

**THE MESSAGE****January 24, 2010****1 Timothy 4:6-16****The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller***Our Leader*

Question: Who has been the most influential person in your spiritual journey? Who has shaped you and made you a better disciple because he or she was in your life?

I've been blessed with a lot of people who fit that description in my spiritual journey. One in particular comes to mind Fred, Fred Wedemeyer. Fred was the mission director for the New England Synod. He had ministry oversight of the mission church when I served in South Hadley for 10 years.

Fred was responsible for training and supporting the mission pastors who started new congregations or redeveloped stuck congregations through out New England. Fred had a passion for evangelism. He lived it and breathed it. He believed in the Kingdom work that God had given him to do – namely to raise up, encourage, equip, and support mission pastors to lead thriving congregations.

I remember the first time Fred invited me out for lunch. Somewhere in the conversation he asked me to join the Outreach Committee for the Synod. I was just starting my second year as a parish pastor. I remember saying something like, "Fred, I have no desire to serve on some synod committee." He said something like, "Just come and sit-in on a meeting and see what you think. No pressure." So a month later I was attending an outreach committee meeting. By the time that meeting was over – I had been elected the new chair person for that committee. And I served in that leadership role for the next six years.

Fred and I spent a lot of time together over those years. He believed in me at times when I didn't even believe in myself. He walked beside me, encouraged me, prayed for me, and equipped me. I learned a lot about mission and parish ministry from Fred. It wasn't what he said that helped me learn but how he lived.

Is there someone like that in your life -- a person whose influence who has shaped your spiritual journey in powerful and profound ways? We call that kind of influence – "leadership." Author and leadership consultant John Maxwell writes, "All leadership is influence, nothing more and nothing less."

Leadership has very little to do with age or position or title. It has everything to do with character, integrity, and love. Our reading today from 1 Timothy is all about that kind of leadership. (*Read 1 Timothy 4:6-16*)

This was part of a letter Paul wrote to a young man named Timothy. We could say that Paul was the first mission director and Timothy was the first mission pastor. They met on Paul's first missionary journey. He was so impressed with the young man that Paul became Timothy's mentor.

The two of them worked together to start the church in Ephesus. When it was time for Paul to move on, the community of faith was still struggling in many ways. So Paul asked Timothy to stay and lead that church. Timothy was to be a leader -- an influencer. Timothy was to confront and correct the false teachings in the congregation and equip other leaders. Notice how Paul encourages Timothy to be a leader of leaders, to be a person of influence.

Paul taught Timothy at least two important things about leadership.

First, leadership begins with self-leadership. Before Timothy could lead others, he had to learn how to lead himself. Listen again to verses 7 and 8. Paul writes: *"Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way."*

Paul used a sport metaphor. Like an athlete training diligently for the Olympics. The opportunity to be in the games does not come freely -- it costs a life of discipline and sacrifice. Great athletes discipline themselves through training. Paul encouraged Timothy to do the same. He was to train himself in godliness in order to lead others in godliness.

Timothy had to get into (and stay in) spiritual shape by reading and applying scripture, worship, prayer, generosity, service, all the core "disciplines" of the Christian life. Timothy couldn't lead others -- he couldn't influence others -- if he didn't first lead himself.

The second thing Paul taught Timothy was that leadership is best done through example. Paul put it this way: *"Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."*

Paul was talking about Timothy's age here. Timothy was young, and some people may have dismissed him or not taken his leadership seriously or even respected him because of his age. Paul tells him that, no matter how young he was, he could effectively lead by example. Actions speak louder than words. Timothy was to live by the faith and let his actions be an example for others.

Leading through example is the most powerful kinds of leadership. Parents, pastors, teachers, and bosses are at their "leadership best" when they are leading by example. Isn't that how Jesus led? He didn't just tell his disciples to serve -- he washed their feet. He didn't just tell people to love -- he embraced the unlovable. He didn't just tell people to live sacrificially -- he sacrificed his own life. That kind of example influences others. It changes them.

So, what does all of this mean for us? What might God be saying to us here today as we consider this letter from Paul to Timothy? I'm guessing that many of us don't think God could be speaking to us, because we're not leaders. Keep in mind the definition of leadership -- *leadership is influence*.

So consider these two truths: First truth, each one of us is a leader in someone's life. We influence the people around us. Who might that be in your life? A child or grandchild? A parent or grandparent? A co-worker? A neighbor or a friend? A classmate? A spouse? Each one of us is a leader in someone's life.

Second truth, every one of us is on assignment from God to influence someone's life in a positive way. Think about that for a minute. We are on assignment from God. The God of the universe, the One who created the heavens and the earth, the One who knows you better than you know yourself, has an assignment for you today and everyday of your life. That assignment includes being a leader -- being a person of influence in someone's life, for the sake of the Gospel.

I want to make this really clear, because this is so important. Joys beyond your wildest imagination awaits you -- if you are willing to allow God to use you to influence others -- to change a life. Here is what I'm talking about. Check out this video... ([www.blueribbonmovie.com](http://www.blueribbonmovie.com).)

Who you are really does make a difference because Jesus lives through you. Your leadership, your influence in someone's life, can make all the difference in the world.

Question: By God's grace, whose life will you influence today? Amen!