

The Transfer of the Gospel 2 Timothy 2:1-2

Every year, Southern Baptist Churches are urged to fill out an annual church profile, or the ACP. This is a form used to determine the size and scope of the Southern Baptist Convention by measurables such as membership, baptisms, and giving. Just this past week, the 2009 ACP was released online. Here is some of what it said.

In the 45,010 churches in the SBC, there is a total membership of **16,160,088**. The average worship attendance in all these churches is **6,207,488**. Doing basic math, that tells you that nearly **ten million members**, or **62%** of the total membership, of Southern Baptist churches cannot be found in a worship service on any given Lord's Day. If you were a business owner where **only 4 out of your 10 employees** showed up for work, it is painfully clear that your business will not likely succeed.

And yet we are not talking about a business but the church—the people for whom Christ died. This disparity has been around for years, and many church experts have convened together to determine what caused this to happen. Most have concluded that this is a discipleship problem. While I do believe that is the case, the problem is much deeper than discipleship. It is a gospel problem fundamentally, and to the degree that the gospel of Jesus is assumed, short-circuited, or shelved in the church, it will remain stagnant or worse declining.

Even more troublesome is this statistic. The total amount of money given to or through Southern Baptist churches for 2009 was **\$11,912,179,313**. The net increase in new churches in the SBC was a total of 162. Out of 45,000 churches, **a net gain of 162 new churches**.

Why do I mention all of this to you this morning? Why should you or I care? We should care because our Lord and Savior left us with one final word before he ascended into heaven. He said,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

At the very center of the mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus. Not decisions, not unfaithful church members, not casual, consumeristic Christians. But disciples—learners and followers of Jesus who help others learn and follow Jesus. If we don't get the commission to make disciples right, it really does not matter what else we do. The Lord's agenda for the church is that we focus our attention on this all-important matter—**make disciples**.

A healthy church obedient to this command of Christ will be composed of disciple-making disciples. As Pastor Tom as explained on more than one occasion, **the outgrowth** of a Great Commission church of disciple-making disciples is the formation of new churches being planted. If new churches are **not** being planted, there is likely a failure to make disciple-making disciples. Where there are not many disciples, it is likely a failure to grasp and apply the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That is essentially the point of my message this morning. ***When we are strong in the gospel—in understanding it, applying it, and embracing all of its implications for our lives—the outgrowth will be a church full of disciple-makers. When there is a church rich in disciple-makers, the outgrowth will be a church reproducing new churches as a natural and full expression of the Great Commission.***

Today is a momentous and historic day in the life of our church. Today, we launch our first (and Lord willing not the last) church plant as a mother church. About 40 of our members along with one of our staff have rallied around the Great Commission to plant their lives, plant the gospel, and labor together to see a church planted in East Lee County. By God's grace, Providence Church will be a gospel-centered outpost of the kingdom where weary sinners will be rescued by the outstretched arms of our Savior through His people.

But the significance of this day also puts us in a significant minority among all the churches in United States. The latest research shows that **only 4% of all churches today are actively participating in planting other churches.** That's four churches out of a hundred! It is almost as if the church at large today is on birth control! Have you ever thought that the gospel has come to us because *someone* was sent? *Someone* made disciples? *Some disciples gathered* to plant the church here in the West? And yet it seems that churches make disciples on mission and planting churches has moved into maintenance mode in attempt to hold onto what we have, perhaps due to the ever-increasing anti-Christian culture. The church by and large is not mobilized on mission because disciples are not being made. Disciples are not being made because we are not being strengthened by the gospel.

I submit to you this morning that the reason why only 4% of churches are mobilized on mission and reproducing is because reproducing churches are made up of disciple-making disciples, and disciple-making disciples are empowered by the strength that comes from the gospel of Jesus Christ. So what our text shows this morning is that the way to have a fervent and robust commitment to the Great Commission is by being strengthened in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Look with me in the book of 2 Timothy chapter 2, and I want to draw your attention to the first two verses of this chapter. The book of 2 Timothy is written by Paul to one of his young pastors, Timothy, who is facing many obstacles, opposition, and opportunity while leading the church in Ephesus. The purpose of this book is to give instruction, encouragement, and exhortation to a disciple Paul himself had invested in with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Read along with me these two verses in 2 Timothy 2 . . .

¹ You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

In these two verses, I want to argue what I have already stated in my introduction:

T- the way to plant churches is to make disciples, and the way to make disciples is by being strengthened in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Through the transfer of the gospel—that is faithfully sharing that which you have received—the church is built, strengthened, and multiplied. The command to be fruitful and multiply is one that we should desire to do because that is the heart of the Great Commission given to us by Jesus.

There are two points to support this argument. The first one focuses on **establishing a gospel tradition**. The second one focuses on **executing the gospel transfer**. In conclusion, I hope to draw out some implications and applications of these truths for our church.

First, I want to you see that Paul focuses on establishing a gospel tradition with the command to “be strengthened in the gospel.”

Obviously the key word in verse one is the verb, and unfortunately most English translations get it wrong. Normally, it is not helpful or necessary to draw out Greek syntax, but here is one I think it vitally important to our understanding of what Paul is saying (and to the point of my message!). Most English translations (KJV, NKJV, NAS, NIV) say “**be strong**.” However, as the ESV puts it, the better and more accurate way to say it is “**be strengthened**.” Why is this so important?

ένδυναμοῦ ἐν τῇ χάριτι τῇ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ - present passive imperative, to be empowered, to be strong (by means of, instrumentality) in the grace of Jesus Christ

The difference is the **voice**. One is active (be strong); the other is passive (be strengthened). If I say, “I hit the car.” Who performed the action? I did. But if I say, “I was hit by the car.” Who performed the action? The car did (or the driver of the car). The verb “to be strong” is not active but passive. But notice it is also in the present tense. This means that that the need to be strengthened is continual, ongoing, and constant. Finally, I want you to see that this verb is a command. Paul is not merely making an observation. He is making a command to Timothy. In other words, Paul is saying that being strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus is of absolute necessity. You must have it. It is not optional.

So let’s put this little grammar lesson together and see what Paul is saying here. Paul is saying that **we are continually and constantly needing to receive and be empowered by the grace that is in Christ Jesus**, which is basically another way of saying “the gospel.” We do not have the resources or the ability to do this. We are absolutely dependent on the gospel (passive). We continually and constantly need the gospel (present). And it is imperative, not optional, that we are strengthened in the gospel (imperative).

What Paul is establishing in his disciple is a **gospel tradition**. I have always thought of traditions as being bad because I understood them to be things people uncritically held to without purpose or reason. Merriam-Webster defines tradition as “**a customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior handed down by word of mouth and/or personal example.**” This is exactly what Paul was doing in making disciples. The question that needs to be asked is “**what kind of disciples are we to make?**” For Paul, it is gospel-centered disciples—those who are strengthened in the grace of God, who are molded and mastered by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The way Paul establishes this tradition of gospel-centered disciples is threefold. **First, Paul begins in personal relationship.** Did you see how Paul addressed Timothy? You, my son! This speaks of intimacy and personal connection that is full of emotion, passion, commitment, and care. It is impossible to make disciples apart from investing your life in people. Paul was someone God used to change the world, but notice **Paul’s focus was no a worldwide program but individual people.** He probably learned this from Jesus who spent the majority of his ministry discipling twelve men who would turn the world upside down.

Almost everywhere you see Paul mentioning Timothy in Scripture, it is like a father who can't stop saying, "**That's my boy!**" For instance, to Corinthians, Paul says that Timothy is "**my beloved and faithful child in the Lord**" (1 Cor. 4:17). To the Philippians, he says that "**as a son with his father Timothy has served with me in the gospel**" (Phil. 2:22). And at the beginning of 1 Timothy, Paul addresses him as "**my true child in the faith**" (1 Tim. 1:2).

Second, Paul establishes this tradition through gospel community. He brings to Timothy's attention "the presence of many witnesses." There are others who witness to this tradition, this way of living according to the gospel and being strengthened by the grace that is in Jesus. The community of faith plays a vital role in displaying the gospel in a pattern that conforms to the ways of Jesus as taught by Paul. You don't make disciples in isolation from other Christians. The Great Commission is always to be carried out in a witnessing community.

Third, Paul establishes this tradition for the purpose of the mission. Paul does not establish this tradition to draw attention to himself but to extend the mission. Turn with me to Acts 16 where we first read about Timothy in the city of Lystra. I want to read the first five verses to explain this point:

¹ Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, *the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek.* ² He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took *him* and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. ⁴ And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily. (Acts 16:1-5)

Notice how things got started between Paul and Timothy. Notice that Timothy was not into self-promotion or trying to gain recognition so that Paul would disciple him. All we know from verse 1 is that Timothy was a disciple of Jesus. But notice verse 2. Luke explains that Timothy was "**well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.**" In other words, "the presence of many witnesses" commended the grace of Jesus in the life of Timothy. Because of the testimony of others about Timothy, we discover in verse 3 that Paul "**wanted** Timothy to accompany him."

Timothy was not idle when Paul found him. He was faithful. He was fruitful. He was fervent in serving the Lord. He was already on mission. So Paul wanted him. Paul found Timothy while he was on mission and disciplined Timothy for the sake of the mission. Notice how verse 5 concludes this section, "**so the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily.**" Don't we want that?

To have that we need to establish a gospel-centered tradition through personal investments in the context of a witnessing community for the sake of the mission. This is the framework through which we are to be strengthened in the grace that is in Jesus Christ! **Those who are weak in the grace of Jesus will have little to no personal investments, detached from community, and sidelined from the mission.**

Application of Point One

What Paul is saying here has profound implications to us today. Yes, Paul was writing to Timothy as another leader and pastor in the church, but certainly the command to be strengthened in the gospel and make disciples **does not end with him**. In these same verses Paul speaks of “faithful men” and “others” who would do the same. That’s includes *every* Christian!

It is impossible to establish a gospel tradition if you yourself are not strong in the gospel. We cannot command others to go where we have not been. If you are not personally being strengthened by the gospel, then the making of disciples will be a futile exercise. You don’t have it in you to do it. Those who are strengthened by the gospel know they are weak, needy, broken, and desperate people who are transformed and strengthened by grace. They don’t just get enough of God to get by. They want to be empowered by the gospel to live for the glory of Christ. Here’s how Paul described himself:

¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. (1 Cor. 15:10)

At the end of the day, Paul says I’m spent. I worked hard than all of them. I ran the race so as to win the prize. How did I do it? It was not I, but **the grace of God in me**. Whatever I am, whatever I will be, Paul says it is because I have been strengthened by the grace of God. And this is what he is exhorting Timothy to become as well.

Practically, this means **preach the gospel to yourself**. If you continually need to be strengthened in it (as these verses say), then how long can you go without rehearsing the gospel and being renewed by it in your life? One of the benefits of being on Twitter for me is everyday reading gospel tweets from people like Paul Tripp and Tullian Tchividjian. In fact, I have compiled over 200 tweets from Paul Tripp on the grace of God where I pull from to bring the gospel to bear on my life. **What means are you employing to be strengthened in the gospel?** Brothers and sisters, being weak in the gospel should not be an option, and though we are dependent upon God’s grace to do it, we do not fold our hands and wait until God shows up.

Pray the gospel into your heart. Meditate on the great truths of the person and work of Jesus. Seek out other people who are being strengthened in the gospel and be encourage by the company of many witnesses. Take the gospel and live it out on mission. Establish a gospel tradition in your life so that as you obey Christ’s command to make disciples, you are not only pointing them to Christ but you are also providing for them a faithful example to follow.

God is not stingy with his grace. He has **lavished** it upon us (Eph. 1:7-8). God is eager to show **the immeasurable riches of His grace** (Eph. 2:7). Therefore, be strengthened in it. Feel you deep need for grace today and ask God to empower you continually through His abundant provision!

Before we go on the next point, be careful to see how Paul addresses Timothy. He focuses on **who he is** before telling him what to do. What you do flows from who you are. If you tell people to do something and not explain to them how to do it, you are setting yourself up for failure.

The second thing I want you to see from this text is that those who are strengthened in the gospel will make disciples.

When the gospel tradition has been established, the transfer of the gospel will occur. The first point speaks of being **faithful to the gospel**. The second point speaks of being **fruitful in the gospel**. Those who are strengthened by the gospel will be discontent to keep it to themselves!

The way Christ builds his church is through the faithful stewardship of the gospel by His people. To be a faithful steward means **refusing to allow the gospel to terminate in your mind, your heart, or even your life**. If that is the case, then you have not gone deep enough in the gospel. The purpose of being strengthened in the gospel is to give as you have received from others. Grace turns you from being inward (me first) to being outward (others first). Brothers and sisters, **we have been given much**, have we not?! Indeed, we have much to give away!

But notice that Paul is discriminating in who should be the focus of gospel investments. There is one qualification here—**faithfulness**. Does this surprise you? The times in ministry when people have turned down opportunities to lead or serve, their reason has always been something else—I don't know enough, I am not trained enough, I am too busy, etc. In other words, we are tempted to disqualify ourselves by artificial standards while not appreciating the one thing God has put a premium on—being faithful! What does it mean to be faithful?

Faithful men are those serving, ministering, and leading without a title, without recognition or fanfare. They are content to serve without a spotlight or stage. They do it because they love God and love the church. This is what Paul discovered in Timothy. Remember in Acts 16, Paul wanted to disciple Timothy. He was someone who **ministered with tears and a sincere faith** (2 Tim. 1:4-5). He was faithful to God mind, heart, and body. And he was faithful to the church. Turn with me to Philippians 2, as I would like to read what Paul said about Timothy. Writing to the church in Philippi, he said:

¹⁹ But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. ²⁰ For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. ²¹ For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. ²² But you know his proven character, that as a son with *his* father he served with me in the gospel. (Phil. 2:19-22)

Paul had no one like Timothy who sincerely cared so much for the welfare of the church. Timothy was not about his interests. He did not seek things pertaining to himself. His heart was set on Christ and faithfully served with Paul in gospel ministry.

One of the things I've learned is that **the most outspoken and most eager people are not necessarily the most faithful**. Just because someone is passionate about something does not mean they are faithful. The measuring stick of faithfulness is **humbly and authentically living a devoted life to Jesus as a good steward of the gospel**.

What Timothy is to entrust to these faithful men are **the things he has heard from Paul**. Can anyone guess what Timothy might have heard from Paul? I am going to take a safe guess and say that was about Jesus. Paul was consumed by Jesus. He had been dominated by grace. He had nothing left to talk about than the person who had radically changed his life!

This is the transfer of the gospel—from one faithful man (Timothy) under Paul to other faithful men under Timothy. And see what the task of the faithful men is? Teach others also! This is disciples making disciples making disciples! In fact, it could be argued that there are five generations of disciple-making here. First, there is **Jesus** who discipled **Paul** who discipled **Timothy** who discipled “**faithful men**” who will disciple **others**. This is the Great Commission in action of disciple-making disciples in action! And this is what church planting churches are made up of.

These faithful men are to teach others. There is an emphasis of teaching, which makes sense, since Jesus commanded in the Great Commission to “**teach them to observe all that I have commanded you**” (Matt. 28:20). But we need to be careful not to insert our Western way of teaching into this text. While there were specific times of instruction and learning for disciples, the primary way of teaching was “on the way.” Teaching happened through the medium of shared lives. This is the kind of teaching that is transformative.

A clear example of this is seen in the case of Paul and Timothy in 1 Corinthians 4:15-17. Look what Paul says here:

¹⁵ For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. ¹⁶ Therefore I urge you, imitate me. ¹⁷ For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

Paul told Timothy that teaching is way more than being an “instructor” but that is how we think of teaching today. There are ten thousands of those. But real teaching is as a father to a son—**teaching that leads to imitation**. Paul had so taught Timothy that he could leave Timothy in Corinth with confidence that he would say what Paul would say and conduct himself the way Paul would conduct himself. This is what Paul means of “my ways in Christ as I teach . . .”. And brothers and sisters, **this is the tradition of the gospel transferred to Timothy for the purpose of teaching Corinthians and “every church.”**

Do you see it? How can Paul start a church in Corinth, a church in Philippi, a church in Ephesus, and other places? He can because he was a disciple-making disciple who was being strengthened by the gospel. This gospel tradition he transferred to other men that was transferred to other men. This process of reproduction was the fruitful response of churches rich in the gospel.

Application of Point Two

As we seek to be a church planting church, we aspire to see that kind of multiplication. For that to happen, there has to be a culture of disciple-making disciples. For that to happen, we need to be strengthened in the gospel. If we are weak in the gospel, two outcomes can occur. Either we **ignore the central task** of disciple-making altogether, or we **substitute the gospel with other means** to make disciples. Substitutes like programs, techniques, tell people to simply do more and try harder in performance-based moralism. When this happens, we create religious people and Pharisees, not disciples of Jesus who grow in repentance and faith.

You might be wondering: **“We are not a large church. How are we going to plant multiple churches in the future? Isn’t one church enough?”** The answer to that question is faith in God’s promise. The future is in the harvest. There are people in our city who have yet to be won to Jesus who will be discipled and become future teachers, growth group leaders, and potentially church planters. I believe there are future missionaries here who will end up in unreached people groups because of the gospel’s impact on their life through the make of disciples here.

When you see new faces here, what comes to your mind? “They are strangers, and they might take my seat in the sanctuary?” A disciple-maker strong in the gospel will think, “Wonderful! God has sent us someone with whom I can pour my life into and love them with the gospel!” **When you hear about new Christians** in the church, do you feel a responsibility for them? If someone dropped off a baby in this church without a mother or father, would you want to do something to help? Sure you would! And we have several spiritual babes in our congregation who could spend a couple of hours each week helping them get grounded in their faith.

So where do you begin? Let me encourage you to begin by being faithful. Be faithful in God’s Word and prayer, faithful in repentance and pursuit of holiness, faithful in the home, faithful in the church (and by that I don’t mean simply showing up on Sunday morning), faithful in the mission Jesus gave us. **Ask yourself the question, “If every church member was like me, how healthy would the church be?”**

Men, be faithful to your wives and children. They are your first and foremost disciples God gave you. Pour the gospel into them. When you get home from work, don’t tune out and ignore the opportunities in the home. Turn the TV off, turn the cell phone and computer off, and lead your family to love Jesus and grow in the gospel. If you are not faithful to disciple your wife and children in the home, then it stands to reason that you are not going to effectively disciple anyone in the church.

Ladies, take advantage of the opportunities to invest in one another through our ladies’ ministries and fellowships. It is clear in Titus 2:3-5 that older women are to train young women—this is disciple-making in action!

Singles and young people, don’t spend the strength of your years on being experts in things that don’t matter. Set aside the video games, television, and computer and get in the Word. Timothy was apparently a young man. People questioned his leadership because of his age, but Paul told him to not look down on his youth but show himself an example to others. You can do the same!

Here’s the universal principle of application. Brothers and sisters, **there is always someone ahead of you can disciple you**—therefore you should always be a **learner**. At the same time, **there is always someone behind you whom you can disciple**—therefore you should always be a **leader**. Even if you have only been a Christian for less than a year, there are people who have been a Christian for less than a month whom you could disciple! And perhaps no one would be more suited and helpful to them than someone who has just walked down that road themselves! A church planting church is comprised of people who are simultaneously learners and leaders in strengthening others in the gospel!

As I speak, we need faithful men and women. We need faithful disciple-makers who will invest in new Christians who have just come to Christ in recent months. We need to start at least three new growth groups to strengthen believers in the gospel in small groups. We need laborers who will go on mission to Haiti to train pastors in the gospel and help care for needy orphans. The need goes on and on. **But more than anything, we need to be strengthened in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is how we are going to make disciples. This is how we are going to plant church after church after church.**

Can I offer a few challenge to you today? Be strengthened in the gospel. Go hard after God. Be faithful in gospel words and deeds. Don't be indifferent toward people around you—determine to view them through the lens of what they could become through the power of God's grace. Become a disciple-maker where you are by committing a portion of your week to invest in other people with the gospel. And become a disciple-maker for the nations by going on a short-term mission trip. I am praying that 50 of us will go overseas to make the gospel known in the next 2 years.

Conclusion

The Scripture I read earlier this morning from Acts 11 was about the church in Antioch. There is one verse that has stuck out that I cannot get out of my mind. In Acts 11:23 it says:

²³When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, (ESV)

How do you see the grace of God? What does it look like? Well, one thing we know is that they were faithful to the Lord. Isn't it interesting that **faithfulness and the grace of Jesus** are connected here as it is in 2 Tim. 2:1-2? But going even further, Antioch was a disciple-making church. In verse 26, it says that Paul and Barnabas "taught a great many people for a whole year." The same **emphasis of teaching** in 2 Tim. 2:2 is displayed here as well.

But notice something with me. How did this church get started? Was it Paul or Barnabas or Timothy? No. In verse 19, the church was started when "**those who were scattered**" came to Antioch "preaching the Lord Jesus." We don't know who they were. In 2 Tim. 2:2 terms, they were probably "faithful men" or "others". And yet this church started by no-name believers on mission became the first (and most influential) church planting church recorded in Scripture. Two times in Acts 11 we read that "a great number of people were added to the Lord" (Acts 11:21, 24). This made the heart of Barnabas glad, and it should us as well.

What does the grace of God look like? How is the grace of God seen? It is seen in believers strengthened in the gospel, faithfully making disciples, teaching others, and resulting in churches being planted. May there be such a rich tradition of gospel faithfulness here at Grace that we see the fruit of the transfer of the gospel in changed lives and churches planted!

Let us pray.