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Discipleship: Learning From Jesus by Dan Trygg

Spheres of Intimacy

When examining the ministry of Jesus, one of the first observations that becomes evident is that **there were many, many disciples**, i.e., many who considered themselves to be “followers of Jesus”. **Yet, of the great throngs that followed Jesus, we see various levels of involvement of the individuals in their pursuit of Him.** Some of these levels or spheres of involvement occurred naturally, others by the particular design of Jesus. The involvement level, which was usually directly proportional to the extent of relationship and intimacy the disciple had with Jesus, also had an effect on the teaching that the disciple was privy to, both in regard to style and content. Certain other privileges and responsibilities accompanied the various degrees to which followers were “with Jesus”. This was all part of Jesus’ strategy for training.

What were the various spheres of involvement? Are they clearly presented in scripture? I believe so. Allow me to list them as they are referred to biblically. Take note of what patterns of privilege and responsibility emerge as you consider each group.

The multitudes -- This sphere would include all who would come to hear Jesus teach and to witness the signs He accomplished. It was comprised of all His disciples, many inquisitors who never really seriously pursued Jesus, and also those who were hostile to Him, e.g., the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus traveled throughout the land preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is near” (Matt. 4:17). He also performed various signs, healing every disease and sickness, casting out demons and, in general, demonstrating powerfully the kingdom of God (Matt. 4:23-25). This caused large crowds to follow Him, some seeking healing and deliverance for themselves or their loved ones, and some drawn by what they could see to be a genuine move of God. Jesus’ healing ministry provided opportunity to address the assembled crowds (cf. Matt. 5:1; 7:28,29). In addition, He taught in the synagogues on the Sabbath days (Matt. 4:23). Most of His teaching centered around a call to a lifestyle of radical commitment to God and His kingdom (e.g., Matt. 6:19-34; Mk. 8:34-38). Much of it was designed to confront the errors of the false religious system of His day (e.g., Matt. 5-7; 12:1-14; 23:1ff.). He identified Himself with the kingdom of God and made significant claims about Himself, yet most of the time His public claims were somewhat obscure or shrouded (Matt. 11:27; 12:8,39-42). This was by design (Matt. 13:11-15), to provoke thought and to avoid needless controversy. Most of His public teaching consisted of parables and “dark sayings” (Matt. 13:34,35; cf. Jn. 16:29).

The 500 brethren -- a group of disciples to whom, on one occasion He showed Himself after His resurrection (I Cor. 15:6). This being a post-resurrection and pre-Pentecost experience, these were believers that must have been purposely meeting together. A group of this size would not just assemble by chance. We also know that the disciples were not involved in public ministry until Pentecost (Lk. 24:45-49; Acts 1:3-5). This was not a general crowd gathered to hear the apostles. This group must have been comprised of those who had been known to be seriously dedicated to following Jesus. They must have come to this prearranged place and time in response to an invitation from others who knew them and their attitude toward Jesus. The Lord Himself honored their obedience and dedication to Him by appearing in their midst.

The 120 -- These were the men and women disciples gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem to wait in prayer for the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:13-15; 2:17,18). Of all those who were disciples, it was these 120 who were committed to wait for Jesus' word to come to pass. As such, they were also the first to receive the Holy Spirit.

The 72 -- Disciples sent ahead of Jesus to proclaim in Judea the coming kingdom by word and by miraculous signs (Lk. 10:1-17).

The 12 -- The men Jesus specifically chose for in-depth training (Mk. 3:13-19; Lk. 6:12-16). Previous to the 72, they had been sent out throughout Galilee to preach and demonstrate the kingdom of God. They often received special instruction not open to the crowds.

The 3 -- Peter, James, and John comprised a more intimate circle than even the twelve.

Again, Jesus selected them to participate in or observe certain experiences that the others were not invited to share in (e.g., Mk. 9:2-10; Lk. 8:51-56; Mk. 14:32-42).

The disciple whom Jesus loved, John, the son of Zebedee. He was the most intimate with Jesus. As such, he was privy to more than the other disciples (Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20,24).

By way of observation, **certain principles become evident regarding Jesus' spheres of intimacy:**

- (1.) **All were welcome to learn and to receive ministry.**
- (2.) **Levels of intimacy were reflected in Jesus' teaching style and content.** More of His total vision was entrusted to those who knew Him well.
- (3.) **Intimacy grew out of *quantity time* as well as *quality time*.**
- (4.) **Although Jesus always taught for response, *responsibility in ministry* (assignments), as well as *special training*, came to those who were *more dedicated and more intimate with Jesus*.**

The Choosing of the Twelve -- Jn. 1; Matt. 4; Lk. 5,6.

In order to understand the process of the choosing of these twelve men, a careful study must be made of the events surrounding each of the pertinent passages. A chronology of events reveals that **the disciples were not superhuman in faith or vision. It took *time and relationship* with Jesus before they could step out in obedience to Him.** There were several false starts before they became consistent and dedicated to their call.

The twelve were called/invited by Jesus to become His *primary ministry focus* (Mk. 1:16-20; 2:13,14; 3:13-19). It is significant to **note the price that they had to pay** in order to be Jesus' primary ministry. ***They had to free up time.*** For this, they *left their jobs and traveled about with Jesus*. **Note, too, what the vision was that Jesus called them to. They would be "fishers of men", "catching men"** (Matt. 4:19; Lk. 5:10).

That is what discipleship is all about, "*catching*", *keeping* and *maturing* people (cf. Col. 1:28,29)

Out of *many* disciples, Jesus chose and appointed *twelve* (Lk. 6:12-16). This selection was made after an entire night of prayer. This was no decision to take lightly. Jesus knew He needed the Father's direction in order to pick men that would be dedicated and responsive to the training that lay ahead of them. They were the men He "*wanted, desired, or liked*" (Mk. 3:13). **They were people Jesus knew He would enjoy working with.** He did not choose as primary disciples men who were stubborn, antagonistic, or who were just a constant drain to be with. We also must wisely choose and invite those we would work with in a primary discipleship relationship.

These twelve men He designated as *apostles* (Mk. 3:13,14). The word "apostle" literally means "sent one", and referred to a delegate, messenger, or representative. **The twelve were to become representatives of Jesus' ministry.**

There were two aspects to this calling of apostleship:

(1.) **"that they might *be with Him*"; and, (2.) "that He might *send them out...*"** (Mk. 3:14). We see here once again the importance of time spent together, so that truth might be modeled and vision of the heart might be conveyed through intimate sharing. Through this, they were equipped for the second aspect, "to be sent out".

The passage in Mk. 3:14,15 has in focus two activities that they were to do in their "sending out" ministry. They were to preach the gospel message and they were to have authority to cast out demons. When we find them finally being sent out in chapter 6:6b-13, we find them preaching the need for repentance as well as casting out demons and healing many people. Jesus *taught them* the ideas, but He also *showed them how* to minister in power so that their ministry would be confirmed by signs and wonders, as was Jesus' own. **Being a disciple of Jesus meant "doing the stuff" of the kingdom**, not just hearing about it in safe classroom settings. They knew this up front. We also must be pursuing the same dynamic for ourselves, i.e., to be learning about, implementing, and demonstrating the reality of the kingdom of God. We must encourage others in the body to be doers of the word also (Jas. 1:22-25; Matt. 28:19,20). Finally, we

must select as primary disciples those who are willing to take a risk, willing to do things they have never done.

Jesus' Methodology

What things did Jesus do that we can implement in our setting with disciples that we may be working with?

(1.) Jesus modeled -- Jesus *first* attracted people or became recognizable because of His life and His works (e.g., Jn. 3:1,2; 10:37,38). Jesus WAS. His *walk* spoke loudly, ...before He ever opened His mouth to talk. John the Baptist first testified of His life, "I have need to be baptized by You" (Matt. 3:13,14). Then, after seeing the sign of the Spirit, John pointed Jesus out to two men who became some of Jesus' earliest disciples (Jn. 1:29-39). *People were drawn to the reality of God in Him.*

(2.) Jesus taught (and explained) -- *Teaching is a critical aspect of the discipleship process.* For example, Jesus is portrayed as teacher, or in the act of teaching, some 39 times in the gospel of Mark alone. Much of Jesus' teaching was in parables, which made them easy to remember. In private, He explained and taught more clearly what these stories meant. He also explained on many occasions the application of scripture to a situation in their everyday life (e.g., Matt. 9:9-13; 12:1-8; Lk. 4:1-12). *His teachings were thoroughly rooted in scripture* (Matt. 5:17-20; Lk. 24:25-27,44-47).

In the same way, our teaching will be most effective if we are biblical, and if we illustrate with easy to remember stories and examples. We also must be ready to take advantage of life situations in order to be most effective in administering the word in training (cf. Dt. 6:4-9; 11:18-20).

(3.) Jesus overheard and corrected (e.g., Matt. 16:5-12; Mk. 9:33-37).

(4.) Jesus tested with questions (e.g., Jn. 6:5,6; Mk. 8:27-30).

(5.) Jesus got the disciples involved. He made them part of the action of His ministry. For example, He had them do the baptizing (Jn. 4:1,2). He had them distribute the bread that multiplied (Mk. 6:39-41; 8:6,7), and, of course, He sent them out as ministry teams to do what they had seen modeled (Mk. 6:6b-13).

(6.) Jesus held them accountable. They had to report back to Him (e.g., Mk. 6:30; 9:14-16).

The PRIMARY Principles

What we have learned from this brief study on Jesus example can be conveniently summarized in seven points represented acrostically by the word, "PRIMARY". Since Jesus was the master disciplemaker, and our primary teacher, it is only fitting that we should remember these concepts as the PRIMARY Principles.

Preparation -- Jesus had a relationship with the Father, He knew the scriptures, He prayed, etc. -- Effective personal walk with God.

Relationship -- Jesus established friendships which developed into various levels of intimacy through quantity and quality time -- Effective people skills.

Information -- Jesus taught both clear and sound doctrine as well as definite vision and purpose -- Effective communication.

Model -- Jesus was an example of what He taught -- Effective personal application.

Action -- Jesus used assignments and directive counsel to help the disciples apply what they were learning -- Effective direction.

Revaluation -- Jesus used personal observation and the feedback of ministry reports to confront problems, assess ministry, and to gain new insights and applications -- Effective oversight.

Yielding -- Jesus was able to let His disciples go, both to entrust them to the Holy Spirit's direction and to commission them for their own ministry responsibilities apart from His own work -- Effective release.