

## COLLABORATIVE DISCIPLESHIP

### Telford Discipleship Conference

29<sup>th</sup> June 2013



The tasks of *making disciples* and engaging *in outreach and mission* often become **peripheral** to churches whose main focus is *worship and fellowship*.



The **Fresh Expressions** movement has been encouraging and resourcing new ways of being church and works across a broad range of denominations and



*A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.*

*It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples;*

*It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.*

traditions. The 'framework' seeks to put **discipleship** right at the heart of what it is to be church. **River Community Church** grew as Steve and Maggie tried to put these ideas into practice by reaching out and serving the new developing communities of Lawley and Lightmoor. We also use the term '**incarnational mission**' to describe reaching out to people in *loving service* to bless them and share God's love in practical ways.

***1 Cor 9: 22b-23 "I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all this because of the Message."*** THE MESSAGE

As people come to faith today, there are significant issues which stand in the way of them becoming disciples...fully devoted and surrendered followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- People are much busier today and seem to have little free time
- They often have little or no knowledge of Scripture or the Christian story
- Their personal ethics have been formed in a pluralistic & relativist culture
- They are 'well-disciplined consumers' whose lifestyle is often self-centred



We have grappled with this challenge for 3 years and have found that the process of 'making disciples' today is incredibly hard work. We've tried *old and new approaches*, we've made *lots of mistakes*, we've had people who've come and then gone but we've persevered with the task!

*"The most critical question facing the Church in the West today concerns discipleship. How can we live authentic and consistent Christian lives in a globalized consumer world? The evangelizing of Western culture does not depend on 'fresh expressions of church' alone. It depends on the quality of the disciples that both fresh expressions and more traditional churches make. It is this challenge that makes leadership such an important matter. Without appropriate leadership, we will never get appropriate discipleship."* **Graham Cray.**

Initially, we thought this was a really key issue for *new forms of church*. We now realise it's a huge issue for many (if not most) *traditional forms of church* as well. Many people today are '**consumers**' who come to church to have their spiritual and social needs met.

*"You cannot build a church on consumers. They will desert you at a moment's notice. They have no commitments beyond their own needs."*

**Alan Hirsch**

## We've learned a few key lessons over the last 3 years:-

- ✚ There's no point in making it easy for people to become Christians by lowering the bar and 'dumbing down' the demands of discipleship.
- ✚ Some of what we do to make church *more attractive and accessible* can make it difficult to embrace the call to discipleship. **Authentic, loving relationships** are the most attractive thing 😊
- ✚ Discipleship happens most effectively in small, committed and accountable groups where you meet **at least weekly** to share *your real life*.
- ✚ You cannot disciple people who don't want to be discipled. You'll wear yourself out and they probably won't embrace the call for themselves.
- ✚ We can fall into the trap of thinking that discipleship is a **course**, rather than a lifelong **journey** of becoming more and more like Jesus.
- ✚ You learn *about* discipleship from **the Book/books** but you learn *to be* a disciple through service. Any invitation to life in all its fullness and the joy of salvation must be accompanied by a realistic but bold call to *sacrificial service*.

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. Luke 9:23-24

**Jonathan Edwards wrote: 'A true and faithful Christian does not make holy living a mere incidental thing. It is his great concern. As the business of the soldier is to fight, so the business of the Christian is to be like Christ.'**

**Dallas Willard** says that every church should be able to answer two questions: *First, what is our plan for making disciples? Second, does our plan work?*

For a highly recommended study of **discipleship** and **leadership** (as Jesus did it!) see *The Fourfold Leadership of Jesus* by Andrew Watson.

## Core values for making disciples in a consumer culture

### 1. To be a disciple involves an understanding of the cross

The apostle Paul himself tried different forms of evangelism according to the mission context. We see two different approaches in Athens and Corinth. It's salutary to note that a church was established in Corinth but not in Athens.

<sup>2</sup>For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup>I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. <sup>4</sup>My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, <sup>5</sup>so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

See Acts 17:16-34, Acts 18:1-18, 1 Cor 2:1-5

### 2. To be a disciple means that you're under new management

The New Testament church coined the phrase JESUS IS LORD to express that a Christian has a new master, a new Lord. Jesus is not just *Friend and Saviour* but *Lord and King!*

<sup>10</sup>By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. <sup>11</sup>For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

### 3. To be a disciple means a lifelong commitment to become like JESUS

The Greek word *mathetes* is the word that scripture uses for "disciple" and it means *learner*. In other words, disciples are people who LEARN to be like Jesus and learn to do what Jesus could do. *Discipleship is the process of becoming who Jesus would be if he were you.* A disciple is someone who, with increased intentionality and passing time, has a life and ministry that looks more and more like the life and ministry of Jesus. They increasingly have his heart and character and are able to do the types of things we see Jesus doing *in the power of the Holy Spirit.*



See '*This is discipling video*'

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_eGGHQdWgN8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_eGGHQdWgN8)

**G. Allan Kerr writes,** *'The church is NOT a "volunteer organization." Jesus calls us disciples. There is a difference. When you are a disciple you don't give up your time. You realize that you possess (or own) no time of your own. God created you, gave you life and time in this life. So it is His time. We are not volunteers, to do what we want and to come and go as we wish. The church is the body of Christ called to discipleship.'*