

Right or Wrong? Younger leaders

February 12, 2015

Our pastor says he wants to find and educate “spiritual leaders” in our church, and he’s focusing on members who are middle aged and older. Shouldn’t we consider younger members? And how should we educate spiritual leaders, anyway?

Early in the new year, I spent a couple of days with leaders from Baptist Student Ministry groups from all over Texas. They were in the midst of planning a prayer retreat for other students from across the state, and so they were attending sessions, as well, to prepare them for their roles as leaders in their own BSM ministries.

While we were together, we considered the life of Timothy. His story is a bit difficult to trace, since he often is mentioned in a supporting role. Still, if you follow his life in Acts and the letters of the New Testament, you find at least one way to answer your question.

Timothy was young. Even after spending more than a decade working alongside Paul, he’s called a “young man” (1 Timothy 4:12). Perhaps he was still in his late teens when he was converted to Christianity and wasted no time gaining a positive reputation among the believers. He very quickly began to travel alongside Paul and was allowed to be Paul’s spokesperson on a number of occasions. It would be easy to dismiss Timothy as only a “helper,” but it is clear Paul trusted him explicitly to speak and act on his behalf. This gives clear evidence he already was living as a spiritual leader, even as a young man.

It would seem for Paul, at least, whenever a person exhibited the qualities necessary for being entrusted to lead, age wasn’t of primary concern. Paul

speaks of Timothy's "proven character." This gave him a solid reputation, which outweighed his youth in terms of giving him credibility.

Further, Paul provides a model for training spiritual leaders. Paul knew he couldn't do the work alone, and throughout his journeys, he trained others to serve as spiritual leaders for the congregations he served. Timothy was one of these.

Paul took Timothy alongside as he worked, served, preached and taught. Timothy learned firsthand what ministry looked like as he watched and then participated alongside Paul. Paul also provided specific direction and instruction (see 1 and 2 Timothy) for difficult situations Timothy encountered.

In *Servants of the Servant*, Don Howell Jr. notes four major types of instruction Paul provided in the letters to Timothy in order to continue his preparation for spiritual leadership—instructions for self-discipline, instructions directed toward his specific duties, instructions for developing others as leaders, and instruction on devotion to the word of God.

That's not a bad model for preparing anyone for spiritual leadership.

Emily Row Prevost, director and assistant professor of leadership development

East Texas Baptist University

Marshall

If you have a comment about this column or wish to ask a question for a future column, contact Bill Tillman, consulting ethicist for "Right or Wrong?" at btillman150@gmail.com