



## Biblical Foundations Foundation for Serving

by Chuck Gianotti

*Studies in 2 Timothy—Part 2 (1:15-2:13)*

Paul's letters to Timothy are a treasure trove of inspired wisdom on leadership in the church. In his second letter to his young prodigy, Paul continues to give counsel essential for facing the challenges of shepherding God's people.

### Leadership can be lonely

At times Paul had a traveling entourage numbering as many as eight co-workers (Acts 20:3-5). At other times, the apostle, used greatly of God, found himself abandoned. According to his testimony in our passage, "*all who are in Asia turned away from me*" (2 Tim 1:15 NASB). He probably was referring to the geographical area that included his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14), where there had been considerable opposition from the so-called Judaizers who resisted his teaching on grace. Yet, after his second trip there and appointing elders in every city (Acts 14:23) and even after writing a terse, doctrine-laden epistle to them, his statement that all had turned away from him is a sad message. However, Paul was not looking for a "pity-party," nor was he self-flagellating. Rather, he points this out to Timothy as a reality in serving the Lord.

As elders, we need to recognize the work of shepherding can be lonely at times. Others may either *seem* to be not very committed to the work or they are in fact *not* committed. Paul mentions two by name, and we know nothing of them other than they turned away from him. As an elder we will at times have people who turn away from us or even work against us. Jesus, at His most difficult time had His Judas (betrayed Him), Peter (denied Him), John (kept his distance) and the other nine (abandoned Him). True, people may respect us outwardly as elders, but at times we may feel that no one else understands or supports us. Take courage, we are in good company!

Paul has been there and he, speaking from an abundance of experience and spiritual insight, encourages Timothy to "*be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*" (2:1) and "*suffer hardship with me*" (2:3). He speaks to him about the hardship of soldiering (2:3-4), the careful training of an athlete (2:5), the

hard work of a farmer (2:6) and the suffering of a prisoner (2:9). The one thing all these examples have in common is endurance. So he writes to Timothy, "*For this reason, I endure all things ...*"

### Leadership Needs Encouragement

Paul found encouragement in the most unlikely place—while in prison, by a visitor, whom he knew from Ephesus. Onesiphorus had searched and found Paul languishing away in prison. His eager attention to Paul, the prisoner, was refreshing, not only for the physical help he brought (most likely food and washing of wounds), but also the emotional and spiritual encouragement of one who had not rejected Paul. Though many had abandoned him, here was one that supported him! How refreshing is that!

God at times will raise up individuals to encourage us when we are down. It may be a letter of thanks, a visit, phone call or e-mail. However, though we welcome such efforts, we

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recognize these things are simply the vessels through which God may work. It is the Holy Spirit who encourages, and He does it in miraculous ways. As for our part,

we look to Him, not to the vessel He may use. I am reminded what the Scripture says of David when he was fleeing Saul, "*David strengthened himself in the Lord his God*" (1 Sam 30:6).

A side application here is that as leaders we should encourage other leaders because they too will, from time to time, feel the loneliness that we have felt. We need to support them and acknowledge their work. We need to be an Onesiphorus to them. I am reminded of a time when I was in the hospital for four days, and feeling rather sorry for myself. A fellow elder took time off work to visit me for about 10 minutes. That was such an encouragement to me, that I was not forgotten. That little act of kindness resulted in great spiritual encouragement for me.

### Pay It Forward

What Paul is teaching Timothy must be "paid" or passed forward to others. While it is true that he was in prison, Paul's plan, ever the optimist who was motivated by an incredible hope and faith, was to go to Spain still and preach the gospel. As such he

*(Continued on page 4)*

In Mark's gospel, there is a brief statement of the Lord's plan for working with the men He was choosing: "Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14). Here is the essence of discipleship; spending time with the Lord and then heading out to serve. How does this work out in a local assembly today? Is it happening? Is discipleship something the church should be involved in? Some would say "no," some are hesitant, being unsure of what's involved. It's a subject worth considering.

**Discipleship is Alive and Well**

In Matthew 28:18-20, the Lord gave what has come to be known as The Great Commission. Not complicated, but profound. He instructed His followers to go everywhere and make disciples who confessed Him publicly in baptism and went on to learn and follow His words. The very fact that He promised to be with all who obeyed this commission "until the end of the age" is sufficient proof that this is still a work in progress today, a fact reinforced by testimony from Christian servants around the world. Every church should be involved in making and sending disciples!

But how can a local church fellowship become active in making disciples? What responsibilities do the elders have to make sure this vital task is not lost in the complexities of church life?

**First Things First**

Getting practical about our faith will require attention to many details for certain, but before a church tackles details, it is important to step back and look at the big picture. Two points should be kept in mind. In the first place, Scripture provides foundation truths or principles which simply cannot be ignored. Our passage in Mark 3 is an example. Note the order in true discipleship. Spending time with the Lord precedes being sent out. Relationship and fellowship before service! Peter in his first letter (chapter 2) expands this truth when he writes that believers – as holy priests – offer spiritual sacrifices in the presence of the Lord (verse 5) before going out to show His

excellency to those who do not yet know Him (verse 9).

Also note that true discipleship is goal oriented. The text says ".....that he might send them out...." Discipleship must have this outward side too. It is not limited to enjoying the presence of the Lord so that we might have a comfortable life. There is a sensitive balance here that must be preserved.

Secondly, the Lord has given liberty to work out logistics and details not specified in Scripture. Having a plural leadership through elders, the participation of

church sacrifices faithfulness for relevance to society. When new church plants or mission activities are undertaken before the disciples involved are spiritually grounded, disillusionment can easily result.

Thus it is vital for elders to make sure these great truths are kept in balance. A healthy internal focus is the best preparation for facing the needs "out there." What are some of the contributing factors? The context of our passage (Mark 3:11-15) suggests seven areas that help prepare disciples.

*Each must learn who he is in Christ, determined by personal relationship rather than by success in the work.*

**Checklist for Overseers**

**A holy life.** In the paragraph just prior to our verses (verses 11 – 12), the Lord rejected the testimony of unclean spirits. What they said concerning Him was true, but the Lord wants

the believers as functioning priests, and the autonomy of each local congregation gathering to study the Scriptures is sufficient to discern the mind and will of the Lord in specific situations.

Sadly, sometimes details in which Christians have liberty become issues over which they divide and break fellowship with one another.

**The Danger of Imbalance**

It is not the purpose of this article to explore the many problems that can surface when things get out of balance. A brief reminder of what can go wrong will suffice.

Over emphasis on the inward focus of discipleship, i.e., making the gathering around the Lord the end in itself, without anything else is by nature unhealthy for disciples. Meeting around Him for worship, learning His Word, and prayer is indeed precious, but for what purpose? The church is not called simply to establish and maintain an exclusive society of likeminded saints, to ensure that the church meetings continue until "the end." Rather, the goal of being "with Him" is that they might "be sent out."

On the other hand, over emphasis on the outward focus, i.e., outreach, can also cause an imbalance. When size of the group and numbers attending become all-important, so that any doctrine or practice standing in the way of expansion needs to be "adjusted" or even dropped, the

to use clean vessels. The local church is a place where true holiness is modeled. Not separation from people based on externals like the false holiness of the Pharisees, but personal holiness shown by a deep love for the Lord that leads away from worldliness and the works of the flesh. This is most helpful when seen in the life of older saints demonstrating godly conduct before young disciples. Sanctification is an important doctrine to teach growing disciples.

**Dependence through prayer.** Before selecting His disciples, the Lord retired to a quiet place to pray alone (vs. 13). It is not long, flowery orations in public that mark one as a man or woman of prayer, but a track record of solving personal and assembly problems by faithful private prayer. True, glimpses of the prayer life can be seen in collective prayer times, but these are just "the tip of the iceberg." Much of the real work is done in private.

**The call of God.** In verse 14, the Lord chooses disciples calling them by name. The call of God in the life of servants seems to come in many different ways and is under the sovereign will of the Lord. It can range from a discernment made in retrospect based on years of fruitfulness, all the way to the dramatic call of Saul of Tarsus, and probably everything in between. Regardless of how the Lord works in setting servants apart, it is important that the assembly, especially its leaders, be sensitive to recognize God's call in obedi-

*Continued on page 3*

# Fellowship More Than Friendship

by Mary Gianotti

Slipping our tea between services on a Sunday morning, it is easy to just build casual friendships. I believe God wants more from us women, something that will strengthen the faith of our sisters in Christ. In Scripture it is called *koinonia*, which is translated, *fellowship*. One of the joys of being an elder's wife is to practice and promote Christian fellowship. *Koinonia* has been defined as the communion or common faith experiences and expressions shared by the family of believers, as well as the intimate relationship they have with God.

We discover in Act 2:42 that fellowship was *foundational* to what the early Christians did when they meet together. It is second in the list of the things to which they devoted themselves.

Fellowship is also *exclusive*. Only believers can enter into its blessings (2 Cor. 6:14). It is impossible for us to experience genuine fellowship with a coworker or neighbor regardless of how nice or moral a person they are.

Fellowship *depends on our relationship to God*. "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). As a seasoned believer, John shares what

he knows of Christ and based on that he can have a partnership with those to whom he writes. The intimacy I have with my heavenly Father directly affects my ability to share my faith and experiences with other Christians.

Fellowship *affects how we treat other believers*. As we daily spend time with our Lord in His Word and communing with Him we are changed. Crowded out are sarcastic remarks, innuendo, gossip, ignoring, being resentful or holding on to unforgiveness. Paul appeals to Philemon to act contrary to the culture of his day in dealing with his runaway slave who had recently become a Christian: "*that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake*" (Philemon 1:6). We too will experience difficult situations with the believers we meet. Giving in to our natural responses does not grow our faith, but will destroy the fellowship we have with one another.

So can we move from Christian friendship to "the communion or common faith experiences and expressions shared by the family of believers?"

### Some practical suggestions

1. **Pray.** Rather than saying "I will pray

for you," just do it! On a Sunday morning, on the phone or when you meet for lunch, praying together is fellowship in action.

2. **Use the Word.** Share the Scripture when discussing a life challenge or write a note of encouragement that includes a verse—this also promotes genuine fellowship.

3. **Give God the glory.** Express what God has done for you when you share your joys or sorrows, for in so doing you take fellowship to a deeper, more intimate level.

4. **Show spiritual interest.** Ask simple but sincere questions like, "Where are you in your spiritual walk with the Lord?" or "What have you been reading in the Word lately?" These can open up conversations that lead to fellowship at a deeper level.

We all know that fellowship is not a piece of banana bread and coffee between services or the dinner you share after the meeting. It is something much more profound and we women, in particular elders' wives, have the privilege of leading by example. 

## Rethinking Discipleship—Part 1 (cont. from page 2)

ent disciples (this is pictured so clearly in Acts 13:1-3).

**The believer's identity.** Throughout Scripture and in this section (verses 14 and following), the disciple is related to the Lord through grace, not because of earned personal merit.

This is a most important lesson for young disciples. Each must learn who he is in Christ, determined by personal relationship rather than by success in the work.

Guiding young believers into a solid grasp of this truth is a major work in the assembly. Unfortunately, multitudes of true believers evaluate their relationship with God based on job performance.

**Fellowship.** The assembly is a place of relationship building. Spending time "with Him" (verse 14), which includes spending time with His people who make

up His body, is the key to healthy relationships in families and within the church, and is a vital prerequisite to being sent out to serve. John describes relationships as one test of the validity of Christian profession (1 John 4:20).

*Spiritual life has an authority that is "not of this world."*

**Gift.** In the early days of the disciples' work, the task was sowing the Word—plain and simple (verse 14). But once the harvest began, and a church gathered, the work would require the equipping of the saints (Eph. 4:12), a significant part of which would be to discern and develop spiritual gift. Here again is a special work of the local assembly which can hardly be

overestimated.

**Spiritual authority.** The Lord gives disciples the authority to speak and act in His Name (verse 15). Over time, young disciples learn that the church does not accomplish its work by imitating the world's system of laws, lawyers and penalties. Spiritual life has an authority that is "not of this world." The Lord may be absent bodily, but He is still present to faith and will bring to light (or "make manifest") those who are approved. (1 Cor. 11:19).

Disciple making is hard but rewarding work. It begins in earnest when elders take a hard look at the balance between the inward and the outward focus of their own congregation. Healthy disciples sense the need to "go" and make a difference for Christ. 

## Foundation for Serving *(cont. from page 1)*

would probably never be directly involved in the ministry around the eastern Mediterranean again, where Timothy was serving. The plan he left for Timothy was simple but profound. It was a plan that could only work if the Holy Spirit was involved. The plan is this: leaders must be constantly looking for other potential leaders who by their faithfulness will not only continue to walk in the ways of Christ, but also teach others to do the same. Paul's message was in essence the same as the Great commission that Jesus left His disciples (Matt 28:18-20). Make disciples who will obey Christ in everything, which includes making other disciples. Paul instructs Timothy to teach others, who will in turn teach others. The key ingredient is faithfulness. We leaders and teachers, and elders in particular, must be constantly looking for others to carry on the work and keep the chain of influence going. At the core is teaching the truth of God's way.

Some corollary truths to keep in mind: First, there will be relatively few men who will remain faithful to the task of serving the Lord. That's why Paul shared his experience with Timothy (and with us). If it was true in his experience, how can we expect it will not also be true in ours. Virtually every leader I have met feels there are not nearly enough other spiritual leaders for the work. Let this be our constant prayer, as Jesus asked His disciples to pray, *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest"* (Matt 9:38).

Second, we need to be on the lookout for men with the key ingredient, namely faithfulness (2:2). This is a very appropriate admonishment in light of Paul's experience with men who had lacked faithfulness in long term service, that is, they turned away from the work. Leadership requires faithfulness!

Third, we need to encourage others to pay it forward, that is, to teach what they know to others. This includes encouraging men to convey not only the blessings of serving the Lord, but also the hardships as well. Sometimes, we can give an unbalanced sense of serving the Lord when we only speak of the "success stories." We do this for a variety of reasons: we don't want to speak badly about the Lord's work; we don't want to scare people away from serving; we shy away from anything that could make us look like failures; we haven't really processed the negative experiences fully to see where the learning is; we may feel the need to portray a super-spiritual persona that never struggles with loneliness or discouragement.

We need to take a lesson from Paul (see also 2 Cor 4:7-12, 7:5-6, 11:23-30) who was not ashamed to speak of his failures. Paul was not ashamed to write about his struggles. All leaders struggle at times. Talking about these times is part of the discipling of others in serving the Lord: Be prepared for hardships. That message has to get through.

The work is hard—we need encouragement, we need faithful endurance and we need to help one another by sharing our struggles.

### The Supreme example

Paul used illustrations from everyday life and from his own personal experience, but now he presents the supreme example, Jesus Christ (2:8). While we might expect Paul to specifically focus on the suffering of Christ at this juncture, that is more implied than stated. Rather, he points to the resurrection, which gives us the ultimate hope in our serving the Lord. Whatever hardship or difficulty we go through as servants of the Lord, the resurrection is coming! For Paul, that made all the difference in helping him endure his present incarceration and suffering.

Ever the master teacher, Paul shares his personal testimony which should challenge us all, *"For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory"* (2:10). His motivation is the prospect, the hope, that his service will result in others coming to saving faith and obtain eternal glory. He was driven by the desire to see others bringing glory to God. Let us keep our focus on the big picture, not on the unfaithfulness of others.

Paul concludes this admonishment for Timothy with "a trustworthy statement." We elders would do well to memorize it and remind ourselves frequently, especially during difficult, lonely times of leadership. *"For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself"* (2 Tim 2:11-13). 

## THE SMALL PRINT

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