

**TALKING POINT #12**  
**LIVING IN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY #5: A DISCIPLING COMMUNITY**

**AN OLD-FASIONED WORD BUT A TIMELESS CONCEPT**

The last words that Matthew records Jesus leaving with His disciples when He ascended gloriously to Heaven were, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing 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.” (Matthew 28:18-20). Often called the Great Commission, here we have the great mission of the Church until Jesus comes again at the “very end of the age.”

The Church is a dynamic, Spirit-empowered, Christ-reflecting movement of God’s people sent to “go” into all nations. However, whereas the Church has often rightly emphasises the “going” of the Church, we have often missed what we’re to do once we’ve “gone” and that is, “make disciples.” We are not to simply “get converts.” Rather, it is to make “disciples.”

So, what is this discipleship? Who does it? How is it done? What is the outcome of discipleship?

**WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?**

There is a long heritage of “discipleship” in Jewish religion. As you look through the Old Testament, you see most of the significant figures in Israel’s history also had someone they were discipling. For example, Moses discipled Joshua, Elijah discipled Elisha and the prophets often had a group around them, as we know from the life of the prophet Isaiah.

This was carried through into the world of Jewish religious teachers, the Rabbis. Even today, Rabbis gather groups of disciples who learn from these teachers, serve them and try to imitate their lives. It is no surprise, then, to see Jesus gather a group of 12 disciples (Matthew 10:1-4), since he was often called “Rabbi” (Matthew 26:25; Mark 9:5). So, when Jesus had completed His earthly mission, He passed on the mission to His disciples at His Ascension.

This process of one generation teaching and passing on the Faith to the next is how the Church has effectively been built. We see that the earliest Church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42) and throughout the 2,000-odd years since, Christians have passed on discipleship through teaching, Church discipline, caring for one another and basically modelling Christ to each other, just as the Apostles modelled to the Church what they had seen in Jesus face-to-face. Indeed, a proof of authenticity for those that followed the Apostles was that they had been discipled by an Apostle themselves, such as Polycarp or Ignatius.

Discipleship then is a whole-of-life process where we become more like Jesus as we are encouraged, disciplined, taught, empowered and mentored in the body of the Church. It is not always a formal program (though it can be) and it may not always look the same but this is what we do in Church – help people in their journey to become more like Jesus – beginning with those who don’t know Jesus at all to become a Christian and then go on to grow in Christ.

**WHO DOES THE DISCIPLING?**

Paul tells Titus that older women are “to teach what is good and so train the young women.” (Titus 2:3-4) Peter likewise instructs the older men to disciple the younger men (1 Peter 5:1-4). So, clearly, it is not just the pastor that discipled the Church! We all have a role to disciple others.

**TALKING POINT #12**  
**LIVING IN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY #5: A DISCIPLING COMMUNITY**

If you're older than someone else (either by physical age or maturity in Christ), you have an obligation to get alongside someone who is younger than you to help them move forward in Christ. Similarly, when someone older than us comes to disciple us, we should honour them by heeding their words. Someone may see someone else struggling with some area in their faith-walk - the right thing to do is to go and help them, to disciple them.

But, more than just impromptu discipleship, we should be intentional in our discipleship – offer to meet with someone regularly, join a life group in the Church or a mentoring group. Make a regular time to pray together, share around the Bible together, be accountable with each other. In other words, “edify” each other. This is a great word that used to be widely used and understood in Church life, but has fallen out of common usage. It means to “build up,” “reinforce” or “strengthen.” It came from the construction industry and gives a great picture for what happens in someone's life when we take the time to “edify” each other – we build them into great, strong cathedrals of praise.

### **WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF DISCIPLESHIP?**

The result of discipling a brother or sister in Christ is to see a life empowered to be more like Jesus. This was Paul's vision– “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (Colossian 1:28). What an amazing picture of the results of discipleship and mentoring. That word “perfect” is a great one which has a range of meanings, such as “complete, mature, perfect, accomplish” – this is what happens when we disciple in Church – a process that will be consummated at Christ's Second Coming!

### **ARE YOU A BARNABAS OR A TIMOTHY OR A PAUL?**

One of the great examples we have in the Bible for discipleship is in the life of the Apostle Paul. Even though he had been a persecutor of the Church and no one trusted him, Barnabas took Paul under his wing to mentor and disciple him (Acts 11:25-26). In time, Paul becomes the primary person in the ministry and it appears that Barnabas (whose name means “son of encouragement”) rejoiced to see his friend ‘overtake’ him in status. Such is the heart of a good mentor!

On the other side, when we read Paul's letters to Timothy, we see Paul's heart for his young disciple. Paul has disciplined him, instructed him and now releases him into a ministry of his own.

So, for Paul, he had a mentor in Barnabas and a disciple in Timothy. We should all aspire to be like Paul – to find someone who will mentor us and to find someone whom we can mentor.

### **CONCLUSION**

The questions then are simple. Do you have someone discipling you? Do you have someone you're discipling? See Ps Mark if the answer to either of these questions is ‘no’ and you'd like it to be ‘yes’. Be inspired by the impact you can make in another's life and the impact that could be made in yours!

Next month, we'll continue our series on “Living in the Church Community” as we look at our mission – both in word and deed.