

The Methods of Training Used by Jesus and Their Applicability Today

Introduction

I have been using Coleman's *The Master Plan of Evangelism* for many years, as a guide when I mentor others and as a tool to teach mentoring to those others. It is only natural that Coleman has influenced my perspective on how Jesus went about his task of creating multiplying disciples. For this paper, I have read through the gospels and the beginning of Acts to make my own observations, and then gone back through Coleman to note certain issues he raised. When I owe Coleman an obvious debt of gratitude, I put the page number of his book in brackets, reserving the use of footnotes for multiple scripture references. From the scriptures, I tried to note every occurrence of various aspects of Jesus' methods, but I compiled the lists not so much to be comprehensive as to help me see what stress the gospel writers placed on these things in their narratives. Some of my citations are of things Jesus did only with the twelve, and some are of things he did with larger groups, sometimes referring to someone who merely was following him while considering himself [or herself] Jesus' disciple.

Coleman pointed out our present need to emulate Jesus in creating multiplying disciples, rather than focusing only on reaching the masses with the gospel: without subsequent instruction and leadership, the masses will fall astray and thus not realize Jesus' goal for them of spiritual maturity and effective participation in the mission [35]. Jesus focused on raising up leaders who could guide the masses and reproduce more disciples from the masses, like he was producing those leaders. In the church today, pastor-elders need to focus attention on developing this type of spiritual leader: people who will become multiplying disciples themselves, who will grow into biblical deacon-level leadership, equipped to share the gospel and to mentor the next new believer [36]. In this paper, I seek to observe the methods Jesus employed in the disciple-making process, and to analyze their relevance for that process today.

Selecting and Focusing Attention on Specific People

Jesus was intentional about approaching select people to enter discipleship.¹ In some cases, the person was already following Jesus at least part of the time, but then received a specific call from Jesus [compare John 1.40-42 with Luke 5.10-11]. Jesus also made clear who was in the more intimate and intentional group of twelve.² This was a step after commanding some to follow him, so we can see there were stages in the apostles' development into full disciples and in the development of the focused attention they received from Jesus. Today, we continue planting seeds for discipleship and watering them by teaching the congregation, but there will be some to whom we will give a special encouragement or exhortation, to encourage them toward taking a step toward full consecration for God. Our notice of them might be driven by the Spirit or be the result of our own observation of something in them. Eventually, it will be time to call these people to a more intensive relationship with us and with Christ.

Even among his closest disciples, there were three whom Jesus repeatedly isolated for special situations.³ I have heard that we could consider the twelve to be a small group and the three to

¹ See, for example, Matthew 4.19-22; 9.9; Mark 1.17-20; 2.14; Luke 5.10-11, 27-28; John 1.43.

² Matthew 10.1-4; Mark 3.13-19; Luke 6.13-16.

³ Matthew 17.1; Mark 5.37; 9.2; 14.33; Luke 9.28-36.

be the directly mentored assistant leaders from that group. I am not sure we can draw that analogy in concrete, but there are useful inferences we can draw from what Jesus did. First, it is ok to be selective about which disciples to include in specific experiences. Second, while we might approach mentoring through a group, we have to realize that there will be some who are more advanced than the others. Third, there are times when we need to talk with each disciple individually, as Jesus did with his disciples. Fourth, having a group of twelve did allow for small group type experiences. Being in a group allowed for each person to get enough of Jesus' attention and for interaction in group discussions [30], while making it possible for Jesus to mentor more than he could have otherwise.

Jesus was focused on developing leaders, not on reaching the masses directly [27]. We must note that his goal was not just training, but inner transformation with training [48-49]. We need to find people to mentor, so we can help guide them into an accelerated and sustainable sanctification by the Holy Spirit. When I select someone with whom to enter into an intensive mentoring relationship, I look for someone who is ready for that investment, someone who is faithful to do what is necessary, available to meet together regularly, and teachable by me. Such a person also needs to be passionate about pursuing God [29].

Jesus was not afraid to raise the bar for discipleship.⁴ Many churches today have loosened the requirements for membership and leadership [60], as well as watered down their teachings and otherwise lessened what they teach about the requirements for being disciples of Christ. As my wife and I work toward planting a church, we hope to establish consistent biblical teachings on what it means to be a follower of Christ, what is required for membership, and what standards will be upheld by all the spiritual leaders of the church. I intend as the senior pastor to focus on ensuring the spiritual health and growth of the other elder-pastors, and then with the other elder-pastors ensuring the spiritual health and growth of the deacons. If we have done our work well, the deacons will be multiplying disciples, and thus ready to raise members of the congregation up to a deacon level of spirituality.

I still have some issues to work out, such as how I will ensure the women get the mentoring they need. Jesus did not have any women in his group of twelve, but he did have many female disciples in the broader sense, and he did interact with them. One-on-one cross-gender mentoring is frowned upon today as a needless risk for accusations of impropriety. I have never mentored a woman one-on-one, but I have been impressed by the responsiveness of women I have taught in small groups and Sunday school classes. Another concern for me is to have leaders in place from the first day, available to mentor others, especially new believers, so those others will not fall away or become stagnant [49]. I want every new member/convert to get personalized attention [50]. Toward this end, my wife and I intend to mentor about twenty people for several months, prior to opening the church up to others.

⁴ See, for example, Mark 8.34-38; Luke 9.23-27; 14.25-35.

Laying a Foundation of Relationship and Authenticity

Jesus spent focused time with his closest disciples, even when not doing ministry among the crowds; in other words, Jesus lived life with them,⁵ he ate, slept, talked, walked, visited, sailed, fished, prayed, and worshipped with them [45]. We cannot expect today to find disciples willing to be with us all day every day, but we can be intentional about spending time with them and sharing life with them. As they observe us in daily life, they will see how we use scripture to guide us, how we rely on the Holy Spirit, how we find our security and identity in Christ, how we seek to maintain our integrity and reflect the image of God. They also will sense our values and priorities, and have opportunities to ask questions and receive personalized instruction.

A few times, Jesus was even vulnerable before them.⁶ More often, he ministered to their needs. I am sure there were many less significant instances, but the ones recorded in scripture are miraculous, such as healing Peter's mother-in-law and raising Lazarus from the dead.⁷ While most of us cannot expect ever to be a part of such miracles, we can still meet real needs of our disciples, speaking Spirit-inspired words into their life situations, helping them deal with their problems and build sustainable lifestyles, and participating in mundane daily matters.

One tremendous benefit the disciples derived from being with Jesus so much was they could discern the value he placed on worship, prayer, and knowing scripture. Though there are not many instances recorded in scripture, Jesus did sing spiritual songs with his disciples,⁸ and Jesus modeled the value of attending synagogue and the temple festivals. Jesus modeled prayer before them and taught them about prayer.⁹ And Jesus quoted and taught with scripture both to them and before them.¹⁰ As the disciples saw Jesus using scripture so often, they would learn of its importance to life and ministry, and how to interpret and apply it to life [73]. Surely much of what Jesus taught to the crowds, especially in the synagogues and in the temple, was based on scripture, so there would have been many more uses of scripture than what is directly recorded in the gospels. As we spend time with our disciples today, we need to model the spiritual disciplines and a life of passion for God, so our disciples too will pick up on the importance and value of these activities.

Jesus lived out what he taught: sacrificial love and obedience. Because the disciples were with Jesus, they saw his lifestyle and how it authentically reflected his teachings, that he sacrificed comfort and worldly pleasures to serve others [22, 62-63]. By staying with Jesus, effectively

⁵ See, for example, Matthew 9.10; 26.20; Mark 2.15; 6.31-32; 11.11, 19; 14.3, 17; Luke 5.29; 8.22; 22.7-38; John 2.12; 3.22; 11.54; 12.1-8; 13.1; 21.9-15.

⁶ Matthew 26.37-38; Mark 14.34; John 12.27.

⁷ Matthew 8.14-15; Mark 1.30-31; Luke 4.38-39; John 11.38-44.

⁸ Matthew 26.30; Mark 14.26.

⁹ Matthew 6.9-13; 11.25-26; 19.15; 26.36-39, 42-44; 27.46; Mark 1.35; 14.32, 35-36, 39; Luke 4.42; 5.16; 6.12; 9.18, 28-29; 10.21; 11.1-13; 18.1-8; 22.40-46; John 12.28; 17.1-26.

¹⁰ I probably have missed some of the more subtle allusions to the Old Testament in Jesus' teachings, but the more obvious ones are as follows: Matthew 5.21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43; 11.10; 12.7, 40-41; 13.14-15, 42-43; 15.4, 8-9; 16.27; 18.16; 19.4-5, 18-19; 21.13, 16, 42; 22.32, 37, 39, 44; 23.39; 26.31, 54; Mark 2.26; 4.12; 7.6-7, 10; 10.6-8, 19; 11.17; 12.10-11, 26, 29-31, 35-37; 13.24-26; 14.27; 15.34; Luke 4.18-19, 25-27; 5.14; 6.3-4; 7.27; 8.10; 10.12; 11.30-31, 51; 13.35; 17.29-32; 18.20; 20.17, 37, 42-43; 22.37; 23.30, 46; John 2.16; 6.45; 7.38; 10.34; 13.18; 15.25.

they had to obey and conform to his lifestyle [52-53]. In this regard, Jesus did not give up on them despite their failings, instead helping them to continually grow toward spiritual maturity [55]. In his death on the cross, Jesus showed them that they could not compromise on obedience, even in the face of death [57]. To be effective at mentoring today, we too must be authentic enough to live out what we teach. It is not enough to understand the Bible accurately or even to do so and teach it well, we must also live it out, truly following Jesus ourselves, and thus inspiring and edifying those who are following us. We also need to help our disciples to walk with Christ [not just with us], both through his life as depicted in the scriptures and in their own lives as they learn to live out scriptural teachings [41¹¹].

Teaching and Equipping

Jesus brought his disciples with him when he was ministering to the masses, such as teaching in synagogues or Temple¹² or teaching to the crowds elsewhere,¹³ healing and delivering those who came to him,¹⁴ and arguing with the religious leaders of the day.¹⁵ His disciples traveled with Jesus, which allowed him to model before them the attitudes and actions he valued, and allowed them to see his methods of relating and teaching. The disciples also would have learned from seeing the miracles Jesus did, including the healings mentioned above and other miracles.¹⁶ Today, we need to be intentional about bringing our disciples out with us when we minister, so they can see how it is done and can learn from us as the ministry is occurring. Much of the focus for Jesus might have been on showing them who he really was: all the miracles and many of his arguments focused on his identity and mission. Today, we can help people understand who Jesus really is by reflecting his character as we model ministry before our disciples, as well as by what we teach them from scripture.

¹¹ Coleman, 41, stresses that Jesus did not offer outlined courses of study, just fellowship with him, but as we seek to model for our disciples as Jesus did for his, we must supplement that fellowship with scriptural study that brings our disciples into greater fellowship with Christ too.

¹² Matthew 4.23; 9.35; 13.54-57; Mark 1.21-29, 1.38-39; 6.1-4; Luke 4.15-32, 44; 5.17, 20; 6.6; 13.10, 18-21; 19.45-47; 20.1, 9-18; 21.37-38; John 6.25-40, 59; 7.14, 28-29, 33-34, 37-38; 8.2, 12, 31-32. Some of these categories will overlap, for example, arguing with the religious leaders and teaching to the crowds.

¹³ Matthew 5.2-7.29; 8.10-12; 9.14-17; 11.7-24, 27-30; 12.48-50; 13.3-9, 23-34; 15.10-11; 19.16-22; 23.38-39; Mark 2.2, 13; 3.32-35; 4.1-9; 6.6, 34; 7.14-15; 8.34-9.1; 10.1, 17-21; 12.35-40; Luke 4.43; 5.1-3; 6.20-49; 7.24-35; 8.1-8, 21; 9.11, 57-62; 11.28-36; 12.13-21; 54-59; 13.1-9, 22-30; 14.25-35; 18.18-25; 19.9-27, 41-44; John 9.35-39; 12.30-36, 44-50.

¹⁴ Matthew 4.23-24; 8.3, 13, 16, 32; 9.6-7, 22-33, 35; 12.13, 15, 22; 13.58; 14.36; 15.28-31; 17.18; 19.2; 20.34; 21.14; Mark 1.32-34, 39; 2.3-12; 3.3-5, 10-11; 5.1-13, 25-34, 38-43; 6.5, 56; 7.30, 32-35; 8.22-25; 9.20-27; 10.46-52; Luke 4.33-41; 5.12-15, 24-25; 6.6-10, 17-19; 7.1-17, 21; 8.2, 27-36, 41-56; 9.11, 38-43; 11.14; 13.11-13; 17.11-19; 18.35-43; 22.51; John 2.23; 4.49-50; 5.5-9; 6.2; 9.6-7.

¹⁵ Matthew 9.4-6, 12-13; 12.2-13, 24-45; 15.1-9; 16.1-4; 19.3-9; 21.12-16, 23-46; 22.1-46; 23.2-36; 26.55-56; Mark 2.8-11, 16-17, 19-22, 24-28; 3.4, 23-30; 7.5-13; 8.11-12; 10.2-9; 11.15-18, 27-33; 12.1-34; 14.48-49; Luke 5.22-26, 30-39; 6.1-10; 10.25-37; 11.15-26; 13.14-17; 15.3-32; 16.14-31; 17.20-21; 18.9-14; 19.39-40, 45-46; 20.1-8, 21-44; 22.52-53; John 2.14-20; 5.16-47; 6.41-58; 7.15-24; 8.3-59; 9.40-41; 10.1-18, 24-39.

¹⁶ Matthew 8.26; 14.16-20, 25-33; 15.36-38; 17.1-8; 21.19-20; Mark 4.39; 6.39-44, 48; 8.1-10; 9.2-8; 11.14, 20; Luke 5.4-10; 8.24; 9.16-17, 29-36; John 2.6-11; 6.5-13, 19-21; 11.38-44; 20.30; 21.6; Acts 1.3, 9.

Jesus also taught his disciples more fully than he did the crowds, including times when he challenged or rebuked them,¹⁷ explained things more fully to them,¹⁸ provided them with special illustrations,¹⁹ or simply had unique conversations with them.²⁰ Jesus helped them understand what the scriptures taught about the character required by God the Father, the plan God had for Jesus, them, and the world, the mission into which he was guiding them, and the dependence they would need on the Holy Spirit [62, 64]. Today, we must both model and teach our disciples about Christ-like character, God's plan as revealed in scripture, the mission Christ has for us, and how we depend on the Spirit for empowerment in life and ministry. Jesus used life situations as teaching opportunities, and sometimes was intentional about provoking the conversation himself if the disciples did not raise the question [74-75]. We can do the same today.

As part of the equipping and teaching process, Jesus involved his disciples in his work in introductory type ways, usually just doing some manual task.²¹ Involvement would increase their interest and insight into the ministry. It is interesting that many of the examples of the disciples being involved in Jesus' ministry activities apparently occurred after Jesus had sent them out on their own at least once. Perhaps we should not make too much of this, but it is evident that there was not simply a progression of first observe Jesus, second participate with Jesus, and third do on your own.

When Jesus sent his disciples out to do some ministry on their own, he did so after providing them with strict guidance,²² and afterward they had with him a follow up debriefing.²³ These initial ministry experiences allowed the disciples to build confidence and gain some experiential wisdom, but all under the comforting conditions of knowing Jesus was still there to mentor them, with guidance beforehand and affirmation and interpretation afterward. When our disciples are ready, we can get them more involved by increasing their responsibility, sending them out in pairs or small groups to do some ministry on their own, without us. This will build their confidence and proficiency [88]. They can begin with visiting the sick and elderly, ministering to the poor, working up eventually to following up with new believers [112-113]. As part of this process, we must emulate Jesus in motivating them and encouraging them [93-95]. Like Jesus, we too should give our disciples adequate guidance for the task and adequate debriefing so as to

¹⁷ Matthew 8.26; 15.16; 16.8-9; 17.17; 26.40-41; Mark 4.13, 23, 40; 7.18; 8.17-21, 33; 9.19; 14.37-38; Luke 8.25; 9.54-56; 22.46; 24.45-46; John 6.60-70. Again in these categories, there likely is some overlap.

¹⁸ Matthew 13.10-23, 36-43; 15.13-20; 17.9-13; 17.19-20; 19.11-12, 23-26; 26.52-54; Mark 4.11-20, 34; 7.19-23; 9.12-13, 29; Luke 8.9-18; 9.11; 18.26-34; 20.45-47.

¹⁹ Matthew 18.1-14; Mark 4.21-22, 24-25; 8.15; 9.36-37, 42-50; 10.14-16, 23-27; Luke 9.46-48; 11.1-13; 16.1-9; 18.1-8, 15-17; John 13.3-11.

²⁰ Matthew 9.37-38; 10.5-42; 13.44-52; 16.6-28; 17.22-27; 18.15-35; 19.14, 27-20.28; 21.21-22; 24.1-26.2; 26.9-10, 21-29, 31-34; 28.18-20; Mark 8.27-32; 9.31-35, 39-41; 10.10-12, 28-45; 11.22-25; 12.43-44; 13.1-37; 14.6-9, 18-25, 27-31; Luke 9.18-27, 44, 49-50; 10.22-24, 38-42; 12.1-12, 22-53; 16.10-13; 17.1-10, 22-37; 21.1-36; 22.15-38; 23.28-31; 24.27, 36-49; John 1.51; 4.31-38; 9.1-5; 11.4, 7-16, 21-27; 12.7-8; 23-27; 13.18-26, 31-38; 14.1-16.33; 18.11; 20.15-29; 21.15-22; Acts 1.2-8.

²¹ Matthew 14.16-20; 15.32-39; 21.1-7; 26.17-19; Mark 6.37-43; 8.6-7; 11.1-7; 14.13-16; Luke 9.12-17, 52; 19.29-35; 22.8-13; John 4.1-2, 8; 6.10-13.

²² Matthew 10.1-11.1; Mark 6.7-13; Luke 9.1-6; 10.1-16.

²³ Mark 6.30; Luke 9.10; 10.17-20.

affirm and interpret for them afterward. Jesus' teaching included both warnings about persecution and the promise of Spirit empowerment [83], and we should include such teachings in our approach to disciples today also.

In the end, Jesus had to leave them. Before he did so, he clarified their mission again.²⁴ Jesus assured them that he would be in authority and would be with them, empowering them through the Holy Spirit, and therefore they were to multiply by making new disciples throughout the world, evangelizing them into the body of Christ and raising them up into mature believers who would reflect the image of God and obey the scriptural commands; in other words, to reproduce more disciples who also would multiply themselves through others. Thus would the image of God be spread throughout the earth, as had been commanded throughout scripture as far back as Genesis 1.28. We too must pass along the vision of multiplication to fulfill the great commission and the gospel mission. We are raising up these disciples so they can go out and raise up others to do the same.

When I have mentored in the past, I invested a lot of time in each disciple, but I let them go too early. I had given them all I had in terms of equipping; in fact, they were doing more in ministry by that time than I was. But I had a false confidence in their spiritual stability and maturity; I should have given them more of the Bible as I was learning it in seminary. Jesus intensified his time and attention on the disciples toward the end, ensuring they were prepared for what they had to do [43]. We need to finish the process off well, and perhaps transition to a looser coaching relationship, so our disciples do not get discouraged or sidetracked [94-95]. The goal is for the disciple to continue on in his spiritual growth and in his effort to follow Christ.

Conclusion

Jesus produced multiplying disciples, in that he raised them to a spiritual maturity and equipment sufficient to obey his command to go and reproduce themselves by making more multiplying disciples. This technique brings slower results for church growth or evangelism than large programs or reliance on gifted evangelist-preachers; but it is more sustainable in the long-run, and allows each member to participate fully in the Great Commission. Jesus' command was not merely to share the gospel or even to bring people into salvation and the church, but to raise people up to be true multiplying disciples [101-103]. This was Jesus' method of sustaining and increasing the ministry, and it is still applicable today.

We observed ways we could follow Jesus in his method of selecting and focusing on a few disciples with whom he had close relationships. Just as he did, we can encourage many into a deeper walk, but select a few to mentor intensively at any given time, tailor the process for each person's unique situation, keep standards high before them, and seek transformation of their character and their equipment for ministry.

We observed ways we could follow Jesus in his method of being in close relationship and living authentically before his disciples. Just as he did, we can walk in close relationship through daily life, modeling and teaching spiritual disciplines and values, serving their needs as we relate to them as friends, showing them how to interpret scripture and apply scripture to life, and modeling and teaching about the Christian lifestyle and obedience.

²⁴ Matthew 28.18-20; Luke 24.46-47; Acts 1.8.

We observed ways we could follow Jesus in his method of teaching and equipping his disciples. Just as he did, we can bring them with us when we minister to others, allow them to work with us, help them to be successful in their own ministry efforts, and teach them the theological foundation they will need to understand our triune God, his way of life, his expectations for us, and our dependence on him.

As a church, we *need* to do these things. The Great Commission is for us too, and there is no better way to accomplish it than the way Jesus modeled and taught.