

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Disciple-Making YOU!

(2 Timothy 2:1-6; Matthew 28:18-20)

***A message designed to equip you to serve Jesus.

Introduction: Going deep with Jesus...

Last Sunday, I told you a couple of stories about my time in India in early April. I went to participate in a “*Strengthening Your Interpersonal Relationships*” workshop put on by the organization Paul Lere leads, **International Training Partners**.

While there, I had great interactions with several of my fellow participants and made a few new friends.

One of those is a man named Shibhu. Shibhu is active in ministry throughout India. And, among other things, he teaches in the Perspectives missions course. He is a “Missions Mobilizer” who points Indians to missions involvement, for Jesus’ Great Commission, in India.

He told me that it’s not uncommon for someone in a tribal village to ask the local shaman to heal a loved one who is sick.

When the sick person remains sick, someone in that village will send for a Christian to pray for the sick. The Christian makes his or her way over to the first village, prays for the sick, and the sick person miraculously gets well.

As a result, the entire village converts to Christianity, knowing little more than that Jesus proved Himself mightier than the gods they had been worshiping.

They know only the most basic facts about the faith: Jesus died on the cross for their sins; Jesus rose from the dead; Jesus is good and powerful; Jesus is their Savior.¹

Of course, as Shibhu described that scenario, he was grateful that the villagers had come to faith in Jesus. But the story highlights the desperate need for disciple-making in India. Shibhu was struggling for a way to express the immature faith of many in his country.

So, I told him of an African who described Christianity in his own country as being “*an inch deep and a mile wide*.” Shibhu nodded his head in agreement.

It’s a sad thing when a Christian doesn’t go deep with Jesus. It’s important that everyone who has begun in Jesus, continues, and goes deep. Today, we’ll consider how we can help others go deep in Jesus, take a “next step” with Jesus.

Preview...

Today’s message is both an intentional follow-up to the Easter celebration of last Sunday AND is one of several “equipping” messages the Elders have planned for this year.

These “equipping” messages will be given to help you live out, in practical terms, an important aspect of life in Jesus. This one is themed around what I experienced in India and what is stirring in my own heart.

Think of yourself as a runner in a relay, racing around a track. In a relay, typically four runners form a team and take turns running the same distance against other teams who are doing the same thing.

When one runner finishes, he or she passes the baton to the next runner until all four have run. Then, the race is over.

¹ Let’s not knock this. It is very similar to Paul’s description of the story of the Thessalonians who [*1 Thessalonians 1:9*] turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.

When it comes to life in Jesus, we are to pass the “faith baton” on to someone else. Then, they race around the track and pass it on to someone else.

There is a difference, though, between the passing of the baton on the track and the passing of the faith baton.

On the track, after a runner passes the baton, he stops running.

In our faith race, after we have passed the baton on to someone behind us, the amazing “multiplying faith baton” is still in our hand!

We keep running, but we are now joined by a new partner who also has a baton, which he will pass on to someone else. Eventually there are lots more runners - all with batons to pass.

I think the best passage illustrating how the faith baton gets passed is found in Paul’s second letter to his spiritual son, Timothy.

Paul starts off by giving strong, personal encouragement.

How the Baton of the Faith Gets Passed

Paul, on Baton Passing (2 Timothy 2:1-6)

Be a disciple (v. 1)

[1] You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

This is the flight attendant telling the passengers, “Put on your own oxygen mask first.” If we want to impact others for Jesus, we have to be healthy, ourselves.

If I intend to make a good handoff of the faith baton to someone else, I must have a firm grasp on that baton. I must, personally, be following Jesus into holiness, prayer, service, giving, and more.

This is Paul urging Timothy, first of all, to **BE** a disciple. Then, he urges Timothy to **MAKE** disciples.

Make disciples (v. 2)

[2] The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

There are five generations of runners listed in that one verse. The faith baton passed from *Jesus* to *Paul* to *Timothy* and was to pass to *faithful men* to *others*.

As Timothy had been taught, he was to teach. As Timothy had seen the faith lived out by Paul, he was to live it out - for others. Using Northwest vocabulary, Timothy was to help others take a next step with Jesus.

So (and this is quotable), spiritually speaking, everybody is somewhere:

- They might be *antagonistic* to God or they might *not believe* in God.
- They might *know about* Jesus and have even *heard* the Gospel, but they *don’t believe*.
- They might be a *young believer*, or a *believer* who is *not currently walking with God*.
- They might be *on fire for Jesus*; they may be quite *mature*.

Everyone you know is somewhere, and they can each take a “next step” forward with Jesus. You can be the one who helps them take that next step. And if you help someone take a next step with Jesus, you would be putting Paul’s exhortation to Timothy into personal shoe leather.

Paul then goes on to tell Timothy and us in what spirit we are to help someone in their “next step” journey.

In the spirit of...(vv. 3-6)

...a soldier (vv. 3-4)

[3] Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

[4] No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

The life of a Roman soldier involved suffering and hardship, low pay, physical danger, deprivation, and long periods of time away from home and family.

Soldiers want to hear “*Well done!*” from their superior officers. We who follow Jesus want to hear “*Well done!*” from Him as we pass the baton of the faith to others. We serve others, but we’re ultimately serving Jesus.

...an athlete (v. 5)

[5] Also if anyone competes as an athlete,² he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.

Think of a track athlete, taking a running start before the starter’s signal, veering out of his lane, taking a shortcut across the infield. No runner would do that because it would disqualify him for the gold medal he’s running to win.

Christians run in obedience to Jesus to win commendation from Jesus at the finish line.

...a hard-working farmer (v. 6)

[6] The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.

Well, yes, since you asked, my tomatoes plants are growing and the pepper plants are healthy in my garden.

But it’s not harvest time yet. Tomatoes will come in due time. Patience and weeding and fertilizing is the name of the game in late April south Texas gardening.

² In view were the Greek games - Ithsmian, Athenian, or Corinthian - where athletes won prizes, mainly of wreaths on the head.

And patience is the name of the game when it comes to helping someone take a “next step” with Jesus. You invest in another. You press the love of Jesus into another.

And then you wait for the harvest in due time. You’ll see fruit in the life of the one you’ve loved in Jesus’ Name.

We find this theme of faith-baton-passing all through the Bible.

Baton-Passing Relationships in the Bible

Old Testament

Moses passed the baton to Joshua. The prophet Elijah did the same for his replacement, Elisha. The old priest, Jehoiada, diligently passed on the baton of faith to the young king, Joash. Uncle Mordecai did the same for his young niece, Esther.

Solomon passed the baton to those coming after him by the wisdom of his proverbs. Deuteronomy 6 calls parents to pass on the faith to their kids.

We see the same thing in the New Testament.

New Testament

The husband/wife team of Priscilla and Aquila mentored Apollos. Barnabas invested heavily in the life of John Mark. And, obviously, Paul poured himself into the young man, Timothy.

In fact, the Apostle Paul organized his ministry around the theme of baton-passing / disciple-making everywhere he went.

The missionary trips Paul took weren’t really “church-planting” trips. They were disciple-making trips.³

³ As Mike Breem notes, though, in [Building a Discipling Culture](#), if we start out seeking to establish churches, there is no guarantee that we’ll wind up with disciples.

The New Testament model is that each congregation is a community where disciples grow into maturity. We in the church are to be constantly passing on faith batons. (See Ephesians 4)

Of all those who handed off faith's baton, though, the Master was Jesus.

Jesus, the Master Mentor

He thoroughly trained a small group of followers. Their role was to train others to follow Jesus.

He invited twelve men into a "discipling" relationship. They learned His ways and watched Him at work. He called them to increasing levels of commitment.

He taught them about God, how to pray, and the importance of servanthood. He modeled a heart for people who were far from God. He called them to trust God in everything.

He gave them extreme and intimate access to His life as they traveled together.

At the end, after three years of being with Jesus - and after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost! - Peter, James and John and the rest were equipped to take the world by storm.

He passed the baton of the Gospel to them, and told them, in essence, *"There is no Plan B. It's you and the people you train, or the Mission dies."*

It has been the blessing of God over the course of my life to have been given access to lots of good men and women who have passed a baton to me and who have helped me go deeper with Jesus.

Personally, for Me; for You

Joan Dodds, our family's next-door neighbor in Dallas, personalized the story of Jesus and shared the Gospel with me while I was a teen.

A few fine men poured into me while I was still in High School; in college, a pastor and some older friends in Christ made investments in my walk with God.

Through the years here at Northwest, lots of men and women have been used by God to help me to keep growing as a Christian.

This - the passing of a baton - is the way movements grow. It is how people are developed. AA has "sponsors" and business talks in terms of interns and apprentices. Athletes are coached.

In Jesus, we use the vocabulary of discipleship. Older, more mature disciples of Jesus "disciple" less mature disciples of Jesus.

So, the faith baton having been passed to you, you are charged to pass it on to others.

Any conversation about faith baton-passing requires a reference to what Jesus Himself said at the end of Matthew's Gospel.

The Mission / Our Mission / Your Mission (Matthew 28)

The Great Commission (Matthew 28)

This was after the crucifixion and resurrection, and after several appearances to His disciples. Jesus gathered them together and spoke to them up on a mountaintop in Galilee.

What He said has become so well-known, we have named it.

Along with the Great Commandment ("**love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength...**") and the New Commandment ("**love one another as I have loved you...**"), we also have His Great Commission.

[Matthew 28:18] "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

This is the resurrected Jesus telling His followers what He wanted them to do until His return. And He was speaking as much to you and to me as He was to Peter and James and John.

“Go”

The first word of verse 19 is a part of speech known as a participle. And it could be translated, “*As you are going...*”

But, the Greek structure of this phrase gives the participle the force of a command.⁴

So, to render it, “*as you are going*” or “*wherever you go,*” doesn’t really reflect what Jesus is saying. It is a command to disciples to “**Go!**”

Go across the street, go across the city, or go across the sea. But don’t just stand there - go somewhere!

“*Make disciples of all the nations / ‘ethnoi’*”

Then, having “*gone*”, Jesus commands that we are to “**make disciples of all the nations**”.

Jesus speaking in 2019 terms, where “nations” are divided by lines drawn by politicians.

The word for “**nations**” here is *ethne*. Think *ethnicities*. Jesus wants us to make disciples and to think in terms of people groups - groups of people who need Him.

Mongolian herdsmen. This or that remote, Indian mountain tribe. Navajo tribes of the southwest US. New York City Hassidic Jews. Prisons of the Dominican Republic.

San Antonio’s at-risk teens. Residents of a memory care facility. Families of Braun Station.

The first disciples were to make disciples out of every distinct grouping of people, whether distinct by language or culture or geography.

And we are each to do the same thing today. We are to penetrate cultures and sub-cultures with the news about Jesus.

God may put it on your heart to reach out to an unreached group of people on the other side of the world - as He did with Ken and Denise Case with Thailand, from whom we will be hearing next Sunday! Or He may impress you with the need of a group right here in San Antonio that is currently not being reached.

In each case, you’ll be thinking and praying about how to touch them for Jesus’ sake.

Or, you may have access to some hidden culture that nobody else can reach: your neighborhood; college students at Northwest Vista or UTSA; workmates at USAA; classmates at school; the cult of Crossfit.

You have a network of relationships that is unique to you. “**Go**” to them and tell that *ethne* what Jesus is all about.

Invite them to follow Him. Tell about Him. Show them the difference Jesus has made in your life. Point them to faith in the One who gave Himself that they might have **LIFE** - *abundant* and *eternal*.

This - making disciples - is the essential privilege and assignment of everyone who follows Jesus.⁵

The ESSENTIAL Great Commission

Over the years that Northwest has partnered with Duane and Sharon Miller, they have served in various places. These days, they live and work in Spain. Their work in Madrid, Spain is to serve the thousands of Arab-speaking Muslims in Jesus’ Name.

⁴ This is because it is dependent on the imperative verb, “**make disciples**”, that follows (it’s called “attendant circumstance”)

⁵ See Robert Coleman’s [The Master Plan of Evangelism](#); A.B. Bruce’s [The Training of the Twelve](#).

Duane sees what he is doing as nothing other than obedience to Jesus' command to make disciples. He says that the church's mission and every Christian's mission is to make disciples. Period.

He believes that everything about living for Jesus fits under the umbrella of "make disciples" AND that "make disciples" should be the organizing principle around which the life of every Christian revolves.⁶

Maybe you've never considered disciple-making / helping others take a Jesus "next step" / passing on the faith baton to be quite so "all-encompassing" as this.

It's a provocative thought because if it's true, the ramifications are profound for each of us here today.

For one thing, it means that each one here today is called to be a Paul to some Timothy or to a group of Timothys.

You - a Paul to a Timothy

The YOU You See in the Mirror; the FACES You See in the Window

Before developing that thought more fully, I'm going to ask that you exercise your sanctified imagination and pull out your pretend mirror and look at what you see.

The point of your look into the mirror is not so much to look at your physical face. I'm asking you to see if you can see a "Paul" in the mirror.

He's there. If you're a woman, Paul's female counterpart is there. But you may be tempted to believe that what you see in the mirror is *only* a Timothy.

Now, of course, there's nothing wrong with being a Timothy. At some level, all Christians are Timothy's who could use a Paul.

But a Christ-follower is more than a Timothy. A Christ-follower is also a Paul.

And you may hear a voice behind the face in your mirror that says, "*You're not ready to pass the baton. You don't know enough. You haven't traveled far enough. You're not mature enough. You're too young and inexperienced. You haven't gone deep enough yet with Jesus to have a baton worth passing.*"

That is a lie from the enemy who hates you.

The truth is that if you have any experience walking with Jesus, if you have followed Jesus at all, if you have learned anything about Jesus, you have a valuable baton you can pass on to someone.

Look! Incredibly, your mirror has now turned into a window! What do you see?

Can you see the face of someone you know who would love to know what you know about Jesus? Do you see friends who would be thrilled to know what you know about how to follow Jesus?

If you look closely through the window, you will see someone or a group of someones to whom you can give access to Jesus' teachings, His ways, His eternal life and His abundant life.

The most *loving* thing you could possibly do for your friend in the window is to be Paul to him, to her. The most *powerful* thing you can do for the *ethne*, the group of people you can see who don't know much of anything about Jesus, is to pass the baton you have to them.

And you're already thinking that a decision to give your life to passing the baton of faith will require a reorientation of some life priorities. Change. A willingness to try some new things and to get out of your comfort zone. Some stretching will be in order.

Flexibility

Speaking of stretching, I'm not a very flexible guy - and I'm talking, now, about physical flexibility.

⁶ I recommend Duane's book, Two Stories of Everything (the competing metanarratives of Islam and Christianity) in which he fleshes out the idea of the church's sole mission being "*make disciples.*"

Three or four times a week, I do physical training in our garage at home. It's part of my regular routine.

Despite the exercise, though, I am really, really tight. I'm not at all limber. And, yes, I need to work on that. If I was more flexible, I could do more. I could do more exercises, lift more weight, be more fit.

Well, what is true, physically, is also true personally.

When we are mentally flexible, willing to be stretched outside of our emotional comfort zone, we open pathways to more adventures and to different activities.

And, when we are willing to stretch in our walk with God, get spiritually flexible, we make ourselves more useful to Jesus.

For you to consider becoming a "Paul" to some "Timothy" may be a stretch - and getting flexible can be painful!

But you'll forget the discomfort involved in getting flexible when the person to whom you passed the baton ends up taking a next step with Jesus and then passes their own faith baton to someone else.

Disciple-Making You

Commendation...

Here at the end, I commend so many of you who are here for doing exactly that right now.

- I watch the way you parents carefully and prayerfully nurture your children. It's a beautiful thing to behold as batons are being passed from generation to generation.
- There are wives and husbands who take pains to press Jesus into their marriages.
- You are serving students in the *Refining Fire* youth ministry and you are serving kids in the *Elevate* children's ministry.
- Men are spurring other men forward and women are doing the same thing with other women.

- Faith batons are being passed on in Care Groups and in Adult Bible Fellowships.
- Lots of older people (in age and in faith) are pouring into those who are younger.

It's happening in these ways and in so many more ways - and I thank God for that.

But here's a word for you, if you are not currently intentionally passing on the baton of faith to someone else.

Take a "next step" by helping another take a "next step"...

Whoever showed up in the "window" you were just holding needs more of the Jesus you have to offer.

Would you be so bold as to pray, that God would use you in that person's life this coming week?

Would you take a step of faith, invite them to a meal or to coffee and then, over a friendly conversation, pass them your faith baton?

You just might find a partner in Jesus as they join you in the race with Jesus.