

Kingdom Apprentices

Sharing the Journey

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Summary

A family of friends called to obey Jesus in making multiplying disciples in Liberia and beyond.

What Is Kingdom Apprentices

There are two answers to this question - the answer from my perspective as the "leader" of this family, and the answer from God's perspective, as far as we can discern it.

From my perspective, *Kingdom Apprentices* is an 'accident' – but not a mistake! It is simply the name I came up with for a website to host some teaching material that I had shared with some friends in Liberia.

I did not plan for *Kingdom Apprentices* to become any kind of organised ministry; it just developed slowly and organically over numerous years visiting my friends in Liberia.

Looking back we can discern development, direction and purpose which we assume indicates that from God's perspective *Kingdom Apprentices* is part of God's plan to make multiplying disciples in Liberia and beyond.

So my current understanding of "What Is *Kingdom Apprentices*?" is "We are a family of friends called to obey Jesus in making multiplying disciples in Liberia and beyond".

As we go forward we hope to walk in obedience to Jesus every step of the way for as long as He keeps leading us.

Kingdom Leadership

Kingdom Apprentices does not have a leadership structure. The absence of a leadership structure has not been easy, and the case has been made for appointing a leader in Liberia, but to date we do not think this is what Jesus wants. We are reminded of the people of Israel demanding a king so they can be like the other nations, but Jesus said "you are not to be like that":

Jesus said "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. (Luke 22:25-26)

Appointing a local leader is generally considered important to hold a team together and provide drive and focus. But Paul taught that it was not leadership, but love that holds the body of Christ together:

Ephesians 4:16 From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

We look to obedient Christ-like love as the glue that holds us together, and we look to the fire of the Spirit and our passion for the Kingdom to give us drive and focus. If we do not have that, then what can a leader do other than fake it?

We do acknowledge and value leadership, but we emphasise that each of us offer our gifts as a service to the Body of Christ and for His Kingdom. One of those gifts is leadership, but it is not a "position" or "office" and must never be used as a means of coercion or control.

We recognise and welcome different aspects and roles in leadership, for instance leading in vision, leading in exploring new locations for mission, leading in practical help, leading in organising team activities, leading in pastoral care, leading in demonstrating disciple making, leading in healing and evangelism...

These roles are recognised, nurtured and valued; they emerge organically; they may be exercised for a season or over an extended period. But there is no pecking-order, no seniority, no fixed appointments or ordination.

A Family of Friends

So if we are not an organisation with a leadership structure, then what are we? We are clear that we are not a denomination or a church. Neither are we a mission organisation (we have no constitution or board).

Perhaps we are an association of churches – except that not everyone in the family is a pastor or has a "church". So I think a *family of friends* is a more appropriate description.

We have a motto, which we try to use as often as possible:

"Love one another – Go and make disciples"

Families are not always known for their love. Sometimes there may be fierce arguments and siblings not talking to each other. It was no different for Jesus' disciples, and I am afraid it is no different for us. Relationships between us are not always what we would like, and do not always reflect the love and mercy of Jesus. But team relationships are always high on the agenda and we keep trying to walk in the light with each other and learn to function as the Body of Christ in grace and humility.

We expect each member of the family to take responsibility for their relationships within the family, and not to accuse or blame others, or walk away from disagreements. Paul warns people who have fallen out with each other that "those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep." (1 Cor 11:29-30)

A Team on a Mission

A natural family is a family because of blood-ties. The *Kingdom Apprentices* family is not tied by blood, but by mission; the mission to make multiplying disciples. We have been trying to do this, with varying degrees of effectiveness, for years. But over the years we believe Jesus has led us in particular ways that are increasing our effectiveness. It has been a long and sometimes challenging journey and we trust it will continue as we try to listen to Jesus and learn from Him.

We believe Jesus has called us to focus on mission to communities where there is little or no Christian discipleship. In Liberia this has been mostly to rural areas.

We believe Jesus has led us to a number of strategies for effective mission and disciple-making. We are continually practicing, evaluating and improving our methods and seeking to learn from each other. Our mission is to see the Kingdom of God established across Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast. However, we are not looking for a thin scattering of a few churches, but a multiplying movement of obedient disciples of Jesus transforming lives and whole communities.

Our Values

There are a number of directions that we feel Jesus has highlighted for us, which we identify as our values. These include:

The First Commandment

John 13:34-35 Jesus said "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

"Love one another" is the start of our motto and our first priority. If we are not obedient to this then we are foolish builders whose house will collapse with terrible destruction (Luke 6:46-49).

Loving each other in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family, loving our home family, loving our fellow Christian family, loving those we reach out to with the Gospel, loving those who oppose and attack us.

This is a great challenge, and we often fall short, but we in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family will never let this command fall from the very top of Jesus' priorities and values for us.

Team Relationships

Preaching, teaching, training disciples and going on mission are all easy. Relationships are the hard bit. Relationships between leaders within a church are often hard, and relationships between pastors is hardest of all. Jesus knew this was the problem area and He gave a great deal of attention to it.

When Jesus prayed for his future disciples, His entire prayer was for their unity! (John 17:20-23). The epistles also have much to say about loving each other:

Eph 4:1-3 I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

We know that team relationships are often difficult, but if we ignore those problems we are sowing the seeds of our own destruction, and we will reproduce destruction in our ministries. Those of us who have great looking ministries but fail to obey the first command to love will hear Jesus say:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

In the *Kingdom Apprentices* family we expect team members to relate to each other and those they minister to in gentleness and humility, full of mercy, speaking truth in love, correcting in gentleness, listening carefully to each other and being open to reason.

The Great Commission

Jesus said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
(Matthew 28:18-20)

"Go and make disciples" is the second part of our motto and, after love, is the measure of our obedience as disciples.

People need to be taught how to obey Jesus. It does not come naturally. They need to be taught how to read the bible, especially the gospels, how to listen to Jesus speaking to them through the Holy Spirit, how to believe and trust Him and how to do what He says to do. This is our mission.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family believe we must go to other communities and nations and we must train obedient disciples who will go.

Simple Church

Please prayerfully go through the S-Path Training, ["Simple Church" which you can find here](#).

Jesus never told us to plant churches or run church services. He told us go and make obedient disciples.

Jesus said "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!"
(Mark 7:9)

Much of what we observe in the average church service and church structure is the result of copying human tradition rather than the command of Jesus.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family try to be obedient to Jesus, rather than to the traditions of men. In particular we recognise the following common problems:

Members not Disciples

Churches commonly focus on member or attendance numbers rather than obedient disciples of Jesus. They also tend to see church as the primary means of making disciples.

However, the clear evidence is that church is a very ineffective way to make obedient disciples

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family do not believe you need a "church" to make disciples; rather you need disciples to make a church.

Heavy investment in "church"

Nearly all our time, energy and money commonly gets poured into running our churches (its buildings and activities) and success is measured by attendance numbers. Yet Jesus said not one word about investing in these activities. Jesus was only concerned with disciples obeying his commandments.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family try to shift our focus and priority and investment towards training up obedient disciples rather than maintaining church services.

Heavy burden of meetings

West African churches commonly have a heavy weekly schedule for members; typically Sunday school followed by the main service (perhaps 3 hours or more), then Wednesday and Friday evening meetings, choir practice and leadership meetings. Plus fasting, watch-nights, early morning prayers, crusades, revivals and so on.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family encourage minimising the burden of church meetings, and evaluating all that is done by its effectiveness in raising obedient disciples.

Knowledge without Obedience

Jesus warned that knowledge without obedience leads to destruction.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family avoid the lust for knowledge and focus on hearing and obeying Jesus. We do not consider theological knowledge to be a measure of discipleship.

Training People to Disobey

The church commonly focuses on preaching and hearing instead of obedience and practice. When we do this we get people used to just hearing, hearing, hearing. The result is we train people that disobedience is OK – just keep coming to hear more.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family urge leaders to maximise their focus on demonstration and practice and minimise the focus on teaching.

Reliance on Church Buildings

Churches have become associated with church buildings and this association has brought many problems. The message of evangelism has become "Go to church..." instead of bringing healing and deliverance into people's homes. Discipleship has become "Go to church" instead of listening to and obeying Jesus in our homes. Church-planting has become a matter of erecting buildings instead of planting groups of disciples.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family encourage the use of public locations where believers are easily seen by the community and where non-members can easily come and see what is happening.

Reliance on Revival meetings

The church commonly focuses on revival meetings and crusades for evangelism or for raising funds. Yet experience tells us that they are very ineffective in raising obedient disciples. Although Jesus often addressed the crowds that followed Him, He never made appeals for people to say a sinners prayer.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family promote and practice regular outreach through Growth Groups, Missional Communities and other small-scale outreach with healing and story-telling rather than revival meetings and crusades.

Disobedience to Breaking Bread

Churches have mostly replaced Jesus' command concerning Breaking Bread with church traditions that are completely different.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family put shared Breaking Bread meals at the heart of our fellowship and mission. We invite unbelievers to join us so they can encounter Jesus and witness the love between believers.

Impressive Preaching

Many preachers like to be impressive, make people laugh and show how passionate they are. Jesus warns against speaking for our own glory.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family encourage teaching people to listen to Jesus instead of listening to much preaching.

PA Systems

Many West African churches blast their services through powerful PA systems. But PA makes no contribution to making obedient disciples.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family encourage natural singing, dancing and celebration without reliance upon noisy PA systems.

Special place for leaders

Jesus warned about those who do things for show.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family encourage leaders to sit in the congregation rather than have special seats or places.

Special clothes for church

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family encourage simple dress for church services so that those who do not have smart Sunday clothes will not feel excluded and out of place.

Pressurised Offerings

Many West African churches put great emphasis on the offerings and pressurise people to give. Many have multiple offerings during a service. They also make them very public so that those who give are seen and those who do not are shamed.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family encourage a single simple unpressured offering for sharing with those in great need and for mission. The purpose of the offering should be made clear each time it is taken.

Spiritual fathers and sons

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family train disciples to listen to Jesus and discourage the practice of using special titles, such as "Pastor" or calling people their spiritual fathers, mothers, sons and daughters.

Simple Church Conclusion

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family try to keep church as simple as possible. Where existing churches are used to non-biblical practices we are active in teaching obedience to Jesus and dropping the traditions which are contrary. Anything and everything we add to the simplest expression of church must be in obedience to the scriptures and justifiable in terms of its effectiveness and fruitfulness in love and obedient discipleship.

Listening to Jesus

Our familiarity with the Gospels and the years we have listened without taking care to obey have dulled our ears and hardened our hearts. We nod in recognition of the familiar stories and remain untouched. We have defences against the words that challenge the status quo.

When we hear a gospel passage and think "I am OK; it's the others who need to hear this" then it is a sure sign that we have become like a Pharisee and need serious repentance.

Even Jesus' closest disciples struggled to listen properly to Jesus. In the end, God had to speak directly from heaven in an audible voice to get their attention:

Luke 9:35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; **listen to him.**"

Jesus instructs us to walk in step with Him and learn from Him:

Matt 11:29 Jesus said "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart"

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family place a very high priority and emphasis on listening to Jesus and learning from Him. We practice it ourselves and teach our apprentices to do so.

Walking in the Light

1 John 1:5-7 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all ... If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family try to walk in the light with each other, speaking the truth in love and correcting each other in gentleness (Eph 4:15, Gal 6:1). We aim for clear communication and faithfulness in doing what we say.

The Kingdom

Jesus said we enter the Kingdom of God through obedience to Jesus:

Matthew 7:21 Jesus said "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

The Kingdom of God is found wherever obedient disciples are found:

Luke 17:21 Jesus said "the kingdom of God is in your midst."

The Kingdom of God creates a community that cares for one another so that none go hungry or unclothed:

Matthew 6:31-33 Jesus said "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

The Kingdom of God is demonstrated in healing and deliverance:

Luke 11:20 Jesus said "But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family understand that establishing the Kingdom of God in our communities the responsibility of obedient disciples in partnership with Jesus.

Growth Groups

We believe Jesus when he said that He would meet with two or three disciples and He would teach them through the Holy Spirit. We call these small discipleship groups Growth Groups. We view them as the primary means of discipleship and the basic unit of church.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family measure the health of our churches by the number of properly functioning Growth Groups, not the number of members.

Missional Communities

Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus said "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family make obedience to this command a priority through a continuous program of establishing Missional Communities wherever we have Growth Groups established.

Discipleship Training

Jesus commanded that we go and make disciples. Jesus, the Master disciple-maker, discipled just three close disciples and nine second-tier disciples. We do not assume that we are better disciple-makers than Jesus.

We in the *Kingdom Apprentices* family try to follow Jesus' methods for disciple making. We train in small groups, teach Gospel stories, and help our apprentices to hear Jesus speak to them and practice their obedience to Him. We train our apprentices to train up their own apprentices.