

The Character of a Disciple-Maker

2 Timothy 2:2; 1 Timothy 3:1-13

INTRODUCTION

This morning we begin our final mini-series on our core values here at Oakwood. So far we've covered our values of *Biblically Grounded*, *Prayerfully Dependent*, *Gospel Centered*, *Relationally Connected*, and *Empowering Everyone*. Our last core value that we begin a discussion on today is *Multiplying Disciple-Makers*.

We specifically chose the word "multiplication" because of the reproducible nature of the Gospel. It is like a seed that when scattered, it germinates and grows and ultimately produces additional seeds that then fall into the ground to start the process over again.

The idea here is that every product of the Gospel has in itself the ability to reproduce that Gospel in the life of another. This means that every one of you, if you claim the name of Jesus, has through your own life and ministry the ability in Christ to reproduce the Gospel in others!

The implications of this are significant! For too long the church in America has settled for addition. Everyone is encouraged to do their small part to draw people to Christ. You invite unbelievers to church, you share your story, you share God's story, and when able, you lead them to Christ. This happens one by one by one by one. This is a good work that demonstrates our effort to scatter the seed of the Gospel, but its effects are limited, and here's why: ***We are sharing the Gospel but we are not training others to share the Gospel*** (repeat).

This is the difference between the Gospel becoming expendable compared to reproducible. The Gospel is expendable when we only share it, but it becomes reproducible when we train others to share it.

I just read this week through a book about Paul Revere with my children. He's famously known for his famous midnight ride from Boston to Lexington and Concord. His mission was to notify as many people as possible that the British were coming to invade their cities. ***What many people don't know is that the most important people he notified were the 40 other horsemen along his route, who then carried on that word to every town in the greater area to prepare for battle.*** Within a few hours, every single person up to 25 miles from Boston knew the British plan for attack! → Was this made possible by Revere's singular voice? No, it became possible because everyone shared in passing on that message to those around them. They reproduced that message to everyone they knew. ***In effect, the message was multiplied and it's what led to their victory.***

It's this same model of multiplication that Christ calls us to replicate today. Where in the Scriptures do we get such a model clearly written? Turn with me to 2 Timothy 2:2. Here Paul is speaking to his protege, Timothy, about the mission of multiplication. It says, ***“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”***

Here we see the Gospel being reproduced through four generations. It starts with Paul, then goes to Timothy, who then shares it with “faithful men,” who then share it with others. Multiplication happens when we share both of two things: 1) The Gospel itself, and 2) the expectation and the method to share the Gospel with others.

BODY

In the coming weeks we will spend more time covering in detail the multiplication model but for today I want to talk about the disciple-maker himself. Who are the “faithful men (and women)” that Timothy shares the Gospel with and then go on to share it with others? In other words, what makes up the character of a fruitful disciple-maker?

This is an important question because we all know from experience and observation that character far outweighs competence. My ability to make disciples is minimal compared to my ability to simply be a disciple. Our key point for today is just that: ***Making disciples is less about your competence and far more about your character.***

We all know the stories of highly gifted Christian leaders who used their influence to build megachurches that ultimately fell because their character couldn't keep up with their competence. You see their temptation, much like ours, is to believe that what we do is most determined by how well we do it. But the reality is that what we do is most determined by who we are. Gifts and abilities may open doors, but character will determine what we do once those doors are open. For some those open doors lead to self-glory and self-worship rather than God-glory and God-worship. They fail to see that God opened those doors, not them, and it makes them susceptible to a significant fall.

To keep you from falling or myself from falling, a sound foundation is essential. I remember when my parents were ready to pull the trigger on buying a wonderful house. It looked great! It had a beautiful patio overlooking a spacious and quiet backyard. It had a nice floor plan to accommodate guests. But before they signed the papers, they had a house inspector come. In his review, he found a massive crack in the foundation! It was something you would never see until you put a roll of tape in the kitchen and watch it accelerate toward the hallway! He said if this crack was left undealt with, it would eventually send cracks through the drywall and into the ceiling, leading to a situation that would be irreparable.

This is the danger for us as disciple-makers for Christ. It's what Jesus spoke specifically on Matthew 7: ***If our lives are not built on the firm foundation of Christ, we risk not only losing an effective ministry or our reputation, but our very souls!*** Billy Graham famously said, *"When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, all is lost."*

How do you measure your character? What's the litmus test for it?

Character is measured by your likeness to God's character. We don't determine who good we are based on the goodness of society at large. Our goal is not to merely look a little better than those around us. **Rather, our litmus test is Christ Himself!** We learned last week in Ephesians 4:12-14 that our mission is *"to equip the saints for ministry until we all attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."*

Oswald Chambers spoke perceptively when he said, *"The true expression of Christian character is not in good-doing but in God-likeness. If the Spirit of God has transformed you within, you will exhibit divine characteristics in your life, not good human characteristics. God's life in us expresses itself as God's life, not as human life trying to be godly."*

This quote tells us that if we are trying to be like God, we in ourselves can never muster up enough good morality to meet His standard. The reason is because He is God and we are human. **But the game changes if God comes to live inside a human!** Now the emphasis is not on trying to make my humanness god-like but rather letting God be God in my humanity.

The application here is that we can become godly if we humbly allow God to reign inside our mortal flesh. This is why Romans 12:1-2 says to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. When we do this, God shows up and works through our willing sacrifice!

Let's also remember that our character is gauged by general tendencies, not by a few isolated actions. Who you are in your character is not determined by irregular and standalone sins. **Character is determined by the lifestyle habits and practices that you cultivate day in and day out.** It's for this reason that the Bible declares King David to be a man after God's own heart, even though he had a major moral fallout when he committed adultery with Bathsheba! This sin had its consequences for David, but it didn't define his ongoing character.

The main reason for this is his quick repentance. Remember what God said to Cain before he killed his brother: *“Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”* **Sin is always ready to not just pinch us but pounce on us!** How do we keep this from happening? How do we rule over sin? **We rule over sin by repenting of sin.** We choose to confess our sin and turn from our sin and to turn towards God.

Cain’s anger already led him to kill his brother in his heart. If he had repented of that evil thought right then, he would have been kept from acting on it with murder. It’s the same with King David. If he hadn’t repented of his sin immediately after committing it, he would have continued acting on it. **Here’s the key: Unrepentant sin is unrul ed sin. It turns isolated acts of disobedience into habits of disobedience.**

I am so thankful that David set the example for us in [Psalm 51](#). In [v.10](#) it says, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me...Restore to me the joy of my salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”* **When you repent of your sin, you are either breaking habits or preventing new habits from spawning. Isolated sins don’t determine our character, but habits do.**

Jim Elliot was a missionary to Ecuador. He was described by everyone who knew him as a radical lover of God. His character was that of consistent service to his Master! But before we put him on a pedestal higher than a human, we can be encouraged by reading his final journal entry before he was martyred. Even here we can see that he wrestled with the occasional inconsistencies of sin. It reads:

A month of temptation. Satan and the flesh have been on me hard on the dreadful old level of breasts and bodies. How God holds my soul in His life and permits one with such wretchedness to continue in His service, I cannot tell. Oh, it has been hard. I have been really low inside me struggling and casting myself hourly on Christ for help. But though the flesh conspire, Lord, let the Spirit conquer!”

It was only eight days later that Jim and his fellow missionaries were speared by the very people they came to save with the Gospel. ***Even though Jim Elliot had a character of holiness, he still wrestled with holes in his holiness.*** But what mattered was his resolve to get right through repentance. May we be encouraged that God doesn't expect our perfection. But may we be challenged that God does expect us to get right through repentance.

Let's turn our attention for the remainder of our time to the character qualities of a disciple-maker. This list could be extensive, but Paul gives us a simplified list in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. Here we have the qualifications for overseers and deacons. The leaders of the church needed to possess these character traits or they couldn't be considered for either eldership or deaconship.

Now this may lead you to think this list excludes you if you're not in that role, but these are qualities we all should aspire to! ***An effective disciple-maker can't be a subpar Christian.*** There must be a level of spiritual maturity developed in him or her. Certainly the leaders of the church were making disciples through their ministry, but this wasn't due to their role in the church; it was due to their character as disciple-makers! So for these reasons, these are qualities we should all seek after. They will make us better disciples and disciple-makers.

I don't have time to cover all of the traits listed here, but we will quickly highlight 5 essential traits of disciple-makers.

The first trait is above reproach. V.2 says, ***“Therefore an overseer must be above reproach.”*** This does not equate with faultlessness. Otherwise we'd all fall short. It rather means “of blameless reputation.” It has to do with irreproachable observable conduct. The Greek literally means “not able to be held.” The man who is above reproach cannot be arrested and held as if he were a criminal; there is nothing for which to accuse him.

It doesn't mean that this person is without sin, but that his or her life has not been marred by some obvious sinful defect in character that others notice and are influenced by.

Richard Baxter, who was a pastor in the Puritan movement of the 17th century in England, wrote on the importance of being above reproach:

Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling-blocks before the blind, as may be the occasion of their ruin; lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labours.... One proud, surly, lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action, may cut the throat of many loving words, and blast the fruit of all that you have been doing.

How quickly all of your efforts at leading others to Christ can be thwarted by a foolish hypocritical act. You may have been trying to reach your neighbor for years when he happens one night to catch a glimpse of you yelling at your wife or angrily demeaning your children. You may have been trying to reach a coworker for years when he happens to catch a glimpse of you taking a shortcut on a project or misusing company funds.

The call here is for us to be vigilant of all our activity, realizing that everything we do influences our witness, whether it be positive or negative. When we are above reproach, we put no obstacle in the way of someone's reception of the Gospel. People rarely care what you say until they see that what you do backs up what you say. This is the reason we as disciple-makers should strive to be above reproach.

The second character quality is that of self-mastery. Although these words are not used in the passage it encapsulates the traits of ***“sober-minded, self-controlled, and not violent but gentle.”*** Another word for “sober-minded” is temperate. The Greek word *nēphalios* means “wineless.” Taken literally, a Christian should not come under the influence of

intoxicating drinks or drugs that take away his or her ability to control themselves. Ephesians 5:18 says we shouldn't *be intoxicated with wine but be filled with the Spirit*. The idea is that we are either under the influence of worldly perversions or we are under the influence of the Spirit.

Those who consistently go to alcoholic drinks struggle more deeply with escapism. They use the good feelings produced by alcohol to help them escape from the disappointments of their life. More than ever this is a respectable sin. Our culture, including much of Christian culture, accepts the drinking of alcohol. I do as well; for most of us there is nothing wrong with having an occasional drink. ***But the problem comes when we go to it to get away from something else.***

This defines much of the allure of worldly temptations. They offer us something that temporarily brightens our day. Paul tells us here to exercise sober-mindedness and self-control. A self-controlled person is well-disciplined. He is not caught off-guard by the wooing call of temptation. Such recklessness is described in Proverbs 7. The author in v.6 says,

“For at the window of my house I have looked out through my lattice and I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man lacking sense, passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness. And behold, the woman meets him, dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart. (v.21) With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life.”

This is how sin deceives us. We play the role of victim rather than vigilant. We allow temptation to seduce us till we give into its sinfulness. ***You can be certain that when you fail to control yourself, sin will certainly control you!*** But the self-controlled person has mastery over his body! He

chooses as Proverbs 4:23 says, *“To keep his heart with all vigilance, because from it flows the springs of life.”*

The point is this: You cannot give life to others if your own life is held captive to the lure of the flesh. Choose rather to walk by the power of the Spirit and be radical in your killing of the sin in your life. Such a decision will bless your disciple-making. Choose Spirit-driven self-mastery.

The third character quality of a disciple-maker is hospitality. This Greek word, *philoxenos*, is a compound word that translates both “to love” and “strangers” as one. It literally means “to love strangers.” It is a frequently commanded Christian virtue, showing up in Romans 12, Hebrews 13, and 1 Peter 4 to name a few. It doesn’t refer to entertaining friends, but showing hospitality to strangers. Jesus said in Luke 14:22:

“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment comes to you. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Persecution, poverty, orphans, widows, and traveling Christians made hospitality essential in New Testament times. They had no hotels or motels, and the inns were notoriously evil. Often they were brothels, or places where travelers were robbed or beaten. ***So having a place of warmth and security met a huge need.***

Today it doesn’t seem that hospitality is needed to the same degree. However, there is still great value in opening our homes and our hearts to anyone God brings across our path. If most of us are honest, we rarely ever invite anyone into the place we live. Our home is our sacred retreat, our personal space, our place of separation from the stress of the world. I understand this position, and I’m not here to knock it down. We do need a place to rest and recuperate, especially if we are introverts.

But I wonder what ministry we are missing out on if our homes are never part of the equation. Rosaria Butterfield is the author of “The Gospel Comes with a House Key.” Before she came to the Lord, she was a professor of English at Syracuse University, a lesbian, and a passionate LGBTQ activist. She knew of the Gospel but never saw its radical love in action. So what did God use to draw her to Himself? Was it an evangelistic rally, or was it something in print that especially spoke to her since she had a doctor of literature? ***No, instead God used an invitation to dinner in a modest home from a humble couple who lived out the Gospel daily, simply, and authentically.***

It was here that walls of bitterness broke down, misconceptions were driven away, and love was experienced. Through multiple meals a friendship was established that overtime led to Rosaria making a decision to follow the Lord. This demonstration of hospitality had such an impact on her that she wrote this book about it.

In it she calls on Christians to start using the greatest asset God has given them to advance His mission. In the book she says, *“Those who live out radically ordinary hospitality see their homes not as theirs but as God’s gift to use for the furtherance of his kingdom.”* In another place she says, *“We live in a post-Christian world that is sick and tired of hearing from Christians. But who could argue with mercy-driven hospitality?”*

I know for many of us opening our homes is very much like opening our hearts. It makes us feel vulnerable and gives people room to judge. Our tendency, just like our hearts, is to tidy it up and present it as something it is not. To us this is tiring and not worth the effort, so we settle to never have people over.

Yet the beauty of the Gospel is found in the incomplete nature of our lives. When our lives were a wreck and sin covered everything we did, Jesus came to knock on our door. Our first response was to nicely decline, but He continued to knock. We tried to straighten our lives up, but we knew

the task was too big. Finally, we gave in and opened the door. As He walked in, we tried to make excuses and attempted to cover our shame. Yet His gentle words were, “Thank you so much for inviting me in; come, let’s sit down and enjoy a meal together.”

When we invite others to see our incomplete lives and homes, the beauty of the mercy found in the Gospel is amplified all the more.

People don’t want to see your fake, plastic, sterile attempt at perfection. They want to see that you’re just like them: incomplete and still in need of the Savior.

Emma and I are big believers in a conviction we settled on a few years ago: ***We invite people into our church by inviting them into our home.*** We love having people over our home. And let me tell you, it’s not easy: five kids and a very small home complicate the experience, but the true joy is sharing a meal and good focused fellowship with others. I know hospitality isn’t everyone’s gift or joy, but I think there’s room for most of us to grow in this character quality. It will advance our disciple-making efforts, perhaps more than we even realize.

CONCLUSION

I know there are so many more qualities I’d love for us to cover today. I encourage you to go through the list further yourself. See how God might be calling you to grow your character.

The truth stands that making disciples is less about competence and far more about your character. The more we reflect Jesus in our character, the more we will reflect Jesus to others. ***Thus, our ability to make disciples must quickly give way to our identity as disciples.***

In Ezekiel 22:30, God says, ***³⁰ And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. ³¹ Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. I have returned their way upon their heads, declares the Lord God.***

God is still looking today for a faithful man, a faithful woman, who stands apart from the crowd, who is not given over to the lusts of the flesh, who is not caught up in selfish pursuits. Oakwood, will He find them here? If He does not, He will move on to use others. But if He does, He will gladly use us to accomplish His great works of disciple-making in our time!

I'll close with a poem by George Liddle, who was a pastor for most of his life throughout the 1800s. He wrote this about the man God uses:

*Give me a man of God—one man,
Whose faith is master of his mind,
And I will right all wrongs
And bless the name of all mankind.*

*Give me a man of God—one man,
Whose tongue is touched with heaven's fire,
And I will flame the darkest hearts
With high resolve and clean desire.*

*Give me a man of God—one man,
One mighty prophet of the Lord,
And I will give you peace on earth,
Bought with a prayer and not a sword.*

*Give me a man of God—one man,
True to the vision that he sees,
And I will build your broken churches,
And bring the nations to their knees.*

CLOSING PRAYER