**Making disciples of Jesus – 1 Thessalonians 1-2**

Battery Point, 30 Aug 2020

**Intro:**

6 months ago we had never heard of ‘social isolation.” Now we are becoming experts. We know what it’s like to live in our homes for 3-4 months with only occasional face to face conversations at the supermarket or chemist from 1.5 metres away. A couple of weeks ago I spoke with someone who had just put petrol in their car for the first time since March!

We have experienced being isolated as Christians and a church, and we’ve tried to work out how to be a community of God’s people when we can only use computers or phones. Victor has had to work out how to pastor you when he couldn’t meet up. How would he and Tristan make disciples of Jesus in Battery Point during coronavirus? Or now when some of you can meet up and some can’t? How do you as a church makes other disciples of Jesus now?

Isolation was something that also happened at times at the beginning of the church. The apostle Paul, one of the first church leaders, was isolated from a church in a town called Thessalonica in Macedonia, southern Europe.

Paul founded the church and was only with them for maybe a few weeks, or months, before he was forced to leave by a riot in the city (Acts 17) – people were out to get him, and any other followers of Jesus. He was run out of town. The group of locals who he had told about Jesus were in some trouble too – their leaders were up before the courts. There was no email, phones, Australia Post, Facebook, zoom, no way of hearing how they were going, these young vulnerable Christians, who had to grow up in a hurry.

So Paul sent a younger leader, Timothy, back to Thessalonica to see how they were, travelling hundreds of kilometres away (like walking to Battery Point from Strahan). It would have taken many months until Timothy could return to Paul and let him know how this young church was coping.

After a year or 18 months of waiting, Paul was so thankful to hear that this group of baby Christians was OK. To Paul’s delight, they weren’t merely surviving, they were thriving, growing, healthy disciples of Jesus. He can’t help but thank God for them in this letter, he’s overjoyed.

**Stages of making disciples: 1:5-8 – Bill Hull (disciple making church)**

Paul had a strategy to help the people in that church live out their faith in difficult circumstances, and help others experience the hope and joy they had through their new faith in Jesus.

Paul’s strategy was in three parts: it comes from 1 Thessalonians 1:4-9 in the New Testament.

Demonstration, imitation and reproduction.

1. **Demonstration (read verse 5)**

Paul was quite happy to point to the way that he and the others with him lived - for those months spent in Thessalonica. You know how we lived among you, for your sake. ‘

2:8 – “we shared our lives”. They had many meals together, stayed in homes together, worked together, had long discussions about God and his ways together.

Their sacrificial unselfishness was demonstrated - 2:9 – “you remember how we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel.” Paul often worked his trade making tents (in 2020 he would have worked for Kathmandu or Mountain Designs) – and he did this so that his role of evangelist was freely given.

Their character was demonstrated – 2:11 – we dealt with you - encouraging, comforting, urging.

So the first stage of making disciples is to live your life and faith out in close proximity to others. You might be socially distanced but others can still see how you use your money and your time, how you speak and act online, how you are different to the average Aussie because you follow Jesus.

We demonstrate our Christian faith to our next door neighbours – not just when we drive off to church, but to the person serving us at the supermarket; to our kids or grandkids schoolteacher; to our non-Christian family members and friends.

This is mildly terrifying! But remember that Paul also calls himself “the worst of sinners” – he has no illusions that he lives perfectly. But he is able to live out the life of a disciple of Jesus forgiven by God and being changed by God’s spirit. Demonstration.

1. **Imitation**

The second stage of making disciples is imitation. Verse 6 – “you became imitators of us and the Lord.” Elsewhere Paul says, “imitate me as I imitate Christ.”

I can remember lots of times when I started to hear things come out of my kids mouths that I realised sounded like me. When they do things that I do. Unconsciously, they imitate me in many ways – for good and bad!

The Thessalonian Christians imitated Paul and his team. Later, in 2:14 we read “they became imitators of God’s churches in Judea.” They imitated the Christians around them.

When you are making disciples, they will start to imitate you. They will lead the kids club like you do, or care in the community like you do or post on Facebook like you do. They will use the same words and phrases to teach others or lead the service or prayers that you do. Imitation.

1. **Reproduction**

The third stage in making disciples is reproduction. READ v7-9.

The word “model”, *tupos* in Greek is used to mean things like the design stamped on a coin; or more broadly a pattern to be followed.

The design stamped on the Christian in the Thessalonian church then became a design reproduced in other disciples. Like a coin machine owned by the Reserve Bank of Australia producing thousands of coins, all with the same design characteristics – the Thessalonian Christians, who were known for their faith, love and hope, who were known for turning from idols to serve the living God – they became a design model for many others.

Have you ever thought that about the reason why you sit here today as a disciple of Jesus? One reason is that at least 20 generations of Christian over the past 2000 years have reproduced the same design model of faith, over and over, through demonstration, imitation, and reproduction.

The church in Battery Point needs to be reproducing more generations of disciples – that’s the mission Jesus gave us, one main reason for our being.

So, we have these three stages of making disciples in chapter 1. Demonstration, imitation, and reproduction.

Then in chapter 2 of Thessalonians we see a bit more of the “how”. How do we make disciples?

**How do you do it? (2:7-13)**

1. **Like a mother (2:7-8)**

Verse7-8 – *Just as a nursing mother care for her children we cared for you.* Think about how a mother cares for a young child – they feed them, protect them, comfort them, love them. They meet their needs in a close attentive way. That’s how we spiritually make disciples. We meet the spiritual needs of young and new disciples of Jesus in the most tender, caring way.

Most of you won’t remember being a baby! And it’s easy for us who have been a Christian for a long time to forget what it was like as a new Christian. But if you are a new Christian you might not know how to look up a verse in the bible, how to pray, how to serve God. Your spiritual fervour might swing from wildly enthusiastic to down in the dumps as you experience how wonderful and how challenging it is to follow Jesus. New believers need the loving close care a mother gives a young child.

1. **Like a father**

We make disciples like a mother. We also make disciples like a father. READ 2:11-12

Again this an individual approach, 1-1. Particularly this focusses on how a new follower of Jesus should live. To encourage is to literally “put courage in” someone. Following Jesus in Thessalonica 2000 years ago in the face of riots and persecution took courage. Following Jesus in 21st century Australia also take courage. Courage to live a life different from our next door neighbours and work colleagues and family members. To live a life worthy of God.

Of course both men and women can care and urge and lead. But these images from 1st century family life give us a picture of loving, caring and nurturing, as well as leading, guiding and challenging, that each of us, male or female, needs to provide for newer disciples of Jesus. And making disciples is a group thing – each new disciple in Battery Point Church will need the gifts and support of the whole church, not just one person, in order for them to grow and mature.

1. **With the word of God**

The last bit of the “how” to make disciples is found in v13. READ 2:13.

We make disciples using the word of God, the bible. Why? Because we are making disciples of Jesus, not disciples of Stephen, or Victor. And we get to know God, and his Son Jesus through the bible. We get to know how a disciple of Jesus should behave, what their life motivations should be, how they should use their money and time, how they should have relationships, what sort of character they should develop. It’s all found in the word of God.

We need to teach new disciples of Jesus how to use the word of God in their life. That might be showing them a Read the bible in a year app on their phone. It might be reading through on one of the gospels, with them over a few months. Or pointing them towards the Ridley or Moore Certificate course – Introduction to the bible. Using the wisdom and teaching of the bible to answer their questions and help them make Godly decisions as we live our lives alongside them. The bible is the course curriculum for making disciples, but it’s much more than that – we meet God in and through his word to us.

So, to summarise, we make disciples through a pattern of demonstration, imitation and reproduction. And we do it with the gentle care of a mother, the encouragement and urging of a father, and with the word of God.

**Who should you disciple in 2020?**

This isn’t just Tristan or Victor’s job. When Jesus said go into all the world and make disciples it was first to the apostles, but then passed on to every new believer. If you are a disciple of Jesus, then part of your call is to make other disciples.

Why don’t you think of three people that you can care for and encourage spiritually over the next few months.

* 1. **Someone in your family** - a child or grandchild or niece or nephew or cousin, maybe a close friend
  2. **Someone in your church** - wouldn’t it be great if every more experienced church member in Battery Point met regularly with a newer follower of Jesus to mentor and guide them.
  3. **Someone who doesn’t yet know the hope you have in Jesus** … someone you would love to share that hope with.

Ring them, email them, if you are out to get groceries drop a card in their letterbox. Pray for them. Share the hope you have, and how in these difficult times Jesus is your hope and strength.

Imagine how joyful it will be if after 12 months I visit you again and celebrate all the people God has enabled you to share your hope and love with and how God has sustained you and grown you during this time when the foundations of our world have been shaking!

That’s the plan that Jesus has for his church, so social isolation or not, let’s all be a part of that in 2020!

PRAYER