

WITH HIM

A BIBLICAL MODEL OF DISCIPLESHIP FOR MEN

WITH HIM

KENNETH G. SMITH

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“THE BRIDGE BUILDER”

BY WILL ALLEN DROMGOOLE

An old man going a lone highway,
Came, at the evening cold and gray,
To a chasm vast and deep and wide.
Through which was flowing a sullen tide
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
The sullen stream had no fear for him;
But he turned when safe on the other side
And built a bridge to span the tide.

“Old man,” said a fellow pilgrim near,
“You are wasting your strength with building here;
Your journey will end with the ending day,
You never again will pass this way;
You’ve crossed the chasm, deep and wide,
Why build this bridge at evening tide?”

The builder lifted his old gray head;
“Good friend, in the path I have come,” he said,
“There followed after me to-day
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been as naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be;
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him!”¹

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NOTE TO THE READER

The Bible speaks to us in *principles*. Principles are axioms of truth which have a universal application. So when thinking in terms of Christian *discipleship*, for example, the truth applies to all, men and women. This brief book lays out some of the fundamentals when it comes to helping new believers in Christ. While the accent may seem to fall heavily on men, the principles are usually applicable to both sexes. Such is true about biblical *discipleship*: the principles apply to both.

INTRODUCTION

I was spellbound! As I sat there in First Presbyterian Church in downtown Pittsburgh, I heard a man speaking about multiplying disciples committed to Jesus Christ. I had not heard much about “multiplying” followers of Christ in my seminary training. My denomination had been decreasing in membership as long as I could remember, and my seminary training had virtually omitted any prospects of that changing. But here was hope! Here was a man who not only knew about “discipleship” in Christian terms, but had seen hundreds of servicemen come to Christ as a result of the ministry of one man whom he had trained to reach others, with the new disciples in turn reproducing other new believers (telling the gospel to others), and so on. I was hooked! And I determined to learn everything I could about it. I dogged his steps to hear him while he was in the city, and eventually asked him for help. The man was Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, who helped Billy Graham develop a follow-up plan for his crusades. Dawson died in 1956 at the age of fifty saving a girl from drowning in Schroon Lake,

New York. But his ministry lives on as a result of the men he helped equip and train.

When I went to Dawson for help, I asked him to send us a man to Pittsburgh who could help us learn these principles. As a result LeRoy Eims, a former marine, came to our city. Since I was a single pastor with an empty parsonage, he and his family moved in. I used to say, “He lived in my house; I lived in his family.” But the point is I was *with him*. We had two very productive years together. And because I was *with him*, I could both observe and also participate *with him* in his ministry as he reached other men for Christ. As a result the gospel multiplied.

I now understood the very simple principle Jesus practiced during His years on earth. As Mark 3:14–15 says, “And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.” It’s so simple. He wanted them *with Him*. From these men, except one, He would initiate a world conquest for reaching lost men, women, and children for their eternal salvation and the building of His church and kingdom.

THE “WITH HIM” THEORY

I suppose the idea behind this “with him” practice is so obvious it seems ludicrous to try to spell it out. But the practice is foreign to much, perhaps most, of the church in Western countries. The idea used to be embraced by becoming an “apprentice,” but we don’t hear that term very often any more, except in industry. It was key in Trotman’s thinking. He kept asking, “Where’s your man?” In other words, who is the man you’re discipling? Whom do you have *with you* whom you are coaching to walk with Christ? And his aggressive probe was not just to pastors, but to anyone who claimed to be a Christian walking with Christ. On more than one occasion he challenged me, “Where’s your man? Where are your men?”

For a person who is acquainted with the Bible, this idea should not seem strange. We see it first when Noah was assigned the task of building the ark. He had three sons whom the Bible includes in that great effort. In fact, his sons and their wives were *with Noah* on the ark. It was through them the generations of mankind would in the years to come populate the earth. Hebrews

11:7 shows that Noah's interest was not just in the ark, but in his family: "By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household." His sons were *with him* in that massive construction ... which would save their lives. They, with their wives, would now be the ones to multiply and fill the earth.

Later Scripture tells us that Moses had a young man *with him* very early in his experience of leading Israel through the desert, and that young man, Joshua, would actually become Moses' successor and take the nation into the promised land. We see it too in the life of David, who built his army with men who had been *with him* in his earlier escapades with King Saul. It's interesting also to note how Elijah enlisted his "disciple," Elisha. Like the fishermen Jesus would later recruit, Elisha dropped everything and followed his new mentor. And he persisted in being *with him* right up to the time when Elijah was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. Thus Elisha became empowered by the Spirit to continue the ministry of Elijah, and Israel was blessed. In short, this concept of mentoring has a long history.

Some years ago I was speaking of this principle with Dr. Elizabeth Coleman, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. She mentioned to me that up until 1929 medical schools training physicians always had their students working with corpses. But in that revolutionary year they began taking their students "on the floor" to be dealing with *live* patients. Thus we now see a physician visiting patients with students clustered about him or her, witnessing the events and the conversations. And this "with him/her" practice even accompanies the surgeons into what is known as the operating "theater." It's the experience of being there on site to watch, then later to inquire, learn, and ultimately perform. It makes sense.

Likewise, when I was in high school during the Second World War, I worked in Florida Aircraft in Orlando, Florida, during the summers. My first summer I was assigned to the fabric department where we covered wings. (You need to understand that the Stearman PT-17 was the primary trainer for pilots learning to fly with the Army Air Corps, as it was then called, and it was an open-cockpit bi-plane: a two-seater with wings, tail, and fuselage covered with fabric.) I had to learn from scratch

what was involved in this “covering” process, but Mr. Moore, the old-timer there, showed me what was involved, including holding a mouthful of tacks to use with the magnetic hammer. (No, I never swallowed one!) Once the wings were tightly covered and tightly tacked to the inner rib, we coated them five times with clear lacquer in order to make the fabric stronger and airtight, lightly sanding them between each coat. Finally we sent them off to the paint department for the finish color coat. There were many processes involved, but I learned how to do that from the *mentoring* of Mr. Moore and then trying my hand.

This same approach to learning is seen in the term “disciple,” as Luke, the gospel writer, spells out in Luke 6:40: “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.” In short, one can see in people the traits of their teacher. “You sound like ...” we say. And so it was that the leaders of the Jews who had crucified Jesus recognized later in His men His characteristics. Luke writes in Acts 4:13, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.” It was their fluency

and confidence that struck their listeners. They were *like* Jesus. That is the central focus of the serious Christian: be like Jesus. That is why when Jesus called His men, He did not just say, “Listen to Me ...” He said, “Follow me.” To do that they had to drop everything and be *with Him*.

An Italian communist produced a film years ago, *The Gospel of Matthew*, which was second rate but very powerful in that he portrayed a purposeful Jesus on the move in mission. The Twelve were pictured as stumbling along behind Him, trying to keep up so they could hear what He was saying. I do not like pictures of Jesus, but I was impressed that this producer, in studying Matthew, had caught the mission aura of Jesus’ ministry. To learn from Jesus, of course, you had to *follow Him*. He was on the move. He was obeying His Father in heaven. That’s really the posture of a follower of Christ, a true disciple. It’s movement! It’s kingdom mission! And it is obedience.

Three components make up a true learning situation. First, there is the one who *knows*; second there must be the one who wants to *learn*. Third, there must be the *environment* in which it’s learned. It is this final piece that marks Jesus’ way to developing His twelve disciples. Of course

Jesus also gave *verbal instruction*. Scripture tells us that Jesus went about all of the area *teaching* His listeners. To take an example, in Matthew 5–7, which has become known as “the Sermon on the Mount,” the disciples were there. In fact, there is reason to believe that when Jesus saw the crowds, He intentionally turned and taught His disciples in the context of a listening crowd, because ultimately these disciples would be the men to reach the people.

Jesus did not neglect to instruct His disciples in the truth of the Word of God. But my point is that they learned most of it out in the public arena where Jesus ministered, though at times He would leave the crowds and talk to them privately to make sure they understood. They learned in the *context* of gospel ministry. That experience was going to make a great difference to them as they later were confronted by similar crowds and hostile critics. They’d actually been *with* Jesus as He suffered these things. Consequently they were not caught off guard when later facing the same circumstances.

One of the best examples to me of how to disciple was the late D. James Kennedy of Fort Lauderdale. Yet it is common knowledge among

those who knew him that, in his earliest days as a pastor, he was taught how to evangelize by an older pastor in the Carolinas who had invited him to come and preach a series of evangelistic messages. As he told us, “Every afternoon this pastor took me out knocking on doors to invite persons to church and also explain the gospel.” But wasn’t he the visiting evangelist? Yet here he was learning firsthand from his veteran host how to present the gospel to people! He learned from that out-on-the-street experience. Back in his home church he later developed what became known as “Evangelism Explosion,” a way to conduct visitation evangelism for one’s church. He also took care to take others *with him* in this task. I have colleagues who had been with him as they knocked on doors there in Fort Lauderdale to follow up visitors at worship, and he maintained that discipline for the rest of his ministry: one night a week visiting with a colleague in the neighborhood. It was a principle he learned not by reading a book, but by a man who took him with him in the actual activity. Likewise, it was a principle he shared *with* others. By now you should have grasped the theory! By being with your mentor *as* he ministers, you learn both how to minister and how to conduct yourself in the process. You also experience the fellowship

of the Lord Jesus Himself by His Holy Spirit who is there.

The benefits of this “with him” principle are many: men who accompany their mentor actually *visit* people, learning to make observations in homes, learning how to listen, and so forth. Sometimes it can also reveal a great gap in a learner’s grasp of the truth. One night I took a young man from seminary out to visit homes in the neighborhood with a gospel presentation. We had been to Mr. Bucie’s place before, and he warmly welcomed us each time we came. We shared *with him* the gospel from John and this night I asked my colleague to lead the conversation. He did a commendable job of it. But then Mr. Bucie asked, “Well, what do I do to get it?” My companion froze. He looked frantically at me, then back to Mr. Bucie, and said, “Well, Mr. Bucie, there’s really nothing you can do.” The man responded, “Well, it sure sounds great! I just don’t know how you get it.”

The problem was that my seminary student had come into contact in class with the truth of “total depravity,” the impossibility of a sinner doing anything to save himself. Yet what he did not know was how, in that light, to call sinners to real

repentance and faith, and therefore he had no real answer for this hungry inquirer. As we returned to the seminary, we had a great opportunity to think through his theology. He then understood the gospel call is based upon God’s election and human responsibility. We freely call all men and women to repent and believe the gospel. That night my friend learned theology in the context of sharing the gospel with me, and I was glad the Lord had exposed his need. He learned on site in a way he would never forget. Nor would I. Also, and wonderfully, Mr. Bucie committed his life to Christ.

To summarize, the “with him” principle which Jesus employed in training His men was crucial. It was not unique—the practice of being with one’s teacher was seen, for example, in the “pedagogue” in ancient Greece who led his pupil to school. The uniqueness of Jesus’ teaching was who He is. As the Son of God Jesus came to redeem His people from sin and its eternal condemnation. He came to “bring us to God ...” (1 Pet. 3:18). He was full of the Spirit and went about doing good. Ultimately He died on the cross and then rose from the dead so that by faith in Him we would be saved from hell and given everlasting life. He trained His men

to preach this good news or “gospel.” They were witnesses of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection because they had been *with Him*. They had seen it all.

It’s a simple concept. From the perspective of Christian discipleship, we do not minister alone. We imitate Jesus and take another or others with us.

FINDING THE MEN

PRAYING FOR MEN

When I have spoken about this matter of training with church leaders, I have often run into the question, “Where do you get such men?” The thought behind the question is that such men just are not available. And indeed that is a real challenge. Remember God’s comment in Ezekiel 22:30: “I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none.”

Without sounding simplistic, let me address this challenge. I noted when I was first exposed to this concept of “training men” for ministry and outreach that Jesus spent the night in prayer before He chose the Twelve. It is therefore no wonder when He looked on the crowds as scattered sheep wandering and without food, direction, or leadership that He told His men, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:37–38). Don’t miss this: Jesus taught His men to look to God for such workers. Doesn’t that mean that God will