

“LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON”

(II Timothy 2:1; I Peter 5:13)

“Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

“Marcus my son salutes you.”

We are examining seven suggestive pictures of what a disciple is in Second Timothy chapter two. Though the terms are not exhaustive (presenting a complete picture of a disciple), they are very strong in their suggestions of the character and characteristics of a disciple. The seven pictures are: (1) A *son*, II Timothy 2:1; (2) A *soldier*, vs 3 & 4; (3) An *athlete*, vs 5; (4) A *farmer*, vs 6; (5) A *workman*, vs 15; (6) A *vessel*, vs 20 & 21; and (7) A *bondslave*, vs 24. The first picture is in the very first verse of the chapter. The writer is the Apostle Paul, and the recipient of the letter is his primary disciple, Timothy, whom Paul calls “my son”. The second text recorded above is in the fifth chapter of First Peter, and is made up of the words of the Apostle Peter to his primary disciple, John Mark, whom Peter also calls “my son”. The two references provide an interesting field for research, comparison, contrast, and spiritual lessons to be learned. We will elevate imagination a notch in exploring these texts.

I. The Steady “Father” and the Steady “Son”

The first text at the beginning of this study reveals the beautiful and challenging picture of a *steady “father” in Christ and his steady “son” in Christ*. Since Paul calls Timothy his “son” in the faith, we may call Paul Timothy’s “father” in the faith. The steady father is the Apostle Paul and the steady son is his apparently much younger disciple, Timothy, whom he calls “my son”. We must not overestimate the word “steady” in either of these descriptions. All of the body of material we have in the book of Acts and in his personal letters reveal that Paul was and could still be a somewhat erratic figure.

One Christian psychiatrist, Dr. David Stoop, in his excellent book entitled *You Are What You Think*, says forthrightly that Paul “struggled with anger even more than we do” and he candidly declares that Paul was “basically an angry man”. Any unbiased, objective reader would be forced to grapple with this strong possibility. This does not judge Paul, it simply evaluates him. With his “mix” of parental and family background, his national Jewish heritage, his Judaistic religion and his hot-hearted (and hot-headed) devotion to every facet of it, his revolutionary conversion to Jesus and his recognition of Jesus as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, his close and confrontational verbal and mental jousting with Jews and Gentiles would leave his spirit in a tense state of unrest, and would surely tend in his kind of personality toward outbursts of passion and anger. D.L. Moody often said, “I wouldn’t give a dime for a man who didn’t have a temper, but I wouldn’t give a nickel for the man who couldn’t control his temper.” I’m sure that Paul experienced many a struggle for self-control in the matter of anger and temper.

A. The Steady “Father”

But Paul became polarized, consolidated and solidified by his faith-center, Jesus Christ. So close was he to Jesus after his conversion, so aware was he of His Life and Resources, so committed was he to the new-found God, that he was remarkably steady and fixed in his character, devotion and message. So, in spite of his tumultuous and erratic background, we can identify him in this relationship as the *steady Father*. I am sure that his love and appreciation and aspiration for Timothy made him an even more competent and self-disciplined father/discipler to the younger man.

Futhermore, he clearly saw himself as Timothy’s *father* in the faith. Indeed, Paul saw himself as the responsible father of every person whom he led to Christ. He wrote concerning this to the Corinthian Christians when he said, “I write not these things to shame you, but *as my beloved sons* I warn you. For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you don’t have many fathers: for in Christ Jesus *I have begotten You* through the Gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers (in Greek, the word is ‘mimics’, the word that might describe the action of children in imitating their parents) of me” (I Corinthians 4:14-16). Incidentally the very next verse supports this point, when Paul wrote these words, “For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved son and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which are in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” What a wealth of disciple-making insights there is in this verse.

Christian, please understand that the responsibility to win people to Christ is universal among Christians (no exemptions, no exception, no exclusions), and then the responsibility to raise the spiritual children whom God has given us belongs to the “parent” who led them to Christ. Both responsibilities are greatly aided in fulfillment by the disciple-making process which is the universal responsibility of all believers (to *be* disciples and to *build* disciples). *That process always equips the disciple to think soul-winning and to practice soul-winning, and to then disciple the new convert when he is won to Christ.* So future generations of soul-winners are guaranteed by an adequate and Biblical standard of disciple-making. However, any other standard of generating soul-winners is necessarily hit-and-miss and will leave vast members of the Family inactive, uncommitted to soul-winning, and thus completely non-productive.

In six of Paul’s letters Timothy’s name is associated with his own in the opening lines of the letters, and in four of those letters Timothy’s name is the *only* one associated with Paul’s in the salutations of the letters. From the very beginning of their Christian association, Paul was willing to share his ministry with Timothy in the most personal, open and transparent ways possible. Timothy was Paul’s disciple, Paul’s intern, Paul’s apprentice, and was groomed always to become Paul’s successor in fruitful ministry.

The relationship of Paul and Timothy began very, very early in Christian history. The year was probably about A.D. 47, some 17 years after the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Christian, ponder this carefully. Paul and Timothy were in

the front line, the vanguard, of Gospel advance, and each played his role with precision and skill. The church in Antioch had been led by the Holy Spirit to extend Christianity westward, and they selected Barnabas and Paul to be their first missionaries. They traveled westward, and everywhere they went, they not only stimulated faith in Jesus Christ, they also stirred up opposition to Christ and His Gospel. Lystra, Timothy's home city, did not seem to be on their original missionary itinerary. It was a replacement venue, sovereignly selected by God for now-obvious reasons. After persecution in each of their last two stops, the missionary team walked through the city gate of the small and secluded mountain town of Lystra. Nearby, Paul was stoned by enemies of the Gospel and left for dead. Timothy may have seen this stoning, and the Holy Spirit may have used it to stimulate a deep sympathetic interest in his heart toward Paul. In course of time, it seems that Lois and Eunice, Timothy's grandmother and mother, were saved, and then young Timothy trusted Christ, also.

In one line, Paul almost gave an autobiographical and biographical description of his relationship with Timothy. In I Timothy 1:18, he wrote, "Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction." Paul won Timothy to Christ, then immediately "took him to school in Christ's school of discipleship." The word "instruction" describes an activity Paul carried out comprehensively in Timothy's life. Dear fellow believer, you should have in your life at least one "Timothy" who occupies the same position in your life, and into whom you are building the Truth of God for strategic purposes.

On Timothy's part, he was surely a rare student of Scripture. Paul mentions his education provided by his mother and grandmother in the Old Testament Scriptures, which "from a child" had made him "wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 3:14-15). And Paul told him to "continue in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom you learned them." Much later, Paul again admonished Timothy to "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman not needing to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15)," and we have overwhelming evidence to believe that Timothy did exactly that. Paul encouraged Timothy to "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (I Timothy 4:13), and again we may be sure that Timothy did as he was taught.

As I write, I cannot but wonder what staggering advances would have occurred in the world or in America if every person brought to Christ in the history of the Christian work here would have been placed under the project and possibilities of this kind of discipling, and had followed the standard of it. What if every believer had been a true *disciple* of Jesus Christ? What if every "Christian" had been a true *learner, pupil, student, understudy, SCHOLAR, learning the Life, Truth and Practice of the Gospel and its Strategy and pursuing them with passion of heart and life? What if every born-again child of God had become, AS JESUS COMMANDED IN THE GREAT COMMISSION and Paul echoed in II Timothy 2:2, a maker of other disciples like himself, thus LIKE CHRIST)?* But alas, this kind of Christian is seldom to be found. We tend to station those who profess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord on seats in a church building and make passive auditors to someone else's growth, study, and communication of the Gospel, and seldom does one emerge to really go to the front lines of Gospel advance over the earth.

I have often said that a seated Christian (as one “in church”) has two points of contact with his natural environment—his *seat* and his *feet*. And his history as a Christian can be predicted or summarized by *which of those dominates his Christianity*. Remember, the Book does not say, “How beautiful are the *seats*....!” Rather, it says, “*It stands inviolably and unchangeably written, How beautiful are the FEET of those who announce or herald* (in this text, we can forget ‘preaching’ as we think of it, i.e., in a church building and behind a pulpit; this is not the consistent use of this word in the New Testament) *the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things*” (Romans 10:15). *No Christian is likely to be an effective disciple, or servant, or warrior, or spokesman for Christ unless he is systematically, comprehensively, and person-to-person taught and trained in all the matters of Christian life and truth. Just consult the procedure of Jesus with Eleven surviving disciples to see this substantiated and proven-in-practice-and-in-product! And note how the same procedure and strategy are now being followed by Paul with Timothy.* The evidence of the Strategy, the Procedure, the Truth-and-life transfer of New Testament discipling is presented overwhelmingly in I and II Timothy and in the first three chapters of I Thessalonians (note I Thessalonians 2:8 for a clear statement of the transfer of Truth and life from discipler to disciples). Paul was an absolute master at personal, close-up relationships *used strategically* for the Cause of Christ (as was Jesus the Prototype). For the sake of Christ, for the sake of every person he might influence and disciple, for the sake of the fulfillment of the Mandate of Christ, for the sake of the world-wide and history-long Cause of Christ, Paul devoted himself to become and be a *steady and competent father for any sons or daughters God might give to him in Christ*. Is there any question about the outcome? But why is such a course not being pursued in an at-large and many-persons way in the Body of Christ today?

B. The Steady “Son”

The steady “son” of Paul in the text was Timothy, his primary disciple. In this case, it was surely much easier for Timothy to be a steady son simply because of his personality and background mix. He was quite apparently a somewhat mild-mannered, shy and timid person. It was remarkable from the beginning that the dynamic Apostle would choose a mild-mannered but steady person to be his understudy and successor. Yes, I am convinced that Paul chose Timothy to be his own successor in the ministry.

Being a close-up pupil of Paul, Timothy was also tutored in the disciple-making process, both by Paul’s example and his exhortation, by his practice and his proclamation. By close observation of Paul, by hands-on training from Paul himself, and by first-hand on-the-job training, Timothy emerged as another strong link in the disciple-making chain that stretched through the early church. Repeated exposure to the skilled disciple-making of the Apostle Paul riveted the practice in Timothy’s life. Plato, the Greek philosopher, said, “Learning is remembering,” and Timothy had enough great examples stored in his mind to promote lifelong remembering and continuous learning. Dear Christian, what a bonus it is if you have time after time seen disciple-making modeled right before your very eyes, but what an immeasurable loss if you are well-educated in every other

discipline but do not have an image of Jesus' Mandate and Model of "making disciples" fixed in your mind and heart and *forming your practice*.

It is my pleasure and unspeakable privilege to teach the Strategy of Jesus in place after place and to group after group of motivated believers on a regular basis (in one major U.S. city last weekend, another major U.S. city this weekend, and yet another the following weekend), and to experience the gratification of testimony after testimony (and model after model) of those who are seriously adapting their lives to the Strategy of "making disciples of Christ who will reproduce others of the same kind and thus will multiply to the ends of the earth until the end of time."

There is one more profile to see in this study, and it is both encouraging and discouraging. It is encouraging because it proves what God can do to graciously overcome our failures, but it is discouraging because it forces us to face the reality of failure among Christians. In fact, I firmly believe that one of the overt failures of the Christian church that I know is that *it does not have an adequate theology of/for failure, and yet every Christian I know is marked by significant failure (and I head the list, more often failing than I care to think about)*. Indeed, since God's salvation comes to us "by grace", it is predicated upon our failure! If we had not badly failed, we would not *need* God's grace.

The Sometimes Stumbling "Father" and the Sometimes Stumbling "Son"

The second text at the head of the chapter conjures a quite different picture. It is the story of Simon Peter and his relationship with his primary disciple, John Mark. Both men had a checkered and erratic picture of historical spiritual failure, modified by growth in grace and Christian maturity, and concluding with stories of great spiritual successes for Christ's sake and the sake of multitudes of people. I want now to examine them as *the sometimes stumbling "father" and the sometimes stumbling "son"*.

A. The Sometimes Stumbling "Father"

I call Simon Peter the "sometimes stumbling father", recognizing that he was the spiritual father of his "son", John Mark (cf. I Peter 5:13). Simon Peter's failures were numerous. Some were failures of weakness, many were failures of willfulness, many others were failures of speech, and a few were very serious failures. These failures dotted his history with Christ for a long time after their first meeting. Simon seemed to always be dusting himself off after a fall. When he first met Jesus, his genius seemed to be that of failing. He had a serious case of "hoof and mouth" disease spiritually, either failing while on the move or failing by opening his mouth. His motto was, "Open mouth, insert foot." Someone said, "He should have worn peppermint shoes; at least his foot would have tasted better when he inserted it into his mouth!" His movements were predictably inconsistent, and his speech suffered from the "Speak first, ask questions later" syndrome. He often seemed to be marked as much by failure as by faith. Parenthetically, I will say that *I love the guy, because I often find in the Biblical picture of Simon Peter a*

full-length mirrored reflection of myself! Happily, Jesus remained faithful to Simon (as He has to me), or he would have left the Apostolic ranks a hopeless failure (as would I).

B. A Submitted but Sometimes Stumbling “Son”

There is no question in the consensus of New Testament scholarship that Simon Peter disciplined the young man, John Mark. Almost all Bible scholars today recognize that the main source for most of the material which Mark incorporated into his Gospel was the teaching he received from Simon Peter in their personal relationship. In fact, many scholars have called Mark’s Gospel “The Gospel According to Simon Peter”, reflecting the influence of Peter the discipler on John Mark, his disciple. Simon Peter was an action-oriented person, though his actions were at first quite undirected and often wrong, and Mark’s Gospel is conspicuously an action-oriented book. One brilliant Bible commentator wrote that “Mark traveled extensively with the Apostle Peter as Peter’s traveling companion, secretary and interpreter.” Note that in the text at the beginning of this study, Peter himself called his disciple, “Mark my son”.

Papias, an early historian and church father, wrote: “Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatever Peter remembered. Afterwards, Mark accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord’s sayings. Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as Peter reported them. For one thing, he took special care not to omit anything he had heard and not to put anything fictitious into the statements.”

Irenaeus, another early church father, wrote that “Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of Peter’s preaching.” Clement of Alexander wrote that Peter was alive at the time that the Gospel of Mark was written. Eusebius recorded that Peter “was pleased” and “authorized the book to be read in the churches.” An additional writing of Clement of Alexandria that has been preserved only in Latin, but accurately translated into English, states the following: “Mark, the follower of Peter, while Peter publicly preached the Gospel at Rome before some of Caesar’s knights, adduced many testimonies to Christ, in order that thereby they might be able to commit to memory what was spoken by Peter, and he wrote entirely what is called ‘The Gospel According to Mark’.”

Note that numerous early writers used the word “*interpreter*” when referring to the work of Mark and his relationship to the Apostle Peter. There is a strong possibility that Mark may literally have been an interpreter or translator for Peter, since it is widely accepted that Peter spoke primarily Aramaic whereas evidence indicates that Mark’s primary language would have been Greek. So *the evidence is substantial that Mark was Peter’s disciple.*

New Testament scholar A. T. Robertson describes John Mark as “a protégé of Simon Peter.” He also said that John Mark was “one of Peter’s pupils, who as a young disciple must often have sat at his feet to be catechized and taught the way of the Lord.”

Robertson adds straightforwardly, “Behind John Mark and his Gospel stands the figure of Simon Peter.” Dr. Robertson further says, “It is clear that in Mark’s Gospel we have reports that come from an eyewitness, and it is well-known that the eyewitness was the Apostle Peter. Mark has been willing and able to use Peter’s eyes for us.” Again, “In Mark’s Gospel we are dealing primarily with Peter’s interpretation of Christ after his reception of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is quite likely that Mark made notes of Peter’s preaching from time to time, beginning at an early date, using this and other data for the final book which we possess.”

When Peter was released from prison (Acts 12), the first place he thought to go was “the house of Mary the mother of John whose surname was Mark” (Acts 12:12). Peter had spent many an hour in that same home through the years of John Mark’s early life, and a discipler-disciple relationship had developed between them. Mark reveals his vocation of listening, learning, note-taking, and repeating what he was taught in the Gospel that bears his name. Thus, the life and Gospel of his disciple, John Mark, were some of God’s chosen means for multiplying the ministry of Simon Peter. There is also in this relationship a quirky example of the “like father, like son” rule.

Whatever spiritual success was developed by the Holy Spirit in Mark’s life later, he is marked by what appears to be a singular failure early in his ministry. I say “appears to be” because I myself have important questions about the action of John Mark that is usually branded as dark and immature failure. I am not nearly as sure as some that John Mark should be labeled as such a drastic failure. Furthermore, I am not laying Mark’s failure at the feet of Simon Peter as the one who modeled failure for John Mark. No, the incidences of failure in their lives are simply representative of many believers who failed through either weakness or willfulness—and sometimes the failures are many and horrible. I am just saying that Paul and Timothy look like steady believers (though this “pancake” has two sides to it), and Peter and John Mark look like stumbling believers (although this, too, might represent too simplistic a view of their ministries). We will explore the surface situation and the passages that are used to explain it.

Acts 13 records the remarkable account of the remarkable first missionary journey by the first missionary team in Christian history. The primary players on the team were Saul (who would become the Apostle Paul) and Barnabas. As the Antioch Christians were praying, God pointed out His purpose to send these two choice and capable saints to penetrate into fields west of Antioch with the Gospel. And the text adds, “And they also had John (Mark) as their minister” (Acts 13:5). Here is my first reason to suspicion that our accusations against John Mark have been very unfair and unfounded. Many have said that he simply got homesick on this journey and “abandoned ship and high-tailed it for Mom and home.” Some have conjectured about other causes for his defection from the team. Acts 13:13 simply says, “Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John (Mark) departing from them returned to Jerusalem.” Note that he returned, not to Antioch, the place of departure for the team, but to Jerusalem, the home of John Mark. John Mark was a kinsman of Barnabas, who probably enlisted him to be a “gopher” or servant on the missionary team.

Note the word “minister” used to describe John Mark in Acts 13:5 (mentioned in the last paragraph). This is a very specialized and definitive word. It comes from a captivating Greek word, *huperetes*, which means an “under-rower”. The word refers to a person who was willing (or forced) to remain under the decks among the lowest (third) tier of oarsmen on board a ship to man the oars while the captain of the ship gets the credit for its speed, determines its destination, and governs its movements. The purpose of the under-rower was to provide the means of transportation that would guarantee that *others would get to their destination*. This is the word that Paul used in I Corinthians to state the ideal for Christian ministers—lowly servants of *others, who would simply follow the Captain’s orders for the purpose of delivering other believers to God’s intended destination of service and strategy for them*. That is, John Mark was already a remarkable and lowly, self-effacing servant when he set out with the missionary team. To support this view, Mark was called a “*diakonian*” in II Timothy 4:11, a lowly “dust-kicking slave” who hurried to minister to others. So John Mark is not to be dismissed with a glib charge of homesickness or shallow failure. Apparently, something more serious happened in his mind and heart early in the journey with Paul and Barnabas.

Let me tell you what I think happened, and then I ask you to put yourself in Mark’s place on the trip with Barnabas and Saul and think of what you might have done. Remember that it was this trip that began with Barnabas as the leader and Saul (now known to us as the Apostle Paul) as a follower. But on the trip, it apparently became evident especially to Barnabas that Paul was the one best equipped and skilled to lead such a team and such work. So the leadership quietly switched, as seen in the “Barnabas and Paul” order early in the trip (Acts 13:2) and the shift to the “*Paul and Barnabas*” order as the trip progressed. Acts 13:13 even identifies the team as “Paul and *his company*”—and *Barnabas is not even mentioned at this point!* John Mark, proud of Barnabas his kinsman and himself marked by youthful idealism, simply could not adjust to the young upstart Paul usurping the place occupied by Barnabas as the team leader. Nursing a sense of outrage and insult, he showed his protest by dismissing himself and going back home. So his was not a failure of weakness (except maybe weak vision and weak tolerance), but of protest against his view of Paul’s audacity and disrespect for his kinsmen’s veteran leadership. I’m sure that Barnabas himself did not feel this way at all, but John Mark, youthful and idealistic, would have been very susceptible to irritation and over-reaction at this change. So it is very likely, in light of all the evidence in the text, that John Mark did not revolt from the team for such reasons as we may think, but for an altogether different motive, that of jealousy for his kinsman’s position.

At any rate, historical distance from the scene and better Christian perspective will enable us to see that John Mark did not make the wisest decision when he decided to abandon the team. If he had only known what God had in mind for this team led by Paul! If he had only known what a role he could have played in supporting one of the most important movements ever launched on this earth! John Mark’s name would probably have loomed large in the chronicles of the missionary movement in the Book of Acts if he had not defected from the team on the basis of a totally personal reaction. The message? We must be faithful to Jesus even when the circumstance looks small and insignificant, and we must not let personal feelings determine our reactions to irritating circumstances.

At any rate, here is a stumbling disciple, Peter's "son" in the faith, Peter's primary disciple, John Mark, placed in the I Peter 5 text in a filial relationship with a stumbling discipler, Simon Peter.

I find great comfort in knowing that such men as Simon Peter (like Jacob in the Old Testament, who "limped" *all the way Home*) and John Mark had conspicuous clay feet and were *marked and remembered* by failures both large and small. In spite of these failures, God's rule is still, "My grace is sufficient for you"—if you will face Him with your faith *and your failures*, and live in full dependence upon Him for His overcoming provision of that grace.

Here then are the profiles of two pairs of discipling partners, Paul and Timothy on the one hand and Simon Peter and John Mark on the other. Each pair models a spiritual "father" and "son" discipling relationship. Paul the spiritual "father" of his spiritual "son", Timothy, and Simon Peter the spiritual "father" of his spiritual "son", John Mark. All four men were marked on occasion by spiritual and personal failure, and all were recovered by grace to find significant niches in the annals of Grace and Godliness. Again, the disciple-making Strategy of Jesus is on very high profile in their relationships. But *what about you, dear Christian? Whom has God given you as your spiritual "son" or "daughter", and what are you doing with them to advance them into disciple-making reproduction of others of the same kind so that they will multiply in enlarging generations of disciples and disciple-makers?* The Great Commission still stands with authority and assignment for us today, and Jesus' Strategy is still the best *modus operandi* for advancing His Cause—the strategy of "going into all nations and turning individuals into *disciples*." To whom can you say, "Thou, therefore, *my son?*"