

Leadership Principles & the Pastoral Epistles – 2015
WEEK 3: DEVELOP WORKERS

Interpretive comments on 2 Tim. 2:2

To whom does this biblical mandate apply?

The Great Commission (Matt. 28:19,20) is a mandate given to *all* Christians.

The command to “make disciples” is very broad. It is unpacked by three participles:

- “Going”
- “Baptizing”
- “Teaching”

The “teaching” part of the Great Commission and other passages argue that *all* Christians are responsible to help other Christians to mature and develop into Christian workers.

- Eph. 4:11-16 describes two key elements of this “teaching”:
The equipping ministry of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers

The every-member ministry of speaking the truth in love to one another

- Col. 1:28,29 and 3:16 show that all Christians should be engaged in discipling specific individuals toward spiritual maturity.

- The metaphor of the church as the family of God implies that more mature Christians have a special responsibility to help less mature Christians mature (1 Thess. 2:9-12; Titus 2:2ff.). Therefore:
We should challenge the Christians in our home group to build discipling relationships with one another.

Home group leaders should prioritize discipling prospective home group leaders.

- Key leaders (pastor-teachers?) must identify other spiritually faithful people who are similarly gifted and help them become effective key leaders (2 Tim. 2:2).

Whose “disciples” are we?

On one level, we are Jesus’ disciples.

This has two practical implications:

- Remember that discipleship has an important corporate aspect. We may well play a crucial, ongoing role in someone’s development—but healthy development requires exposure to many members’ wisdom, example, gifts, etc.
- We should avoid a possessive or territorial attitude toward people we disciple. For this reason, Ajith Fernando recommends using “disciple” as a verb rather than a “noun.”¹

On another level, it is appropriate and important to take responsibility to disciple specific individuals (cf. 2 Tim. 1:2). This is the language of loving responsibility.

¹ “The work of Christian leaders to help other Christians become disciples of Christ I am calling the ministry of discipling. I am calling the leader who cares for the trainee the *discipler* and the trainee the *disciplee*. The words *discipler* and *disciplee* (as opposed to *master* and *disciple*) point to the fact that we are raising up disciples of Christ rather than of ourselves . . . I feel uneasy when I hear people say things like, ‘He’s my spiritual child,’ or ‘He’s my Timothy.’ Such statements can take glory that is due to Christ and deflect it in our direction. We saw above that Paul and Peter said something like that, but in these cases they were calling Timothy, Titus, Philemon and Mark their children in order to lift the children up, not to lift up themselves. What I am cautioning about is the habit of using our disciples to boast about ourselves.” Ajith Fernando, *Jesus Driven Ministry* (Crossway Books, 2002), pp. 152,170.

This has two practical implications:

- Discipleship has an important individual element. “Everybody’s job is nobody’s job.”
- We should agree on certain commitments that go into discipleship relationships. Otherwise, this important concept and term becomes so general that it is meaningless.

A framework for discipleship relationships

When we survey the New Testament material on how we are to develop younger Christians, we find that no one method is prescribed or described. Our own personal experience confirms that God works through many methods to develop Christian workers:

- Many were discipled primarily by one-on-one mentoring.
- Many were discipled primarily in a corporate model rather than individually.
- Some of us were discipled in an “ad hoc” way.
- Many of us disciple individuals in different ways.

In Xenos, we insist on certain common elements in discipleship relationships. This is because we believe these elements are essential, and so that we are on the same page when we use this term.

Both mentoring discipleship and peer discipleship are important.

Commit to time together that is regular, personal and intentional.

- “Regular” means weekly unless really not feasible.
- “Personal” means that we build a real Christ-centered friendship

- “Intentional” means that we are trying to foster genuine spiritual growth in one another’s lives. There are four elements of intentionality, represented below with examples:

| | |
|---|--|
| STUDY | COUNSEL |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Bible • quality Christian books • quality recorded teachings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • key relationships • besetting sins • fears, doubts, etc. |
| COACH | PRAY |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evangelism & follow-up • discipleship with others • spiritual gifts & other roles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • together & out loud • for one another & others |

STUDY: Help them become a lover of God’s Word. Study and discuss Bible books and/or a quality Christian book together. Suggest other biblical passages and Christian books on topics that come up. Take a Xenos class together.

COUNSEL: Help them develop godly character. Emphasize the importance of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23). Help them identify their besetting sins and develop long-term, grace-based strategies for resisting them. Help them to build and maintain good key friendships (including spouses!).

COACH: Help them become servants who thrive off of a lifestyle of giving God’s love to others. Help them become consistently edifying workers at meetings. Cast vision for evangelism and discipling other Christians. Help them identify their spiritual gifts, urge them to use their gifts, and facilitate this where you can.

PRAYER: Help them become pray-ers. Pray with them regularly and pray regularly for one another. Urge them to be part of your home group prayer meeting, and to initiate prayer with others.

Such a framework facilitates making progress in these four essential aspects of spiritual maturity. It also allows the flexibility to respond to “real time” growth opportunities or issues that need to be resolved.

Additional practical elements in discipleship relationships

Selection is important! We can’t make anyone want to grow—we try to find people who want to grow, and help them grow. We know the Holy Spirit is motivating everyone to grow (Phil. 2:13), but we know they have to decide they want to grow (Phil. 2:12).

- Pray for hungry people, and keep your eyes open.
- Do the work God has called you to do, and see who is drawn to you as you do this.
- *Do they evidence interest in the Word?*
- *Are they honest about what is going on in their lives?*

- *Do they show a willingness to serve others?*

- *Do they take challenging steps of faith?*

Are you discipling learners, or are you trying to force-feed someone who is not presently a learner? Beware of feeling like you have to “have a disciple” so you can “be somebody.”

On the other hand, don’t apply this in a perfectionistic way. Very few Christians (including ourselves!) consistently exhibit all of these characteristics. Beware of using “selection” as an excuse to avoid investing in others.

If you are unsure about someone, consider asking him to commit to a short-term (e.g., 2 months) of getting together to do the above. This gives the person an idea of what discipleship is, and it gives you the opportunity for better discernment before making a long-term commitment.

Focus on *your* progress more than on theirs (1 Tim. 4:15)! Modeling is one of the most powerful influences we have (1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7)!

- Are you the kind of person who is growing more in love with God, excited about his Word, etc.? Are you continuing to grow in your understanding and appreciation of God’s grace? Are you thriving more off of giving God’s love away to others? Are you open about your sins and fear to others? Do you repent quickly and apologize when you blow it? This example of godliness, maybe more than anything else, draws hungry people and inspires them to become godly.

Do your best to develop well-rounded and self-motivated workers.

- “Well-rounded” – We want to help them become workers who are growing in the Word, godly character and competence in ministry.

- “Self-motivated” – We want to help them become “independently dependent on the Lord.” Unhealthy dependence on the discipler is failure.

One key to this is to help them become deeply grounded in God’s grace.

In grey areas (e.g., dating decisions; complex ministry decisions), resist telling them what to do. Instead, remind them of related biblical principles and urge them to come to their own convictions before God.

Discipleship in a healthy home group

Transformational leaders will emphasize this ministry, form appropriate structures to facilitate it, and closely monitor its progress.

This ministry will be emphasized and esteemed as a core ministry along with sharing our faith, and loving one another.

Younger members will have opportunity to be disciplined one-on-one by an older Christian, and older Christians will have opportunity to engage in peer discipleship. We should also urge them to take initiative to seek these discipling relationships.

Not every Christian worker will feel responsible to develop younger Christians into leaders. Many can do this, and some (especially gifted leaders, elders, etc.) must do this—but not everyone.

In summary:

- More mature Christians should intentionally help younger Christians to mature (mentor discipleship).
- Christians of roughly equal maturity can help each other to mature (peer discipleship).
- Leaders should utilize the equipping of apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers as a key aspect of helping younger Christians develop.
- Home group leaders should identify possible future home group leaders and do their best to develop them into leaders—though they should also rely on help from gifted leaders (see above).
- Other ministry leaders (e.g., service ministries) should try to develop future leaders in that ministry.

Don't get overwhelmed with how much there is to do, how difficult this is, etc. Jesus is with us—He will keep discipling us, and He will keep providing us with what we need to develop others. So just wade in there and do your best. Over time, you will experience the joy of knowing that God used you to deeply impact many Christian workers (3 Jn. 1:4), and many of them will become life-long friends (2 Tim. 1:2,4)!

Organic Disciplemaking is an excellent resource for questions and issues related to personal discipleship.