

Disciple – big groups of people

Alison and I want to lead a church which takes people who want to be disciples of Jesus, nurtures & equips them and gives them a base from which to go and change the world.

In the third in this series we're going to hear from you about ways in which you want to make a difference, express your calling/gifts/discipleship.

In the second we're going to have an exciting morning hearing about and launching the new Small Groups. Places where you can do life with other people and learn more about being a disciple.

In the first talk of this mini-series I want to share some thoughts with you about how weekly worship is an essential part of our discipleship.

Psalm 96:1-13

1 Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

2 Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.

3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples.

4 For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.

5 For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

6 Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

7 Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

8 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.

9 Worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.

10 Say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns.' The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.

11 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it.

12 Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.

13 Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.

I've been struck by the middle verses in this passage:

7 Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

8 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.

9 Worship the Lord in the splendour of his[a] holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.

There are several Psalms like this – which leave you with the sense of a community of people who are experiencing the presence of God in their lives and who can't wait to gather all together to worship.

Bring an offering, the Psalmist says, and come into the courts of the Lord. It's not just a financial offering but an offering of praise and story-telling and the giving of self.

In the New Testament, after Jesus has ascended and sent His Holy Spirit to His disciples we get a similar picture.

Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

It wasn't particularly complicated, all pretty simple really. Sharing and eating together, praying together, being taught and learning together, worshipping and going out to do the stuff – then coming back to tell stories and celebrate and worship some more and share some more. All ages involved. They gathered to scatter and then gathered again.

Doing church is a team sport. Rugby not tennis. You are in an orchestra, you're not a soloist. You need time on your own to get fit, to sharpen your skills, to learn new things and get your attitude right. But it is when we all come together that the event happens.

For us, at this time, this happens at weekly worship. This is when we all come together to say thank you to God for what He has done in our lives during the week, to worship together and learn, to pray for each other and be sent back out into the community nurtured and equipped a little more – to be disciples wherever you are, the church gathered and then scattered again before it regroups next week.

Different times and places are possible but by and large Sunday mornings works best for most people most of the time. Saturday afternoons are best for playing a rugby match, Saturday evening is best to go and listen to a band or an orchestra and Sunday

morning is generally best to gather the disciples together to celebrate what God is doing amongst us.

Family business

I know that some of us ...

- Find it hard to prioritise coming (and bringing the family) to weekly worship
- Don't feel any great affinity with Headingley
- Find this sanctuary, the pews, entranceway etc restricting and uninspiring
- Wish we had better spaces for Vineyard Kids
- Feel constrained by the short time we have available together
- Would prefer the worship music to be louder, or quieter, or to use different songs or a different style
- Like the teaching style here but some would prefer other interactive/creative/discussion forms
- Wish we had space to hang out near, but not too near, to read the paper, have a drink – mingle with friends before and after

When Leeds Vineyard first started meeting on Sundays we were smaller and used many different venues: sports centres, schools, hotels. Generally speaking they allowed us more flexibility and creativity and relational life. But they also had their weaknesses which we didn't like at the time.

The truth is that we will never have the perfect venue and that God has clearly placed us in Headingley for the duration. When HMC invited us to rent this building on a Sunday morning it was clearly something from God too.

Nevertheless, it does feel a bit like a sports team without its own ground or an orchestra without its own concert venue. Always dependent upon other people's hospitality, having to rehearse and train in different places, unable to try out different things easily or do things in different ways.

At one level that is all irrelevant – we are called to gather together (for us on Sunday mornings), whether we feel like it or not -

Verse 8: Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.

We are called to gather together with our offering – of ourselves – to celebrate, worship, learn, share, pray and spend time with each other as best we can. Whether or not the place and timing and style suits us!

If you find yourself in a church that does meet all your needs, be very careful. It's not the Vineyard but it may be a cult.

But – that doesn't mean we are settling down to this format and situation for ever. I recognise that Leeds Vineyard needs something different and although I don't know what that looks like yet, we are actively waiting on God for direction and provision. I know that He will give us what we need, when we need it. He always does.

But in the meantime:

- pursue your own walk with God
- do life with one another in small groups
- find somewhere to serve and express your gifting and calling
- and bring it all together on a Sunday to celebrate with the family, to learn and to minister to one another.

DISCIPLESHIP

You can self-diagnose your discipleship health by your attitude to weekly worship.

When you decide to follow Jesus, you join his family, his church. He invites you to enter his courts together. Hebrews says, “do not forsake meeting together”. It's so different from the world – where we default to doing what is easy, comfortable, with people we know.

So if you choose to stay at home, stay with family, do a hobby – rather than gather for worship – that tells you something about your discipleship.

To cross that threshold, or the front door of someone's home to go to housegroup, is not always easy. But that's the point. God grows us as disciples through each other.

Let's say you are here – you can tell a lot about your discipleship from where you are sitting, from your posture, from the way you engage with worship and the opportunity to share with each other and minister to each other.

Think about it – where you are in the room, what your attitude was in worship time. Have you come with a word for someone? When someone asks for prayer are you the first to jump up and offer to pray?

Your attitude isn't, David's a rubbish teacher, I'll check my emails – but God, please speak to me, even through him!

Your attitude isn't, I Don't like the way X leads worship, I don't like this song – but God, I'll lose myself in worship whatever. I'll use these words to sing of what You have done for me and to worship You – even if I don't get a chance to share with anyone any other way, I'll testify to God's grace in my life through these songs.

I'll give of my time and energy – maybe I'll bring an offering by serving the children, helping them to grow as disciples and learning about you from them too.

I'll bring an offering by serving on set up or AV or PA in order to help others do their job better.

I would love you to come here on a Sunday morning with every intention of sharing your offering.

First time visitors and guests

Thank you for coming. I know it can be really difficult. Well done and welcome.

My prayer is that you'll meet with God today. The fact that you're here is a statement of your discipleship even if it is early days for you.

That's why Rob's Café team and Hannah's welcome team are so important. Their smile and welcome is saying to the person for whom this is a first time or a difficult thing – you're welcome, we like you, please join us, we're not going to judge you or make you do weird things or expose you.

Why don't we leave the edges of the room for 1st time visitors so they aren't forced to come to the front?

Discipleship is many things – but one thing is gathering with the family in order to scatter. You can tell how you're doing in discipleship by examining how you respond to the Psalmist's invitation,

Verse 8: *Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.*

Let's use what we have here - the predictability and consistency and geography to do two things:

1. plan weekly worship into your calendar as a priority for you and your family
2. ask God to show you which friend or neighbour you can invite

Let's pray for the Lord to open up opportunities for even better places and ways of celebrating together as disciples of Jesus here in Headingley.

Alison and I want to lead a church which takes people who want to be disciples of Jesus, nurtures them and gives them a base from which to go and change the world.

Bring your life, your stories, come prepared to share and minister to one another. Let's make this a great place to be on Sunday mornings because we can hear and see God at work in each other's lives and in the world around us.

David Flowers

6 September 2015