

The Master's Plan

Vienna Presbyterian Church
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Mark 3:13-19

August 21, 2016



Today is the closing ceremony of the Olympics, and I have a confession to make. I'm an Olympic junkie. I love watching because I am inspired by all the incredible feats of these amazing athletes. Simone Biles' stellar performance in gymnastics left me speechless. What can we say about Michael Phelps and his 23 gold medals? It's unbelievable! He's not just a once-in-a-generation athlete; he's a once-in-ten-generations athlete.

The speed of Usain Bolt and Elaine Thompson is mind-boggling. And Shawnee Miller's finish in the 400-meters was unforgettable as she dove across the finish line to grab the gold. It was a disappointing moment for Alyson Felix, so I was glad when she later won gold on the two women's relays. She is an all-around champion not only because of her many medals but because she has demonstrated grace in both victory and defeat, and a desire to glorify God in whatever she does.

These Olympic moments are so fun to watch, but what we don't see is the way these athletes arranged their lives to get to where they are. They had a vision for the life they wanted. They had intention—the desire that drove them to make choices that would lead to becoming world-class athletes. And they had engaged the means—the practices, relationships, and experiences—that would help them get to achieve their goals.

Each athlete had to put in thousands of hours at the gym, in the pool, on the track, running or swimming miles, working out, lifting weights, doing drills, refining skills to become the kind of person who could do what needed to be done in an Olympic competition. But they didn't do it alone.

Every athlete has parents, teammates, workout partners, and coaches who have helped them.

Now, we are not Olympic athletes. But understand this: whoever we are, whatever we do, Jesus wants us to go for the gold in our life with him. Our passage for today makes clear the Master's Plan for what that looks like in our lives.

So let's look at it again: "He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him..." (Mark 3:13-14).

My first two points are simply a reiteration of what Pete has said the last few weeks, but they are central to understanding Jesus' master plan. Jesus called a few people—the ones he wanted—to be with him. Jesus wanted these men to become all that they could be—all he created them to be. But more than that, he knew it would take intentional time and practices and processes to prepare them to become the leaders he needed them to be to continue his mission when he was gone.

We, too, are invited to engage in a personal, intentional plan of spiritual formation to become like Christ. *Intentional* is the key word. I know you are busy,

but you have time. You have 24 hours a day like everybody else in history. Each of us will spend those 24 hours one way or another. The invitation is to be with Jesus in those 24 hours and to spend all of them *with him*. The invitation is to be intentional.

engage

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Part of that means engaging in intentional practices that cultivate a trusting relationship with Jesus—practices we have talked about all summer. Jesus is not asking us to do something more but to do something different. He’s inviting us to be with him in the course of our everyday life. That does involve setting aside some intentional time to listen to him through the word and talk with him in prayer. But it can also mean incorporating practices into our everyday life as we drive, clean the house, mow the lawn, take a walk, or exercise. But hear me now: practices are not the end but the means to an end. The goal is to become like Christ.

The scandal with some of the US swimmers points to the reality that life isn’t just about doing, achieving, succeeding. Life is about who we are becoming. Every moment of every day with every choice we are becoming some kind of person. Jesus wants us to be with him, to abide in him, to become like him so that we are able to do what needs to be done in the moment.

Understand this: my own transforming relationship with Jesus is the best thing I can bring to my life, my marriage, my kids, my friendships, my work. As I become like Christ, I become a better person. The ripple effect of my life on my relationships, community, and in the world is immeasurable. Life is too short and the cost is too great not to be intentional. So here’s your first action point. Write or review a spiritual growth plan to become like Christ.



While Olympians have to be intentional and engage in personal practices, that is not enough. Every individual athlete is a part of the team that represents their country. There is a great scene in the movie *The Miracle* in which Coach Herb

Brooks asks the 1980 US hockey team, “Who do you play for?” They don’t get it, but he makes clear that the name on the front of their shirts (USA) is more important than their individual name on the back. He even told them they weren’t good enough as individual players to win gold. But by elevating community, he proved the value of teamwork and that miracles still happen. Interviews with athletes in Rio indicate that this value of teamwork over individual performance is a strong part of the culture of Team USA.

We, too, are invited to elevate community by cultivating intentional, spiritual friendships with others. We’re not just becoming like Christ, we are becoming like Christ *together*. We really are better together than we are alone.

That’s a hard lesson to learn because we have to swim against the cultural stream of our culture’s independence and individualism. *The Lego Movie* theme song keeps going through my head. Kids, sing it with me: “Everything is awesome. Everything is cool when you’re part of a team. Everything is awesome when you’re living the dream.”



Jesus understood the value of teamwork and community, and that’s why he didn’t just call individuals to himself. He called together a group of twelve to cultivate intentional, spiritual relationships with him and with each other.

Again, we all have relationships and they influence us more than we think. Look at Pete’s sermon last week to think about this more. But understand that we need authentic, honest, spiritual relationships because we can’t become all that we can be without others. This is a value no matter what your age or stage of life, and that’s why we have

so many different kinds of groups for children, students, men, women, singles, couples, mothers of preschoolers, seniors, and so on. We have classes on Sundays and groups almost every other day of the week. So here's your next action step: Assess your relationships and find a place to grow with others. Go to "group finder" on our website to explore options (<http://viennapres.org/group-finder>).



Jesus understood what was at stake, so his master plan was to call individuals to be with to become like him together with others as a part of a team or community, but his vision was

even bigger than that. We are becoming like Christ together *for the world*. What does "for the world" mean? Even as the Son of God and the second person of the Trinity, Jesus knew he could not reach the world alone in his human lifetime. For that to happen, he invites us to enlarge the vision of what God wants to do with our lives.

In John 14:12, we read what Jesus said to his followers: "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father."

No one individual could possible do more than Jesus did, but his strategy after his ascension was that the band of believers he developed would continue his ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. Becoming like Christ together *for the world* is the Master's plan, and you need to believe that your life and your intentional relationships with others does have a ripple effect that goes beyond time and space through generations and communities. Enlarge your vision and believe God that God wants to use you to be a part of changing the world.

So what does that look like practically? Let's look at our passage again: "He appointed twelve...to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons" (Mark 3:14-15).

Jesus' master plan was to equip and empower a few to lead others. Follow me now. He not only wanted his disciples to experience and enjoy the

abundant fruitful life that he created them for, his mission was to help them become the kind of people who could lead others. He needed to equip and empower them with the faith, knowledge, skills, and relational ability to continue his work in the world in the power of the Spirit after he was gone. Of course, they could never do this through their own human striving. It was the work of the Holy Spirit in them, but they learned from Jesus how to partner with him and do the things he did—teaching, preaching, and manifesting the power of the kingdom in their real, everyday lives and ministry. But they, too, had to become leaders who equipped and empowered others so that the kingdom baton would not be dropped but could be passed to the next generation.

Now some of you are tuning me out because you don't believe you are a leader. Stay with me now. I loved the commercial for a utility vehicle that shows people doing ordinary things and says, "We are all champions. We are all coaches. We are all play-callers." I like that because it's true. We are all leaders—not the same kind of leaders. But as those called to Christ, we are called to lead.

I like what Parker Palmer writes, "Everyone who draws breath 'takes the lead' many times a day. We lead with actions that range from a smile to a frown; with words that range from blessing to curse; with decisions that range from

equip and empower

a few to lead others

faithful to fearful.... When I resist thinking of myself as a leader, it is neither because of modesty nor a clear-eyed look at reality of my life.... I am responsible for my impact on the world whether I acknowledge it or not.

“So what does it take to qualify as a leader? Being human and being here. As long as I am here, doing whatever I am doing, I am leading, for better or worse. And, if I may say so, so are you.”

Every day you are leading. It’s only a matter of what kind of leadership you are offering. Jesus’ master plan involved intentionally investing in a few people to make a life-changing difference in their lives that lasts for eternity.



The faces of these parents may be as familiar to us now as those of their children—Simone Biles, Ally Raisman and Michael Phelps. I have to tell you, I love the commercials in

which athletes acknowledge the role their moms played in their becoming champions. No competitor gets to that level without the support and leadership of their parents. It’s true in the spiritual realm as well, and that’s why we ask important questions of the parents when children are baptized.

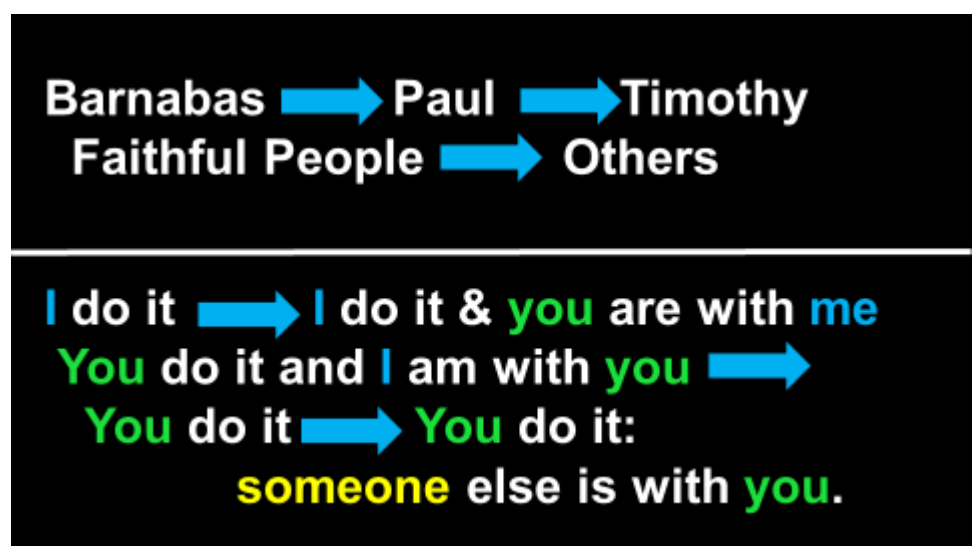
No one has more potential to influence a child’s relationship with God than a parent, simply because a parent spends more time with them. But the problem is we are sometimes so busy with the culture’s values of achieving, succeeding, and giving them every opportunity that we neglect what matters most—their relationship with God. Kids need parents who will be intentional about spending time together

as a family and staying actively involved in their children’s spiritual growth. If you are a parent, your children need your spiritual leadership. Again, it’s not necessarily doing more, but doing what you do differently with intention for their spiritual well-being. Our NextGen team has some great ideas on how to do that, so feel free to talk with them about that.

As critical as the love and support of a parent is, it takes other intentional relationships for an athlete to get to the Olympics. Great athletes and great teams have great coaches. Again, that’s true in the spiritual realm as well. Kids need other adults in their lives as spiritual mentors and leaders, especially as they grow older. That’s why our NextGen team is always actively looking—not just for volunteers—but people who are willing to invest in the lives of children and students who will not only impact their life but the lives of many for years to come.

That’s not only true for children and students but adults as well. The truth is that each of us can benefit from 360-degree relationships. This is outlined in 2 Timothy 2:1-2: “You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.”

Barnabas is not mentioned in this passage, but he is the one who discipled Paul. Paul in turn mentored Timothy as a son in the faith and then equipped him for leadership.



Timothy then became a leader of the church at Ephesus, who was called to teach faithful people who would teach others.

What we see here in this biblical model are the five phases of leadership: I do it on my own. I do it and you are with me observing and learning from me. You do it and I am with you observing and coaching you. Then you do it on your own. Finally, you do it and someone else is with you.

Assess your relationships.

Who is leading you?

Who are you leading?

How can you intentionally engage in 360 relationships going forward?

The effectiveness of our ministry is whether we are teaching and training others who can pass the kingdom baton to others. We all need

360-degree relationships. I have been in vocational ministry for over 30 years. Not only do I look for spiritual friends to grow with, I have a spiritual director who helps me pay attention to my life, my relationships, my leadership. Along with other leadership tasks I do, I also make sure that I'm leading a small group of people helping them grow spiritually.

We all need this in our lives, so here's the next action step: Assess your relationships. Some of you simply need to take the step of identifying spiritual friends and getting in a group, but some of you have been in that kind of group for a long time. Some of you are in many groups like that, and it is time for you to take the lead. Ask yourself: Who is leading you? Whom are you leading? How can you intentionally engage in 360-degree relationships going forward?

Finally, understand that Jesus' master plan enables us to expand our impact through multiplication. This is the

measure of greatest fruitfulness. In the early '80s, I saw a shampoo commercial that is locked in my memory to this day. As a college student, I was being mentored and challenged to invest in others through the kingdom principle of multiplication. This visual image stayed with me, and others picked up on this principle as well, as we see from this clip from Wayne's World clip of Wayne sharing with two friends, who tell two friends, and so on and so on and so on.

There are many things we can and do tell our friends. I'm grateful for the example of former NFL player Ray Lewis giving his friend Michael Phelps the life-changing book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. You see, we have the best news there is: Jesus has made it possible to enjoy a relationship with God forever. We have been given the joy of sharing that good news with others, and we have been given the privilege of mentoring others to become more like Jesus. Here's the thing: we can reach more people through multiplication than addition.

The end goal is Jesus' Great Commission: "Go and make disciples of all nations." Jesus laid out the strategy of how to

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reach the world. It involved developing and multiplying all kinds of leaders, who teach and train others, who will then train others. Some of us will lead others through ministries in the church. Others will influence others for Christ as they lead others through community organizations like PTA, Scouts, sports, or clubs or in their workplace. But be sure of this, God is calling all of us to be a part of His master plan.

My favorite story from the Leadership Summit last week was about Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Mark Schmidt, who sees his squadron as his flock and the flight instructors as the few he is called to lead and mentor. He noted that the military understandably cares about the skill competency of pilots. But as a Christian, he knows they will be better pilots if they become better people. So he began to incorporate more personal, holistic life principles and skills into the training program for fighter pilots. The impact of his leadership has been so dramatic and measurable that his superiors want to know what he's done so it can be replicated.

I don't know all of the particulars of your life, but I do know that Jesus wants you and me to be gold medal followers and leaders. He wants us to engage in his master plan of *becoming like him together for the world*. August is such a great time to assess where we are in this journey and to make intentional plans about how we are going to reset to do things differently, more intentionally. Please don't leave here believing this doesn't apply to you. If you feel anxiety, resistance or any kind of negative feelings about this master plan, you can pray about it. Talk about it with a friend. Contact a pastor or staff member to process this more. Consider receiving renewing prayer to better understand the belief that is behind the negative feelings. But in the end, we have to just do it! Jesus is calling us to be a part of his gold medal team and engage in his master plan to full his Great Commission. So let's do it.



BECOMING LIKE CHRIST
TOGETHER
FOR THE WORLD