

What does the bible teach, regarding 'Becoming like Jesus' and 'Making Disciples'? AA Sept 2022

1. WHY THIS DOCUMENT?

As a local church we have committed ourselves to the vision, "*Becoming like Jesus, Making Disciples, Bringing real change.*" Sometimes people may have legitimate questions about how we deliver the vision, wondering if there are several ways of fulfilling it. In response to all this I have turned to scripture to see if there is a clear answer to this matter. As we are a church that has chosen to acknowledge the authority of scripture, whenever we face varying views, we need to seek out if God's word has anything to say about this.

As an obvious preface, the phrases 'Becoming like Jesus' and 'Making disciples' are profoundly biblical matters, and not simply a contrived human church vision. Consequently we are obligated to recognise the bible's understanding of these important terms.

In this document I will show that scripture is very clear and plain regarding the need to adopt the ways and practices of Jesus Christ as a key part of 'Becoming like Jesus', and likewise, his tuition, practical principles and modelling of disciple-making is to be reproduced in like manner. I believe that this is not one model of church among many options, it is a core, biblical matter which should be adopted by all. It is sufficiently flexible for all kinds of expressions, but the core principles must remain. 1 John 2:6 "Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."

SHORT SUMMARY: Bullet points!

As this document runs to around 10,000 words here is a short summary of its key points. Nevertheless, for anyone who is serious about the scriptural basis for our methodology, do please read the whole document carefully. If you have a biblically rooted alternative perspective, let me know!

- Just as we need to be biblical in our doctrine, so we need to be biblical in our practices as church.
- Though our historic creeds miss out Jesus' three year ministry, the existence of the four gospels require us to learn what they say about the practices of Jesus.
- If we are to become like Jesus, we need to understand his priorities and his ways of living.
- The first disciples followed Jesus in every way, not only adopting his beliefs and values, but his life priorities, including his missional lifestyle.
- There is clear evidence in the gospels that Jesus trained his disciples to be like him and to make new disciples like he did.
- Christ's life and method can be described in some detail and was obediently imitated by his early followers.
- The way Jesus lived with and trained disciples was meant to be adopted by all; Acts 2 church demonstrated this fact.
- The life teaching in the letters (specifically the 'one another' commands) reveal a continuing pattern of shared life.
- Acts 2 church, Corinthian church life and Paul's method reflect what Jesus did with the Twelve; as an essential way of doing and being church family on mission together.
- Jesus and Paul's ministry in religious buildings was strategic and not permanent, with both being more flexibly focused on making disciples than having a fixed location for ministry.
- It can be concluded that there are clear, essential priorities and practices for church life, if we are to truly become like Jesus and make disciples (like he did) - **see Point 27 below for the list.**
- We must not be inconsistent in our imitation of Christ, but must gradually reform all we do to reflect him and his disciple-making ways.

2. THE NEED FOR REFORM

In the 16th Century, Martin Luther wrote his famous statements denouncing wrong teachings and wrong understandings within the established church of the day. This historical Reformation was

focused on the doctrine of salvation, and rediscovered the biblical teaching of justification by faith in Christ alone. It was a time of incredible revolution and transformation, coupled with intense conflict and strong differences of opinion. In the end, the argument rested on scripture, over-ruling any inherited understanding of church and belief.

In 1995 Bill Beckham wrote "The Second Reformation". This was one of a series of authors who were questioning not the doctrines of the church, but the priorities, shape and methodology of how the church was operating, primarily in the West. Beckham's thesis was that we in the West had missed fundamental commands of Jesus and his Apostles relating to the 'how' of church. There are clues from church history where 'practice' was reformed - when Celtic Christians operated differently to the Roman church, when the Anabaptists resisted State church practices in the 1600s, or when Wesley set up his 'Classes and Bands' to develop disciples during the 1700's revival. New movements have continued to spring up (including Kairos Connexion), exploring ways of getting closer to what Jesus originally intended for the practice of the church. So this document is about practice, not doctrine, but it is nevertheless all about scripture. If we are faithful to scripture in our doctrine, we must also be faithful to scripture in our practice. If scripture is unclear we need to acknowledge this. If scripture is clear we need to embrace what it says.

3. KEY QUESTIONS

How clear or unclear is the New Testament in describing 'Becoming like Jesus' and 'Making Disciples' ? Is the idea of making disciples something that can be legitimately interpreted in very different and broad ways? Or is there some clear content with recognisable principles attached to the concepts? Are 'Becoming like Christ' and 'Making Disciples' obligations for all Christians? And if so, what does the bible say this means in practice?

4. A MISSING PIECE IN OUR CREEDS

It has been noted that our historic Creeds (earlier still than the Reformation of Luther's day) do not describe or highlight the content of Christ's earthly ministry. They cite Christ's birth, death and resurrection, but miss out any reference to the three years of his ministry. This was because, at the time of the credal writing, the disputes and heresies of the day were concerned primarily with God's nature, Christ's identity and his achievements through his sacrifice. So these particular matters were addressed as the corrective at the time. However, today the dispute in hand is over the 'ways' of Christ, and the means by which we make disciples. This is no small matter, as our obedience to Christ must surely include everything Christ commanded, with no exception.

5. THE EXISTENCE OF THE GOSPEL ACCOUNTS MEANS WHAT?

The reason we have the four gospels is because their content was the original 'tradition' handed on by the Apostles from the beginning (See Richard Bauckham's 'Jesus and the Eye-witnesses'). With Peter shaping Mark's account, along with Matthew and John as primary witnesses, and Luke as a researcher of eye-witness testimony, we have a comprehensive description from different perspectives of the whole of Christ's story. Before the apostles died, this teaching was captured for posterity in writing; as an essential means of carrying on the eye-witness account of Christ.

The existence of these texts indicate a key means by which, from the beginning, new believers would encounter Christ and learn Christ's teaching and ways. Coupled with Apostolic letters, the gospels reveal all the teaching content that is needed to know and follow Jesus Christ, with the Old Testament retained to point people to Christ also.

6. THE REVELATION OF THE SON OF GOD

We have the advantage as Christians of already knowing the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. The gospel stories gradually reveal this to his followers, but we can read the gospel stories fully knowing who is acting and speaking. This allows us to reach certain conclusions about what Jesus said and did.

If Jesus was divine as well as human, then his priorities and intentions would be perfect. He must have been the most spiritually smart person in history. His way of life was exactly as a human life should be, in terms of his relationship with God, relationship with others, and how he shaped his life. So his life patterns, goals and strategies to achieve those goals must be exemplary. This implies that his mode of being, his priorities for life and the ways he organised his time must be how God intends humanity to operate.

7. THE PRIORITIES OF JESUS

Matt. 22:37-40 "Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Lk. 4:43 "But he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

These texts and others reveal the core driving beliefs in Jesus. His own love was directed first and wholeheartedly to his Father (most beautifully revealed in a lot of private praying away from people), which then showed itself in love for all others. He knew he was God's herald, preaching and bringing the good news of God's Kingdom - that he as Saviour was sent as the key sign of God's love. This was so that the world would not perish but have everlasting life through believing in him.

Given that these were his priorities, what did he do to achieve and reveal this?

How a person spends their time gives a clear picture of priorities. Jesus' public ministry was roughly 3 years long. It has been noted that the Twelve and travelling women (Lk. 8:1-2) were generally always with him. Mark 3:14 says, "He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach." They never or rarely went away on their own (apart from mission practice). The lifestyle he required of them was 24/7 community with him. He conducted his public ministry in their company, and then, when the crowds went away, they received more private tuition from him. It has been calculated that the personal, focused input given to his key followers made up a very high percentage of his 3 year ministry.

So if Jesus, the Son of God, perfectly modelled life and ministry, then we can see that he was completely committed to the concept of 'shared life' - as a means of lovingly shaping and influencing people while doing public ministry. Indeed, he fulfilled his priorities by making disciples (who made disciples with him).

8. BECOMING LIKE JESUS: Scripture

There are numerous references to Christians being called to become like Christ.

"Follow me" (Matt 4:19, Matt. 8:22, Matt. 9:9, Matt. 16:24, Matt. 19:21, Mk. 1:17, Mark 1:20, Mk. 2:14, Mk. 8:34, Mk. 10:21, Lk. 5:27, Lk. 9:59, Jn. 1:43)

Jn. 8:12

'When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Matt. 11:28-30

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Mk. 10:21 (cf. Lk. 18:22)

"Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Matt. 10:38 (cf. Lk. 14:27)

“Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

Matt. 19:28

“Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Jn.15:12

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

Rom. 8:29

“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

Eph. 4:20-24

“But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Eph. 5:1-2

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Phil. 2:5

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...”

Phil. 3:10-11

“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

1 John 2:6

“whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”

1 John 3:2

“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

1 John 3:16

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

1 Cor. 11:1

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

2 Cor.3:18

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

Gal. 2:20

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Gal. 3:27

“For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ.”

2 Thess. 3:9

“We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.”

9. DIFFERENT SCRIPTURAL ASPECTS OF BECOMING LIKE CHRIST

1. Becoming like Jesus meant this in practice: Multiple references to disciples who literally followed Jesus around, adopting him as their Rabbi; learning his teachings, observing his ways, imitating his life, loves, and priorities. This was more than an adoption of his morals or beliefs, but a full embrace of everything he was, said and did. In Jewish culture, some research suggests that a disciple might even adopt the voice style and mannerisms of their Rabbi as a sign of complete devotion. This illustrates the ‘whole life’ nature of following. Over time they were to be conformed to Jesus’ life and ways more and more, so how they lived looked just like him.
2. It involved the taking up of Christ’s calling and priorities; being commissioned by him to represent him, his ways and message.
3. They were to accept as a follower the cost of following Christ, in his suffering and death, as a sacrifice to God.
4. Post Resurrection, believers were to cooperate with Christ who indwells the believer, as he literally lives through their lives, as fully as possible.
5. This leads to the imitation of Christ in such a way that others could also imitate Christians.

Arising question: Does the NT make a distinction between Christ’s teaching and ways? Are his teachings to be regarded as separate from his lifestyle and practices? Are his values, ethics and morals to be regarded separately from his missional patterns of behaviour? Is there any basis for such a separation? Or is the whole life, teachings and practices, to be received as as one witness of God come in the flesh?

10. GOSPELS: MANUALS FOR BECOMING LIKE JESUS AND DISCIPLE-MAKING?

Each of the four gospels have a unique emphasis, but all include the dynamic between Jesus and his immediate followers.

The gospels are written as narrative, not as systematic theology. Yet, as with all narrative scripture, clear theology can still be deduced from these stories. The structure and content of the gospels are intentionally drawn to reveal what the authors wished the readers to discover about Jesus and his Kingdom.

MATTHEW

When Jesus told his new disciples that he was going to teach them how to fish for people (Matthew 4:19-20, cf. Mark 1:17), he was explicitly saying that they were to undergo training in a practice. Just as they had been skilled in the art of catching fish, he would show them by example and teaching how to ‘catch people’ for God’s Kingdom. In Mark, The Greek word used is ‘poieo’; to *make, form, construct*. Jesus the carpenter/builder (tekton) was going to construct his followers. This reveals a clear intention with a forthcoming plan to achieve his goal. This meant that they would need to observe how the Master did it over many months, in all kinds of situations. First as observers, then as helpers. Later as imitators and finally as representatives. At his direction, they would begin to join in with his process and pattern. They would review with him how they were doing in imitating his disciple-making skills. Latterly, after his death and resurrection, they would be a well-trained group; ready to act for him, without him being physically present. Just as the first disciples knew their fishing trade well and could have taught another person to do it, Jesus was training them in his work, a phase at a time. He was making them in his image and giving them his ministry.

The outline of Matthew’s gospel in particular is most explicitly shaped like a training manual; with a series of teaching discourses, inter-mingled with practical demonstrations. It is concluded with the final commission: “Make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Written at the end, this concluding phrase clearly indicates that the process of

disciple-training was sufficiently complete, and that his principal followers were now to replicate everything they learned through him, in the lives of others, who in turn would keep on replicating the process throughout the world. Disciples who make disciples who make disciples.

MARK

One of the most striking features of Mark's earlier account (drawn from Peter's teaching) is the unusually abrupt end (Mk.16:8) - Scholars agree that v9-20 are not part of the original. So why does Mark leave the story hanging in the air like this? Many commentators think that the creative intent is a literary device with a purpose. If a reader comes to such an end, they naturally want to know more. If questions are left unanswered, then the reader is invited to participate in completing the story themselves. This indicates that we readers are to be a part of the mission; continuing on with what Jesus has begun as future disciples.

LUKE

Luke's gospel is well known to have many amazingly clear parallels with his Acts of the Apostles (19 clear parallels) - Tying together the story and ministry of Jesus and the subsequent ministries of Peter and Paul. This is obviously Luke's intention, showing that the Master's life and ministry was replicated by his key followers. Luke is insisting that followers of Jesus live out the life of Christ. (<http://assets.bakerpublishinggroup.com/processed/esource-assets/files/1032/original/09-04.pdf>)

JOHN

John's account pays specific attention to the benefits of being a disciple (adoption by the Father, royal association with the Son, and abiding with the Son and Father through the Spirit). This is given to fortify the followers in the context of hostility and opposition.

11. MULTIPLE COMMISSIONS

In parallel to Matthew's great commission (Matt. 28:18-20), Luke ends with a call to his disciples to be Christ's witnesses (24:44-49), which is described more fully by Luke in Acts 1:8. Likewise, in John 20:21, Jesus explicitly commissions the Apostles in like manner to his own commission, just as the Father had sent him.

Of course, the gospel accounts are more than disciple-making manuals, but they are certainly not less than this. They are in themselves a witness to the Messiah and his message, but they also carry the training and teaching for followers who are to be witnesses themselves.

12. EVIDENCE OF TRAINING IN THE GOSPELS

If Jesus said that he was going to make his disciples into 'fishers of people', is there any evidence that this happened?

1. Observing / Shadowing: where disciples observed Jesus' ministry closely

The general inference of each gospel account is that the Twelve/core group literally followed Jesus around wherever he went (numerous examples including Matt. 23:1, Mk.2:15, 23, Mk. 3:20). Jesus repeatedly exposed his disciples to his public ministry, and additionally gave them private tuition away from the crowds (Mk.4:33-34).

2. Helping: where disciples joined in in some way with Jesus' ministry

Jesus asked his disciples to organise the crowd at the feeding of the five thousand (Lk. 9:14-15). The disciples organised a boat for Jesus (Mk. 3:9). They later set up the Passover supper for him in advance (Matt.21:1-3). This helping role gradually involved them in what he was publicly doing.

3. Imitation of Jesus' mission: where disciples replicated missional aspects of Jesus' ministry

Famously, in Luke's gospel (8:49-56) Jesus raises Jairus' daughter. He explicitly calls Peter, James and John in particular to observe the private event. In Acts - also authored by Luke - (9:36-43) Peter is involved in a very similar miracle. Luke is clearly showing that Jesus was training Peter, and Peter was replicating the ministry of Jesus (which he had previously observed).

Mk.3:14-15, Mk.6:6-13, Luke 10. In Lk 10:17 the Seventy Two describe how they are replicating Jesus' deliverance ministry.

4. Official Representation: the disciples operate in mission and ministry on Jesus' behalf

Matt. 10, Matt.28: 18-20, Mk. 3:14-15, Lk.24:45-49, John 20:21.

13. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER - DESCRIBING CHRIST'S MINISTRY

In Mark 4:13 it says, "'Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?'. This key parable, referenced in all Synoptics, is a vivid self-portrait of the ministry of Jesus. We are to properly grasp it, otherwise (according to Jesus) we won't understand lots of other teaching.

(Matt. 13) The seed is the word of God and the Sower is the Son of Man (Jesus). He spoke out what God was saying and doing, and this produced different responses. This exactly parallels Jesus' experience with groups and crowds. It also indicates that Jesus was looking for 'good soil', where the spiritual harvest was to be found. It describes his investment in his most receptive followers, who warmly received Christ's words. This parable neatly fits with the teaching given when he sent out the Twelve and Seventy Two; who were to look for 'people of peace' (receptive people). So here in this parable we have a picture of Christ's practical, dynamic ministry approach. It parallels with Paul's later experience (1 Cor.1:18-25), where he sees people respond both positively and negatively to the gospel.

14. DISCIPLES MAKING DISCIPLES: scripture

Matthew 4:19-20

"'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' At once they left their nets and followed him."

Matthew 10

"Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness..."

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Matthew 28:19-20

"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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Mark 1:17

"And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'"

Mark 3:14

"And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach."

Luke 10:1-3

"After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.'"

John 15:8

"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

John 15:16

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit-fruit that will last-and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”

John 20:21

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

Acts 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Romans 10:14-15

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

1 Peter 2:9

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

15. IMPERFECT PROTOTYPES FOR ALL FUTURE DISCIPLES

The gospel narratives which repeatedly describe and include the disciples clearly portray these followers as examples. They make mistakes often and fail to understand Jesus at times (most clearly shown in Mark’s account), but they also model for us what being a disciple is all about.

16. OBEDIENCE AS A KEY CHARACTERISTIC FOR DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

In Matt. 8:27 it says, “The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!” Christ is portrayed as the commander of literally everything. Nature obeyed his words, sickness was removed at his command, and demons left their hosts at his say so. “The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” Mk.1:27.

This pattern of commanding included his relationship with his disciples.

The context of obedience to Christ made all the difference. Rather than Jesus being a harsh dictator, he was their loving tutor, parental in care and attentive to their personal development. He nurtured each disciple, with extra input for particular people. His leadership style was like that of a servant, never asking them to do or bear anything he wasn’t already doing. His iconic act of leadership - at the cross - illustrated his incredible sacrificial love for his disciples, enemies and the human race as a whole. It was this context, this environment of love that engendered a willingness in his disciples to happily obey his every word.

In John 14:23-24 it says “Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.” He indicated at the same time that a sign of our obedience will be the receiving of the same response as our Master received, “Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.” Jesus prayed for his followers and identified them before his Father as the ones who obeyed (John 17:6). This pattern of obedience continues after Christ’s ascension; “Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!” (Acts 5:29), and Peter even defines followers as being those who have received the Holy Spirit because they obey God (Acts 5:32). Later in his first letter he says, “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.” (1 Pet. 1:22) indicating the fundamental and essential quality of obedience for the disciple of Jesus.

During his three years with the Twelve, Jesus commanded them repeatedly, (eg. Mk. 7:36), and fully expected them to do whatever he said. From the initial 'passive' command to simply follow him and be with him, this tone of commanding began to include in-depth commands, relating to their character (Sermon on the Mount) and their 'active' missional activity (Matt. 10, Luke 10). He sent them out with clear and explicit instructions, which he fully expected them to obey, just as he fully expected them to live out the moral teaching of his sermons. They weren't given latitude to experiment or react beyond his instructions (Matt. 10:5-6, 9-10, 19, 26-31, 34), but were to specifically do what he instructed (Matt. 10: 6-8, 11-18). This commanding had been preceded by many weeks of clear modelling from Jesus himself, showing them a masterful picture of how he proclaimed and demonstrated the Kingdom of God on earth. So the disciple's sending out came with both word and example, equipping them as helpfully as possible to obey him.

Arising question: Any exemptions?

Were any of Jesus' Twelve or Seventy Two given exemptions from obeying Jesus? Were any individuals who sought Jesus, given an alternative 'discipleship-lite' version of following him?

All the evidence says no. This was emphasised by stories of those who engaged with Jesus, and were challenged to change. In Luke 9:57-62, several people said they want to follow, but Jesus set precise commands before them that would first qualify them as followers. In Luke 18:18-30, a rich ruler sought an inheritance of eternal life, but was not prepared to give up that which Jesus required of him. At no point did Jesus soften his requirements for those who wish to be his disciples. He even queried the sincerity of so-called followers; "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). For him, complete obedience was the norm, universally for everyone who was a disciple of his.

17. REPRODUCTION OF CHRIST'S MISSIONAL METHOD AS AN ESSENTIAL MATTER

It becomes very clear throughout the New Testament that Jesus fully expected his followers to observe, help with, imitate and replicate his own ministry on his behalf. When he sent the Twelve and Seventy Two out, it was with detailed (and almost identical) instructions. These instructions were a picture of what they had seen him model for months, as they all followed him around the villages. Given that Christians today embrace the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount as binding on Christians today, is there any reason why his missional training and these missional directions should not be regarded in a similar manner? Why else were they recorded for us to read?

18. TWO ADDITIONAL INGREDIENTS

The gospel

After the resurrection, Jesus instructed the disciples not only to replicate his three year ministry (his method of making disciples), he also commissioned them with the message that summarised God's good news (Lk. 24:45-49). Announcing his death for sin and resurrection as a sign of victory became their new key responsibility. After Jesus had ascended, they were to speak out this message as the means of people encountering Jesus everywhere. Paul defines the gospel in 1 Cor. 15:3-5, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance : that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve." This was what Paul received from Jesus, and it tallied with the message of the Twelve (Gal. 2:1-10).

The Empowering of the Holy Spirit: The true Temple of God

Jesus also commanded his followers to wait in Jerusalem ... "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8. Jesus himself was empowered and filled by the Spirit for ministry (Matt. 3:16-17), and knew that his followers could only fulfil his mission if they had the same source of power. Instead of relying on observation of Christ and his loving ways, now the disciples would have Christ's power and love *within* them. This describes Christ's ministry as the new Temple. Instead of Jerusalem Temple being the place where heaven met earth (in the Holy of Holies), Jesus kicked the tables over (Matt. 21:12) as a sign that this old system

was being replaced. In Jesus Christ God was 'with us' (Matt. 1:23) as the true presence of God on earth. Everything else up until this point had been pointing to the incarnation, where God would 'tabernacle' with us (John 1:14) as a flesh and blood person. Therefore the ultimate outworking of this plan was for the presence of Jesus (by his Holy Spirit) to fill his followers (Col. 1:27) as the new travelling, mobile Temple. This was what happened at Pentecost. Like Jesus who moved around as the Spirit led him, so now this new Temple made up of disciples was filled like Jesus was. This transition confirms Christ's shift away from spiritual activity being located primarily in a special building.

19. RECOGNISABLE FEATURES OF CHRIST'S LIFE AND METHOD

Now we can begin to list what Jesus actually did (so we can become like him).

Complete loving prayerful devotion (private and public) to his Father.
 Acted as his Father's representative in the world.
 Possessed a deep familiarity with the scriptures.
 Filled with the Holy Spirit for active ministry.
 Announced God's message and ways of love to many people.
 Went to where people already were, in their networks or neighbourhoods.
 Healed the sick, cast out demons.
 Taught crowds, and smaller groups.
 Utilised religious buildings as a place to speak.
 More often taught in public open spaces and homes.
 Gathered followers as a natural outcome of ministry.
 Selected those he wished to train and love as his close community and future representatives.
 Shared life and mission deeply with his chosen group - defining Christian 'fellowship'.
 Involved this group in his work - His public ministry was done as a family ministry.
 Invested deeply in 72, 12, and especially 3 (Peter, James and John).
 Engaged with people across social divides, with a focus on the marginalised and poor, but not excluding the rich and influential.
 Used his public ministry as a means of training his followers.
 Gave dedicated private input to his chosen followers.
 Developed the character and priorities of his followers.
 Sent his group out to practice ministry separately from himself.
 Gave explicit teaching to them for both personal holiness and outward mission.
 Reviewed and refined their beliefs and practice.
 Coached followers in preparation of difficulties and challenges.
 Commanded them to be witnesses in his physical absence.
 Commanded them to wait for the infilling of the Holy Spirit, as God's newly formed Temple.

Non-transferable features:

Clearly there are certain unique aspects to Christ's ministry, notably his saving death and resurrection. Yet beyond these distinctive features, all of what he taught was to be emulated, and even his death was seen as exemplary in terms of courage, sacrifice and devotion.

20. AN EARLY NAME FOR THE MOVEMENT : THE WAY

There are several references in the NT where Christians are described as followers of 'The Way' - (Acts 9:2, Acts 18:26, Acts 19:9, 23, Acts 22:4, 24:14, 22). This title reveals a very tangible sense of following Jesus as an all-encompassing lifestyle and pattern. Why would they be called 'The Way' if they were just held a set of beliefs?

21. PARALLELS BETWEEN THE GOSPELS AND ACTS 2

If the training in the gospels was fundamental and for all, there should be some evidence that the early church followed similar practices.

Looking initially at Acts 2, we can see some clear parallels.

1. Acts 2:14-36 - Peter preaches good news like Jesus had done. This time with the gospel of the cross and resurrection centre stage in the message.
2. Acts 2:37-41 - Peter and the Apostles call open people to repent, believe and be baptised, like Jesus had done (Mk.1:15).
3. Acts 2:42 - Just as the disciples were devoted to the teaching of Jesus, now the new believers were devoted to the Apostle's teaching. What was the content of their teaching? Everything they had learned over three years with Jesus, now including the gospel of the forgiveness of sins.
4. Acts 2:42 - The new believers were devoted to 'fellowship'. This close association, partnership and family bond closely reflected the quality of life Jesus had with the Twelve.
5. Acts 2:42 - New believers joined in with 'the breaking of bread, and prayer'. This phrase may refer to the re-enacting of the Lord's Supper, or simply eating together often, or more likely, both. This drew the new community into a shared life around the table, like Jesus had done many times with the Twelve and others. It also communicated the full inclusion of new believers into 'communion' with Christ himself, who offered his body and blood symbolically in bread and wine. The reference to a prayerful community also reflects the reality that Jesus taught his disciples to pray (Lk.11:1-13).
6. Acts 2:43 - Awe at signs and wonders performed by Apostles is a direct link between the miraculous ministry of Jesus and his follower's ministry. We also find later (Acts 8:4-8) that people other than the Apostles perform signs, indicating a transference of powerful ministry to all believers.
7. Acts 2:44-45 - The believers were together, holding all they had materially in common. This indicates a family covenant, where a household co-owns everything as a bonded unit. This parallels the 'common purse' (John 12:6) Jesus shared with those who travelled with him for three years. The level of sharing in Acts 2 included the selling of property and possessions for the care of those in need - which mirrors the generous father in Jesus' parable of the two sons (Lk.15:11-32) and the spiritual 'spending' of Christ at the cross for a needy human race.
8. Acts 2:46 - This new community met daily in the temple courts. The text doesn't say what they did there, but it may indicate time to praise God together and to receive more Apostolic teaching- which would include a proclamation of what Jesus had done. This also is a clear indication of the church being public and visible. Like Jesus and the Twelve, the life of this group could be observed and engaged with by people who may have been interested. In the Temple courts they would have been able to invite new people back to their homes to find out more. The same verse refers to the breaking of bread again; this time in their homes, which may also tie into the frequency indicated previously (daily?). So the new physical centre of ministry and fellowship included households and houses. During his three year ministry, Jesus was the new centre of God's activity, and as he travelled around with his spiritual family, also in and out of homes, they celebrated God's kingdom together. This parallels Paul's later teaching that the believers (physically) were the new temple (1 Cor.6:19). We hear that the Acts 2 church ate together with glad and sincere hearts praising God, and enjoying the favour of all the people. So this worshipful community, hosting God's presence, that ate together often, were well regarded by others who observed them and spoke well of them. This parallels the warmth and popularity of Jesus with the crowds.
9. Acts 2:47 - Once again there is a reference to another daily occurrence; this time the adding of new believers 'who were being saved'. This verse sits as an outcome of the previous description of the life of the community. What they were doing was observable to outsiders, and was sufficiently powerful as a witness to draw in new believers. We can infer that the miracles, sharing of possessions and money, sharing of time in public spaces and private spaces, the devotion to apostolic teaching, being in the public sphere, prayer and shared meals remembering Jesus, were all in themselves a witness to the presence of Jesus. We know from Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor.14:24) that outsiders were drawn into church meeting times. Likewise, Jesus enjoyed much table fellowship with people he was reaching out to (Zacchaeus, Matthew), and routinely ate and taught at the same time.

All these descriptors find a parallel with the methodology of Jesus and the Twelve.

Differences between Acts/Early Church and the ministry of Jesus.

This early group was sedentary compared to the itinerant Jesus: Jesus was obliged to travel round for three years when he was on earth in the flesh. But after he ascended, his presence (by

his Holy Spirit) became available in all places. Therefore after Pentecost the obligation was no longer for disciples to always travel in ministry like they did with Jesus. Indeed many were called to simply make disciples where they were if that was what the Spirit of Christ was saying. This was fine for a time...

But this Jerusalem church failed to take up the call of Jesus to go beyond the city. They did incredibly well in many areas of ministry, but didn't initially fulfil the command of Jesus to go to all nations (through Acts 2-7). Only through persecution (Acts 8) did God sovereignly move the Jerusalem church out, to complete the command of Jesus. So the full call of Jesus was gradually worked out through the whole story of Acts. As one example we have Peter called to gentile mission in Acts 10, and later in Acts 13 Saul and Barnabas are led by the Spirit to do mission in new regions. This was always part of Jesus' original training and intent, but it took time for this aspect of mission to become clear and significant to the early Jewish 'Jerusalem-centric' believers. Christians take time to embrace his whole mission.

22. THE 'ONE ANOTHER' COMMANDS

Throughout the NT letters there are approximately 59 references to the greek word 'allelon', meaning 'one another'. These commands describe the quality of the 'fellowship' all churches were to maintain. It has been pointed out that you can't fulfil these commands sitting in rows; they describe people who are sharing life as Jesus and the Twelve did, and how the Acts 2 church did. (<https://www.mmlearn.org/hubfs/docs/OneAnotherPassages.pdf>)

23. THE CORINTHIAN PICTURE OF GATHERED CHURCH

The New Testament doesn't give a lot of precise information about how exactly the emerging churches organised time together. The best data we have is found in 1 Corinthians, Chapters 10-14, where Paul is addressing various problems. He covers the following themes:

- Eating food sacrificed to idols with unbelievers
- The covering of heads when praying or prophesying
- Sharing food together sensitively and generously, while remembering Jesus in bread and wine
- Exercising spiritual gifts together well
- Pursuing love above all gifts
- Desiring the gift and good practice of prophecy in gatherings
- Using the gift of tongues and interpretation well when Christians meet
- Using gifts wisely so as to draw attending unbelievers to a place of faith in God
- Operating gifts with a measure of order and self control

Given that the outpouring of the Spirit was a common feature of church life from the beginning (Acts 2, Acts 8:14-17, Acts 10:44-47) this portrait of meetings in Corinth is unsurprising.

What we can summarise from these themes is that:

- The church was a social body used to eating with people beyond the believing community.
- They prayed and prophesied together on a regular basis, men and women together.
- They ate meals together as church, proclaiming Christ's death, meals which included people who were yet to believe, with an expectation of new people coming to faith in Christ.

This picture fits well with the Acts 2 description, indicating that there are some consistent elements to church life, from Jerusalem to Corinth.

24. BODY OF CHRIST GIFTS AND MINISTRIES

Paul uses the analogy of the body of Christ in Romans 12:3-7, 1 Cor.12:27 and Eph. 4:12, to describe members of church who are connected as one, but with different functions/ gifts/ ministries. The basic idea is that the church continues Christ's ministry as a collective. Everything Christ did (for example as Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Teacher, Shepherd, Pastor) the church now does; with different members expressing different parts of the ministry. But we must be careful to remember what Christ's ministry was, and not co-opt these gifts and ministries to

describe something else. For example, the pastoral work of Christ towards and with the Twelve was to shape disciples into his image, not just to help with any personal needs they're going through. Likewise, Jesus the Evangelist was always training his followers to join in with his role as a herald of good news, not doing the gospel work separately on behalf of the church. When Paul lists spiritual gifts in Romans 12 and 1 Cor. 12, he is describing gifts which facilitate what we have already described in Christ's ministry and in Acts 2. These gifts are not to be co-opted to fit some other scheme or tradition, thereby removing them from the original context. For example, when Paul encourages the gift of 'leading' (Rom. 12:8) he isn't talking directly about leading Christian worship services (although this gift may possibly have its uses in this context). He would have the original picture of Christ leading the church in his mind. To this end, we must see that, though some are Apostles, ALL are sent out. Though some are Evangelists, ALL are witnesses. Though some are Teachers, ALL must share God's message with others. There is a general calling for ALL disciples, (To make disciples) with some specialism to help equip each other where we are lacking. We cannot use these titles as a means of delegating or deflecting the general responsibility. ALL are called to be a disciple who makes disciples.

25. JESUS, PAUL AND SYNAGOGUE MINISTRY

Some may wonder what such a diagnosis leads to, especially when much of modern Christianity is based around meetings for believers in special buildings, out of sight of the public. Might formal meetings in the synagogues of Jesus' time be a legitimate model of later (but early) church life? To answer this suggestion we need to look at Jesus' ministry in synagogues (see Jordan Ryan's work <https://bibleinterp.arizona.edu/articles/jesus-and-early-synagogues>.)

Synagogues could best be described as 'town halls with Torah', where Torah was read and matters were debated. Jesus went to synagogues because all the people of each town met at these places (John 18:20). It is true that Jesus often anchored his teaching in several local synagogues (Mk. 1:21-28, Luke 4:31-37, Mk. 6:2-6, Matt. 13:54-58, Luke 4:16-30) and it was his 'custom' to do so (Lk. 4:16). But we need to think through his reasons for doing this. He wished to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom to the towns (Lk. 4:43). The most sensible and strategic place to do this in a Jewish context would be at the synagogue. This was the place to appeal to 'the town' with his call to believe, repent and join his movement.

We also need to see that the gospels intentionally record mixed responses to Jesus in synagogues. At Capernaum he is first warmly welcomed because of the authority of his words (Mk. 1:27). Yet later in the same place, many leave him because they cannot accept his teaching (John 6:53-61). Likewise he preached at Nazareth synagogue, announcing his ministry manifesto, but was roundly rejected by those present (Lk. 4:14-30). Later in Matt. 11:20-24 Jesus condemns whole towns - presumably because of their rejection of his message when the town gathered to hear him at synagogue.

So we see his repeated strategic use of a hall, but he clearly does not set himself up in these places. He does not even stay long when he is received well. Rather, these times in synagogues are opportunities to proclaim his message where people gather. He sees them as useful venues to speak and appeal to people. Yet he does not regard them as a base, from which he regularly delivers a ministry. In fact, his travelling group, led by himself, are his mobile community base for ministry. This fits Jesus' belief that he was the new Temple (Jn. 2:19), where the true presence of God resided. Where he goes (and consequently where his followers go with him), is where God's presence is. Jesus visits synagogues, representing the presence of God, but never settles there.

Likewise, when we follow Paul journeying around as a missionary Apostle, he often began in Jewish synagogues; out of courtesy to God's chosen people - initially offering the gospel to them first (Acts 13:15, Acts 14:1, Acts 17:1). Paul used these moments like Jesus did, to appeal to those familiar with Torah, to see if any were open to God's good news about Jesus. Also like Jesus, Paul was rejected in several synagogues (Acts 18:1-8), and so he consequently committed himself to the call to the Gentiles. In Acts 19:8-10 we see Paul shift from synagogue to the public hall of Tyrannus, where he spoke to whole groups in the area for two years. Note that this was a public meeting place, and again, wasn't permanent.

Once again, even the hall of Tyrannus isn't an argument for basing Christian ministry primarily in a building, delivering planned ministry. Instead this story is an argument for finding spaces where people are, and publicly sharing faith there. When Paul was saying farewell to the Ephesus church in Acts 20:17-37, he describes the practical nature of his ministry: "...You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house...." Paul's model was to use public spaces for outward ministry, and to operate in homes when nurturing believers. So once again, we have a parallel with Jesus and the Twelve, the Acts 2 church (who met in the Temple Courts; where other people were gathered, and then in homes), Corinthian church life, and Paul's mode of operating.

Jesus, Jerusalem church and Paul happily used buildings to speak and minister in. But their goal was not to base ministry there. Rather they wished to build networks and families who shared lives around Jesus; who were sensitive to the direction of Jesus, who went to where people were with his message.

26. SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE?

Given the sheer volume of examples from scripture, that there are some core universal principles and practices associated with 'Becoming like Christ' and 'Making Disciples', the burden of proof to show otherwise (from scripture) lies with anyone who may have a different picture of what these phrases mean.

27. CONCLUSIONS

In the light of this study, we can be confident that the meaning of the terms 'Becoming like Christ' and 'Making Disciples' has some practical clarity and content, carried on by the Early Church.

Becoming like Christ will include:

1. Adopting the core priorities and intentions of Jesus.
2. Adopting where possible (with the help of others) the shape and practices of Christ's life and ministry.
3. Owning Christ's values and beliefs, revealed in his verbal teachings (including Apostolic teaching).
4. Operating with a group of Christ-centred people in shared life and mission.
5. Being consciously and willingly sent out to make new disciples, where people are.
6. Counting the cost of this life choice, like Jesus and the Apostles did.

Making Disciples will include:

7. Replicating what training Jesus did in the gospels with others.
8. With others, sharing the gospel message of Jesus and performing the works of Jesus in public, often.
9. Investing regularly in and nurturing open people, as a family.
10. Helping new disciples become like Christ, who are also being sent out.

For individual disciples:

UP

A disciple hears Jesus call them to himself

A disciple gets to meet and know Jesus personally (including prayer and bible)

A disciple is willing to give up everything to obediently follow Jesus

A disciple watches and listens to Jesus as their primary source of life and truth

A disciple has their character shaped to imitate Jesus

A disciple is committed to the teaching of Jesus (and consequently his Apostles (whole bible))

IN

A disciple shares life deeply with other disciples, like Jesus did

OUT

A disciple is trained to join in with Jesus' work, doing what he did

A disciple is commissioned by Jesus to represent him, with others

A disciple is empowered for ministry by the Holy Spirit

A disciple knows and understands what Christ's death and resurrection has now achieved

A disciple is a regular witness to the gospel, with others

A disciple makes disciples as Jesus did, as a family on this shared mission

These principles are not 'options' for those who might like them. These are requirements according to the command of Jesus himself. He said "Go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I commanded you." (Matt. 28:19-20), This document won't capture even a tenth of what Jesus commanded, but it does describe in broad terms his general patterns and practices. Followers of Jesus are those who learn to obey such practices.

Arising Questions:

If these are clear principles for church practice from scripture, how did the contemporary Christian faith around the world end up looking so different?

From the Second Century onwards, changes in beliefs, adopted from pagan surrounding cultures, began to shape church practice. (see <https://www.manchester.edu/docs/default-source/academics/by-major/philosophy-and-religious-studies/journal/vi1-2/4-schall.pdf>, <https://www.Youtube.com/watch?v=aFHH3RpOmKk>) Once Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity as the State religion in the Third Century (now that it looked a little bit more like a Roman religion), the patterns of Christian practice moved rapidly towards more formal expressions. Buildings for worship, liturgical rites and appointed priests became commonplace. It could be argued that some benefits arose from the adoption of Christianity (like the cessation of persecution), but there was also a growing separation from what Jesus had taught in practice. The absence of his three year ministry in the creeds is an indication of this shift. This may be the biggest tragedy in church history.

28. INCONSISTENT ADOPTION OF CHRIST'S WAYS

Most Christians today will happily acknowledge that we are to follow Christ as our great example. Many recognise that his personal devotional life is something to imitate. We often refer to his humility as a model. We see him champion the marginalised and support such a view. We warmly embrace his command to 'love one another'. We are committed to his instruction to break bread and drink wine in memory of him. All these aspects are drawn from the life of Jesus found in the gospels and highlighted in Apostolic letters.

Yet contemporary Christians do not routinely consider themselves obliged to adopt other clear life patterns and priorities of Jesus. It is not the norm for all Christians to understand they are all sent out to make new disciples.

It is not the norm for Christians to live out the kind of shared life we see with Jesus and the Twelve and in Acts 2; living publicly as witnesses, sharing all things in common.

It is not the norm to be consciously investing in others so that they can make disciples who make disciples.

We all must resist the inclination to cherry-pick scripture, simply to endorse what kind of Christianity we want to adopt. Personally speaking, I am both excited and frightened of this call from Christ. The gap between how Jesus lived and how I live is large. But, by his grace and training, I want to be a willing learner.

29. THE PERMANENT NEED FOR REFORM

When Martin Luther called the church to reform its doctrines in the 16th Century, many resisted and much debate and conflict resulted. The ultimate strength of the argument rested on whether scripture was regarded as the final authority, and if so, what scripture said had to stand. All of us will have all kinds of presumptions about what we are believing and doing as Christians. We can read the phrase 'Making disciples' and unconsciously co-opt it to mean what we want it to mean. Given that we have all inherited the culture of church as it is now, it will always be necessary to try and step out of what thinking patterns we live in, and attempt to re-enter the world of the bible, as a means of properly evaluating what we do. This is a permanent call to gradually reform what we do as church, understanding that the goal is to return to what Christ originally intended for our lives as his followers.

This is not easy. It will take a lifetime. But given that the stakes are so high; given that the rescue and transformation of the human race is our task, we simply must commit to the gradual reform of our beliefs and practices, until we are 'conformed to the image of God's Son' (Rom. 8:29).

Given that our local church has committed itself to '*Becoming like Jesus, Making Disciples, Bringing real change*', this fundamental practical matter must be considered head on, so we can honestly and biblically commit ourselves to what the vision really means.

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