**Invest in a Few**

Acts 16:1-5

Think about ***Jesus on the cross*** - suffering for us… darkness descending, pain engulfing his body… every breath an agony… voices mocking… soldiers laughing…

**But a few faces in the crowd are kind.** A few are covered with tears - looking on Him with sympathy instead of anger and judgment. Dear, beloved John. Mary his faithful Mother. Mary, his devoted disciple. Salome. Disappointing that most of the men have fled. But they will be back. They will continue the mission.

***Finally Jesus surrenders His spirit unto death.*** Finally he breathes his last, bowing under the overwhelming weight of your sin and mine. Darkness and agony envelop Him as the just wrath of God shakes the foundations of the earth in the death of the divine Son of God.

“***Then came the morning that sealed the promise.*** His buried body began to breathe. Out of the silence, the roaring lion - declared the grave has no claim on me! Jesus yours is the victory!” Hallelujah! The Lord Jesus has risen from the grave and once and for all conquered sin and death!

One of the comforts for Jesus on the cross - one of the joys set before Him - was **that little group of disciples**. Just a few. Only one of his twelve guys. Several of the brave women.

The key to Jesus’ ministry strategy - apart from His death and resurrection - was His ***investment in that small group***. He poured himself into a few faithful followers. He invested the vast majority of his time in a few uneducated, insignificant fishermen, a tax collector, a political zealot and a few other young Jews. Jesus gave Himself to Peter, James and John. He gave some of Himself to the other nine men even though one of them was a traitor. He included women in his traveling team because he knew the men would need those women.

Jesus invested in a few to reach the many. ***He wagered everything on that small band of rebels.*** Jesus was the spark, that little handful of Jewish believers were the match that lit a flame that spread a fire across the galaxy - I mean across the Roman Empire.

As we walk in the footsteps of Jesus, as we pattern our lives after His life, we must not overlook this strategy. We too must invest in a few if we want to reach very many. It is not about drawing large crowds. It is not about major book contracts or viral social media. (Aren’t we thankful for that!)

No. The key to advancing the gospel and growing the global church of Jesus Christ is for disciples to make disciples. Each of us needs to follow Jesus and follow Paul in how they investing in a few.

Join me in Acts 16 and let’s learn from the Apostle Paul. Here are **four keys to effective disciplemaking.** First:

1. **Look for F.A.T. People**

“Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. ***A disciple*** was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek.” Acts 16:1

**Lystra** is where Paul was stoned by an angry group of Jews on his first missionary journey. When he got up and walked it off, he and Barnabas went on to the neighboring town of **Derbe** where they preached and made more disciples. One of those disciples was a young man named Timothy.

We know from 2 Timothy 1 that ***sincere personal faith ran in his family*** - coming through his grandmother and his mother to him. So Timothy grew up in a devout family that loved and worshiped the Lord, the God of Israel.

1. **Look for F.A.T. People - Faithful**

“I am reminded of ***your sincere faith***, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.” 2 Tim. 1:5

Timothy had a sincere and personal faith. Paul had gotten to know this family on that first missionary journey. With the legacy of faith it is possible they served as the **person of peace** for their village - welcoming the missionary team into their home and becoming the nucleus for a church.

A few years later Paul circles back to the churches he planted on the first trip to check on them and see how they were doing. And that is when he meets **Timothy** - who would at first be his apprentice or intern, then would become a key gospel partner and arguably served as Paul’s primary successor in leadership and apostleship.

But in Lystra, all he knew was that this young man came from a devout family and had a sincere faith himself.

1. **Look for F.A.T. People - Faithful**

“He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.” Acts 16:2

Faithful believers are filled with faith and act on that faith. Timothy had already built a positive reputation, not only in his home church but also in the region. They must have seen his heart for the Lord and some gifting in service to the church.

As we seek to invest in a few, this is what we are looking for: not the most talented or gifted people, but the most FAITHFUL. Sincere personal faith that is lived out in practical ways. In your Community Group, who stands out for their consistency, their service, their heart for people? In your ministry area, who comes to mind as a faithful worker - not looking for attention or applause but just quietly doing their job to please the Lord and serve His people?

Let’s look for Faithful people and also Available people.

1. **Look for F.A.T. People - Available**

“Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him… As they went on their way through the cities...” Acts 16:3,4

If someone is so busy that they don’t come to small group or can’t serve consistently, they aren’t AVAILABLE enough for you to effectively invest in them. This was not a small request from Paul to Timothy, saying, *“Come, join my team. Leave your parents and your hometown and come with me on an uncertain journey into almost certain persecution and danger.”*

But Timothy jumped at the chance. He was available.

This is a simple profile for a disciple - faithful, available and also:

1. **Look for F.A.T. People - Teachable**

“Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews…” Acts 16:3

Now be thankful that we don’t include this step in our membership process. We save it for more advanced leadership roles like deacon and elder. That’s when you’re REALLY committed. Now the parents have something to talk with your kids about over lunch. You’re welcome. “What was Pastor Darin talking about? Why were people laughing?” Come on. Circumcision. It’s funny!

Actually it’s bloody. There’s a reason we take care of this business with babies so they don’t remember the trauma of it. If Paul did this himself, as it sounds like he did in the language here - this was some **PERSONAL, HAND-ON ministry**. “Sorry man, but a lot of our ministry is with Jews and Jewish believers, so you’ll need to get this done so they know you’re kosher.”

Usually being teachable is more about being willing to **study the Bible** - taking the time out of your schedule to dig into Scripture together; working to memorize some key verses. Teachability is also about **willingness to adjust your lifestyle**, adjust your habits to be more evangelistic, more missional. Let’s say you don’t have any non-Christian friends - are you willing to make the effort to change that? That would be a sign of being teachable.

That’s the kind of person you’re looking for to invest in: a faithful believer, who is available to work with you and teachable, responsive to your leadership. That’s the first key to disciplemaking. Here is the second.

1. **Bring them with you as you Serve**

“Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him.” Acts 16:3

This is an obvious principle but it’s important to be sure we observe and apply it. Don’t just DO MINISTRY - **bring someone with you** as you do ministry.

* Don’t just **pressure wash the soffits** on PowerHouse, bring a younger guy with you to help you pressure wash.
* Don’t just **teach Sunday School**, bring someone with you to show them how you prepare and how you teach.
* Don’t just **go to Panera** (or wherever) to connect with non-believers, bring someone with you to show them how to connect with non-believers and engage in spiritual conversations.
* Don’t just go to **a city outreach event**, bring someone with you to a city outreach.
* Whatever you do - whenever possible, bring someone with you.

This was most of **Jesus’ ministry strategy**. He came to preach the good news of the kingdom. But he almost never did that alone. (Maybe with the woman at the well.) Very early in his ministry he called the twelve and did almost everything with them and then later through them.

Paul embraced this principle and practice and throughout Acts we see him always traveling with a TEAM. And this is how he did it - he was looking for FAT people like Timothy. When he found one he would bring him along and say, “***Follow me as I follow Jesus*** - watch how I connect with people; watch how I share the gospel; watch how I plant churches; watch how I appoint elders. Pay attention. Pretty soon you’ll be going ahead of me or circling back behind me and doing the same things.”

The third key to disciplemaking:

1. **Give them Opportunities to Serve and Grow**

“As they went on their way through the cities, **they** delivered to them for observance the decisions…” Acts 16:4

Notice that key word: THEY. Paul was the leader, but **his team helped him** with this - including the newest member, Timothy. Do you see what Paul was doing here? He didn’t just have Timothy listen while he taught. He had Timothy prepare and help teach these decisions from the Jerusalem council. ***You always learn more when you TEACH than you do when you just LISTEN.***

As you go about your life and ministry - look for opportunities like this to **EMPOWER** other believers. Have them read Scripture. Have them lead a discussion. Have them read a chapter and share what they learned. Have them prepare a lesson to teach the kids our youth. As you talk with a non-believer, don’t do all the talking - give other people opportunities to share some of their story or to explain some part of the gospel.

This is Acts 16, in the very next chapter, still on the second missionary journey, Paul is already giving Timothy a special assignment.

1. **Give them Opportunities to Serve and Grow**

“Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there.” Acts 17:14

Do you see what Paul is doing - the genius of it? Not only is he giving Timothy an assignment, but he is connecting Timothy with another mentor. And in the same moment he is helping Silas contribute to this pattern of leadership development. This is how we know that ***disciplemaking is not a pyramid scheme*** - **it’s a team effort**.

Think about ***how many people invested in you over the years.*** For me it was a volunteer youth director, then a youth pastor, several upperclassmen in my youth group and older counselors at Bible Camp. Manny became my youth pastor when I was just a sophomore in high school and I have stayed in touch with him since 1992 - going on 30 years now. He was my primary Paul. But then I met Kristin and started getting to know her father, who has been a mentor and encourager for me since 1997 when we met at the Sweet Tomatoes on Dale Mabry. For 3 years in Louisville I had the great privilege of working directly with him in ministry. And I’ve had two exceptional executive pastors, a Barnabas type District Superintendent and more peer encouragers than I could list in one sermon.

That’s what Paul wanted for Timothy - additional mentors, additional partners in ministry. And that’s what God wants for each of us and for every believer. Early on in your walk with the Lord there may be one person who plays a primary role in your training. But over the years you see how the Lord brings someone else, then someone else to pour a little more into you.

And a key way that happens is by giving you opportunities to serve and grow. Pastor Manny was all about this. After my freshman year of college I did a summer internship with Manny. His main philosophy was simply - ***come with me and whatever I do, you do***. Then it was - **you try it**! He taught Sunday School, then he said “You teach the rest of the summer.” He led a small group discussion, then he said, “You make up group questions and lead the rest of the summer.” He brought me on a hospital visit then the next time he said, “You lead this visit.”

Then a few years later when I was graduating from college he pretty much did that with my career. He said, “You’ve watched me do the youth pastor thing - now you try it.” And Manny shifted into an associate position at the church and ***they hired me to take his place as youth pastor*** - right out of college. **It was a massive risk**. I was excited but wildly disorganized. (Kristin didn’t graduate for another year, so that first year of youth ministry was quite the spectacle of spontaneity and confusion.)

But that is a big part of making and multiplying disciples - **we have to give them responsibility**. We have to take RISKS and give people an opportunity to fail. That is how we grow. That is how we learn. That is how we develop future leaders. Look now just two chapters later, in Acts 19:

3. **Give them Opportunities to Serve and Grow**

“And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.” Acts 19:22

This is how Paul operated. He couldn’t be everywhere. But he always traveled with a team so he could send different members of the team to different places. ***What a genius win/win strategy!*** Now Timothy has a new partner in ministry - Erastus. And where last time Timothy and Silas stayed while Paul moved on, this time Paul stays put and sends Timothy and Erastus on ahead. Notice also how Timothy was an apprentice, but now is a HELPER.

**3. Give them Opportunities to Serve and Grow**

* “My beloved and faithful child” 1 Cor. 4:17
* “And Timothy our brother” 2 Cor. 1:1
* “Our brother and God’s coworker” 1 Thes. 3:2

In 1 Corinthians Paul writes about Timothy as a ***“child in the faith.”***

* Then in 2 Corinthians Paul calls Timothy ***“our brother”*** - an equal already.
* Then by the time he was writing 1 Thes. Paul calls Timothy ***“our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel.”***

In fact, if you read the Pauline epistles, which make up almost half of our New Testament, did you know that **Timothy helped Paul write HALF of those letters**? If you set aside the two written TO Timothy, the young apprentice helped write 6 of 11! How much he contributed we can’t know for sure, but the fact that he is named in the introduction of six Pauline letters is a noteworthy fact!

Like Jesus, Paul was all about giving ministry away! He empowered Timothy and Silas, Erastus and Epaphroditus. One NT scholar (FF Bruce) found **60 co-workers** Paul mentions in his writings! <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ae75f34e74940380c1926c3/t/5dbc9b5755d2e25fcd15d882/1572641624577/60+-+Paul%27s+Co-Workers+-+F.F.+Bruce.pdf>

He strongly believed in the importance of doing ministry as a TEAM and thereby developing and empowering others to serve and carry on the ministry!

We need to learn this lesson since we live in a culture that values authority and legacy. ***We tend to COLLECT followers not empower other LEADERS.*** We tend to develop and promote our own BRAND rather than empower and release workers into the kingdom harvest. So this leads into the fourth key to multiplying disciplemakers.

1. **Encourage and Cheer them on as they Lead**

“Fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” 1 Tim. 1:6

Paul’s two letters to Timothy are filled with ***personal and powerful encouragement***. If you need a boost this week, read slowly and prayerfully through these two letters. At my installation service as senior pastor in Kentucky, Kristin’s Dad preached 2 Timothy 4. Listen to these words as a mentor to his intern:

**“**I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” 2 Timothy 4:1-2

***Is this how we relate to each other in the church?*** Is this how we raise up and exhort our young people? Are we actively, intentionally and regularly pouring into younger Christians to empower them as gospel workers? ***Do we solemnly CHARGE THEM***, before God, to fan into flame the gifts given to them, to preach the word and steward the calling on their lives?

We need to be actively and constantly looking for **FAT people** - faithful, available, teachable believers. We need to **bring them with us** as we evangelize, train other disciples and serve. We need to SHOW THEM how to live like Jesus and how to lead like Jesus. Then we need to **give them opportunities** to serve and grow. And finally, when they are ready to start leading we should not get in their way but we should raise them up and joyfully **empower them to lead**, cheering for them all along the way!

I have had several interns I’ve been blessed to work with and pour into, but let me close today by telling you about Kujtim. He grew up in Albania, hence the name Kujtim. For Americans who struggled with the name he said, “Just call me Tim,” so it fits with our Timothy focus today.



If your geography is like mine you need to be reminded where Albania is. It’s just north and west of Greece, right on the Mediterranean Sea. Kujtim actually grew up in Kosovo, which became famous for the genocide there which caused his family to flee to Albania in 1998 and 1999, when he was only 10 years old. Imagine being suddenly a refugee, running for your life at the age of 10!

Kujtim was raised, like most Albanians in Kosovo, as a nominal Muslim. As far as I know his father is still a nominal Muslim. But when they made it back to Kosovo and Kujtim was a young teenager, he was looking for things to do and found a local community center that happened to be run by a Christian woman. He went there to play basketball and soccer but developed a relationship with this woman.

She invested in him for the next couple of years and slowly, graciously helped him both experience and understand the love of Jesus. Sensing that he might be called to ministry, this wise mentor encouraged Kujtim to apply to Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, where he enrolled for undergraduate and then masters level studies. There are Moody, at a conference, he ran into Pastor Colin Smith who invited him to do a residency at the Orchard Church, where I served.

And I was the staff member who was blessed to oversee that residency! So for a little more than a year I met regularly with Kujtim and helped him clarify his theology and ministry plan to return to Albania and give leadership to a church planting movement there. In 2016 Kujtim and his wife, Lauren, with two kids at that time - moved to Durres Albania where they continue to work at planting a church in a part of the city where there is no evangelical presence.

Kujtim is working with a couple of experienced pastors who continue to encourage and support him as together they seek to plant churches along the via egnatia.



The Apostle Paul traveled this very road from east to west - and you can see it ends in DURRES, ALBANIA, passing through cities like Philippi and Thessalonica! Now, pastors from Albania and Macedonia are seeking to mobilize a disciplemaking and church planting movement bringing the gospel back east from Albania all the way to Istanbul!

How will they get this done? By investing in young gospel workers like Kujtim and Lauren Rushiti!

How will we reach every man, woman and child in Tampa Bay? By investing in a few. This is the upside down nature of the kingdom. God uses large gatherings and crusades. But most of the time the way God works to change the world is in the small - the unseen. A conversation here; some time spent together there. You may think your relationship with a new believer doesn’t matter much - when, in fact, it is the thing that matters most!

Let’s pray!