Some Disciplines of the Christian Life 4/4

The Disciplines of Apostleship

There are four disciplines of apostleship I would like to cover:

1. Embracing suffering and hardship – 2 Cor. 11:23-28
2. Overcoming criticism and negativity – Gal. 2:11-14
3. Maintaining perspective and perseverance – 2 Cor. 4:16-18
4. Exhibiting courage and fortitude – 2 Tim. 4:6-8

Introduction

When the Catholics pioneered into Korea in the late 19th century, they lost about 8000 workers over a twelve-year period. What would happen today if our company lost 8000 workers over a decade in this part of the world? But in Korea their perseverance brought results and the killing stopped.

In the early days in West Africa there was only 'short-term missions'. The average career of a worker was 2-3 years. Many left to go to Africa with their belongings packed in coffins. It was known as 'the white man's graveyard'. But still they went in their hundreds.

Adoniram Judson was the first American worker to go to Asia. The Congregational Mission Board sent him out but he resigned while travelling to India and became a Baptist. He had very little support after that. He was 21 years old when he arrived in Burma after spending two years at sea! As an American he was not allowed into British India. His wife, Ann, was 19 years old. Soon after they arrived they lost their first baby. About a year after their arrival Judson was put in prison for eighteen months suspected of being a British spy. Every night he was hung upside down from a bamboo pole with just his shoulders on the ground. During this period Ann lost their second child. Judson focused on language learning and Bible translation. He kept all his papers, books and manuscripts in a thick wooden trunk. After several years of work and a New Testament nearing completion as well as several books of the Old Testament, there was a fire and the trunk and everything in it was burned! He had to start again. After a few years Ann died. William Carey sent his secretary, Sarah, to marry Judson. They had five children. The Bible was completed by Judson and printed by Carey. Then Sarah died. After 33 years in Burma Judson had his first home leave! He married again and immediately returned to Burma. Four years later he died. When Judson arrived in Burma there were no believers. When he died there were over 7000! The Baptist churches are the largest group in Burma today – especially among tribal peoples like the Karen, Lisu etc.

When I was 18-24 I read many biographies. I loved the adventure and the excitement! Now I realise something of the disciplines of apostleship that the early pioneers went through.

I benefited greatly by reading:

- The Shadow of the Almighty – about Jim Elliot
- A two volume biography of Hudson Taylor
- About J.O. Fraser the pioneer to the Lisu people of China
- Books about Henry Martyn
- Books about Ian Keith Falconer

These and many others greatly influenced me. Now, in my 70s, I realise some of the hardships they went through. Yet we, in our generation, are still called to pioneer.

Three orders of apostleship

'Apostle' has a Greek root. 'Missionary' has a Latin root and both mean someone who is sent. Apostleship is a controversial word today. This may help to make it less so.

1. **The apostle of the Father**

   There is only one unique person in this order – the Lord Jesus!

   "Therefore holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession." (Heb. 3:1)

   Forty one times in the Gospel of John Jesus says that He was sent by the Father.

2. **The apostles sent by the Son**

   They were called and sent out by the Lord Jesus. Originally there were twelve of these disciples. It was clearly important for them to find a replacement for Judas Iscariot. (Acts 1)

   There were clear criteria for this order of apostleship. It had to be someone who had been with Jesus and the group from the days of John the Baptist through His death on the Cross, the Resurrection (of which they had to be an eyewitness) and the Ascension. Paul was added as one of these apostles for he too was an eyewitness to the Resurrection and Ascension of the Lord Jesus and he was personally called and sent out by the Lord Jesus. The New Testament in particular flowed from these men.

3. **The apostles of the Holy Spirit**

   "When He ascended on high He led a host of captives and He gave gifts to men." (Eph. 4:8)

   "He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers...." (Eph. 4:18)

   Clearly this order is different from the second order. In this third order the Holy Spirit sends out apostles – see Acts 13:2. If we are to use the word 'apostle' today it is only in this last category. So I am using the word apostle of those men and women sent out as pioneers into new situations.

Discipline One: to embrace suffering and hardship

"Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the church." (Col. 1:24)

I want you to get a hold of this for I think that in the last 50 years we have lost something in our evangelical theology in the western world. We have looked at the Incarnation and said it is truly wonderful. We have looked at what Jesus did and how He taught and we have tried to model our teaching on that. We preach what Jesus preached. It is wonderful that Jesus healed the sick and we have tried to follow His example in this. It is wonderful that Jesus cast out demons. We also have got into releasing people from demonisation. It is clear that Jesus moved in the supernatural and so we have tried to do so as well.

But when it comes to the Cross we are so glad that the Lord Jesus suffered, but we have no intention of following Him there. We see the **life** of Jesus as our model, but the death of Jesus as unique.

But you don't find this taught in the New Testament. ***"I do my share in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions"***. The price of pioneering is suffering and sacrifice. This was well understood by the Early Church. It was recovered again in the Reformation and in the Great Evangelical Awakening, but it was largely lost in the 20th century.

The greatest thing Jesus did was **suffer** – greater than His teaching, healing, signs and wonders. We long to move in power, but do we long to suffer? Yet our greatest calling is to suffer and perhaps to lay down our lives. Biblically this is greatness! In the history of the church this has often been well understood. It is not so in the Western Church today.

For example: Francis of Assisi died at the age of 51 very disappointed he hadn't been martyred. In his 20s he had gone to Egypt (in 1251) in the middle of a crusade and spent two years there preaching to the **local** people. He even preached to the Caliph, but was not killed for his

presumption! This was not just cavalier, over-the-top nonsense. The historical Biblical faith has always seen it a great privilege to suffer for Christ because it ***"fills up what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions"***.

Now there is **nothing** lacking in the death of Jesus as to the issue of providing for our sin and guilt. This is unique and we can add nothing! We can add **nothing** to improve the merit and atoning value of the blood of Jesus shed to purchase our salvation. We can add **nothing** to the death of Jesus in the whole issue of eternal justice.

But was there something lacking in the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in Paul's understanding of apostolic mission? What does Paul mean? ***"I fill up in my flesh*** (or make complete) ***what is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions."*** The only other place in the New Testament we find the phrase "***to fill up that which is lacking"*** is in Phil. 2:30. It speaks of Epaphroditus. Paul writes that he almost died for the work of Christ, ***"risking his life to 'fill up'*** (or 'make complete') ***the help you could not give me"***.

The Philippian believers had sent a gift to Paul while he was in prison in Rome to show their love for him. Epaphroditus carried the gift to Paul and thus "***completed the gift"***. The believers in Philippi were poor. They had sacrificially collected the money together as a love offering. What was still missing in their gift? It was the presentation of the gift **in person**. So Epaphroditus – in his person and with great personal sacrifice – ***"made up"*** that which was lacking in the gift of the Philippian believers – the presentation of a love gift in person!

Paul's understanding of our task

God's great love offering of salvation is to be presented to **all** people. It is an immensely costly gift and it must be presented **in person**. How can the receiver understand the cost of a free gift? The presentation is most effective when the receivers can see our suffering – the costly offering of our lives – to enable them to understand the value of God's gift. This is the only way it is believable!

An example: a young Indian believer – very poor – not highly educated – just a few months of Bible School – felt that God had called him to go from village to village preaching the Gospel. One day he was tired, hungry and alone, but felt the urging of the Holy Spirit to go to a remote village. It took him nearly all day. When he arrived a crowd gathered and he began to preach the Gospel. The villagers were angry. He was beaten with rods and stoned as he was driven out of the village. Some little distance outside the village he found a big tree. Under it he fainted with exhaustion and despair. A couple of hours later he woke up and now he was very frightened for the whole village had gathered around the tree quietly waiting for the believer to wake up.

This is what had happened. After driving him out of the village, the village elders had sent some strong men to follow him to make sure he didn't come back. When he collapsed under the tree the men went to look at him. They noticed his feet – bleeding, blistered and clearly very painful and they realised that the young man had paid a very high price to get to their village. They reported this to the elders who came to the conclusion that he was a 'holy man'. They decided that the whole village should listen to what he had to say. They asked the young man to forgive them for treating him so badly and asked if he would come back with them and stay with them and teach them. He stayed several days and many in the village believed.

This is what Paul means. It is the presentation **in person** of the greatest love gift of all time – the gift of salvation – bought for us by Jesus through great suffering through His life and death on the Cross. The value of this gift – demonstrated by our suffering – proves its value to us!

Why is suffering and hardship so important? We measure the worth of a hidden treasure by what we will gladly sell in order to buy the treasure. If we don't sell what we have, we are saying that what we have is more valuable to us than the treasure in the field. ***"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."*** (Mt. 13:44)

The extent of his sacrifice and the depth of his joy demonstrate the value he has put on the treasure in the field.

So in the midst of hardships, difficulties and suffering, we can joyfully live through these times knowing that we are making up that which is lacking in the presentation of the Love Gift!

2 Cor. 11:23-28 is a catalogue of some of the sufferings Paul went through in order to be effective. We are to follow in his steps. So suffering is not unfortunate, it may actually be the greatest thing to do!

Two other reasons to embrace the discipline of suffering

1. Paul says, ***"We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God"*** (Acts 14:22). Hardship, stress and suffering are mechanisms that disarm the powers of darkness. We are in countries where we are going to have to pay a price to win for the Lamb that was slain the reward for His suffering. Suffering can be hard and heavy and can be completely evacuated from the life of the Spirit. But this is **not** what we're aiming at!

   Our goal is suffering and death coupled with resurrection power. Remember, ***"The power of the resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering".*** (Phil. 3:10)

2. There are degrees of suffering. We are all called to suffer. Some of you are going to tumble into bed night after night absolutely exhausted physically, emotionally and mentally. This is part of the sufferings of Christ. Others may suffer in other areas such as homesickness etc. Is this a reason to be discouraged? No! *"O Lord, it is such a privilege to be exhausted and homesick for you!"* This is a discipline you need to work on.

The discipline of overcoming criticism and negativity – Gal. 2:11-16

You won't be able to pioneer a work for God without overcoming immense criticism and negativity.

In the lifetime of John Wesley, during the Evangelical Awakening, he (John) was very greatly attacked. Six hundred and six books and pamphlets were written against John and what he was trying to do. There were terrific waves of opposition.

It is the same for any pioneer. It is the price that has to be paid. When William Booth started the Salvation Army, he was put out of the evangelical establishment and the press and politicians vilified him. The watchword of the Salvation Army was "blood and fire" – the fire of the Holy Spirit and the blood of the Lord Jesus – and their own. The army was rejected by all. Their halls were burnt down and their street meetings were pelted with muck. But over the years (as with Wesley) they turned the tide of public opinion. They stopped child prostitution in England and dramatically reduced drunkenness. They changed many things nationwide and did an immense amount of good. Towards the end of William's life, King Edward VII invited him to Buckingham Palace. By now the Salvation Army was in many countries. The king said, *"Booth, what is the establishment saying about you now?"* William replied, *"Sir, they are not saying anything. They are copying us!"* and it was true. The Anglicans started the Church Army modelling themselves on the Salvation Army. Imitation is an indication of success.

In the early 60s YWAM and our company initiated short-term mission. We were also vilified, but now so many have imitated us!

If we are going to be pioneers we must be prepared for criticism. It will come from **external** sources. We need God's wisdom to handle it wisely. Often it also comes from **internal** sources such as our family, friends, supporters or even from our own company. This is 'friendly fire' and it is just as deadly. You can often tell a pioneer in a crowd of believers for he is the one walking around with arrows sticking out of his back shot at him from his own side. This criticism can really hurt! We learn to make a good defence against an expected enemy, but have no defence against our own side! It really hurts. Evil-speaking is terribly destructive. How do we handle this? ***"A soft answer turns away anger."*** (Prov. 15:1) We need to admit our mistakes, say God has forgiven us and that we are learning and aspiring to be better as we push on ahead.

The discipline of maintaining perspective and perseverance – 2 Cor. 4:16-18

It is very important for pioneers to maintain perspective and to persevere. Dr Ralph Winter of the USCWM produced a statistic some years ago saying that more of our Muslim friends came to faith in the 90s than in the previous 14 centuries. Since 9/11 the number of Muslims coming to faith has increased. Some estimate it at about 6 million per year.

All this is very encouraging. A crack has appeared in the dam. This is the sort of perspective that pioneers **must** maintain. Someone has said, *"The further you can look back* (reflectively), *the*

further you can see the future". We need to read our history. We need to know what was done before us so we can learn – learn how previous generations coped and learn from their mistakes.

There are usually three stages in the fulfilment of a vision:

Stage One: This is when the vision is new and fresh. You arrive and you are in the "honeymoon period". There is a lot of encouragement from God. There is financial provision. It's a wonderfully encouraging period. It sometimes lasts for a year or two. There are some great supernatural experiences and you are thrilled. Then you move into Stage Two.

Stage Two: **This is the difficult stage!** It is difficult because it seems to go on for such a long time. It's tough. It's dry. There is not much indication of breakthrough. You begin to question your original guidance and leading. You are tempted to give up and go home or at least to move sideways. But if you are called to pioneer, if you are called to see breakthroughs, **you have got to stick it out**! If you do, you will eventually move into fruitfulness – Stage Three. Hudson Taylor said that there are always three stages in the work of God:

Impossible – Difficult – Done!

Stage Three: This is the fulfilment of what God originally placed on your heart. It is awe inspiring to see God fulfil your dreams.

So it is important to maintain perspective. Beware of the Grasshopper Syndrome! (Num. 13:3) From time to time exchange your microscope for a telescope. Much of what we do is microscopic stuff – details, rotas, small things that have to be done, financial reports, ordering materials etc. We have to use the microscope otherwise we will live in unreality. But there must be a regular time when we exchange the microscope for the telescope. With a telescope you see things that are a long way away and for us this produces hope!

Part of the discipline of pioneering is keeping perspective. We must persevere to get through to Stage Three.

William Wilberforce came to faith in the Evangelical Awakening in the 18th century. His father was very rich and an aristocrat. For a 21st birthday present he bought William a seat in the House of Commons. [British politics were very corrupt in those days!] As a member of parliament, William spent his days sword fighting and his nights drinking and gambling. He came to faith when he was 24. After his conversion he wanted to leave politics and become a minister. He went to see John Wesley. Wesley persuaded him to stay as a member of parliament and told him to fight the injustice of slavery that Wesley thought was the greatest sin of the British people. So William began to speak out about the slave trade. He was hated; he was a huge irritant since slavery was the foundation of the British economy and if you touch economic issues you touch people where they feel it.

William was often ill. He had high squeaky voice that made people laugh at him, but William fought on. There were several attempts to murder him for the rich and powerful were extremely angry. He introduced bill after bill into parliament. They were all defeated, so he turned to the people. He invented the tract! He got evangelical leaders on his side and they used their churches to speak about this terrible evil. John Newton, a converted ex-slaver joined William. [John Newton wrote the hymn 'Amazing Grace'.] Slowly a grass roots movement was born. This was the first really democratic movement in British history! Slowly parliament began to make concessions. But William fought on. After 46 years – on July 26, 1812 – the final bill abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire was passed. All slaves were freed and slavery, for the most part, was dead. Three days later – July 29, 1812 – William Wilberforce died! His work was done. He persevered until he accomplished what God had called him to do. Pioneers never quit!

Read the history of missions. We need to know what was done before us. We need to learn the lessons of the past. All this helps us to maintain perspective.

The discipline of demonstrating courage and fortitude – 2 Tim. 4:6-8

Bonhoeffer – the German pastor who was hanged by Hitler in the Second World War – said, *"Jesus didn't only die to make us good. He died to make us strong"*.

There are many Scriptures about the Lord being our strength. [Ex. 15:2; Ps. 18:2; Ps. 28:7; Is 12:2; Ps. 27:1; Ps. 46:1; Ps. 72:26; Is. 26:4] We are urged to ***"be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might"***. (Eph. 6:10)

Bonhoeffer said that more damage was done by believers being weak than by believers being involved in a multitude of petty sins. He said that in our teaching we are often only concerned with trying to remove petty sins. That is good, but it is not enough. We must teach believers courage and fortitude.

Here is a beginning. These are three Biblical truths about courage:

1. **Courage gains territory for God**

   This needs a more thorough treatment than we have time for. The classic passage is Joshua 1:2-9. ***"Have I not commanded you be strong and very courageous. Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*** (v. 9)

   Joshua was inclined to believe that he was not the instrument God was going to use to possess those specific goals (dreams) that God had given. Your task is to penetrate all the areas of your assignment through God's power. With the assignment goes the corresponding measure of grace and strength.

2. **Courage disarms the principalities and powers**

   You can't disarm them unless you stand in the arena in a fairly public way. Historians say the catalyst behind the Great Awakening of Wesley and Whitfield and others was the stand of the Quakers. At a spiritually barren period they courageously stood for justice. They visited prisons and pushed for reform. They stood against slavery and tackled various other social ills and slowly transformation began:

   - ✧ The courage and conviction of a few to push for justice and righteousness lead to:
   - ✧ The pulling of the trigger of a revival – great spiritual awakening that lead to:
   - ✧ Huge social transformation

3. **Courage releases the supernatural**

   Often in Scripture acts of courage precede a release of the supernatural power of God. I will give just one example – Jonathan and his armour bearer. [In the New Testament think of the woman with a blood disease who touched Jesus' robe or Paul and Silas singing in prison.]

   The story is in 1 Sam. 14. The people of God were confronted by the enemy and filled with fear. King Saul was in a cave (v.2). Jonathan said to his armour bearer, ***"Come, let us go over .... It may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few"***. Jonathan devised a simple test to see if the Lord was with them. He was! So they attacked – just the two of them! Amazingly they killed 20 of the enemy.

   But their courage released the supernatural. There was an earthquake. The enemy was filled with panic and fled (v. 5). They started to fight each other (v. 20) and there was a great victory.

   Courage on our part releases God ***"to do far more abundantly than all that we can ask or think. According to the power at work within us"***. (Eph. 3:20)

   Fortitude has been described as grace to go on enduring when there is no heart left in you. It is an act of the will that governs the feelings and the emotions. Towards the end of his ministry Paul said, ***"Having obtained the help that is from God, I continue ...."*** (Acts 26:22)

When all men forsook Paul, he said, ***"Nevertheless, the Lord stood by me and strengthened me. .... I was delivered ... the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and save me unto His Heavenly Kingdom."***

That is fortitude. It is seen supremely in the Lord Jesus who set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. ***"Be steadfast, unmovable"*** is God's command to us that we must obey. It takes fortitude to stick it out. We are here in response to God's appointment and each day we each need to say, ***"I have opened my mouth to the Lord and I cannot go back"***. (Judges 11:35)

So never yield to doubts. They always threaten. We are heralds of hope – heralds of the Gospel of the Resurrection. We must face every situation with confidence, knowing that out of death and defeat there can come resurrection and victory. Jesus said, ***"Be of good cheer, for I have overcome"***. Let us seek to be strengthened with might by the Holy Spirit that we may abound in hope!

The Laws of the Kingdom

This is the law of My kingdom,
Marked by the print of My feet,
Stained by the blood of My sufferings,
Proved in the furnace of heat,
Writ with the pen of My Spirit,
And shrined in My holy law,
But also in hearts I have conquered,
Men who are grit to the core.

Swift as the roe on the mountain,
Bold as the lion in fight,
Fired with the zeal of the martyr,
Ready to die for the right,
Hating their lives as I told them,
Casting them gladly away,
Yet deep in their hearts expecting
To find them again one day.

Men who dare to be different,
Men who dare to be true,
Choosing instead of the broad way,
The narrow path with the few,
Not drifting down with the flotsam,
But pressing upstream 'gainst the tide,
Disdaining the forces of convention,
With a will that is tougher than hide.

Who sign a cheque in My favour,
Leave me to fill in the sum,
Prepared with joyous abandon,
To face whatever may come;
Men who will rise by the moonlight
And wait at the posts of My doors
Watch for a glimpse of their Master
As they eagerly study His laws.

Women of deep intercession
Whose cries awaken the dawn,
Hannahs who travail with sorrow
Till prophets of God be born;
Christians who will to be holy
Nor care if the road be hard,
With souls athirst their aim first
A burning passion for God.

Them will I call My disciples.
Them will I gladly own.
They shall inherit My Kingdom
And sit with Me on My throne.
But as for the weak and tepid,
I would they were hot or cold.
I would they were overcomers.
I would they were strong and bold.

I'm sick and tired of the spineless
Who bear no light that I ken.
One by one I will spew them out,
For all that I seek are men.
These are the lovers of comfort
Who live the undisciplined life
With flesh that is pampered and petted,
That shrinks at the touch of the knife.

Too long has the cause been hindered
By salt that has lost its tang;
Fit to be thrown on the roadway
And trod under foot of man.
Yet even now for the fruitless
The axe is laid to the root.
For all I require in this solemn hour
Is the tree that brings forth fruit.

This is the law of My kingdom,
That only the pure shall thrive,
That in the heat of temptation
Only the true will survive,
Such as are poor and needy
Are heirs of my wealth untold.
The weak who cast themselves on Me,
They are the strong and the bold.

Two thousand years I've waited.
My work of redemption done.
High on the throne I have waited
A day that is yet to come.
When I shall arise in splendour
My glittering sword unsheathed.
Come with the shout of the victor
Wearing the victor's wreath.

To oust the wicked usurper
And stablish the rule of God;
To grasp with the hand once pierced
The orb and the scepter's rod.
Two thousand years I have waited
The hour when I claim my bride,
Purged, refined and resplendent
And throned at her Bridegroom's side.

Awaited a generation
Who will pray 'Thy Kingdom come'
Then bind themselves to the altar
To see that the thing is done.
Men who, fired with a vision,
Will stir My church with the cry:
'Evangelise to the finish!'
'Bring back the King from the sky!'

Storming the ramparts of heaven,
They seize the Kingdom by force,
Not thinking My gifts and treasures
Would come as a matter of course.
With the instinct of wrestling Jacob,
They plead for the Spirit's power;
Praying and fasting and waiting
Till clothed with the tongues of fire.

They speak a word to the mountain.
They cast it into the sea.
They tell the slaves of Satan,
'In the name of Christ be free.'
Willing for no reputation,
Their names men drag in the dirt.
They pray for those who revile them
And leap for joy at the hurt.

Feared by the powers of darkness,
They fear only God above
While hating nothing but evil,
They answer hatred with love.
Though men may think them extremists,
Call them fanatics and fools,
I will claim them My servants,
Shape them and make them My tools.

Send them with flaming evangel
To reach the uttermost parts;
Till they blazen My name and establish
My fame in a million hungry hearts.
In the day of My vindication,
They will shine as the noonday sun,
Robed with eternal splendour
And wreathed with crowns they have won.

In glory that beggars description,
Beholding that face once marred,
They will share the joy of their Saviour.
Clasped in the hand of God.
But what of the one who failed Me
When he stands at My judgment seat,
When deeds he thought would commend him.
Are ashes beneath his feet?

What will he say when he gazes
On the One who died in his stead,
Wringing those hands that are empty
And bowing that crownless head?
This is the law of My Kingdom,
That only the pure shall thrive,
That in the heat of temptation
Only the true will survive.

None but the overcomers
Shall purchase the right to reign.
Surely the day shall declare it;
Eternity make it plain.

A. Wallis