

Worship (30) Corporate – Discipleship

The saying goes, ‘Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.’ I’m not sure how true that is, but when it comes to the Christian life we could say – ‘Imitation of Christ is a sincere form of praise.’ And that’s why discipleship is a part of worship.

A disciple is one who loves God supremely, follows Christ single-mindedly and holds the world slackly. We need discipleship to make disciples. In this message we see that discipleship is the second way we worship God in the way we treat each other. We saw the first is fellowship, the second is discipleship.

What is Discipleship?

When we think discipleship, some think a nine week programme, where people fill in words in blank spaces. Or you think of some kind of course a church runs for a brief time. It is not a programme; it is the relationship between believers.

Discipleship is helping another believer to make changes toward Christlikeness. Discipleship is embracing your responsibility before the Lord to stimulate more love for the Lord in another believer. As Jim Berg has pointed out -

Parenting is discipleship.

Church ministry is discipleship.

Counselling is discipleship.

Whenever you help mature a less mature Christian – this is discipleship. It is a lifelong process of forging and strengthening relationships with believers, and assisting them to grow. Why is it worship? Well, we have seen that the primary qualification of a disciple is that he or she loves Christ supremely. In other words – the primary marker of a disciple is that they are a worshipper. To develop another worshipper is worship.

And as we saw much earlier in this series on Worship, the primary form of individual worship is becoming like Christ. So, when you help another individual become more like Christ, this is worship – this magnifies the glory of God, through the lens of your entire being, to the other believer.

God has not set up the body so that the spiritual growth of others is none of your business. He has set up the body so that spiritual weakness in others negatively affects you, and spiritual strength in others benefits you. It is in your interest to serve others in discipleship, for their growth will strengthen you.

Once again, we need to emphasise that anything done in service of other believers counts as service to Christ Himself.

But if there is anyone we ought to look to for the method of making disciples it is the Lord Jesus. For three years He lived and worked with His disciples. From this group would come men and women who would change the world. We look around and see Christianity in its various forms. The reason we see that is because Christianity did not cease with the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. It continued in the disciples, who in turn discipled others.

What was our Lord's method of discipleship? Understanding how the Lord trained and discipled others will guide us as we seek to worship Him in this as well.

Invitation

Matt 4:18-22 *And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ They immediately left their nets and followed Him. ²¹ Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.*

Our Lord's discipleship of others began with an invitation – 'Follow me. Come unto me – all ye that labour and are heavy laden.'

One thing you never find the Lord doing in Scripture is begging people to be His disciples. In fact, you find the opposite. You find Him seemingly discouraging people from flippant, impulsive discipleship. He tells seekers that foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. He tells another that no one looking back is fit for the kingdom. He tells another to go and sell all his goods and then come and follow. He tells others unless they eat His flesh and drink His blood they cannot have any part in Him. It is as if He discourages the unwilling, and yet at other times, He calls, and discipled, those who are willing to come. Now there is a mystery here. Only the willing come, and the unwilling are never called. Now no one seeks after God by themselves, but God calls those who want to come. 'All that the Father gives me shall come', and 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power...' (**Psa 110:3**)

Discipleship is not a discipler following after disciples. It is disciples willingly following their teacher.

Discipleship begins with an invitation to someone else to disciple them in the faith, and they are willing. And their willingness continues to show in the weeks, months and years ahead. You do not have to chase them down, remind them, deal with cancellations every second week. They are willing, and respond to the invitation by leaving what they are doing and making changes so as to better follow Christ.

Now this does not mean that we are to neglect Christians who are going astray. Jesus certainly taught us that the heart of God is to go after that one sheep even if the other ninety-nine are with him. We are to go after the one backsliding, the one wandering. And that will often be a part of the discipleship relationship. We make phone calls and visit these ones.

But discipleship is not a discipler trying to create and sustain interest and enthusiasm in a person who is otherwise uncommitted and disinterested.

Instruction

Matt 5:2 *Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:*

The second phase of discipleship is one of the most important – it is the instruction phase. In fact, the idea is inherent in the word disciple. It means a learner - one who is taught, one who is instructed. The word is even translated 'teach' in the King James Version – 'teach' all nations.

Once the Lord had his disciples, He spent hours and hours teaching them. Only the parts that the Spirit of God wanted in the Scripture are recorded for us. But you can imagine how much Jesus was teaching them. Even if you take the recorded words of Jesus, you have teaching on the Father, on Himself, on the Spirit, on heaven, on hell, on sin, on salvation, on holy living, on future events. He must have taught His disciples an enormous amount.

The discipler's role is to impart to the disciples the knowledge they need in order to love and glorify God. As you know, the whole counsel of God is a huge amount of information. And the teacher must start with the basics, the priorities, and teach the fundamentals of the Christian life. As the person assimilates and understands and obeys, the teacher advances. The knowledge becomes more detailed, sometimes more complex, sometimes more difficult.

The Lord knew that His disciples could not handle everything He had to tell them. Even after three years, the night before His crucifixion, He says, *'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.'* (**John 16:12**)

They weren't ready yet. But listen to the next verse: *'Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.'* (**John 16:13**)

The Spirit of God would continue the instruction process of the disciples even after Jesus had gone.

In a way, this is still true – you may teach a person so much, but the Spirit of God must be the one who illuminates and guides a believer into all truth. You can't teach them everything, but you teach them what you believe they are ready for.

When you think of our Lord's ministry, He taught His disciples in very different places. He taught them in the synagogue. He taught them in the fishing boat. He taught them on the mountain side. He taught them while they were walking somewhere. He taught them before and after miracles. He taught them when He rebuked them. He taught them while He interacted with others. The point is that He was teaching them not just in one place and time, but in a diverse number of life settings. The instruction of your disciple does not only happen at church. It happens when you get together to study the Word and pray. It happens as you get together to meet and you talk. It happens during phone calls. It happens when they come to you and you need to counsel them from the Word of God. The Bible tells us to be instructing one another, in **Romans 15:14**.

But here is the crux of the matter – with what are we to be instructing our disciples? Should we be instructing them with our personal opinions on life?

Sometimes the advice you hear one Christian give to another is nothing short of horrifying. You ask 'Where did they come up with that?' They simply felt it was right, so that's what they said. If you instruct others using personal opinions shaped by Oprah, Cosmopolitan, Pop-Psychology, and supposed 'common-sense' inherited from others – you will do more harm than good.

In **John 7:16** and **12:49**, The Lord spoke the Words of God. We are to instruct our disciples with the Word of God - the unadulterated, undiluted, pure Word of God.

Remember, whose disciples are they? Are they yours? No, they are Christ's. And though you are in a discipling relationship, and you can speak loosely about the person being your disciple – in truth, they are Christ's. That means you teach them Christ's words and thoughts as authoritative, not your own.

Second Timothy 3:16 tells you what kind of instruction you are to give – doctrine, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. You teach them the doctrine, God's standard; you reprove them when they deviate; you correct them and put them back on the standard, and you train them to stay there.

Imitation

Luke 11:1 *Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."*

The Lord did not preach from an ivory tower. What He taught His disciples, He lived out in front of them.

Jesus so prayed before His disciples that they eventually came to Him and said, 'Teach us to pray'. He modelled the life He was teaching them. Peter would later write that He was a lamb without blemish and without spot. They were with Him and they saw His sinless life. They in turn would seek to copy how He lived. They would seek to imitate Him. They had a pattern to follow; they had a living demonstration of what the truth meant.

And this is why God does not disciple us through books or tapes or CDs or DVDs of sermons alone; He discipled us through us being in the presence of other believers, who are living the truth. They flesh the truth out for us and we see it and understand it, and desire it, and seek to copy it.

Think of an example from life - it is one thing to *say*, 'Husbands love your wives' but it is another thing to *see* a Christian man truly loving his wife.....

It is the example which is lived out in front of your disciples which causes them to want more truth, and want to implement it in their lives. This is why Paul could say seemingly radical things like, '*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*' (**1Cor 11:1**).

When he hands the baton to Timothy, he tells him, '*Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*' (**1Tim 4:12**).

Likewise to Titus: '*in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility,*' (**Tit 2:7**).

It does not work in parenting, it does not work in pastoring, and it does not work in mentoring to say, 'Do as I say, not as I do.' If you fail to practice the truth in front of the ones you teach, you effectively render what you have taught, powerless and useless. They reason – 'If the truth isn't strong enough to change you – why should I be interested in it?'

Now do you have to be perfect to disciple another believer? No. But you do need to aim for consistency. And you need to humbly confess your inconsistency to a young believer. God has stern warning for those who cause young believers to stumble in their walk with God.

If that sounds scary, let me encourage you – having someone look up to you is one of the best motivators to get yourself straightened out. God can use the presence of a disciple in your life as much as He will use you in theirs.

Inspiration

Matthew 12:20

One of the most precious verses to describe the nature of our Lord is **Matthew 12:20** ‘*A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax [smouldering wick] shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.*’

The Lord is not a cruel god who snaps off a broken reed, and extinguishes a smouldering wick. If there is still life in it, He will help, strengthen, encourage. Again and again, we find Him encouraging His disciples.

He says to them, ‘Fear not – you are of more value than sparrows. Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. Let not your heart be troubled.’ He encouraged them with promises of His return, of the Comforter coming, of the future kingdom.

The Lord knew the frailty of man. We take some steps forward, and we take steps back. We have really up days, and down days. We have days we are discouraged. There are days the person you are discipling will have great doubts, great anxieties. And a discipler is to inspire as well. You are to provide the strength from the Word which revives the spirit, gives extra strength for the journey. You bear some of their burdens and encourage them.

So many of the ‘one-another’ commands are commands to inspire each other:

Encourage one another daily - **Heb 3:13**

Consider one another to provoke to good works - **Heb 10:24**

Comfort one another - **1 Thes 4:18**

Edify one another - **1 Thes 5:11**

Don’t forsake assembling with one another - **Heb 10:25**

Be hospitable toward each other - **1 Pet 4:9**

We are to encourage by lifting up the hands which hang down, and strengthening the feeble knees, as instructed in **Heb 12:12** - *Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.*

Your goal is to see your disciple succeed, not fail. Therefore, generous amounts of encouragement are needed.

Delegation/ Supervision

Mark 6:7-13 *And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits. ⁸ He commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff -no bag, no bread, no copper in their money belts - ⁹ but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ Also He said to them, “In whatever place you enter a house, stay there till you depart from that place. ¹¹ And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgement than for that city!”¹² So they went out and preached that people*

should repent. ¹³ *And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them.*

Our Lord did more than teach, model and encourage. He gave them opportunities to practice the truth under His supervision. He gave them opportunities to serve, from which He could guide them and teach them.

Examples of this would be: Peter on the water, the disciples breaking the bread and fish, disciples seeking to cast demons out of the demon possessed boy.

A discipler sees the whole process as an apprenticeship. And apprentices have to try their hand at various things. They have to be trained. And while they try on their own, the trainer is there to supervise, to correct, and to further encourage.

As you train someone you are first training them in their walk with the Lord, to think biblically. Then you train them in various practices of the Christian life – Bible study, prayer, memorisation, church attendance. Then you train them to witness to others, to serve others, and eventually to teach others. But all along the way, with their cooperation, it is a process of setting goals, supervising, and guiding.

We need accountability. We need exam invigilators. We need speed cameras. We need external audits. We need performance reviews. We need managers and supervisors. Without these, our sinful natures will try to do as little as possible, much of the time. So in order to mentor someone in walking with God, there has to be a sense of accountability. If there are no expectations on the person you are discipling, then don't expect much! It is when you expect them to put something into practice, knowing you will be asking whether they did it, that encourages action.

The more you train your disciple, the closer he or she will come to training someone else. *'And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also'* (**2Tim 2:2**).

One of the biggest gifts you could lay at the Lord's feet is a believer, or several, who are like their Lord. Are you worshipping Him in discipleship?