

God's Multiplication Table

II Timothy 2:2

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2 Timothy 2:2

The great spiritual blast-off stimulated by the Day of Pentecost was underway. The early church was about to be propelled by the force of that blast-off to the ends of the world of its day. Peter had just concluded his sermon, explaining the Gospel of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit; and verse 41 of Acts 2 says, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added into them about three thousand souls." Pretty prolific addition! No pastor on earth would be anything but elated over the conversion of 3000 people in one day after he had preached the Gospel. Give special note to the word "added." The same word recurs in verse 47 of the same chapter. Scan verses 42 through 47a, then hear this sentence: "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Note again the word "added."

Now turn to Acts 5:14. The tragic story of the sin and judgment of Ananias and Sapphira has just been recorded. Verse 13 says, "And the rest dared no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them." How would you like to belong to a church that is so spiritually powerful that people are actually afraid to join it? But verse 14 said, "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." The "adding machine" has broken down! They can't number them any longer because so many are being added to the Lord.

Now notice a significant change. In chapter six, God's mathematical strategy of growth for the early church apparently accelerates. In verse one we read, "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was MULTIPLIED, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." The proper "M and M" order is "multiplied," "ministration," and "murmuring." When members multiply a church, additional ministries must follow, both to provide for them and to employ them; and as surely as daylight follows darkness, murmuring will follow multiplication. It is part of the territory that more *people* will always mean more *problems*. After all, aren't *you* a problem of one kind or another?

Note the nature of the problem. A daily "deaconing" (the word translated "ministration") took place to distribute food, supplies, and money to the vast number of new Christians who had come under immediate economic stress and social ostracism because of their faith in Christ. The "Grecians" were Hellenized, Greek-speaking Jews who had been born outside of Israel and had recently returned for the Passover and Pentecost feasts. Some of them had come to Christ as a result of the Gospel events that had occurred dramatically in Jerusalem. The "Hebrews" were native-born Jews who spoke the Aramaic language of Palestinian Jews. The Grecians were the minority group, and the Hebrews were the vast majority group.

So the murmuring arose (reasonably) from the minority group as a protest against their widows being neglected in the daily distribution of goods. "The majority was taking care of itself to the abuse and neglect of the minority," they said. To take care of the problem, the Apostles appointed seven men, all with Greek-speaking names. This is sensible, isn't it? To solve the problem and stifle the protests, men from the ranks of the murmuring party were appointed to supervise the distribution of goods. The problem was solved, "and the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples MULTIPLIED in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (verse 7). So massive was the multiplication that there was

even a heavy leakage from the Jewish priesthood into the community of faith in Christ in Jerusalem. Note that multiplication is now the common standard for the growth of the early church.

In chapter 9, the acceleration continues. Chapter nine records the conversion story of the greatest of all Christians, Saul of Tarsus. When the turmoil over his conversion and early preaching had subsided, we read in verse 31, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." Because the noun is so far removed from the verb in that sentence, it might be easy to miss the multiplication standard here. Now the *churches* are *multiplying*! Question: Whatever happened to that kind of Christianity? *They had no missionary societies, no committees or staff for church planting, no official home or foreign missionaries, yet the churches were multiplying.* Whatever happened to that kind of Christianity?

The answer may be fairly seen by attending almost any pastor's conference in the US today. When preachers begin to assemble, they ask several usual and universal questions. "Did you have a good day Sunday?" "Yes, we did." And what is the next question? "How many ADDITIONS did you have?" Friends, it is not possible to impact a radically multiplying world population by merely having *additions* to our churches, *however many we may have*. The pace of multiplication cannot be matched by addition! Somebody has deceived us somewhere about something awfully important.

On the day Noah's ark landed after the flood, the animals were emerging from the ark in a spirit of great celebration. All, that is, except two—a pair of snakes. As they came out of the ark, they were weeping heartbrokenly. Noah said, "What's going on? Don't you know that this is the greatest day in world history? Why are you weeping while everyone else is celebrating?" One of the snakes sadly answered, "We're sad because you told us to multiply—and we're ADDERS!" That silly story points to a great tragedy in the Christian community. God has called us to multiply, and we have tragically reduced ourselves into mere adders. The magnitude of this tragedy cannot be measured.

We must not underestimate the value and importance of additions (conversions) to the Christian community, but we must force ourselves to face a tragic error in our procedures if the additions do not become catalysts for multiplication in the total Christian world community.

The only marching orders Jesus ever gave His church is called the Great Commission. There are seven verb forms in that Commission, but *only one of them is a command. There is only one strong imperative, only one command, in the Great Commission!* The verb is translated "teach" in the KJV, but it is again apparent that somebody is hiding something from us. The verb means much, much more than mere teaching! The verb means to "make disciples," or "turn men into disciples." We need to immediately stop asking, "How many *decisions* did you have?" and begin asking, "How many *disciples* are you building?"

The early church multiplied by using the standard and the procedure patterned perfectly in the three-year public ministry of Jesus with His twelve apostles. He was the original disciple-maker, and the procedure He followed must be examined, studied, mastered, and copied by us if we are to *reproduce reproducers* as He did. I personally do not believe an individual can be a *disciple* without also being a *disciple-maker*. Our obedience to His Lordship necessarily includes a priority in the fulfillment of His Great Commission. I believe disciple-making is built into the contract of being a disciple. If one is a New Testament disciple, he will necessarily be a disciple-maker.

The PROFILE of a Multiplying Disciple

Now turn to Second Timothy, chapter 2. In Second Timothy 2, we find seven great pictures of a disciple, and a great presentation of God's "multiplication table." First, the profile of a disciple. Each of the seven supplies a part of the portrait or picture of a New Testament disciple.

1. A "Son"

First, a New Testament disciple is a "son" (verse one). He is a son of God by a birth from above; but here, he is the spiritual son of the believer who led him to Christ. Paul called Timothy "my son," because he had led him to Christ. Paul had come to the town where Timothy lived on one of his missionary journeys. He found a family which included two great Old Testament students, a grandmother named Lois, and a mother named Eunice (II Tim. 1:5).

Eunice had a hybrid son (his father was a Greek) named Timothy. When Paul found how well-taught the boy was in the Bible, he easily led him to Christ. As he began to disciple him, he saw an apparent spiritual potential in the boy that was very exceptional. When Paul left to continue his missionary journey, he encouraged the boy to continue his walk with Jesus. Paul promised to pray for him daily, and also promised that he would return when possible.

Sometime later, on another missionary journey, Paul did return to Timothy's town. When he checked on the young boy, his fondest dreams were realized. The boy had grown beyond Paul's expectation spiritually. When Paul was ready to leave, he said, "Timothy, how would you like to make a trip with me?" Timothy was aghast. "Me? With you?" "Yes," Paul replied, "a trip with me." "What will we do?" "You watch me, pray for me, and we'll talk at night." When you are a visionary Christian, that is disciple-making!

What does a good son do? He learns from his parent, loves his parent, obeys his parent, and extends the family traits. And so does a spiritual son.

2. A "Soldier"

Second, a New Testament disciple is a "soldier." "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." What does a good soldier do? He abandons all of his own plans and purposes to fulfill the duty assigned him. He trains with great discipline and effort. He defends the interest of his homeland. He fights when it is necessary. In short, he is ready for struggle and sacrifice, which are essential if he is to fulfill his assignment.

Captain beloved, battle wounds were Thine,
Let me not wonder if some hurts be mine.
Rather, O Lord, let my deep wonder be,
That I may share a battle wound with Thee.

3. An "Athlete"

Third, a New Testament disciple is like an "athlete." Verse 5 says, "And if a man also strive for masteries [competes to win] yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully." It has been estimated that there are more than 50 references in the New Testament to athletics. What does a good athlete do? He applies himself totally to his sport, trains rigorously and steadily, masters the required skills, strives for mental discipline as well as physical, and does his best to excel. A Christian disciple will do no less in following Christ.

4. A "Husbandman"

Fourth, a New Testament disciple is pictured as a "husbandman," or a farmer (verse 6). What does a good farmer do? He labors, he breaks up the soil, he sows seed, he cultivates, and he reaps the crop. All of these activities have evident counterparts in the spiritual exercise of being a disciple and making disciples.

5. A "Workman"

Fifth, a New Testament disciple is a "workman" (verse 15), and a specialized workman at that. He is to be "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." In order to do this, he must "study to shew himself approved unto God." As Christian disciples, we are here to labor and not to loaf.

6. A "Vessel"

Sixth, a New Testament disciple is a "vessel" (verses 20-21). What is a vessel? A vessel is a hollow object intended to contain something or someone. As Christians, we are intended to contain and convey the very life of Christ Himself. What does a good vessel do? It sits on its master's shelf, empty and available, and waits for him to fill it if he wishes. The Christian disciple never has to wonder whether his Master wants to fill him or not. Ephesians 5:18 commands him to "be filled with the Spirit." When it is filled, it waits for him to pour it out. It simply waits for him to employ it as vessels are normally used. So should it be with a Christian disciple.

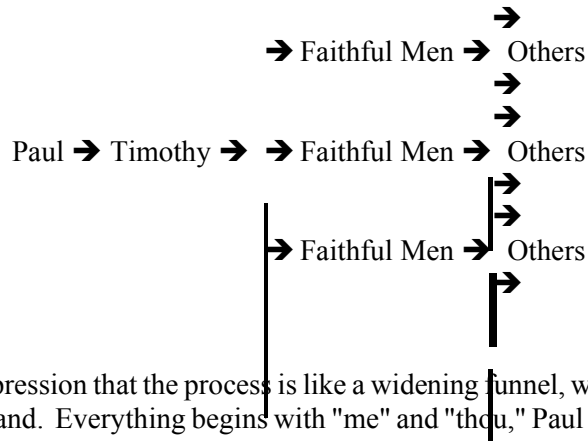
7. A "Servant"

Finally, a New Testament disciple is a "servant," or bondsman (verse 24). A bond-slave has no will of his own, no schedule of his own, no rights of his own, and no property of his own. He is completely at his master's disposal. However, he is not lacking in resources. His master's checkbook endows any assignment the slave may receive. And so it is with a Christian disciple.

The PROCEDURE for Multiplying Disciples

Now, having seen the profile of a disciple, as presented in 2 Timothy 2, let's examine the procedure for multiplying disciples. I call it "God's multiplication table." It is recorded in verse 2, where Paul said to Timothy, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit

thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Notice that there are four generations of disciples in this one verse: "Me . . . thou . . . faithful men . . . others also." The process of multiplication in this verse can be diagrammed like this:



You get the impression that the process is like a widening funnel, with the little end being where Paul and Timothy stand. Everything begins with "me" and "thou," Paul and Timothy, and this association indicates two crucial things about disciple-making:

- (1) The importance of the individual, and
- (2) The importance of positive relationships.

Take away either of the two initial individuals, Paul or Timothy, and the process collapses at its inception. No multiplication can occur without a solid integer at the beginning—and others to relate to.

Both Paul and Timothy must each be of a certain quality and commitment as disciples if multiplication is to happen. Then, they must be related to each other in a winsome, open, trustworthy way. How the church needs to extensively explore and apply relational theology! This is an entire universe that generally is hardly touched in the church at large. If Paul and Timothy had not had a relationship based on trust and availability, the chain would have broken as the first links were being forged. But, happily for us and all future generations, Paul was a winsome, attractive, disarming ambassador for Christ; and Timothy was an available, teachable, faithful disciple.

1. How does the process reach a disciple?

A question arises: How did Paul "get it across" to Timothy? How did the process reach Timothy? How did Paul's contagion spread to him so that he himself became contagious with it? Paul said, "The things that thou has *heard* of me . . ." Is it merely a matter of *hearing*? Is the curriculum merely academic concepts, or philosophical ideas, which may be classroom taught from one generation to the next? Hardly! What does "hearing" mean in the New Testament? Why is hearing singled out to picture spiritual intake instead of seeing, or smelling, or tasting, or touching? Indeed, there are spiritual counterparts to each of these physical senses. Then why is hearing singled out? Could it be because hearing is the sense by which objective reality goes *most directly* to the inner being? In every other sensory intake, a translation is necessary. Sight (visual images) must be translated to ideas and

thoughts to reach the inner being. The same is true of touch, smell, and taste. But in hearing, the most direct communication occurs. So "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word (*hrema*, a vital, lovingly addressed word) of God."

2. What does the process of hearing entail?

In the process of disciple-making, just what does this all-inclusive "hearing" entail? Two verses in 2 Timothy 3 give us a clue (verses 10 and 11). Paul wrote, "Thou hast *fully known* (Paul lived a perfectly transparent life with Timothy; transparency . . . transmission . . . transformation, that's the order) my *doctrine* (teachings), *manner of life* (lifestyle), *purpose*, *faith* (actually, faithfulness or fidelity), *longsuffering* (ability to suffer a long time), *charity* (love), *patience*, *afflictions* (so Paul didn't hide the severity from Timothy)."

This is the natural outcome of what has been called the "with him" or the "with me" principle. Jesus "ordained twelve that they should be *with him*" (Mark 3:14). Being a disciple and making disciples are lifestyles that are *caught* more than they are taught. Can you imagine anybody making a lengthy trip with Paul and *not* being changed by it?

3. Once a disciple is equipped, what does he do?

Now, once Timothy has been "equipped," or "fully furnished," or "fully trained," what does he do? "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men."

Two words call for special treatment in defining Timothy's role. He is to pass it on (the entire faith, lifestyle, and commitment) to "faithful" men. Great care must be taken here. This is one of the essential features of the genius of Christianity. When it functions properly, it *always guarantees* second and third-generation leadership. This is why it is absolutely essential that a discipler only seek to instill the process into *faithful* men. If his disciples prove to be unfaithful, the entire process stops with them, and all future generations may be left without skilled spiritual leadership.

The other word which calls for special attention is the dominant word in the verse. It is the word "commit." Again, great care must be given to understand this word. It is a banker's term. It literally means to "deposit." When you make a deposit in a savings account in a bank, you are hoping to gain a dividend, to draw interest. So it is when you make a disciple.

You are not merely disinfecting a sinner. You are making a quantitative and qualitative investment that will accrue interest indefinitely into eternity.

An Investment or An Expenditure?

So, let me ask a crucial and sober question: Is your present life more of an *expenditure* or an *investment*? Are you *spending* it or *investing* it? Think carefully here. If you are *spending* it, the expenditure is *final*. There is no dividend from the act. Frankly, most "Christian activities" we engage in—whether church attendance, Bible reading, prayers, etc.—are expenditures more than they are investments. They are "survival" activities to make us "good Christians" instead of investments which will impact the world to the ends of the earth 'til the end of time. Thus, they betray the

Commission of Jesus.

Timothy was to take the total investment of Christ's life that had passed from Paul to him and "deposit" it in turn in the lives of faithful men, and the process has not been properly passed on unless they are "able to teach others also." So, the process should be constantly enlarging into an expanding funnel that encompasses more and more territory and includes more and more people.

Illustrations to Show the Importance and the Potential of Multiplication

Let me employ some common illustrations to show both the importance and the potential of multiplication.

An Evangelist

Suppose there was an evangelist who could (and did) win 1,000 persons per day to Christ (as converts). If the present population of the world were "frozen" so that nobody else is born and no one dies until the last person on earth is won to Christ, it would take over 15,000 years to win this present world population to Christ!

A Daily Day of Pentecost

Or, suppose the day of Pentecost was reproduced daily, with 3,000 conversions every day. It would take approximately 5,000 years to win this present world population to Christ! And the population is hardly standing still! It is multiplying at a staggering rate. Seems pretty hopeless, doesn't it? This is why we must implement the Bible standard of multiplication. This is a mechanical, hypothetical, theoretical illustration, but it will serve to let us see the possibilities of spiritual multiplication. If one discipler were thoroughly "infected" so that he could be an adequate trainer, and he were to enlist a disciple for a year of training which would enable him to enlist and train another the following year, and this were to go on, mechanically and consistently multiplying through the years, this process would pass the "1,000-a-day" evangelist at the beginning of the 23rd year; and would (hypothetically) *disciple* the entire population of the world in about 35 years. Note the difference between the "converts" of the evangelist and the "disciples" of the visionary reproducer.

Doubling of Pennies

Another familiar illustration: If I were to offer you one penny on the first day of a 31-day month, and offer to double the sum each day for 31 days (so that on the second day you have 2 cents, on the 3rd day 4 cents, on the 4th day 8 cents, etc., etc.); or offer you the outright sum of \$1 million, which would you take? If you took the million dollars, you would be losing over 9.7 million dollars. But remember where it starts—with one penny. Without the invested first penny, the process never begins.

Why is disciple-making working so poorly? Frankly, God cannot find enough qualitative "first pennies." And remember, it is Paul to *Timothy*, a "second penny." The process largely depends on the quality, commitment, vision, and *work* of the first two pennies. Why? Because they are usually

the only models of this process their companions will ever see, as tragic as this may be.

So, penny number one and penny number two are all-important. But think for a moment all the way to the 31st day of the doubling process. On the last day, the sum goes from approximately 5.3 million dollars to approximately 10.6 million dollars. *So each day's multiplication is crucial to the finished result. No enlisted individual can afford to fail. If one Christian fails in the multiplication process, he cuts the potential for fulfilling the Great Commission in his lifetime exactly in half. However, if one Christian succeeds (multiplies), he doubles that potential in his lifetime.*

The Vision of World Impact by Disciple-Making

Christian, do you have the vision of world impact by disciple-making? Are you qualitatively investing the Jesus-lifestyle, the Jesus-vision, and the Jesus-commitment in the lives of individuals so that they have a similar vision and commitment and can impart them to others? Someone has wisely said that in order to impart a vision to others, you yourself must:

- See it clearly,
- Say it consistently
- Show it continually
- Share it compassionately, and
- Safeguard it carefully.

Stacy Rinehart wrote in his book, Living in the Light of Eternity, "Some of us who came to Christ in the 1960's thought we would change the whole world in our generation. We had visions of great throngs of people, cup in hand, waiting patiently for us to dispense the Water of Life. The world has long since slid into an abysmal state. We have personally lowered our expectations to helping a moderate number of individuals over the course of a lifetime. But the real question, the one that rescues us from disillusionment and feelings of failure, is this: Is that really a lowering? Is it a small and insignificant vision unworthy of real sacrifice? Not when we consider the One who reached the world with a handful of men, who constantly multiplies His own life in people, whether or not we happen to be around to tabulate the 'results.' "

In fact, not only is "helping a moderate number of individuals" *not* a "lowering"; it is the only way one individual can qualitatively impact the world TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH UNTIL THE END OF TIME.

Later in the same book, Mr. Rinehart says that "every Christian has the potential for an eternal impact in countless lives." However, some serious, almost embarrassing questions must be asked. Is our "fox" the same one Jesus went after—the whole wide world of people? Are we actually qualitatively and systematically investing in the lives of the individuals we work with to guarantee that we are closing in on that "fox"? Are we imparting the vision so that our disciples are consumed with it and thus will communicate it automatically to others?

Think your way through to the finished outcome of world impact and create your own sober questions to test the process. Disciple-making requires continued education, information, indoctrination, study, discussion, encouragement, accountability, and personal refinement.

Peter Wagner said, "The mission fields of the world are overloaded with evangelistic *programs that are not functioning properly*. *Sadder yet, many people deeply involved in them don't even realize the fact. In many of these programs, believe it or not, the results are not even tested.*" Friends, we cannot afford the luxury of the unexamined life or ministry.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once boldly said, "A righteous person is one who lives for the next generation." Disciple-making, properly done, both forces and guarantees that kind of righteousness. Are you still thinking of occasional "additions" to the church, or are you a solid integer in God's multiplication table? Think carefully, because many generations may depend on you.