

A WORD FROM THE DEAN

Discipleship occurs in small numbers

When morning came, he [Jesus] called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James (also known as Thaddaeus, the name that is used in Matthew and Mark), and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor." (Luke 6:13–16).



Photo by Sam Goh

DTC students: (from left) Dorcas Liu (Singapore), Melvin Lee (Singapore), Pang Wee Heong (Malaysia), Nelson Kro (India).

In noting the above account of the calling of Jesus' first disciples who were also named apostles, we may be inclined to ask: why did he limit the number to just twelve? The reason is certainly not for lack of a following. For apart from the Twelve, Jesus had a wider circle of 72 followers (Luke 10:1–20), and a group of women who travelled with him (Luke 8:1–3). And wherever he went, large crowds followed him (see e.g., Matt 4:25; 8:1; 12:15; Luke 6:17).

A learned response to our question is that Jesus' choice of the Twelve was largely symbolic, "intended to correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel." (David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2008, p.264). Another scholar had opined, "The very existence of the twelve speaks, of course, of the reconstitution of Israel. Israel had not had twelve visible tribes since the Assyrian invasion in 734 BC, and for Jesus to give twelve followers a place of prominence . . . indicates pretty clearly that he was thinking in terms of the eschatological restoration of Israel." (N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, p.300).

As insightful as these suggestions are, there may well be a further, more practical reason. It has been Jesus' practice to go for a select few with whom he could relate in depth, and with whom he could live out all aspects of life. Once

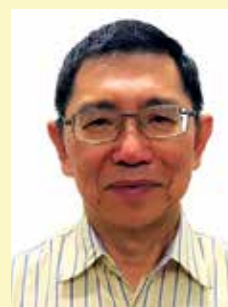
as he was sending out his disciples to preach, he instructed them thus: "Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave." (Matt 10:11). Jesus' pattern of discouraging people from following him by laying down stringent conditions (see Luke 9:57–62) only makes sense if it is seen as a deliberate attempt on his part to thin out the throng of eager followers.

According to J. Oswald Sanders, the terms of discipleship were

made exacting because Jesus "was concerned more with quality than with quantity." (*Spiritual Maturity*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1962, p.109). This is, of course, a "spot on" observation. What Jesus wants is a company of committed disciples on whom he can count to build the Kingdom of God. Yet, the Saviour's invitation is never elitist or discriminatory: "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." (John 6:37).

Keeping the number of disciples small is not intended to limit outreach. It is, I believe, to yield the principle that true discipleship can only occur in small numbers. As David Brown notes, "Discipleship is not simply a matter of individual relationship to Christ as Lord or even of following his example, however indirectly, wherever it might lead. It has a strong social dimension." (*Discipleship and Imagination*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000,

p. 8). At Discipleship Training Centre, we seek to provide for our students an environment in which deep relationships necessary to discipleship can be cultivated and developed. Please pray for us.



DR LIM K THAM
Dean



FROM OUR FACULTY

Take time to smell the roses

Photo by Sam Goh

I've taken to smelling roses in recent months. Several of them bloom next to the entrance to DTC's main building, along with purple orchids, white buttercups and the occasional pink rain lily.

The fragrance of a rose reminds me of another world: light, unforced whispers of goodness and beauty. Philosophy professor Dallas Willard (1935–2013), known for his writings on spiritual formation, describes it this way:

*Taking time to smell the roses leaves enduring impressions of a dear glory that, if sufficiently reengaged, can change the quality of our entire life. The rose in a very special way—and more generally the flower, even in its most humble forms—is a fragile but irrepressible witness on earth to a “larger” world where good is somehow safe. (Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, New York: HarperOne, 1997, p. 324).*

Willard was writing about how we may enthrall our minds with the great and beautiful God, so that we may dearly love and constantly delight in our heavenly Father and trust in the goodness of his intentions and his power to carry them out. Willard emphasised the power of thought in spiritual formation, which interacts with our other dimensions: feelings, will (heart or spirit), body, social context and soul.

We must bring the reality of God before our minds and keep it there, as we do when we take time to smell a rose. He suggested three main ways in which God comes before

our mind: through his creation, through his public acts on the scene of human history, and through experiences of him by ourselves and others.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his disciples to consider how the flowers of the field are dressed more splendidly than King Solomon so that they would have confidence in the Father to know and provide for their daily needs. Or look at the birds, how the Father feeds them: “Are you not much more valuable than they?” (Matt 6:26). Even the sun and the rain can tell of God's mercy that we might imitate him in loving our enemies, for “he causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt 5:45).

To think about God's mighty acts in human history, we may trace the big story of how “God is with us” through Creation, Fall, Redemption and New Creation, or zoom in on, say, the book of Ruth, whose kindness towards her bereaved mother-in-law Naomi, and kinsman-redeemer Boaz's kindness towards the widowed Ruth, revealed the LORD's kindness to them and to his people.

We could read each of the four Gospels in its entirety, not only for the stories of Christmas, Good Friday and Easter but also for Jesus' whole life and ministry. We could meditate on a short passage about Jesus, such as one of his conversations with his disciple Peter (Luke 22:31–34). Imagine the scene where they interact. Focus on a phrase or a picture that draws your attention. Linger on it. Speak to the Lord about it.

The rose in a very special way—and more generally the flower, even in its most humble forms—is a fragile but irrepressible witness on earth to a “larger” world where good is somehow safe.

— Dallas Willard

Finally, there is the experience of God’s hand in our lives and the lives of others. The late Dr Jeanette Hui would ask students in her Christian Spirituality class at DTC to write down their life story. I did mine in seven-year periods. I discovered that God was so good to place teachers and mentors throughout my life to nurture and guide me. The stories of other people who trusted God, such as George Müller (1805–1898) who prayed for God’s provision for the orphan houses he ran, testify that this is the same God in whom we can trust.

Willard warned that “we will never have the easy, unhesitating love of God that makes obedience to Jesus our natural response unless we are absolutely sure that it is good for us to be, and to be who we are”. This means knowing that nothing irredeemable can happen to us. He observes that the “moral failures” of well-known Christians always turn out to be based on the idea that God has required them to serve in such a way that they themselves must “take care of their own needs” rather than being richly provided for by God. Resentment toward God, not love, is the outcome, and from such a condition it is impossible to consistently do the deeds of love. (*The Divine Conspiracy*, pp. 337–338).

So we do well to guard our hearts against resentment and bitterness towards God (or indirectly, towards people or our circumstances). May we learn to see, as Joseph (Genesis 50:20) and Paul (Romans 8:28) did, that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, for we live in the reality that is our great and good God. Perhaps it would help to smell the roses too.



SAM GOH
Faculty-in-training

FROM OUR ALUMNI

3 hard-learned lessons from a missionary

A member of our DTC alumni shares lessons from serving in a Creative Access Nation.

1. Don't hurry to serve

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23–24).

There is a “first” and “then” in verse 24. Jesus said if you want to offer a gift to God, don’t hurry, “first” go and settle whatever problem you have that could hinder your sacrifice to God, he can wait. God is not in a hurry to receive your gift because he is more interested in your life than your gift.

I have come across many people who were passionate to serve full-time in the church or to do missions cross-culturally, but they faced a lot of problems while serving because of some unsettled issues in their lives. One worker was homesick most of the time. She requested to go home every year, especially during winter. She couldn’t blend in to the culture, and became bitter and angry. Another worker, a single lady, always hoped to get married. She almost fell into a terrible sin and had to return home immediately. In many other cases, the missionaries couldn’t serve effectively on the field due to unsettled problems related to attitude, relationship, discipline and spiritual life.

I also learned the lesson by putting a local believer too prematurely in a very important leadership position. Later we realised that he had a lot of unsettled problems of character, attitude and relationship with his family. It took us many years to rectify the damage he made in the church. The negative impact was almost irreversible. I learned that we shouldn’t rush a person to serve. We need to wait upon the Lord for his timing, not just look at a person’s enthusiasm or passion. We try to pass on the leadership to the locals so that we missionaries move on, but it’s not as easy as we think. It takes time for a Christian to grow to be mature, and we shouldn’t rush into it.

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2. Obedience over need

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." (John 11:41–42).

In the case of raising Lazarus, Jesus was facing tremendous pressure from the needs of the people. Several times the sisters told Jesus, "If you were here earlier...", and the people told Jesus "the one you love is ill". I can identify with Jesus, especially the pressure he was facing to attend to the tremendous needs around him. Before becoming a missionary, I heard that if we wish to preach the gospel to hungry people, you should feed them first. In other words, we should address the immediate needs of the people first then only preach the gospel. It sounds sensible but unfortunately many workers are busy attending to people's needs and they have no time left to preach the gospel. Serving in the Third-World context, you are faced with constant struggles between attending to people's needs and obeying God.

Notwithstanding the desperate needs of that time, Jesus wants them to see God's glory and to know him personally. Jesus loves the family so much and he could have remotely raised Lazarus. But he didn't do that. He put up with the pressure from the people who were shouting, "Do something NOW before it's too late!" Jesus prayed "that they may believe, that you sent me!" I think the prayer has two meanings. First, Jesus was saying, "Tell them, Father, I am here to do your will. You are the one who sent me, not them. They can't dictate to me what to do, as I'm here not for their need but to obey you, who sent me." The second layer of meaning is that through this miracle, Jesus wants the people there to have faith in the Father, which is more important than solving their problem the way they expected.

Until now, after 17 years, I still tend to give in to the pressure of needs. If we always run to attend to the needs of people, we would end up feeling disappointed, exhausted and feeling used. The worst thing is the people won't even see God's glory. In most cases, they won't become more godly because of your help. It will only make them depend on you, not God. I'm very sensitive to people's needs but I have to learn to bring those needs to God instead of playing God myself. I need to let the people see God and put their trust in God instead of relying on me to solve their problems.

The truth is it's much easier to attend to the needs of people than to obey God. It's easier to give up my salary to help those who have needs than withholding the help but waiting for God to do something, maybe through me, but in his way, not mine. Oswald Chambers said that the emphasis of the New Testament is not on the needs of mankind, but on the command of Christ—"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations".

SPECIAL INVITATION

Calling all DTC Alumni! The DTC Alumni Committee invites you to a special "Quiet Retreat" to be conducted via Zoom, and facilitated by Revd Howard Peskett (Dean of DTC, 1976 –1986).

Topic: "Pressing on in Hope"

Date: Friday, 12 March 2021

Time: 2 pm to 4 pm (Singapore time)

To register, please send an email with this message, "I wish to participate in the Quiet Retreat", to elsielim09@gmail.com by **5 February 2021**.

APPLICATIONS TO STUDY AT DTC WELCOME

DTC's residential programmes include the Graduate Diploma in Intercultural Studies (one year), Master of Christian Ministry (two years) and Master of Christian Studies (by dissertation only). All three programmes are accredited by the Asia Theological Association. We also offer a Sabbatical Studies Programme (one or two semesters, or six to nine months) for those who wish to review, reflect and refresh by attending courses, writing, or guided personal reflection or self-study.

For more details, go to www.dtc.org.sg

3. Faithfulness over satisfaction

Another struggle most missionaries face is dealing with discouragement. I often read missionaries' biographies and compare what they have done with what I've done. Look at Dr. Paul Brand. He started hospitals treating lepers. His contribution was so significant. George Müller looked after 10,000 orphans and opened 117 schools. What am I doing? I wish I could do greater things for God.

God often reminds me, "Your faithfulness is more important than your sense of satisfaction. Just focus on what I have given you to do now. Be faithful where you are. It's about me, not you!" The people whom I serve are generally very responsive to the gospel, but they also have a very high drop-out rate. They may not mind to believe in Jesus, but very few would become a disciple of Jesus. Through the church that we started in 2004, we have brought many people to Christ, but only 15 people stay back and attend church every week. I sometimes feel discouraged but I have to keep reminding myself that it's not about my feeling; it's about God's glory and my faithfulness in the task he puts in front of me.

Brothers and sisters, if we want to serve long term, we need to learn to deal with discouragement and grasp this truth: He is the one who sent you. Follow his timing and stay faithful!

Giving to DTC

Donors may issue a cheque made out to Discipleship Training Centre Ltd. and mail it to **33A Chancery Lane, Singapore 309554**; or transfer the funds to DTC's account number **024-901049-4** with DBS Singapore by ATM, Internet banking or telegraphic transfer. Donors may also scan the PayNow QR code.

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