

Timothy

My name is Timothy. My father is a Greek and my mother is a Jew. My mother and grandmother became Christians and so did I. My life got really interesting when Paul chose me to journey with him, beginning in Philippi.

I had learned the facts of the gospel at home, but Paul gave me an intense internship in gospel ministry. I later used that training as pastor in churches Paul had established, at Corinth, Philippi and Thessalonica.

So, what did I need that could not come from lessons and books? First was the confidence that I gained from Paul's high expectations for me. He treated me like the son he never had. My own father was a good man but did not have a spiritual perspective and, although he married my mother, a Jew, he did not permit me to be circumcised in the Jewish tradition. He did, however, allow my mother and grandmother to teach me the Hebrew Scriptures.

I then watched Paul carry out a series of actions that on the surface seemed to be contradictory. He carried the instructions to the churches from the Jerusalem council that they should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Then he had me circumcised to avoid criticism by the Jews... but he also opposed the Judaizers who said circumcision was necessary for salvation! Is there a simple way to classify those actions? Paul also stretched the limits of tradition by affirming the spiritual leadership of women. The first example was locating a church in Lydia's house. Later he supported the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila. Of course, he completed the work done by my mother and grandmother in training me.

He did not make a big show of prayer, but I realized when I saw the letters he wrote to the churches, that he was praying all the time! And when I think about the situations he had to deal with, it only makes sense that he was in constant touch with the Lord for the strength, wisdom, spiritual protection and persistence to make it through each day! It appeared to make a difference in Paul himself as the ministry progressed. When he wrote to Galatia, he spent a lot of words on defending his apostleship. But starting with the letter to the Thessalonians, he started the letters with how he rejoiced when he prayed for them and what he was proud of in them.

The incident of the demon-possessed slave girl was a dramatic foray into the occult but also a demonstration of Paul's compassion for the victim. He would not just accept the "free advertising" by this young woman who was crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." Whether that was the voice of the woman herself or the evil spirit having an attack of truth-telling, Paul saw a needy person.

I know that my predecessor as "junior member of the team," John Mark, had left the trip after witnessing the spiritual battle Paul had with Elymas on Cyprus. But I stuck

around and watched Paul's responses to the amazing sequence of events in Philippi. Paul made no complaint when he was falsely accused by the slave owners before the Roman officials, who beat both him and Silas. Had the Holy Spirit made it known to him that he was needed in the jail or was it just his willingness to let circumstances play out? The rest of us made ourselves scarce! But there was a great miracle in the jail leading to the conversion of the jailer and his family.

When the officials sent messengers to call for his release, he refused to go quietly. Only then did he make it known that he and Silas were Roman citizens and had been beaten without a trial. That put the officials on the defensive and may have saved the jailer from prosecution for the technically illegal things that had happened in the jail.

After the apology, the officials again asked him to get out of town. Paul first encouraged Lydia and then left. He knew it was time to go.

Next, in Thessalonica, there was a good response to the gospel by some of the Jews in the synagogues as well as leading women and Greeks who worshipped God. But the Jewish leaders gathered a mob that created an uproar and began persecuting believers, like Jason. The believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea and Paul agreed to go, probably for the benefit of the believers who remained. I could see that the Spirit was leading him.

In Berea the Jews listened and studied the Scriptures to check up on Paul's teaching and many Greeks also believed. But eventually the troublemakers found them, and Paul consented to be taken to Athens, alone without his team. There, in that international center of philosophy and idolatry, as we later found out, he debated the leading lights of Stoic and Epicurean thought. His claim that Jesus had risen from the dead produced interest in some, but derision by others, because their philosophy did not allow for resurrection. Interestingly they did not ask for evidence – in that respect they were exactly like the Jewish leaders who could look a miracle in the face and plot how to stop word of it from getting out.

We joined Paul at Corinth and when the Jews opposed him, he "shook off the dust," echoing the instruction of Jesus Himself to the disciples, and even declaring to those Jews that they now were responsible for their own fate. But then he received a vision with the message, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." Paul changed plans in response to the Lord's direction. Then, hearing the concerns Silas and I brought concerning the Thessalonian church, he wrote them a letter. I guess you call that "multi-tasking."

But when opposition arose again in Corinth and threatened the believers who lived there, Paul moved on to Ephesus. There he instructed the Ephesian believers who had not experienced the Holy Spirit and they then had the Pentecost experience. Yet, later,

writing to the Corinthian church, Paul clarified the teaching that the Holy Spirit determines the distribution of gifts.

In Ephesus there were many miracles of healing and deliverance. Seven itinerate exorcists, all sons of a Jewish priest name Sceva, tried to cast out demons in the name of Jesus. The evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" The exorcists were attacked by the demon-possessed man and severely beaten. This led to a mass repentance by people involved in magic and occult practices, publicly burning books worth a large fortune. The gospel had produced a transformation of the whole society.

After that, Paul sent me and Erastus to Macedonia to prepare for an upcoming visit. While we were there, a riot arose back in Ephesus over the recession in the Artemis idol industry. Two of our team were seized and dragged into the theater. Alexander, a Jewish believer, tried to explain the situation and was shouted down. Paul wanted to go in, but the believers and two friendly provincial authorities advised against it. Paul accepted that advice and eventually the town clerk quieted the mob by declaring that they were close to getting the dreaded "mob-suppression" response from the Roman army. That public servant called for transferring the dispute to the courts.

As Paul prepared for departure, he encouraged the believers and went on to meet Silas and me in Macedonia. From there we went to Achaia with plans to go on to Syria when word came of plots by the Jews and he backtracked, again showing flexibility without discouragement. In Troas his late-night sermon led to a drowsy young man, Eutychus, falling from a high window to his death. Paul went down, raised him from the dead and continued his sermon. I guess that qualifies as being unflappable.

At the end of the journey, Paul addressed the Ephesian leaders at a special meeting he called in Miletus. He shared that he was going to Jerusalem at the direction of the Holy Spirit although he did not know all that was going to happen, aside from warnings that there would be trouble and prison. Paul recognized the direction of the Holy Spirit and trusted in the sovereign will of God. Thus, when he received warning messages by way of other believers, he knew what God had directly told him to do and would not be dissuaded.

Before concluding, I must mention Paul's practices concerning money. He used his tent-making trade to feed himself. He even made a point of telling the churches that he might have insisted on their support but chose not to. He **did** raise money for others, particularly the needy believers in Judea and he wisely allowed the giving churches to appoint those who would convey it to the "mother church." But in his letters, he taught that pastors were worthy of their pay. His quotation of Moses' provision for the nourishment of dumb animals was a little humbling. He wrote, "Do not muzzle the ox that threshes the grain." He did that on purpose because he does not consider the pastor to be an elite individual but a member of the body with a specific gift which he

was actually obligated to use for the edification of the church. Paul said that he himself should not be honored for what he did because he had no choice but to preach.

This was all part of my training. Paul did not appoint me as a pastor based on hearing three sermons and reading my statement of faith. I had seen testing and been tested and apparently, I passed! Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord."

Acts 16 – 18; Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 4, 12 – 14, 16; 2 Corinthians 1; Philippians 1, 2; 1 Thessalonians 3; 1 Timothy 2; Timothy 1; Philemon; Hebrews 13.