

Discipleship

2 Timothy 2:1-6

As we begin this new year, I want to focus on discipleship. In my personal study and reading of scripture over the last few months, the Lord has continually brought me back again and again to discipleship. A few months ago a few of us got together for a Sunday School conference. And one of the things we did was to ask God, "What do you want us to accomplish in Sunday School?" Maybe another way of phrasing that question is, "What is our mission?" And I began to pray about not just our mission in Sunday School, but our overall mission together as a church.

In that Sunday School meeting we studied again the great commission that Jesus gave to us. You can find His commission in various forms in all four Gospels and also in the book of Acts. Turn to Matthew 28 and let me remind you what it says:

16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them.

17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Jesus said that our mission was to go and **"make disciples."** What Is A Disciple?

In the New Testament, the Greek word for disciple is *mathetes*. That word simply means 'learner' or 'pupil'. This means that every time we see the word disciple in the Bible, we can insert the word 'learner'.

You can see that way this works in Matthew 5. In verse 1 Jesus goes up on a mountain, and it says, **"when He was seated His disciples came to Him."** And in verse 2 it says, **"Then He opened His mouth and taught them."**

The disciples were those who learned from Jesus. Now Jesus would have much more to say about what it means to be His disciple, but the simple definition is that a disciple is someone who learns from Jesus. A disciple of Jesus is someone who is intentionally choosing to learn from Jesus, in every area of life. Simple!

All throughout the book of Acts we can see discipleship at work in the early church. Let me just show you one example. In Acts 11 the apostles Barnabas and Paul are in Antioch and verse 26 says, **"So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."**

Thus a Christian (a word used only 2 times in the Bible) is defined as someone who is a mathetes (used 268 times in the Bible) – a learner.

How many of you would agree that the apostle Paul took the great commission seriously? We know from the New Testament records that Paul went all over the civilized world in his day preaching the gospel, establishing churches, and teaching believers. That was his life's passion, to know Jesus and make disciples.

Now let's go to the end of Paul's life. Paul wrote this 2 Timothy from a prison cell. He knew he would soon be executed. But Paul also knew he had invested the Message of the Gospel in his disciple, Timothy. So he writes to him to tell him how to continue the discipling process.

- 1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**
- 2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.**
- 3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.**
- 4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.**
- 5 And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.**
- 6 The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops.**
- 7 Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.**
- 8 Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel,**
- 9 for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.**
- 10 Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.**

Paul taught Timothy and he then taught Timothy how to teach others. In other words, Paul disciplined Timothy and taught him to disciple others. Paul told Timothy to invest the Message in other reliable men who would continue the discipling process.

This is what a disciple of Jesus does. A disciple is someone who makes disciples who will make other disciples ... who will make more disciples ... who will make still more disciples ...

If you think about it, that discipling process is why you and I are here in this room today. The reason you are in this church today is because someone disciplined someone ... who disciplined someone ... who disciplined someone ... who eventually disciplined the one who disciplined YOU.

Now, who are YOU discipling?

No Christian is too old or too young to disciple others. If you are young, the ones that are younger than you are watching. Whether they are little brothers and sisters, or kids here at church, the way you live and the things you say will make a lasting impact.

Of course, those of us who are parents are discipling our children every single day. Like it or not, you WILL have tremendous influence on your own children ... as well as on your nieces, nephews, grandchildren, and so on. The question is not, Will you have an influence? The question is, Will you influence them for Christ?

Now, if you are an older person ... a Seasoned Citizen so to speak ... your discipling days are not over! You are showing others what it means to follow Christ for a lifetime. Remember, even if your health fails ... God has a purpose for every day of your life.

I want to challenge all of you to do what Paul asked Timothy to do: choose someone that you can Disciple. Ask God who that person is. Then make time to be with them --- to invest yourself in that person --- so that they will be able to disciple someone else. That is the GOAL of a Disciple.

One way we disciple others is through Christian Service. This is what the Church is all about. The life the church ought to be centered on discipleship, that is our mission. Whether you teach a class, or help in the nursery, or serve as a greeter, or attend a Bible Study, or help set up tables for a fellowship dinner, or visit people in the hospital. Everything that brings you in contact with other Christians --- or with people who might become Christians --- is a chance to disciple others.

But it won't be easy. Dwight L Moody said, "It is better to train ten people than to do the work of ten people. But it is harder." Paul gave Timothy 3 word pictures to illustrate What it will Take to Disciple others.

What does it take? Paul tells us here in 2 Timothy 2.

1. Dedication of a Soldier

The first example is that of a Soldier: **"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier."** II Timothy 2:3-4

A soldier lives a hard life. He knows that he is headed for danger. Soldiers endure extremes of climate; soldiers go without sleep, food, and water. And soldiers on active duty, are not allowed to get involved in civilian affairs. They do not get tangled up in the world. In the Roman world, a soldier was not even allowed to get married while he was enlisted. (Keener, IVP Bible Background commentary, p. 626)

Paul said a Soldier's whole aim is to please his commanding officer. Back then, Generals recruited their own soldiers. So your commanding officer was often the very man who recruited you. That practice continued up until this century. Back in the 1800's the Italians had an Army General named Guiseppe Garibaldi. He became a legendary Hero by recruiting an incredibly DEDICATED army of volunteers. Listen to how Guiseppe would appeal for recruits: "I offer neither pay, nor quarters, nor provisions; I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles, and death. Let him who loves his country with his Heart and not with his Lips Only, follow me!"

Jesus Christ gives a similar appeal to any who will follow Him. Let him who loves his God with his Heart and not with his Lips Only, follow me!" As soldiers who follow Christ, we might be fighting a spiritual battle, or we might be enduring hard

times, or even enjoying some leisure time ... no matter what, we aim to please our commanding officer. We stay away from anything that would displease Jesus Christ. Like Soldiers, we are completely DEDICATED to the One who enlisted us.

2. Discipline of an Athlete

Paul's next example is an Athlete. **"And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules."** II Timothy 2:5

In the ancient Olympic Games, athletes trained for at least two years before the games. An athlete without DISCIPLINE would never make it. According to an Article in a magazine called Scientific American, today's Olympic competitors endure about 1,000 hours of intense training in order to achieve an improvement of one single percentage point in the competition. But it is often a single percentage point that wins the Gold.

In 1992, American Gail Devers won the 100-meter dash by only 6/100th of a second. Hers is an amazing story, because Gail suffers from Grave's Disease. Just one year before she won the Olympic Gold, Gail came within two days of having both feet amputated. After surviving that scare, she began to train and push herself toward her goal. Her self-discipline and persistence won the day.

Any successful athlete has to have DISCIPLINE ... the discipline to train and the discipline to follow the rules. It does no good to win the race and then be disqualified because you broke the rules.

In a NCAA cross-country championship held in Riverside, California, 123 of the 128 runners missed a turn. Mike Delcavo was 1st runner who stayed on the 10,000 meter course. He began waving for fellow runners to follow him, but only 4 other runners came with him. Afterwards an interviewer asked Delcavo how the other runners responded when he stopped following the crowd. Delcavo responded, "They thought it was funny when I went the right way."

As a Disciple, you have a race marked out for you by Christ. The crowd is most certainly not headed in that direction. In fact, you may have to endure the laughter of the crowd. But you can rejoice over the ones who have the courage to follow you.

Here's how Paul said it at the end of his last letter to Timothy: **"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.."** II Timothy 4:7-8

According to Paul, a Disciple must have the

- Dedication of a Soldier,
- the Discipline of an Athlete,
- and the Diligence of a Farmer.

3. Diligence of a Farmer

"The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things." II Timothy 2:6-7

It takes patience, persistence, and plain old hard work to be a successful farmer. Farming is no hobby for a person to dabble in if they want to make a living at it. Farming is a commitment that requires all a man has and then some. Does a farmer plant the seed on Monday and then go back on Friday of that same week to harvest? No, it takes time. The crop has to be watered, fertilized, and cultivated. Crops don't mature overnight. Neither do disciples of Jesus Christ.

A disciple who wishes to disciple others needs DILIGENCE like that of a farmer. The harvest won't come in a day or even a month --- and a Disciple doesn't mature overnight either. But the farmer knows if he works hard, prays a lot, and gives it time, the harvest will come.

The harvest comes when those you disciple begin to disciple others. Then the 2 of you will disciple others --- who will disciple others --- and so on. Imagine the impact on the church if every disciple-maker in the church grew a new disciple-maker each year.

CONCLUSION:

Paul ended this section of the letter with these words: **Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel...** II Timothy 2:8 This is what gave Paul the strength to keep discipling Timothy ... even from a Prison cell. Paul would not give up, even though he was facing death. He knew that Jesus overcame death in the end.

That's what will give you and me the strength to keep on keeping on with the Dedication of a Soldier; the Discipline of an Athlete, and the Diligence of a Farmer.

- When you get tired ... Remember Jesus.
- When you get discouraged ... Remember Jesus.
- When you don't see immediate results ... Remember Jesus.
- Remember Jesus ... who disciplined 12 men who ... in time ... disciplined the world.

This year I want to challenge you to ask God for three people in your life. Ask God for:

1. A Paul -- Someone who will disciple you. Someone from whom you can learn. Someone who would set the example for you and encourage you and teach you by the way they live and what they say.
2. A Timothy -- A believer you can disciple. Someone in whom you can invest your love and time to see them grow in Christ. Someone you can teach by how you live and what you say.
3. Another -- An unbeliever whom you can disciple. One person whom God will use you to make them a disciple.