



They Need to Know About Me – They Need to Know About My Faith

As a 68-year-old mentor of men primarily in their 20s and 30s, each mentoring meeting is an adventure of God bridging the age and experience gap between us. I look at the young man and wonder what about my life could be relevant, helpful or interesting to him. This is not because I think poorly of myself. It is because I imagine his life and mine as wholly different from each other, with no shared goals, challenges, or aspirations. He's at the beginning of his adult life; I'm in my later years. He's figuring out college, graduate school or early career; I'm figuring out eventual retirement.

If I follow this misdirected mindset, then I'll make the mentoring meeting only about him and the Lord's work and calling in his life. And in doing so, I'll poorly serve him and misunderstand an essential aspect of my role in his life.

The Apostle Paul wanted the churches to know how he was doing. And He wanted to know how they were doing. This is evident in the following passages.

Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you. Ephesians 6:21-22 (NIV)

Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here. Colossians 4:7-9 (NIV)

So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain. I Thessalonians 3:1-6 (NIV)

Tychicus was responsible for traveling to churches to whom Paul had already written letters to give the church complete updates on Paul and what he'd been doing. Was this just egotistical puffery? He'd just written them a letter telling them how he was doing and what he was doing. Why did Paul want them to know more about him and his activities? And what guidance does this give me as a mentor who feels that he is 150 years older than, and wholly other than, the young men I mentor?

In Romans 1:11-12, Paul writes, "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you - that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both



yours and mine.” For these people whom he hopes to see soon, he wants to share any gift that God has given him to give to them. Moreover, he wants himself and them to be encouraged by each other’s faith. This kind of faith is the *how I am trusting Jesus when it’s really hard* kind of faith. To be encouraged by each other’s faith, we must learn about each other’s faith. We must hear the stories, in all spheres of life, in which, by God’s grace, we’re wrestling to trust Jesus, especially when it is hard to do so.

I believe that Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus and Colossae to tell them stories of how Paul lived out faith and faithfulness in his spheres of influence. Thereby, he hoped to encourage them. And in I Thessalonians 3:1-6, Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to keep their faith from being shaken by Paul’s suffering and to learn of the steadfastness of their faith. Paul knew both were important – his stories of trusting Jesus even when it is hard and their stories in return.

So how does this apply to me and my much younger mentees? In our brotherhood, both are needed – my stories of faith and faithfulness and theirs. Hearing their stories of faith and faithfulness strongly encourages me as I see God raising up the next generation of God-honoring leaders. And as they see me trusting God, or getting back up when I failed to do so, they are encouraged to see an older believer striving to finish well. We need to see each other wrestle well to live such that our belief in Christ penetrates all aspects of our lives (Integrity). And we need to see each other trust Christ, even when it is hard, and faithfully do what He commands, by His grace and for His glory (Daily Faith and Faithfulness).

Tish Harrison Warren wrote the following:

I go to a church full of older people who live pretty normal, middle-class lives in nice, middle-class houses. But I have really come to appreciate this community, to see their lifetimes of sturdy faithfulness to Jesus, their commitment to prayer, and the tangible, beautiful generosity that they show those around them in unnoticed, unimpressive, unmarketable, unrevolutionary ways. And each week, we average sinners and boring saints gather around ordinary bread and wine and Christ himself is there with us.¹

Warren beautifully describes the integrity and daily faith and faithfulness of older believers. The young men with whom I meet need to see this in me. And just as much, I need to see it in them.

So each time I meet with a mentee, I tell him how I’m doing; how I’m really doing. This isn’t an hour monologue and hopefully not mere self-absorption. I’m an older Christian man, and though I don’t always believe it, they need to know how I’m doing, how my faith is doing. And I need to know the same about them.

¹ *Struggling with Everydayness*, Tish Harrison Warren, <https://renovare.org/articles/struggling-with-everydayness>.