Interpretive comments on 2 Tim. 2:2

Read 2:2. The second essential leadership responsibility is that Timothy must prioritize the development of new leaders. This is the first *horizontal* imperative, perhaps emphasizing its strategic importance. Although we can be sure that Paul had modeled and instructed Timothy on the importance of this task, he reminds him yet again.

Be careful how much you read into 2 Tim. 2:2. It is a command for Paul's apostolic delegate (Timothy) to pass on apostolic doctrine to gifted teaching elders who will teach the flock. It is (in principle) a good passage that emphasizes leaders' responsibility to develop other leaders. But it is *not* exegetically accurate to say that this is a mandate for every Christian to raise up Christian leaders who raise up leaders. Rather, this mandate is a specific application of a comprehensive discipleship mandate that Jesus has given to His church. Let's start with the big picture . . .

To whom does this biblical mandate apply?

Matt. 28:19,20 is a mandate given to *all* Christians. Jesus' promise to be with us to fulfill this commission "to the end of the age" implies that it is given to the whole church for the whole church age, not just to the apostles. The command to "make disciples" is very broad. It is unpacked by three participles:

"Going" – this is a command to "go and be/tell," not merely invite people to "come and see." This is the mandate to take the gospel not only to our people group, but also to other people groups—both extra-locally (missions) and locally (our culturally diverse community).

"Baptizing" – this is a command for *all* Christians to help people come to a decision to receive and confess Christ as Savior and Lord and identify with a local church.

"Teaching" – this is a general command for *all* Christians to instruct other Christians into comprehensive obedience to Jesus' commands. It does not say much about how to do this (more on this later)—but other key passages provide important insight on this.

The "teaching" part of the Great Commission and other passages (see below) argue that *all* Christians are responsible to help other Christians to mature and develop into Christian workers. *This "teaching" aspect of discipleship is what we call "discipleship."* Thus, I have entitled this teaching "Develop Workers" rather than "Disciple Leaders."

Eph. 4:11-16 is a key passage that describes certain elements of this "teaching." God has given the local church people who have foundational leadership gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers). These people are responsible to equip church members for ministry, so that the church (individually and corporately) will mature. Also, all Christians are to speak the truth to one another in love (4:15) in order to build one another up into maturity. These Christ-centered friendships form the heart of good Body-life. Thus, both the equipping ministry of the APEPT's and the formation of Christ-centered (discipling) friendships form the essential context in which this "teaching" takes place.

Paul's description of this "teaching" in Colossians sheds more light. In Col. 1:28, he says "we" teach and admonish every Christian so that we may present every Christian complete (mature) in Christ. So the goal is for all Christians to be discipled because this intentional discipleship is necessary for their maturity. Although some argue that the "we" in Col. 1:28 refers to Paul and his apostolic band, Col. 3:16 clearly instructs all Christians in Colossae to pursue this ministry with one another. So the local church should build a network of Christ-centered friendships (both mentoring and peer) in which we all intentionally help one another toward spiritual maturity.

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The metaphor of the church as the family of God sheds additional light on this "teaching" aspect of discipleship. It seems clear that one of the reasons why Paul reminded the Thessalonians of his spiritual parenting (1 Thess. 2:9-12) was so that they would follow his example in spiritually parenting other younger Christians. Paul also reminds Titus to inculcate this ethic in the church in Crete (Titus 2:2ff.)—older Christians are to "train" younger Christians to live as good representatives of Jesus. When Christians neglect this ethic, the church becomes like a perpetual day-care center rather than a healthy growing family. A few professional care-givers maintain members who remain in a state of arrested development.

This material has two main implications for home group leaders:

We should cast biblical vision for Christians to build discipling relationships (mentoring and/or peer) with one another in the home group. We should challenge them to initiate these relationships if they do not have them. (More on what these relationships should look like below.)

Since we want to bring people to Christ, and then help them mature in community (home groups), we must prioritize multiplying home groups. This means that home group leaders must devote energy and time to developing prospective home group leaders. This development should involve both the equipping of the APEPT's (e.g., Xenos classes) and the personal mentoring of the existing home group leaders and more mature workers.

Finally, we come back to our passage in 2 Tim. 2:2. This is a very specific command that key leaders (pastor-teachers?) must identify other spiritually faithful people who are similarly gifted and help them become effective top-level leaders.

Whose "disciples" are we?

On one level, we are Jesus' disciples. In the gospels, the "disciples" were those who followed Jesus. Jesus taught us that we have only one Teacher and Father, and that we are brothers (Matt. 23:8-10). In Acts, the "disciples" are Jesus followers. (The one possible exception is the reference in Acts 9:25 to Paul's disciples, who may have been his rabbinic apprentices.) In the epistles, "disciples" disappears and is replaced by "saints," "brothers and sisters," etc. This has two practical implications:

Discipleship has an important corporate element. We are brothers and sisters helping one another to become more effective disciples of Jesus. No one of us is ever adequate to bring a brother or sister to maturity. We may well play a crucial, ongoing role in someone's development—but healthy development requires exposure to many members' wisdom, example, gifts, etc.

We should avoid a possessive or territorial attitude toward people we disciple. They are not "my disciples" in this sense. They are Jesus' disciples, and Jesus is working through us to disciple them. For this reason, Ajith Fernando recommends using "disciple" as a verb rather than a "noun."[1]

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[1] "The work of Christian leaders to help other Christians become disciples of Christ I am calling the ministry of discipling. I am calling the leader who cares for the trainee the *discipler* and the trainee the *disciplee*. The words *discipler* and *disciplee* (as opposed to *master* and *disciple*) point to the fact that we are raising up disciples of Christ rather than of ourselves . . . I feel uneasy when I hear people say things like, 'He's my spiritual child,' or 'He's my Timothy.' Such statements can take glory that is due to Christ and deflect it in our direction. We saw above that Paul and Peter said something like that, but in these cases they were calling Timothy, Titus, Philemon and Mark their children in order to lift the children up, not to lift up themselves. What I am cautioning about is the habit of using our disciples to boast about ourselves." Ajith Fernando, *Jesus Driven Ministry* (Crossway Books, 2002), pp. 152,170.

On another level, it is appropriate and important to take responsibility to disciple specific individuals. In this sense, parents speak of "my children." Paul likewise can speak of Timothy as "my beloved son" (2 Tim. 1:2), and of the Corinthians as "my beloved children (1 Cor. 4:14). This is the language of loving responsibility. This has two practical implications:

Discipleship has an important individual element. "Everybody's job is nobody's job." Saying generally that "the people in our home group are discipling one another" may mean that no one is taking individual responsibility to help other individuals mature.

We should agree on certain commitments that go into discipleship relationships. (See the next section for discipleship commitments that we agree on in Xenos.) Otherwise, this important concept and term becomes so general that it is meaningless. We also run the risk of thinking that discipleship is happening in our home group when it is not.

A framework for discipleship relationships

When we survey the New Testament material on how we are to develop younger Christians, we find that no one method is prescribed or modeled. Rather, we find the principle of Christians helping one another mature, and older Christians helping younger Christians mature, key elements in this process (e.g., modeling; teaching and preaching; exhortation and correction; on-the-job training with coaching afterward; etc.), and examples of this crucially important ministry.

Our own personal experience confirms that God can work through many methods to develop Christian workers. Many of us were discipled primarily through one-on-one mentoring. Many of us were discipled primarily in a corporate model rather than individually—yet God raised us up. Some of us were discipled in an "ad hoc" way—not through any ongoing intentional mentoring process, but through many godly examples, leaders, classes, etc. Yet God gave us the input we needed to develop into workers and leaders. Many of us disciple individuals in different ways—yet God has honored our discipling ministries.

In Xenos, we insist on certain common elements in discipleship relationships. This is because we believe these elements are essential, and so that we are on the same page when we use this term.

Both mentoring discipleship and peer discipleship are important. Mentoring discipleship involves a more mature Christian discipling a less mature Christian. Peer discipleship involves Christians of relatively similar maturity helping one another to mature.

Commit to time together that is regular, personal and intentional.

"Regular" means weekly unless really not feasible. (I find that when I meet with someone bi-weekly, it is difficult to really progress relationally and/or developmentally.) It also means that you don't miss except for out of town and/or emergencies—and that even then you try to find a way to meet. If you let an "It's OK to cancel" ethic happen, you're done. It also means (preferably) the same time and the same place. It also means at least an hour (I vastly prefer two hours) for the personal and intentional (see below). And it means that you will probably be doing this for years rather than weeks or months.

"Personal" means that we build a real Christ-centered friendship—that we practice real transparency with one another, by encouraging one another and showing affection to one another, and by confessing our sins and fears and bearing one another's burdens as needed. That's why these times together should be one-on-one or (at most) three people. Of course, we will want to relate in this way outside our time together—but we need to be sure that we express this appropriately during our regular meetings.

"Intentional" means that we are trying to foster genuine spiritual growth in one another's lives. It is usually easier to be intentional in mentoring discipleship – but it is equally important in peer discipleship. There are four elements of intentionality, represented below with examples:

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STUDY	COUNSEL
• the Bible • quality Christian books • quality recorded teachings	• key relationships • besetting sins • fears, doubts, etc.
COACH	PRAY
• evangelism & follow-up • discipleship with others • spiritual gifts & other roles	• together & out loud • for one another & others

STUDY: Help them become a lover of God's Word. Study and discuss Bible books and/or a quality Christian book together. Suggest other biblical passages and Christian books on topics that come up. Take a Xenos class together.

COUNSEL: Help them develop godly character. Emphasize the importance of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23). Help them identify their besetting sins and develop long-term, grace-based strategies for resisting them. Help them to build and maintain good key friendships (including spouses!).

COACH: Help them become servants who thrive off of a lifestyle of giving God's love to others. Help them become consistently edifying workers at meetings. Cast vision for evangelism and discipling other Christians. Help them identify their spiritual gifts, urge them to use their gifts, and facilitate this where you can.

PRAYER: Help them become pray-ers. Pray with them regularly and pray regularly for one another. Urge them to be part of your home group prayer meeting, and to initiate prayer with others.

Such a framework facilitates making progress in these four essential aspects of spiritual maturity. It also allows the flexibility to respond to "real time" growth opportunities or issues that need to be resolved.

Additional practical elements in discipleship relationships

Selection is important! We can't make anyone want to grow—we try to find people who want to grow, and help them grow. We know the Holy Spirit is motivating everyone to grow (Phil. 2:13), but we know they have to decide they want to grow (Phil. 2:12).

Pray for hungry people, and keep your eyes open (Jesus prayed about this—Lk. 6:12.)

Do the work God has called you to do, and see who is drawn to you as you do this (Jesus did this—Jn. 1:35-42).

Do they evidence interest in the Word? Disciples are "learners," and Jesus said we are His disciples if we abide in His Word (John 8:31,32). How do they habitually respond to teachings? Are they reading the Bible/Christian books on their own? Do they ask spiritual questions and respond to good answers?

Are they honest about what is going on in their life? Jesus said the "good soil" signifies people with "honest and good hearts" (Luke 8:15). Do they admit the sin-problems they are struggling with, and seek help for them? Do they respond properly to God's discipline (through others and directly from God)?

Do they show a willingness to serve others? (Mark 1:17) Do they talk to others about Christ? Do they respond to requests for ministry help? Do they offer to help people out in practical ways? Look closely here—sometimes the evidence is subtle.

Do they take challenging steps of faith? Are they are demonstrating that their relationship with God, and his promises, is real to them and impacts their lives? (EXAMPLES: financial giving; confessing sin; witnessing; confronting)? Remember: what is challenging to them may not be challenging to you at this point.

Are you discipling learners, or are you trying to force-feed someone who is not presently a learner? Beware of feeling like you have to "have a disciple" so you can "be somebody."

On the other hand, don't apply this in a perfectionistic way. Very few Christians (including ourselves!) consistently exhibit all of these characteristics. Beware of using "selection" as an excuse to avoid investing in others.

If you are unsure about someone, consider asking him to commit to a short-term (e.g., 2 months) of getting together to do the above. This gives the person an idea of what discipleship is, and it gives you the opportunity for better discernment before making a long-term commitment.

Focus on *your* progress more than on theirs (1 Tim. 4:15)! Modeling is one of the most powerful influences we have (1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7)!

Are you the kind of person who is growing more in love with God, excited about his Word, etc.? Are you continuing to grow in your understanding and appreciation of God's grace? Are you thriving more off of giving God's love away to others? Are you open about your sins and fear to others? Do you repent quickly and apologize when you blow it? This example of godliness, maybe more than anything else, draws hungry people and inspires them to become godly.

Do your best to develop well-rounded and self-motivated workers.

"Well-rounded" – We want to help them become workers who are growing in the Word, godly character and competence in ministry. See the above 4 QUADRANTS.

"Self-motivated" – We want to help them become "independently dependent on the Lord." Unhealthy dependence on the discipler is failure.

One key to this is to help them become deeply grounded in God's grace. Talk about grace, read together about grace, share your insights, etc. Be excited about God's grace, and express this excitement! Model honesty and vulnerability under grace through your own self-disclosure. Model treating them and others graciously.

In grey areas (e.g., dating decisions; complex ministry decisions), resist telling them what to do. Instead, remind them of related biblical principles and urge them to come to their own convictions before God.

Discipleship in a healthy home group

Transformational leaders will emphasize this ministry, form appropriate structures to facilitate it, and closely monitor its progress.

This ministry will be emphasized and esteemed as a core ministry along with sharing our faith, and loving one another. A healthy home church is balanced in its emphasis on and esteem of all of these kinds of ministry. Personal discipleship will not be the *only* answer to "What's my ministry?" But it will be an important answer, and especially important for home group leaders.

Younger members will have opportunity to be discipled one-on-one by an older Christian, and older Christians will have opportunity to engage in peer discipleship. We should also urge them to take initiative to seek these discipling relationships.

Not every Christian worker will feel responsible to develop younger Christians into *leaders*. Many can do this, and some (especially gifted leaders, elders, etc.) must do this—but not everyone.[2]

In summary:

More mature Christians should intentionally help younger Christians to mature (mentor discipleship).

Christians of roughly equal maturity can help each other to mature (peer discipleship).

Leaders should intentionally expose younger Christians to the equipping ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers as a key aspect of their development.

Home group leaders should identify possible future home group leaders and do their best to develop them into leaders—though they should also rely on help from other gifted leaders (see above).

Other ministry leaders (e.g., service ministries) should try to develop future leaders in that ministry.

Don't get overwhelmed with how much there is to do, how difficult this is, etc. Like all aspects of authentic ministry, this is humanly impossible! But Jesus is with us—He will keep discipling us, and He will keep providing us with what we need to disciple others. So just wade in there and do your best. You will experience disappointment and failure. But over time, you will also experience the joy of knowing that God used you to develop many Christian workers (3 Jn. 1:4), and some of them will become life-long friends (2 Tim. 1:2,4)!

Recommend *Organic Disciplemaking* as an excellent resource for questions and issues related to personal discipleship.

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[2] Leroy Eims, whose book on personal discipleship has been very helpful in Xenos, makes this point explicitly. Speaking of "harvest workers" (those who are "directly involved in the specific task of reaping souls for Christ and then helping them to become reapers also"), Eims says: "But there are some that never reach that stage. They are disciples of Jesus Christ in the true sense of the word. They are openly identified with the Lord. They are in fellowship with Him through the Word and prayer. They do manifest the fruit of the Spirit . . . And they are fulfilling their unique contribution in the Body of Christ . . . (gives examples of different ministries) . . . But they do not have the gift and calling to become personally and actively involved in a discipleship ministry in the lives of others. To try to push them further in that direction would be a mistake. Disciple--yes! Workers who are actively involved in making disciples--no! Serious damage may be done by overzealous trainers who try to push people too far, beyond the limit of their gifts and calling of God . . . This is not to minimize the work of any disciple of Jesus, nor to relegate him to second-class citizenship . . . (stresses the importance of certain ministries) . . . Our discussion here concerns the particular type of worker . . . who is a . . . wise master-builder in the lives of others . . ." Speaking of training leaders later, he asks, "Are there those who have the gifts, abilities, and calling of God to become leaders of a disciple-making ministry? Those who could do what you are doing? If so, they will need some special leadership training to do the job." Leroy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*, pp. 84,85, 126.