

Discipleship Skills

WISDOM: DISCERNING HELPFUL WAYS TO ACCOMPLISH GOSPEL WORK

The work of making disciples for Jesus Christ is the great mission Jesus has given all His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). It should be considered a great privilege for any disciple to take part in fulfilling this mission. Helping other people progress toward the goal of being devoted followers of Jesus, though, is not always a clearly marked path. As people are complex beings with complex thought processes, experiences, and circumstances, it will require wisdom to help them navigate from where they are to where they need to be. Consider, therefore, some Scriptures to help you learn to show discernment in doing gospel work.

MATTHEW 10:16

As Jesus prepared His apostles for their work, He said they would need wisdom/shrewdness. Although this wisdom would be needed in many areas of gospel work, Jesus particularly emphasized wisdom amid hostility and danger. So, gospel workers today are not expected to be gullible simpletons. Instead, we must use wisdom and shrewdness to navigate this hostile world as we try to share the gospel (following Jesus's example, Matthew 21:23-27; 22:15-22, 23-33). But we must do so in a way that maintains innocence and purity in everything! You will need wisdom in areas such as: How to respond to questions, how to avoid unnecessary hostility, how to lead in the most helpful ways, how to challenge and rebuke, how to navigate difficult situations, when it's time to move on, etc.

JOHN 16:12-15

Jesus had spent around three years with His disciples (apostles). Yet, as He would soon ascend to Heaven, He recognized there were still many things left for them to learn. So, even Jesus recognized that discipleship took time and allowed room for growth. He had the wisdom to know His disciples were not ready for everything He wanted them to know at this point. Instead, they would learn these things later through the Holy Spirit He would send them. Similarly, you must recognize that people will not be able to understand everything at once. It will require wisdom to discern what is most needed and helpful for people

at a given time to help them go from where they are to where they need to be!

COLOSSIANS 1:24-29

Paul's focus was on making God's word fully known, helping the church grow, and presenting everyone mature in Christ. Accomplishing this task involved warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom. True gospel work to make disciples, therefore, is not just about having the right Bible knowledge. Instead, it also requires the wisdom of how to put that knowledge into its proper application in your life and helping others do the same. Furthermore, it involves the wisdom of how to best communicate that knowledge in a way that will be understood and received by those who hear it! For example, some people are only prepared to receive the milk of the word, while others are ready for the meat of the word (Hebrews 5:12-14). Sometimes encouragement is needed. Sometimes correction is needed. Sometimes understanding is needed. Additionally, wise teaching discerns whether someone is open to hearing God's word and applying it or not. Then, wisdom in teaching helps people practically apply the things they learn (Matthew 7:24-27; 28:19-20).

COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

Paul connects wisdom and prayer in the work of making God's word known. This involves both having opportunities for the gospel and sharing it in a way that is most helpful to draw people to Christ. While the previous passage focused more on the wisdom needed to bring people to maturity in Christ, this text focuses more on the wisdom needed to help outsiders come to faith. This will involve carefully considering when and how you act and speak. Your speech should not be abrasive, but like salt that makes food palatable (without compromising truth). Part of this wisdom also involves knowing where someone is spiritually. This can be seen throughout the teachings of New Testament disciples who worked to spread the gospel, starting where they needed to start to help whoever they were teaching get to where they needed to go (Acts 2:1-41; 8:26-40; 17:1-9, 16-34). For example, we should be concerned about setting the proper spiritual foundations of truth for each teaching (e.g., teaching the authority of Scripture before teaching the proper way to worship God).

1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23

Although God has given a law for His people to live by today, there are many liberties/freedoms we have also

been given. Paul illustrates in this text how he would give up his own liberties to work for the good of the gospel and not cause any unnecessary obstacles to people hearing and obeying the gospel (e.g., Acts 16:1-5). Similarly, you must use wisdom in knowing the people you are trying to share the gospel with and be willing to deny your own liberties (e.g., opinions, traditions, preferences) to help win them to Christ (Romans 14-15)! This requires you to learn people, their sensitivities, and what will best help each one learn the gospel. In this, you will also need the wisdom to discern between what matters God has taught and must not be compromised and matters that are liberties and opinions!

MARK 1:35-38

Jesus had a limited time on earth to accomplish specific things. Therefore, He had to use wisdom in how He spent His time and who He would teach. There would be times Jesus would have to move on to another place to teach, even when some were looking for Him. In your gospel work, you will also have to use wisdom in knowing who to invest your time and effort into and when you will need to move on. Certainly, the Scriptures demonstrate there will be times when you will need to recognize people who have no interest in obeying the gospel and invest your time and energy elsewhere (Matthew 7:6; 10:11-15; Luke 10:5-12; Acts 13:49-51; 19:8-10). Then, you will also need to be able to adjust how much time, energy, and patience you will devote to certain opportunities over others. In this, look for openness, eagerness to know God's word, and faithfulness to obey what is taught (Acts 17:10-12; 19:8-10; 2 Timothy 2:2).

CONCLUSION

God's word demonstrates the critical nature of wisdom in accomplishing gospel work. Rather than giving people a single way to teach spiritual truths and demanding the same methods be used in every circumstance, God has demonstrated the need to use wisdom to apply the gospel to the many different circumstances encountered in life. These circumstances differ with time, culture, and even individual personalities. Therefore, the one who desires to be effective in accomplishing gospel work will need to have a firm grasp on the truth, be praying for wisdom, and be willing to adapt to various circumstances without compromising truth!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What are some areas in which wisdom will be needed in gospel work?

How is wisdom important in navigating difficult circumstances in gospel work?

How is wisdom used in determining what to teach someone?

How is wisdom involved in helping people come to maturity in Christ?

How is wisdom involved in helping people come to faith in Christ?

How is wisdom necessary in properly handling matters of liberty?

How must wisdom be used in determining who to spend time with?

How is wisdom useful in knowing when it's time to move on to other gospel opportunities?

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