

June 5, 2016

Church Planting
Why Timothy?
Acts 16:1-5

Opening Words A.W. Tozer once wrote, *"I remind you that there are churches so completely out of the hands of God that if the Holy Spirit withdrew from them, they wouldn't find it out for many months."* That quote makes me ask you these questions: How long do you think it would take for us to discover the Holy Spirit had withdrawn from Western Reserve? Would the Holy Spirit's exit be an instant discovery? Would the Holy Spirit's exit be a slow erosion? How many would never notice the Holy Spirit was gone? Do you think the Holy Spirit left Western Reserve years ago? Do you think the Holy Spirit was ever here?

In 2013, I decided to take the summer months and preach through the Book of Acts. I also decided to call the entire body of work *Church Planting*. I had hoped to cover the entire book in three years. I can't believe my foolishness. This is summer number four in Acts and we still have a long way to go. The Book of Acts offers us so much, and I refuse to race through it. This summer we are going to look at Paul's second missionary journey. We find ourselves today looking at the first five verses of the sixteenth chapter. Let me call this message *Why Timothy?*

Acts 16:1-5 Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. ²The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Max Lucado once said, *"Faith is not the belief that God will do what we want. It is the belief that God will do what is right."* If you think you can remember that quote, say, **"Amen!"**

We continue our journey in the sixteenth chapter of Acts. So much has happened, it is impossible to summarize. By this chapter, Paul has taken center stage. His first missionary journey is over and he is about to embark on his second. However, before he leaves, he enlists some new help. His list of potential helpers is short. As a matter of fact, only one name is mentioned, Timothy. According to our text for today, Timothy was the product of a mixed marriage. His mother was a Jewess believer and his father was a Greek, or Gentile, non-believer. His references spoke of him in glowing terms. Having just stated these facts, one question remains: why Timothy? What was it about Timothy that made him stand out? What made him an excellent candidate? That is the

question I want to try to answer today. They are the same qualities that God is looking for today. Could it be you have some of those qualities? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** Let me begin with the obvious.

Timothy was not selected by Paul for any **physical** reasons. This was not like the NFL draft where the physically gifted are selected first. We do not know how much Timothy weighed. We do not know how fast Timothy could run. We do not know if Timothy was extremely quick or tall. We do not know if Timothy was short or overweight. Luke does not include any of this information for one reason; it simply doesn't matter. Church history is filled with people of every physical description. Timothy was not selected by Paul for any physical reason. If you think you can remember that, say, **"Amen!"** Your physical state does not excuse you from Christian service. That is a good thing. Did you know, according to the United States government, approximately 36% of Americans are considered obese?

Timothy was not selected by Paul because he was the right **age**. I know age is one of the factors in this story. We can assume Timothy was young. He must be young. Both of his parents and his grandmother are still alive. In First Timothy 4:12 Paul tells us that Timothy was young. However, age does not seem to be the driving force behind Paul's choice. If he was a United Methodist, it would be a factor. Did you know the medium age in America today is 37 years old? Did you know the average age of a United Methodist is 57 years old? Did you know our denomination has intentionally decided to shrink that gap by promoting more youthful laity and clergy? I believe every generation has something to offer. After all, God uses every generation. Timothy was not selected by Paul because he was the right age. Your age is no excuse for not serving God. If you think you can remember that, say, **"Amen!"**

Timothy was not selected by Paul for any **economic** reasons. There is no mention of money in this story. However, I do know that money is important. If you don't believe me, then try to live without it. Try to maintain your church ministries and building without money. It would have been easier if Timothy had some extra cash. He could have paid for everyone's lunch. He could have paid for some traveling expenses. He could have paid for some advertising. If Timothy had had some money, then they could have eliminated all the fundraising. The problem is, money isn't mentioned in the story, so money wasn't a major factor. Timothy was not selected for any economic reasons. If you think you can remember that, say, **"Amen!"** So why was Timothy selected? Timothy was selected for one reason, FAITH!

Second Corinthians 5:6-9 says:

Therefore, we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

Timothy was a man of faith. Faith isn't a magic wand to get what you want. Faith is a deep trust in God, who knows what is best. Does your faith teeter on getting what you want? Is your faith rooted in trusting God? The two are a million miles apart. Martin Luther once said, *"God our Father has made all things depend on faith, so that whoever has faith will have everything, and whoever does not have faith will have nothing."*

When I was in high school, I had a friend by the name of Nancy. There was no romance, just friendship. We were in high school youth group together. The love of her life as a teenager was her horse. She was bright and attractive. As an only child, she was the apple of her parent's eyes. To say the least, she was an extrovert. She made every experience fun. I spent hours with her acting silly and laughing. Years later, I attended her wedding and had too much fun at the reception. A year later, she told me she was going to have a baby. Her future seemed so bright. Then a horrible thing happened. Both she and her baby died during the birth. Her husband struggled for answers and her parents mourned. My parents told me her parents left the church because they didn't believe in God anymore. Their faith was gone. I don't want to be critical, but they didn't get the memo. There is nothing easy about life or faith. Faith is not a magic wand to get what you want. Faith is trusting God to know what is best.

Last weekend, Kathryn and I were in Vicksburg, Mississippi. We love history, and in particular, Civil War history. Today, Vicksburg is a struggling community on the Mississippi, but in the 1860's it was a booming metropolis. Do you remember your American history? As long as the Confederates controlled Vicksburg, they controlled the entire Mississippi River. It was vital that the Union take Vicksburg. Ohio born U.S. Grant made that happen because of a forty-seven-day siege. Once Vicksburg fell, the Confederacy was cut in half and the Mississippi was opened up to commerce again. That battle happened in 1863. However, the Union occupied Vicksburg for years to come.

One of the great names attached to that battle was Ohio born William T. Sherman. In time, he would make it to Atlanta, and then complete his famous march to Savannah, the famous "March to the Sea". You can say, in Vicksburg he practiced for his future success. Trying to isolate the state of Mississippi from the war, he traveled 180 miles from Vicksburg to Meridian, Mississippi. He destroyed railroad lines and private property along the way. Sherman was confident that he would succeed, but one thing did surprise him. He never expected freed slaves to follow him and his army along the way. That would happen time and time again, until the end of the war. They followed Sherman for one reason: they didn't just believe in Sherman, they had faith in Sherman. They really didn't know what the future held. There were no promises of free money, education or a piece of land. They only thing those former slaves knew was life had to be better following him. Blindly, they followed Sherman because they believed he knew what was best for them. That, my friends, is true faith. Timothy was selected because he had faith. As we come to this Communion table, this is my question for you:

Are you a person of faith? I am not talking about a magic wand faith. I am talking about the kind of faith that trusts God no matter how hard life gets. Do you remember what Max Lucado said? He said *"Faith is not the belief that God will do what we want. It is the belief that God will do what is right."*

Will you pray with me?