

The Local Church: Proving and Preparation

Student Assignment: Read **Acts 16:1-5**

- Timothy was from Lystra
- Paul and Barnabas came through Lystra on their very first missionary journey
- Here a man who had been crippled since birth was healed
- The people began to worship Paul as a god and this caused the crowds to turn against Paul to the point he was stoned, dragged out of the city and left for dead.
- Paul miraculously survived and left and went to Derbe to preach but then returned to Lystra and strengthened the disciples (**including Timothy**) and encouraged them to remain true to the faith. (Acts 14:22 *"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*)

Paul completed his first missionary journey, and 5 yrs later returned to Lystra on his second missionary journey. In Lystra he picked up Timothy and took him with him. For the next 5 years Timothy was in a period of preparation.

Characteristics and Qualities of a Leader who God Can Use:

- Must be a disciple – Acts 16:1
 - Must be proven – “well reported of” (Acts 16:2)
 - Must be an overcomer of personal problems (Acts 16:3)
- Timothy was from a split home/marriage.
- his father was a Greek, a worshiper of the goddess Diana
 - his mother was a Jewish Christian
- **Must be faithful**
 - Must be an example
 - Must be teachable, willing, submissive – Acts 16:3
 - o Paul circumcised Timothy so his ministry could be received by the Jews

Training Begins in the Local Church

Using the life of Timothy as our example, we see that he was found serving faithfully in his local church. **Acts 16:1**

Let's define what it means to serve FAITHFULLY:

- One who can be relied on (Paul could rely on Timothy because he knew that Timothy would do everything that Paul asked him to do.)
- One who is acceptable to God, to yourself, and to someone over you
- One who is trustworthy

Faithfulness is a quality of the divine nature. God is faithful to us. He is faithful to His promises and to His word. Jesus was faithful to His Father and to the call on His life. As His disciples, we must be faithful also.

a. Faithfulness is an Absolute Necessity for Leadership

1 Cor 4:17 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

· *Timothy was sent because he was faithful and well prepared.*

Personal reflection: Are you reliable? Can others depend on you to do what you commit to do? Can others depend on you to do what you are asked to do? Can you be trusted to handle God's business, yourself and others responsibly?

Proving and Preparation Process in Faithfulness

Don't despise the preparation and the proving process. Proving is the process of preparing you for your position in the kingdom of God. Proving prepares you, proving makes you, proving defines you. Preparation is everything for a leader. Preparation tells you where you will go and how you will serve. Many leaders, ministries, and families have been destroyed because they failed to be patient and submit themselves to this process.

1. Like a tree planted by the rivers of water

(Psalm 1:1-4) *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; ² But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. ³ He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. ⁴ The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away.*

Characteristics of a tree that is **planted in the house of the Lord:** (vs 3)

- You will have roots that go deep and are fixed into the soil
- You will be immovable when tested by the storms of life
- You will draw strength from the source of "living water" when you need spiritual nourishment
- You will bear fruit to supply for others

2. Faithful (committed) to the local church

(Acts 14: 21-23) And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." ²³ So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

"Planted" in this sense, speaks of faithfulness in 3 ways:

- faithful to the local church; with an understanding that the local church is God's vehicle by which He fulfills biblical vision
- faithful to spiritual authority
- faithful to the body of believers

The fastest way to grow is to stand in the place where God has put you and be faithful

there. Wait on God, fulfill your task, get your heart ready, work on your character - and then when you are exposed to testing and pressure, you will remain faithful and pass this test. Only then can He elevate you to the next level of leadership.

Remember: God is more concerned with your character, your development and your growth than He is with your giftings. Do not allow yourself to be promoted or put in positions of leadership that you are not ready for just because you are needed, or someone says you are gifted at something. Leaning on your gifts to carry you may work for a short amount of time, but sooner or later your lack of character development will show up under pressure and become a stumbling block for you and others. Choose faithfulness to the process of preparation over any desire to move ahead of God just to be used in the church.

b. Three Tests of Faithfulness

Luke 16: 10-12 He who *is* faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much. ¹¹ Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

1. Faithfulness in small things

If you cannot remain faithful with small responsibilities, you will not be able to be faithful when big responsibilities are handed to you.

*Faithfulness in small matters leads to faithfulness in large matters.

2. Faithfulness with a few things

If you cannot be faithful with a few, how will you be faithful with many? Are you discipling anyone? If you are not, then how can you be faithful to lead a whole church?

*Faithfulness in a few things leads to faithfulness in many things.

3. Faithful in serving others behind the scenes

If you cannot be faithful behind the scenes, serving someone else's vision or dream, then how can God trust you to be faithful with your own ministry? If you are not faithful serving behind the scenes, you will not be faithful on the front line.

*Faithfulness in the background, leads to faithfulness on the platform.

· **Every true leader first must prove himself faithful by serving another man's dream.**

Timothy served Paul before he started to minister. David served Saul. Joshua served Moses. If you are not faithful with the things (work) of others, God will never give you your own.

· **Faithfulness will not always be noticed by those we serve but will always be seen by God and rewarded.**

What we do for God is always more important than what we do for people. God rewards what is done behind the scenes. God will expand your capacity by stretching you, let Him to do it. Let Him put the pressure, the responsibility, the burden on you. He is preparing you for your future and for what you will have to be able to carry later.

Can you push the limits of your potential? Can you exceed it?

God needs to make you strong. Because later when the enemy comes you will not survive if you have not allowed God to condition you for the responsibility you will carry.

You need to let God do it. Do not give up. (Think of how a bodybuilder or weightlifter trains)

As you faithfully carry the assignment and responsibility of serving those God has called you to serve, you will be given more authority.

· This is not once in your life. **With each assignment this process is needed.** God will always lead you through this process again and again. Look at the example of Paul throughout the New Testament. This is why he said to Timothy in Acts 14:22 *"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*