

Outlive your life “ Through the Team”

Proposition: WE are all called to make disciples.

Last week we looked at the call of God on our lives to throw seed, that is to verbalise our faith in some respectful manner to people at the beginning of any acquaintance. Some will share testimonies, some will offer to pray for folk, some will mention one liners as the Spirit directs, some will invite others to hear the gospel, some will sing the good news publically, some will hand out tracts as they speak to people, others will share their faith over a meal with a guest. However you do it ALL of us are called of God to throw seeds to put appropriate words to our faith as we live our daily lives. Before cultural identity or job title or our roles in our families we are Christians first. In Acts 1:8 the risen Jesus said that all Christians would be His witnesses, where they live and work, outside of their region and to the ends of the earth. Jesus didn't pick this person and that person over there to be His witnesses; He picked us all to be a witness for Him.

I want to look this morning at the process of making disciples and I want you to notice especially that it takes a team, a good team, to make a disciple – a disciplined Christ follower. I want to encourage you and I to outlive our lives through the team, God's team.

1. FAITH IN CHRIST IS A TEAM EXPERIENCE.

There is no such thing in the NT as a Christian who has a personal faith in Christ but is not a part of God's team, some-one who believes in the Lord but doesn't join a local fellowship. So much of Jesus' teaching about how to live the Christian life is preceded by the term one another. Love one another, serve one another, forgive one another, bear one another's burdens etc etc etc.

Acts 2:42-47 describes clearly how the Christian life was first lived.

They spent their time learning from the apostles, and they were like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together. 43. Everyone was amazed by the many miracles and wonders that the apostles worked. 44. All the Lord's followers often met together, and they shared everything they had. 45. They would sell their property and possessions and give the money to whoever needed it. 46. Day after day they met together in the temple. They broke bread together in different homes and shared their food happily and freely, 47 while praising God. Everyone liked them, and each day the Lord added to their group others who were being saved.

Faith is not just a private experience but something that you cannot experience unless you are a part of a team.

In this month of mission as we encourage each other take the primary work of the faith seriously, that is to share the gospel, we need to be very clear in our heads that the goal of mission is not just to help someone get right with God. The greater goal of mission is to help someone join the team, for eternity. God's team. God's family.

2. A HEALTHY TEAM WILL ALWAYS GROW!

If we study church history and look at seasons when churches have grown steadily or rapidly and then looked at seasons when churches have plateaued or declined there is one common denominator.

Churches that are in decline are inwardly focused. There are arguments over who is getting looked after and who is not. Arguments over worship style or church structure. Arguments over leadership style or constitutions and policy. In the church at Corinth there were some that said we can be Christians and not be a part of a team, there were others that said our role and our ministry is much more important than his or her role and ministry.

Paul corrected them by describing Gods church as His body.

1 Corinthian s 12:15-18

Suppose a foot says, "I'm not a hand, and so I'm not part of the body." Wouldn't the foot still belong to the body? Or suppose an ear says, "I'm not an eye, and so I'm not part of the body." Wouldn't the ear still belong to the body? If our bodies were only an eye, we couldn't hear a thing. And if they were only an ear, we couldn't smell a thing. But God has put all parts of our body together in the way that he decided is best.

Inward looking churches soon plateau and struggle. Over time inward looking teams usually decline in numbers and eventually die. They might have their policies well worked out. Their theological statement clearly defined in a book format. They might have all the structural flow charts and position descriptions perfectly ordered and beautifully presented but if they are not engaged in mission, in sharing the gospel with the lost, if they do everything well but forget the bread, they struggle and eventually die.

Contrary to that the biblical example shows us that it is natural and normal for churches to grow. To have people added to their team daily. Something is terribly wrong when people aren't being baptised into the team and being transformed continually.

Outwardly focused churches which are engaged in doing what the church is meant to be doing may be full of faults and be messy in so many ways and yet God blesses them and they work as a team and they grow naturally.

People often misquote Ecclesiastes when it says there is a season for everything and suggest that there will be seasons for growth and seasons of no growth. The bible simply says that every day is the day of salvation.

God just loves it and pours out his power and blessings as we do things together as a team.

Ephesians 4:3 Try your best to let God's Spirit keep your hearts united. Do this by living at peace.

Matthew 18:19 I promise that when any two of you on earth agree about something you are praying for, my Father in heaven will do it for you. 20. Whenever two or three of you come together in my name, I am there with you.

3. IT TAKES A TEAM TO MAKE A DISCIPLE!

A question I have often asked people when I have been discussing evangelism with them is this.

Does God tell us to get decisions for Jesus or make disciples (disciplined followers) for the kingdom?

Listen again to one of the most read bible passages as you consider your answer to this question.

The Great commission

Matthew 28:19-20

Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.

Nowhere are we told to get decisions for Christ. Nowhere can we find anything vaguely like a simple sinner's prayer in the bible – although you and I know that God always responds to sincere prayers prayed from a humble heart.

The goal of evangelism is to make disciples; that is lifelong followers of Jesus Christ. How does that happen?

First we throw seed; we give out the bread of truth about Jesus and help them over time come to understand who Jesus is. That when He claimed to be the way, the truth and the life, when he claimed to be God the Son, that He pre-existed in heaven before the virgin birth, Jesus was not lying or crazy, he was in fact telling the truth.

Once someone believes and turns from their sins through confessing their sins to God and asking His forgiveness we first baptise them into the kingdom and then teach them to do all that Jesus taught his disciples to do.

Personally I believe that though God always responds to a sincere, humble heart, the sinner's prayer is many people's PC way of replacing faith, repentance, water and Holy Spirit baptism as the way into the kingdom. There is no such person in the bible as a Christian who had not come to faith, turned from their sins, and been baptised in water and the Holy Spirit. I never prayed a sinner's prayer with anyone but I will make sure they know who they are putting their trust in, I will explain repentance fully, I will baptise them in water and the Holy Spirit, as soon as they believe and repent.

Modern churches celebrate someone praying a 30 second prayer when we should be celebrating repentance, we should be celebrating people dying to self and being raised, washed clean, and desiring to live for Jesus.

When a believer has been faithful to the end of their lives – wow that is something to really celebrate. When a disciple completes this brief life of challenges and is found faithful and goes home to glory. That is worth making a whole lot of noise about.

About 15 years ago some evangelist drew up something that became known as the **Ingles scale**. Now I can't remember the details of this scale but to me it illustrated the goal of discipleship really well. If I draw a vertical scale on the white board and put at the bottom of the scale a position of faith we will call negative 10. These are the people maybe like Asama bin Laden who are not only closed to Christianity but are quite enthusiastic about the idea of blowing people like you and I up.

At 0 we have the brand new believer who believes in who Jesus is, has confessed and turned from their sin and has been baptised into the kingdom of God.

At positive 10 on the scale we have people like Smith Wigglesworth and those apostolic like people whose shadow is capable of healing someone if it just passes over you.

Now the main point of the Ingles scale was to illustrate to us that evangelism is not just about getting people to ground zero. Evangelism is about making disciples and that involves the life long process of moving people up the scale. So if I am helping someone progress up the scale I am making disciples for Jesus Christ.

In a healthy church there are always people moving up the scale. I get the joy of working with people in this middle area a lot but I love stretching faithful Christians and I really appreciate it when many of you disciple me and stretch my faith.

When I see someone responding to the seed we have thrown, truths about the Kingdom, I don't look at them and think, hey I want to get this person to pray a prayer with me, no what goes through my head is this. I hope, I pray that one day when I go home to glory this person that I am talking to now will be living down the corridor from me, and not just them but their family and friends and workmates as well. I want to see them in his team for eternity.

I want to illustrate for you how discipleship works and I pray that somewhere in this illustration you will see where you and your ministry fits in this process of making disciples.

Eg: George People on stage.

Prayer. Friendship. Hospitality. Serving. Explained the gospel. Born again in water and the Spirit. 1 on 1, care group leader.

Here's the closing question for you. I want you to turn to the person beside you and give them your answer to this question.

Which one of these people was the evangelist????

All were.

Friends I am not interested in getting scalps for the kingdom or bums on seats. But what I am willing to live and die for is to see as many people as possible get the opportunity through this team to join God's team. If we each use our gifts, if we keep outwardly focused and don't let hurts or offences or differences of style and preference get in the way, and if we agree in our prayers and function as His body, we will outlive our lives through this team by helping many, many more people join God's team, our family.