

Invest Yourself in People

Many of us try to gain respect from others by earning some kind of credentials. Yet the life of Paul indicates another value that ought to take precedence.

By Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

IN THE CHURCH at Corinth, during the Apostle Paul's lifetime, there were some people who challenged his authority and credentials as an apostle and a minister of the gospel.

These men had long lists of credentials by which they tried to add authority to their teaching. They distorted Paul's teachings and accused him of selfishness and improper authority.

Paul's reply indicates to us what are the most important credentials for ministry in the Body of Christ, and what ought, therefore, to be among our highest goals.



Rather than referring to his own worldly credentials—he had studied in some of the greatest of the Hebrew and Greek schools, was obviously tremendously learned, and had at times borne letters of commendation from the church in Jerusalem—he referred to the fruit of his labor.

Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God. Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. ([2 Cor. 2:17–3:3](#))

Paul first denounced the accusation that he used the gospel for personal gain. He then told his fundamental credentials: the Corinthian Christians.

He mocked the papyrus "letters of commendation." If credentials were needed, the lives of people were the greatest proof of his work.

Was Paul's ministry of God? "Examine the lives of these people," Paul would respond. Paul's influence on the Corinthians' lives proved his ministry was genuine.

"You are our letter, written on our hearts," Paul wrote. In his commentary on this passage, **Philip Hughes** writes, "Paul indeed has a letter of commendation the validity of which is beyond dispute, but it is a human letter: none other than the Corinthian believers themselves. This is a letter engraved in his heart, not flourished in his hand or carried in his luggage. It is something far more intimate than an external document of paper and ink, and at the same time far more permanent."

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Moses made many contributions to the people of Israel. Certainly his teaching and leadership were great, and his transmission of the law from God to men has been a great benefit to all mankind. But another great contribution from Moses, often overlooked, was Joshua, the man who led Israel into the promised land, into victorious battles, into a faithful walk with God. Without Joshua's leadership after Moses' death, Israel might have disappeared and, with it, the law.

Investing in people is the essence of Christian ministry. In His daily ministry Christ did two things: **He walked obediently to God and He invested Himself in others.**

When I first became involved in the church, I found that the backgrounds of the staff and church leadership had little in common. They had been farmers, lawyers, homemakers, carpenters, accountants, teachers, mechanics, engineers, secretaries, and many others.

But what were their credentials? They pursued solid, obedient walks with God, and they personally disciplined others.

The classic example of this is Dawson Trotman who was the founder of The Navigators. What was his greatest contribution? His famous messages, his Scripture memory system, his determination to acquire Glen Eyrie as a headquarters, the "Wheel" illustration—all of these were important. But perhaps his greatest contribution was Lorne Sanny, who has faithfully led The Navigators in the more than twenty years since Dawson's death.

MULTIPLYING OURSELVES

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he shared his heart and burden for these people to walk obediently with God. He reminded them that since he had led them to Christ, he had a fatherly love and care for them. He exhorted them to imitate his life and walk with Christ, to copy his pursuit of God, his Christian lifestyle.

But Paul was not there for them to copy. We instinctively think he ought to have gone to Corinth so the believers there could imitate him. Instead, he sent his disciple Timothy. By imitating Timothy, the believers there could imitate Paul.

". . . I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love; who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Cor. 4:16–17). He had invested in Timothy such that he was confident that imitating Timothy would be imitating Paul and, ultimately, imitating Jesus.

Many people have heard of Michelangelo. He was one of history's greatest painters and sculptors. His works have been exalted for centuries. But few know of a man named Lorenzo. He discovered Michelangelo early in his development, took him into his home, treated him as a son, and disciplined him in the ways of art. Some considered Lorenzo's ability greater than Michelangelo's. But no matter who is better, Michelangelo might never have become the great artist he was if Lorenzo had not poured his life and discipline and talent into him. **Lorenzo disciplined Michelangelo in the ways of art and all mankind has benefited from this discipleship.**

Dawson Trotman saw the power and ministry in reproducing one's life in another. In his message, "Born to Reproduce," Dawson said, *"Everyone should be born again. That is God's desire. God never intended that man should merely live and die—be a walking corpse to be laid in the ground. The vast majority of people know that there is something beyond the grave, and so each one who is born into God's family should seek others to be born again."*

Though we may not be able to trace all the steps, we all owe our Christianity to faithful people who, in a long chain of transmission, invested their lives in others.

Jesus faithfully, sacrificially invested in the life of the Apostle John. John passed the life of Christ on to a man named Polycarp. Polycarp passed the life to a man named Irenaeus. Irenaeus passed the life to Hippolytus . . . and so on down to us.

What are you investing your life in? Who are you investing your life in? What are your credentials for Christian ministry—a degree, a program, or people walking with Christ?

The other day I was reading an article about the history of the ministry of The Navigators. Emerson wrote, *"The best effect of fine persons is felt after we have left their presence."* *What effect has your presence left on the lives of others?*

Early in the ministry of The Navigators, Don Rosenberger helped Waldron Scott grow in Christ. Waldron Scott helped LeRoy Eims grow in Christ. LeRoy Eims helped Fred Wevodau. Fred invested three years in my life. I invested in Bruce Alexander. Bruce helped a man named Ralph Moller grow in Christ. Ralph became faithful and invested in Geoff Brown.

As I was writing this article, I got a phone call from Geoff Brown. He is a student at the University of Washington. He was excited! "I think I found a man! I think God has answered my prayers. He is a freshman in my fraternity and he desires to become a disciple of Jesus Christ and he wants me to help him!"

If one of the men in this lineage had declined to invest himself in someone, many others would have suffered. The responsibilities are great, and the consequences of faithfulness are powerful. The same is true about the ministry at Living Word Christian Center.

THE HONOR GOES TO GOD

Paul's lessons in [1 Cor. 3:1–15](#) are crucial to our understanding of discipling ministry. We must study them, understand them, and live them. Two points stand out.

First, Paul writes, **"So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building" ([1 Cor. 3:7–9](#)).**

The glory of investing in people is for God—not for man. God worked through Gwin T. Turner in my life. Pastor Turner was a simple channel faithful to God. I give God the glory for the disciplining relationship I had with Pastor turner.

Second, there is another motivation for investing in people besides passing on our lives. Each man's work **"... will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" ([1 Cor. 3:13–14](#)).**

God tests the value of our lives and ministries by consuming fire. Whatever is left after the fire will be an offering for us to present to Jesus Christ.

If you invest in **"wood, hay, or straw"** (which I liken to pleasing the flesh, gaining possessions or developing one's pride) **fire will destroy what you have and your offering will be a handful of ash of which you will be ashamed when it is presented to Jesus.**

However, if you invest in **"gold, silver, [or] costly stones"** (which I liken to the Word of God, obedient living, and human souls) **fire will purify and produce an offering of great wealth and you will humbly present this to Jesus in order to honor Him as your Savior and Lord.**

Therefore, investing in the life of an individual for the glory of God is not only fulfilling our responsibilities but investing in a future offering to Jesus. People are precious stones. How many precious stones will we offer Jesus when we are before His throne?

What must we do to secure a wise investment? Here are five suggestions:

- 1. Become committed to a group of believers that is building in God's way.**
 - 2. Become committed to building a powerful and consistent devotional life.**
 - 3. Become committed to being discipled or invested in by an older believer.**
 - 4. Pray and ask God for one man or woman to invest in and bring glory to God.**
 - 5. Commit yourself to that person in a wholehearted and faithful manner.**
- "Therefore go and make disciples . . ." ([Matthew 28:19](#)).**