

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Learning the Christian Life

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: TMC53

I want to share with you from my heart a little bit, this morning. If you'll take your Bible and look with me at 1 Corinthians chapter 4...1 Corinthians chapter 4. We have about a half an hour and I just want to draw you to some thoughts along the lines of discipleship.

A lot of people ask me, a lot of students ask me questions about discipleship. It's almost a weekly occurrence. And I thought that I might take a little bit of time this morning to share with you some of the basic elements of discipling. What is really involved in discipling someone? What really makes up a discipling relationship?

Obviously from the administration on down through faculty and staff down to students, we are committed to a discipling process. But just what does that process involve? I believe that in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 14 to the end of the chapter, verse 21, you have a good model. It's what I would call an implicit discipling model, rather than an explicit one in the sense that it doesn't say "this is discipleship." It implies it in the process of delineating the truths in this particular text. There are six elements here that I believe make up an effective discipling relationship and you need to look at this two ways...one as a discipler and the other as a discipulee, if I can coin that term. One has one being disciplined, one has one discipling someone else. This is the stuff that you have to be involved in. This is what we would be engaged in discipling someone.

Now Paul is writing to the Corinthians. They are, in every sense, his disciples. From the very beginning, they have learned from him. They continue to do so. He writes this letter to them as the one responsible for their discipleship.

Now let me give you a simple definition of the word "disciple," it means a learner. Mathetes in the Greek means a learner, one who learns. And that's all a disciple is. Discipling is simply teaching someone. It's not simply didactic, it's implanting in their life a pattern of living. In fact, I have often said that the best way to define discipleship is a deep friendship with a spiritual core. It is a deep friendship with a spiritual core. It is coming alongside someone not for the sake of instruction, but for the sake of passing on your life patterns to them. And that means that it's not just disseminating information, it's teaching them how to live a godly life. It's walking through the world with them and passing on information in the daily struggles and issues of life. Discipling someone is reproducing in them the pattern of your own life. It's more than didactic, it's more than informational, it's much deeper than that.

But there are six ingredients that Paul delineates here as he speaks regarding his relationship to the Corinthians. And I want to give you these six for your own thinking because I believe they'll help you frame up what discipleship is all about. And you can hold your discipler to this and you can be held to this by the person you may be discipling.

Number one, and we looked...let's look at the text, first of all, in verse 14 and 15. We'll read those two verses. "I do not write these things to shame you but to admonish you as my beloved children. For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel."

Now Paul here is saying you're my children, you're my disciples, you're my followers and the first reason, or the first element of that is the discipler begets. Okay? Jot that one down. He begets. This is where the relationship really begins. Paul says you are my beloved children, I feel responsible for you. That's why he wrote to them 1 Corinthians, that's why he wrote to them 2 Corinthians. That's why he spent eighteen months of his life in the city of Corinth. That is also, by the way, why he wrote to them 3 Corinthians which is not a canonical book but another letter that Paul wrote to them between 1 and 2 Corinthians that expressed his continuing concern for them. It was a book written by Paul, not by the Holy Spirit, so it doesn't show up in Scripture. But he wrote them at least three letters, two of them inspired. He spent 18 months of his life there. He was intimately involved in the process of nurturing them as his disciples. But it all began when he beget them. And verse 15 is where we go to see that.

He says, "If you were to have countless tutors," now this is an interesting word, paidagogos...paidagogos. The word means "moral guardians." It's not the idea of a teacher. It's the idea of someone who was hired by a family to come alongside the children in the family and guard their moral development. It would be a slave in most cases, not hired to teach them but hired to guard them, hired to walk with them, to spend his time with them, to make sure their lives were as they ought to be, almost like a nanny might be, almost like a guardian. We could translate it, "You may have ten thousand," that's the Greek word, "you may have ten thousand moral guardians, you might have an unlimited number of people who are concerned about your moral development. Yet you would not have many fathers." How many fathers does anyone have? One. You only have one who begets.

So you may have ten thousand people concerned with your moral development, but you only have one father for in Christ Jesus...and here the emphatic use of ego, I only became your father through the gospel. The discipling process begins when you beget someone, when you father them into the faith. That's where the discipling process begins. And when you have followed through on your responsibility to communicate Christ and have the privilege of leading someone to the Lord, then you become their spiritual father. And they might have ten thousand moral guardians but they will view

you in a unique relationship. They will see you as their spiritual father, having begotten him through the gospel, and there will be a bond there like no other bond. I can tell you that from personal experience. The people that I have had the privilege of leading to Christ have a far different relationship to me than any other people because they see me as a very special instrument of God in their life and the attachment is almost frightening.

I was in Phoenix and I was in Albuquerque this week doing pastors conferences all week long and on occasion during those times when I was having rallies with...really we had several thousand people at the rallies, and then the seminars during the day with pastors, people would come up to me tearfully, want to hug me and say, "I was saved listening to you preach...I was saved listening to your radio program...I was saved reading something that you wrote." There is a bonding there that's really remarkable. And the purest, truest kind of discipling process flows out of that one-to-one relationship when one begets another through the gospel of Jesus Christ. And you will find in that such a fulfilling and such a joy because the bond of love is deep.

Now you say, "Well are you saying that you should never disciple somebody you haven't led to Christ?" No, because let's face it, a lot of people have been led to Christ who don't have access to the person who was instrumental in leading them to Christ. Maybe the person is moved away, maybe it's like me, they read a book or heard a tape or listened to a radio program, or maybe someone led them to Christ and was unfaithful to follow them up. So I've often thought that the world is surely full of new babes in Christ who are lying around kicking and screaming, pleading for somebody to feed them and change their diapers, you know. So there are a lot of folks who are around that aren't being disciplined because whoever disciplined them either would not, or could not follow them up.

But just remember this. The bonding in discipleship is the purest and the most fulfilling when you have been the spiritual father in that relationship. It begins with evangelism. And if we are to be a true discipler, we are to be a true evangelist. To bring someone to Christ is what starts the whole thing and obviously it would be ideal if everyone who led someone to Christ was responsible to follow them up, that's not always possible. And so from time to time we'll have to pick up the children of other people and become a surrogate father to them in the discipling process. But that's where it all starts.

So let me just encourage you, young people, that it's essential that we be involved in the discipling element of begetting, bringing people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. I was so encouraged this morning in the ministry forum class which I have on Monday morning, a number of the questions this morning came from students asking how to be more effective in evangelism, how to be more effective in one on one, how to be more effective in leading someone to Jesus Christ. Of course that's tremendously encouraging to me, because that's where the discipling process begins. And when you lead someone to Jesus Christ, you feel the bond of that.

I can give you a strange but true illustration. I had the privilege of leading a girl to Christ. She came out of a pagan, unsaved family. And it was very difficult for me because I was...she was a high school gal and I was a high school guy. I was a senior in high school and I had the privilege of leading a girl to Christ. It just so happened that she was a lovely girl and I was very privileged to lead her to Christ. For a number of years, it was a tremendous burden in her heart because she couldn't separate the affection she felt for me as her spiritual father from the kind of love that she would feel toward a man she wanted to marry and it came to the point where two weeks before her wedding to another man, she came to me and said, "If you will marry me, I'll call the wedding off."

Now I was so young that I really didn't know how to handle that. But I've looked back on that...I did not marry her, by the way, she did not call the wedding off. She went ahead and married the guy, which was fine. I didn't feel that that was God's purpose for either of us at the time, and it obviously was not. But the point was, the bond was so strong that I had to teach her that the spiritual bond you feel toward someone is not necessarily the indication of God that that's to be your life partner. But I've often thought of that bonding that occurs when you have the privilege of leading someone to Jesus Christ.

Talk about a true friend, you looking for a true friend? Lead someone to Christ, now you have a friend, probably a friend that in most cases will stick closer than a brother.

The second element in discipling, after you've begotten someone, notice verse 14. Paul is writing to them and he's been, for all intents and purposes, blistering them up one side and down the other for four chapters, I mean he has really laid them out. What is the highest form of abuse or criticism? Well usually people say sarcasm. Sarcasm is the highest form, the most volatile form of verbal scathing and he gets very sarcastic with them in chapter 4. In fact he in verse...you might look at verse 8, get the sarcasm he says to these Corinthians, "You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us, aren't you hot stuff?" Now that's sarcastic stuff. "I would indeed that you had become kings." He is so upset with them that he's being sarcastic. And verse 11 he says, "We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise. We are weak, but you are strong." All dripping sarcasm. He is very upset. "You are distinguished, we are without honor," and so forth.

] Now why is he talking like this? And their ears are beginning to burn and then you come to verse 14. He says, "I don't write these things to shame you." Listen, you never want to bring into a relationship the goal of shaming someone, that's negative. You don't want to just shame people. You don't want to just embarrass them. You don't want to just put them down. He says, "I don't write these things to shame you, to embarrass you." But, here it comes, "To admonish you." And there's the second element in the discipling process. He not only begets, but he admonishes.

Now what does it mean to admonish? Put down the word "warn." Her warns, that's really what it means. This is a Greek verb, noutheteo, and what it means is it means to admonish or encourage

someone with a view toward impending judgment. It's warning. It's saying, "Look, if you continue to go the way you're going to go, the consequences are going to be serious." He says, "That's why I'm writing this way to you. It's because I'm warning you about the path you're headed in." The Corinthians were in discord. They were saying, "I'm of Paul," and others were saying, "I'm of Apollos," others were saying, "I'm of Christ," and some were saying, you know, I'm of Cephas." There was discord there. There was a failure to acknowledge that they would judge the world and therefore they ought to judge in their own quarrels and squabbles and they were going to the courts of men and they had no business taking their problems before the worldly pagan courts. They were messed up about singleness. They were messed up about marriage. They were messed up about sex. They were messed up about remarriage. They were fouled up about meat offered to idols and pagan worship. They were confused about many, many things. They were confused, as you know later on, about spiritual gifts. They were confused about the resurrection from the dead. There were all kinds of problems in that church and Paul is saying to them, "I have to warn you that if you continue in this path, you're going to face some serious consequences."

I believe that's part of the discipling process. There's a warning thing here that when you love somebody you warn them. Certainly as a father I warn my children out of love. Nobody says, "Why do you continually warn your children? Don't you love them?" Wait a minute. I warn them because I love them. "Don't touch that, it's hot." "Don't get in there, it will burn you." "Don't walk in the street, you might get hit by a car." I mean, that's normal expression of love that says you better not do that or the consequences are going to be bad.

A couple of weeks ago in church I gave an illustration, I just repeat it for those of you who might not have been there. I turned on a Christian radio program and a lady called up, counseling program, and she said, "I'm a Christian and I have a real problem and I want to ask you about my problem."

And the counselor on there said, "Fine."

She said, "I am a...I am really a compulsive sex addict," which is kind of a dumb term but that's the way she put it. She said, "I just...I just want to have sex all the time."

And he said, "Well, how do you mean...how does this manifest itself?"

She said, "Well, I just go to bed with everybody, anybody. I meet somebody, I want to go to bed with them I'm just compelled to do that."

And he said to her...this is a Christian radio station, Christian counseling program, he said to her, "Tell me about your father."

She said, "Oh, my father was passive. He never gave me any advice, never told me anything, he was just passive."

And he said, "Uh-huh, yeah, that fits." Then he said, "Tell me about your mother."

She said, "Love/hate, love/hate. I love my mother, she loves me, but I hate the fact that she's overbearing and dominating and she always tries to control me."

"I see...I see. Don't you see why you're acting like this? You're trying to penalize your mother and your father. You're trying to penalize your father who gave you no direction by saying you didn't give me any direction, and now look the way I am. You're trying to penalize your mother who was overbearing, tried to control your life by saying...now I'm out of your control, see how I'm living, take that. And don't you see what you're doing is...see, you're doing this to pay back your parents for the deep wounds they've applied in your life." Then he said, "You know what you really need, you need therapy." And he said, "It's going to take a long time."

She said, "Oh, I've already been in therapy a year."

"Oh," he says, "it's going to take longer than that." He said, "It's like taking a piece of meat out of the freezer, you can't eat it, you've got to let it thaw and you're going to take a long time to thaw." And then he said this, "What you need, you need to find a loving, accepting church environment where people are really willing to work with you as you struggle to deal with this issue."

And I said to myself, "That's the biggest bunch of baloney I ever heard in my life." What he should have said to her is, "I don't know if you're a Christian since fornicators don't inherit the Kingdom of God. But should it be true that you might be a Christian living in sin, may I please say to you, dear lady, please get on your knees and repent of your fornication and cry out before God for His grace before the wrath of God falls upon you and you be chastened severely for the way you're living. You don't need an accepting environment, you need a confronting environment. That's what discipling does. It doesn't coddle sin, it confronts it in love. It doesn't tolerate it."

But that's the mood of the day that says since it isn't your fault anyway, why should we hold you responsible for your behavior?

Paul certainly didn't handle things that way. In 1 Corinthians he says, "You better stay away from that sexual sin." He was very confrontive. That's part of discipleship, it's an admonishing, it's an accountability. I hold you responsible for virtue. I have people in my life who call me during the week at set intervals to tell me whether they have committed a certain sin. And they do that during the week because I have set up an accountability with them to hold them accountable not to commit that sin. And some of them have fallen into such habit patterns that they have to call me every couple of days

to report in because I demand that of them. I want to pray for you and I want to help you get over this sin, this thing that's in your life and the only way I know to do that is to make you responsible to tell me every time you do it, so call me every other day and tell me whether you've committed that sin. And invariably they don't want to have to tell me that so that accountability becomes a deterrent and if you can follow that pattern long enough, you can break the back of some habits. That's accountability and that's done out of love.

You admonish. A discipling relationship confronts sin in a loving way. Hey, you do it how? As Galatians 6 says, "You that are spiritual....what?...restore such a one in love considering yourself lest you also be tempted." You're not impervious to that. You do it with love but you do it, admonish.

Third factor in discipleship. This too is vital. An effective discipler begets, an effective discipler warns. Thirdly, an effective discipler loves. And I just draw this out verse 14 where he says, "To admonish you as my beloved children."

Paul, we think of him always, you know, as this great mind, this analytical, critical thinker, this massive intellect, but he had a heart of tremendous compassion. He had a gentleness about him. He had a meekness. He had a caring spirit and it's manifested in the way he loved. He loved deeply and he loved profoundly and he loved unhesitatingly and he loved sacrificially. And he says to these Corinthians, "My beloved children..." and in so doing he cracks a little window on his feelings toward them and says, "I love you." And let me tell you something, young people, you will never effectively disciple anyone that you do not love because it is the love that you show to them that binds them to you. That's the attraction in the relationship. That's the bonding element. As you demonstrate your love to them, they hold tightly to you because love is the greatest of all things to experience.

You say, "What do you mean by love? You mean feelings?" Not just that. I mean basically sacrifice. How does somebody know you love them? When you sacrifice for them. If you say, "Hey, I want to disciple you, I really do." And they say to you, "Could we meet, I have a real burden, could we meet and pray?" "Oh I'm sorry, let's see...it will be...oh boy, how about next Tuesday at four?" The message you just sent is, "Look, I want to disciple you, it's a duty I'd like to perform, but I'm not really too concerned about you to be honest with you." You are sending loud signals to that person that you don't love them and love is the bond that holds the relationship together.

The way you demonstrate that love is not by feeling the warm and fuzzies, not holding hands and swaying back and forth and singing songs. The way you demonstrate that love is how much sacrifice you make for that person. What are you sacrificing for that person? Is that the...that's the message you're sending. If that person knows you have them in your heart and that to the point where you sacrifice things on your agenda for them, there's going to be the essence of love that's going to make the relationship hold together.

It's very simple. Jesus in John 13 washed the disciples feet, then He said, "By this shall all men know that you're My disciples if you have love one for another." How are you going to love one another? "Just as I have loved you." How had He loved them? By washing their dirty feet. That wasn't His choice, that was their need. And when you set aside your choice for someone else's needs, you send signals of love, biblical love, spiritual love that binds a relationship together.

So discipleship means begetting, it means admonishing, and it means loving which means sacrificing myself for you. I believe that some of you because it's typical of any group of Christian people will make it through most of your life without ever setting aside any significant things in your life for the sake of anybody else. You will do it until maybe you learn the hard way and you wake up to find that you don't have anybody left in your circle of friends. You don't have any relationships that have any depth at all because you're not giving up anything to make those relationships what God would have them to be.

Number four, the fourth element in effective discipleship is to set an example...to set an example. It is more important what you do than what you say. And I know there are some people who say, "You know, I don't know if I could be a very good discipler, I don't know much theology. Or I don't know if I could be a very good discipler because I'm not sure what the principles of discipleship are.

That isn't the issue. The issue in discipling someone is to come alongside of them and model a virtuous life. Whatever you may say or not say, certainly it can be strengthened as your effectiveness as a communicator, but the real issue here is exemplary. Look at verse 16. Paul says, "I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me, be imitators of me." Pattern your life after me and that's what a discipler has to say, "I want you to be like me." Does that put any back pressure on you? I mean, if you're discipling someone, you say, "Be like me." Now that ought to put some heat on you, right? Do you expect them to have a prayer life? Then you better have one. Do you expect them to have a time in the Word of God, you better have one. If you expect them to love the Lord with all their heart, then you better do that. If you expect them to be sacrificial Christians, then you better be one because that's exactly what they'll pick up...the level of our own life pattern.

You see, a true discipleship relationship is intimate enough for that to be manifest. It's intimate enough for that to be manifest. And frankly, young people, you probably right now in the years, or the four years you're here at the Master's College, have the greatest possible training ground on the face of the earth to learn the discipling process because never again in your life will you probably live in a communal environment like this. Once you step out of this thing, marry somebody, you'll go into your own little box on your own little street and it will be the end of intimate community for you. And you can, from then on, pretty much isolate who you are to the three, four, five people that live in your house. But while you're here, who you are ripples all down the hall, doesn't it? The impact, the potential impact for the discipling process here may be the greatest it will ever be in your life unless

you wind up with a career in a submarine, or something like that.

That's one of the neat things about athletics. Athletics throws people together and in athletic competition, whatever you are on the inside comes screaming out for everybody to see and it's in that kind of thing where everything is transparent and visible that real relationships are born and built. That's the strength of that. That's why you can...I look back and the conflict of athletics and I made bonds with people that I'll have a lifetime even though I don't ever see them again because I know the depths of their emotions and feelings and attitudes because they all came out in the artificial conflict of competition. So you have a tremendous opportunity here to live an exemplary life and to impact and affect probably the widest range of people you ever will.

I'll put it very personally. You will by your example here probably influence more people than I can by my example. I am mostly a voice and I live in a house with a family and I can impact them with what my life is, but I don't live in a dormitory. And the potential for one-to-one impact of an exemplary life is great and that's the heart and soul of the discipling process.

So Paul says, "Imitate me," and that's what the discipler has to say, "Imitate me." You've seen me in the morning. You've seen me at night. You see me all through the day. You see my reactions to difficulty. You see my reactions to good things. You see how I use my time, how I use my money, how I use my eyes, my ears, everything, my body. It's all there for you to see.

Verse 17 says, and following up the same thing, "For this reason," that is the reason that I want you to imitate me, "I have sent to you Timothy who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord and he'll remind you of my ways which are in Christ." Paul says I've reproduced myself in Timothy and since I want you to be like me, I'm sending him because he's already like me. So it's a matter of setting an example. You know, the fun of discipleship is reproducing yourself. And, you know, you sit back and all of a sudden you look at this guy you've poured your life into and he comes to you and you just...you almost want to laugh...I've had this experience...because he's just...he's regurgitating back to you everything you've shown him, only he thinks he's discovered it all. You know, he's saying, "Boy, you know how I feel about this..." and you're just smiling away cause that's exactly how you feel about it. And he gives you all his concerns, and all his passions and you're just smiling away because you know where he got them all. That's the joy of the reproductive process. You set the example.

Let people come alongside you and learn how you live, how you think, how you react and set the example. Paul says, "I want you to imitate me so I'm sending Timothy who imitates me and you can imitate him and thus imitate me.

Number five, an effective discipler teaches...he begets, he warns, he loves, he sets an example, he teaches. Paul at the end of verse 17 says, "I teach everywhere in every church." So he says, "I want you to follow my pattern, I want you to follow my pattern as exemplified in Timothy, he will remind you

of my ways which are in Christ. He'll show you how I lived. And though they're the same ways I teach everywhere." So there's another component in discipling, there is teaching.

You say, "What do I do in this process?" For years and years I...I've disciplined men by taking them through books of the Bible, teaching them the things of the Bible, teaching them theology, teaching them all kinds of things, that's part of it. I've also recommended many books that I love and books that I think are very important that I encourage them to read and give them instruction in areas of Christian development, biblical truth, doctrine and so forth. That's a part of it. You give them principles and you give them precepts.

Some of you were in church yesterday morning, did you notice what I said as I was introducing the message? "Principles can only go so far, teaching can only go so far," and I made this distinction, it's a good one to keep in mind. "Teaching tells me what I am to do, teaching shows me my duty. Example proves to me it's possible." That's good, that's encouraging because if all I got was principles, principles, principles, principles, principles and I looked at my own life, I'd say, "I can't hack it, I can't make it." So you show me someone who is and I say, "Hey, not only is this my duty but it's possible."

So you teach the principles, you teach the precepts. You give people the Word of God. You give them good material, good books to read, whatever you want to give them in the discipling process and then in your example you show them that responding to those principles is possible...it's possible.

And then the last principle, number six. And let's just say he disciplines...he disciplines. The discipler disciplines, or she disciplines, either one. Would you notice in verse 18, "Some of you have become arrogant and you don't think I'm coming to you." Paul says, "Some of you people I've poured my life in, you don't think I'm going to come back to Corinth, so you're just out on your own doing your own thing and you're proud about it." But verse 19, "I will come to you...I will come to you if the Lord wills and I'm going to find out not the words of those that are arrogant, but their power." I'm going to come and I'm going to find out if you're all talk or if you've really got some clout. "For the Kingdom of God doesn't consist in words but in power."

So what do you desire? Look at this, verse 21, "Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness?" What's he saying? He's saying, "Even when we're severed in that discipling relationship, even when we've separated, I'm going to come back to you and if you think you can get away with anything, you're wrong because I'm going to confront you and I'm going to confront your arrogance and find out if you've really got the clout you claim to have." So he's saying you better get your act together so that when I come to you I don't have to come with a rod because if you've got things right with the Lord, I can come with a spirit of love and gentleness.

Now what I want you to see in this point is this, there's a sense in which you never lose the disciple. People say to me, "How long do you disciple someone before you give them up?" Let me tell you something. Once you've disciplined someone effectively, you never give them up the rest of your life. I had a guy I disciplined for three years, I poured my life into that guy. We separated because he moved to another area. I heard about him being involved in sinful things. I basically enacted 1 Corinthians, I went to him, I confronted him, I disciplined him, I went with a rod in that kind of situation. And I said, "Out of sight is not out of mind, we have a relationship and I want to confront that sin which is in your life." And I called him back to repentance.

That's part of it, too. That's part of it, too. Now you may not be able to follow up everybody that you've influenced but the need to follow up. And so he says to the Corinthians, "Hey, I'm coming, I'm coming to see you." And he writes a letter. "And I hope when I get there I'm going to find that you can take me in love and gentleness rather than with a rod."

Now, how then do we disciple? Beget, warn, love, set an example, teach and discipline when discipline is necessary. That really is the simple stuff of which discipleship is made. And that's really what we would hope and pray all of us would be doing with our lives. And my prayer is, of course, that you would do that and that you'll know the joy of the kind of bond that occurs.

Can I just draw a conclusion right here and then I'll let you go? And it is this, the dearest person in Paul's life was whom? Timothy, dearest friend he had. And why? Because he had made the greatest discipling investment in his life. You want a lifelong friend? That's where to have it. And let me suggest that that's the bond even that will hold a man and a woman together when they see the challenge of discipling one another in Christ's likeness. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for our time today. What a good time. What a refreshing time. We thank You for all that You're doing in our lives and in our college and we pray that we might be effective in reproducing the very life of Christ in those that are around us. Give us somebody that we could nurture in the faith that we can pour our life into for Your glory, not for ours, but for Yours and that they might be effective in exalting Your name and it's in that very name, the name of Christ we pray. Amen. God bless you, have a good day.

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