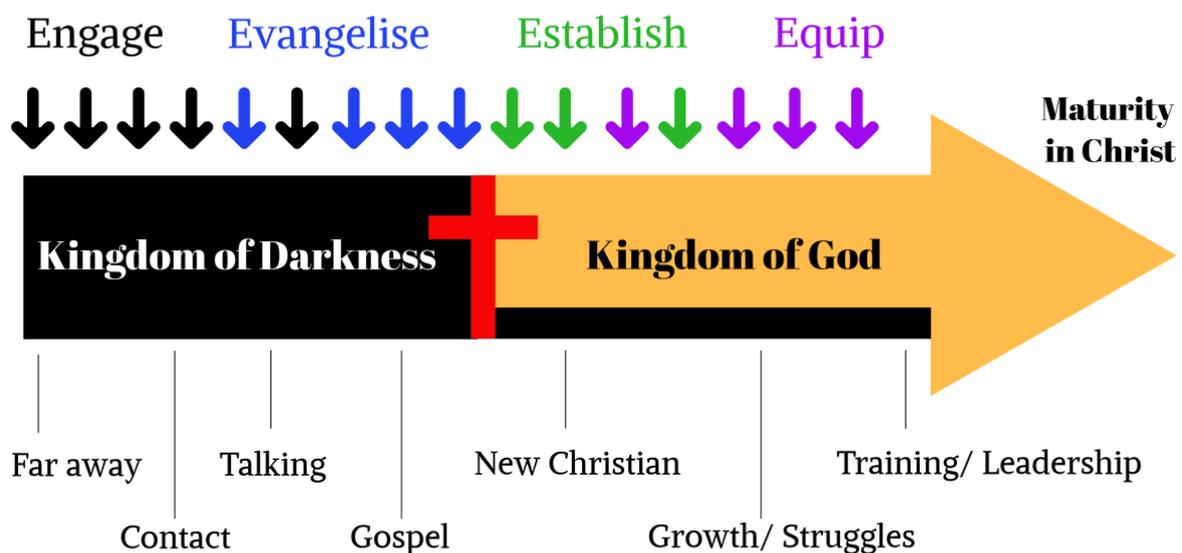


Over the last few weeks we've been thinking about making disciples and, hopefully, those of you who are here regularly will know we're using four words starting with the letter E to help us remember how what we're doing:



Making disciples involves us encouraging and enabling people to move to the right, towards becoming spiritually mature followers of Jesus. When you look at the four E words: Engage, Evangelise, Establish, Equip and you can see that it needs people with a range of talents and abilities – that's us. God has given every one of his people gifts:

1 Cor 12:27-31 ²⁷ *Together you are the body of Christ. Each one of you is part of his body.* ²⁸ *First, God chose some people to be apostles and prophets and teachers for the church. But he also chose some to work miracles or heal the sick or help others or be leaders or speak different kinds of languages.* ²⁹ *Not everyone is an apostle. Not everyone is a prophet. Not everyone is a teacher. Not everyone can work miracles.* ³⁰ *Not everyone can heal the sick. Not everyone can*

speaking different kinds of languages. Not everyone can tell what these languages mean. ³¹ I want you to desire the best gifts.^[e] So I will show you a much better way.

The point is that we need each other:

1 Cor 12:25-26 (MSG) ²⁵⁻²⁶ *The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.*

So, if you are good (back to the arrow pic) at making friends easily we want you at the engaged end of things. Of course, relationships are important all the way through, but we know that people are more likely to engage in talking or thinking about faith with someone they already know and like. What we learned on the 'Talking Jesus' course is that more people are willing to have a conversation about God or faith than we imagine – the problem is not them, it's us. We make all sorts of excuses for not sharing our story with others. If your gift is hospitality, you can find a place anywhere. If your gift is teaching, you'll be better placed from the middle to the right. The point is that everyone, all of us who believe and are trying to follow Jesus, have a part to play in 'moving people to the right', more commonly called making disciples.

So, what do we learn from our reading today?

First, there is a harvest to bring in. The first thing we need to acknowledge is that there are people who don't know Jesus but who need to get to know him.

John 17:3 (CEV) ³ *Eternal life is to know you, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, the one you sent.*

John also records Jesus telling Nicodemus that anyone who believes that Jesus is God will receive eternal life with God. We all know people who don't believe: family members, friends, work colleagues and neighbours. That's the harvest. You might argue that they're not interested. In fact, some are openly hostile to you and to any talk

about faith. I know that and I have experienced it. What I also know is that harvesting is easier if your scythe is sharp. I think that we can metaphorically sharpen our scythes by spending a regular time with God. I believe that prayer works. Prayer can change circumstances and people. What difference might it make if you spent time each day praying for the people you know you are going to meet. Praying that God would work in their lives and that he would give you insight and understanding of how to respond to them. It's not about being all super-spiritual, bible bashing, in your face arguing. There is another way:

Second: Bring a blessing

“Peace to this house” was a powerful blessing. The word for peace is shalom and it speaks of wholeness, soundness and spiritual well-being. It was used to pray for the blessing of God to come on someone or a household. Here, the seventy-two were to go into the town and find people of peace, people who would welcome them and show hospitality.

Those people still exist in our communities and we are still encouraged to find them. I remember Alan McWilliam in Whiteinch talking a lot about this when I was on placement there. They had made contact with people in the council, community groups, social work etc who were not Christian but who recognised the benefit the church brought to the area, and so were willing to work with them for the benefit of the people of Whiteinch. These are modern day people of peace, and we have them in Ayrshire too.

Third: God is at work

As if actually sharing faith with someone wasn't enough, here we are being told to heal people as well. Of course we could argue that this was a one off instruction that couldn't possibly apply to us today.

Unfortunately when Jesus sent out the 12 Mark 6:12 ¹² *They went out and preached that people should repent.* ¹³ *They drove out many demons and anointed with oil many people who were ill and healed them.*

Luke 9:6 ⁶ *So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.*

And, even Matthew gets in on the act: Matthew 10:7-8 ⁷ *As you go, proclaim this message: “The kingdom of heaven has come near.”* ⁸ *Heal those who are ill, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.*

I think that in the West we have tended, perhaps because of our focus on the importance of the written and spoken word, to minimise or even ignore the miraculous. The message of the kingdom of God is powerful and life changing and it is entirely proper that there are times when speaking about that kingdom is accompanied by miraculous events. If shalom is about peace, wholeness and spiritual well being, why would Jesus, the Prince of Peace, not want to bring wholeness to people who respond. But it is also important to note that our passage today says ‘heal’ then ‘tell’. Show the power of God to heal and bring real shalom, then tell them who it is that has been at work. I find that very challenging.

Do I really expect God to move in power? Would I be willing to go out there and try it?

Fourth: share the gospel

There comes a point where we must explain who Jesus is.

Romans 10:9-10 ⁹ *So you will be saved, if you honestly say, “Jesus is Lord,” and if you believe with all your heart that God raised him from death.* ¹⁰ *God will accept you and save you, if you truly believe this and tell it to others.*

Note the connection to believing and saying. I have heard people say that their faith is a private thing and I have to hold myself back from responding to that. Faith is a community thing and it is a personal thing, but it is never a private thing. If we are believers we have a responsibility to share faith.

Ezekiel 3:16-19 ¹⁶ *Seven days after I had seen the brightness of the Lord’s glory, the Lord said:*

¹⁷ *Ezekiel, son of man, I have appointed you to stand watch for the people of Israel. So listen to what I say, then warn them for me.* ¹⁸ *When I tell wicked people they will die because of their sins, you must warn them to turn from their sinful ways so they won’t be*

punished. If you refuse, you are responsible for their death. ¹⁹ However, if you do warn them, and they keep on sinning, they will die because of their sins, and you will be innocent.

What if we did this? _____, I have appointed you to stand watch for the people of _____. So listen to what I say, then warn them for me. ¹⁸ When I tell wicked people they will die because of their sins, you must warn them to turn from their sinful ways so they won't be punished. If you refuse, you are responsible for their death.

It may be that you're thinking that was a specific call to Ezekiel, and you would be right. But many things that were written to specific people apply to all of us.

Paul puts it a little less aggressively in Romans 10:14-15 ¹⁴ *How can people have faith in the Lord and ask him to save them, if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear, unless someone tells them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone tell them without being sent by the Lord? The Scriptures say it is a beautiful sight to see even the feet of someone coming to preach the good news.*

Fifth: Jesus sends us.

It's easy to skim over things in a familiar passage. We tend to jump to the harvest and the thought that we might be expected to do some of that work. It's easy then to miss the bit that says, 'after this the Lord appointed....' After what? Sending out the twelve and hearing what they had done; seeing the miracle of feeding the 5000; Peter declaring that Jesus was the Messiah; Jesus healing a demon-possessed boy. They were seeing the power of God in action and so there was an expectation that God would continue to work in that way. It was not a surprise to them that they would be asked to do the same as their master was doing – that was a mark of discipleship, learning from and following the practices of your teacher.

We know more about who Jesus is and what he accomplished at Calvary than his disciples did when they went out, yet we find it hard to get excited, or sometimes even vaguely interested, about this whole thing. When they came back they were full of excitement that even

demons had fled from them. They had seen God at work. They had seen lives transformed and people responding to the message and I wonder if we're not like that because we don't see that very often. It's hard to expect something that you've not really experienced. When we don't see people being healed it's hard to believe it happens. When we don't see people being converted it becomes hard to believe it happens, and we get caught in a cycle that says the church is dying and people are not interested, and even if we do speak to them, nothing is going to happen.

Jesus told the 72 it was more important that their names were recorded in heaven than what they had experienced. We should rejoice that our names are recorded in heaven but we also need to remember that there is still a great harvest to bring in. We are not alone though. Jesus is Lord of the harvest. He is already at work in the world and has promised to go with us into the harvest field.