

Volume

1

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING

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Relationship in the
Bible with Human
Disciplers

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Introduction

God desires to raise men for Himself and for His use through discipleship. He seeks to do this by direct encounter with men as well as by using mature men/women to do it. This “discipler” helps to nurture and train the person who has summited himself to be helped to become more like Jesus and fit for His use.

We want to examine examples of such a relationship in the Bible and see how we can safely remain under the hand of a human discipler and at the same time maintain a close and direct walk with the Lord.

Moses and Joshua

Moses was born into the family of God's people and anointed to deliver Israel from bondage in Egypt and take them to the Promise Land. He was trained (discipled) by God first under his mother and later under his father-in-law Jethro (Hebs 11;24-28, Exo 3:1-12).

As he continued serving the Lord this way he had a close working relationship with Joshua, a young man referred to as his 'servant'. Joshua was effectively doing his apprenticeship under Moses. So while Moses was being disciple by others, he was also making his own disciple. This shows that we cannot make disciples unless we ourselves have been through a similar process.

Joshua was also born into the family of God's people, the same as Moses was. Num 13:8,16; John 3:3,6. He was also enlisted in the army of God's people (Exo 17:9,10; Lk 14:31,32).

What is the significance of these two steps in discipleship?

Being born again is a fundamental prerequisite in discipleship. A lizard cannot be 'discipled' to become a crocodile. A person must be of the same 'stock' as Jesus before he can be disciple to become like Him. A natural person cannot be discipled to become a spiritual person like Jesus. A person must be born again into God's family. The natural must become spiritual.

This question needs to be asked at this point: are you born again into God's family by the power of the Holy Spirit?

Secondly Joshua became eligible to be enlisted into God's army. God will only appoint disciples to fight His battles. When He looks for people to use God only picks from among people who have surrendered to Him and are committed to Him in a discipleship relationship.

Discussion Point

Joshua walked in close relationship with Moses. Discuss how we should relate to the Lord and to our earthly discipler. Exo 24:12-13,18; 1Pet 2:21; Lk 16:1

Joshua was called Moses' servant in Exo 24:13. What is the implication of that?

He dropped his life's ambitions and personal preferences to become a servant to a man, so that he can be properly linked with God.

He agreed to become Moses' servant, not servant of God. He esteemed the knowledge of God and his walk with God of a greater value than his personal ambitions. In other words, Joshua humbled himself to become a servant of an ordinary man so he can get closer to God. The crucial question here is: can you take such a step if you were in Joshua's shoes? This is the important step in discipleship.

Most of the time God puts people who have submitted to Him in discipleship under one of His servants as their 'discipler'. Then God watches the person's progress under their discipler to see whether they qualify to hold position of trust. This is how the Bible puts it in Luke 16:12, *"If you have not be faithful in that which*

belongs to another man, who will give you that which is your own?"

Joshua walked with Moses closely as his servant. In Exo 24:12,13, God called Moses to come up to the mount and to stay there for some time. When Moses got up to go Joshua also went with him, though there was no direct command for him to do so. He did not know for how long they would stay on the mount. He just went with his master without questioning because he was a committed and faithful servant.

While on the mount God communed with Moses, and Joshua just waited quietly. God never spoke to Joshua throughout the forty days, yet Joshua did not grow impatient. He did not interrupt their conversation.

What lessons can we learn from the life of Joshua?

He waited for Moses throughout his stay on the mount: no food, no rest, perhaps little sleep, and no one to talk to.

Discussion Point

1. Are you willing to do likewise?

Are you willing to submit to an earthly master as a servant and endure whatever hardships come your way, like Joshua?

2. What did he forsake in order to become a disciple, a servant of Moses? (Luke 14:26,27)

3. He learnt under Moses as an apprentice (Exo 32:17-18; Num 11:28-30)

4. Who is an apprentice? What is the relevance of being an apprentice? What is the relevance of being in discipleship? (Matt 11:28,29; Lk 6:40; Mk 10:15)

An apprentice is a learner. Unless we humble ourselves, recognizing our ignorance in the matter of the kingdom and be ready to learn not only from the Lord but also from our disciples, discipleship relationship will be difficult and ineffective.

Examine Joshua's level of understanding in these scriptures, and his submission and willingness to learn. (Exo 32:17,18; Num 11:28-30).

After forty days Moses started coming down with Joshua from the mount to the camp. They started hearing some noise from the camp. Joshua said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp". Moses corrected him, saying, "It is not the voice of them who shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them who cry for being overcome; but the noise of them who sing do I hear" (Exo 32:17,18).

Joshua was still a learner. He was yet to know how to distinguish between different noises and he needed to be trained in that as a man of war. When he heard the noise, he thought it was that of war, but he was wrong, and needed to be corrected, as Exo 32:19 confirmed.

In Numbers 11:28-30 he was also corrected of another mistake he made.

Joshua recognized himself as an apprentice, and he was not ashamed to make mistakes or for his ignorance to be discovered. He opened up his life to his master. He was not afraid of being wrong, knowing his master was near. That is what is expected of a disciple.

As His disciple the Lord is always near us to train us for His purpose. He is always near to correct, to rebuke and to build us up through our earthly discipler.

Discussion Point

1. How do you take rebukes from those who watch over your life? Do you take it with joy and gratitude?

2. Compare Joshua's learning attitude here to the Lord's demand in Matt 11:29. What did you discover?

God's demand for discipleship is the same both in the Old and New Testaments. Every disciple must have a learning attitude. He or she must be teachable, otherwise his training may not be thorough and effective.

3. Are you teachable or do you have an argumentative heart? The Lord resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

4. Discuss Joshua's personal relationship with God in the course of his discipleship relationship with his master Moses. (Exo 24:13-18, 33:11; Num 27:18)

When Joshua followed Moses to the mount to receive the Ten Commandments, he experienced the glory of God as Moses did. He was there all through the six days when the glory of the Lord covered the mount like a devouring fire. What others in the camp did not know about God Joshua experienced it and embraced it. He did not run away and stay afar like the others.

Also in Exo 33:11, after God spoke to Moses in the tabernacle, Moses went back into the camp but his servant Joshua departed not out the tabernacle. We are not told what he was doing there, or whether God spoke to him there, but he stayed there. He abode with God. Joshua had a personal relationship with God. He was not living in sin, so he was able to stay boldly in God's presence.

As a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ you are expected to have a personal experience of God even though you are under a human discipler. He expects you to abide in Him and learn of Him. He is willing to reveal Himself to you and show you His glory, only if you will abide and turn away from every unrighteousness. He will not reveal Himself to truants, who have one leg in and one leg out of God's presence and His programme for their lives.

God expects you to have a personal testimony of your own experience with Him, so you won't be a stranger to the God with whom you have to deal in ministry.

Joshua grew in discipleship, and later he succeeded Moses as leader of Israel (Num 27:15-21; Deut 1:37,38; Deut 34:9).

Joshua walked in close discipleship with God and with his master Moses. Therefore God could testify of him in Num 27:18 that Joshua was a man in whom the Spirit is. What a testimony? The Spirit of God is abiding in him, working in him, and directing him. Can God testify of you like that? Or do you keep grieving the Spirit of God in your life?

We are not told when the Spirit of God came upon Joshua like that. It must have been during those times he experienced God personally. He had the anointing of God upon his life, therefore God singled him out as Moses' successor. Having been discipled by Moses such a responsibility would not have been strange to him. He was able to lead Israel to the Promise Land as God commanded him (Jos 4:10).

We have seen how Joshua humbled himself to serve under a man. His life and all his programmes were controlled by Moses. He dropped his own agendas to follow a man in discipleship relationship, and God saw it and promoted him.

Maybe you have been praying that God should reveal His purpose for your life, and cause you to fulfill it. However, so far have you been faithful to the Spirit of God in you? Are you faithful to the people whom God has placed in position of authority over you? Or do you think you owe your allegiance to God alone and not any man? The Bible says that: "If you have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?"

Paul and Timothy

The Scriptures make it clear that Timothy was Paul's disciple. We are going to look at their relationship in order to gain some insight for ourselves and satisfy God's expectation of us as disciples.

First thing we must note is that Paul was born again, and he was disciplined by Barnabas (Acts 9:1-6, 9:26,27; Acts 11:25,26). This is an example of where a disciple maker is himself a disciple of someone. Only a hypocrite would want to disciple someone when he himself has never submitted his life under another person's discipleship. Paul had the courage and experience needed to disciple Timothy because he himself had gone through the process.

Let us study Timothy's background and see what it cost him to become Paul's disciple. Acts 16:1-3; Lk 14:25-27.

Timothy was born again and already a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ, yet he still had to submit his life and career under Paul in discipleship in order to become what God wanted him to be.

Timothy left his parents, his Greek tradition, his personal and parental plans concerning his career in life, his friends and relatives. It was not part of Greek tradition to be circumcised but since Paul (not Jesus) wanted it, he agreed to be circumcised. It was a painful experience to be circumcised as an adult, but Timothy submitted to it.

Jesus said that anyone that does not forsake all that he has cannot be His disciple. There is nothing too big to be forsaken for Christ.

Discussion Point

Discuss the intimate relationship between Paul and Timothy in Acts 16:4-7.

Timothy followed Paul everywhere he went, not to preach but to learn. He learnt how Paul followed the leading of the Holy Spirit. He saw how the Holy Spirit did not permit them to preach in some places, while He allowed them to preach in other places, like Macedonia. That was not a classroom teaching but real life apprenticeship. Lessons like these are difficult to impart in a classroom. That is why discipleship is often best carried out where there is friendship and fellowship between the discipler and the group.

Discipleship is not without suffering.

Discussion Point

How did Timothy learn this lesson from the life of Paul? Acts 16:18, 22,23; Phil 1:29.

As Timothy followed Paul and Silas about they encountered a severe persecution in Philippi. Paul and Silas were beaten and put into jail. I wonder where Timothy was at this time, that he was able to escape jail. Maybe he ran away and abandoned his mentor. We are not told, but it must have been a hard lesson for him.

Many Christians today think suffering for Christ is out of date, and if you suffer persecution as a Christian there must be something wrong with you. But we know from Phil 1:29 that it has been given to us not only to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ but also to suffer for Him. We all must be ready to face suffering for the sake of our faith in Christ.

Timothy grew in experience (Acts 17:14; 19:22).

Discussion Point

Note the addition of another disciple in the team, Erastus. What was the expected responsibility of Timothy over Erastus in the team?

Firstly, you will discover that Paul left Timothy with Silas in Berea to probably follow up the believers there. He was being exposed to the ministry of Paul's partner, Silas, for more training. Timothy was not ready to stand alone in ministry at this point in time. However, in Acts 19:22 we see Paul sending the newly recruited disciple in the team (Erastus) to follow Timothy to Macedonia for ministry. Timothy has now grown to such an extent that the ministry of God's word could be committed to him, and he could also now teach a newer disciple. There is need for growth in discipleship. While you are under someone's discipleship you yourself can also begin to disciple another person.

Discussion Point

1. *What do you think Timothy and Erastus were to do in Macedonia? (Acts 16:10, 30-34; I Thes 3:2)*
2. *Discuss the spiritual growth that had taken place in Timothy by this time. What is the purpose of discipleship that you can discover here? (Eph 4:13,14; Gal 4:1,2; 2Cor 3:18)*
3. *There are stages of growth in discipleship. Discuss the stage reached by Timothy in 1Tim 1:2,3; 2Tim 4:9,21; Phil 2:19-22; compare with Gen 2:8.*

Timothy's discipleship relationship with Paul was like that between a son and his father. Even when Timothy has grown to become a preacher Paul still had the liberty to send for him anytime his help was needed. He did not grow beyond discipleship.

Discussion Point

Did their separation stop their discipleship relationship? How did they sustain the relationship? (Heb 13:16; 1Tim 1:1,2; 2Tim 4:1-9)

There came a point in their relationship when Timothy became mature enough to handle ministry. He was to oversee certain local churches on behalf of Paul and that brought physical separation. Yet they continued relating through correspondence right up to the death of Paul.

Conclusion

Discipleship is God's method of raising men. He may choose to raise one directly or use human vessels as His delegates. The relationship with our human mentors should be for life. This is what Jesus said about the conditions that must be met by every aspiring disciple: Lk 9:23,24; Lk 14:26; Heb 12:1,2: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."

Personal Assessment Questions

From this Bible study we saw how becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ is a step all Christians must take if we want to be conformed to His image. We also saw the examples of men in the Bible who took these steps.

- 1. What steps have you decided to take to make discipleship a reality in your life? Share with us who your discipler is?*
- 2. What inspires you about your discipler? What are his/her strong points of influence in your life? What has been your experience of following a man in order to follow the Lord?*
- 3. Since he/she is still growing in the Lord what conflicts do you find in submitting to his/her counsel and instructions? How did you cope? How do you reconcile his voice with the Lord's voice each time?*
- 4. What have you been doing to encourage your discipleship relationship to grow? What aspect of his/her life has rubbed off on you?*