

The Way of Jesus Midweek Update, Week 2

Here are a few of my random thoughts again this week on the issues of discipleship...

This Coming Sunday:

- Complete the devotional reading (Luke 7-12, Philippians 2) and make sure you have written down some of your thoughts on your own discipleship in a journal.
- Reflect deeply and penitentially on the first three steps of the '12 Steps of a Disciple' from last week's handout. Make each step a confession to Christ, being as specific as you can, and always concluding with a prayer that Christ's own presence and life and will and character and Spirit would fill and shape us more and more.
 - *"I admit that I am powerless to fix the brokenness of my life on my own. My life has become unmanageable.*
 - *"I believe that God, through his actions and those of his Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit – can restore me to sanity.*
 - *"I will turn my will and my entire life over to the care of God. Father, I'm asking for a total transfusion of your will, power, presence and love."*
- Handouts from previous weeks will be available
- We meet from 10:25-11:15 in the Sanctuary. After this Sunday we will encourage new people to wait till we offer the seminar again next winter.
- Remember: "*Truth is captured by obedience*" (Alf Stanway) or, "*Blessed are you if you do these things*" (Jesus)

A review of John Stott's upcoming (May '10) and final book, 'The Radical Disciple'

I found myself drawn to these issues again and again in this week's readings from Luke, esp chapters 9 and 10.

From Mark Maynall's blog (<http://markmeynell.wordpress.com/2010/01/22/uncle-johns-farewell-an-inescapable-call-to-be-radical/>).

[John Stott] has picked *these* characteristics of Christian discipleship to expound – despite calling them 'selective' and 'somewhat arbitrary' (p137). Each is touched on lightly and briefly, but with all the hallmarks of Stott's vintage prose and pithy clarity of thought still firmly in place:

1. **Non-Conformity:** *"we are neither to seek to preserve our holiness by escaping from the world nor to sacrifice our holiness by conforming to the world"* (p19)
2. **Christlikeness:** *"we are to be like Christ in his incarnation, in his service, in his love, in his endurance, and in his mission"* (p38)

3. **Maturity:** *"may God give us such a full, clear vision of Jesus Christ, first that we may grow into maturity ourselves, and secondly that, by faithful proclamation of Christ in his fullness to others, we may present others mature as well."* (p53)
4. **Creation-Care:** *"God intends our care of the creation to reflect our love for the Creator"* (p65)
5. **Simplicity:** *"All Christians claim to have received a new life from Jesus Christ. What lifestyle, then, is appropriate for them? If the life is new, the lifestyle should be new also"* (p71)
6. **Balance:** *"We are both individual disciples and church members, both worshippers and witnesses, both pilgrims and citizens. Nearly all our failures stem from the ease with which we forget our comprehensive identity as disciples."* (p102)
7. **Dependence:** *"We are all designed to be a burden to others... The life of the family, including the life of the local church family, should be one of 'mutual burdensomeness.'" (p113)*
8. **Death:** *"If we want to live we must die. And we will be willing to die only when we see the glories of the life to which death leads. This is the radical, paradoxical Christian perspective."* (p135)

He chooses these because, as he reflects on western (which I suppose primarily means UK & USA) Christian culture, he is anxious about their dwindling importance. We'd be utter fools to ignore the observations of so wise an elder statesman. Their challenge is straightforward and unavoidable – not least because John practises what he preaches. It is quite something, is it not, for a man in his 9th decade to be making an appeal for people to be *radical*?! Retirement is usually the time for conservatism and comfortable ease, not the prickly and disturbing calls for Christ-like discipleship.

The chapters are not even, in the sense of being similarly structured or equally expository:

- the **Christlikeness** chapter takes a topical approach, touching on various aspects of Christ's life and character we should emulate;
- the **Non-Conformity** and **Creation-Care** chapters are also topical, but show a sustained awareness of contemporary issues: hence his helpful articulation of 4 challenging trends in the former (*pluralism, materialism, ethical relativism and narcissism*) and 4 ingredients of the current ecological crisis (*population growth, depletion of earth's resources, waste disposal and climate change*). Not bad going for someone who's 89 in April.
- the **Simplicity** chapter is essentially a publication of a statement issued after a Lausanne consultation led by John and Ron Sider in 1980. The whole statement plus commentary is online: An evangelical commitment to a simple lifestyle <<http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/lop-20.html>> . I'd not come across it before and was *profoundly* challenged by it.
- the **Balance** chapter is somewhat unexpectedly an involved exposition of 1 Peter 2:1-17 – but I'd never quite seen before the way Peter mixes his metaphors in the chapter and this was illuminating (*as newborn babies we are called to growth, as living stones to fellowship, as holy priests to worship, as God's own people to witness, as aliens and strangers to holiness and as servants of God to citizenship*).

But despite the chapters' varieties of style or approach, they are always biblical and theological,

and yet also pastoral and *real*. It is so helpful to have thumbnail sketches of people he's been challenged or influenced by, some widely known, others not so, some British, most not. These ground the book.

What *is* new, perhaps, is that as the book draws to a close, Uncle John becomes increasingly candid. He's always been an honest and humble man, but no one could remain unaffected by the poignancy of the last 2 chapters particularly. I well remember that Sunday morning in 2006 (described in chapter 7) when he was getting ready to preach at All Souls, but tripped in his flat and broke his hip, which resulted in an emergency hip replacement operation. We were involved in the All Souls week away down in Devon that weekend, but heard about it very quickly and we were all shocked. But it still didn't prepare me to read his own agonising account of that morning:

I knew at once that I had broken or dislocated my hip, for I could not move, let alone get up. I was able, however, to push the panic button I was wearing and kind friends immediately came to my rescue...

... as this chapter progresses please do not forget my earlier experiences, spreadeagled on the floor, completely dependent on others. For this is where, from time to time, the radical disciple needs to be. I believe that dependence involved in these experiences can be used by God to bring about greater maturity in us.

... There is another aspect of the dependence which I experienced which was new to me, which I am tempted to gloss over, but which my trusted friends have urged me not to conceal. It is the emotional weakness which physical infirmity sometimes brings to the surface and which finds expression in weeping. (pp104-105)

There are few who would be prepared to turn so private and painful an experience into so public and challenging a lesson.