

Introduction:

Good Morning!

ME:

- (first time I was asked to lead, but realized I had actually been prepared for that earlier)
- When we talk about leadership, most of us picture titles, positions, or platforms.
- But one of the simplest definitions I've ever heard is this: leadership is influence.
- Leadership influence is the opportunity to guide, inspire, and foster collaboration, and to shape behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes without relying solely on authority.
- Whether we realize it or not, every one of us has influence.
 - Parents influence their kids. (Kids to Parents)
 - Friends influence friends.
 - Coworkers influence workplace culture.
 - Believers influence other believers.
- That means leadership is not reserved for the elite few. It is something we all carry in a variety of different settings.
- **The question is not whether we lead, but how we lead.**
- When I read Acts 15 and 16, what strikes me is that leadership development does not happen in a calm, ideal environment.
- It grows in the middle of tension, disagreement, and sacrifice.
- that is often where God forms leaders most deeply.

Mature discipleship means we must be learning how to lead well wherever that may be.

WE:

- Most of us would say we want to grow, mature, and be useful to God.
- But we also want growth without discomfort.
 - We want maturity without sacrifice.
 - We want influence without limitation.
- We live in a culture that tells us freedom means expressing every right we have.
- Scripture often tells a different story.
- In the church especially, maturity is not about how much freedom we exercise, but how wisely we steward it.
- The passage we are in today shows us that leadership formation happens when freedom, mission, and relationships all collide.
- And Acts 16 shows us that being called to lead often means being willing to lay something down to better consider others in love over ourselves

GOD:

- Today we are continuing on in Acts 15. If you missed last week...(quick recap)
- Then there is an interesting event that happens that isn't mentioned here. It happens between verses 35 & 36. It's an interaction where Paul calls out Peter publicly for his hypocrisy. In Galatians 2
- After the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, the church has just affirmed freedom from the Old Testament law.
 - Gentiles are welcomed without circumcision.
 - The gospel of grace is protected.
- But shortly after that, tension rises again.

- Paul tells us in Galatians chapter 2, that Peter visits Antioch.

11But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

12For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. 13And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

- Under pressure from certain men connected to James, Peter withdraws from eating with Gentile believers.
- Barnabas is caught up in it too.
- Paul confronts Peter publicly **because the truth of the gospel is at stake.**
- Most scholars believe Galatians was written shortly after the events of Acts 16.
- This is not a calm moment in church history.
- This is a fragile, tense, emotionally charged time.
- Let's read what happens in the time that follows:

ACTS Chapter 15:36 – 16:

36And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” 37Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. 38But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, 40but Paul

chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. 41And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

1Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. 2He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. 3Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. 5So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

- In Acts 15:36, Paul suggests returning to visit the churches.
- Barnabas wants to bring John Mark. (his cousin - Colossians)
- Paul strongly disagrees. b/c Mark left them earlier
- Scripture says their disagreement was sharp.
- We are not told who was right.
- We are not told who was wrong.
- We are told they separate.
- And yet God continues to work through both paths.
- **Sometimes God uses tension not to produce sin, but to produce movement.**
- Disagreement is not always failure.
- We must disagree in a way where we don't need to ask for forgiveness after.
- What matters is how we disagree, and how we continue to honor the mission.
- Now they each go their own way, and God uses that. John Mark goes on to eventually write the Gospel of Mark.
- Then in Acts 16, Paul meets Timothy.

- Timothy has a Jewish mother and a Greek father.
- Paul wants him to join the mission.
- And then something surprising happens (after all that's happened!): Paul has Timothy circumcised.
 - This is not about salvation.
 - This is not about legalism.
- Acts 15 already settled that.
- The text tells us exactly why: It was **because of the Jews in those places**.
- Timothy's mixed background would have closed doors before the gospel was even heard.
- Paul removes an unnecessary barrier, not because he is afraid of people, but because he is focused on the mission.
- Paul does not change the message.
- He adjusts the method.
- The result is that the churches are strengthened and continue to grow.

(transition)

YOU:

- We began by saying: Leadership is influence. That means this passage applies to all of us.
- Disciples who are growing to maturity in their faith.
- Timothy's story shows us what mature discipleship looks like when God is preparing someone to lead.

- **Mature disciples aim to be strong leaders**
- Strength in this passage does not look like asserting rights.
- It looks like restraint fuelled by love
- A strong leader is not someone who uses every freedom they have.
- A strong leader knows when not to.
- Mature disciples do not ask, “What am I allowed to do?”
- They ask, “What best serves the mission God has given me?”

Maturity Principle 2

- **Mature disciples prioritize the mission over personal comfort**
- Timothy’s leadership journey begins with discomfort.
- This wasn’t a command for Timothy – he chose to the snip the tip
- There is often sacrifice before there is influence.
- In this situation, God does not start by giving him a platform.
- God starts by inviting him to lay something down.
- And remember - **Giving up freedom for the mission is not people-pleasing.**
- **It is purpose-driven.**
- We do not surrender truth, but we are willing to surrender comfort.

Maturity Principle 3

- Mature disciples invest in the next generation
- Paul does not just defend the gospel, he also develops leaders.
- Timothy learns by walking with Paul, not just listening to him.

- Just like Paul learned walking with Barnabas
- Leadership is caught as much as it is taught.
- Dennis Roy Funeral...
- Who is watching your faith?
- Who is learning how to follow Jesus by watching your life?
- Mature disciples think beyond themselves.

Gospel Call:

- As we talk about leadership, sacrifice, and maturity, we need to be clear about something.
- Christianity is not ultimately about what we give up for God.
- It is about what God gave up for us.
- Timothy was cut out to lead, literally and figuratively.
- Timothy was willing to be cut so the mission could move forward.
- But long before that, Jesus was willing to put aside his comfort so we could be brought in.
- Scripture tells us that the law could never save us.
- Rules could restrain behavior, but they could never transform hearts.
- No amount of obedience could heal our brokenness or restore our relationship with God.
- So God did what we could not do.
- Jesus lived the life of perfect faithfulness we could never live.
- He fulfilled the law completely.
- And then He went to the cross, not because He failed, but because we did.
- On the cross, Jesus took our sin, our shame, our rebellion, and our self-reliance.
- He was cut off, forsaken, so we could be reconciled.
- He was condemned so we could be forgiven.
- He carried the burden so we could walk in freedom.
- **The gospel is not that God helps good people get better. (rich young ruler...)**

- The gospel is that God saves broken people who could not save themselves.
- And when Jesus rose from the grave, He proved that sin does not have the final word.
- Shame does not have the final word.
- Death does not have the final word.
- Grace does.
- INVITATION
- Some of you today are tired.
 - You have been trying to prove yourself.
 - You have been carrying guilt.
 - You have been striving to be good enough.
 - You have been managing your image instead of trusting in grace.
- Others of you are curious, but hesitant.
- You respect Jesus, but you are unsure if you can trust Him.
- You wonder if following Him means losing yourself.
- The invitation of Jesus is not to clean yourself up first.
- It is to come as you are.
- Not to earn His love, but to receive it.
- Salvation is not found in effort.
- It is found in surrender.
 - Trusting that Jesus is enough.
 - Trusting that His death paid for your sin.
 - Trusting that His resurrection offers you new life.
- If you have never placed your faith in Jesus, today can be the beginning.
- Not because you understand everything.
- But because you decided and are ready to trust Him.
- **WE:**

- This passage calls us to a deeper vision of discipleship.
- A church marked by maturity is not a church without disagreement.
- It is a church that handles disagreement with humility, love, gentleness & Respect
- It is a church that values mission over comfort.
- It is a church that forms the next generation intentionally.
- God is still growing His church.
- And often, He does it through uncomfortable obedience.
- May we be a people willing to be shaped, limited, and sent for the sake of the gospel.

Let's pray.

God, thank You for the freedom we have because of Jesus, a freedom that was secured for us once and for all. As people who are already loved and already accepted, help us learn how to steward that freedom well. Teach us when to hold tightly to the truth of the gospel and when to willingly lay something down for the sake of the mission. Like Timothy, help us trust that when You ask us to give something up, it is not punishment, it is preparation. Shape us into mature disciples who care more about people meeting Jesus than protecting our own comfort and help us invest our lives in others the way Paul did. We want to be a church that uses freedom to love, to serve, and to lead well. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who laid down everything so we could truly live. Amen.

Benediction