

The Acorn Vision



**Going and making Disciples of
Jesus Christ.....**

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We have grown up *going to Church*. We have been very involved in the *ministries of the local Church*, and we have always gone to *big Church* on Sunday mornings, *smaller and more informal Church* on Wednesday evenings and *Church in disguise* on Saturday mornings, where you invite unsuspecting friends to a breakfast or other event aimed at introducing them to the *Real Church*. After being very happy with all of this for over 20 years something has happened though. God has taken the carpet from under our feet.....

Where did it all start to go wrong?! Well like usual, God uses hardship and suffering to teach us deeper things! During a time of illness we began to explore what it meant to be a Disciple of Jesus when you could not fill up all your time with church programmes, evangelistic events and where often we could not even “Go” to church on a Sunday morning.....Sure we still wanted to share our lives with other believers and we wanted to live the life of a believer as described in scripture. But we began to see things from outside of the “Church Box” that we had grown up in. Maybe there was more to this life with Jesus than going to predictable meetings on a Wednesday and a Sunday? Maybe Father God is more concerned about the spread of His Kingdom in the world than what the music was like inside the “Church building” on Sunday morning. When God confronts you, it involves asking yourself the hard questions. We began to ask ourself hard questions like *“What does it mean to seek first the Kingdom of God?” (Matthew 6:33)* and *“What did Jesus actually ask His disciples to do?”*

Some people who don't know us very well think we have lost the plot! Those who know us understand our genuineness. We are not doing what we are doing to criticise, rubbish or question the integrity, commitment or faith of people who live out their walk with Jesus through more traditional forms of Church life. We are not doing what we are doing to establish some Elite group of Super-Believers who are too good to rub shoulders with 'Normal Christians.' And to be honest we have no desire to enter into lengthy discussions about 'what is Church'. **What we are doing however is questioning whether what we are doing as “The Church of Jesus Christ” fits with what God wants.** If you do not want to ask yourself and your fellowship the hard questions then don't bother reading any more of this and continue with your life! If you do, then read on..... Our hope is that the thoughts we have written down here will help to lay some kind of foundation about what Father God requires from people who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ and how effectively we are doing what Jesus commanded His Disciples to do. If the world is to be reached with the knowledge of the one true God – which is what Jesus asked His disciples to do – then we need to re-look at what we are doing...



Over recent years we have had the privilege of meeting brothers and sisters in Christ from all over the UK and Europe. Everywhere we go we are met with genuine followers of Jesus asking the same questions. “Church attendance” is falling drastically. “Going to Church” just seems so disconnected with the daily reality of a believer as put forth in scripture. And people who love Jesus are just fed up with something that seems to have no life and real power in it. There are some who have turned to 'slagging off' the church, criticising 'leaders' and finding ways of doing things which release their frustrations. There are some who are faithfully 'serving' while trying to keep a lid on their growing frustrations. Then there is another group of people. People like us. Maybe people like you as well. We have grown up with how things have always been. We have been very happy 'fitting in'. But we have a clear sense that things must change. Don't ask how or why we feel like this but we do. The way ahead seems very unclear but the need for change is something which we constantly feel. I want to suggest that there is a way forward which is not the result of frustration or the desire to 'do our own thing'. But rather a way which God leads into. A way of doing things that 'fits' with the things that God has put on your heart.

For years we have been involved with Churches where people have talked about God doing 'new things'. Prophetic words have poured out about New Wineskins and about God bringing great Revivals. Forgive me for being a little cynical but 10 or 15 years later has anything changed here in the UK? There is some encouragement but generally I feel rather the opposite has happened. We are meeting more and more followers of Jesus who are disillusioned and don't know how to 'live out' their growing sense of uneasiness with how things are. The clear call to 'scriptural discipleship' is there but as a whole we seem powerless to step up to the mark and do it. It is like believers and fellowships here in the UK and the Western World are realising that there is little or no foundation to what they are “doing”. Everywhere we go there is a sense that God is stirring people's hearts but that it all seems incompatible with the 'status quo' within 'Church Circles'. I want to suggest that we need to re-examine the foundation upon which we are doing everything. If we don't then the house will never be built correctly....This is why we are writing this little booklet. Not because we have all the answers – but because we feel God has shown us part of the answer! And to find the answers we need to first ask the questions....Paul writes in Ephesians 4 that there are different gifts given to build up the Church and to equip the saints for the work of ministry. We feel our part to play is to share these foundations which we are basing our lives and ministry upon and in doing so our hope is that many other people will be equipped to make disciples of the nations and in doing so fulfilling the will of Father God. We like to think of it as a ground level strategy!



Like many others we have sensed God calling us to serve Him and to do things which appear very different to how other people are doing things. Even our closest Christian friends have questioned us. Our simple desire is to live as scripture tells us to. Nothing more, nothing less. Some people don't like this but then we are often reminded that some people didn't like what Jesus and His friends did! We began to ask ourselves , *"What does Father God want?"* And we began to see again that He has revealed what He wants through scripture. We are seeing again what Jesus said to people, what He revealed about the Father and ultimately what He commanded His disciples to go and do. So this quest to find the new things of God has led us back to the foundation that God has revealed through scripture. This is the lesson we can learn from places around the world where the Kingdom of God is growing and where the Church of Jesus Christ is multiplying. And it is the lesson we can learn from faithful servants of God who are working with the Spirit of God to see regions and nations transformed through multiplying churches. They are not doing anything new – but are returning to the Apostolic foundations laid down by Jesus Christ Himself in scripture. As far as we can see these are the foundational things that we see in scripture:

Jesus Christ, who expressed the fullest revelation of Father God (John 1:14, Colossians 1:19, Hebrews 1:1–3) clearly stated that He came to seek and save the lost. (Matthew 18:11, Mark 1:38, Mark 2:17, John 3:17) Jesus Christ was not a pastor, an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist or a teacher. He fully expressed everything about God. In the absence of Jesus it is now the Holy Spirit filled body of Christ – equipped by the giftings He gives – that carries on this work of revealing the fullness of The Father to the world. (Matthew 5:14, Ephesians 3:10, Ephesians 4:11–17) If we want to see what the Father wants then we look at Jesus Christ who perfectly revealed the Father. So this is foundational to our understanding of "The Church" and what God wants His people to be doing here on Earth. If the fullest expression of God the Father we have EVER received was ALL about seeking and saving the lost then what does that tell us about what we should be doing? That thought alone would drastically change what the Church of Jesus Christ looked like in the UK and more importantly how it functioned. According to scripture, the Holy Spirit now gives gifts to the body of Christ to help it become more like Jesus. **Surely one of these gifts is men and women who will bring us back to this foundation – that one of the foundational things that God requires from His children is to personally and corporately give themselves to His mission of seeking and saving the lost. In my opinion these types of people are Apostolic in that they see who is lost and they go to them in order see the Kingdom growing amongst them. In the UK we are used to a pastoral church, a prophetic church, a teaching church. If we truly desire to be faithful**



to the will of Father God as revealed through the written and living word then we desperately need to get back to building everything we are doing upon the Apostolic Foundation of "The Church". All the other giftings fit together as we work towards the 'Apostolic Task.' We need men and women here in the UK who will carry towns/cities and regions in their heart and ask "What will it take to see this region disciplined for Jesus Christ." It is not about roles and pecking orders. But it is recognising what God wants and how we all effectively work together for the sake of the Kingdom. I often imagine in the book of Acts how the churches in peoples homes and in the temple were multiplying. And I often imagine what it has must have been like when they were scattered through persecution. The one thing I know though is that there was a clear Apostolic foundation. 12 Men saw what Jesus did and what He lived for. Jesus told them to basically go and do what He had been doing (**John 17:18, John 20:21**) and to do it there in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. (**Acts 1:8**) I have to ask myself whether I am serious about the things that Jesus said. Presumably when Jesus told His followers to go and make disciples of all nations, to baptize people and to teach people to do everything that Jesus had taught them to do (**Matthew 28:19-21**) – He actually wanted them to do it. Presumably when Jesus said that the Holy Spirit was going to come upon the Disciples and that they would be His witnesses locally, nationally and then internationally (**Acts 1:8**) – He actually meant for them to do it.

We must measure and test everything that we are doing as "The Church" of Jesus Christ up against the mission of Jesus Christ. Scripture is very clear from start to finish about this. In Genesis God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful, to multiply and to fill the earth (**Genesis 1:28**) When Jesus sent out His Disciples He too told them to be fruitful, to multiply and fill the earth. (**Matthew 28:19-21**) So did God really mean that Adam and Eve should have lots of Children and fill the earth. Of course He did. It wasn't an impossible goal. It was something that God gave to them to guide their actions – to help them know that they were on the right track. To help them know what they should be doing. After all God is a Father who delights in revealing Himself to His children isn't He. So did Jesus really mean for His Disciples to be fruitful, to multiply and to fill the nations with the knowledge of Him? Of course He did. But why is this seen as something extra to what we do "In Church". We think that this is reserved for the special missionaries who go to the harvest fields abroad. No. The great commission that Jesus gave in **Matthew 28:19-21** is no different to what God commanded His people to do in Genesis and what God revealed to the world through Jesus. This is the basic role we have as Christians – to be fruitful and to fill the earth. So why are we not doing it and why specifically in the UK are we so often experiencing the opposite? Jesus spoke the words of **Matthew 28:19-21** to help keep His disciples on the right track. Are we on track – its time to ask ourselves a hard question....



I love reading the stories of Jesus and His disciples. We see how Jesus – the son of God – is encouraging His 12 untrained friends to do the work of the Father. It gives me courage to keep going. We are untrained ordinary people like those 12 Disciples. I always think about what caused those 12 ordinary men to be able to turn the world upside down. Something struck us the other day when we were reading about the feeding of the five thousand in **Mark 6:37**. Here you have the Disciples – ordinary, untrained men – looking out upon the multitudes and wondering how on earth they are all going to be fed. They turn to Jesus – much like we would do when faced with such an impossible task – and ask Jesus what they should do. They go even further and suggest that He should send the people away to buy some food for themselves. What does Jesus do? He replies, *“You give them something to eat....”* (**Mark 6:37**) The disciples saw the need and turned to Jesus. Jesus answered though and put the responsibility of feeding the multitude back onto the shoulders of the bunch of ordinary men. We feel very much like this and I am sure you feel the same! I spend most of my time looking at the multitudes of people who are without a shepherd. People who don't know Jesus and whose lives are spiralling down to an eternity without Him. We are always asking Jesus about the multitudes and how they are going to be reached with His good news. Not because we are workaholics or because we are trying to save the world ourselves. But because according to scripture and the words of Jesus – that is what we are supposed to be thinking about and doing! But like with the disciples Jesus always turns the tables on us! As we pray about things and ask Him more about how the people around us are going to be reached – the more Jesus asks us to do something about it ourselves! It is scary and exciting all at the same time. It's like Jesus telling His Disciples to pray that more laborers will be sent out into the harvest and then the next minute they are the ones being sent out! (**Matthew 9:37–38**) So that is where The Acorn Vision came from. It is not something that we planned or imagined up ourselves. As we have spent time talking to Jesus about the people of the UK and around the world who don't know Him we have sensed The Holy Spirit showing us how to be part of the Father's answer. We believe that The Acorn Vision is part of God's answer for Somerset, the UK and the nations much the same as what Jesus told the Disciples to do was the answer for Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth. In fact they are the same thing! And in fact what we are doing is just part of the answer. There are many others as well who have heard Jesus asking them to do something about reaching the multitudes. Like our good friends Peter and Marsha who are working to see their region discipled through multiplying simple churches. Like our good friends Chris and Ruth who are sharing Jesus with people where they live and all over the UK. Like our friends Roger and Brooks who are literally investing their lives into seeing disciples being made and churches multiplying in third world countries.



And like our friends Mark and Mandy who are passionately working to see simple Christ-centred communities growing where they live. So this is where The Acorn Vision came from – seeing the work that needs to be done in God's harvest fields and praying for God to send in people! It is God's vision and we have the pleasure of working with Him to see people and communities transformed. Lets not forget that. It is easy to look at the size of the Lord's great unfinished task in Matthew 28:19–21 and to feel discouraged and overawed by it. Remember – Jesus commanded His Disciples and us to go into all the world and make disciples. He would not have asked us to do something that was not possible through prayer, faith and total reliance on His Spirit! It is not impossible!

So why The Acorn Vision?

When we were thinking and wrestling through what the way ahead for us was – a friend phoned me. Earlier that morning I was out walking and talking to the Lord about our heart to plant the Gospel into communities and families with a view to seeing simple churches growing amongst people considered un-churched or unreached. I was well aware of the misunderstanding and criticism that we would receive from people for stepping outside of the status quo but we had gone beyond the point of no return with it all. I had asked the Lord to confirm these things to us through someone. We had spent so long working through it all that we felt we needed to step out even though we had so many questions and concerns! So right on cue this friend calls me up to say that He had been thinking about us that morning. He had a picture of us looking out over a huge field. In our hand we were holding an acorn. He wanted to encourage us to not worry about the size of the field but rather to plant the acorn in our hand. Within that acorn was all the DNA needed for a tree to grow – but it had to be planted first. I couldn't believe what I was hearing – it confirmed everything we felt! So despite feeling pretty silly and pathetic we stepped out and 'planted the acorn'. During those really early days we found such encouragement from the words of Jesus in Matthew 13 where He likened the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed! It always seems that what you are doing is so small when you are pioneering and doing something new! But when you plant the right seed in the right conditions there is the potential of unlimited growth and multiplication! So that is why we love the picture of an acorn. Not only could it produce one tree – but it contains the DNA to produce a tree which can produce more acorns. These acorns can then produce more trees and so it goes on. If Jesus was serious about His followers reaching the ends of the earth with the Gospel then we need serious growth and multiplication.

We want to share what we feel is the important DNA of The Acorn Vision



The DNA of the vision:

Planting the Gospel not a Church

When we read about what Jesus did and what He asked His disciples to do we see no reference to '*planting Churches.*' Jesus preached the message of the Kingdom (**Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:38**) Jesus sent His Disciples out to Preach and demonstrate the Kingdom and to make disciples. The result or fruit of the Great Commission was the growth and multiplication of simple Churches. If we plant the Gospel and sow the Kingdom into people and communities then Jesus will grow His Church. (**Matthew 16:18**) **The form and nature of The Church is determined by the mission of God** . Discipling regions and nations is the issue – not what the Church looks like. Get the foundations right and the building will be right.....

Planting small to grow large

Jesus Himself said that the Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which is small when it is planted but grows to be the largest plant. (**Matthew 13:31–33**) Jesus called 12 men to follow Him everywhere. They were allowed access to every area of Jesus' life. So when Jesus sent them out to do what He'd been doing they had the tools to do it. They had no training or intellect, but they knew how to hear the Father's voice, know His will and they knew how to make disciples. If the goal is discipleship – not merely Church attendance then it is going to take something much deeper. Discipleship involves the sharing of lives – not merely the sharing of one and half hours on a Sunday. And this can only be done in smaller groups. Jesus invested deeply into just 12 men and looked what happened. **Discipleship is all about investing deeply into the few – in order to reach the many.....**

Simple Churches that multiply

Throughout the New Testament we read about what happened when believers got together. Paul gives instructions that everyone can bring and share something for the benefit of the group that is gathering. (**1 Corinthians 14:26**) We must strip back the cultural elements of “Church life” to allow us to focus on the critical elements. If it is about discipleship then Church must be simple, participatory and must revolve around understanding what God is saying through scripture and agreeing to help each other be obedient to it. If the Father is glorified by fruitful obedient disciples (**John 15:8**) then what we must ask ourself these questions, ***“How is what we are doing helping people to understand and be obedient to the will of Father God?”*** and ***“Can what we are doing be reproduced by anyone regardless of their race or intellectual ability?”***



So what does doing The Acorn Vision look like? Well if our goal is to see our area reached through a network of multiplying simple churches then these are the things we must do:

- Give ourselves to prayer for our villages, towns and cities
- Prayer walk the villages, towns and cities of our area
- Sowing the seed of the Gospel (Evangelism) into the communities and peoples who have no indigenous simple Church amongst them
- Working with people who respond to the Gospel (People of Peace, **Matthew 10, Luke 10**) to see a simple church growing around them amongst their network of friends or family
- Encouraging these simple groups/churches (Baptizing and teaching/coaching) to grow and multiply
- Encouraging Christians to start a simple church in their home/work/leisure which is capable of growing and multiplying

There is not space in this booklet to explore all these areas of the work but you can follow more about these areas of the work through following our blog : <http://benandcatherine.org/>.

If you would like to join us in any of these aspects of the work we are doing then we'd love to hear from you! Jesus said that *"the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few"* (**Matthew 9:37**) so there is always a need for more workers to see simple churches multiplying in the harvest!

If you would like more practical help, advice or training in any of the things mentioned above then please contact us. We would love to help you or put you in contact with others who are also working towards seeing networks of Simple Churches in their area.



So now you've read all this stuff maybe it has connected with something you have been feeling in your heart. Where do you go from here.....?

Pray.....

Jesus encouraged His Disciples to pray for more laborers to be sent out to work in the harvest. (**Matthew 9:37–38**) Please join us in praying for more people in the UK who will give themselves to join Father God in His mission to seek and save the lost.....Please pray that networks of discipleship-based, simple churches will grow and multiply in every area of the UK.

Consider.....

Consider how you might play your part in God's plan for His church. Who might God be sending you to or asking you to pray for? Consider how you are fulfilling the command of Jesus to make disciples of all nations (**Matthew 28:18–20**) How might God be asking you to invest practically and financially in the work of seeing the UK disciplined?

Make a start.....

Make a start! Start a simple church in your home/work/leisure or start moving your fellowship towards a simpler more discipleship based model as opposed to just maintaining the status quo.

Network.....

Start to network with people who are “doing the stuff” and learn about what God is doing around the world. We can learn so much from places where the Kingdom of God is growing and Churches are multiplying and people who are learning “out there in the harvest fields”.

FOR MORE INFO ABOUT ANY OF THESE AREAS PLEASE CONTACT US



About the Authors

At the time of writing this we are living in Somerset, UK with our 3 children. We are passionate about following Jesus and sharing Him with others. This passion has led us to think about this question more than anything else...

“What will it take to see our regions and nations discipled?”

Currently we are involved in working to see our area of the UK reached with the good news of Jesus Christ and taught how to be His Disciples. Our primary calling is to work with 'the harvest' and to see simple house churches being birthed and multiplied among people and places where there is no church. But we also work with existing Church groups/Organisations/Ministries to encourage and equip people for ministry and to work together to see the UK reached through networks of multiplying simple churches....

Thanks for reading this and our prayer is that you will be encouraged to go and make disciples of all nations. It is time to 'make a start'...

Ben and Catherine Taylor



If you would like to know more or would like to invest in/support The Acorn Vision then please contact Ben and Catherine through their website : <http://benandcatherine.org/>