2 Timothy 2:1-7 *Disciples Who Make Disciples: Spiritual Parenting*

***Coaching Tree*This is one** of the most famous pictures ever taken of a college football coaching staff. This is the coaching staff of the 1983 Iowa Hawkeyes.

This photo is famous not so much because that was such a good football team—they weren’t bad, they went 9 and 3 and lost to the Florida Gators in the Gator bowl; they ended the season ranked 14th in the nation—but the picture is famous because of the collection of coaching talent. Some of the best college football coaches of the last 30 years are in this picture.

The Hawkeyes’ head coach was Hayden Fry. He’s the guy in the suit coat in the middle. He had a career record of 232-178-10. He was Iowa’s coach from 1979 until 1998. He is credited with making Iowa football into a respectable program. He was national coach of the year in 1981. He’s a member of the college football Hall of Fame.

But consider some of the guys with him. Back row, on your left, is Bill Snyder. He is the current head coach at Kansas State, a position he has held for about 30 years, with a 3 year break for a retirement that didn’t take. His career record is 204-106-1. He was national coach of the year in 1998. The football stadium at Kansas State is named after him. He’s a member of the college football Hall of Fame.

Front row, second from your left, is Barry Alvarez. Alvarez went on to be the head coach at Wisconsin for 16 years. He was coach of the year in 1993. His career record is 118-73-4. Today he is the athletic director at Wisconsin. He is a member of the college football Hall of Fame.

Two guys over from Alvarez is Dan McCarney. McCarney is probably the most popular and successful head coach Iowa State has ever had. He coached the Cyclones for 11 years. During that time, he took them to 5 bowl games. The Cyclones have only 7 other bowl games in their history. Of the men in this photo who went on to become head coaches, McCarney is the only one with a career losing record.

Next to McCarney, bottom row on your far right, is Bob Stoops. Bob Stoops retired as the head coach at Oklahoma last year, after coaching for 18 years. He won the National Championship in 2000 and was twice named national coach of the year. His career record is 190 and 48.

And finally, standing next to Hayden Fry—on Hayden’s right—is Kirk Ferentz. Ferentz succeeded Fry as the head coach at Iowa in 1999. Thanks to Snyder’s brief retirement, Ferentz is currently the longest tenured head coach in Division 1 college football. He was the national coach of the year in 2002. His career record is 150-113.

So, let me summarize: Counting Fry, there are 6 division 1 head coaches in this picture. Between them, they have one national championship, 6 national coach of the year awards, 3 Hall of Fame spots (with the likelihood that both Stoops and Ferentz will get in some day) and a combined winning percentage of about 60%.

One of the phrases used in the sports world is “coaching tree.” That’s a way of talking about assistant coaches who serve under a head coach and then go on to be head coaches themselves. It is widely acknowledged that Hayden Fry has one of the most impressive coaching trees in college football. And when you consider the assistant coaches that served under some of these guys before going on to lead their own programs—guys like Brett Bielema and Lincoln Riley and Mike Leach and Paul Chryst and Rex Ryan and more—it gets even more impressive. When you follow the branches of Hayden Fry’s coaching tree, you find that nearly every college football program in the last 3 decades has been touched by him.

And I bring it up because I believe that, as Christians, we should also have coaching trees. That is to say, we are called to influence people for Jesus who will then go on and influence others. We are called to reproduce our Christian lives.

***Spiritual Generations***Here’s the verse that made me think of coaching trees. **It’s 2 Timothy 2:2:**

**2**And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

This is the Apostle Paul writing to Timothy. Remember, Timothy was a close friend of Paul’s who became a Christian on Paul’s first missionary journey. On Paul’s second journey Timothy joined him, and became a valuable assistant. After traveling with Paul for 10 years Timothy became the pastor of the church in Ephesus. The books of the Bible we know as 1 and 2 Timothy are Paul’s letters of advice as Timothy begins caring for the church. We think of Timothy as a young pastor at the time, though we learned last week that he may have been in his mid-40s at this point.

And what Paul is doing here is he is laying out a vision for how the good news about Jesus is going to be spread. It’s Paul’s coaching tree. This is the plan of transmission.

What’s going to happen is that **Paul is going to share what he knows with Timothy**. “The things you have heard me say.” The “pattern of sound teaching” as it says a few verses earlier (2 Timothy 1:13). Paul shares what it means to be a Christian and how to live as a Christian with Timothy.

Then, it becomes Timothy’s **responsibility to “entrust” this “good deposit” with “reliable people.”** As the pastor and leader of the church in Ephesus, Timothy needs to find some trustworthy people who he can invest his life in and share what it means to follow Jesus. In other words, he needs to disciple them.

**These people, in turn, will be qualified to teach others.** They will pass on what they know of the Christian life to more people and then, presumably, **these others will share it with still more** people and more people and more.

This is sometimes referred to as spiritual generations, or spiritual parenting. In this verse alone, Paul references four generations of faith. The first generation is himself. The second generation is Timothy. The third generation are the ones Paul calls “reliable people.” And the fourth generation are others. If we were to play it out far enough, we could see how you and I eventually fit into the coaching tree that started with Paul (and, of course, we could go before Paul all the way to Jesus, who is the root of the tree).

I’ve seen this verse **represented graphically to show the power of multiplication.** Imagine aperson who shares Jesus with two people, and then spends a year teaching them what it means to be a Christian and how to live as a disciple. Then, imagine each of those two people finding two more, and sharing Jesus with them, and spending a year teaching them what it means to follow Jesus. Then, in the third year, imagine those four people each sharing Jesus with two people each, and so on.

The power of multiplication is such that by about the 33rd generation over 8 billion people will have been taught about Jesus! That is to say, if every Christian would help 2 people a year to know Christ, and all those new converts also reached 2 people a year, the entire world would know Jesus in a little more than 30 years.

Of course, it doesn’t work out quite that way. The math is good, but the reality is that not every Christian is reaching two new people every year. God doesn’t produce disciples like widgets in a factory. He uses us to reach others in a wide variety of ways and unpredictable patterns. His methods are not always smooth and symmetrical.

But the principle of spiritual parenting is still part of His plan**. Paul’s instructions to Timothy** are God’s instructions to us. What we have heard we are to pass on to others. We should all have a spiritual coaching tree. We should all be disciples who make disciples.

***Review***Today we are finishing up a series by that name: *Disciples who Make Disciples*. As we’ve begun our new church year, I’ve been setting a vision for us as a church to be a place where we take responsibility for helping others to grow in Jesus. We’ve been looking at passages which talk about the importance of imitation: having godly role models to pattern ourselves after as we follow Jesus; and also being godly role models for one another.

We are introducing a new program—I hate to call it a program, but that’s what it is—where we are creating mentoring partnerships so that this sort of spiritual coaching can take place. We’ll be introducing the program at a couple of dinners—a men’s dinner we are calling Ironman this Thursday, and a women’s dinner we are calling Refined next Thursday. If you haven’t signed up for those meals, you can do so yet today. And we’ll be laying out more of this vision for growing in discipleship. Because, of course, the goal isn’t a program, but that we would be a church where disciples making disciples is as natural as attending worship on Sunday morning.

And so, as we wrap up the series, I want to encourage you to think about your own spiritual coaching tree. Where do you fit into 2 Timothy 2:2? Who are you spiritually parenting?

And I want to look at the context of this verse, so that we can hear what Paul says about what it takes to be a spiritual parent.

So, let’s look at the whole passage. **2 Timothy 2:1-7:**

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. **2**And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. **3**Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. **4**No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. **5**Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor’s crown except by competing according to the rules. **6**The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. **7**Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

So Paul gives Timothy this plan of transmission, and then, in quick succession, he uses three metaphors: a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. Each one says something about what it takes to be a disciple who makes disciples. So we’ll look at each one.

***The Soldier***First, we need the **Discipline of a Soldier.** Making disciples means enduring hardship and single-minded focus. **Verses 3 and 4:**

**3**Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. **4**No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.

As soon as Paul gives Timothy the charge to make disciples who make disciples, the very next thing he says is “join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”

The thing about being a soldier is it is not easy. War is not pretty. It never is. I’m a guy who likes to read military history. One of the best parts of the vacation we took this summer was—for me--the day we spent on the battlefield at Gettysburg. I love the strategy and tactics, and reading about the heroism of certain soldiers.

But as much as I like to romanticize the stories, the truth is: being a soldier is hard. People are shooting at you. You have to hide in dirty, cramped holes. We visited the wheat field, near the peach orchard, and the tour guide told us that after the battle it was virtually impossible to walk across that field without stepping on a wounded or dead soldier with every step. It’s terrible.

So when Paul invites Timothy to think like a soldier, he’s being upfront about the difficulties. The fact is, if Timothy is serious about making disciples, he’s going to encounter opposition. I mean, the Master disciple-maker, Jesus Himself, was killed on a cross. Timothy’s discipler, Paul, is writing this letter to him from prison. If Timothy is going tell others about Jesus, he needs to be prepared to endure some hardship.

If you think about it, nobody ever gets persecuted for just believing in Jesus. The enemies of Christianity don’t much care if you love Jesus, as long as you keep it to yourself. If your private opinion is that Jesus is alright and you never talk about Him, nobody is going to go through the effort of throwing you in jail.

But it’s once people start talking about Jesus, once you start inviting other people to put their hope in Jesus, that’s when the enemies of the gospel get worried. It’s preaching about Jesus that threatens authoritarian governments and repressive family systems. It’s talking about Jesus that leads people to change their allegiances and adopt new lifestyles.

And so, Paul says that it takes the discipline of a soldier. You have to be prepared for the hardship, prepared for the opposition.

We’re blessed to live in society where we have freedom of speech and freedom of religion—and yet we know something of the societal pressure to keep our thoughts about Jesus to ourselves. There is this commonly held belief that talking about our faith is getting too personal, too preachy, to pushy. We live in a cultural climate that says religion should be private.

But if we are going to be true to Jesus, we need the courage to speak up about what we believe. We need the discipline of a soldier that endures whatever hardship might come our way.

More than that, Paul says: **“**No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.”

Besides trying to get us to keep quiet about our faith, our culture is filled with distractions. David Mathis, of Desiring God Ministries, writes:

We live in the age of distraction. And not only will disciplemaking be sidelined if we smartphone and entertain ourselves to death, but Satan has a thousand ready-made, event-oriented distractions to divert us from pleasing Jesus in the grunt work of advancing the gospel through the process of disciplemaking. We are bombarded not just by obvious time-wasters, but good initiatives that, if we’re not careful, will not just supplement disciplemaking, but supplant it. <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-cost-of-disciple-making>

We need the discipline of soldiers who listen to the orders of our commanding officer. We need remember who it is we are called to please. Stay focused on the mission.

***The Athlete***Second, **we need to the vision of an athlete**. Making disciples means we need to keep our eyes on the prize. Remember the goal. **Verse 5:**

**5**Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor’s crown except by competing according to the rules.

Paul switches metaphors, from soldier to athlete. He has in mind here the athletes of the Olympic Games, which had been held every four years for centuries at this point. Nearly everyone in the ancient world had heard about the Olympic Games, and they were one of Paul’s favorite illustrations.

What he references here is athletes competing according to the rules. There was a lot of ceremony associated with the Olympic Games, and respect for the competitive process was emphasized. The rules didn’t just concern fairplay during the competition, but also preparation for the games and training. For instance, all athletes had to swear an oath before the statue of Zeus that declared they had spent at least 10 months in training before the games began.

So what Paul is saying here is that athletes need the vision to see the crown they are competing for. The way to get through those 10 months of training is by anticipating what it will be like to stand on the winner’s podium when it is all over.

For instance: at the height of Michael Phelps swimming career, when he was training to win 8 gold medals at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, he would train twice-a-day for six days a week. He would swim over 50 miles a week and also lift weights three days a week and do countless push-ups, pull-ups and sit-ups. He trained so much that he needed to eat over 12,000 calories a day just to maintain his body weight of 165 pounds. He was training and swimming literally all of the time.

Why did he do it? Because he had a vision of standing on that podium and receiving those gold medals. He believed he could be the best swimmer in history and he felt it was worth it.

In the same way, the kind of life-on-life discipleship we are talking about can seem like a long process. It seems like it would be so much easier if everyone could sign up for 4-week class or if we could just hold a big retreat on the weekend. But discipleship happens over the long haul, as we do life together, as we model what it means to follow Christ.

So how do we find the energy to make that phone call, to get up and go to that early morning breakfast, to walk across the yard and engage in conversation with our neighbor? It comes from remembering what lies at the end. It comes from keeping our eyes on the prize and knowing that someone who is growing in their relationship with Jesus is worth it. It comes from the perseverance to keep being intentional, relational and focused on Christ.

Disciple-making costs us energy. It can be draining to share your life with someone, to take on some of their trials , to be available for an emergency phone call. But when you have a one-on-one meeting scheduled after a long day, or you have an early morning appointment after a short night, the discipler says with Paul, “I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls” (2 Corinthians 12:15). When we think we can’t do any more, we keep pushing to the finish line, like an athlete, as we learn the invaluable dynamic of serving in the strength the Lord provides.

***The Farmer***Or third, **we need the patience of a farmer.** Making disciples means trusting in God for the growth. We can do our part, but we have to leave room for God to do his. **Verse 6:**

**6**The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

I’ve been around farmers most of my life. I’m not a farmer, neither was my dad. I can’t even keep a garden growing. But I grew up on an acreage and I did chores for farmers growing up. My first church was very rural, and everyone in our congregation farmed or was related to someone who farmed. And, of course, many of you are connected to the farm in some way.

And here’s the thing, I’ve never found another group of people who can work, collectively, as hard as a group of farmers. When harvest time comes, or when equipment breaks down, or when a building needs to be built; farmers are willing to work hard hours and they find a way to get it done.

But I’ve also noticed this: there is no other group that understands as well as farmers that there are certain things beyond our control. Farmers can prepare the ground, spray for weeds, choose the best seed, repair their equipment, and everything else—but they understand that if the crop is going to grow it is up to God. They can’t control the rain, they can’t control the heat, they can’t control storms. And so, they do what they can do, and then the leave the rest to God.

It strikes me that it takes a lot of patience to be a farmer.

It’s the same way in disciple-making. We do our part to pass on what we have heard and learned. We make ourselves available to guide and lead people closer to Christ. We can plant the seed and water it, but we need to know that only God can make it grow (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:6).

It’s not one meeting, but often a year’s worth of regular meetings. It’s not one conversation, but sometime difficult conversation after conversation. We don’t typically see progress all at once; but over the course of months, it’s amazing what kind of harvest can happen. Our job is to be faithful with our part, and then leave the rest to God.

***Our Glory and Our Joy***So we are called to be a church of disciples who make disciples. God’s calling to us is take responsibility for helping one another grow in Jesus. Spiritual parenting. Grow your spiritual coaching tree.

I want to close by giving you another verse written by Paul, this one in the book of 1 Thessalonians. It’s a verse that reminds us of what a privilege it can be to help someone else grow in Jesus.

Paul is talking about his desire to return to the church in Thessalonica. When he first traveled there, he received a warm welcome and a number of people put their hope and trust in Jesus. But, at the same time, some Jews who were opposed to the gospel rounded up a mob and eventually Paul was forced to leave. So now Paul is telling the Christians there how badly he wants to come back. Then he says this, **1 Thessalonians 2:19-20:**

**19**For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? **20**Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

It’s an interesting thing for Paul to say. His hope, his joy, the crown he is going to boast in when Jesus comes again, is the Christians at Thessalonica. “For you are our glory and joy.”

You might have thought Paul would boast in meeting Jesus, or having a mansion in heaven, or eternal life.

But that’s not how it is. Paul says that it is those that he has discipled, those that he led to Jesus, those that he got to see grow up into Jesus who will be his glory and joy.

When you get to heaven, what will be your greatest joy and delight? Won’t it be the others that you see there who, in some small way, have gotten there because of your influence? Won’t you be overwhelmed to discover how you helped others to follow Jesus?

When I was in college there was a song that was popular by a man named Ray Boltz. Ray Boltz was a guy whose songs sort of told stories, I kind of put his music in the category of Broadway show tunes. I think they might seem kind of cheesy today. But this song was called “Thank You” and in it Ray imagined going to heaven with a friend and then watching as all these people came up to thank the friend for all the ways he had touched them for Jesus. The chorus went like this:

Thank you for giving to the Lord  
I am a life that was changed  
Thank you for giving to the Lord  
I am so glad you gave

So what about you? What is will your joy and glory be? Who is in your spiritual coaching tree? Who are you influencing for Jesus?