

Weekly Reflection – Disciple Maker’s ROI

2 Timothy 2:7 - Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

One of my main aims in preaching and teaching is to get you to think. “To exercise the mind.” It occurred to me that the listener or the reader is just as responsible as the talker or the writer if they are to get true understanding. No matter how great the preacher or author is, if you are not willing to think, it is unlikely that you will gain understanding. This verse and many other verses point to the idea that thinking about, meditating on (chewing on) the Word of God will lead to understanding and knowledge of the Word of God.

Romans 12:2 - Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Renew your mind, think differently. That word for testing is the idea of examining. As we think with our minds, as we examine, we will gain understanding of the will of God and what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Disciple Maker’s Return On Investment (ROI) = (Net Profit/ Cost of Investment) x 100

Here in 2 Timothy, Paul is making it very clear to Timothy and the church, that if the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to be passed down from generation to generation, it will only happen at significant cost. There is a cost to disciple-making, so the question is, “Is the net profit from investment high enough, valuable enough to pay the cost?”

2 Timothy 2:1-7

- Paul is urging Timothy and us to proclaim the Gospel boldly and to suffer for it bravely. And in order to reinforce that, he provides three metaphors: A soldier, an athlete, and a hard-working farmer.

The Soldier – Verses 3 and 4 - ***Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. [4] No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.***

There’s a war

One of the costs of disciple-making is opposition, even persecution. That’s pretty straightforward but unfortunately, it’s quite easy, and I will say common for us to live like there is no war going on. To live with a peace time mentality. People live differently when there is war, you pray differently when you realize there is war, you parent differently when you recognize someone is trying to destroy your children, you do marriage differently when you realize someone is trying to destroy your marriage, you are involved in your local church differently when you realize there is an enemy trying to cause division and keep the church from advancing.

The enemy doesn’t typically bother fighting against Christians or local churches who keep to themselves. It’s not worth the hassle. But when followers of Jesus commit to making disciples, they become strategic targets for resistance.

Undivided Attention

“No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits.” That verb, entangled, means tripped up by, distracted by, or sidetracked by. Too often we think that we just sign up to be a soldier in God’s army, get a new uniform and then keep doing whatever we want. No, you don’t sign up and do whatever you want, if you sign up you do what the Commander Jesus Christ says.

We live in the age of distraction. All of these things coming at us to get distracted by, sidetracked by. We can’t hardly have a conversation with someone without checking the buzzing phone in our pocket. There’s so much opportunity at our fingertips, but we need to ask the question, are these opportunities getting me sidetracked from doing the best thing, the main thing, from living out and passing on the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Called to please only One

Our aim is ***“to please the one who enlisted”*** us, not to please our flesh, or anyone who walks through the door or joins the church or anyone who considers themselves worthy of our investment. If your aim is to please your flesh, you will likely make choices based on staying comfortable and safe. If your aim is to please others you may be apt to say yes to every seemingly good request that comes your way. We must remember our aim is to please Jesus.

The Athlete - Verse 5: ***“An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.”***

There are rules

There are rules for being a disciple and rules for making disciples who make disciples. There is great temptation to cut corners by constructing mechanism after mechanism, and program after program, for mass-producing disciples. Disciples who make disciples can’t be mass-produced. It’s one disciple of Jesus handing off the baton to the next AND teaching them to hand it off to the next. There is only one baton to pass on, the truth of God’s Word, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It takes energy

Another cost the athlete image calls to mind is the energy it involves making disciples. It takes energy both to train for the race and to run the race. Effort is involved; training is involved. It takes real life energy to go to a small group; it takes energy to have relationships with people. Early-morning and late-night intense conversations are demanding. It’s much easier to avoid them and just watch TV. Disciple-making costs us energy. But we say with Paul, ***“I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls”*** (2 Corinthians 12:15a).

It’s uncomfortable

Another way to say it is that it costs us comfort. You don’t run a race because it’s comfortable, you run to finish the course, to win the prize. You don’t train for the race only when it’s comfortable. It costs us comfort to give of our time to those we’re investing in.

The Farmer - Verse 6: ***“It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.”***

It takes initiative

If a farmer has no initiative to get a field ready and plant the seed, there will be no harvest. Perhaps initiative is where some are hung up in making disciples. You see men or women who seem to be good fits for your investment for a season, but simply taking the initiative to have that potentially awkward conversation about getting together regularly to read the Bible and pray has you hung up. Initiative is so huge today. So much of disciple-making is simply initiative. You don't have to have all the answers; you don't need to have everything figured out, but you do need to have the initiative to be with someone for a period of time. And with it, planning, taking the time to think through the plan. How often will we meet, where will we meet, what if anything will we study together, how long will the commitment be, in what areas does this person need to learn and grow?

It takes effort

Hard work, blood, sweat, and tears. Fields don't plow themselves. Seeds don't plant themselves. Cows don't milk themselves. And disciples who make disciples don't make themselves. (Matthew 28:18)

It takes time

Disciple-making, like raising crops or animals, is time-consuming. It takes time to plow the field, time to plant, time to water, time to fertilize, then time to harvest. 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. Which requires patience. Like with crops, we don't typically see the progress all at once, but over the course of months, it's amazing what kind of harvest can happen.

It will be messy

I'm not necessarily a full-fledged farmer but have done enough to know it's messy, dirty work. I thought about bringing my barn boots in as an object lesson. You would have quickly recognized that farming is messy work. Because we are all in process of becoming more like Jesus, we all still have dirty, messy, stinky areas in our lives; and as we make disciples those areas get exposed.

Disciple Maker's ROI

We looked at some of the costs, we see that there will be suffering, inconvenience, discomfort, hard work; so, is there a ROI, is there a reward? Does it make sense to go all in on this disciple-making? Let's not just count the cost of investment let's also make sure we count the net profit from investment.

We see from this text that yes there is a reward, a net profit. There is reward for being a good soldier in God's army, you will please the one who enlisted you. You will hear Jesus say, "Well done my good and faithful servant." You will be part of the army who pushes back the kingdom of darkness. Part of the army who saves people from eternal hell and gives them eternal life. As an athlete you will be crowned. The Gospel of Jesus will be passed on to others because of how you lived your life, how you ran your race. Children, grandchildren, great grandchildren will know and worship Jesus because you ran a good race according to the rules, because you did not compromise. As a hardworking farmer you will enjoy a harvest.

Perseverance through anticipation.

We see throughout the Word of God that the key to enduring discomfort and suffering is looking to the reward, looking to the net profit. The Word of God repeatedly emphasizes the reward, the crown, the prize, the victory, and the fruit. I ended last week by saying that one of the greatest enemies to our hope, our endurance, our perseverance, our boldness is forgetting God's promises. God is promising reward, prizes, crowns, victory, and fruit; remember that, anticipate that.

Listen to a couple things Paul says: **1 Corinthians 9:24 - Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 2 Timothy 4:7-8 - I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. [8] Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. Where did Paul learn this? Is this his own thing?**

Paul learned this from Jesus, in His teaching and example. **Matthew 5:11-12 - "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Just as clear as His teaching is Jesus' example. **Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Jesus endured the greatest pain, suffering, and shame by looking to the joy that was set before Him. Jesus did not regard the cross itself as a joy. But He could look past the horror of the cross to enjoy the joy beyond it. Jesus was able to endure the ordeal of the cross because He understood the good that would come of it. Jesus was looking to the reward of being with His Father again and hearing His Father say well done My Son, Jesus was looking to the reward of a redeemed people.****

Eternal Return On Investment (EROI) = (Net Profit/Cost of Investment) x 100

Following are several passages that we will take truths from and plug into our EROI formula:

Hebrews 11:24-26 - By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, [25] choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. [26] He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

Psalm 16:11 - "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

2 Corinthians 4:17 - For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

Mark 8:34-36 - "And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"

Eternal Return On Investment (EROI) for not Following Jesus

- What net profit may look like: Pleasures, gain the whole world.

- What net profit really is: Fleeting pleasures, forfeit your soul, lose your life, shame.
- $(\text{Fleeting pleasures, forfeit your soul, lose your life} / \text{Your Life}) \times 100 = 0\% \text{ EROI}$

Eternal Return On Investment (EROI) for Following Jesus (Disciple-Makers)

- What net profit may look like: Mistreated, reproach of Christ, deny yourself, take up your cross.
- What net profit really is: Eternal life, fullness of joy, pleasures forever, eternal weight of glory.
- $(\text{Eternal life and glory, full joy, pleasures forever} / \text{Your Life}) \times 100 = 777\% \text{ EROI}$

“You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 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.” 2 Timothy 2:1-2 ESV

2 Timothy 2:7 - Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.