

Brad McKinnon

MENTORING

Matthew 12:49-50

One Main Thing

The ministry of Jesus is synonymous with the concept of discipling, and Jesus intended for that ministry to continue through His people by their mentoring of others.

Introduction

By nature, Christianity is a social experience. Brother, sister, mother, and father were ways Jesus thought about the relationship between God, Himself, and His disciples—“And pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’” (Matt 12:49–50 NRSV). In addition to these typical familial terms, the New Testament also describes the association between Jesus and his followers as that of a teacher with His disciples. In

fact, this is probably the most popular way the gospel writers characterized the partnership.

Talk of discipling or mentoring has been a trendy topic within pop theology over the last couple of decades or so. However, the notion of mentoring is not a new idea. It wasn't unfamiliar to ancient peoples in either religious or secular contexts. The name for the concept is derived from Homer's poem, *The Odyssey*. In the epic, as Odysseus leaves home to assume command in the Trojan War, he places his young son in the care of a friend named Mentor. Accordingly, the term "mentor" has come to mean an experienced and trusted advisor. A guide, guru, or consultant are other terms that come to mind. In New Testament language, you might say, "teacher." And, a teacher naturally has students or disciples. I remember my Latin teacher in high school beginning class each morning with the greeting, "Salvete, discipuli!" Or, "Hello, students!" Disciples are students. Students are disciples.

The goal of the teacher-disciple dynamic in Scripture is imitation. As Jesus once observed, "A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher" (Luke 6:40). Reflecting on this sentiment, famed twentieth-century theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer noted, "It is only because he became like us that we can become like him." This tells us what we already know: Jesus' ministry, as well as the group of followers His ministry created, was highly relational. In fact, the concept is practically

indistinguishable from the ministry of Jesus itself. Consider three instances in Jesus' ministry that highlight the role of discipling in His work.



Matthew 5:1–16

Early in the Gospel of Matthew, we see Jesus as a teacher, but much more than a teacher. The context of the Sermon on the Mount seems to be the immediate days after calling His first disciples (Matt 4:18–22). “Follow me,” Jesus said simply to Simon, Andrew, James, and John—owners of a fledgling fishing business. “I’m doing something new and amazing, and you’ll want to be a part of it.” As He begins rehearsing what we’ve come to know as the Beatitudes, the disciples begin to understand that Jesus really is doing something revolutionary. He’s not so much setting conditions for blessing, rather He’s reassuring those who actually are poor, sad, hungry, and persecuted that there is hope. I’ve come to bring a blessing. You already are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Just be sure to act that way. As mentor, Jesus helped His followers understand not just their potential, but He introduced them to who they already were. There would be no place for marginalization in Jesus’ kingdom. Everyone was important and needed.

Matthew 9:9-13

Jesus' ability to see what others could not see, even in themselves, is highlighted by the call of Matthew. Jesus sees Matthew at work collecting taxes, and he again simply invites the prospect: "Follow me." I assume Matthew and Jesus had already had some kind of previous interaction with each other, but I'm sure Matthew, a Jew working in collaboration with Roman occupiers, wasn't an obvious choice to be one of Jesus' followers. Two things stand out in this passage. First, Jesus was evidently looking for additional followers. When He observes Matthew, Matthew immediately gets the call. Jesus had things to do and places to go and needed or at least wanted help. Matthew's responsibility was simply to tag along, observe, and learn. Second, Jesus wasn't choosing those who seemingly had it all together or who could win a popularity contest. He had a longer view in mind.

Matthew 10:5-15

Eventually, the disciples were ready to begin venturing out a little on their own. Before they set out, Jesus wanted them to understand a few things. First, they were part of a community. So, Jesus talks about Israel, the kingdom of heaven, as well as homes and villages where they might be received hospitably. Second, they could accomplish more than they could possibly imagine at this point. Jesus anticipates their curing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, and casting out demons. Third,

with all of these good works to do, it was all hands on deck. Jesus couldn't help but multiply Himself, because there was so much that needed to be done.

Application

Good Morning, Students

For mentors, it's important to recognize that God has already qualified each believer for discipleship. Looking out at the ragtag group of early disciples, Jesus couldn't have been very impressed. But, Jesus saw beyond appearances to something much deeper. To be good mentors, experienced believers must recognize the inherent value in even the most unsophisticated Christian. In fact, that lack of sophistication may very well be what enables someone to embody the gospel most effectively. Having the ability to make everyone feel included is a vital mentoring skill.

With Eyes Wide Open

For a mentoring relationship to develop, there must be observation in both directions—from teacher to potential student and from student to future teacher. The advanced believer must consider those who might benefit from such a relationship, just as Jesus observed Matthew at the tax booth. These prospects aren't always obvious. Good leaders see latent qualities in others—not just who they are at any one moment in time, but who they can be with a little help. Taking the

long view when dealing with people requires patience, but it's well worth it. For those who are just beginning to develop their faith, it's necessary to be prepared to receive guidance and mentoring too. When given the opportunity to follow Jesus, Matthew didn't hesitate. We shouldn't overlook opportunities to learn from those more mature in the faith.

The Laborers are Few

It is sometimes tempting to see ministry as a one-person show. However, there is so much to accomplish that we can't afford to dismiss any willing participant. Acknowledging the church as a community allows us to accomplish so much more than we could possibly achieve on our own. The image of community underscores individual strengths and downplays personal weaknesses. This, in turn, breeds confidence that blesses others.

Conclusion

After His resurrection, Jesus seemed focused on leaving a legacy by preparing His current followers to replicate themselves through mentorship or discipleship. What were His disciples to do going forward? The same thing Jesus Himself had been doing all these years—"Go therefore and make disciples" (Matt 28:19).

As I think about mentoring as a tool for leaving a legacy, I'm reminded of an old Chinese proverb, roughly translated:

Not having heard something is not as good as having heard it; having heard it is not as good as having seen it; having seen it is not as good as knowing it; knowing it is not as good as putting it into practice.

Condensed, you get something like the popular quotation: “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.” No matter what you call it (involvement, mentoring, or discipleship), the idea of learning through observed practice is indispensable to the human experience in general and to the Christian life in particular.

Discussion

1. What do you think Jesus was suggesting by characterizing His early followers as the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world,” just as His ministry was getting started?
2. What is the theological, cultural, social, and political significance of Jesus’ choice of a tax collector to be one of His earliest disciples?
3. Before they even understood their own capabilities, Jesus had confidence in all that His disciples could and would accomplish. Why is this meaningful?
4. How can leaders today demonstrate the value they see in each team member regardless of one’s experience or inexperience?

5. In what ways would taking the “longer view” in our relationships positively influence those we’re trying to inspire?
6. How important is it that leaders demonstrate confidence in their followers? What are some practical steps mentors can take to help boost morale in others?