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What is a disciple-making church?

What is a disciple-making church?

Our first value, **gospel-centred**, answers the question, '*why* do you do what you do as a church?' Our second value, **disciple-making**, answers the question, '*what* do you do as a church?' And our third value, **simple**, answers the question, '*how* do you do what you do as a church?' This leaflet is all about 'what do we do as a church', and the answer to that is: we make disciples of Jesus Christ.

1. Radical apprenticeship to Jesus in all of life, for all of life

The mission of the church is, quite simply, to make disciples:

> *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28.18-20)*

A disciple is literally a 'learner', an apprentice. Jesus calls his followers to be radical apprentices who have 'taken up their cross and followed him': i.e. have died to themselves. Thus, discipleship is about following Jesus for all of life. And Jesus' teaching encompasses all of life: money, relationships, thoughts, feelings and ambitions. We say discipleship is about being apprenticed to Jesus *in* all of life, *for* all of life. Christian growth simply cannot be reduced down to a particular set of programs or courses: it is about everything. Where do we find Jesus' teaching? In the Bible – both testaments. Remember that Jesus himself upheld the Old Testament as the authoritative word of God, *and* that Jesus commissioned his apostles to write and teach (what we have in the New Testament) with his authority.

He is with us

Our lives as disciples are undergirded by the fact of Jesus' presence with us by his Spirit: he is with us (the love and joy of knowing and living with the Lord Jesus), he is in us (the power of the Spirit to purify, heal and transform us), and he works through us (the empowerment and guiding of the Spirit for vocation and mission).

Discipleship is both planned and unplanned, written and unwritten, taught and caught. On the one hand, I am actively pursuing areas of growth: putting sin to death, learning and becoming clearer in my thinking on things, and growing in skills. On the other hand, I grow through the unexpected and providential unfolding of my life. I grow both through the unexpected trials and triumphs, and the planned projects. Disciple-making means radical apprenticeship to Jesus in all of life, for all of life.

2. Discipleship happens by God's word and in community

We need God's word to grow (1 Peter 1.22-2.3), and the primary context in which we grow is the Christian community. Without God's word, we have no truth, no light, and no real change. But the truths we learn are 'worked out' in a profound way within community. Belonging to a community of brothers and sisters means there is a context for correction, rebuke, encouragement, and wider learning. We 'spur one another on' as disciples. Within a community that sees itself as God's family, the cracks cannot be papered over. Rather, the truths of Jesus' gospel are massaged into every nook and cranny.

3. Disciples make disciples 'as they go'

When Jesus said, 'Go and make disciples...' (Matthew 28.18-20), he literally said, 'going, make disciples...'. In other words, 'as you go' – both to the ends of the earth, and 'as you go' about in daily life. Historically, the gospel has spread powerfully and unstoppably through normal Christians living normal lives among their neighbours, with gospel intentionality: gospel living and gospel talking.

It's helpful to see our 'Sunday mission' and our 'everyday mission' as inseparable yet distinct. Sundays are our big gathering, an open front door. Our everyday mission is about our individual and community lives, building relationships and living missionally: an open side door.

A helpful picture is that of blood flowing around the human body: the heart, the arteries, and the capillaries. The heart is the big pump that energises the whole system, much like our Sunday gatherings. The arteries supply blood and oxygen to particular regions of the body, like our Community Groups scattered around different parts of Gateshead. The capillaries are the tiny vessels that actually take oxygen to cells. Capillaries get everywhere and on their own seem pathetic. In total, however, every cell in the body is supplied with oxygen. Our lives as individuals are as 'capillaries': we each will have people in our lives, families, friendships and networks whom perhaps only we can point to Jesus. If we see church only as Sunday – the big pump – we actually prove terribly ineffective on our mission. We also don't experience the great joy of co-operating with God in what he is doing in the world. Thus, 'our mission' becomes 'my mission': the two go right together.

Mission and maturity

'Disciple-making' or 'discipleship' are terms which sum up both *mission* (calling people to faith in Jesus) and *maturity* (growing to be like Jesus). Disciple-making is the mission of the church — the mission that Jesus gave us.

