

“Multiplying Our Companions”

1 Thessalonians 2:17 - 3:5

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We are in the midst of a series that I have titled “The Companioned Journey.” We have been following a travelogue that was left for us by three friends: Timothy, Sylvanus and Paul that is meant to help us know how to companion Jesus and each other in this journey of life. These companions were on a journey through a territory called Macedonia spreading the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ when they came to this city called Thessalonica. They all spent only a few months there at most when severe persecution broke out and people were being arrested. Those who received the good news of Jesus became a community of faith who wanted to follow Jesus. They knew that Paul was the primary target of attack by the group that was stirring up a mob to come after them. So, Paul left the city and continued his journey all the way to Athens. When he got to Athens his heart ached for these people who had received Jesus into their hearts but were not established in their faith and were under affliction. He knew these people would be very concerned about him – just as he was concerned for them. So he sent Timothy – one of the companions on the journey through Macedonia to be with them.

We have been reading and thinking about this letter that Paul and his companions sent to the Thessalonians. Today, in the text we read together, we have Paul and his companions talking around the concept of how and why we make disciples. Specifically, *“Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith”* 1 Thess 3:1-2

The text raises a few questions in our minds – have you been disciplined into the gospel of Christ? Are you discipling someone into the gospel of Christ?

If you were asked, “what does being disciplined into the gospel of Christ look like?” What do you think you might say? These questions are of vital significance. The answers literally represent the difference between being a person who is not a follower of Jesus Christ, or a person who follows Jesus Christ but is hanging on by a thread “And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh” Jude 22, or a person who is flourishing “I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.” 1 John 2:14

- Parents – your children are your first disciples. What is your plan for discipling them in the gospel of Christ that they might be strong, the word of God abides in them and they have overcome the evil one?
- Friends – the people in your inner circle of friends should be your first disciples. What is your plan for discipling them.
- Ministry leaders – the people in your ministry should be your first disciples – how are you setting them up to be strong, have God’s word abide in them and be overcoming the evil one?
- Staff and Leadership Team – the people of FOL are under your care – how are we providing a biblical model of discipleship for our community of faith?

This talk will be the first in a series of talks, conversations and dialogues that will occur at Leadership Team meetings, with staff, with ministry team leaders, with members.

This morning, we are going to see what the companions – Paul, Sylvanus and Timothy want us to know about discipleship into the gospel of Christ as part of our life journey.

### Components of discipleship

1. *Face to face* work – we walk as companions with each other.

- John with his disciple Gaius

3 John:13-14 “I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with

pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.”

- John 3:22 “After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.”  
You need to *diatribo* – rub off on them, spending time with them.
- This is one to one engagement, it is personal. This is a together journey.  
This is a journey of intimacy between people who are sharing life together.

2. Disciples need to be *established and exhorted in their faith* – through relationship with another human person.

- Established = *sterizo* = stayridzo to make stable, place firmly, set fast, strengthen, make firm
- Exhorted = *parakaleo* = par-ak-al-eh-o - to call to one’s side in such a way that you can speak with exhortation or entreaty or comfort or instruction or admonishment
- In their faith = *pistis* = conviction of the truth related to God

2 primary aspects to this:

- First, we need to ensure that followers of Jesus are made firm and stable in their faith by knowing the content of the Gospel – through studying scripture together for the purpose of understanding the gospel of Christ. Notice that the text says, “*we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ to establish and exhort you in your faith...*”
- Many folks do not understand the content of the Gospel of Christ even after years of being followers of Jesus. They have received Jesus into their hearts but they have not been established in their faith – they do not know the content of the gospel of Christ and how this must and will radically change their lives, so they are easily blown about by teachings that do not come from God, but arise from within the culture, “*until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge*

*of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” Eph 4:13-14*

Listening to sermons may be part of how a person is disciplined but this does not equal discipleship.

Being part of a Life Group may be part of how a person is disciplined but this does not equal intentional and intensive discipleship. It does provide a platform for learning about God through the scripture. But as Timothy Keller says, “you can preach/teach a text about Jesus without preaching/teaching the gospel.”

Second, we need to ensure that followers of Jesus have all the encouragement and help they need to be strengthened in their faith. This is why discipleship is one-to-one, not program or project oriented. We need to know what is going on inside a life to provide true encouragement.

### 3. We have an enemy.

- There is an enemy in the discipleship process  
*I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.* We have an enemy of our faith – that enemy is Satan, he seeks to tempt you, that temptation comes in terms of that which we put faith in to justify our life, to make us right in the sight of myself, or others or God. The temptation is always this – will you choose faith or will you choose fear.
- Do you choose to put your faith in God, or do you choose, due to fear to put your faith in something else that is more tangible or more quantifiable, or something you can hold on to
- Temptations to our faith are nuanced, layered and dynamic. Temptations to put faith in something other than God in a given situation might look like this:

I have gained power/influence over others

My quality of life that I worked for and produced

I control my life and things that matter to me

People depend on me and need me

I am productive and I get things done

I am a moral person

The way to continually trust in Jesus as the only one who justifies me, the only one who makes me right in my own sight, in the sight of others and in the sight of God is being established and exhorted in my faith so that I have a foundation and companions as my resources to resist the evil one.

#### 4. Understanding the role of affliction in the journey of faith

- *“we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.”* Anyone who is a follower of Jesus will suffer affliction. This is not the bad things that happen to us in life – because the world in its state of alienation is filled with disease and wickedness in people's hearts leads them to do evil to one another. These are the things that come to specifically attack us because of our faith in God, and sometimes to specifically attack the content of our faith. Paul and his companions had warned the Thessalonians that affliction would come. It did come – both to Paul and to the new believers. This makes it clear that affliction should be expected and it comes primarily because we are pursuing faith and that faith is evident to those around us.

#### 5. Goal of our discipleship: *“what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.”*

- This is not the goal of the believer's faith. The goal of the believer's faith is to see Jesus:

*"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure"*

1 John 3:2-3

The goal of our investing in the lives of others is to share the glory and joy of Jesus with them!

This is the hope that is before us in every person's life.

6. Multiplication. Discipleship is not the work of addition – it is the work of multiplication.

- A person is not fully discipled until they are also making disciples. Notice who is writing this letter and who is specifically mentioned in this text. Timothy was a disciple of Paul's. Timothy is the one left behind to make disciples. Paul multiplied his work through Timothy. He did not just add more and more disciples until he had a huge group of people he was discipling. He discipled people to the point where they are making disciples.
- The goal is not 10 years of adding more and more people to our ministry. The goal is making disciples who go out with us or even from us and make more disciples.

7. We companion God in this work. *"and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ"*

Co-worker = synergos = soon-er-gos. This word literally means a companion in work.

What an amazing thought – this is one of the ways we companion God and God companions us!

We care companions when we disciple people in the gospel of Christ.

Wow! Knowing you are God's companion in doing this gospel-of-Christ-work of making disciples might do at least three things:

Blow your mind, affirm that you are able, and set you on fire.

First, that you companion God in the gospel of Christ might just blow your mind – the God who is humble and gentle and meek, who gave his life so that you could have life is by your side is working with you as you make disciples. Think about your favorite work experience and the person you most enjoyed working alongside – this could be in your profession, or in a work project around someone's house or in a volunteer role or in church. Do you have that person in your mind's eye. Put the face of that person in your mind. Now – holding that in your mind – replace it with this face of Jesus:

*“He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed... He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”* Selections from Isaiah 53

Is this the face of God you see when you follow Jesus – this person who was wounded for you, afflicted for you, oppressed for you, stricken for you?

Is this the face of God you see when you walk alongside the ones you disciple?

Does seeing Jesus like this help you to have grace, mercy, forgiveness, and sacrificial love for those you companion as disciples?

Second, that you companion God in the gospel of Christ might affirm that you are able. When God companions you in your work, that work is not up to you – you have a fully engaged teammate. You are just God's companion as he does the work. My first pastor from age 0 – 12 was a man named Mr Boyd. He lost his mother to death at age 4. He was a very, very large man, the largest I have ever met not due to weight or height (although he was tall) but extremely large-framed. He had to have his jackets and shoes specially made for the size of his physical frame. He was a French Canadian who planted bilingual churches mostly for new immigrants, he cared for the poor, he created businesses to support his charitable work and when he preached you knew you were hearing the voice of God through the scripture. Even back in the 1970's sermons from his little church were in over 50 countries on radio around the world. Mr Boyd was a bigger than life person to me. I went back to work for him for a summer when I was 15 years old. I lived in his home and we would go to destinations where I would do door-to-door evangelism, or teach at a VBS with him or counsel at his camp with him.

Mr. Boyd was my companion in making disciples and was discipling me. Do you see the face of the person who has most invested in your life? Put that face in your mind. Now holding that in your mind – replace it with this face of Jesus.

*“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’”*

Third, that you companion God in the gospel of Christ should set you on fire!  
Listen to this description of Jesus and the final destination for all those who follow Jesus:



*“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” Hebrews 12:22-24*