

Mission Impossible?

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I think most Christians are not ignorant of the Great Commission. Often, I have heard people cite Matthew 28:19, “Go and make disciples”, yet beyond that, an ignorance prevails.

Problems exist at a structural level, typically because our first encounters with Jesus were filtered through buildings, good sermons or mass evangelism. Jesus made it clear that the priority is relational discipleship, yet if we have not been discipled ourselves, what hope can we have of replicating or emulating such a mandate?

Who can say they had a mentor?

Bible colleges and seminaries teach theology and methodology, but those who minister or care authentically must receive relational inculcation. Paul told the Corinthians, “I became your father through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15), yet this concept seems foreign today, as a fatherless culture is rife throughout our sacred spaces.

Perhaps we are willing to be sent? To go into unfamiliar situations, locally or nationally and present Christ and model his ways, demonstrating the gospel. But we can only draw on resources first bestowed upon us. Arguably, the Church has moved away from a congruent fraternity in favour of programs, courses, and meritocracy. When Jesus called his disciples, he appointed them “so that they would be with him and that he could send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14). Jesus’ first desire was for a relationship; the work of the ministry was secondary.

Today, these roles are reversed, while countless ministries have abandoned discipleship in favour of business models. Furthermore, people lack patience for the process. Long-suffering was once a thing, and there is nothing glamorous or sensational about discipleship: Allocating several years to leading a small group seems unimpressive compared to marking one’s CV, as CEO of a non-profit.

Then there are people’s frustrations. People are untidy. They sin, they drag their heels, they cavort, they lie, they are unappreciative, and in the case of Peter (supposedly your best student), they deny they ever knew you if challenged by an old hag around a campfire.

It’s one thing to approach this endeavour if your life is straight. But what if you belong to a Church full of unresolved conflicts, personal brokenness and the unhealed many. For example, only in the last two weeks have seismic eruptions flooded the internet regarding Bethel’s handling of Shawn Bolz. The supposed ‘Senior’ leadership team are all implicated in gross ineptitude and in the unbiblical management of a situation they helped create.

Given how the victims are feeling right now, some commentators might argue that mission is not such a good idea! Given the countless Churches worldwide that have modelled

themselves on such dire teaching, is there an argument for calling time on mission endeavours? Perhaps the age of wholesale evangelism is over, or should be over, if multiplying heresy and exporting apostasy are risks that far outweigh the benefits Jesus intended. Is that, then, a valid call to keep discipleship truly personal and local, thus eliminating contagion?

The analogy of the Roman Road network, antiquity's version of the internet, perhaps offers a compromise. Connecting the Church, but at least when something went wrong, writing an epistle corrected flawed teaching, mission and practice in ways live streaming and social media today fail to do.

Ultimately, though, huge egos dwarf even competent business models. I have often said it suits insecure pastors to keep spoon-feeding molasses, for fear of being usurped by mature believers. Current protectionism is opposed to the concept of sacrifice that discipleship might otherwise demand.