Notes on Discipleship

Introduction

- There is a difference between **mentorship** (a commonly used non-Biblical term) and **discipleship** that includes and transcends the concept of mentorship.
- Mentorship is largely about skills (using heads and hands), but it is not about the heart and inner motivations or about community.
- The goal of a discipler is to transform the disciples and reproduce Jesus in them as Jesus is being reproduced in the life of the discipler.
- In parts of Africa one finds street sellers peddling "cheap crosses" (seen as a good luck charm). Salvation is free, but it is not cheap! It cost God the life of His Son.
- "Cheap cross" preaching is:
  - Forgiveness without repentance
  - Baptism without church discipline
  - Communion without confession
  - Christianity without discipleship
- Discipleship in the 21st century is "an endangered species". Why? Possibly urbanisation is a hindrance to discipleship. Many urban churches have cell groups – the fellowship is good, but the problem is often 'babies feeding babies' and not much discipleship is going on. For cell group leaders questions can come from anywhere and everywhere and it is hard to prepare. The problem is the lack of good disciplers.

Key Text: Luke 14:26-27

- To become a disciple means a transformation of both lifestyle and priorities.
- It involves becoming **a learner** – someone who models his life on another – Jn. 9:28 (disciples of Moses) and Mt. 9:14 (disciples of John).
- To become a disciple/follower of Jesus involves living like He did, speaking like He did and doing what He did in the culture where He has placed you.
- Local people need to **see** and **experience** our faith by seeing our discipleship.
- Sports coaches insist on a whole change of lifestyle in those they train.
- So discipleship involves a change in mentality, in worldview, in lifestyle and in priorities.
- In the Old Testament the word is used once – Is. 8:16 ***"Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples."*** But the concept is there in:
  - Joshua being discipled by Moses
  - Ruth being discipled by Naomi
  - Samuel discipling David (1 Sam. 19:20)
  - Solomon being discipled by David (1 Kings 2:1-5)
  - Elisha being discipled by Elijah
- Is discipleship just being a learner? No, not in the academic sense (as a student). Involved in the concept of discipleship there is a **personal attachment** that shapes the whole life of the one described as a disciple and leaves no doubt as to who is deploying the formative power.

- When do you exit from being disciple? When you can do what the Master does and be exactly like Him. So it is not like a Bible School (or 3 yr. course) where you graduate after a while.

Six Ways to describe a disciple

1. **A follower**: (Mk. 2:18; Jn. 1:35,77) following in the footsteps of the Master, following His way of life – Acts 1:1,2 – following so as to bring glory to the Master
2. **A student**: (typical of Greco-Roman culture), someone who understands the teaching – someone who teaches like the Master (Jn. 9:28; Mt. 22:16)
3. **An adherent**: someone who stands close to the Master and who is faithful to the cause and person of the Master – see 2 Kings 17:34 for false adherence
4. **An imitator**: (used in a good sense in the New Testament)
   See 3 Jn. 11; 1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1; Eph. 5:1; Heb. 6:12

   So a 'Christian' in its original meaning was an imitator of Christ – Acts 11:26, 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16
5. **An apprentice**: a learner of a craft – bonded into service for a period to serve the master and, in return, entitled to receive from the master instruction in a trade. It involved living with the master, meeting his needs in service – preparing food, running errands, carrying his bags. It involved watching him and helping him. The master watches the apprentice in minor work and builds up his skills slowly. The apprentice only goes home occasionally. Only when the master accredits the apprentice's work as good as his own can he leave. The master "graduates" his apprentice by providing him with tools. The apprentice is now a master and puts up a sign which incorporates "apprenticed to x".
6. **A protégé**: having a trusted counsellor or guide to discovering and developing his or her abilities. See Acts 8:13, 18-24: Simon wanted power and so he wanted to become Peter's protégé.

Six "C's" in discipleship

- **Called** to be a disciple:
  - It is not your choice
  - It is never self-willed (Lk. 9:57-62)
  - It is not permanent – some went back (Jn. 6:66-69; 2 Tim. 1:15, 4:10) so a daily recommitment is needed
- **Committed** to the person of the Lord Jesus (Lk. 9:57) This involves:
  - Obedience to His Lordship (Lk. 6:46)
  - An obligation to suffer with Him (Jn. 12:24-26)
- **Cost** of discipleship
  - Self-denial in promoting the Kingdom
  - Cross bearing
  - Dying to the "natural" way
  - Preferring Jesus to all others
  - Standing for Jesus and His Word (but remember knowledge puffs up)
- **Characteristics** of the disciple (Jn. 8:31-36, 13:34-35)
  - Abiding in God's Word
  - Steadfast faith in Him
  - Loyalty to Him

- Love for one another
- Walking in the light with each other
- Bearing fruit (a bit like smallpox – it passes quickly from one person to another) so we need to reproduce Jesus in others
- Humble service to one another

- The **commands/commissions** of discipleship:
  - To love God
  - To love our neighbours
  - To make disciples of all nations
- The **community** of disciples (Acts 2:4, 6, 7)
  - A preaching community
  - Repentance from sins
  - Baptism
  - The filling of the Holy Spirit
  - Devoted to:
    - Studying the Bible
    - Fellowship
    - the Agapé Feast and communion
    - Love and sharing
    - Worship and prayer
    - Evangelism and growth

Mentorship is less than discipleship for mentorship just involves one-on-one, but discipleship involves community.

A goal for yourself in multiplication

- Win one disciple each year and disciple him or her.
- Teach your disciple how to win another and disciple him or her.

Why is the contemporary church losing its New Testament concept of discipleship?

Causes:

- Secularism is removing holistic thinking.
- Privatisation makes us very vulnerable.
- The size of the modern church inhibits discipleship.
- Para-church agencies have "stolen" the concept. For example: Navigators is built around the whole concept of discipleship. So if you are a Navigator you are a discipler – if you are not a Navigator, you don't disciple! Inter Varsity Fellowship has also tended to produce a lot of very good discipleship tools for students and graduates. It is assumed that if you are not a student, it is not for you.

The 21st century church must return to the New Testament concept of discipleship.

Questions

1. What does it mean to be a disciple?
2. Based on Mt. 8:18-22, what should be the lifestyle of a disciple?
3. Using Mt. 9:36-38 and 10:1-16, what is the vision and mission of a disciple?
4. Can you be a Christian and not be a disciple? What about Judas – he was a disciple?
5. What are the trademarks of disciples of Jesus?
6. What – according to Mt. 13:1-17 – are the privileges of being a disciple?
7. How does one become a disciple?
8. Being a disciple of Jesus is costly. How do you understand such demands?
9. What is the ultimate goal of discipleship?
10. What are three ways that a church can incorporate a discipleship programme?

Ten steps to take in making disciples

These come from John 17 – the great High Priestly Prayer of the Lord Jesus.

1. **Ensure your disciple knows Jesus.**

   "This is eternal life that they know You the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

   - This is the distinctive of disciples of the Lord Jesus – that they have been given eternal life (v. 2). If you **have it** you can tell others about it!
   - Jesus is concerned that they "remain": ***"That My joy might remain in you"*** (Jn. 15:11) "***That your joy should remain….."*** Ensure that your disciple keeps standing in the Lord. How do you do this? Remember when Peter was sinking (Mt. 14:30) he prayed! So spend time in prayer **for** them and spend time in the Word **with** them teaching them to pray.

2. **Reveal to your disciple the Triune God.** (v. 6 and v. 26)

   "I have manifested Your name to the people……"

   "I made known to them Your name."

   A survey was made in Africa among 70 million Christians in 42 African nations about what they believed. More than 95% could not say who God is! Sadly most people follow their pastor and not God. So do your disciples know more about you than they know about God? The word in v. 6 ***"I have manifested…"*** is the word 'exegeted'. Jesus 'exegeted' the Father! The disciples watched Jesus. We usually learn more from observation than from any other form of communication. So you need to be close to God! You need to be consistent. Your identity as one who is 'in Christ' should not be confused or mistaken.

   Your disciples have the right to ask, *"What has the Lord said to you today?"* Don't ever preach what you are not attempting to practice!

3. **Give your disciples God's Word in its totality – hide nothing.** (v. 8,14)

   - Often more by default than design we have mixed the Word of God with our culture and our western worldview. But this is then not God's Word!
   - Or we have just preached our favourite bits of the Bible. This is not good enough!
   - We need to re-contextualise our Bible teaching out of its Western/Korean etc. worldview into a Middle Eastern worldview.
   - There are three things that are often wrong in the churches:

- ✧ Shallowness in the work of God
- ✧ Ungodly leadership
- ✧ A disconnect between what we know and what we practice

Only the Word of God is "powerful" to change people.

4. **He prayed for His disciples.** (v. 9, 11) **Pray for your disciples. Teach them to pray**.
   - Jesus really prayed for His disciples
   - In Mt. 6:6 He taught His disciples how to pray!
   - 6 'P's (almost!)
     - ✧ **Personal** – "But when you pray…"
     - ✧ **Private** – v. 6
     - ✧ **Parental** – prayer depends on a Father-Child relationship. On this basis how can He deny you?
     - ✧ **Particular** in reference to a place – a special place – a prayer room
     - ✧ **Profitable** – We pray to receive as well as to worship
     - ✧ **In faith** (**Piscus** in Greek)
5. **Protect them and keep them safe.** (v. 12)

   "I have guarded them and not one of them is lost except the son of destruction…."

   Our disciples are like children at the beginning. Small children need to be afraid of some things that look attractive – like fire. They need to be protected from extremes (like the edge of a cliff). So protect them and teach them to detect and avoid dangers.
6. **Train them in mission.** (v. 18)

   "As You sent Me into the world, so have I sent them into the world."

   Initially He sent them out two-by-two. Explain the 2-by-2 principle. Also explain the importance of "team" – the twelve – and then in campaigns like the '72'.
   So train them in mission and in ministry.
7. **He sanctified Himself for them.** (v. 17, 19)

   "Set them apart" (for the holy service of God) (v. 17)

   "And for their sake I consecrate myself that they may also be set apart ...." (v. 19)

   He identified Himself with His disciples. So should you. He also kept Himself Spirit-filled. This led to God being glorified and victory over all temptation. He was ***"anointed with joy above all His brethren"***.
8. **Keep them united.** (v. 21)

   "That they may be one….." This is very difficult but you must keep trying!
9. **Share your glory with them.** (v. 22, 25-26)

   This is one of the ways to maintain unity. Don't take the credit. Share it around with your disciples. May your attitude constantly be: "May Jesus increase as we decrease".
10. **Make sure that not one of them is lost** (v. 12)

So discipleship is not a programme – following a discipleship manual. It is sharing life. They will need as much grace in the relationship as we will need!