

## Influencers: Timothy

She was an ordinary woman – a 42 year old seamstress in a department store, returning home from work. Not someone who was going to make much difference to the world.

He was an ordinary man – a 24 year old security guard going about his night-time rounds. Not someone who was going to make much difference to the world.

But when Rosa Parks, refused to give up her seat in the "coloured section" to a white passenger, after the whites-only section was filled on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, she became an important symbol of the civil rights movement and an international icon of resistance to racial segregation.

And when Frank Wills spotted the locks at the Democratic National Committee inside the Watergate complex in Washington, where he worked, had been tampered with, five men were arrested inside the Democratic headquarters, which they had planned to bug. The arrests triggered the Watergate scandal and eventually the resignation of the US President Richard Nixon.

Just two examples of seemingly ordinary people who have had a big influence on our history.

Today, we finish our series looking at Influencers in the Bible. It should be noted that the people that I have picked to cover in this series are personal choices and I am not saying they are the most influential people in the bible – in fact in some cases I have deliberately gone for lesser known characters as with today when we look at Timothy.

Timothy features in several books of the bible, first appearing in the book of Acts where he travels faithfully with the apostle Paul. He is then mentioned in several of Paul's epistles or letters to churches. We also have two letters that Paul wrote to Timothy, which our reading today comes from, which reveal a bit more about Timothy's background and the challenges he faced in becoming an influential leader in the early church. Like all the people we have looked at in this series, Timothy continues to have influence today – not least for me as I find Timothy one of the people that I relate to most in the Bible and have been influenced by him throughout my own Christian journey.

So what do we know about Timothy? As I said earlier, he is first introduced in the book of Acts where Paul writes in chapter 16 that he arrived in Lystra "where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek" so Timothy came from a mixed background with a Jewish mother and a gentile father and the passage that we read from in 2 Timothy tells us that it is from his mother and his grandmother that his faith came from. Some of you will have heard me talk before of my paternal grandmother and how I credit her with being an important spiritual influence in my life – just one of the reasons that I feel an affinity with Timothy – and it is interesting to see Timothy, who we will see is an unlikely person to be a biblical influencer, having, at that time an unusual influence on his faith, coming as it does from his mother and grandmother rather than his father. We can sometimes see it as not our place to be spiritual influences in others' lives – that it should be left to more appropriate people, parents, teachers, ministers – but in some cases, we might be the only spiritual influence showing people the way to Christ, if God hadn't used Timothy's mother and grandmother to bring Timothy to faith, then you would be listening to a very different message today!

Timothy is not someone that you would think of as a natural choice to be a leader in the church for a number of reasons:

1. His age – In 1 Timothy 4, Paul warns Timothy, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young”. We don’t know exactly how young Timothy was but he was probably about my age – so I will leave it up to you whether that qualifies as young or not!
2. His health – In 1 Timothy 5, Paul writes “Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.” Again we don’t know what his ailments were but it is clear that he was suffering from health issues.
3. The temptation he faced – Timothy was not fail-proof. Paul warns Timothy to be careful in this regard at the close of his first letter to him. “Guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith.” (1 Tim 6:20–21). And he repeats in the reading we heard from 2 Timothy “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner” (2 Tim 1:8)

So Timothy was not the obvious choice to be a Church leader yet in Paul’s letter to the Philippians he writes:

*“I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, ... as soon as I see how things go with me.” (Philippians 2:19-23)*

Like Rosa Parks and Frank Wills, Timothy may have appeared ordinary but, as the proverb goes, don’t judge a book by its cover.

We can be very good at thinking of reasons why God cannot use us, maybe we think that we are too young and immature or too old, maybe we think that health problems limit our usefulness or maybe we feel too spiritually inferior or not godly enough because we struggle with human desires for the things of this world. Timothy demonstrates to us that this is not the case – whatever our background

If we look at the people that we have learned about throughout this series we have seen men and women, young and not so young, Jews and gentiles all being used by God and have seen that the influence that they have both in their own lifetimes and in the present day. So if you are sitting thinking that God cannot use me, I am too weak, I am too stupid, I have too many human failings for God to use, let Timothy influence you and show you that there is no one that God cannot use for his glory. That is not to say that faith in God will remove temptation, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes:

*“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:16)*

In other words, following God does not mean that we aren’t tempted, but through faith we choose to obey God instead of giving into these desires. So, despite our inner, human desire for the things of this world, God will still use us and help us to resist those desires and trust in him.

And we have seen throughout this series that the ways that God can use his people to further his kingdom on earth are varied – Abraham was called to be the father of a nation, Ruth to care for those around her and Timothy, to serve the young Church. God doesn’t call us all to serve him in the same way and how he brings us to the path that we has planned for us will differ too.

We have already seen how God used Timothy’s mother and grandmother to start him on the path and this role is picked up by Paul, who through God’s grace saw the potential that Timothy had and entrusts him with important responsibilities. But if we look at Timothy’s role throughout the New Testament, while he has an important role to play in the new church, throughout it he is not doing it in his own name – he is Paul’s representative in the churches. Paul makes this clear in his 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the church in Corinth when he says:

*“Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, ... He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.”*

*(1 Corinthians 4:16-17)*

So Paul is saying here 'Hey, Corinth, I'm sending Timothy to you so that he will remind you how to live as I showed you. He will point you to me so that I can point you to Christ.' God didn't call Timothy to be the role model, but the one pointing to the role model. That can seem contrary to what our culture tells us, that we should always be the main name and make sure that we get the glory for things. Timothy shows us that in fact we may be called to humbly support and serve someone else in the work that they have been called, as he did with Paul. Through the opportunity that Timothy had with Paul, he was able to learn so much from one of the best possible teachers and through following his instruction, would play an important part in the life of the early church. He ministered in at least five New Testament churches, bringing Paul's teaching to them and helping to lead them through the challenges that the young church faced from its opponents both within and without the church.

And in all these Churches, Paul continues to support Timothy, providing advice through his letters. This serves as a reminder to us that God doesn't leave us on our own to deal with the work that he calls us to do – he provides the people and resources that we need to do the work. And one thing that I think is particularly relevant today, 2 Timothy was written by Paul when he was in prison in Rome, even when they could not be together Paul is still able to support Timothy in the work that he has been called to do. Many of us are finding the current situation tough as we are separated from loved ones and friends but even while we are separated, we can continue to support each other whether that is through picking up the phone, getting together virtually like this or even, like Paul, writing a letter – think how can we support those around us and encourage them like Paul did for Timothy?

So in Timothy, we see someone who God was able to use to bring Paul's teaching to many in the early church and whose influence is felt in its growth. But for me the influence Timothy has is to show how God can use anyone to further his kingdom – no matter their age, their background, their mistakes – our inadequacies should not keep us from being available to God. I relate to Timothy more than anyone else in the bible and hence the letters from Paul to Timothy are amongst the most well thumbed in my bible – they are ones that I turn to again and again particularly when I have drifted from God's path!

Throughout this series we have looked at people who have had influence in different ways and whose legacy is still felt today. I said at the start that they weren't the most influential people in the bible and they aren't – the most influential person in the bible, the most influential who ever lived is Jesus Christ, through whose death and resurrection salvation is available to all who have faith. But the people that we have looked at have put their faith into action, shown the world the character of God so that many may be saved. They all remained faithful through difficult and challenging time and because of this influenced the world for God's glory. I don't know how God is calling you today – maybe he is calling you to do something which will transform the world or something which will change one life, maybe he is calling you to be a leader or to follow others. I cannot tell you what your calling is, but I can tell you that God has a plan for your life, for you to be an influencer for his Gospel message and whatever that plan is and whatever route you follow, it leads to the salvation of the Cross – so is definitely a route worth taking.