

**ALWAYS Look Behind You**  
**Timothy in Luke 16, 17 & 19 / June 13, 2021**  
**Mark Archibald**

Congratulations to all of our 2021 high school graduates. This is such an excellent milestone to celebrate in your life! It's certainly a weird year to have your graduation – but it is guaranteed to be memorable.

If you were required to give a speech about your graduation, I'm sure it would have significant memories and moments shared. There would be lots of people to thank – friends who got you through hard times, friends that help you achieve, friends that just made everything more fun. You'd have teachers and school staff in different periods of your life to thank. You'd want to name every significant family member that was there for you. And maybe you'd even want to thank yourself! You did some hard work to get here, too!

If asked, I'm sure you could also come up with a list of people to “not thank”; people that were not helpful in the least on your road to graduation. Maybe they made certain grades miserable. Maybe they made certain school experiences stressful. Maybe they let you down in a colossal way! On your way to your graduation moment, they were more of a barrier on your journey than a helper.

Here's the crazy thing that may be true about the people on your “not thank” list – some of them were really trying to help! They really were! Their intent was to help you. Maybe by saying a really hurtful phrase, they thought you would step up and try harder. Maybe by pushing you to the point of breaking they thought they were motivating you. But none of this was helpful – it was actually very harmful and discouraging!

I find these unhelpful situations and misunderstandings often happen between differing generations. I don't find these misunderstandings only happen from older generations to younger ones, either; the hurt often travels in both directions. People of different generations other than our own often have our best interests at heart, but have ways of “helping” that are often very confusing to us. So we find ourselves fighting one another all of the time, even though we are trying to accomplish the same things.

We know the destination we want. We want people young and old empowered to lead. We want all generations contributing to a meaningful life together. We want all generations belonging in the church. Yet we feel like we are constantly fighting against intergenerational awkwardness and miscommunication.

We feel like stepdad Philip in his attempted relationship with now-adult stepson Shaun in the British horror comedy *Shaun of the Dead*. All throughout their lives, stepson and stepdad had a very antagonist, stressful relationship. And it's not until Philip is dying that he's able to fully express all that he wanted for Shaun.

*Shaun--It's not easy. Being a father is not easy.  
 You were twelve when I met you. You had already grown up so much. I just wanted you to be strong and not give up because you lost your dad.  
 I always loved you Shaun. And I always thought you had it in you to do well. You just need motivation, somebody to look up to. I thought it could be me. Just, take care of your mum.  
 There's a good boy.*

And of course Philip dies and reanimates as a Zombie, as you tend to do in horror movies. But his words are so relatable! From generation to generation we want to see each other succeed. But we don't know how to express this, and when we try to support each other it comes off as pushy, or even worse, as rejection. So we share this same space in a family and in a church unable to truly care for one another until it's too late.

Now, before this sounds like a sermon lecturing old people about how to help young people, it isn't. ALL OF US have next generations coming up behind us. Toddlers follow elementary school kids, elementary school kids follow middle school students, middle school students drive high school student bonkers, and on and on it goes. No matter who you are, you need to be looking at who is coming up behind you and sorting out how you can support and encourage them well.

Thankfully we have Timothy in the book of Acts (and in other parts of the New Testament) to show us the way. No matter what age we are, Timothy and his connection with the older mentor Paul teach us to ALWAYS look behind us. The Scriptures about Paul's connection with Timothy are going to parallel with the stories of people connected with our church.

**Paul invests in Timothy. 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. <sup>2</sup>The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. <sup>3</sup>Paul 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. <sup>4</sup>As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. <sup>5</sup>So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. (Acts 16:1-5)**

Paul hears of this disciple named Timothy, and hears of his good reputation, and Paul takes an interest in him. He wants to work with him, teach him and take him on some of his missionary journeys. Paul invests of his time, life, ministry and travel in Timothy.

Some people have had a meaningful investment of the generations to come behind them by giving. Julie Hunt has a story about this. *An elderly gentleman in his 90's from my church gave me a scholarship that helped enable me to go to Baptist Leadership Training School in Calgary AB back in the mid '70's. He was a member who cared about fellow believers no matter what their age. The youth of the church were important to him. BLTS proved to be a life changing experience for me.* Note that the giving was an active investment. This person knew Julie, knew her potential, and invested accordingly.

Some of that investment comes from clear encouragements. One of our YETI Youth Alumni told me, *I would say the times I've felt encouraged and valued (that I can remember off the top of my head) have been on my birthday. My parents give me a card every year telling me all their hopes and dreams they have for me and how they are proud of the man I am becoming.* Specific, observant encouragement is a genuine investment.

Investment also comes by providing a community of encouragement and hope for future generations. Tracey Hunt explained, *I always collected inspirational poems and the songs we sang in church were an encouragement for me. I felt seen and loved by God when I sang. I guess maybe too, my Grandma's faith and church affiliation was the most encouragement for me so I followed her lead.*

Investments in the people that come behind us come through generosity in time, encouragement, finances and community.

**Paul asks Timothy to do hard things.** Because of the invested relationship that Paul has with Timothy, Paul has permission to encourage Timothy to do hard things. “What kind of difficult things does Paul ask Timothy to do?” you ask? Let’s look in verse 3 of chapter 16.

**<sup>3</sup> Paul 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.**

Yikes. Paul asks Timothy to be circumcised. Why would that matter? Was Timothy doing nude preaching?

The reasons for Paul’s request were actually very practical. There were many tensions between some Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus. Many Jewish followers of Jesus were expecting new followers of Jesus to follow the Jewish laws, such as circumcision. Paul was clear in setting people free from these expectations. However, Timothy, being a Gentile, had not gone through these Jewish expectations and rites. Paul has him get circumcised so there would be no barrier between Timothy and the Jewish believers he’d be working with. This was a means of making ministry and life more practical. It was a demonstration of being willing to meet people where they are at. Paul encourages Timothy to take one for the team and he does it.

Now, to be clear: if someone asks you to help you with something, and then tells you they need to get you circumcised: RUN! But in the dynamic between Paul and Timothy this was a difficult decision with practical implications.

When we have solid relationships and trust with generations coming behind us, we can encourage them to do difficult things. Here are some examples of an older generation that is able to have hard conversations with a younger one.

Here’s an example from our Regional Minister Dennis Stone. *A deeper item of encouragement to me was the couple times that older Christians I respected took me aside and gently offered correction. In doing so they showed me a certain respect as significant to them, and as one who could and should understand a deeper and important message of Scripture ... so the correction seemed to come not from them personally, but more like the voice of God Himself.* This was advice from caring people.

Instruction and correction needs to come from a good place. Too often it’s lecturing and nagging. No one wants to stick around and hear about how bad they are. There are far better ways to teach! Dana experienced the good kind of instruction and direction.

*I was at camp (age 19 or 20) and a cabin leader for a bunch incredibly challenging young boys. I remember walking down the path feeling sorry for myself, and I said to an older cabin leader (he was a Chaplain on the armed forces) that no one would want my cabin. To which he replied “I would”. He said that “God is obviously preparing you for something greater and whatever it is it will be pretty amazing.”*

The words and observation of an older believer can help us to make good decisions. They help us choose things that may not have been our first choice, but may in the long run be far better for us. Here’s Faye’s story:

*I didn't love school and nearing the end of high school in thinking about a career, I wanted the least schooling possible so had decided to be a lab technician. That summer the church hired me for their summer worker and at the end of it, I had three individual women from the church tell me that I needed to go into Education and work with children. I applied for both and told God I would do whichever program I was accepted into first, and it turned out to be Education. I continued to work my summers at the church through University running day camps and also volunteered leading youth during the year. Our church was later hiring their first youth pastor and my pastor told me that if I had theological training, he would love to hire me. So after three years of teaching Elementary School, I decided to go to Seminary and ended up in ministry. So much for the "least amount of schooling" after 8 years of post-high school education!*

I'm sure many of us can speak to the good direction mentors and believers we look up to have led us in, helping us make choices we may not have made without their input.

And, just so we're absolutely clear, **nobody should be circumcising anybody!**

**Paul needs Timothy.** Did Paul really need Timothy? Probably. But Paul certainly behaved like he needed Timothy. In Acts 16-19, we see moments where Paul send Timothy somewhere on his behalf. He specifically requests Timothy for certain tasks, and he sends him to accomplish tasks without his supervision.

Again, from Dennis Stone: *I was encouraged by an elderly couple in my church. I remember meeting with this couple and the wife showed me notes from the first sermon I ever did written into her Bible. Wow! This elderly couple listened, engaged, and as a result were deeply impacted by Dennis' teaching.*

One of our members of the YETI Youth groups at our church spoke of being fully acknowledged and needed within the church. This student feels valued *when people take my questions seriously and don't just brush them off as not being important because I'm a teenager since we "all go through a rebellious phase". Acting like my contribution actually means something and not being patronizing me.*

**Paul trusts Timothy.** There are several times in the passages that were read that Timothy is sent on missions without Paul at all. Paul is doing the sending, but he fully trusts Timothy as he sends him.

Colleen Klassen experienced this kind of trust in summer employment. *The first thing that comes to mind is a summer job I had in my first year out of high school. I was working on the maintenance crew for the school district, and I was assigned to an electrician to give him a hand updating all the fluorescent lighting in the office and foyer of one of the schools. After working with him for a week or so, he went on vacation and entrusted me with the job. I felt so important, having coffee breaks in the staff room and spending my days on a ladder installing reflectors and re-wiring the ballasts of all the light fixtures so that they could use only 2 tubes instead of 4. The electrician was a Christian man and he had earned the respect of his superiors for his work and for his integrity, and they trusted him when he said I was ready to do the work while he was gone.*

We invest in those coming up behind us. We engage them with them in a way that allows for difficult conversations that still offer support. We live in a way that shows that we need them. And we trust them. We give away leadership and responsibility and opportunities.

Like Paul does with Timothy, we must ALWAYS look behind us. And that requires us to take a moment, pay attention and really listen. Gord Hunt found this listening essential in his life. *When Julie and I, with Steve and Laura, took off for Zaire (now DRC) we were in the middle of nowhere. I was a rookie doctor doing stuff that even now makes me wonder where I got the nerve. The other doctor in town was a local guy and treated me like the scum on his shoe. (No joke). I felt a lot of stress and pressure. Over the course of the 2 years we were there, Bob Barry, Malcolm Card and Muriel Bent came out and stayed with us. (They were the upper echelon of CBOMB -- CBM now). The encouragement was not what they said to us, it was showing up at our house in the middle of the jungle and listening to us tell our stories good and bad. They cared for us without "mothering" us. I imagine that's what the churches in Turkey felt like when Paul or his designates would show up for one of his/ their visits. Presence and listening are encouragement too.*

What are your stories? Class of 2021 or not, where have you been encouraged, acknowledged or valued by the generations ahead of you? Consider these stories that have impacted your life and faith, and like Barbie Patterson, see how you can pass that investment on. *When I was 19, in between years 2 and 3 at college, I was given the summer job of filling in as church secretary for 2 months. I was already a good typist but did not have much other office experience. This church had some members who examined each bulletin with eagle eyes to spot any typos with the goal of reporting these to the pastor. You must remember that in those days, there were no computers, no auto correct features on the typewriter – yes! Typewriter! So, I had to be extremely precise in setting up the margins, indenting, typing, etc. without all the Microsoft WORD helps that we enjoy today. In addition, I was entrusted to keep church “news” confidential. At the time I didn’t fully appreciate the trust shown me as a very young woman to do this job. Now that I look back, I understand that the church was encouraging me in what I do well by offering me the job, and that this job helped me secure similar positions after graduating from college. I strive now to do the same for young adults in whom I spot ability and the desire to serve God with what they’re good at doing.*

ALWAYS look behind you! Look to the generations coming up behind you with care and generosity. Do this in the attitude of Jesus, our Lord, who said to his own disciples (and us): **Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. (John 14:12)** As we carry on the mission of Jesus in our world, we must do so in his same attitude, blessing the generations to come behind us.