**Invest in a Few**

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Last week Jason introduced our sixth and final core value - multiply disciple-makers - by focusing on ***CHARACTER.***

“What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others.” 2 Timothy 2:2

2 Timothy 2:2 is central to gospel ministry. The reason Jesus’ three short years on earth changed the world is because he invested in the 12 apostles. The reason Paul’s ministry rippled through the Roman Empire is that he not only preached the gospel where it hadn’t been heard, but he always brought a team with him as part of how he raised up next generation leaders.

And Paul was explicit that when you choose leaders to put in charge of local churches - elders, deacons, deaconesses - ***the first and most important factor to consider is CHARACTER***, **not GIFTING**. This was a simple application of the teaching and example of Jesus, which always aimed at the HEART. Jesus did not pursue the most educated or prominent or influential - because though they looked impressive and righteous on the outside, their hearts were far from God.

Far better to have small gifting and few talents with a big heart for God than to have big gifts and major natural talents with a small heart for God. Character counts. It’s how we select elders, group leaders, ministry leaders and staff. We first look at the heart.

And so should you! How do you find the right person or people to invest your life in? My youth pastor taught us in 1992, and I’ve applied this for 30 years - ***LOOK FOR FAT PEOPLE***. Faithful. Available. Teachable. F.A.T.

“What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others.” 2 Timothy 2:2

 **Faithful / Available / Teachable**

Notice the first one: faithful. That’s what Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:2. “Faithful men.” He didn’t say “gifted men.” The first and main thing to look for is GODLINESS. Faithfulness. Character. If that is missing or distorted then exceptional gifts will eventually be misused and the name of Jesus dishonored. Start with the heart. Look for FAT people.

Now we will take the next three weeks to look at **the PROCESS of making and multiplying disciple-makers**. ***HOW can we be like Jesus*** and invest in Peter, James and John? ***How can we be like Paul*** and raise up Timothy, Epaphroditus, Luke and so many others?

Our passage in 2 Timothy 3 shows us **three CORE COMMITMENTS** for a DISCIPLEMAKER. They are very simple:

**How to Raise up Disciple-makers:**

1. **Model** godliness (v. 10-13)
2. **Teach** the Bible (v. 14-16)
3. **Train** holiness (v. 16-17)

First, we have to model it. We have to set the example of a life of full devotion to Jesus. Second, we have to teach the Bible, with a focus on the gospel. Third, we have to train people. It’s not enough to fill heads with information, we need to shape LIVES. Let’s look at these commitments one at a time.

**How to Raise up Disciple-makers:**

1. **Model** godliness, purpose, and perseverance (v. 10-13)

“You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life…” 2 Timothy 3:10

***Paul did ministry just like Jesus did*** - by bringing his apprentices along with him. He basically said to young men like Timothy, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Come, watch my life - watch how I pray, how I share the gospel, how I endure hardship. Don’t just show up for a weekend seminar - join me in my life.

This is the reason I’m in ministry today. My youth pastor, **Manny**, invited me to spend the summer with him - the summer of 1995. I had just finished freshman year of college, studying politics, and Manny said - “Spend the summer with me. Whatever I do, you do. When I pray in the sanctuary, you pray in the sanctuary. When I visit someone in the hospital, you come with. When I teach middle school kids, you listen - then you teach next week.”

It was a full immersion in the life of church ministry - and I fell in love with it. ***Manny didn’t TELL me how to do ministry, he SHOWED me.*** And I’ve been asking him about the HOW of ministry ever since! Manny is finally retiring from my home church this August, after 31 years there! Every time I go home to Chicago we have breakfast and catch up. So much of how I do ministry is a tribute to Pastor Manny - his heart, his life, his faith. He showed me RELATIONAL ministry and I have tried to live up to his example ever since.

One of his youth ministry traditions was called ***THE BIRTHDAY BEAT DOWN***. You would be rudely awakened on your birthday (or a day before or after) at like 5 in the morning with Manny and 3-4 other guys literally tackling you in your bed. They would beat on you until you got up and got dressed and then went out for pancakes.

**Aren’t you glad that I don’t apply EVERYTHING that Manny taught me?**

I don’t think the apostle Paul instituted the birthday beat down - but there is no proof in Scripture that he DIDN’T. What we do see in Scripture is that Paul set an example and overtly called believers to “follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.” Here in 2 Timothy 3, we hear Paul reminding Timothy of what he saw in the apostle’s life - how he “followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life.”

Yes, Timothy paid attention to Paul’s teaching - the essential doctrines about God and the gospel. But **Timothy also observed Paul’s way of life** - his conduct, his purpose, his intentionality, his commitment to make tents to provide for his financial needs. We get the term ***“tentmaker”*** from Paul’s practice of literally making tents and we now apply it to anyone who earns money to support ministry from some non-ministry business.

1. **Model** godliness, purpose, and perseverance (v. 10-13)
	* Godliness is making much of God

“You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness.” 2 Timothy 3:10

Paul rattles off eight descriptions of his life and ministry, ending with “persecutions and sufferings,” that I’ve summarized as godliness, purpose and perseverance.

**GODLINESS is putting God first in your heart and life** - it is making God central in all you believe and all you do. A godly person is one who is all about God and is increasingly becoming like God. We’ll talk about holiness in a few minutes. Godliness will always produce holiness, because God is holy. But holiness does not always produce godliness. In fact, it frequently doesn’t because the “holy person” may not be focused on God at all - but may simply be about building his own reputation as a righteous, impressively disciplined, “holy man” or woman.

1. **Model** godliness, purpose, and perseverance (v. 10-13)
	* Godliness always leads to holiness

“You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness.” 2 Timothy 3:10

What Timothy saw in Paul, and what we read in all of Paul’s letters, is godliness. Paul was obsessed with God. His faith, his patience, his love and steadfastness all grew from his fundamental commitment to make much of God.

If we are not **modeling godliness** before our children, they will grow up with WORLDLINESS. Are we first and foremost about GOD? Or are we mainly about this world - achievements, comforts, entertainments, comforts…? Do people look at your life and see a godly person or a worldly person? Before you can effectively train other followers of Jesus you first have to establish your own heart as a godly person. That devotion and example is the main thing you have to give another person!

1. **Model** godliness, purpose, and perseverance (v. 10-13)

“You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness.” 2 Timothy 3:10

Since character is the essential element in leadership, modeling is the essential element in disciple-making. Paul modeled godliness, purpose, and perseverance. We see his purpose in his **“aim in life.”** He expresses this in numerous ways and various passages but Acts 20:24 is representative: “I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given to me: the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”

In all of his letters he makes clear ***his goal to bring the gospel where it had not been heard***. He was the apostle - the sent one - to the Gentiles. Paul, the Jew; the Pharisee; the persecutor of the church - was sent to the Gentiles he had once despised to bring the good news of God’s grace to them. That was his aim in life - his purpose and mission. And Timothy knew and saw that. Anyone who spent any time with Paul was quickly infected with this “aim in life.”

***What is YOUR “aim in life”?*** What are you passionate about? What is your purpose and mission? Is it to spread the good news of Jesus to others? Is it to love and serve people in the name of Jesus? Whatever you love most, that is what people will see.

More is caught than taught in leadership and teaching. What is CAUGHT from your life?

1. **Model** godliness, purpose, and perseverance (v. 10-13)

“My persecutions and sufferings… which I endured…” 2 Tim. 3:11

Paul modeled godliness, purpose, and **perseverance**. In the face of all kinds of persecution, opposition and suffering, Paul endured. He pressed on. He was beaten. He was ridiculed. He was attacked. He was stoned. He was left for dead. He was shipwrecked. He was frequently on the run from his enemies. And he was frequently held in prison. But Paul never gave up. He always pressed on, until eventually he was executed in Rome. He fought the good fight. He finished the race. He endured to the end.

We need to model enduring faith, with a purposeful life that makes much of God. The second key to raising up disciple-makers:

1. **Teach** the Bible, focused on the gospel

“Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.” 2 Timothy 3:14

**Timothy was raised** in a God-loving Jewish family in which his mother and grandmother came to embrace Jesus as their Messiah. His father was Greek, so Paul chose to have Timothy circumcised so he would be more effective in ministering to Jews. But true faith dwelt in Timothy’s mother and grandmother and was passed on to Timothy.

By the time ***Paul met this young man in Lystra***, on the second missionary journey, he was already known as an up and coming leader in the church. So Paul took him on as an apprentice to join his traveling missionary team. And after training him for a while, Paul began to send Timothy out.

**Paul’s relationship with Timothy** is a clear Biblical example of what we are talking about today: MULTIPLYING disciple-makers. Paul didn’t send Timothy away to three years of seminary instruction, he threw Timothy immediately into on the job training. Paul modeled the life of a sold-out Christian leader, he taught Timothy the Bible and how to teach the Bible and he trained Timothy to pass all of this on.

This reminder in verse 14 sets up the stronger exhortations of chapter 4 to “preach the Word.” Paul was well aware of the dangers of false teachers and false teachings - the threats of opposition and persecution. He knew that any preacher of the gospel and any teacher of the Bible would be tempted to compromise the truth to make it more palatable, easier for sinful, secular people to accept.

So Paul said **CONTINUE in what you have learned**. Hold fast to what you have firmly believed. Stand strong in it. You heard this from your grandmother, from your mother - and from ME, Paul says. Don’t be led astray by some new teacher who sounds eloquent and persuasive. Listen for the truth. Verse 13 warned that

1. **Teach** the Bible, focused on the gospel

“Evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” 2 Timothy 3:13

Much of the letters of 1 and 2 Timothy are warnings about false teachers, preparing Timothy to stand firm against the temptation to compromise truth. ***Consider how far things have gone just recently related to gender.*** Just 20-25 years ago homosexuality was still called homosexuality - until the language was intentionally shifted to avoid both the expression homo and the term sexuality. The LGBTQIA+ acronym - which keeps growing longer every week it seems - was deliberately chosen to mask the truth that the sexual revolution is pressing on to ever deeper and more twisted forms of perversion. It has followed the downward spiral Paul warned about in Romans 1 as people reject the Creator God and turn away from truth, and God gives them over to their shameful lusts and sinful desires.

As prominent and visible as the media makes this agenda, ***gay marriage was only just made mainstream*** by the Obergefell decision of the then liberal supreme court in 2015. Gay marriage has only been a federal policy - legislated through the courts not the Congress - for seven years, but the press would have us believe it has always been this way. This is normal.

And **now it’s not enough to just celebrate those who are gay**, we are now being called to support and affirm the transgender movement that encourages even young children to question the gender with which they were born. Paul could not have conceived of something so out there as sex change surgery and hormone treatments. But he knew the way false teaching worked.

1. First, you ***question a difficult truth*** in the Bible - “Did God really say that marriage is between one man and one woman?”
2. Then you ***appeal to the desires*** of a person, getting them to focus on what THEY WANT instead of what God has clearly told them. “Look at this fruit! Why would God keep it from you?”
3. Finally, you ***present an alternative*** that seems close enough to what is currently accepted as to be a small step. Just as the devil whispered to Adam and Eve, “Why be with God if you can be ***like God***, knowing good and evil!”

And once people begin to take the bait, their guilt and shame make them run away from God, work hard to ***cover up their sin and hide it most of all from themselves***. When enough people have followed these steps, the whole culture begins to shift in how they think about what is normal. There have never been more than 2-3% of the country that is actively homosexual - but the media would have us believe that it is totally normal, totally common. And now they want to start kids questioning their biological gender right away in Kindergarten. Yet another reason we are blessed to live in Florida where our governor had the sense to shut that down, even though it caused a big fuss at Disney.

That’s how far our culture has come. Greece 2,000 years ago was not much better. So Paul showed Timothy the treatment for false teaching is the truth of Scripture!

1. **Teach** the Bible, focused on the gospel

“How from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” 2 Tim. 3:15

Like Jesus, Paul rooted his teachings in the Old Testament, showing how everything was leading up to the arrival, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah! In the very next chapter - 2 Timothy 4 - Paul exhorts his apprentice to “preach the word,” meaning the whole Bible. And Paul always preached the Bible with a Christ-centered, Gospel-focused approach. That is how the Scripture can “make you wise for salvation,” - they prepare you to respond to Jesus and Lord and put your faith in Him.

And Paul is explicit about that - salvation only comes ***“through faith in Christ Jesus.”*** It is not by human effort, not by obedience to the Law. It is all grace, received by faith alone. If we are to raise up disciple-makers - disciples of Jesus who make disciples of Jesus - **we MUST be clear on this point about the gospel!**

This is the main thing we pass along as we make disciples who make disciples - the good news of Jesus Christ - that salvation is a free gift of God’s grace because of the death and resurrection of Jesus!

So if we want to raise up disciple-makers, we first have to model godliness, purpose and perseverance. Second, we need to teach the Bible with a clear focus on the gospel and third:

1. **Train** holiness, discipline, and mission

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness.” 2 Timothy 3:16

**American discipleship tends to stop with teaching** - we teach truth and then more truth and on top of that more truth. If you didn´t know the Great Commission and only saw what the American church did you would conclude that Jesus must have charged his followers to ¨Make disciples of all nations, teaching them to UNDERSTAND everything I have commanded you.”

But that is not what Jesus told his followers. He sent them to make disciples, ¨Teaching them to OBEY everything” he had commanded them. Notice here what Scripture is profitable for: yes, for teaching, but also for ¨reproof, correction, and TRAINING.”

Do we allow Scripture to accomplish **this four-fold purpose**? Or do we only allow God´s Word to ¨TEACH US?¨ And if we limit Scripture to merely intellectual knowledge are we really allowing it to teach us? ***This is GOD´S WORD!*** Breathed out by the Creator and Lord of all things! Yes, God spoke through human authors, but ***God breathed INTO those writers*** so the words they wrote down were from HIM not from THEM.

That is **why Scripture is powerful** - because it is from God, spoken with His wisdom and authority. That is why God said through Jeremiah the prophet, ***¨Is not my word a fire, and a hammer that breaks rocks into pieces?”***(Jer. 23:29). That is why Isaiah the prophet compared God’s Word to the rain that falls from heaven and waters the earth, making it bring forth and sprout.

***God’s Word is LIFE to us!*** ¨Man shall not live by bread alone but by EVERY WORD that comes from the mouth of God!¨ So Scripture must be central to our teaching but also to our TRAINING. **Discipleship is best understood as TRAINING** - along the lines of athletic training or apprenticeship. We often think of discipleship as classroom learning but Jesus never had a classroom, nor did Paul. Both taught by example through a ¨Come with me and learn as we go” approach.

**Three essential areas of training** are holiness, discipline, and mission; they are closely related to one another. You cannot be holy or live on mission apart from discipline.

Paul MODELED GODLINESS - making much of God - and he trained his apprentices (like Timothy) in holiness. **Godliness must come first.** Godliness will always produce holiness. If God is the center of your life - if your life is about making much of God, then you will long to be like God in holiness, and you will discipline yourself to be like God in holiness. But if you start with holiness, you will probably never be godly - because you will end up making much of yourself, focusing on and admiring your own discipline.

Holiness is essential for the follower of Christ - Jesus commanded us to ¨Be holy as your Father in heaven is holy.” But we must pursue holiness for the glory of God and to please and serve Him, not for its own sake. Holiness is not the end, worship is. Holiness, discipline, and mission are all means to the end of worshiping, serving, and pleasing God.

This is the kind of thing that needs to not just be taught, but to be TRAINED. It’s like teamwork in sports. You can teach the principles of teamwork with a whiteboard - we are better together, spread out, run plays, pass to set each other up. Whether it’s hockey or soccer or basketball - there is only so much you can do in a classroom and then you have to get onto the field or court or rink and practice. You have to TRAIN. You work on skills to improve them.

* Do we approach ***Bible reading*** this way? As a skill to grow in? Or do we just accept that our Bible study and devotional disciplines are fine where they are… we don´t need to grow or improve in that.
* Do we approach ***prayer*** this way? Do we practice and train, do we pray with people who are more skilled in prayer so we can learn from them and grow to be more like them?
* Do we approach ***evangelism*** this way? Do we keep trying and improving, testing new approaches and strategies to find what works best? Do we seek out those who are gifted and experienced to learn from?

**Every part of the Christian life needs to be TRAINED** - practiced, coached, improved. If we read, study, discuss and obey God´s Word, it will change us - it will reprove us and correct us, it will train us in righteousness. And we need to submit to this training and call each other to greater commitment and growth.

How have you sought to grow in HOLINESS this year? To be more set apart for the Lord and less contaminated by the temptations, distractions and idolatries of this world? How have you TRAINED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS recently? Who is helping you to grow in holiness and discipline?

Many of you know that we have ***DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS*** at Oakwood now - small groups of 2, 3 or 4 people challenging each other to growth in the Lord and in His mission. Community Groups are mainly for relationship - to build community around God and His Word. Discipleship Groups are mainly for training - ẗo spur one another on to love and good deeds.¨

At our D-Group training a few weeks ago I did this **little exercise**. Everyone stand up. I helped coach volleyball for my son Joel’s team - and my job was to work with the brand new guys, teaching them how to make a good pass. Step one is to learn your STANCE - like this. You want your arms straight, locked together in front of you, and your feet apart, ready to move quickly in any direction.

***What you learn early on in volleyball is that our bodies default to conserving energy.*** That stance requires a lot of energy to maintain. So when the ball goes over to the other side of the net, you see everyone stand up straight. Then, when the ball suddenly comes back over, they are not ready to move quickly to play it. So our job as coaches was to TRAIN the players to stay in that ready position, replacing the usual energy conservation mode of the human body with the READINESS mode of a game.

You can sit back down. Just as in volleyball we default to laziness, so in life we settle into our comfortable routines, **unless we TRAIN another way**. We will naturally fill our hearts and minds with the things of this world unless we actively practice setting our minds on things above, not on earthly things. We will default to a focus on ourselves rather than on God if we don´t learn to discipline ourselves in prayer, devotional Bible reading and accountability.

Have you found that your default setting in life is to PRAY or to look at your phone?

Both are learned behaviors. They are TRAINED behaviors. Every habit works on the same cycle, the author of The Power of Habit calls this the Habit Loop:

Your phone vibrates, notifying you of a new email. That’s your trigger, and you suddenly feel a craving to know what that email is about. Is it work? Is it that important reply you were waiting for? No, it’s a forward from that friend who is always sending you random cat videos on YouTube. Now you’re too curious to resist, so the cue prompts the routine - opening the email and watching the video. That produces the reward of laughing at the silly video and writing back to your friend telling him what a nut he is.

That’s a pretty harmless example. You can apply this to addictions and sins. Or you can use the habit loop to train yourself in holiness, discipline, and mission.

* ***Waking up and making coffee*** can become your CUE to meet with God. You can set aside a place and time so the smell of coffee begins to feel like an invitation to open God’s Word and meet with your Lord. The reward is feeling closer to Him as you grow in the discipline of prayer and Bible study.
* ***Seeing a picture of your family*** on your desk or fridge can become a cue to pray for them.
* ***Seeing that familiar cashier*** at Panera or Publix can become a cue to pray for that person - especially if you learn their name.
* Wearing a ***rainbow wristband*** can serve as a cue to pray for the people in your day to day life and can prompt you to pray for opportunities to share the gospel.

If we are going to be effective at multiplying disciple-makers, we need to model godliness, teach the Bible and train holiness, discipline and mission. Disciples are not made by accident any more than Olympic athletes are. It takes training, intentionality, accountability, and perseverance. But look at the promise in verse 17:

1. **Train** holiness, discipline, and mission

“That the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Tim. 3:17

Do you want to be complete, mature in Christ? Do you want to be equipped for every good work? Then submit to training in righteousness through the study, discussion, and application of God’s Word to your life! Connect with one or two Christian friends and start a Discipleship Group - Jason and I can help you get started with that. You can read or listen to the orientation sessions on the D Groups page of our website.

Our prayer at Oakwood is to be a part of a disciple-making movement that spreads from Tampa Bay to the ends of the earth. This is the work Jesus is doing right now - the small work of 1 on 1 meetings, of small personal changes, of fresh daily commitments. As believers in Jesus grow in our commitment to Jesus, as we challenge and encourage one another to grow in godliness that produces holiness - as we grow in boldness in sharing the good news of Jesus, as we discipline ourselves and help train others - this gospel of the kingdom will spread from person to person until everyone on the planet has heard!

Jesus is building His church - He is gathering in His lost sheep from every tongue and tribe and nation. As we engage in the Great Commission right where we are, we are contributing to that unstoppable global mission!

Let’s pray.