

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

The challenge of making disciples – Joss Bray

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Introduction

Looking at the challenge of making disciples.

Many new ones made in Acts – remember

Acts 2:41

Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Acts 4:4

But many who heard the message believed; so, the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

Acts 21:20

‘You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed,

How did this happen?

Jesus had told them to do it – this is the mandate for making disciples –

Matt 28:

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’

It’s clear – Jesus was the one in charge - he would always be with them - and they got on and did it – to all nations. Simple.

Remember the greatest commandments that Jesus highlighted:

Matt 22:

³⁷ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’”^[c] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

Everything we do hangs on these.

Then the rest follows – making disciples, baptising, teaching – is all founded on these commandments.

This love drives us first and foremost.

It should be the basis of all we do.

It's not about what we feel we should do – or are expected to do – or ought to do – or are told to do -although these are all true.

It's about a love that originates in God himself that compels us make disciples.

What is a disciple?

“a follower or pupil of a teacher, leader, or philosopher.”

Latin “discipulus” pupil, from “discere” to learn.

It's a lifestyle of following someone.

But it's more than that – commitment – literally - discipline

It's not just head knowledge – it's life changing.

Who do we follow?

Just to be clear, we are not called to be disciples of men – we are disciples of Jesus before anything else.

1 Cor 3 – Paul says:

³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? ⁴ For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere human beings?

⁵ What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. ⁹ For we are fellow workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

We mustn't blindly follow men and elevate them by becoming their disciples.

We mustn't be distracted by men who seem to want to draw people to follow them or their ministry especially financially.

We shouldn't compare ourselves to others and want to be like them – we have different races to run.

We are fellow workers in God's service – nothing more, nothing less.

But what about imitating people – doesn't the bible say something about that?

Paul says in 1 Cor 4:

¹⁶ Therefore I urge you to imitate me. ¹⁷ For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church

And in Hebrews 13:

⁷ Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Paul says – “imitate me and other leaders” – what does that mean?

He talks about imitating a way of life – in Christ Jesus, a way of faith – in Jesus.

And crucially – teaching needs to agree with how people actually live – this is very important.

So imitation of others is not being a disciple of men -

It is about imitating men who live and walk by faith – looking at their example.

It's still all about following Jesus!

Pitfalls in the church –

“Heavy shepherding and discipling”.

Directive one to one discipling schemes.

Controlling “discipling” relationships.

Anyone had experience of this?

Is there a biblical template for making disciples?

Yes – and no!

There are no programme of meetings and activities listed as such.

But are are told to preach the gospel, teach, baptise – that's all part of it as we've just read.

But that's just the start!

Being a disciple is much more-

It's a journey following Jesus– and it happens in the now.

It's not about the future or the past – meetings, experiences, conferences etc.

We can be distracted from living now – in the present – as disciples if we try to live in the future or the past.

Having said all that - it is about eternity and the big picture!

It's all about our focus.

Consider a motorbike ride – fast straights - easy and exhilarating – corners/obstacles – harder.

That's when experience and wisdom and learning comes in.

When things get tricky -

Remember – who is God – and who are we?

You go where you focus.

Who makes disciples then - is it a specialist job?

Does there need to be a “programme”?

What did the early church do?

Acts 2:

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

It's not complicated.

We do it together – we are all disciple makers – and disciples.

There should not be a culture of – I am discipling you – i.e. I am doing this to you and you are having something done to you – a sort of hierarchy.

1 Cor 3:

¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

It's a "one another thing" – we do it to each other – giving and receiving teaching and admonishing – which is -

"to warn someone not to do something, usually in a kind way, or to tell someone to do something"

This has got to be the right way to make disciples – to help each other to be disciples and to make new ones.

I find that the newest Christians often have things to teach me about enthusiasm and zeal for God – in particular.

This is the biblical model.

Our response?

As well as meeting on Sundays - Discipleship groups - north, middle and south where:

Having fellowship – sharing our lives together.

Discussing teaching and teaching each other – and yes - admonishing as well.

Praying together – listening to God. Praying for each other, the people around us and for the nations.

Remembering what Jesus did for us when we break bread – and looking forward to when he returns and makes all things new.

The church will grow – He is building it.

The church is what Jesus is coming back for – nothing else.

The church is his vehicle for the gospel – the good news that he came to seek and save the lost.

He is preparing us for many thousands to come in when the Spirit moves again in what we call revival.

The vision of the queue of people around the outside of the hall.

We need to be able to make disciples – but first and foremost we need to be following Jesus with everything we have.

If you do follow him – recommit yourself now.

If you don't follow him yet – now is the time – why wait.

He offers you forgiveness from sin, a new life, an eternal destiny that is cast iron guaranteed.

He went to a lot of pain and trouble for you to pay for your sin– because he loves you and wants you to spend forever with him in paradise.

Now is the time to respond and give your life to him – turn away from sin.

Sin is about ignoring God, wilfully going your own way, not doing things we know are right or doing things we know are wrong.

The bible says everyone has sinned and falls short – now is the time to be put right with God – he is calling you right now.

Let's stand if you want to recommit to being a disciple or to become one for the first time – make a move – literally – towards Jesus.

Let's pray.