

Discipleship in the prayer of Jesus

Introduction

We do not see the word 'discipleship' in the NT, we only see the word 'disciple'. This is important since modern Charismatic churches make a great deal about discipleship in order to indoctrinate church members into certain agendas. The worst example of this was the 'Heavy Shepherding' of the 1970s which was simply cultic authoritarianism. These people made discipleship a means of obeying men.

A disciple is a follower or pupil of someone, both in English and NT Greek. It means someone who is learning, someone not yet mature. In Christian terms a disciple is a follower of Christ. From this we derive the idea of discipleship as being: growing into Christ, learning about Christ, learning how to please Christ and learning to obey Christ. Thus the basic principles of discipleship are merely observing instruction and obedience.

For the assistance of young believers, we can identify certain things to help them to develop their growth in grace; such as how to pray, when to pray, how to read the Bible, how to trust God, what the basic doctrines are, how to overcome trials, etc. But we learn most about discipleship as we study how Jesus and Paul trained their disciples. We understand discipleship as we see the Master train his own people; Paul copied this example.

We could draw simple protocols from this observation, such as you can only disciple a small number of people; Jesus concentrated on only twelve. Paul's co-workers in training numbered only two or three at any one time (Urbanus, Rm 16:9; Titus, 2 Cor 8:23; Silas, Acts 15:22; Epaphroditus, Phil 2:25; Timothy, Rm 16:21 etc.). But the best tutor is to see Jesus' methods and learn from his teaching.

In this paper I simply analyse the great prayer of Jesus in John 17, a prayer of support for his disciples, to see how Jesus cares about his people. This gives us many lessons in counselling others in our care.

Discipleship principles in John 17

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: 'Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You'. Jn 17:1

Know your calling and destiny, as well as the timing of God.

As You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. Jn 17:2

Rely upon grace to achieve your calling. Don't trust in your own strength.

You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ... I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Jn 17:2, 6

You need a people given to you by God to disciple. It is not determined by man. It involves a joining of hearts, not mere leadership.

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. Jn 17:3

This is the goal – to get them to know God as Father, and to know Jesus better.

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. Jn 17:4

Are you glorifying God yourself?

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. Jn 17:4

Are you accomplishing the work that God has already given you? Are you obedient? You cannot train a disciple into something that you are failing in yourself. You instruct what you are.

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. Jn 17:4

Consider your work as the gift of God.

And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. Jn 17:5

Expect closeness with God.

I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Jn 17:6

Your ministry is to show God to your people, [God's name = all his character.]

Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. Jn 17:7

Rely upon God's grace by the Spirit to give you the resources to feed your people. [Cf. 'Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Feed My lambs'. Jn 21:15.]

For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. Jn 17:8

Endeavour to get your people to keep God's word. How did the disciples keep God's word? It wasn't legalistic OT observation but obedience to Jesus.

Give them what God gives you, not other men's ideas or little homilies. It may be a doctrine or an example to set, an illustration, a rebuke, a gentle encouragement, even doing nothing for a while (Jn 11:6), but whatever you do must originate in God.

Give everything you have, hold nothing back. The more grace you give, the more grace you get.

Expect God's words to come, don't strive to give your lofty thoughts.

Are your people receiving things from God? Do they recognise the divine origin of your ministry? Do they believe that God has called you to be their teacher?

I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. Jn 17:9

Pray and keep praying for them.

Do you think and act as if they belong wholeheartedly to God and that you are responsible for their welfare?

And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Jn 17:10

Are your qualities becoming evident in their lives?

Do you act like a father to them, as if they are your own family?

Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We *are*. Jn 17:11

Does your lifestyle reveal God as Father? Are you secure in your relationship with God and enjoy the privileges of your inheritance?

Does your lifestyle reveal God as Holy? Does the fear of God operate in your life? Are people spurred on to holiness by you?

Understand your relationship with the world; in it but not of it. Do you act as if it is crucified to you and you to it? Does your behaviour with your people lead to clarity about the world or confusion? Would you be confident for your actions to be broadcast far and wide?

Your main goal is to keep them in the Father's name. Your other goals (giving them God's word, enabling them to know God better, etc.) find their focus in this task. What does it mean? Surely that they should be in Christ, living in His Spirit, manifesting the fruit of the Spirit, knowing the power of the resurrection; i.e. all that is involved in being closely associated to God personally.

Pray fervently for this.

Expect a close unity amongst your people as a result.

Show your close unity with God as an example. Have no favourites amongst your people; love all equally, yet differently. Love all with intensity but manifest that to relate to their different personalities.

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. Jn 17:12

Reveal all that you have of God. As you impart this, they will receive it and be kept in God's name. Only give what is of you, not others.

Guard them as you would guard your own heart.

Have you lost anyone? Why? Was that necessary or your own fault? Did you concentrate on this lost one for a while to bring them back? Do you clearly understand why they left you?

But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. Jn 17:13

Speak for God with authority.

What you reveal of God should result in joy in your people – does it?

Do you laugh much with your people? What causes this?

Do they get excited and joyful over the same things as you in the Scriptures?

Are they fulfilled yet eager for more?

Are they totally relaxed with you, yet expectant for God to speak?

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Jn 17:14

Give them God's word even if it results in problems for them.

I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. Jn 17:15

If problems from the world arise as a result of keeping God's word, pray for the specific issues involved that they may be kept from evil.

They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Jn 17:16

Make sure they understand that they are not of this world; they are new creatures in Christ.

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. Jn 17:17

Pray for their sanctification.

Teach them about sanctification. Are they living in the truth of Rm 6-8? Are you?

Are your thoughts on holiness based upon truth or someone else's ideas on sanctification, or the latest book?

Could you stand up and declare the truth about how to live a holy life in the face of opposition from someone with other views on sanctification? Is the truth of it in you for you to teach it properly?

Can you clearly explain sanctification from the Bible alone?

As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. Jn 17:18

Are you clearly aware of your vocation; are you sent?

Give your people vocation; set them tasks; send them out. Don't develop into a holy huddle with no outside contact.

Get your people into the world to do good, not just in church.

And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. Jn 17:19

Are you consecrated and set apart from them, for their good? Are you totally committed to them?

Are your people consecrated?

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word. Jn 17:20

Do you pray for the effect of their ministry?

Are they evangelistic; if not, why not?

That they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. Jn 17:21

Do you teach them the knowledge of God's Being, and at the same time develop their understanding of their union with Christ?

Do they see your union with Christ in the way that you pray and act?

Is their relationship with Christ developing in intimacy? It should result in the world seeing that Jesus is alive?

And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one. Jn 17:22

Do you experience times of glory together? Can you remember specific occasions easily?

Do you expect glorious times?

Do you act as one man together?

I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Jn 17:23

Are you fully investing yourself in them?

Can others see that God loves them by what they do?

Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.
Jn 17:24

Pray for their continuing development in intimacy with Jesus.

Is their love to God evident to others, especially in worship?

Pray that they will see Jesus in glory, i.e. be enraptured by their vision of his beauty and splendour.

Do they understand how Jesus committed himself in the eternal decree to them before the creation of the world?

O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. Jn 17:25

How deeply do you know God?

Is that recognised by your people?

Do they recognise your calling?

And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. Jn 17:26

Can you look back on your progress so far and state that you have made known God's name (character / attributes) to them in all its implications?

Make it your commitment to continue doing that.

Are you secure in God's love for you and do you feel it?

Determine for that same depth of love to be in them to make them fully secure in their ministry and fully assured of their growing relationship with God.

Conclusion

The high priestly prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane is the closest we get to seeing the heart of Jesus for his people. It is a staggering glimpse of God's love for mere men.

Not only that, this was just as Jesus was about to face his terrible test and to suffer and die for men. Yet his heart is full of intercession for his disciples above all else, excepting doing God's will and glorifying him.

If you were about to die and be tortured would you be seeking the stability and glory of the people under your spiritual responsibility?

The ministry of Jesus is all about his complete commitment to his task to produce a body of people that would glorify God on Earth. The Lord was single-minded in that commitment right to the very end. In this he sets an example of how to be committed to the people God has called you to care for.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
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