



Whole life discipleship

Main video

Colossians 3:17 is a favourite of mine and it says, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

Whatever you do.

In my time giving a theme as Vice President and President of Baptists Together, I’m emphasising two things in particular – *missional communities*, or alternative gatherings as we call them; and *whole life discipleship* – as well as picking up a whole variety of good news stories from churches around the UK.

But it could be argued, “What’s the connection between those two things? They seem in some ways to be really very, very different.” I’d want to say there is lots of overlap, and in many ways they convey some of the same sorts of lessons for us as churches. Let me refer to my list here and point out some of the ways in which both of those themes cover some of the same ground.

1. So, in terms of the way we already do church services, both the whole life discipleship emphasis and the alternative gatherings or missional communities emphasis honour existing church services but say that we must think beyond that as well.
2. Both have a soft distinction between evangelism and discipleship, that it’s all being a follower of Jesus, and that evangelism isn’t a separate thing for super elite Christians, it’s all part of the discipleship package.
3. They both say that it’s not a new or novel programme that we’re calling our churches to. To emphasise whole-life discipleship is an all-pervading value that we convey in all that we do rather than creating something new that says it. It’s the same with missional communities; it’s not so much what’s on the church programme, as the values that we hold and way that we apply them.
4. They both have an attitude of thinking out there – beyond our existing church building; the language of gathered and scattered; that we can emphasise too much what happens when we’re gathered together and emphasise too little what happens when we’re scattered and apart.
5. They both have a theology that emphasises the lordship of Christ everywhere: that everywhere can be spiritual when it’s committed to our God.
6. They both have the idea of not doing more in the life of our church, but doing or emphasising different and that’s important in our busy times.
7. They both think beyond attractional ways of doing church, though that can be valid sometimes, but looking at going to people rather than just inviting them to things.
8. They’re not just asking, “What can we do?” but asking, “What is God doing already in the life of our people and how can we join in with them?”



9. And they both have issues of language, so we need to look at what language and terms dominate, what stories dominate in the life of our church.
10. And they both, if we take them seriously, are about moving and changing the culture of our church. Somebody said once, “Culture eats vision for breakfast” and that’s true, and so if we’re taking on board either or both of these values they’ll be long term things rather than short term things.

I wanted to list those out for you because it conveys some of the thinking or theology behind the two main things I’m emphasising. Maybe if you revisit that list a number of questions or ideas will flow from your discussions.

Feedback video

So, having listed that connection between my two emphases, take either or both of them.

I’ve been asked the question as a leader, “If I’m just starting off emphasising either or both of those things, where do I start? Where do I begin to move forward with those things?” At the risk of sounding over spiritual or trite I’d want to emphasise prayer first of all. We need to start by praying these things through and then we do need to take them personally.

And before we apply them in the life of our church to some people in our church who should really be doing this whole life thing we need to be applying it to our own lives.

And then thirdly, I do want to resource people during my time as vice president and president and my website which will appear on the screen is designed to do that. I’m interested to see whether a group of our churches want to join in this story and see where that takes us. What would it be like if a number of our churches took it seriously - take the whole-life disciple example - took it seriously to emphasise that in our teaching and small group programmes, in our leaders’ discussions for a season. What great stories would come out of that? What kingdom growth could flow from that?

So there’s a place on my website where you can say, “Yes, I want to join the story”, and there’s more detail there as to what that exactly means to join in the story, and there’s a blog and news page that has more detail too and that will be regularly updated with thoughts and ideas. Feel free to use or steal any of them for sermons or illustrations and take full credit for them, that’s absolutely fine.

Then, in addition to that, there are some other organisations that are key. Our own denomination website is there; the Baptist missionary society, BMS World Mission is there; and also LICC are there and, in my view, they are trailblazers in our country for helping people engage with this theme of whole life discipleship, so take a look at their resources and their training and the packages you can get from them.