

I Timothy 4:6-16

Before I became a Christian, the word “disciple” meant someone like a student that follows a person that has a specific technical skill. It can be a student of a carpenter, a mechanic, etc. Disciple in biblical term means something that is different. Jesus’ relationship with His followers is the best example of discipleship. We can also learn a lot from the relationship between Paul and Timothy.

The book of I Timothy is a letter written from Paul to Timothy at about AD62. During Paul’s missionary journey, Paul wrote this letter while he went on to Macedonia (I Tim. 1:3). When Paul realized that he might not return to Ephesus at that time (I Tim. 3:14-15), he wrote this first letter to Timothy to instruct him to supervise the growing churches in Ephesus. This book contains description on church leader qualities (chapter 3:1-13 & 5:17-25). I Timothy is considered as one of the key Bible books on church leadership. Paul also told Timothy to refute false teachings that have been infiltrating the church as stated in various chapters/verses in this letter.

Timothy was a disciple of Paul. Paul treated Timothy like his son (I Tim. 1:2). Timothy might have heard of Paul and became a Christian due to Paul’s first missionary journey to Lystra (Acts 14). Timothy joined Paul in Paul’s second missionary journey in Lystra (Acts 16). Then Paul became the spiritual father to Timothy. Paul mentored Timothy in many ways for Timothy to grow spiritually. At a point where Timothy became spiritual mature, he became a partner of Paul in ministry as shown in I & II Timothy during Paul’s final missionary journey. Let’s learn several main points on discipleship from this book.

1) Discipleship contains teaching and reminding

Teaching as part of discipleship is clearly stated in Matt. 28:20. Paul taught Timothy once Timothy started to follow Paul as in Acts 16. Teaching didn’t stop after the discipler has taught a subject one time. It requires some reminding as shown in I Timothy. Paul taught and reminded Timothy to teach local church members to be godly and put our hope in the living God (I Tim. 4:6-10). Paul also reminded Timothy to fan into flame the gift of God (II Tim. 1:6).

Paul also taught and reminded Timothy to set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity (I Tim. 4:12). Paul must have

taught and mentored Timothy on God's truth and knowledge before but Paul emphasized conducts here. A person's godly conducts are much more important and powerful to bring people closer to God than pure knowledge. I Cor. 13:2 also supports this point.

2) Discipleship involves observing and imitating

A disciple needs to observe the discipler in order to learn. Just observing is not enough. A disciple needs to follow and copy what the discipler did. II Tim. 3:10-11 stated Paul and Timothy's close relationship such that Timothy can copy Paul. "You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them." (II Tim. 3:10-11)

3) Discipleship provides affirmation and encouragement

A disciple can get tired or discouraged sometimes in the discipleship process especially when one has been sent out like Timothy. Affirmation and encouragement from the discipler are very important. In I Tim. 1: 2, it states "my true son in the faith". Paul affirmed Timothy that he cares a lot about him and fully supports him. Regardless how spiritually Timothy became like at the time of the letter (a church leader), Paul still cared a lot about him and that relationship never change. I Tim. 4:12 states "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young ...". Paul affirmed and encouraged Timothy because Paul knew that Timothy might face obstacles and not be respected. When we as disciples face challenges, an encouragement from our spiritual leader or discipler is so needed. Of course, prayer is always part of discipleship (II Tim. 1:3) because our Trinity God is the best discipler, comforter and assurance provider.

4) Discipleship is an extension of the discipler's ministry

The most important part of discipleship is to extend the work of Christ. Paul can not be back at Ephesus but Timothy was Paul's extension of the ministry. The compound effect of discipleship is multiplication of God's ministries that can reach more people and places. Matt. 28:19-20 states that each of us should disciple others and that is the extension of Christ's ministry to the end of age.

Rev. Mark Kor Cheng was one of the pioneer in mission ministry for Chinese churches in the 1960's to 90's. He was a pastor for my local church at one time, and I followed him in serving. I followed him in some local mission activities, and had host missionaries in my home with his guidance. I learned a lot by observing his humbleness and his view on global evangelism. He was at a fairly old age when he became the pastor of my local church. Even at a relatively old age he disciplined a team of followers/coworkers to extend his (God's) ministry which he was too old for some of the activities. Younger followers like me took over the torch and went forward on the evangelism race. Praise the Lord for such opportunity for my spiritual growth and participation in mission ministries. May you also participate in discipleship to carry on the torch of God's ministries.