

Paul's relationship with his younger disciple Timothy is a good model for us.

Paul set the pattern that he wanted Timothy to follow.

“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2, NKJV). The context is for training elders but it applies.

I call this the FAT man teaching principle.

Consider the following passages of Scripture written by Paul in which he mentions Timothy. The following samples are from letters the apostle Paul wrote to local churches. (The following Scriptures are from the NASB.)

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him . . . (Acts 16:1). (note- already a disciple)

Timothy my fellow worker greets you . . . (Rom 16:21).

For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. (1 Cor 4:17).

Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am (1 Cor 16:10).

For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him (2 Cor 1:19).

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus . . . (Phil 1:1).

But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition . . . (Phil 2:19).

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother . . . (Col 1:1).

. . . and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith . . . (1 Thess 3:2).

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you . . . (1 Thess 3:6).

To Timothy, my true child in the faith . . . (1 Tim 1:2).

This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight . . . (1 Tim 1:18).

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you . . . (1 Tim 6:20).

What immediately strikes you about the previous passages? Did you get the impression that Paul was very involved in Timothy's life? If so, then you're getting the picture. Paul disciplined Timothy, not with a discipleship workbook, but by bringing him into his life of serving Christ and all that was a part of it. You may ask, "Where Do I Start?" Invest your life in others.

When we think about the way Jesus trained the twelve or the way Paul mentored Timothy, it wasn't just a formal program of teaching like we do today in schools and classrooms. Jesus said to His disciples, "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). No matter what Jesus is the maker of disciples.

We are a means in the process.

The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour (John 1:37-39, NASB, emphasis added). And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach (Mark 3:14, NASB, emphasis added).

The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames (1 Cor 3:8-15, NIV). (this passage is about properly teaching the Word)

The heart of true discipleship is rooted in our being in Christ and then in the proper use

We must not lose sight of the fact of the importance of the Holy Spirit's role in discipleship. While there are many means God has given us to grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord, the causative agent of all of our growth is the Spirit of Christ.

Some today think that one can be a "baby Christian" for a whole lifetime.

Growth is seen to be an optional extra for particularly zealous disciples. But growth is a sign of life. Growing trees are living trees, and growing animals are living animals.

Growth involves increase and advance. In many areas of our experience when something stops growing it dies. Paul hoped the Corinthians would grow in the Christian faith (II Corinthians 10:15). The Ephesians, he hoped, would "grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ" (Ephesians 4:15; cf. Colossians 1:10; II

Thessalonians 1:3). Peter exhorted some early Christians, "like newborn babes, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (I Peter 2:2). It is tempting for pastors to reduce their churches to manageable statistics of attendance, baptisms, giving and membership, where growth is tangible; however, such statistics fall far short of the true growth which Paul describes and God desires.

Formulas for disciple making are not the key. Studying statistics and numbers and writing another manual of Christian discipleship is not the answer.

The Word of God has the pattern for us even as we looked at some of Paul's relationship with Timothy.

God will cause the growth of His kingdom.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed... and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches (Matt 13:31-32). Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number...the Word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith (Acts 6:1,7).

But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied (Acts 12:24). So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing (Acts 19:20).

By the same token, what kind of Father would God be if He wanted to adopt so many children, but then didn't care whether or not they ever grew up? He is always working towards the spiritual growth of the members of His church. God cares so much about this growth that He expects it in His older children.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly (1 Cor 3:1-2).

We have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil (Heb 5:11-14).

God cares so much about this growth that He commands it in His younger children.

Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord (1 Peter 2:2-3). Be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

God cares so much about this growth that He causes it in all His children.

The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows - how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come (Mark 4:27).

What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth (1 Cor 3:6-7). May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you (1 Thess 3:12).

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater (2 Thess 1:3).

God will not command that which we cannot do by His working in and through us.

If He commands, and I do, isn't that what causes growth?

If the causality of all sin lies in the heart -- Matthew 7:15-20, 12:33-37, 13:15, 15:10-20, Mark 7:14-23, Luke 11:37-41, Romans 6:17, 2 Cor. 3:2-3, Ephesians 6:6 and Hebrews 3:12, then Christ wants us to understand that the heart, not the actions, is of primary import. The actions are merely a signpost, of a heart that is united to Christ in the heavenlies.

True discipleship is not about doing things. It is about the focus of our attention. Many of the things, the means direct our attention heavenward toward Christ.

Why do I read Scripture, study Scripture, memorize Scripture, pray, share the truth of Scripture, attend a fellowship gathering and worship corporately, invest my life in others, give my money for ministry and to help others?

These things all point us to the heavenlies - they are not to prove by action who I am, who I am brings forth the act. These disciplines are not just mechanical exercises of the faithful, they are heart driven so that we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. The old saying goes like this , " he is so heavenly minded that he is no earthly good." But true discipleship sounds like this, "he is so heavenly minded that he is of *great* earthly good."

Our church covenant is really a statement of biblical discipleship.

A Biblical Practice of Growth

How does biblical growth happen?

2Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3seeingthat His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 5Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8For if these qualities are yours and are

Godliness is planted in us as we receive the knowledge of God.

Power for godliness comes through the knowledge of God (v3). The starting point of all godliness is not effort. It is the initial reception of the knowledge of God, when God reveals to us His character, our sin, and Christ's cross-work through His Word. This knowledge is more than mere awareness by reasoning that results from a divine data transfer. It is a relational knowledge of God that results from being called by Him into His family and fellowship (v3).

Godliness grows as we believe the promises of God.

Godliness does not grow as we remain passive when we feel tempted beyond our ability to resist. It grows as we believe the promises God gives us and as we use them to escape the stains of worldliness (Your Word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You [Ps 119:11]).

Some believe that godliness grows as we try harder to obey God's perfect law or laws. It grows as we believe and use God's promises to imitate His character (2 Peter 1:4).

My obedience does not make me more perfect, it just reveals more of the perfection I already have in Christ- who I am in Christ.

"4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." 2Pe 1:4.

By his divine nature and his high moral quality He also grants us His precious and magnificent promises.

Verse four is qualifying verse three where it is talking about godly living. When we are living in a godly manner we are partakers of the divine nature. We are identified with

Christ because we are able to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust, unlike the false prophets that he will teach about.

These great and magnificent promises tell us that because of Christ we ultimately overcome sin and death and condemnation. Corruption is a gradual process. And even for believers their bodies may corrupt in the grave, but spiritually we are progressing toward glorification. We are new creatures in Christ and part of the everlasting New Covenant and it is a Spirit Covenant that gives life because where the Spirit is there is life and liberty not only in living but also from sin and death. There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. All of these things prove to us that we are incurable lovers of Christ and move us to know Christ more and as we do we will be displaying more of the divine nature which in turn displays more of the glory and excellence of Christ.

Our escape from the corruptions in the world through lust is our knowledge and growing knowledge of Christ as we are partakers in the divine nature and live godly lives.

We seize hold of the promises of eternal life by God's grace and then we continue to seize hold of the promises of Christ as we partake in the divine nature that our salvation produces.

The false prophets then or now, have no hope to offer and no promises that are found in Christ. The world always holds out all kinds of false promises that only lead to corruption through lust, which is ungodliness. All kinds of false hopes are given in the promises of the world. It is tragic when that which says it is the church would rather cling to these promises than those of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

There is no true growth in godliness or maturity in Christ without the development of Christ-like character. Maturity into spiritual adulthood only develops as we cultivate these habits and character traits in our own hearts and relationships because this is who we are.

The knowledge of God has a purpose - in its mature form it is supposed to be put to the use of bearing fruit that others can eat and appreciate. If our knowledge of God is not useful or fruitful, we may rightly question whether that knowledge is mature, and may even be wise to question whether it is saving (cf. James 2:14-26).

The character traits listed in 2 Peter 1 are the qualities that make our knowledge of God useful and fruitful. If these qualities are in us and are increasing, we are useful to God in the building of His church and the spreading of His kingdom.

This is the biblical pattern for spiritual growth. As Christians who have been called into saving fellowship with God, we must believe God's good promises, using them to kill the weeds of sin and cultivate the character of God in our hearts and in our local churches. It is in this way that we will bear fruit for God's kingdom both individually and corporately, and prove to be mature disciples in the family of God.

"5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge," 2Pe 1:5.

Because we have escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust we are to pursue the qualities that show us to be Christ's sanctified people. It is not enough to say ' I am a Christian". There must be evidence of it by the way we live, by the way we reason, by the way we interact with the world around us.

I don't believe it a good explanation of the next two verses to say something like "here we have 7 Steps To Proving and Improving Your Sanctification." It makes for a nice seminar title and it makes something spiritual sound so very pragmatic.

I prefer to see this as a finished picture with all of these attributes or qualities, according to verse 8, being pursued with diligence because this is who we are in Christ.

Did Christ exhibit moral excellence, moral discernment, self control, perseverance,

So, do I pursue these as individual qualities of who I am in Christ or is it a package? Do I say, "Joe today you are lacking in moral excellence, work harder at it." Well I might be morally weak today in some area but that is not the point. Why?

Because if I am morally weak at the moment I certainly am not exhibiting a present godliness, I will be self centered and not showing brotherly kindness and so on.

However, if I am pursuing a greater knowledge of Christ, if I am growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ my Lord then I am improving in all of these qualities.

Think about this for a moment. How do I supply or as the NIV puts it "make every effort and add" or the NKJV "applying all diligence, add " these qualities to faith?

These are all God given qualities as a result of His divine calling and His divine power giving me everything I need to live godly in the present age. They are a part of my being, my reality but the qualities can be improved upon while I am still housed in this wretched flesh with its connection to Adam.

And they will improve as I progress in living for the glory of God as I am walking in the heavenlies and I have the focus that what I do is because of who I am. They improve because my desire by God's grace is to be more like Christ in spite of my temporary stumblings and struggles..

This is the goal of making disciples.....living for the glory of God.

This is the goal of preaching the Gospel.....for Christ to bring those into His kingdom

Who will worship him and bring glory to God.

Next time, "What is the Gospel?.