

Method of Disciple Making (Pt III): Prayer & Perseverance

1. INTRO

- Jeremiah Lanphier was a layman at the North Dutch Reformed Church, NY decided to hold a prayer meeting at noon on Wednesdays for business men who worked in offices in the immediate neighborhood
- The first meeting was held on the 23rd of September 1857
- The first person to join Jeremiah was a half-hour late; several others came even later
- But the meeting quickly grew, and one month later they decided to meet daily
- Within months, there were so many meetings in the city that newspaper estimates were that 10,000 were gathering every noon to pray
- By May of 1858 (9mths later) about 50,000 new people had joined the churches in the city
- This was out of a city population of about 800,000
- If you equated that to Sydney today, that would be 278,000 Sydney-siders joining churches here within a year!
- It started with one man, and then a small group, who wanted to pray
- Here was a man who wanted to see the people of NY become disciples of Christ
- He didn't start by
 - Preaching from the street corner
 - Inviting people to Christianity Explored course
 - Learning Two Ways to Live tract
 - Telling people his testimony on the train
- He started by praying

- Over the last couple of weeks we've been looking at the method of discipleship
- And so far, we've seen the method of discipleship includes
 - Ordinary people proclaiming the gospel
- It also includes personifying Christ > maturing
 - That is ... letting the gospel change hearts so that we'd become more like Jesus
 - And it's important we personify Christ for those we disciple ... but also as we seek to be a witness to those we're seeking to reach with the gospel

- But when it comes to making disciples, the reality is ... it's not easy ... and in fact without God it is impossible

- Therefore, when it comes to making disciples we need to
 - prayerfully depend on God and
 - to persevere in our calling to be and make disciples
- When it comes to discipleship, prayerfulness and perseverance are essential

PRAY

2. PRAYERFUL DISCIPLE-MAKING

- In Colossians 1 Paul is writing to Christians to remind them of the gospel and all its implications for their life as well as encourage them to live lives worthy of the gospel
- Chapter 1 opens with a wonderful greeting to the Colossians Christians where Paul tells them how he's in constant prayer for them
- Even though they're already believers ... Paul continues to pray for them
- The first thing Paul prays is he gives thanks to God because of their faith (v4) ...
 - a faith that has sprung out of them hearing the gospel ...
 - the gospel that was brought to them by Epaphras ...
 - and a faith which is bearing fruit in their lives
- Clearly Paul sees that it's God who's at work in the lives of these Colossian Christians
 - In God's sovereignty **he** has worked to ensure that they have heard the gospel and have responded to it with transformed lives
 - God does it **through** people like Epaphras proclaiming the gospel ... but it is God who is enabling it to happen
 - Which is why Paul prays and give thanks to God for this spiritual work in their lives
- However, Paul not only give thanks to God for what he has done in the Colossians in the past ... he also prays that God would **continue** to do a deep work in them into the future ... transforming them to become more mature and Christ like
- And so, he prays in v9 onwards
 - That God would fill them with the knowledge of his will ... the will of God that they learn from the gospel

- That they would be able to apply the gospel message with wisdom and understanding in order that they might live lives worthy of the Lord and please him in every way
- And then Paul specifically prays for four things for them that flesh out what it means to live a life worthy of the Lord
- He prays in v10-12 that they would be
 - Bearing fruit in every good work
 - Growing in the knowledge of God
 - Strengthened to display great endurance and patience
 - Joyful in giving thanks to the Father
- And the reason Paul prays for the Colossians, is because he knows that it's God who does the work in the hearts and minds of people to bring them to faith and transform their heart so that they would become more like Jesus
- God is the one who plans the salvation of all people from eternity in Christ
- He
 - sets the plan in motion
 - steps into creation himself to die and rise again
 - pours out his Holy Spirit to carry on his mission
- God is the worker, Christians are his agents
 - At every point in the making of disciples, God is at work by his Spirit
 - As believers proclaim the word, it is the Spirit who opens eyes and hearts and minds to the truth¹
- It's God who renews and regenerates our hearts by his Spirit
 - It's the Spirit that helps people to understand the need for forgiveness of sin and the means of salvation through Jesus death
 - It's the Spirit who convicts people of the gospel, and the sure and certain hope they have in Christ
 - It's the Spirit that transforms lives to become more like Jesus
 - It's the Spirit that helps disciples to proclaim the truth of the gospel
 - It's the Spirit that emboldens believers to keep speaking the word of truth into a world of darkness
 - It's the Spirit that equips his people to love one another and make disciples of one another

¹ So, for instance in 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul writes *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned*

- Paul knows that all too well
 - For he was a man who was vehemently opposed to Jesus ... and yet he became the apostle to the Gentiles
 - Only God can do that
 - Only the Holy Spirit can soften hard hearts like that
- And so, it's no wonder that Paul prays fervently for the Colossians
 - v3 – we always thank God when we pray for you
 - v9 – we have not stopped praying for you
- Because when it comes to discipleship and making disciples ...
 - all Paul can do is plant or water seeds of the gospel, ...
 - but it's God that gives the growth²
- **Implication**
- This is vital you and I understand this when it comes discipleship and making disciples
- When you and I speak the word of God ...
 - in whatever context or in whatever manner,
 - whether to believers or unbelievers
 - that it's like the sower in Jesus' parable of the four soils
- You and I can't control or determine what sort of soil the gospel falls into
 - Very often it seems to bounce off the hard surface of people's foreheads or penetrate only very slightly or temporarily into their hearts
- But when God's Spirit is present and working
 - to soften the heart,
 - open the eyes,
 - to make the soil fertile,
 - then the words of the gospel become for those hearers the words of eternal life
- **Application**
- Therefore friends ... prayerfulness is vital when it comes to discipleship
- Because prayer reminds us
 - Its not you and I and our efforts that bring people from death to life
 - Yes, you are God's agent, sharing the gospel, scattering seed ...
 - But its God who quickens the heart and enlivens the soul
 - Likewise, it's not you and I and our effort that can transform the heart of the person you're discipling

² 1 Cor 3:6-7

- You and I can't make them more godly, turn from sin, and grow in Christ-like-ness
- But again, God uses people like you and I discipling one another with the word of God ... but God gives the growth

- And so, when it comes to being a church that lives to be and make disciples of Jesus ... first and foremost ... we must pray!
- We must recognise this is God's work and petition him
 - that as we do our work of sharing and teaching the gospel ...
 - God, by his Spirit, would do his work in people's hearts

- And so, while it's important to have
 - GG, Kids Church, Youth Group, D'Ship Groups, Christianity Explored and Discovering Bible groups ... all of which are wonderful means for disciple-making
 - All our effort, planning, meeting, and preparing must be preceded with prayer as we ask God to do his work in and through our efforts
 - Asking God to make and grow disciples of Jesus

- And so whatever disciple making activity / activities you're involved in ... be a Paul
 - Pray for those you are discipling to come to know Christ ... and
 - Pray for those you are discipling to grow to be like Christ
- Whether that's
 - Your kids
 - Friends in GG
 - Youth in YG
 - Kids in Kids Church
 - Colleagues at work
 - Neighbours next door
 - Barber / hairdresser down the street

- Of course, if we're praying like this ... then our prayers will be much more about the spiritual growth of others ... than
 - Aunt Sally's gall stones
 - Passing tomorrow's test
 - Energy because I'm tired
- Instead ... our prayers will include prayers for all those we are seeking to disciple

- We'll be praying like Paul
 - That God would grow them in their conviction of the gospel
 - That God would be growing them in maturity and Christlikeness
 - That they would be bearing fruit in every good work
 - That God would strengthen and uphold them in their faith to persevere
- They're the prayers that we ought to be praying if we want to people we know and love come to Christ and grow to be like Christ
- Now as you seek to engage in prayerful disciple-making ... let me quickly recommend PrayerMate to you to help you pray like Paul for others
 - PrayerMate is an app that allows you to create categories of prayers that you want to pray for
 - Family
 - Church ministries
 - Missionaries
 - Friends
 - Making Disciples
 - Then add list of people or things in those categories
 - E.g. – Missionaries
- Let me be clear ... PrayerMate doesn't pray for you!
 - You can't just fill in your prayer lists and turn it on, and it starts churning your prayers automatically
 - No ... it's just a tool to help you focus your prayers on those things that are important
- Each time you pray ... PrayerMate gives you a list of things to pray for based on the categories and lists you've created
- Really helpful and practical tool to help you engage in prayerful disciple-making
- Because ... if you're going to live to be and make disciples ... it starts by petitioning God in prayer to work those you are discipling

3. PERSEVERING DISCIPLE-MAKING

- The final part of what I wanted to share with you about the method of disciple-making is perseverance
- When it comes to disciple making ... does becoming a disciple of Christ take place in one momentous step, or in a series of incremental steps over time?

- The answer is both
- On one side, we must remember that being delivered from darkness and transferred into eternal life is a huge and momentous step
 - The salvation God has won in Christ is already fully and completely achieved
- But the other side believers are to live out their new lives amid a fallen, broken world ... whilst still struggling to put to death their fallen, sinful nature
- Which means the Christian life is lived amid this struggle
- And disciple making happens within the messiness of this reality ... and that Christians will be at different stages in their walk with Jesus
 - some weak ...
 - some stronger ...
 - some immature ...
 - some in relational conflict ...
 - some struggling with a particular temptation or desire
 - some doubting
- And so how do you cope with that?
 - What's the strategy for persevering in as disciples of Jesus and as you seek to make disciples?
- Heb 12:1-3
 - *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.*
² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.
- Here the writer to the Hebrews is exhorting his readers to persevere in their Christian life
 - He likens it to a race
 - But it's not a 100m sprint
 - It's more like a marathon
 - Running a marathon requires perseverance
 - If you're going to run 42km ... you going to go through
 - times of struggle

- times when you want to give up
- times when you want to cry
- times when you wonder "what was I thinking when I signed up for this?"
- And you'll
 - Begin to doubt you can make it
 - That it's too hard
 - That it would be easier just to give up
- Paul's saying ... when it comes to living the Christian life ... you going to have to persevere ... it won't be easy
- There'll be
 - times when you doubt the truth of the scriptures
 - times when you're being ostracised, persecuted, belittled, and challenged
 - times when you think it would simpler to walk away
 - times when you question whether it's worth it or not
- How can you do that?
 - How can you persevere in the face of those struggles and persecutions?
- Our writer says ... you need to fix your eyes on the prize
- **Illustration – Florence Chadwick**
- Fixing your eyes on the prize would've been very helpful for Florence Chadwick in 1952
- Florence was a champion long-distance swimmer
 - She'd swum the English Channel in both directions setting records each time
 - But in 1952 she attempted to swim from the coast of California to Catalina Island ... a distance of 42 kms
 - During swim Chadwick had a support team in a boat beside her ... encouraging her, being there to assist her in case of cramps, injury or fatigue, and at times shooting circling sharks!
 - About 15 hours into the swim, thick fog began clouding the coast ... severely reducing visibility of Chadwick and her support team
 - About this time, Chadwick told her support team that she didn't think she could keep swimming
 - They urged her to keep going ... but not being able to see the coastline ... they weren't sure how much further she had to go

- Chadwick swam on for another hour before finally giving up and calling it quits
- As she sat exhausted in the boat the fog cleared and it, she sees they were only 1 mile from the island. If she'd swum for just one more hour, she would have made it
- Two months later, Chadwick attempted the crossing again
 - The same thick fog set in
 - But this time she made it
- When she was asked how she did it ... she said she kept a mental image of the shoreline in her mind the whole way while she swam
- Florence Chadwick was able to persevere to the end because she fixed her eyes on the prize
- Our writer is saying ...
 - If you want to persevere to the end in your Christian walk
 - If you want to stand firm when persecutions arise
 - If you want to retain your hope in the face of trials
 - Fix your eyes on the prize
 - Fix your eyes on Jesus
- Why?
 - v3 - *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*
 - Because Jesus also suffered in life and in death
 - Because he ran the race to the end
 - Because he knew what it was like to persevere
- But Jesus is no just our example
 - He's our saviour
 - The race marked for Jesus meant he had to endure the cross
- But the cross was not the end of his race
 - He scorned its shame, was resurrected from the dead and sat down at the right hand of God
- Which means he is the author and perfector of your faith
 - That is ... because he endured the cross ... he is the one who authorised your salvation
- And if you're a disciple of Christ ... that's your Catalina Island
 - There's your goal
 - That's your prize

- **Application**

- When it comes to living to be and make disciples ... understanding that it's a life-long race that requires perseverance is vital
 - This is true for you and me personally
 - And it's true for those you're seeking to disciple
- Because ...
 - There will be times when we stumble
 - There will be times when we fall into sin
 - There will be times when it seems like
 - nothing is happening
 - there seems to be no response to the gospel
 - there is an ambivalence or even a hard heartedness to the gospel
 - There will be times when you see those you are discipling drifting away from God
- But friends ... given the spiritual battle that's going on in each of us ... as our sinful nature wrestles with the Spirit ... we shouldn't be surprised by this
 - Disappointed - yes
 - Discouraged - yes
- However, we know it's a life-long race ... and it requires perseverance
- And so, friends ... in those times
- The answer is not to
 - give up
 - lose interest
 - become cynical
 - blame God, or the church or yourself
- The answer is to persevere
 - In your own walk as a disciple of Christ
 - But also, as you seek to make disciples of others
- For those of you who are parents ... this is particularly important for you
 - It will be hard
 - You will get push back
 - You will get frustrated and worried and discouraged
- But don't give up
 - It's a long game
 - Keep at it

- Run the race with perseverance the race marked out before you
- Same is true when you are discipling someone who's not a Christian
- It can be a long game
 - Daniel > 6 months > getting impatient > Lord ... have mercy > but need to persevere > whenever we pray in GG or staff meeting or with Liana ... pray for Daniel
 - Dean > grew up with Christian parents > going to church > became a believer XX yrs old > his mum and dad and brother persevered

4. CONCLUSION

- Disciple-making requires perseverance
- And it requires you to pray
- Living to be and make disciples requires prayerful perseverance
 - Asking God to do his work of transforming hearts and minds
 - Your heart and mind
 - The heart and mind of those you are discipling
 - Running the race with perseverance by fixing your eyes on Jesus
 - Persevering in your own race as a disciple
 - Persevering as you disciple others in their race

PRAY