

## **Doing As Paul Did: Discipling In the Asian Context**

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How do we ensure the continuing ministry of God's Word? What is our part in reaching the generations whom we cannot know? What is necessary to extend God's Kingdom beyond those places where we live? In other words, what is fundamental to fulfilling the calling of Asian Missions?

Without question, the answer is given by Paul. *"The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."* (2 Timothy 2:2, NIV). That is the basic action, the basic strategy of missions. Every phrase is potent - confirmed testimony, entrust to reliable men, qualified to teach others.

Great emphasis is correctly placed first on confirming the testimony of Scripture. Second, each competent leader seeks reliability in ministers and is ready to give ministry away to them - entrust them with the precious truths of the Gospel. But today I want to think with you about the third phrase - what it means to be "qualified" and able "to teach others." Christ Himself gave instructions to "disciple... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Discipling, teaching - these are essential actions of ministry. How do we become qualified teachers?

How many years of schooling are required to be qualified? How many degrees are necessary before someone can be a qualified teacher? Should we establish institutes, schools, and colleges so we can have places to teach others? None of those common practices are essential to the task. Certainly there can be value, great value, in institutionally-based training with standards, degrees, and recognition. But none of these things ensure that we develop those "qualified to teach others." Neither does the absence of that preparation ensure ability to train others. The core challenge is in how we teach, and how we teach others to teach.

It is axiomatic that we teach others in the way we were taught. So training must be done in a way that can be effectively reproduced by those being trained. Most of those we are training will work

in areas where open, organized witness may be impossible, or where technological support may be lacking. Teaching must, therefore, be constructed and presented in a style as similar to “grass roots” education as possible. What kind of teaching will that be? It will not be based on Western educational or discipling models.

Western education has produced impressive technical and social achievements, but cannot change the fundamentals of human behavior. Its prevailing power has further separated, then alienated the deprived and oppressed of the world. Western education in the Majority World has sometimes accepted differing cultural behaviors or used local illustrations, but deeply held beliefs and assumptions have been overlooked. The majority of all the world’s peoples - European as well as Asian, Africans as well as Americans - continue in traditional beliefs, as well as indigenous reasoning and learning styles. Even when some become competent in “contemporary” patterns and skills, they still function largely with traditional values and assumptions - or revert to them under pressure. Educational, technical, and organizational achievement has left core beliefs untouched, even among many who claim to be Christian.

Thoughtful leaders in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are asking how to change patterns that leave people in poverty, gross under-development, and spiritual darkness. Imitation of Western educational forms in the Majority World, and mastery of inherently foreign concepts, brings change only at a superficial level.

Neither Western nor non-Western modes of teaching have been able to change the nature of humans or society. In small conflicts or massive struggles, man seems equally intent on destroying others and himself, if necessary, to destroy others. There is no evidence that Western styles are of any more value than non-Western in alleviating humanity’s fundamental problems. So why is there such struggle to gain Western degrees? Western approval? To introduce Western methods in our ministries? There is a better way.

It is clear in the Word of God that humans need a new nature, and that God alone can create that in humans. He will do that when humans ask, taking Him at His Word. God has given us, His people, the privilege of communicating the story of God’s deliverance. In fact, that is our central task, telling His story so He can bring change to believing and obedient persons. To do that effectively, we must disciple and teach within existing thought-patterns and perceptions. Paul described the way he did it, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit:

*“To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law, so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law,... so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak.*

*“I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.”*

1 Cor 9:20-22 (NIV)

Clearly, those patterns were not the same as prevalent teaching patterns of the twenty-first century. Can we still follow Paul’s way, or must we remain bound by traditions that originated elsewhere? If we are to be relevant to all levels of society, we must teach in the ways already being used by each society. What are some of those understandings, patterns of thought and styles of learning that we must know and use?

Some major distinctions between “Normal” learning and the “Academic” mode of learning<sup>1</sup> are suggested in this brief table.

<b>Normal</b>	<b>Academic</b>
Inductive development of principles	Deductive application of principles
Experiential learning Apprenticing Storying	Learning abstract or propositional truth Academic qualification Factual presentations
Event orientation	Chronological orientation
Validation of teaching authority by - age. Knowledge of tradition social position	Validation of teaching authority by - formal academic credentials wealth political or social position
Contextual, Semitic, Oriental, or Romantic logic systems	Linear logic system

To better define the differences, this table shows polar opposites. A specific culture would probably not be totally on one side of the table above, but at some point between the opposites. There is power in both kinds of learning, but differing outcomes. The Academic approach is

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<sup>1</sup> “Normal” learning is the term suggested by Timothy Olonade of Nigeria, as more suitable than “Indigenous.” “Academic” learning could also be described as the Aristotelian method of learning.

essential in certain studies, technological areas for example. The Normal approach is much more appropriate when attitudes and relationships are the emphasis.

We are concerned with attitudes and relationships, not only facts. This suggests the need for a different methodology of teaching and training leaders of churches, a method much closer to that of Jesus and Paul than much current practice. Continuing to teach and train within a traditional Western Academic framework will not prevent learning, but will seldom offer a challenge to non-biblical values and assumptions.

This kind of teaching results in cognitive compartmentalization - lessons are learned, but fundamental assumptions and beliefs are untouched. Life continues with mental assent to the Gospel, but lacking an awesome, shattering confrontation with God. Outward behavior may change, masking the unchanged nature of the innermost person. This, I suggest, is the primary cause of remarkable church growth that nevertheless has little impact on a society's values and behavior.

(I speak here as a long-term resident of Africa, though presently based in the USA.) The root of the common mis-judgment of the African church, "Six thousand miles wide, but two inches deep" is not in the Message but in frequent failure to relate the message to the African cultural core. There are many remarkable men and women of God in Africa, but congregation after congregation sees only a superficial relationship between the Word of God and traditional ways of life and thought. It is this superficiality, whether in Africa, Asia, South or North America, that we seek to change so that God's Word shapes the very core of individuals and societies. We have been charmed into accepting Academic rigor as equivalent to the rigor of true discipleship.

Discipling in the Pauline manner considers the differing assumptions and beliefs of the disciple, and confronts those with God's Revelation. Teaching is done in a way that involves the total person, instead of an academic substitute. It begins with the trainee's experience, a mentor helping him to analyze what is happening in his own ministry, then considering case studies from other ministries to discern valid principles - all under the guidance of a personal mentor. The mentor directs the trainee to specific learning experiences - in books, DVDs, online materials, and other available references, and is available for questions and discussions. As a small group train together online, students help one another. The training follows an inductive approach so that at the end of each unit trainees are able to state guiding principles for their own ministries.

This is the way we learn about life as a child and about new situations as adults. It is the “Normal” way of learning, and should be the way we disciple believers - using life “as it happens” and guiding to understanding in the light of God’s Word, and encouraging obedience to Him.

World Link University of the Third World Mission Association is building that kind of training online through the World Link Graduate Center. Using a combination of short residential training, extensive use of the internet, and working with mission training centers worldwide, the life-changing truths of God’s revelation can be given in a directly relevant and comprehensible manner.

“Normal” learning-teaching guides us to the heart instead of developing a two-level understanding: academic learning balanced precariously on top of traditional views of the spirit world and life. “Normal” discipling happens by learning through experience, enhanced by stories and apprenticeship. The disciple learns within life from an authentic teacher who has lived the Truth yet understands deeply the social and traditional environment from which the disciple is emerging.

This is the pattern of Jesus.

Combining “Normal” ways of learning (instead of Academic) with contemporary technology, World Link Graduate Center is much more than traditional training online. World Link Graduate Center seeks to follow the pattern of Jesus in training those who are discipling the nations and establish a pattern that strengthens missionary training everywhere. It is developing understanding through experience, stories, mentoring, deep involvement with the people, building on a solid foundation of knowing God.

This kind of teaching is not cost-efficient. It cannot mass produce mission trainers, even using modern technology. But the way of weakness is the way of power in God’s economy. Grand (and grandiose) programs seldom present God’s ways, often representing man’s vision or man’s attempt to solve problems.

It is the still, small voice that showed God. A baby in a peasant society that was oppressed by the greatest power in the world became the Man that transformed human history and destiny. The Cross of Jesus, intended as the symbol of deepest shame became a glorious symbol of hope (1 Corinthians 1:18-31, NIV).

God communicated with us by becoming one of us, by participating in our feasts, our funerals, as a part of the fabric of our lives. He spoke our language, not calling on the powers of heaven to overwhelm our dullness of comprehension. (What an incredible high-tech show He could have dazzled us with!) Instead, He acted out His love within the framework of our understanding. Similarly, the structure of our teaching must reflect simplicity of Truth and the power of relationship within the limits of the world of those we seek to disciple. In that way, we can create understanding in those we disciple, in those we teach.

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