

# The Church Unleashed as Disciple

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Who are your role models? Who do you like to follow by example? Maybe, like a lot of people, you've gone and learned a trade by going and being an apprentice to a skilled craftsperson. Or maybe you've learnt from somebody older and wiser who's experienced life already, so that your mistakes aren't the same mistakes that they made. And as Christians, our main role is to be a disciple or an apprentice of Jesus.

And the church is called to make disciples of Jesus from all nations, baptising them and teaching them to obey. So this morning, we're going to look at the church unleashed as disciple.

So I want to say that question again. Who are you following? In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, Paul writes, follow my example as I follow Christ.

They are really well known verses. And Paul always aimed to live his life as an example and often used his letters to encourage the new Christians in the churches that he planted.

[ 1 : 1 3 ] This was so that they could see how the Christian life was lived through him. But if we look at the chapter we've just looked at a minute ago in Acts 16, Paul goes a bit further here.

He was on his second missionary journey and he begins by revisiting the churches in modern day Turkey that he'd previously planted. He goes really to go and see what's going on, see how they're doing, to correct any errors that may have crept in with teaching and things.

And he goes and teaches and encourages them. And then he comes to the town of Lystra. And this is where he meets Timothy. Timothy is a young man whose mum and dad are a mixed marriage. His mum was Jewish and she'd become a Christian and his dad was a Greek. So the church seems to think really highly of Timothy and I think so does Paul.

He sees Timothy as a future leader of the church, maybe even a successor to Paul. So what does Paul do? Well, just like Jesus, he makes him a disciple.

[ 2 : 2 6 ] He really says to him, come on, follow me. Come on my journey and be part of what I'm doing. Look, listen and learn. And from then on, Timothy becomes a significant part of Paul's life and his ministry.

In the letters that we see from St. Paul, Timothy is listed as co-author of six of them. And also, as you read through the Bible, there are instances and glimpses of him, sorry, Timothy going on missionary journeys himself, maybe as Paul's deputy.

So he learnt from the master as the apprentice. He followed Paul's example, just as Paul was following Christ. And in the letters that Paul writes to Timothy in one and two, they're filled with lots of advice to the younger man as he takes on leadership roles within the church.

So, who are you following? Have you got a Paul? Who are the Christian men and women that you're looking to as an example?

And whose teaching maybe are you learning from? When you look around, are there anybody that's got similar gifts to yours that you might learn from them how to use them to serve Jesus?

[ 3 : 3 9 ] And when we're doing this, we need wisdom to choose good role models. And the previous chapter in Acts 15 tells us why. So in Acts 15, there was a dispute that the church was trying to intervene with and sort out.

The questions were being asked as to whether people needed to be circumcised and also stick to the Jewish dietary laws before that they could be welcomed into the church as Christians.

This dispute had come about really because there were false teachers teaching unnecessary things. And people had been listening to them in Paul's absence and started to go down the wrong paths.

The church in the end decided that that was wrong. Sadly, there are many today around the world who claim to be Jesus followers. But actually, some of what they say and actually what they do and act is quite dubious.

So we must be wise. The Internet's full of it. The church is unleashed as disciples, as in multiple people following Jesus.

[ 4 : 52 ] But also, as in the singular, one disciple. The church coming together, being unified collectively to follow Jesus. So together, just like the early church did in Acts 15, we must discern the way to follow Jesus.

So if you're hearing things from people that sound a bit dodgy and you're wondering, are they actually good role models to follow? Perhaps it's something that doesn't sound right or you've seen something that you don't like the look of.

You need to talk to others. Talk to other wise people around, maybe people in your small groups. So that together, we can pray and discern what is a good way for us to walk.

And obviously, opinions may slightly vary. But I think that what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11 is a good starting point. When he says, follow my example as I follow Christ, is the person that we're wanting to follow being like Christ?

Is he Christ-like? Does what they say match up to what we read about Jesus in the Bible? And actually, does their life match up to what they say?

[ 6 : 00 ] Have they got integrity there? No one's perfect. So we never just blindly and unquestionably follow someone. But also, we never stop just listening completely to anything someone says, simply because something they said we're not sure about.

But as I said, we don't follow blindly. We must all study the Bible. We must pray and we must discuss questions of faith with others. So when we're looking for role models, let's consciously choose the most godliest people we can.

Now, they don't have to be famous Christians that we've read lots of books about, or we've seen them on television or on Songs of Praise or whatever. Look around more locally as well.

Look around the church. Look at the men and women of Christ that we've got here in our church family. There's always plenty of examples there of good role models to follow. And so for the second part of my talk, I've got another question to ask.

So the second question, who's your Timothy or your Timothys? We may well think, I can't have a Timothy because I haven't got enough experience, or I don't know enough, or I'm a new Christian, or I've not got the right giftings.

[ 7 : 22 ] But like it or not, people, especially from outside the church, they're going to look at you if you proclaim that you're a Christian, and they're going to see you as an example of what a Christian life is.

Also inside the church, our kids and youth especially, are going to be hugely affected and influenced by yourselves, and by growing up in this church.

They're really going to value those conversations they've made with other people other than their family. Those Christians here that take an interest in them, care about them, ask them how they're doing, and pray for them.

They're going to remember that going into adulthood, and that's probably the model of discipleship they'll take with them. People often say that they're only new Christians, and they've got not much to offer.

And we all do grow and learn at different rates and paces, and it's probably, to be fair, not a good idea to throw a newbie Christian into heading up Alpha or something straight away.

[ 8 : 21 ] But, if I'm honest, a lot of people that have said to me that they're new Christians have often been Christians at least as long as me, if not longer than me. They may feel hugely ill-equipped, but they can do it.

You can do it. If we're honest and we think about it, and we think about those people that have influenced ourselves, have encouraged maybe our walk with God, our faith over the years, I'm sure those people too felt hugely in-equipped to be an example also.

So, let's be positive. Just as Paul discerned that Timothy could really benefit from being a disciple of his, have a look.

If you're running a ministry in the church, if you've got a role in the church and you're running something, who are you training up? Who are you allowing to come alongside you and learn from you, so that maybe in a couple of years they can take that ministry role over from you?

If you've got a real gift of praying, praying of intercession, who are you training up to do that to? Have a think. But how can we set a good example?

[ 9 : 33 ] What I would say is that we don't have to have it all worked out and have it all together. We can just seek to follow the example of Jesus one step at a time, and we can get others to follow on behind us one step at a time, or even alongside us one step at a time.

We can learn together how to follow Jesus as his disciple. So, we've been thinking so far about what it looks like to be a disciple individually, but actually, what about the church collectively being a disciple?

What would it look like for us as a community if we lived out this model? Well, our core and leadership team is currently spending time praying and discussing what Christchurch may look like going forward into 2021 and beyond, and hopefully post-COVID pandemic.

It's not going to look the same as it did before, and it can't do. So, I really encourage everyone at Christchurch, take this opportunity to really pray and ask God what this may look like.

In terms of the details of how, where, and when we may meet, that's one thing, but also the bigger picture, the picture of what is this church going to look like as a disciple going forward.

[ 10 : 49 ] A community of disciples where we genuinely all contribute and we all learn from one another, and how the people of Clevedon will have their lives impacted and transformed because of it.

We may, in the past, have thought mainly church on a Sunday as being the main thing. Now, I don't know what things are going to look like, but I do know that we're not going to be effective Christians if we just come and attend and sit and listen to sermons.

There is, of course, a crucial place for sermons and talks. They help us all to grow in our faith and our understanding, to get to know the Bible more, to be encouraged and challenged, and to learn more about who God is and what he wants for us, a bit like the pit stop analogy used earlier today. But we need to put this into practice together. We need to walk together, to follow one another, so that together we can follow the example of Christ. The church has always been understood as a community of disciples, right from when Jesus said, go and make disciples, and also when Paul said, what I received from the Lord, I also passed on to you.

From then on, the faith has been handed down the generations. We're called to receive the faith from those who have gone before us.

[ 12 : 12 ] It's our Christian heritage. We are called to walk in their footsteps and to follow their example. And then we are called to pass that on to the people that follow us and encourage others to follow us as we follow the example of Christ, so that we can live out his purpose for our lives and to equip us all to go out and live for Jesus.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord, help us to be disciples of you. Guide us by your Holy Spirit to think of the people that we can learn from and also the people that we can encourage on their Christian journey too in the days and the weeks ahead.

Help me also to look for and have the qualities of integrity, humility and wisdom to be a better follower of you.

Help us as a church to be prayerful and unified, to work collaboratively and to live to tell the good news of Jesus so that we can make a difference to this town as we are unleashed as disciple. Amen.