

Paul Selects Timothy

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[0 : 00] Chapter 16. As a Christian minister, one of the questions which people often ask me is, what does God want me to do with my life? Christians ask this question when they're looking for some guidance. What should I do? Where should I live? Who should I marry?

Let's peel back the question and apply it to our daily lives. What does God want me to do today? How would Jesus answer it? Well, among the many potential ways he may choose to answer it, near or at the very top of his list would be, go and make disciples of all nations.

What does God want me to do with my life? Answer, go and make disciples. Don't be paralyzed like a rabbit caught in headlights. Don't sit on your hands like a lazy couch potato.

Don't be frantic like a headless chicken. What does God want us to do? Make disciples for Christ. Now, Acts chapter 16, this chapter of the Word we'll be spending our summer studying, begins with the evangelistic disciple-making activity of the Apostle Paul. He's not paralyzed or lazy in the service of Christ. He is up and he's doing. And what is it he's doing? He is making disciples. He is nurturing believers. He is growing the people of God. In these verses, we see him in action as he takes a young Christian man called Timothy under his wing and teaches him how to fly.

And I want to suggest to you that today, if we are asking the question, what does God want me to do? Then we need to start here with making disciples for Jesus Christ and in so doing, building Christ's kingdom.

[1 : 59] The key to both fruitful Christian living and fruitful Christian service lies here in taking younger Christians under our wing and teaching them how to fly because that's what we call discipleship.

Let me suggest that as we pass through these verses, we see eight aspects of Paul's evangelistic disciple-making activity. And let me say again, the key to fruitful Christian living and fruitful Christian service lies right here in taking younger Christians under our wing and teaching them how to fly as believers. First aspect of Paul's intentional evangelistic disciple-making activity is that it is natural. It is natural. Paul had not always been a senior figure in the church. Once called Saul of Tarsus, he had been a very zealous Pharisee, a vicious man who thought he was doing God a service by persecuting Christians. But then comes the Damascus Road experience where the glorious Christ meets with him. And for the first time, Saul of Tarsus understands the gospel in all of its forgiving fullness.

Immediately, Saul begins to preach the gospel he once hated. However, we can understand why a few Christians were suspicious of him. Could this be a clever ruse on his part to infiltrate the early church? And so when he came to Jerusalem, initially the Christians rejected him. But we read in Acts 9.27, Barnabas took him and brought him to the disciples and explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road and how the Lord had talked to him. From then on, Barnabas and Saul were inseparable.

When Barnabas was sent to minister to the growing church in Antioch, the first thing he did was to bring Saul alongside so he could strengthen them with the gospel. The two of them, Barnabas and Saul, now called Paul, were commissioned by the church in Antioch to engage in missionary evangelism to the Gentiles. So Barnabas, this Cypriot, had taken Saul of Tarsus, this gifted young Christian man, under his wing and advocated for him, nurtured him and taught him how to fly. Paul's whole Christian life had been lived in a culture of discipleship. Now, think of older Christians who mentored you when you were young.

Think of how they invested in you. Think of how they took you under their wing. Think of how they taught you to fly. Perhaps they helped us to learn how to read the Bible for ourselves.

[5 : 06] Perhaps they gave us a passion for world mission. How can we repay these older Christians for their mentorship of us, for their discipleship of us? Answer, by mentoring others, by

discipling others, by investing in others. The famous Scottish writer John Buchan himself, the son of a free church manse, in a speech delivered in May 1937, famously said, we can pay our debt to the past by putting the future in debt to us.

A culture of discipleship was natural to Paul. He had been mentored by Barnabas, so it was natural for him now to mentor Timothy. Paul was paying back his debt to Barnabas by placing Timothy in debt to him.

So let's go back to those who took us under their wing and taught us to fly. How can we repay them? By mentoring others. By discipling others. By investing in others. So then let me ask a question.

By whom are you being taught how to fly? And who are you teaching how to fly? Natural. Second, risky. Risky.

Paul's whole life was spent in this culture of discipleship. But far from being a bed of roses, a life spent discipling and being disciplined by others is very challenging.

[6 : 39] The end of Acts chapter 15, we read of the unpleasant parting of the ways between Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas going one way, Paul going the other. What prompted the disagreement was the young disciple called John Mark.

Both Paul and Barnabas had invested in this young man and he had accompanied them on their first missionary journey. But for fear of the Jews, Mark had turned back.

He had disappointed Barnabas and Paul by misunderstanding the application of the gospel. And no doubt both Paul and Barnabas felt deeply betrayed by John Mark.

Barnabas, it strikes me, was always the more patient of the two. And he was willing to give John Mark a second chance. But Paul did not agree. Having been hurt and betrayed by him once before, Paul was not going to invest in John Mark again.

You know what they say, once bitten, twice shy. What we learn is that it's a risky business to invest your life in the life of another.

[7 : 48] Because the closer you get to them, the more it hurts when they disappoint, reject and betray you. Discipleship is a seriously risky business.

So perhaps we've been in situations where we've let others down. Those who trusted and invested in us. Perhaps we've also been in situations where others have let us down.

Those in whom we trusted and invested. What is the answer? To shut ourselves away and have nothing to do with anyone else ever again? No. The Christ-like way is to expose ourselves to the risk again.

To put ourselves in danger of being hurt again. And so when Paul goes to Lystra and Derbe, rather than press on regardless, he chooses Timothy as a replacement for John Mark.

What Paul learned from Barnabas, he is now going to teach Timothy. Even though John Mark's desertion hurt him so profoundly, Paul will once again open his heart and invest in another young man's discipleship.

[8 : 59] Timothy. Clamming up and hiding himself away was not an option for him. That's not what Jesus did. There must be continued commitment to the discipleship of others.

I know that many of us here have been hurt over the years by the seeming desertion of those they have disciplined.

Well, you're in good company. Because both Paul and Jesus endured the same. Don't let these past experiences of betrayal and disappointment stop you from investing again in someone else's discipleship.

Take the risk. Expose yourself to the danger of teaching someone how to fly. Third aspect of Paul's disciple-making activity.

Discerning. He was discerning. The risen Christ calls his disciples to go and make disciples. It is interesting in Acts chapter 16 verse 1 that Timothy is already called a disciple.

[10 : 04] Before Paul takes him under his wing and disciplines him further, Timothy is already a disciple. From verse 2 we learn that he is well spoken of by the Christians in Lystra and Iconium, the surrounding region.

They knew that Timothy was a young man serious about growing in his faith and serving Christ. He has a good reputation among his peers and in his local church.

Paul carefully selected him. Paul didn't say, well I need some help with carrying stuff. I'll just choose anyone. Rather, with wise discernment, Paul chose to invest himself in a young man with a good

reputation who had already shown himself to be a disciple of Christ.

Now this being a study directed toward all of us as God's people, as we listen to God's call upon us to make disciples, we learn from Paul that we are to be discerning in our choice of who to invest ourselves in.

Does this person have a good reputation? Does this person exhibit evidence of wanting to grow in their faith? Does this person want to learn how to serve Christ more effectively?

[11 : 26] Is this person teachable? When you find someone like that, pour yourself into them. Invest yourself in them. And however much it costs you personally, it will pay dividends for the kingdom of God.

We are hardly going to teach someone to fly who is afraid of heights. Let me tell you that there are young people in this conlegation of Glasgow City who, like Timothy, are already disciples, who exhibit evidence of growing in their faith, and they want to learn how to serve Christ more effectively.

Who are teachable. Invest in them. And in so doing, you'll obey the great commission of Jesus to go and make disciples. And who knows what the end result of your discipleship will be.

Thomas Chalmers from Anstruther was a great man in his own right. But he chose to take under his wings men of good reputation and passion.

Robert Murray McShane. Andrew and Horatius Boner and the others. And in so doing, he changed the face of the church in Scotland forever. Who knows what impact our investment in others may have for the kingdom of God.

[12 : 45] Fourth aspect of Paul's intentional discipleship of Timothy. Intimate. Intimate. One of the modern ways in which discipleship is defined, a definition I rather like, is that two people are doing life together.

An older Christian is doing life with a younger Christian. They're getting to know each other in real life. For Paul, it meant taking Timothy along with him.

Verse 3 literally translates as, This one, Paul wanted with him to go. So for Timothy, discipleship consisted in being with Paul.

In doing life together. In such a setting, Paul could model for Timothy what it means to daily depend upon Christ for grace. What it means to apply the gospel into all of life.

And how to relate the gospel to God and to his fellow man. In other words, Timothy learned to be the pastor he would later become, not in a classroom, but in intimate friendship with Paul.

[14 : 01] He listened to Paul. He was with Paul as the crowds mocked and laughed at him. Timothy tended the wounds on Paul's back from the floggings he endured.

He was with Paul when the great New Testament epistles were written. He saw Paul in strength and in weakness. In hope and in despair.

In pleasure and in pain. In success and in failure. Paul's invitation to Timothy to accompany him in his journey was an invitation to intimacy.

To learn firsthand what it means to be a servant of Christ. Just as Jesus did with the twelve disciples. Paul is doing life with Timothy. Perhaps this is one reason that we are slow to invest in the discipleship of the young.

Because it will involve intimacy on our part. Doing life together with them. It means allowing them to see inside our hearts.

[15 : 09] And how we deal with opposition and hostility. How we understand the gospel to apply in our lives. How we relate to God and others. But just as Jesus discipled twelve men.

And just as Paul discipled Timothy. So we are called to make disciples. And the most effective way of achieving that aim. And obeying Christ. Is to allow other Christians into every area of our lives. Of doing life with them. Do you want to teach a younger Christian how to fly? Then you've got to show them how to do it.

And let them fly with you for a while. Fifth. Paul's disciple making activity was intentional.

Intentional. Why did Paul choose Timothy to accompany him on his missionary journeys? What was Paul's intention? Intentional. Surely it was not just because Paul liked Timothy's sense of humor.

[16 : 17] And they thought they could have a blast together. On the way through Asia Minor. No. The way we read these verses. Tells us that Paul was very deliberate with his discipleship of Timothy.

I've been defining discipleship as taking someone under your wing. And teaching them how to fly. But what does it mean for the Christian to fly? For what purpose did Paul disciple Timothy? The answer is in who Timothy was. And in Paul's circumcision of Timothy. We read in verse 1 that Paul, Timothy's mother, was a Jewish Christian. And his father was a Greek. For that reason, Timothy could relate both to Jewish and Gentile people. He belonged to both groups. To the Jew, he was a Jew. To the Greek, he was a Greek. But then, in order to allow Timothy to move freely among the Jewish community. Paul had Timothy circumcised.

[17 : 13] Such a thing was not a gospel issue. It did not matter to the Gentiles. But to the Jews, it gave Timothy, who was only half Jewish anyway, credibility.

Why did Paul choose Timothy? Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised? What was Paul's deliberate intention in all this?

The answer is obvious. Mission. Mission. It seems to me that too much of what we call intentional discipleship lacks gospel intentionality.

It is way too focused on Jesus and me rather than Jesus and his world. It becomes a glorified self-help group rather than a gospel-oriented training ground for mission and evangelism.

Why did Paul choose Timothy of all people to accompany him on his missionary journeys? Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised? Answer, mission. When Jesus commanded, go and make disciples, he envisaged that the disciples would make new disciples.

[18 : 31] Disciple making disciples. When I was a student, I was intentionally disciplined by an old man in the Aberdeen church who had been a missionary.

He would take me back to his house on a Wednesday evening after the prayer meeting. And he and his wife would spread out on their kitchen table a large map of the world. And he would introduce me to mission opportunities in places that I didn't even know that I'd never heard of. He drove me back to God's word. And he inspired me to be outward looking as a Christian. My problem with much of what passes for discipleship today is that it seems to produce too many introspective Christians.

And not enough evangelistic Christians. For what purpose did Paul disciple Timothy? For mission. Sixthly, we're getting there. Faithful. Paul's evangelistic disciple making activity is faithful.

[19 : 46] There are times in the New Testament where Paul may come across as a bit of a maverick. A lone wolf evangelist. But in reality, nothing could be further from the truth. We see this in operation here in Acts 16 verse 4.

Where Paul and Timothy are traveling through the towns of that region. And they're delivering to the churches there. The decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. You will recall that these decisions described in Acts 15.

Were made to accommodate both Jewish and Gentile believers in the church. Did these decisions originate in the mind of Paul? No. They were the conjoined view of the early church.

And so faithful Paul took Timothy with him wherever he went. Delivering and explaining these decisions to the Christians in the towns of Asia Minor. What I want to draw our attention to here is that Paul's discipleship of Timothy took place within the framework and authority of the church. It was both missional and ecclesiastical discipleship. It is a tragedy that because of the church's lack of concern for discipleship, much of the discipleship of our young people takes place outside the ecclesiastical framework of the local church.

[21 : 06] This family here, Glasgow City Free Church contains all the necessary elements to foster a culture of discipleship among us.

We have mature Christians of both genders and younger Christians who are keen to learn and grow. We have mission-minded Christians and younger Christians who are keen to learn how to evangelize and spread the gospel.

We want to foster this culture of discipleship within us as a church. The older taking the younger under their wing and teaching them how to fly.

A culture of mission and evangelism where the gospel is good news for us and for our world. This is an area in which we need to do a mighty lot of work in our church family.

But it's an area surely in which we need to invest. Seventh. The intentional disciple-making activity of Paul is exemplary.

[22 : 12] Exemplary. Some years ago, Ross McCaskill taught me a memorable phrase. Monkey see, monkey do. Very appropriate coming from Ross.

It's a great phrase because it reminds us that if you really want to understand how and why. If you want someone to understand how and why you do something.

They have to see you in action. It's one thing to learn in a classroom. And such a thing is very necessary. But it's an altogether more worthy thing to learn by example.

That's one of the reasons apprenticeships can prove so valuable in mechanics and medicine and law and even in ministry. You're carefully watching an experienced practitioner at work.

Monkey see, monkey do. Thank you, Ross. Timothy watched Paul delivering the decisions of the Jerusalem council. He saw pastoral ministry exemplified.

[23 : 17] He saw how Paul did ministry close up. And so when Paul had a difficult decision to make, Timothy was there watching him think through and pray through the different options so he could learn from him.

And when Paul was delivering sermons in various places, Timothy was able to learn from his mentor firsthand why Paul chose to start off his sermons where he did and why he chose that particular content.

When Paul was managing difficult situations in the church, Timothy was with him to learn how to deal with the backsliding and the unbelief. It wasn't just that Paul was teaching Timothy how to live as a Christian, but he was teaching Timothy the art, we might call it, of ministry.

Now, our own denomination is wrestling with models of ministry apprenticeship at present. And it's too early to say what it will look like in our own setting. However, there is no reason at present why older Christians among us cannot take younger Christians alongside and exemplify ministry to them.

The ministry of prayer. The ministry of encouragement. The ministry of visitation. The ministry of evangelism. The ministry of practical expression.

[24 : 47] And so on. Monkey see, monkey do. Seems like such a simple principle. But when we take younger Christians under our wings, we most often need to show them how to fly.

And then lastly, the intentional evangelistic disciple-making activity of Paul here was fruitful. Fruitful. As we close, need I give a greater motive for engaging in the joyful task of evangelism and discipleship than that given in verse 5?

So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. Wouldn't it be something if that could be said about us? That we're being strengthened?

That we are daily growing in numbers? The churches to which Paul and Timothy are ministering are, to use our phrase, they're flying. They're being strengthened.

They're growing. I want us to notice, first of all, in this verse, the priority of strengthening. The churches were strengthened in the faith. The Greek word from which we get the English word strengthening is simultaneously the root of our English words stereo and steroids.

[26 : 01] Not to be irreverent, but a church with a culture of discipleship is a church in which the gospel is sounding forth in stereo, not mono.

It's a church on steroids. I know plenty of churches which engage in frenetic and frantic evangelism, but the church itself is not being intentionally strengthened.

And we admire churches like that to a certain extent for their mission zeal, but we must be very, very careful to ensure that we are speaking to others about Christ from a position of ourselves being strengthened by intentional discipleship.

It is sad to observe, as I do in many churches in our own denomination, that it's only after a church loses its own young people that it gets serious about evangelism and mission.

No young people left. We need to get serious about evangelism. Yes, we should always be serious about mission, but that's why we must invest in the strengthening of our young people.

[27 : 11] Because once a church has lost its own children, it's almost doomed, no matter how much mission it engages in. It's too late for that church.

Rather than frenetically running about after strangers, it should have first devoted its energy to the discipleship of its own young people, to its Timothys.

But then, in the second instance, notice that the strengthening of the church through the grace of Christ and by the intentional discipleship of its members results in the church growing in numbers.

Now, numbers are the most controversial metric of a church's fruitfulness, and statistics are easy to manipulate. For example, the churches here in Acts 16, verse 5, did not grow by other Christians joining them.

That is not true church growth. For a church to say, well, we're growing because other Christians are joining us, well, that's just who can switch duplicity, postmodern ecclesiology.

[28 : 24] Save your graphs and statistics for someone who really cares. Rather, the growth of the church here in verse 5 is by conversion, by people who were not Christians believing the good news of Jesus Christ for themselves and becoming members of the church.

It is conversion growth which is the measure of a church's fruitfulness. That of new people in new places being reached with the gospel and believing in Jesus for themselves.

And ultimately, that is what our intentional discipleship of one another is aiming toward. Not that we shall have congratulated ourselves on planting churches filled with Christians from other churches, but churches where we're reaching new people in new places with a gospel they've never heard before.

As a Christian minister, people will often ask me, what does God want me to do with life? Let me put it in a nutshell in black and white print so that none of us will misunderstand what I'm saying. God wants you to learn how to fly. And then having learned how to fly to teach others how to fly. Picture the scene. An experienced parachutist jumps out of a plane at 10,000 feet and he has an inexperienced parachutist strapped to him with a harness.

[29 : 56] That inexperienced parachutist is being taught how to fly by the experienced parachutist with the express intention that in the future not only will he be able to fly by himself, but that he will be able to train others how to fall out of a plane at 10,000 feet and land safely.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, plane doors of reformed gospel mission are open and it's time to jump.

Who are you strapped to? Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for this powerful teaching from Acts chapter 16.

We pray that you would rebuke us if we have taken our ease especially with our young people. we've sat back we thought to ourselves we have time let someone else do it.

Lord, we pray for our young people that having been discipled by us they disciple others younger than them. We thank you so much, Lord, for the example that Alan and Joanna gave us of the work in the Philippines where young people are discipling young people.

[31 : 21] Just the people are a bit younger than them. Who themselves have been discipled by someone just a bit older than them. And again by someone a bit older than them. And again by someone a bit older than them. And Lord, we give you thanks and praise that this too can operate in our church.

Lord, we pray then that you would help us to intentionally focus on someone that we think we can disciple. We ask these things now in Jesus' name. Amen.