

ENTRUST TO FAITHFUL MEN

I am not sure there is any verse in the New Testament that better describes our stewardship responsibilities to ensure the future continuation and growth of the church than 2 Timothy 2:2. Paul writes to his younger, spiritual protégé, *and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.* It has been said and is painfully true the church is only one generation away from extinction. For this reason, Paul's words to Timothy are so critically important for church leaders today.

I fear that in too many cases, many godly, spiritual leaders of our day have, practically speaking, abandoned the practice of one-on-one discipleship with young, future Kingdom leaders. Consequently, this topic is critically important for us to soberly consider as we seek to be good and faithful stewards of the King's bride. Paul's mentoring relationship with Timothy is a model for us. I like the definition of a mentor being "Someone whose hindsight can become your foresight." We who are further down the road are telling those who are behind us what lies ahead of them.

The New Testament uses this word *entrust* 19 times. Paul uses this word five times in his two letters to Timothy. It literally means "to make a deposit or place goods in trust with another." There are two assumptions here: (1) Whatever is deposited, or placed in trust with another, is valuable enough to be watched, guarded, and cared for by another, and (2) The person making the deposit, or placing the property in trust, sufficiently trusts the other person to preserve and protect it. No doubt the Christian message is valuable enough; the question is whether the trustee is responsible enough?

We must keep in mind that there is a huge difference between merely informing and entrusting. Informing is simply the conveyance of information. Entrusting carries with it the expectation that the recipient has been adequately trained and prepared to assume the duties and responsibilities of preserving and faithfully disseminating the entrusted message to others. Our stewardship is not just to keep the message pure, but to ensure that those to whom we will entrust it will keep it pure as well. This is Paul's admonition to Timothy, *As I have carefully entrusted it to you, now you also need to carefully entrust it to other faithful men.*

This Kingdom challenge to prepare men and women and entrust them to teach and model the Christian message in their ministries appears to contain three challenges that every Kingdom leader must wrestle with if they are going to successfully carry out this important stewardship charge.

Our Responsibility

Unfortunately, the great commission is often reduced to a call to get the world saved. But that is not what Jesus has commissioned us to do. In Matthew 28:19 Jesus instructs us to, *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...* We are called to make disciples, not just converts. We are called to make mature adults, not just lots of babies. We are called to grow the church deep, not just wide.

I am concerned that our contemporary church growth methodologies seem to be focusing more on growing crowds than on growing disciples. And sadly, our ministry success is generally measured by the size of our church attendance (easy to measure) and not the depth and maturity of our people (nearly impossible to measure). Yet, in our more quiet moments of reflection, I think we all question if in our efforts to grow the church larger, we are missing growing it deeper.

I would suggest that current church growth strategies seem to be the opposite of the ones the Founder (Jesus) of the church utilized. Jesus spent three years working with 12 and out of those 12, He focused even more closely on three. And then after three years, He entrusted the future proclamation of His message and the establishment and growth of the church to a frightened band of believers. Then He left. Mission accomplished. The rest of the story is history: countless millions have followed this small band of deeply discipled believers with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus knew, and I think we all agree, that you cannot disciple crowds. You can teach them, but you cannot disciple them. True discipleship is a one-on-one, face-to-face, heart-to-heart, and life-on-life relationship. There are no shortcuts. There are no mass discipleship approaches. It is just the tedious task of one life at a time over a long period of time.

Let me ask you what may be an uncomfortable question. Are you currently in this kind of individual discipleship relationship with anyone? Twenty years from now, who will say that you were the single, most influential person in their life? I fear for many pastors and church leaders, the answer is, "No one."

Let me ask you another question. Who, besides your own family members, have been the most influential people in your life? Why were they so influential? Let me guess, because they made a significant, personal investment in your life, one-on-one. In whose life are you making a significant investment right now? There is an old proverb that says, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." I believe the opposite is also true, "When the teacher is ready, the student will appear." When you are ready to become the teacher, your student will appear.

Our Temptation

The temptation to neglect personal discipleship in our ministries is quite strong. The tyranny of the urgent (the demands of the crowds) overwhelms the priority of the important (personal discipleship). If I were to ask those who know you best, how would they characterize your ministry? Would they say it was one more focused on raising up leaders or more focused on raising up followers—i.e. growing more shepherds or growing more sheep? Interesting question, isn't it? A true leader seems to be the one who is focused on raising up those who may not just someday fill his shoes, but will someday stand on his shoulders.

Let me illustrate this temptation to focus on size instead of depth by asking you which you would prefer: (1) \$1 million dollars, or (2) a penny doubled every day for 31 days? Most would not think long before choosing the \$1 million. The truth is, even after 80 percent of the month has passed, the penny doubled every day is still only \$168,000. But it is those last few days that make all the difference because by the 31st day, the penny doubled every day breaks over \$10 million.

That is the difference between focusing on growing crowds versus growing disciples. The crowds can be made rather quickly; disciples on the other hand are made quite slowly. Hence, our temptation to go after the

known million dollars (the crowds) instead of the penny doubled every day (disciples) is alluring. It has been my observation crowds do not reproduce crowds, but disciples do reproduce disciples. Jesus' discipleship methods have produced legions of followers who have come to the Lord because Christ entrusted His message and ministry to a few faithful men who were able to teach (train/mentor) others.

Our Legacy

I believe the greatest eternal, Kingdom legacy a pastor can leave will not be established by what he personally accomplishes in his ministry, but by what those he personally mentors collectively accomplish in theirs.

Paul entrusted his ministry to Timothy, Elijah entrusted his ministry to Elisha, and Moses entrusted his ministry to Joshua. Through the ages, great leaders raised up other great leaders and entrusted them the stewardship of the life and message of Jesus for the coming generations.

We need to resist taking the short view of our ministry and instead take the long view. We can be certain that the church will continue to grow and flourish in the future when older men of God are committed to "planting trees" in whose shade they know they will never sit. Who is your Timothy, your Elisha, or your Joshua? Into whom are you making a deposit? To whom have you entrusted the sacred and eternal truths in order to carry the message on to the coming generations? When your days of ministry are finally over, will the number of future leaders in the church be greater and stronger because you were here? Will future generations be able to eat from the fruit of trees you planted generations before?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR — E. G. "JAY" LINK

E. G. "Jay" Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University's Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded the Stewardship Resource Group to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.