

Is Discipleship Possible Hong Kong Eng to Chinese

by George Verwer

Discipleship is a lifelong process of following Jesus Christ and becoming more like Him, and it is possible today through a deep relationship with Jesus Christ and a willingness to obey His commands.

Duration: 57:06

Scripture: Matthew 10:32-33, Matthew 16:24, Matthew 16:26, Luke 9:23-26, Acts 4:13, Romans 12:1-2

Topics: "Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the history and impact of a ship that was used for missionary work. The ship was launched in 1965, but the speaker emphasizes that the real miracle is not the ship itself, but the thousands of messages that were preached before its launch. The speaker also highlights the importance of reaching out to Muslim countries, as they are among the most needy nations in the world. The speaker shares their personal testimony of coming to faith and emphasizes the ongoing need for discipleship throughout different stages of life.

Transcript

Just reading a few very, very relevant portions from the Word of God. Starting in the Book of Luke, the Gospel of Luke, Gospel of Luke, Chapter 9, starting at verse 23, through verse 26. And He said to them all, if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

For whosoever would save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man profiteth if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me, and of My words of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Fathers, and the Holy Angels. And then, please turn to Romans, Chapter 12.

Read verses 1 and 2. I'll ask that we read in Cantonese, and we'll just follow in English. Chapter 12, verse 1. May God add a spirit of obedience to the reading of His Word. Well, I've been thinking about coming to Hong Kong for about 17 years.

And every time I thought about it, I realized all the Christian workers that were here, and great Christian leaders and organizations, I always felt this was at least one place that I did not need to go to. My heart

has always been more captivated by the Middle East. And places like Afghanistan, I've probably visited about 30 times.

And you may be aware of the fact that in all of Afghanistan, there are only about a few dozen believers in the entire nation of 18 million. And right now, we're faced with the greatest opportunity ever to reach these people, as many of them are coming into Pakistan, which is a country that is more free. Of course, being involved with the ship Lagos, I became somewhat involved praying more for Hong Kong.

And actually, I'm here now trying to get to Lagos. In order to have a special conference with the staff and crew, while the ship is in dry dock over in the Philippines. And it seemed that most of the flights, the good flights from London, where I live, went to Hong Kong first.

So I'm very grateful for this opportunity. Certainly, God has put you in one of the most strategically located nations in all the world. Twenty-three years ago, shortly after my conversion to Christ, God put it on my heart to pray regularly for China.

And today is somewhat of a historic day, after 23 years of praying, that I've been able to spend one day over in mainland China. That's not very much time. But I'm afraid if I went there much longer, and the burden became much greater, I don't know what I would do.

I'm sure many of you have a greater burden for that than I do, so that certainly will not be what I'm speaking about tonight. I do believe the burden of every Christian is the whole world. And especially tomorrow night, I'm going to be sharing about some countries that I have been in and worked in, such as India, that I believe will be an encouragement in expanding your world vision.

In preparation for tomorrow night's ministry, it would be good if you could read this book. You can at least read through this section on the Middle East, and some of the Muslim countries, one out of every hundred, seven people in the world is a Muslim. Yet less than 2% of the missionaries in the world work among Muslims.

And you'll see through this amazing book of information and prayer requests, how so many of the most needy nations in the world, unbelievably needy, are Muslim countries. This book has now come out in a number of languages, but I think English will be the closest to home for most of you. I'd like to also mention three other books that have meant a lot in our work around the world.

The Calvary Road, which you can't come on supposedly until you read this book. The Discipline Life, which we often use as a study book in our conferences. I don't know much about Hong Kong, but I can tell you in Europe, the greatest need in our lives is more discipline.

Perhaps the only thing I can think of more important is worship, and that involves discipline as well. And so it's a joy to recommend also this book on prayer and worship, called Destined for the Throne, which I hope soon will also be in Chinese. I don't think most of us are aware of how many different dialects there are in Chinese.

Even on the mainland today, we went from one town only seven miles, and the people were speaking two totally different dialects. By the way, I think at this time of the year, everybody must be going over there. There was just a huge queue of people, most of them had stereos and everything you could think of in their hands, carrying in.

This evening we're considering the subject of discipleship. And is it possible today? Since I am very new to most of you, I thought it would be good just to share my own testimony. And bring into that some very important truths about discipleship.

I wasn't reared in a Christian home. My grandfather was from the little country of the Netherlands, he was an atheist, he didn't believe in the existence of God. My other grandfather was from Glasgow, Scotland.

He was a drunkard, and he used to beat my grandmother so much that she finally divorced him. My own parents ended up near New York City. They were sort of very nice, middle class materialists.

So by age 14, I was baptized into materialism. And by 16, I had three of my own little businesses. And I hadn't remembered ever having heard the gospel.

I went to church, because there were contacts in the church, there were nice girls in the church. And I even became the president of the young people's group, and the assistant to the pastor. I'm not sure if anybody in that church really knew Christ, it was more of a social club.

But there was a godly woman near the school that I was attending. She had been praying for that school for 15 years. Not only that people would be converted to Christ, but that from that school, they would go to many parts of the world.

And then when I went to that school, she began to pray for me. And she prayed for me for three years, and every year I got worse. And she sent me part of God's word, a gospel of John, through the post.

And as I read this gospel, God began to deal with my frozen heart. Then also she put a rack of gospel tracts in the local railway station. And one day on the way to the doctor actually, I picked up a little tract from that rack that God also used to speak to my heart.

Now I was often buying pornographic literature. And one day when I went to get some of this, there was a different magazine in the same place about Billy Graham. So again, literature was the use of God to work in my life.

This is one of the reasons I have a slight bent toward Christian literature. I was so thrilled to see the book display. I always feel a little unhappy preaching if there's no book display.

On Saturday I had a little conference with the navigators in London. It's a great Christian group that specializes in man-to-man follow-up. And several hundred came together.

So we set up great piles of books. And in that one day we saw 7,000 Hong Kong dollars of books sold. Just from two small tables.

I discovered everywhere in the world that somehow God is moving and giving people a concern to read Christian books. Now as I read this magazine about Billy Graham, I didn't know anything about that kind of thing. But because he played sports and was married, he seemed at least partially normal.

So when Billy Graham came to New York City, partly out of curiosity, I went to see and hear him. Of course this lady had been praying. Others had started to pray.

That night I heard the gospel. And I experienced conversion through Christ. And I went back to that school.

And God began to work in a very unusual way. As I shared with other students, a few came to Christ. Then we decided to distribute Gospels of John to the whole school.

Of course there were very few Christians in the school. This was a very unheard of thing. There were hardly any teachers who were Christians.

But somehow we got this permission and a thousand students promised to read the whole Gospel of John. One of my many burdens is that everybody in the world should have at least one portion or one of the Gospels. Before a year or two, some 200 students in that school surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ.

Now some of you know about the ship Lagos. Some of you here have worked on the ship. In two or three years you will get to know the ship Dulos.

We hope somehow in a couple of years we may be able to bring this bigger ship here to Hong Kong. But some of you may not know that story that I just told you, which is a true story. Which is how the whole work of the ships and operation mobilization was born.

One woman, one disciple, who knew reality in prayer, who had compassion, who knew the reality of persevering and pressing on, even when things seemed discouraging. And they of course are just a few of the marks of a true disciple. Sometimes we think of a disciple as sort of a young man moving out down the street, preaching or giving out tracts.

But here is this disciple, is an unknown elderly lady, quietly in her own home, literally making an impact on the world through prayer. One of the most powerful books I have ever read on prayer is called Power Through Prayer. I just noticed some on the book table.

And the author says the church looks for better machinery, God looks for better men. Men of prayer, women of prayer. And to me, this is the greatest activity that the true disciple of Jesus Christ can be involved in.

Well a few of us continued praying in that school. But of course we soon left and went on to university. At university I was destined to meet another very dynamic disciple.

His name was Dale Roton. And he is now the director of the second ship, the ship Doulas. Originally he was not involved with the ships.

Because he was leading our work in the Middle East, especially Turkey. Some of you may know his book, The Logic of Faith, written especially for Muslims. He then led our work into about seven of the Soviet countries.

Then he went back to university and picked up one or two more degrees. And we thought, well, maybe he's going to become a professor. But in an amazing way, God put the second ship on his heart.

And that's where he and his family have now settled down as the leaders of the second ship. When I met Dale at university, he was older than me. And I saw reality in his life.

You know, this would speak stronger than anything else, even stronger than literature. A life that's on fire for God. Of course, some people didn't like him.

And when I first arrived at the college, they warned me, said, watch out for this fellow, he's even baptizing people in the showers. Which I thought was rather unusual since he was a Presbyterian. But I went to a prayer meeting that some students were having.

And I saw again reality in their lives. Dale and I have now been locked together for 23 years. I think, in fact, very few people have ever understood Operation Mobilization.

Some thought it was a literature agency. Then after that, some thought it was a shipping company. And all kinds of different ideas.

And all these things, to some degree, are true. But as I look back over these past 25 years since I came to Christ, I think the key thing that stands out in my mind is that Operation Mobilization is a fellowship. A fellowship of people from all over the world who have been drawn into a very deep relationship with one another.

There are now about two to three hundred leaders in OM. And over a hundred of them have been together for many years. Even though one of our greatest joys is always when another one of our main leaders gets led into another fellowship.

In fact, just two weeks ago, in a small church, we were having a sending-off meeting for one of our workers. To become a full-time worker in the International Evangelical Students. This brother's fellowship.

Working under Chua Wing Hin there in Europe. And one of our greatest burdens is to just be able to lock hearts and lock arms with all of God's people around the world for the cause of world evangelism. Well, about eight months later, Dale Roton, myself, and one other brother headed overseas to Mexico.

We were just students. And back then, this kind of thing was not done. Somehow, we felt we must go and just work with missionaries and learn about other cultures and the language as well.

This was one of the birthplaces of short-term missionary work. We were received especially by the Wycliffe Bible Translators, another great fellowship of God's people. And we saw God answer prayer.

Already, we were getting so much into our heads as Christians. Dale was memorizing the New Testament. He soon had almost half of it committed to memory.

We were studying the Word of God. We were reading Christian books. But how do you get this into practice? And when you're 19, as I was, just before I went to Mexico, what hope is there for you at that age? Everybody was saying, you know, study harder, study longer, go to cemetery, seminary, etc., etc.

And I found that I was getting bigger and bigger in the head, but my heart was not growing at the same pace. Maybe this is a problem more in the West. We get men who are big-headed theologically, but their hearts, when it comes to compassion and love and reality, are often small.

And then how would we learn to communicate cross-culturally? I was studying Spanish at university. Both my professor and I were getting discouraged. It did not seem that I had language ability.

I was doing better in history. One month in Mexico, and I was preaching in Spanish. It can be very helpful.

Even today in China, my guide, he was speaking Spanish. I don't understand this. But some of you may not think you can ever learn a foreign language, like Arabic, or Turkish, or Pashto, or some other

language.

But once you get into that environment, where all these people are speaking, you will discover that God will give you the gift of languages. Do not be discouraged in your language study, whatever language you are studying. A number of our men have proven that the first four languages are the hardest.

After that, it's easier. Almost without planning it, OM became a massive program, teaching literally thousands of people their second, third, and fourth languages. We did not have such a plan.

But later on, OM began to train people, many people, to learn many languages. Not just one, but two, three, many languages. It was a long story, but I want to shorten it a bit.

The work began to grow in Mexico. It was a very outward proclamation of the Gospel. Literature had to be distributed secretly.

So we sent it out through the post. In one and a half years, 900,000 pieces of literature went out through the mail. And Spaniards began to move in reaching others for Christ.

And it was Spanish young people who first took on this name, Operation Mobilization. And they could not freely work in their own country, so they worked quietly all year in the Spanish capital. And in the summer, they launched out in evangelism in more open countries.

We had Spaniards moving on teams, evangelizing Germany. It would be as if suddenly a team came from mainland China to evangelize Hong Kong. But God used these Spanish young people.

Their faith triggered off a movement of God's Spirit in Great Britain. In fact, in that first summer, 90 British young people, many of them university students, joined with the Spaniards. By the next summer, there were 2,000.

900 from Britain alone launched out across the more needy European lands like Italy, Spain, France. And this had been going on every summer. Though soon, the one and two year programs became more important as it gave a greater opportunity to do an in-depth kind of work.

It was only in 1965 that the burden and the vision for the ship came. Already a foundation had been laid. And I think it's so important to understand that the miracle is not the ship, but it's what God has done in people's lives for more than 10 years before there was any ship whatsoever.

Just a few days ago, actually on Friday, I was in Glasgow. In Scotland, and I was on the Doulas, the second ship. There were about 300 people on that ship living.

And it's two to three times the size of the Lagos. And yet, once again, I was made aware of this fact. It's not the ship.

The people. The people that God has brought from all over the world. To go through this discipleship training.

To learn the reality of prayer. To learn the reality of loving all kinds of people, regardless of race, or nationality, or anything else. To learn how to effectively communicate cross-culturally to people of a totally different background.

To learn the reality of books like Calvary Road, and what it is to daily repent and live in revival at the foot of the cross. And I believe that the young people on these ships, and the other six or seven hundred who work on shore, are just one of many proofs that discipleship is possible today. Not because they're perfect.

Not because they're special. Because according to the New Testament, every true believer is a disciple. Discipleship is not some superior level of Christian living.

It's not something that only missionaries qualify for. According to what I can see in the New Testament, every person, once he becomes a believer, he is a disciple. It says in the book of Acts, the number of disciples increased.

That was Acts 6, verse 1. And then in verse 7, the same thing. The number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem. It's not decisions God's looking for, it's disciples.

It's not a matter of just saying with your head that you believe in Christ. It's a matter of putting your life on the altar, as we read in Romans, chapter 12. And the most amazing thing in the past few years, is what is referred to in Europe in OM circles as the Chinese invasion.

Because in God's providence, with the ship Lagos registered in Singapore, even though we were the movement committed not to going any further than Bangladesh, it was God's providence to overrule our little man-made decision, and put us in Singapore. And then in Malaysia, just about a year ago when I was in Singapore, we had a full-day conference called an Operation World Conference. We had sixteen hundred young people there, serious young people, for the whole day.

When I went to Malaysia, the response was even greater. And now almost the third largest group within the whole OM worldwide are the Chinese. From Malaysia.

And in all fairness, just a few from Hong Kong. Maybe that's why I'm here tonight, I don't know. But when I found out the Malaysians are not allowed to go into mainland China, I was very disappointed.

The Malaysian government will not allow their citizens to go into mainland China. Singaporeans, I think, it's a little easier. But from what I've seen today, those of you who have the privilege of being residents here, in most cases are faced with one of the most unusual challenges, perhaps in the history of the Church.

However, whether it's that mission or some other mission, if it's God's work, the first step is your own life. It's not a matter of just running out and doing something. The first step is always that our own life be brought into deeper reality with Jesus Christ.

This is why in our work we want to remain a training program. It's true we have many other aspects of our work. Especially in some Muslim countries, where we're almost the only group functioning.

We have longer term people, they speak the language fluently of course. I guess maybe they are no longer in training, though we feel God's training of course is all of our life. People often talk about closed doors.

For 24 years of Bible study, I've been looking for this doctrine of the closed door. I have not yet found it. But if you can find it, you can also autograph my Bible at the end of the meeting.

Everybody said for years, Afghanistan, a closed door. The most fanatic country. People accepted Christ, within 24 hours they were dead.

But God opened the way. Gordon and Grace Magni have been there for 9 years. Of course, they went as students.

They got into the University of Kabul. Of course, they were very slow students, took them 9 years. Turkey is another so-called closed country.

No official missionaries in Turkey. We have a brother there in one city. After he finished at London and Oxford Universities.

He got a job in a university in Ankara doing brain research. Also a professor. And in his free time, he's planting a church among the Turks.

It's the only one of the few churches of converted Muslims in the whole nation. Just a handful, just a few. So there are many aspects of our work in which it's not just training.

And even when people are in training, when they are working under the right supervision through prayer, they can be used of God to accomplish great things. Two years before we got the ship, we started our work in India, our main OM field. In the world today.

Every year there were less missionaries in India. And we were told again and again, this cannot be done, this cannot be done. But we first made our priority prayer.

Secondly, we determined that the whole work must be built on our Indian national brothers. And that we as foreigners must serve them and humbly work with them and under them. And people said, but you're not going to find the strong men of integrity to lead this kind of work.

You say, God, is this too hard for you? Are not Indians capable of being disciples? Are they some special case? And as we began to pray together, and as we shared these principles of spiritual life, we discovered many Indians were more hungry for God and these realities than any of us who came from the West. And that especially in the area of devotion and worship, that they had seemingly at times something that we often lacked from our workaholic Western world. And within 12 years, these Indians had reached 150 million people with the word of God.

They were reaching between 12 and 15 million people every year, preaching, mainly preaching, but also with literature. Thousands went through the training program and are now working with almost every denomination and every major mission in all of India. And some areas, those who were trained went on to plant new churches of new believers in those areas.

And today there are 300 full-time workers with OM India. Is discipleship possible today? I believe it is. And I believe that as we look out across the world today, there is an increase of desire, especially among young people, for taking that which we have in our heads and getting it down into the life, that which we read about in the book of Acts, the boldness and witness, the courage in claiming great things for God, the faith to do the impossible, the nights of prayer we read about in Acts 12, the nights of praise that we read about in Acts 16.

There is an increasing number of people who are hungry for this kind of reality in their own lives. They are tired of the game of words. They are tired of just going through religious motion.

They want reality. They want to know God. And they want God to be controlling their life.

I personally feel that I have a long way to go. And I've come to this conviction now that I'm in the middle years of my life. And most of the realities of discipleship must be relearned again and again in one's life, in different age brackets, under different circumstances.

I'm re-reading some of these books. I say, Lord, now how does that apply for a 20-year married man with three teenagers? How does this apply? Recently I was reading a book called *The Middle Years Crisis*. I was actually feeling quite well until I read that book.

I think that book created a new crisis. Actually I've stopped reading it. There are times when you have to stop reading books and go back to this one.

Yes, discipleship is possible today. It's not some special little weird thing way out here for just a few little super saints. It's God's way of life for every believer.

It doesn't mean you have to leave your beloved Hong Kong. For some of you it may mean that. Certainly it seems to be a rather crowded place from the little I have seen.

And I'm so glad that your underground system opened completely yesterday for my arrival. And I just pray that as we go from this meeting tonight, it will be in a spirit of seeking the Lord. Saying, Lord, what would you do with my life? Is there some other country? Is there some other thing I should be involved in right here? Is there more that I can be doing right in my local church? Or even in my own church, is there something new that I should be able to see? I feel that the Lord has to do the work of world evangelism through the church.

And if at times you feel a little discouraged, just think of that one lady, and that one schoolboy, and that one gospel of John, that one gospel of John, what God was able to do. And of course, this is only the beginning. Let us pray.

Let's have a moment of silent prayer in which we can make deeper commitments of our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ even here. Our God knows all about us, and He loves us still. Let us in silence just pour our hearts out in prayer and surrender and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our God and Father, we thank You for this time together. Lord, You know I have come here in great weakness and inadequacy. There are so many things yet that I must learn and relearn in my own life.

Lord, I thank You for Your great patience with me. I thank You for Your great love and mercy and acceptance. Lord, I thank You this day for the privilege of even having some hours in this great land to the north of us.

Lord, waken our hearts to a greater burden of prayer. Cause us in these days to surrender our life in a deeper way to You. Deliver us, God, from the subtle enslavements of the self-life that keep us from being what You want us to be.

Lord, fill us afresh with Your Holy Spirit that we may be as those men and women we read about in the Book of Acts and that compassion and communion with Yourself may be the marks of our life. Strengthen

Your work around the world. Raise up and send forth more laborers into trading and into the harvest fields.

For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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