

Following Jesus In All Of Life

INTRODUCTION

In this booklet we want to unpack the six practices we feel best describe what “following Jesus in all of life” really looks like. These practices shape the life of our covenanting community, and flesh out our core values as shown:



Before we begin to unpack a fuller understanding of practices, there is something that we need to take a moment to emphasise.

The importance of the Holy Spirit

The journey of following Jesus in all of life can only ever be fulfilled through our full surrender to the Holy Spirit. If we do not grasp this, or seek to fulfil these practices without the Spirit, we will simply fall into the trap of seeing the practices as a 'self-help' project.

Please hear us: this is not a behaviour modification method. This is only and ever a work of the Spirit of God.

To further emphasis the point, we only need turn to the pattern of Jesus. Jesus lived and ministered in the power of the Spirit. We see the Spirit all over His life: Jesus' birth (Luke 1:35), baptism (Luke 3:21-22), temptation (Luke 4:1-2), and at the start of His ministry of proclamation and healing (Luke 4:18).

We could summarise it like this: the scriptures show the Spirit affirming Jesus in His identity and empower His influence. We should take serious note for our own spiritual journey.

- **Identity**

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

The Spirit longs to affirm our beloved standing before the Father. He wants to remind us, like Jesus showed us, that we are called to live out of perfect sonship. As we do, we will be led deeper in love into His likeness. Transformation cannot come without the Spirit's work in our lives, gently leading us lay down our 'false self' so we can live more fully as beloved

sons and daughters. As we learn to live in the Spirit, we come to realise that the process of spiritual transformation in our lives is not merely about controlling our sinful acts but rather, allowing God to change the source.

'Those who are led by the Spirit these are the sons of God.'
Romans 8:14

As we learn to abide in God's love through the Spirit, we will be more 'plugged in' to the source - the power of the cross – and here find a love stronger than death itself leading us into glorious freedom.

- **Influence**

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. 16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. "Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4

Jesus did nothing outside of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. He was the fulfilment of the Messiah who Isaiah prophesied about hundreds of years before, and His

distinguishing feature would be **the One on whom the Spirit was upon**. Jesus was zero-resistant to the Holy Spirit and provides an example for us to follow. We desperately need the Holy Spirit's presence and power to make us effective in the mission of God; He calls to us partner with Him in.

PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Key verse: *After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Matt 14:23*

Throughout the gospels we see that Jesus prayed - a lot! We are told on many occasions that Jesus withdrew to a quiet place and prayed. He walked in intimate communion with the Father, submitted to His will in everything He did. Tim Keller describes the prayer life of Jesus:

“Jesus Christ taught his disciples to pray, healed people with prayers, denounced the corruption of the temple worship (which, he said, should be a ‘house of prayer’), and insisted that some demons could be cast out only through prayer. He prayed often and regularly with fervent cries and tears (Heb. 5:7), and sometimes all night. The Holy Spirit came upon him and anointed him as he was praying (Luke 3:21–22), and he was transfigured with the divine glory as he prayed (Luke 9:29). When he faced his greatest crisis, he did so with prayer. We hear him praying for his disciples and the church on the night before he died (John 17:1–26) and then petitioning God in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Finally, he died praying.”

The disciples were captured by the level of intimacy Jesus shared with God and we are left to conclude they intuitively connected Jesus' prayer life to His joy, His peace, His power and His endurance. It is easy to understand why they asked Jesus, *‘teach us to pray.’*

Jesus reply was what is now known universally as the Lord's Prayer –

This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will

be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

As we think about how we can practice a life of prayer that looks like the prayer life of Jesus, a helpful way to break down the prayer He instructed us to pray is through the acronym of **PRAY**

Pause (*Our Father who is in Heaven*):

Prayer is intimacy with God. The original design for our lives, our ultimate purpose, is to enjoy God and walk in friendship with Him.

Prayer begins with a turning of our attention to the God whose attention is constantly on us. Jesus took time to PAUSE. It is in this place we are reminded of our true identity – sons and daughters of a loving Heavenly Father.

The Lord's Prayer begins with *Our Father* (Abba, Dada), setting a familial framework for entering into conversation.

The journey of prayer is learning how to abide in His presence (John 15), hearing His voice, and learning how to share our lives with Him.

There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with God; those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it. Brother Lawrence.

Rejoice (*Hallowed be Your Name*):

As we learn how to PAUSE, we flow into rejoicing. Our intimacy with God should be wrapped up in worship - *Hallowed be your name!* We move from stillness and rest, to adoration and wonder as we encounter His love, His goodness, and His holiness afresh.

As we become aware of who He is, we pour out our love and affection to Jesus and praise Him for who He is – worship is the only legitimate response to seeing Jesus.

In this regard, we realise prayer and worship flow together, and should not be separated or compartmentalised.

'In prayer we do two things: we get out of ourselves, being lost in wonder, love and praise, but also, and in the same act, we go in on ourselves, we stir up all that is within us to bless and hallow God's name.' PT Forsyth

Ask (*Your Kingdom come, Your will be done. Give us this day our daily bread*)

Out of the place of worship and alignment with the will of the Father we are encouraged to ASK - in two main ways:

1. We are invited to ask for God's Kingdom to come and His will to be done.
 - Interestingly we are invited to pray this first. We are drawn out of our own stories into His big story before we request our own needs. The Lord's prayer is framed in this way to GROW us and to FORM us as we say it; to mature us from childish, self-centred kids into mature sons and daughters. Jesus wants us to 'keep watch' with Him, praying His heart into being. We call this intercession.

- Intimacy with God leads to involvement with God and the primary way we involve ourselves with God in His mission is in intercession - partnering with God in prayer, we learn to speak His will and ways into being in the world. As John Wesley said, '*Prayer is where the action is.*'
 - This should involve praying constantly for the lost.
2. We are invited to ask for our daily bread - our everyday needs and concerns. As a good Father, we are invited to trust Him with our daily needs, our cares and concerns. He wants us to trust Him with our whole lives.

Yield (*forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us, lead us not into temptation, deliver us from evil.*)

We finish prayer by ultimately yielding everything to our loving Heavenly Father. We relinquish control and recognise His good and sovereign hand.

'We pray because our life comes from God and we yield it back in prayer. Prayer is a great antidote to the illusion that we are self-made.' Walter Bruggemann

We yield to God in two main ways:

1. We allow His **ways** to be formed in us.
 - We confess our sins to Him, and we receive His forgiveness so we can be transformed into His likeness.
 - We relinquish control and trust Him to protect us from the evil one.
2. We embrace His **will** beyond our understanding.

- In prayer we yield to His purposes no matter how difficult to accept. We join with Jesus in His ultimate prayer of yielding - *'...not my will but yours be done...'*

Prayer of Commitment:

Father help us to be a people of prayer and worship. May our community be marked by a genuine intimacy with you and an awareness of your presence. We want to discipline ourselves to pause more regularly, to turn our attention to you in worship and devotion, to grow in intercession, and to ultimately yield our lives to you.

CREATIVITY

Key Verse: *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Eph 2:10*

God is Creator. The first verses of Scripture remind us that the Spirit hovered over the face of deep. It was formless and empty (unordered and uninhabited) yet God brought order and filled it with beauty.

If God is Creator, it follows that a core part of being created in 'the image of God' is to be a creative reflection of who He is.

Psalm 139 reminds us that each of us is fearfully and wonderfully made, created by God, to uniquely display His beauty. This is our original design.

The implications of 'the fall' led to a selfish corruption of our God-given creativity, but in Jesus and through the cross we can rediscover our original design. Eugene Peterson describes each of us as, 'splendid never-to-be-repeated stories of grace.' Through new life in Jesus we can fulfil the 'good works' God prepared for us even before we were born. As the key verse above states, we are His handiwork. In the Greek this word is '*poiema*' which means literally His 'work of art', His 'masterpiece.'

We don't often acknowledge the creativity of Jesus' life and ministry but He expressed the glory of God in a host of creative ways - stories, miracles, conversations - and was constantly calling people into their creative destiny, e.g. fishermen, became 'fishers of men'; Simon becoming Peter (literally, Rocky).

Each of us has been entrusted with a creative contribution on God's earth in our own unique way. Paul exhorts the church in Colossae, 'Whatever you do, do it in the name of the Lord!' (Col 3:17). Whatever sphere of influence (e.g. business, arts, education, health, parenting etc.) you are called to in this season of life, your vocation should be your worshipful response to the creative and unique talents and abilities that God has given you.

As members of His Church, we can reflect the creativity of our Creator God in two main ways:

- **Gathered Church:** We should be creatively inspired in church. Engaging all the senses, we should be caught up in worship of the majestic Creator. We have all been given Spirit-breathed creative gifts and talents which can contribute to the corporate worship gathering (e.g. singing, playing instruments, art, dance, drama, etc.) and the edifying of God's people (creative gifts of the Spirit).
- **Scattered Church:** Our creativity also needs to be expressed as we scatter to where we live our lives every day. Our towns and cities are desperate for fresh creativity, for the imagination of God to be expressed through our daily lives bringing beauty, wisdom, insight and creative solutions to the places where we work, socialise and build family.

Prayer of Commitment:

Creator God, thank you for creating us in your image with unique gifts and personalities and abilities to reflect your beauty and glory in the world. Forgive us when we have not taken this seriously or not surrendered these gifts to you, for your glory and the extension of your Kingdom. May your Spirit breathe afresh on us as a community, unlock the beauty you have placed in us, and may we faithfully express your glory to the world.

GENEROSITY AND HOSPITALITY

Key Verse: *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.*

The Bible is clear: God is a *giving* God. He is abounding and overflowing in steadfast love and abundant in kindness. There is absolutely nothing stingy about God! His heart is constantly open to His creation and He longs for them to live in the bounty of His blessing.

As image-bearers our original design was to overflow and multiply with God's blessing. The Eden mandate upon mankind was to co-partner with God in the establishing of His generous, loving rule over the whole of creation and to manage and utilise His resources for His glory

'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it' Gen 1:28 (see also Gen 12:1-3)

Another way to say it is, the core vocation of God's image-bearers was to steward His generous blessing throughout the earth.

While God's people Israel ultimately failed to reflect God's generous will and ways, Jesus came as the true Israelite to embody and reveal God's generous and self-giving love. Jesus revealed to us the hyper-abundance of blessing that characterises His Kingdom - think overflowing barrels of wine at the wedding in Cana; 12 extra baskets full of food after feeding five thousand; the offer of a life 'more abundantly.' Yet, importantly and counter-culturally, Jesus showed us that this life of abundance and overflowing was linked to sacrifice - His generous nature was demonstrated through acts of radical love and self-sacrifice, climaxing with His sacrifice on the cross.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Rom 5:8

The cross of Jesus starkly reveals that He was generous when there was nothing in it for Him. Jesus showed us in His life – and ultimately in His death – that life in the Kingdom of God is defined as the opposite spirit of the world. We find life not by hoarding, but by giving ourselves away. We find abundant, generous life by losing our own.

A beautiful window into the type of generosity and hospitality expressed through a covenanting community is seen in Acts chapter 4:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them!

If we want to 'follow Jesus' in a life of generosity and hospitality, we must therefore follow the exhortation of the apostle Paul, to '*have the same mindset as Christ Jesus*' (Phil 2:5), after which he described the self-emptying nature of Jesus' descent from Heaven to the cross. He followed this up in other passages with commands like, '*prefer one another*', '*love one another sincerely*', '*lay down your lives for one another*.'

Jesus teaches us to live not with a clenched fist and closed heart, but with an open hand and an overflowing heart. Within this generous Jesus-like posture we get right to the heart of the Biblical theme of hospitality. The Biblical Greek

word for 'hospitality' is *filoxenía* – which literally means 'friendship to strangers.' A sacrificial kindness is therefore implied. Biblical hospitality is not merely having your friends round for a dinner party. Rather, it infers a hospital for hurting people, a hostel for those who are unwelcome. It begins in an intentional attitude of availability toward others and a posture of radical presence.

True hospitality will therefore disrupt our schedules, ensure we will feel taken for granted at times, and maybe even mess up our homes, but the Bible teaches us that in this sacrificial living there is a deeper joy to find. Jesus Himself declared, '*...it is more blessed to give than it is to receive...*' (Acts 20:35)

It all comes back to stewardship. If we steward well what God has blessed us with and 'seek first His Kingdom' by sowing generously, not only will we experience the joy of becoming more like Christ, but God will also find us faithful to be entrusted with more (2 Cor 9:6-15).

This is particularly true when it comes to our finances. We are called to be extravagantly generous, knowing He will supply our every need. The stewardship of our finances starts with the Biblical command of tithing. We believe the Bible instructs us to give at least 10% of our income to Him. This should not be seen as a duty but a love-offering of who we are back to Him, and in that respect, it should often exceed 10%.

Prayer of Commitment:

Father, we are so grateful that you are a giving God. Thank you for how you opened up your heart to us and invited us in through the giving of your Son. Jesus, thank you for giving yourself for our redemption. By your grace, help us to have the 'same mind', to follow you into death so that we may live in the abundance and overflowing nature of your Kingdom life. May we be

found faithful with the many blessings you have placed in our hands. Give us the strength to move against 'the spirit of the age' by stewarding your blessings with courageous faith and sowing an extravagant generosity.

COMPASSION AND JUSTICE

Key Verse: The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

God is just! If God had a 'bio' or social media profile, part of it would read *'father to the fatherless, defender of the widow.'*

As God reveals Himself through scripture, we see His prophets declare His justice as a central tenant of His character!

Moses reminded the Children of Israel, *'He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing'* Deut 10:18. Later on before Moses died, he sang a song over the Children of Israel, in which he would include the lyric, *'All His ways are just'* (Deut 32:4). The Psalmist had multiple references to the justice of God but perhaps most explicitly he declares in Psalm 89:14, *'Righteousness and justice are the foundations of his throne.'* And Amos scolded the Children of Israel along the lines of, *'God despises your worship, because you have forgotten about justice.'*

Biblically justice is not just about a rallying call to certain economic or political issues - that is one of the ways it should be expressed for sure, but fundamentally justice is linked to the righteousness of God.

In the Bible the words for righteousness and justice are intricately connected. The two words in Hebrew are *'mishpat'* (justice) and *'tzadeqah'* (righteousness) and they go together over 30 times in the Bible, e.g., *'This is what the Lord says: Do what is just (mishpat) and right (tzadeqah). Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no*

wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place' (Jeremiah 22).

In simple terms we could say, God's justice (*mishpat*) is about making things right (*tzadeqah*), on God's terms.

The great hope we have amidst the evil of our world is that God is one day going to make things right. We can have confidence like Abraham of old, *'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?'* (Gen 18:25)

'The Christian hope is founded on the promise of God that all things will be made new according to His righteousness.' Fleming Rutledge

'According to His righteousness' is an essential part of the end of the quote above. We hear the word justice used a lot in the public domain today. Yet it is justice with a human agenda, justice on our terms. Another way to say it is, the prevailing narrative of our culture today seems to want the ethics of the Kingdom without the King! They want (peace, justice, equality,) but on their terms not God's Biblical standard. We need to ensure we are aligned to God's plumb-line.

As the Biblical story unfolds, we come to realise that God's justice can only be understood with reference to His ultimate essence - loving compassion. In fact, we could say, in human terms, God holds back 'enforcing justice' when there is an opportunity for mercy to win the day.

The great Psalm 103 declares,

'The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he

harbour his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.'

The Judge of all the earth is a compassionate Father. While inherently just, God is also full of compassion. In other words, He will not always give people what we think they deserve. Thank God! The writer of the book of Hebrews speaks about the discipline of God, and in this he helps us realise that the justice of God needs to be seen through the lens of a loving 'parent' not some cranky deity.

Like the rest of our practices so far, Jesus brings these themes together in His own life. A central theme of the Old Testament prophets was that Jesus was coming to execute justice. Andy Stanley says,

'You cannot understand Jesus and his mission without understanding the biblical yearning for justice and Jesus' announcement that he was the fulfillment of that yearning... we can say definitively: you cannot have Jesus without justice.'

Yet crucially *the way* Jesus was bringing justice was a way that knocked everyone off balance. The Messiah who was coming to execute justice, expressed this as a compassionate, suffering servant. If you look closely though, particularly in the prophet Isaiah's writing, we find Biblical clues for this kind of Messiah:

*'Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.
He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break,*

*and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.
In his teaching the islands will put their hope.'*

Ultimately Jesus is a King of gentle power, a ruler of generous justice, a compassionate deliverer.

In Jesus' life we see the compassion He carried for others physically 'move' Him.

'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'" Matt 9:36-39

The Greek word for compassion is *splanchnízomai*, which literally means to have the bowels yearn. This obviously implies a deeply inward movement of pity and empathy towards our fellow mankind. It leads us to be present and 'at one' with those who are suffering.

Again, these themes climax in the work of the cross. In fact, we can only really understand Biblical justice through the lens of the mercy of the cross. Paul describes the apparent juxtaposition powerfully and poetically in the book of Romans - God is both *the just and the justifier* of those being saved (Romans 3:23).

At the cross we see the justice of God being dealt with in the most compassionate way you could imagine, in the most compassionate act the world has ever known.

Here we see a God doing what is right: demonstrating His righteousness, dealing with sin and all its results, but doing it in the most compassionate way imaginable. In giving His own life for the sins of the world, becoming the substitute for our sin, overcoming sin and death and hell, He revealed a God who is incomprehensibly compassionate, a God who would rather forgive His enemies than seek revenge over them!

We are called to follow the founder of our faith in such a way. We are to be like Jesus, as people who fight for justice, who speak truth to power, who defend the weak and vulnerable from oppression and exploitation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who stood against the injustices of the Nazi regime said, *'We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.'*

Yet the motivation for our justice is always compassion. We fight for justice in an attitude of love both for the victim and for the perpetrator. We 'overcome evil with good'. Or as Dr Martin Luther King famously said, *'Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.'*

Prayer of Commitment:

Lord Jesus, break our hearts for what breaks yours. Help us to further understand your great compassion for the world in light of your good and just designs for humanity. Lord help us to be faithful in our defence of the weak and our care of the poor, and would you give us the grace to show compassion to both victims and perpetrators. We are in desperate need of your Spirit for this Lord. Forgive us when we don't care enough. We need your Spirit. We need your Spirit. Fill us afresh we pray.

MISSION

Key Verse: *'The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'*

Gen 12:1-3

God's heart from the beginning was to fill the earth with the blessing of His manifest presence. His desire was for man to co-partner with Him in His dream for the world. He therefore bestowed authority (Psalm 8:5-6) on mankind to be His vice-regent over creation and carry His manifest presence to the ends of the earth, extending His loving rule.

The fall, which involved both human and angelic rebellion against God, led to the capitulation of this original mandate of mankind, ultimately resulting in mankind multiplying 'sin' rather than blessing around the world.

God in His mercy however did not give up. Though grieved deeply in His heart, He launched His rescue mission. God chose Abram and told him this original seed of blessing which was for 'all peoples on the earth' would come through the womb of his barren wife! Abram would become Abraham - the Father of Nations - and God's blessing would flow through his descendants (the Children of Israel) to the nations.

God reminded His people constantly that He desired them to be *'a light to the nations'* (Isaiah 49:6). As we know by now, they failed to live up to this calling and unfortunately on many occasions represented the opposite of the God who had set His love upon them. We see glimpses of what God really

wanted in the Old Testament through some of the faithful remnant, but essentially it takes Jesus to come to earth show what God really looks like. Jesus comes to show us what God looks like and to reveal what the mission of God really looks like.

In the life and ministry of Jesus we come to understand the mission of God as His desire to take back everything the enemy had stolen, rescue His wayward sons and daughters by overcoming the curse and consequence of sin, and ultimately inaugurate His Kingdom on the earth, beginning the redemption project of all things!

'The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.' 1 John 3:8

Jesus was coming as the true King and Lord to usurp the devil's dominion and establish the 'Kingdom of God.' The great hope of the gospel ('good news') Jesus proclaimed was that because He (the King) had come - the rule and reign of God was now accessible in a whole new way, and it was for everyone.

Yet importantly, Jesus showed and taught that the rule and reign of God looked incredibly different to the 'kingdoms' - man-made systems and patterns of this world. So, at the heart of Jesus' invitation into His Kingdom was the call to repent, i.e., *'repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand (available).'*

To see and live into the reality of the reign and rule of God, you are going to have to *'repent'*. The Greek word here is *'metanoia'*, which literally means *a change of our thinking, a turning around of your whole life in the opposite direction, a giving up everything that is not our highest good.*

Ultimately you are going to have to be *'born again'*, born by the Spirit, into this new reality of the Kingdom of God. You are going to have to get off the thrones of your own hearts, surrender over your own little kingdoms, and allow Jesus to take up His Kingly residence in your heart.

At the centre of Jesus' mission, and the climax of His ministry, was the act that made all of this possible. Through the atoning sacrifice of the cross over sin we come to realise not just the salvation of our own souls, but the utter vanquishing of death, the devil and all his demons! The cross is therefore the turning point of history and means no less than the beginning of the redemption of all things. The following scriptures declare it best:

'We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body. He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.'

Colossians 1:15-20 (MSG)

In and through the cross we are called to participate with the Spirit in this redemption project of all things! Essentially, we are stepping into our original design, to co-partner with God by His Spirit in the filling of the earth with His presence. The Apostle Paul describes our newfound vocation in Christ as ambassadors - the ones through whom God declares His love and desire to be reconciled to humanity.

With all of this in mind, we recognise that we have been saved to serve in the mission of God. The Church is not a randomly selected group of God's favourites waiting to escape this evil world, but rather, we are a ransomed people, saved into the family of God, caught up in His mission to take the gospels to the nations.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 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

Mission is therefore the primary reason the Church exists. As Leslie Newbegin says, *'The question isn't, "Does God's church have a mission?" but rather, "Does God's mission have a church?"'*

The early Church understood this. Through the infilling of the Holy Spirit they recognised they were a 'sent' people. This is what the word 'apostle' (*apostoleos*) essentially means: literally, *'sent ones'*. And this is why we say the primary impulse of the Church should be 'apostolic' - a people caught up in the mission of God, carrying on the ministry of their founder, Jesus Christ, on the earth.

Kevin De Young says it powerfully:

'The Church acts as a sort of embassy for the government of the King. It is an outpost of the Kingdom of God surrounded by the kingdom of darkness. Just as an embassy is meant to showcase the life of a nation to the surrounding people, so the Church is meant to manifest the life of the Kingdom of God to the people around it.'

The core message of apostolic ministry is therefore, *'Jesus is Lord!* The early believers were fearless in declaring the Lordship of Jesus over every other person and power, and they believed when they did this that the signs of that Kingdom would manifest themselves on the earth.

Finally, it's important for us to understand the ways the Kingdom of God is proclaimed, because unfortunately today different streams of the church emphasise only certain parts, and we are left with a reductionist gospel. But the gospel of the Kingdom is best summarised in Paul's words to the church in Rome – *'For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, 19 by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ...'* (Romans 15:18-19)

Here we see the fulfilment of the ministry of the gospel through:

Words: the speaking and heralding of the good news - *'Jesus is Lord, the Kingdom is at hand. Turn from your sins, a whole new way of life is available.'*

Works (deeds): walking in the way of Jesus and His sacrificial love; showing the love of God in acts of kindness, mercy and justice.

Wonders: the demonstration of the Kingdom in supernatural acts of power and love, bringing healing of sickness and deliverance from evil.

As the people of God, we are called to live a life on the redemptive edge - this should provoke us to a life away from comfort and the fear of man, into a life of increasing risk where we find the presence and power of God waiting for us to show up.

'The deepest motive for mission is simply the desire to be with Jesus where he is, on the frontier between the reign of God and the usurped dominion of the devil'. Leslie Newbigin

Prayer of Commitment:

Father we want to get more fully caught up in your mission. May your Spirit fill us afresh and empower us to 'go'. Don't allow us to settle. We ask that you would become the King of our hearts all over again, and as we surrender you would demonstrate your Kingdom in words, works and wonders through our lives in fresh power. We pray for courage and risk to join you on the 'redemptive edge', to prayerfully proclaim your Lordship in places of darkness, and for an increase of faith to believe your Kingdom will show up when we are prepared to live as your ambassadors.

DISCIPLESHIP

Key Text: *'Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."' (Matt 28:18-20)*

At Emmanuel Church we define discipleship as, 'following Jesus in all of life'. In the previous five practices we have defined the essential practices of Jesus and outlined how we can imitate Him in these ways. But as we examine our final practice of 'discipleship', we now want to move into a place where we don't just live these practices out ourselves, but we intentionally see the life of Christ reproduced or replicated in the lives of others. In simple terms, to be a true disciple is to eventually become a discipler!

An essential part of the movement of the Church and our obedience to the Great Commission, which is often undervalued by the Church, is the dynamic of prayerfully inviting people into our lives who we disciple in ways of Jesus. If we believe the Great Commission is for everyone who chooses to follow Jesus, then all these followers should be doing it. The dream has always been disciples who make disciples!

Often, we find people don't believe they can or should be discipling people, and we want to address this dysfunction in the Church. The process and principle of discipleship is so central to New Testament thinking. To emphasize the point the word 'Christian' is mentioned only 3 times in the Bible and the word 'disciple' 269 times!

Let's go back to our 'original design' again for a moment. We were called to steward and harness the potential of life, to multiply and reproduce life. God always wanted us to always be childlike, (i.e., fully dependent on Him, trusting Him and finding our complete identity in Him) but He never wanted us to remain childish (self-obsessed, self-promoting, self-serving). God wanted mature image bearers - loving mothers and fathers who think more of themselves, who manage the affairs and relationships of life and creation well, who lead others into a flourishing life. These are all the essential ingredients of becoming a discipler.

While our fallen state has rendered us ineffective and often destructive disciplers, the work of Jesus on the cross forgives us and frees us to walk in our original design. We relinquish our control of our own lives, and it follows as we grow in the love of God we naturally serve and lay down our lives to serve others.

Along with the other practices we have explored, Jesus is again the prototype for this particular practice of discipleship. His life is the pattern we follow for discipling others who God is calling us to lead into life.

Having explored the mission of Jesus in the last practice - the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God on the earth - I now want to propose that Jesus' method for fulfilling the mission was as important as the mission. This is actually quite obvious if we carefully study the words and commands of the Great Commission (see above). Discipleship is right at the heart Jesus' last commands to us. The central part of the commission Jesus left us was *to make disciples* - this was the mission. And a local Church is only really doing as well as it is fulfilling this mission.

The gospels make clear that Jesus' method for His mission, broadly speaking, was two-fold:

- Intimacy with the Father: Jesus did everything in communion with the Father, always submitting to the will of the Father. He did everything from the posture of perfect sonship, empowered by the Spirit. May God give us grace to do the same.
- Relationship with friends: as Jesus called people to follow him, He invited them into friendship, He built a sense of family. From this deeply relational context, Jesus poured His life into the disciples, shaping them into His likeness and calling them into their ultimate destiny.

Establishing these core strands of Jesus' discipleship we can now dive deeper into Jesus' discipleship strategy, with the hope of assimilating these into our lives as disciples who make disciples!

1. Calling people into destiny (to be like Jesus):

- Jesus called people out of their own self-serving, disconnected, lives into His bigger story of true meaning, redemption and love. Ultimately when Jesus was calling people into destiny, He was giving them a vision for Christlikeness, He was awakening the buried purpose within each person to become a unique God-breathed reflection of Himself. This is why the disciples were so captivated by His presence in their lives - Jesus believed they could be more than they ever dreamed they could be!
- Therefore, when Jesus calls us to 'make disciples' in the Great Commission, He says to *'baptise them in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.'* In other words teach people who they really are - a person's core identity can only be found in Jesus, so as you disciple people, call out of them who you see Jesus created

them to be and encourage them to be baptised into their true gospel identity.

2. Calling people to leave everything:

- While Jesus believed passionately in people, He also plainly called people to let go of everything that would prevent them from embracing the fulness of this life.
- *'Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life[f] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"'*
- Jesus embodied a supernatural grace of unconditional love and acceptance, yet the call to discipleship was intense, and the cost was everything! Ultimately Jesus wanted people to know the greatest love and this meant giving up what you loved more than His love, to fully embrace and experience it. Whatever has our hearts more than Jesus is preventing us from knowing the perfect love that He longs to pour into your soul. This is the why repentance is the gateway into the Kingdom (see previous chapter for definition of repentance). We need to disciple people into continual repentance, a daily surrender and dying to ourselves in order to embrace life in all its fulness.

3. Calling people to intimacy and intentional relationship:

- Jesus' discipleship was a call to friendship in a deeply committed way. The loving commitment He showed His disciples was gradually activating a reciprocating commitment out of them. The Apostle John would testify, *'...we love him because he first loved us...'*

Essentially Jesus was painting a picture and embodying the reality of the covenantal love we spoke about previously.

- *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* John 13:34-35
- Furthermore, while Jesus loved the crowds, He wasn't seduced by the numbers game, and He didn't seem to think that speaking to the crowds was the most effective way to fulfil His mission. Rather, He invested in the 12 disciples and more intensely in 3 (Peter, James and John). It appears the big was in the small for Jesus.
- The other thing about this type of focused discipleship was that it was done in the context of community. This is such a critical aspect of discipleship that we need to rediscover in the western world, fighting against the dominant individualistic nature of our culture. Jesus prioritised the collective over the individual.

4. Calling people to life-on-life apprenticeship:

- Discipleship is an ongoing apprenticeship to Jesus. He is the Way - remember you are walking in a WAY and following a Person, not just believing a doctrine! We are called to follow Jesus into a whole new way of life. He is not just our Saviour, he is also our Rabbi, our Teacher and following Him is something you grow in more than simply cognitively understand.
- Jesus gave the disciples a 'back-stage pass' to His life. He seemed to favour the conversations on the road more than the classrooms. He placed high value on the times of hanging out or working together with the disciples 'on the job.' As we disciple others we should be prepared to count the cost of inviting people into

our lives, allowing them to watch how we live, how we work, how we treat our families and spouses, how we demonstrate the Kingdom.

- It is a kind of practical wisdom where action is embodied and assimilated rather than rules simply obeyed.
- We could summarise Jesus' apprenticing strategy in the following steps:
- I do. You watch. We talk e.g., the call to discipleship, *Come follow me*.
- I do. You help. We talk e.g., feeding five thousand.
- You do. I help. We talk e.g., sending out 72.
- You do. I watch. We talk e.g., the Great Commission

5. Calling people to life in the Spirit:

- As we have already noted, Jesus was zero-resistant to the Holy Spirit. His ministry was marked by the love of the Father and fully empowered by the empowerment of the Spirit.
- As Jesus began preparing the disciples for what was ahead, He told them it would be better for Him to go so that the Spirit would come. His encouragement to the disciples was that His Spirit would be their Guide, their Teacher, their Helper. Essentially Jesus was saying that the Holy Spirit would continue His role in discipling them; '*the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*' John 14:26
- It is therefore no wonder that some of Jesus' final words, before His ascension, were, '*stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.*' Luke 24:49
- As we disciple people we must follow the pattern of Jesus. First of all, *we must* surrender our lives to the

infilling of the Spirit, and secondly, we want to encourage those we disciple into 'life in the Spirit'.

Prayer of Commitment:

Jesus, thank you for believing in us. You believe we can be like you and you grant us 'grace upon grace' to journey toward this. We want to be better disciples and we want to be more effective disciplers. Please show us those who we should be granting a 'back-stage pass' to our lives, an invite into a shared and intentional relational journey of apprenticeship unto Christlikeness. Give us the courage to take the cost of following you seriously so we may encounter the joy of your abundant life. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, enable us through your grace and power.

