TRAINING Disciples to Train

Session 29: The Disciple's Standard: Excellence (12a)

Offered by Ron Lively, M.Div., M.A. – BiblicalMentoring.org (Studies)

Step 1: Opening prayer

Step 2: Each person quotes the memory verse: VERSE: **Matthew 5:46-48**

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?
Do not even the tax collectors do the same?
47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?
Do not even the Gentiles do the same?
48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Step 3: *Read and discuss all or part of the Bible Chapter* - **Matthew 5**
Link: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%205&version=ESV

Step 4*:* Questions for Personal Applications and/or Group Discussions:

1. Jesus demands excellence in 5 areas of inner character: speech, conduct, love, faith and purity. Are you prepared to do the same with yourself and your trainees?

2. Do you realize that the only way to meet these high demands is to have Christ in you? These are God's gifts of grace and mercy.

3. If shaken or tested the real person is revealed. Just see what happens when someone steals your parking spot or cuts you off in traffic.

4. Note that Phillips says again that discipleship is reproducing in another person your own experience of Christ's involvement in your life. Can you teach someone to make a disciple-maker if you haven't become a disciple yourself?

5. **Speech**: Why does God expect you as a trainer to control your tongue? (James 3:2)

Step 5*: Read and discuss the Content from the book:*
Chapter 12a per the author – Keith Phillips:

The Disciple's Standard: Excellence

Christ's teachings have been variously interpreted as everything from idealistic ethics to legalistic commands. But no matter how others understand His teaching, a study of our Lord's life clearly reveals that He expected His disciples to practice what He taught them.

Jesus demanded excellence in all that His disciples did. His primary emphasis in the Sermon on the Mount, as with all His instruction, was on righteousness—the inner character which underlies outward conduct. He taught His disciples to be "perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). In the parable of the Sower, Jesus revealed His desire that fruit be brought to perfection (Luke 8:4-15). The crowd's evaluation of His life and ministry confirmed Christ's own commitment to excellence: "...He has done all things well..." (Mark 7:37).

God is excellent and everything He does is excellent (Psalms 119:68). Your disciple needs to understand that as a child of God his entire being must reflect the excellence of his Father. God requires him to be "perfect in every good work..." (Hebrews 13:21 KJV).

A person may become discouraged if he believes this expected level of performance far outweighs his capabilities. Yet God's gifts of grace and power accompany His demands. Because Christ is in you (Colossians 1:27), righteousness is attainable.

One cold morning I took a cup of hot coffee along on my drive to the office. I had successfully maneuvered my way onto the freeway without spilling a drop. Suddenly, the driver in front of me slammed on the brakes. I swerved to avoid an accident. The coffee scalded my hand and redecorated the interior of my car.

Why did coffee come out of the cup? Because the man in front of me forced me to jerk my hand? No! Coffee spilled out of the cup because coffee was in the cup. Whatever was in that cup would have come out when it was shaken.

The same is true with our behavior. When we are shaken, the real person comes out. If another motorist takes your parking place and your reaction is to swear, would you rationalize, "If that driver had not taken my spot, I wouldn't have sworn"? The disciple knows that if hostility and vile language had not been inside, the words would not have come out.

If a scantily clad girl walks by and you lust, would you say, "If she had not been there, I wouldn't have lusted"? A disciple knows that if there had been no lust inside, he would not have lusted. If Christ is in you when you are shaken, righteousness will emerge (Romans 8:10).

Discipleship is reproducing in another your experience of Christ's involvement in your life. In order to faithfully impart a godly character to others, your disciple must understand and strive for God's standard of excellence.

Paul pinpointed for Timothy the five areas that reveal whether a disciple is accurately reflecting his God and Father. Paul wrote, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:12).

Speech

Your disciple's speech is an accurate barometer of his spiritual health because it reflects his character. "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless" (James 1:26).

One morning I was talking with a pastor in the privacy of his office. To my amazement he told a dirty joke, complete with foul language. Without a moment's thought, my respect for this man plummeted. Instinctively I knew that his words reflected his heart, and this man was struggling with impurity and immaturity. Luke 6:45 teaches that "...his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart." A pure heart produces correct thoughts which enable us to speak in a manner pleasing to God.

God expects your disciple to control his tongue. "...If any one does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect [or mature] man, able to bridle the whole body as well" (James 3:2).

James uses horseback riding to illustrate that if one fails to govern a small, seemingly insignificant part, he forfeits control over the whole. A skilled horseman knows exactly how and when to rein his horse by applying pressure on the bit. But a rider who drops the reins is helplessly out of control.

A Christian without control of his tongue is in serious danger: the tongue "corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell" (James 3:6 NIV). An unrestrained tongue expresses pride through boasting; it incites moral evil through off-color stories, negative humor, or racial slurs; it hypocritically blesses God even while it curses man, God's creation. Psalms 34:13 counsels, "Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit."

But James 3:8 warns that no man can control his tongue. However, the Holy Spirit can tame your disciple's tongue so that every word he speaks honors God and builds others. Romans 14:19 encourages us to "pursue the things which make for ...the building up of one another."

Honesty is not always edifying. The truth can be terribly destructive. Your disciple will need to rely heavily on the Spirit's guidance in order to consistently build others without compromising the truth. He will need to correct others without undermining their will to learn. He will be called upon to stimulate excellence without thwarting the motivation to try. He will be expected to sympathetically bear others' burdens without fostering self-pity. The effectiveness of his investment in others will be largely determined by his ability to speak the truth in love. "...Love edifies" (1 Corinthians 8:1).

You and your disciple must pray: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer" (Psalms 19:14).

Conduct

Your disciple's behavior must produce respect for the Christ who is in him. He is exhorted to "abstain from fleshly lusts" and to keep his "behavior excellent" (1 Peter 2:11,12). His loving concern and sensitivity for others will draw people to Christ (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). This can only happen as he puts "on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness..." (Ephesians 4:24).

In order to develop excellence in your disciple, you must help him to live by his priorities. He must say no to seemingly good things that do not fit into his purpose and objectives, that do not aid his goal of making disciples. Satan often uses an abundance of opportunities as a ploy, knowing that if your disciple attempts too many things, mediocrity will characterize them all. Keeping his eye on the target will allow him to concentrate on doing everything well.

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Step 6: *Share personal prayer requests then each person prays for the other's requests.*

Source: The Making of a Disciple by Dr. Keith Philips. Pub. by Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981. ISBN 0-8007-1181-5. Introduction by Robert E. Coleman. Content (except study questions) is taken from the book without revisions.

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