generations of Presslers, together at my dad's favorite hibachi restaurant, in what would be our last night together. He would pass away just a couple of weeks later. I have looked at that picture several times over the last month partly just to remember my dad, but also to think of all the things he passed on to me that I'm trying to pass on to my sons. His influence has already reached the next generation, and I pray that, one day, my boys will be looking at a pic where I'm the old guy in the last chapter of my life, they're grown, and with us is their children, who will have received what my dad gave to me, what I gave to their dads, and what my sons have given to their children.

What we see in my family, and I know in many of yours, is what we've also seen in the Church for the last 2,000 years. Each of us is a branch on a spiritual family tree that begins with Jesus and has been passed down from one generation to the next, from spiritual mothers and fathers to their spiritual children, to their spiritual children, to their spiritual children, and so on.

But for too many of us, the idea of passing on our faith, activating someone else into their God-given purpose, and encouraging them to do the same for others, seems daunting. We struggle with the idea that we don't know the Bible well enough, we're not living our lives as perfectly as we should, we're afraid someone may tell us "no thanks" or label us as something we are not, or we believe that's the work of "super-Christians", and that's just not who we are.

But in order to answer the call of Jesus, we must become **insistent on a legacy of exponential impact**. This morning, as we continue in our series called *Becoming*, we are going to look at two Bible characters who show us how that can be done. They are Paul and Timothy, a spiritual father who poured himself into a young man he called "my true child in the faith", and who sent him along to do the same for others. This isn't a message about church planting and church leadership, though. It's about how all of us can pass on to others who God is to us, what he's done in us, and what he wants to do through us, as we grow the family tree of God.

To help, I want to focus on four words: **Identify. Invite. Invest. Ignite**. Last week was the perspective of investing your whole life. This week is how we do that. I believe these four words are a pathway we can all follow to pass on our faith to others and activate them for the Kingdom. If we live this way, the impact we make for God will continue long after we are gone.

Identify and Invite: Exponential impact begins when we engage another.

Paul is on his second missionary journey, and he is on his own. He has parted ways with his partner Barnabas, who has chosen a different path and taken John Mark to accompany him.

[Acts 16:1-5] 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.

Paul makes his way to Lystra and hears about this young man named Timothy. You get the sense Paul is on the lookout for someone to invite in. Based on his own observations, the input of others, and likely the prompting of the Holy Spirit, Paul identifies Timothy as someone to engage and invites him to join him. Paul met many impressive people on his journeys, but he was alert to who God might give him and he identified Timothy to be the one. Timothy is now in a position to be discipled by Paul and given a front row seat to observe and participate in the work of his ministry. In so doing, the life of Timothy, and the history of the church in Asia, would never be the same.

You and I are on the mission field ourselves. When we wake up in our home, take a walk around the block, go to work, or yell at the referees at our kids' games, we exist in those places as light bearers and ambassadors for the King. But for us to have an exponential impact, we have to begin with the same three things Paul has here: Open eyes, a willing heart, and thick skin; eyes to see people like God sees them, a heart that will respond to his holy nudge when he wants us to engage, and the courage to possibly be rejected. It may be a family member, friend, co-worker, neighbor, or maybe someone halfway across the world that God wants to send you to in order to invite them to know God through Jesus and live their life with him and for him.

We also have to be of the character that would cause someone to accept our invitation. There's a word we don't use a lot that fits here. It's winsome – pleasing and engaging in a way people would desire to be around you. For some we engage, the first impression they get of God may be you. Our reputation may not precede us like Paul's preceded him, but the greater the impression we make, the greater the possibility of someone accepting our invitation.

I was speaking with a woman in our church who felt led by God to engage her neighbors more intentionally. She had her first opportunity at a Bunko party she was invited to and reluctantly attended. But the real breakthrough came over a random encounter on the sidewalk. She and another neighbor got to talking, followed that up with a phone call, and this woman decided to invite her to help start a neighborhood Bible study.

But her invitation went beyond just getting together. Her neighbor has been invited to co-lead the group and encouraged to invite others, since she has more relational capital (winsomeness!) in the neighborhood. They held their first meeting a couple of weeks ago with five women and are already sharing hosting and leading duties. And they have plans to hold a holiday open house this December and invite their Muslim and Hindu neighbors in the hopes of building relationships with them. What started as a holy nudge that identified her neighbors as the ones God wanted her to engage turned into a conversation that turned into an invitation that turned into a gathering that turned into multiplication. We will all be able to tell a similar story if our eyes are open and we're willing to take a risk, a courageous next step, for God and move.

So who are your people? Who is God nudging you to engage, given you to identify and invite into this walk with him? He knows exactly where you are or where he's calling you to go, and he

put you there or is sending you there because he has people he wants you to engage with the good news of Jesus and invite them into the life God has for them.

Invest: Exponential impact advances when we grow another.

Paul's invitation to Timothy included him observing and being a part of his ministry, but the entirety of his investment in Timothy went far beyond that. Near the end of his life, Paul wrote a letter to his protégé that we have in Scripture where Paul reminded him of all he had given him.

[2 Timothy 3:10-15] ¹⁰ You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 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.

Paul invited Timothy to learn from and participate in his ministry, but perhaps the greatest investment he made in Timothy was to invite him to learn from and participate in his own life. Timothy traveled extensively with Paul, became an influence in the churches Paul planted, and was even named as a co-greeter in many of Paul's letters. Along the way, Paul did more than teach the ABCs of ministry. He showed him how to follow Jesus. He taught him the Scriptures, modeled a God-centered life characterized by fruits of the Spirit, passed on an unquenchable desire to see the Gospel spread, and modeled faithful perseverance through trials by relying on God's grace. Paul didn't just say, "You saw how I planted churches. Now go do it." He instead said, "You saw how I lived my life. Now go do it." Discipleship is ultimately about reproducing yourself in others.

Exponential impact is a process, but it's also deeply relational. There is plenty of training to be done in studying the Bible, sharing our faith, leading a group, and equipping others, but for us to truly reproduce ourselves in someone else, our investment must include letting them in. We all ultimately want to say the same thing as Paul: "watch what I do so you can do what I do."

A beautiful example of this is in our STEPS program we launched a couple months ago. Each participant is paired with a mentor for the sake of helping navigate the revelations and struggles that come out of the study. The mentor can counsel, coach, and give ideas, but the most powerful thing they can do is open up their own lives and invest in the other person what they've experienced themselves: This is what I know about God. This is how he's shown up in my life. This is how I've lived in light of that. Let me help you do the same.

As we think about that, it should give us pause, because it's based on the assumption you are living a life God would want reproduced in others. Reproduction is reproducing our character, not just our actions. Does God want you to make more of you? A sick tree won't bear good fruit, and neither can a sick Christian living in opposition to God. If that's you, repent, go back to

week one of living God-centered life, go back to week two and ask your community to help you get back to a place of spiritual health, and then go reproduce.

But here's the encouraging part of that. God calls us to reproduce only what we are. It's all we have to invest, and it's enough. There is no need to wait until you've mastered the Bible or you are living perfectly. Progress is key. Just reproduce what you are now. An apple can't reproduce an orange. A cat can't reproduce a dog. And you can't reproduce something you aren't. But God is not asking you to. He's asking you to reproduce what he has made you become up to this moment. If you have trusted in Jesus for salvation, you have a testimony that includes the recognition of your sin and need for God's free gift of forgiveness, you have his Spirit living within you who has given you new life and empowers you to live for God, and that means you are reproduceable.

The Gospel of Mark tells us of a demon-possessed man who suffered for a long time. Jesus healed him and then said, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." The life change that Jesus made possible was to become the investment that man would make in others. Like him, if your life has been changed by Jesus, you are still a work in progress, but you have something to invest today in someone else. And as you grow, you will have more to invest. But you don't have to wait until then.

Ignite: Exponential impact culminates when we launch another.

Igniting is not kicking someone out of the nest but is instead lighting a fire to launch them out into who and what God has for them and calling them to do the same for others.

[2 Timothy 1:2-7, 2:1-2] ²To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. ³I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. ⁵I 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. ⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control...¹You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, ²and 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 the same letter to Timothy, we're shown how someone is ignited. Put yourself in Timothy's shoes and see if you would be inspired to go. He is clearly adored and loved by Paul, being referred to as a beloved child, and Paul acknowledges him as a source of joy. He affirms his faith and the gifts of God that he sees in him and commissioned him to use by the laying on of hands. He reminds him to stand firm in the power, love, and discipline of God when fear comes. And Paul challenges him to pass on to others what he himself had invested in him, and then to challenge them to also do the same. The command is generational. Ignite others who will ignite others who will ignite others. Paul is telling his spiritual child to make him a grandfather!

We ignite someone we've invested in when we say "**This is how I feel about you. This is what I see in you. This is what I believe God has for you. Now go!**" Our investment and

encouragement becomes fuel for their journey with God. That means you are not only commissioned into the Great Commission, but you are commissioners. When we invite someone in and share our faith and our life with them, we are in prime position to send them out to do the very same thing for someone else. This is how the church has grown and impacted the world since the day of Pentecost, and it's the way it grows and impacts today.

I want to close this morning with a story of two young ladies who have lived this out together, and my prayer is that you would be inspired by their story to do the same thing.

Because of what Paul did with Timothy, the church in Asia flourished, and the family tree of God grew, long after Paul had died. And because of Alexa's faithfulness, who invited her friend Addie into a relationship with her, invested her life in hers, and ignited her by inviting her to Sudan and encouraging and challenging her to take that courageous next step, someone's eternity may be changed. We may never know the impact they had, but I rejoice in thinking there's a person in South Sudan who is going to put their faith in Jesus in 2050 whose spiritual family tree will include Alexa and Addie. I believe God also has generations of followers for you to impact.

Over the last few weeks, we have told four stories of courageous next steps, and now it's your turn. As you consider what yours might be, think of it as something small enough that you can see yourself doing but big enough that God has to show up. It doesn't have to be going to Africa tomorrow. Take that first step, and then another, and then another. For example, our Communications Director, Jeff Harmon, had a lot of fear and insecurity about public speaking, and God led him to confront those fears. So one week ago, Jeff attended a meeting of Toastmasters, spoke before the group, and actually won a ribbon. Good things happen when we trust the Lord is with us and move boldly and courageously.

I encourage all of you to prayerfully decide what that next step is for you, take it, and then share it so that we can celebrate it together. We will be sharing stories all year in our Life Groups and different ministry areas, but we also want to share them churchwide. We have set up a page on our website that reminds us of what we are doing, tells the stories of some who have already taken their next step, and includes a way for you to share your story with us. You can also access the form on our app by clicking "Take a step + share a story". It will only take a minute and will allow us to know what God is doing in your life and give us a way to celebrate as a church family. We pray you are courageous in taking your step, sharing your story, and allowing us to share it with others (with your permission). We also want you to post your story to social media and use #storiesofbecoming.

This isn't just a fun campaign. I believe this is a movement God wants to make in our church, to make him known and to change our lives forever. As I said in the first week of the series, imagine what a newcomer will experience if they walk into a church full of people living courageously for God, and imagine the impact we can have inside and outside of these walls if we all take this step. Nothing will ever be the same. So go...and I invite you to come back next week because I'm going to invite all of us to take a courageous next step together.