

2 Tim. 3:10-17...As I worked my way through our passage this week, I remembered Lawnchair Larry Walters. I've told you about him before. He was the unemployed truck driver who, in 1982, decided to tie a few weather balloons to his lawn chair so he could float above a SoCal neighborhood for a while. Armed with a pellet gun, he planned to shoot the balloons one at a time until he came back to earth. He climbed up on his girlfriend's roof and began tying 40 balloons to the chair. When the rope holding him to the roof broke, Walters went up so fast he dropped the gun and held on for dear life. A commercial airplane called him in at 11,000 feet. After several hours, he descended safely where an army of reporters were waiting to get the story. When they asked him the inevitable "why" question, all Walters could say was, "You can't just sit there. You have to do something."

Larry Walters serves as a constant reminder of a deep desire that dwells in all of us to do something significant, to contribute something, to make a difference. In the absence of a clear vision of how we can do that, we will go to great lengths to find anything that will help us escape a meaningless existence. "You have to do SOMETHING."

The rest of the story is not nearly so funny. Ten years after his famed lawn chair launch, Larry Walters hiked to a remote canyon in the Angeles National Forest, put a .357 to his chest and pulled the trigger. His search for meaning and purpose ended tragically at the age of 44. He left behind those haunting words, the cry of a lost soul, "You can't just sit there."

Jesus came to earth to extend a personal invitation to rise above the meaningless and the mundane. Trivial pursuit is not a game. Jesus calls us to life, real life, abundant life. He called His first disciples to do one thing, the one thing that makes the biggest difference in the world, to make disciples - followers of Jesus armed with an understanding that we are citizens of Heaven passing through an earthly experience inviting everyone we can to join us in the forever Kingdom. What made the early disciples successful? How can we be faithful to our calling and make a difference in the world? Our passage today provides the answer. Paul reminds Timothy of four qualities that are present in the life of a difference-maker. If these qualities are in you, then you will make a difference with your one brief life. If they are not, you can go home and get out your lawn chair.

1. A Difference-maker builds relationships with those worth following...vv. 10-11. Paul commends Timothy for following his example. Paul was not afraid to invite imitation. "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us." Phil. 3:17. "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." Phil. 4:9.

Could you say that? If a young Christian were to follow you around for a year or two, what would they see? If that young Christian wanted to be like you, what would they be?

Making disciples requires mentoring. When it comes to living out the Christian life, a lot more is caught than taught. People need to see truth applied, truth lived out. They are not interested in hearing from those who are trafficking in unlivable truth.

If you are over 40 and you can't identify someone younger that you spend time with discussing the faith, then you need to get out of your lawn chair and get busy. If you are under 40 and you have not sought out someone older who has walked with the Lord for a long time, then make it a priority to do so this week.

2. A Difference-maker grows through resistance...vv. 11-13. Paul and Timothy went to the same school - The University of Adversity. The experience they had in common was persecution and suffering. There are some scriptures that I just don't want to believe. I affirm the truth of the words but I live like the words don't apply to me, like v. 12. "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted." We go to great lengths to avoid suffering. But one of the unavoidable facts of life is that growth requires resistance. In the physical realm, resistance exercise is the key to strength training. The same is true in the spiritual realm. I've learned very little in my life through success. I've learned most of what I know through failure.

Have you ever noticed that God shows up in the most unexpected places? He chose to dwell among a bunch of slaves in Egypt rather than to take up residence in the palace of Pharaoh. He chose to reign through a young shepherd boy rather than a physically imposing, battle-tested warrior named Saul. God spoke to the prophet Elijah not through an earthquake or a whirlwind but in a still, small voice. And when He came to earth He slept on the rough straw of a feeding trough rather than the silk sheets of a golden crib. Of all the strange places God shows up the strangest place of all is that wasteland called suffering. We don't seek suffering in order to find God but that is often where we encounter Him. Suffering gets our attention. "God whispers to us in our pleasures," said C. S. Lewis, "and shouts to us in our pain. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Are you prepared for persecution? I met a man at our Fall Festival who is a refugee from Iran. He was imprisoned and beaten every day for 52 days straight. His crime? He had converted from Islam to Christianity. He would not recant and I am pleased that he and his family have found friends here at Fellowship. How should we respond?

3. A Difference-maker obeys a higher authority...vv. 14-16. One of the telltale signs of living in the last days is that people reject all authority outside of their own. We don't trust people in authority. We don't trust police or politicians or even pastors. We have seen too many examples of the abuse of authority so we resist all authority outside of my own authority. But here is where we have a great opportunity. In an age suspicious of all authority outside of the self, the appeal to a word that carries transcendent authority can be just distinctive enough to be heard, even when not immediately embraced. The Bible is God-breathed. It is our ultimate authority. The problem is we claim that the Bible is authoritative and then we live as though we can pick and choose what to obey.

I recently heard Francis Chan give a great example of this. He said if I tell my daughter to go clean her room, I don't want her to come back later and say, "Daddy, I memorized what you said. In fact, I even invited some other kids over and we sat around and

discussed your words for a long time. It was great." When Jesus said, "Make disciples," He wasn't looking for a discussion but an act of obedience.

Jesus said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (Jn. 8:31-32). Those bold words suggest that truth does exist, it is absolute and it never changes. This kind of thinking is viewed as intolerant in our world. "How can you say there is only one truth? There are many versions of the truth." We are entitled to our own opinions but we are not entitled to our own truth. It is not intolerant to suggest that we can know the truth and act upon it with confidence. Do you want a "tolerant" doctor treating you for cancer? I want an intolerant doctor who takes on cancer as vigorously as possibly in order to eradicate it. Do you want a "tolerant" pilot? When I fly somewhere I don't want a tolerant pilot who is going to put the plane down anywhere he wants." Paul tells Timothy "abide" in what you have learned. Don't back down. Keep preaching truth.

4. A Difference-maker is being fully equipped for every good work...vv. 16-17. The purpose of the word of God is to equip us for every good work. This is one of my favorite words in the NT. In Mt. 4, it is translated "mending." "He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them."²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him." Mt. 4:21. In Galatians 6, it is translated "restore." "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness." Gal. 6:1

Here the word used is translated "equip." Can you see the connection? Broken nets don't catch fish. Broken people don't function the way God designed them to function. The word of God is not merely a source of information about life. The Spirit of God uses the word of God to equip the people of God to do the will of God for the glory of God.

Tuesday is a big day. There is a lot riding on this next presidential election. Supreme Court Justices, the abortion question, the definition of marriage, immigration, national security, all these issues and more will be affected by who becomes president. The person who will become our president will make a difference. But let me remind you of something that you can tuck away for next Wednesday morning. The Person who has made the greatest difference in the world was not a politician. He was not a Republican or a Democrat. He held no public office. He was not wealthy or well-educated or well-connected. But He lived His brief life in the presence of many witnesses and demonstrated His total obedience to the word and the will of His Father. Furthermore, "He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him." Heb. 5:8-9. Jesus, the Word made flesh, voluntarily endured suffering so He could be our perfect representative.

Would you like to see this country change? Then be the change you want to see. Follow Jesus, the ultimate Difference-maker. Live out your faith in the presence of others who will observe your obedience even under fire. It's our best shot at changing the world. Then again, you could always go home and get out the lawn chair.