

MENTORING AS DISCIPLESHIP

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The power and potential of godly mentoring is an important process in the developing of disciples as they seek to grow and progress in spiritual disciplines. Of course this is not a new perspective as we speak on the realm of discipleship and the training of disciples. It has been the practice of the church down through the centuries and is still continued today.

One example of this I mention at the beginning is that of John Wesley and his accountability discipleship groups. The heart of Methodism during the life of John Wesley and beyond was the Methodist Class meeting. This was a small covenant discipleship support group where members were accountable to each other. They confessed to each other, prayed for each other and supported each other. It is stated that here the teachings of the Bible were examined in the light of actual personal experience and leaders were nurtured and equipped.

Wesley held four basis convictions for discipleship.

1. The necessity of discipleship.

Wesley wrote; "I am more and more convinced that the devil himself desires nothing more than this, that the people of any place should be half awakened and then left to themselves to fall asleep again." He firmly believe that converts should be brought into his small group setting so they could be confirmed in their faith and grow in their commitment. To abandon a new convert soon after conversion would be like abandoning a new born baby to raise itself. The support and strength of the body of Christ is essential in the growth of the new babe in Christ. Wesley saw discipleship mentoring as imperative to that growth.

2. **The necessity of mentoring disciples through the small group model.**

In order to do this Wesley created 3 strands of discipleship mentoring

- a) Societies (Larger group mentoring)** Through these society meetings strong biblical teaching and instruction was given. These society meetings usually had at least fifty members each.
- b) Classes. (Smaller group mentoring)** These were more of a sharing type of setting, accountability times, confessing of need and sins, supporting each other. They consisted of about ten to twelve people.
- c) Bands (An inner core with one to one mentoring)** There were usually four to six people involved in this setting, maybe a couple or individuals. It was to take those who were committed to a deeper level by one to one accountability and mentoring.

3. **The necessity of leadership in discipleship.**

Wesley took the appointed of leaders of these groups very seriously; they did not necessarily have to be educated people but had to possess certain gifts. They were extensively trained, their quality and integrity carefully examined; such was the importance that Wesley place on their position within the groups. Their job was to preach, teach, study, travel, meet with groups and one to one mentoring. In addition to that, Wesley saw that their primary function was to equip others to lead so that from the groups themselves countless officers would be raised up to lead the different groups and help in various capacities.

4. **Holiness and service as the goals of discipleship.**

Wesley's goals for such mentoring was the development of goodwill and godliness with a thrust for evangelism with the focus of disciple-making. He recognized before someone could go and make disciples, discipleship had to be the hall mark of their lives.

Wesley took as his example the early church and especially the example of Jesus Himself where his disciples and followers were concerned.

After the birth of the early Church, those early church leaders took seriously the task of mentoring these new believers and developing disciples. One of the great examples of that is in Acts 2 where the process of community development was established. Community describes the relationships we form that help us live out our beliefs and experiences. It is stated in Acts 2 v42 that those early leaders established four primary practices in growing and establishing those early converts.

- 1. The apostle's teaching.
The ministry of the Word.**
- 2. Fellowship.
The ministry of encouragement and support.**
- 3. The breaking of bread.
The ministry of inspiration and worship.**
- 4. Prayer.
The ministry of the miraculous as God moved among them.**

The verses that follow verse 42 gives us a picture of the early church in operation; the way in which these mentoring and accountability sessions and ministries encouraged believers brought about the intended purpose v47 "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

But, of course, the idea of one to one and small group mentoring began even earlier than that. The life of Jesus shares with us some of the greatest lessons to be learned from mentoring disciples and establishes some of the principles He followed. Jesus ministered to the multitude at least 17 times, according to the New Testament, however, there are approximately 46 mentions in the Bible where He spent His time in private with His disciples. In the smaller group setting He trained His committed follower for their own ministries.

At other times His ministry was conducted one on twelve; He also provided on the job training with the 70 and spent some apprenticeship time with the 120. But there were also times when He would get alone

with the two's and three's from the group of 12. Mentoring to Jesus was an important and fundamental part of His preparing His disciples for the future.

The Great Commission, which Jesus personally gave to His disciples; see Matthew 28, had a two fold purpose. The first was to go and make disciples. We see that as the primary ministry of the church today - we are a missional people, but the second purpose is no less significant but is sometimes set aside as secondary importance; it is to teach them to obey. What Jesus is suggesting is that there cannot be a disciple without training, and their cannot be training with mentoring and accountability.

The most effective manner to train and equip people for any skill is by providing effective models and opportunities to practice the skill itself. Jesus operated on a show, tell, release and supervise model of training. After calling His disciples, He took them along with Him, teaching and healing the sick as He went. Then, after He thought the disciples had seen and learned enough to try for themselves, He commissioned, empowered, instructed and sent them out to do the same things. The model of training should be no different for those desiring to bring other into a complete understanding and walk in Christ likeness.

The role of the coach is important in many areas of life today, whether it be sport, business or church. A good leader should and will often serve as a coach to others. Many coaches begin as players of the game, and at a natural transition point, they begin to play less and coach more. What you have effectively learnt, experienced and used can be passed on to others. Robert Clinton associate professor at Fuller Seminary said "Coaching is a process of imparting encouragement and skills to succeed in the task through relationship." Bill Hull in his book on Discipleship states: "Coaching involves a relational process in which the coach, who knows how to do something well, imparts skills to a follower, who wants to learn those skills."

This I believe is exactly what Jesus did with those early followers - He knew that He was with them for a limited time, that eventually He would leave them to do the job He was to commission them to do; His training, under the presence and the anointing of the Holy Spirit was going to enable them to carry out His mission to the world.

Robert Coleman, in his book "The Master Plan of Evangelism" essentially took apart Jesus' life and put it back together again and as he did so he identified eight steps that Jesus took and used to make and equip disciples - I mention them to help us better understand the avenues that Jesus took in mentoring

1. Selection - people were His method.

Jesus believed that people should reach people. He chose common men and women like us to reach the world.

2. Association - he stayed with them.

With the first disciples, the essence of Jesus' training was just letting his disciples follow him - come along side of Him.

3. Commitment - he required obedience.

The call to follow was the call to total commitment to Him - without that there would be detraction, divided loyalties and conflicting priorities.

4. Impartation - he gave himself away.

Jesus gave his disciples everything, in fact he said in John 15 v15 "...for everything I learned from my Father I have made known to you." He withheld nothing, not even His own life.

5. Demonstration - he showed them how to live.

They watched and listened to him interact with people, to teach, to pray. They saw and heard Him use the scriptures - his was a mentoring of example.

6. Delegation - he assigned them work.

Jesus was working Himself out of a job (Jason) He gradually turned responsibility over to them, like the 70 (Matthew 10 v1-2) and the extensive instruction to the twelve in Luke 10v1-20. Until finally He left them and the work was theirs.

7. Supervision - he kept check on them.

When Jesus gave his disciples work to do, he followed up. He listened to their reports, shared their disappointments, corrected their errors, inspired their vision. A good mentor is always in the background ready to encourage and support.

8. Reproduction - he expected them to reproduce.

Jesus told the disciples to pray for workers (Matthew 9 v36/38) he told them to go out and to reach and to teach (Matthew 28) The purpose of mentor disciples is that they will produce disciples - it is an on going process.

How did Jesus follow through this process with His own disciples ?

Jesus gradually took his disciples through a process that infused them with the qualities that would eventually make them trustworthy carriers of the gospel. It didn't happen all at once, it was a gradual process.

Let me illustrate what I mean as we see how this developed over the three years of Jesus ministry.

1. Come and see - John 1 v35 - 4 v46

It began with the invitation, then over a period of four to five months he worked with Andrew, Nathaniel, Peter, Philip, John, James and maybe others. During this period they followed Jesus, listening, discovering, watching; who He was and what He did. They discovered His passion, saw he was real and were enthused to follow Him in ministry. They saw Him performed a miracle at Cana, encounter the Pharisees at the Temple, interviewing Nicodemus at night, even heard the story of meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well. They discover that mission and ministry was and is people.

2. Come and follow - Matthew 4 v19 Mark 1 v16-18.

Next over a period of 10 to 12 months Jesus invited people to follow Him, first the twelve disciples, then the 70, then the 120. It was time to take them from simple observers to actually follows, from those who simply walked along with Him, to those who were now following, totally committed to Him. Sure, there were those who declined His invitation, others made excuses, some even started out well but went back. The invitation to follow was for an express purpose "I will make you fishers of men." First they walked with Jesus, then they followed Him.

3. Come and be with me - Mark 3 v13-14

Up on the mountain it says that "he called to them he wanted.." Hundred's of people followed Jesus during the course of His ministry now it was time to set aside the twelve; he was going to center in on them, designating them to be apostles, spend time with them in training them for ministry. In that passage the twelve are named, their course is set, their names are known and over a period of almost two years he works with them, trains them until finally He commissions them.

First they walked with Jesus, then they followed him, then they were trained for ministry.

4. Remain in me - John 15 v5,7

Finally, He was with them for a few hours in the Upper Room just prior to the cross. He had taken them through many changes now He was going to lead them through the greatest change of all, His leaving and the coming of the Holy Spirit. There came a time when He had to step back just as there will come a time when the mentor has to step back and allow those He has mentored to do the job for which he has trained them.

It was both a frightening and yet amazing experience; a scary responsibility but an amazing honor and privilege.

This process of mentoring did not cease with Jesus leaving His disciples; it became the pattern of the early Church as we have already seen from Acts chapter 2. in fact as you go through the scriptures you can see it as a pattern.

**Moses had a Jethro and Joshua a Moses.
Barnabas had a Peter and Mark, and Paul a Barnabas.
Paul had a Timothy.....**

This is probably one of the greatest example of mentoring there is in the New Testament that of Paul and Timothy, and the letters that Paul wrote to Timothy share some of the rich experiences of that mentoring with us.

The term mentor is linked with a wise and trusted counselor and teacher. John Mallison said "It is a dynamic relationship of trust in which one person enables another to maximize the grace of God in his/her life and service. Robert Clinton said "Mentoring is a relationship through which one person empowers another by sharing God given resources."

The fact is that each of us needs somebody and somebody needs us. There is no biblical 'lone wolf' Christianity. Howard Hendricks said; "A person trying to make it on his own is an accident waiting to happen." John Wesley said "The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion; watch over one another in love. Do not attempt your Christian journey alone."

This was certainly Paul's approach to Timothy as he prepared him for Christian ministry. Look at some of the advice he gave Timothy.

**"..command and teach these things....set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity...devote yourself to the public reading of the scriptures, to preaching and to teaching."
1 Timothy 4 v11 - 13.**

"But you, man of God, flee from all this (the love of money) and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith." 1 Timothy 6 v10-12.

"..use the gifts that God has given you.." 2 Timothy 1 v6

"You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 2 v1-3

Did you note the statement "entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.." Paul is encouraging the mentee to become the mentor.

So from all of this comes the question - what is the purpose of mentoring disciples ?

1. Mentoring encourages growth.

The purpose of Jesus in mentoring his disciples was to grow them in their experience of Him so that they could share that experience with other.

The purpose of the role of the early Church in establishing the four principles of teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer was to establish those believers in faith and commitment.

The purpose of John Wesley in establishing the class meetings was to develop a simply plan and pattern for the nurturing and establishing the saints.

Paul encouraged the believers in Ephesians to establish the ministries of those called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teaching for the express purpose "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.." 4 v11/12.

2. Mentoring confirms commitment.

In my own life, John Staff who mentored me for months after my conversion did so with the purpose of taking me from the conversion experience to become a committed follower of Jesus Christ. Little did he know at the time that he would be part of the process of God preparing me for a life of Christian service and ministry.

As I stated in my first paper, our responsibility as Christian is to move from a position of faith to a commitment to follow.

That's exactly what the early Church did - wherever there were converts, wherever possible, they established a church, a group of believers who together could encourage and mentor each other.

3. Mentoring plants vision.

From the mentoring of 12 disciples - the Great Commission was given as the vision for the Church. From the sending out of the seventy two, the picture of the harvest field, vast and ready was painted as the vision of mission. The plea for workers, the training of disciples, the mentoring of those who chose to follow becomes the thrust of that mission, for from the thrust a harvest is reaped and souls are brought to a knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Personal testimony. After 55 years of being a Christian, and 45 of those years spent in full time ministry I still look back with gratitude to God for the men that he placed in my life during those early days who helped lay a strong foundation for me and my desire now at this period in my life is to do the same for other.