

Simple Church

S-Path Training

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Summary

Jesus never told us to plant churches or run church services. He told us go and make obedient disciples. This training considers some of the ways that church tradition has replaced the commands of Jesus.

S1 - Church - A Command or a Tradition?

This is the first training in the S-Path: Simple Church.

Motto: Love one another – Go and make disciples

Mark 7:9 You Observe Your Own Traditions

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

Ask Jesus to help you recognise where this is true in your church.

Matthew 28:19-20 Go and make disciples

Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus said, "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."

There is not a single command in scripture to start churches or run church services!

How effective have you been in making obedient disciples of Jesus?

Do you think that your church is a truly effective means of making obedient disciples of Jesus?

Matthew 7:21 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,'

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."

When you gave an account of your life to Jesus and you tell him how you faithfully led a church in His name, what will you answer when He says, "But I never asked you to lead a church, I commanded you to make disciples."?

S2 - The Cost of Church Services

This is the second training in the S-Path: Simple Church.

Motto: Love one another – Go and make disciples

Luke 13:6-9 Fig Tree in the Vineyard

Luke 13:6-9 Jesus said, "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'"

A fig tree takes up huge amounts of moisture and goodness from the soil and takes lots of sunlight from the vineyard. Churches are like this. They take up a huge amount of resources.

The vineyard represents disciple-making (see John 15:1-8).

Think about all the resources of time, money, planning, buildings, enthusiasm, good-will, commitment and hard work that goes into keeping church services going each week.

Do all these resources produce a good crop of obedient disciples of Jesus? What does Jesus want to say to you about this?

Matthew 23:4 Cumbersome loads on people's shoulders

Matthew 23:4 Jesus said "They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."

Matthew 11:28 Jesus said "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

What meetings does your church have each week and each month? Do you have Sunday school followed by the main service? Wednesday and Friday evening meetings? Choir practice? Leadership meetings? Fasting and watch-nights? Morning prayer meetings? Crusades and revivals? What other meetings do you have?

Is coming to all these meetings seen as a sign of commitment to Jesus?

What does Jesus want to say to you about this?

S3 - Knowledge without Obedience

This is the third training in the S-Path: **Simple Church**.

Motto: Love one another – Go and make disciples

Luke 6:46-49 Wise & Foolish Builders

Luke 6:46-49 Jesus said "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the sand. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

Both builders in this parable have *heard* Jesus' teaching. So what makes you a *wise* builder?

What kind of people are you raising up if you teach lots about Jesus, but forget to make sure they are being obedient?

John 5:39 You study the Scriptures diligently

John 5:39 Jesus said "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

What is the reason that these people are studying the scripture?

These people are very knowledgeable about scripture. They have been going to church for years and have learnt their scriptures well.

Would you be pleased if all your church members were this diligent in bible study?

What is the problem with how these people are studying the scripture?

What does Jesus want to say to you about your approach to bible study and how you teach scripture?

Matthew 13:14-15 You will be ever hearing but never understanding

Matthew 13:14-15 Jesus said, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become hard; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes."

If you keep preaching and teaching but do not make sure the hearers are practicing what they are learning, what will the result be?

In your attempts to teach people about Jesus, are you actually training them in disobedience?

What does Jesus want to say to you about this?

S4 - Church Centred Mission

This is the fourth training in the S-Path: **Simple Church**.

Motto: Love one another – Go and make disciples

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to me

Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Churches are usually centred around a building, the pastor and church programs.

Jesus said, "Come to me..." not "Come to church..."

What does Jesus want to say to you about treating church as the place for people to come to Jesus?

Matthew 5:15-16 Don't hide your light

Matthew 5:15-16 Jesus said, "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."

Do you think that building a special church building and gathering believers there for worship is in line with what Jesus said?

We shouldn't hide ourselves away but, as much as is possible, meet in public places where all can see us.

Luke 10:8-9 Heal the sick... and tell them...

Luke 10:8-9 Jesus said, "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"

What did Jesus say to do in the towns and villages? He never said to build churches and start church services!

What does Jesus want to say to you about church buildings in places you are doing mission?

John 2:23-24 Jesus Would not Entrust Himself to the Crowds

John 2:23-24 Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people.

Jesus never made appeals for people to follow Him, and never suggested that anyone should pray the "sinner's prayer". Repentance, obedience and baptism were the marks of conversion, not a raised hand.

What fruit has come from your church's revival meetings and crusades? Have you baptised believer's as a result? Have you raised money from them?

What does Jesus want to say to you about your reliance upon revivals and crusades?

S5 - Breaking Bread

This is the fifth training in the S-Path: Simple Church.

Motto: Love one another – Go and make disciples

Acts 2:46-47 They broke bread in their homes

Acts 2:46-47 They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Is this how breaking bread is practiced in your church?

List all the differences you can think of between how Jesus broke bread with his disciples, and how it is done in your church.

Jesus frequently used meals for evangelism. Looking at the passage above from Acts, do you think unbelievers were invited to these breaking-bread meals?

What does Jesus want to say to you about changing the way you Break Bread?

S6 - Personal Glory

This is the sixth training in the S-Path: **Simple Church**.

Motto: Love one another – Go and make disciples

John 7:18 To Gain Personal Glory

John 7:18 Jesus said, "Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him."

Do you love to impress when you preach? Do you love to get applause and make people laugh? Do you try to be engaging and dramatic and passionate?

None of these things are automatically good or bad – it all depends upon who you are trying to glorify. It is all too easy to try and glorify ourselves whilst preaching about Jesus!

The disciples had constant arguments about position and prestige and we have continued in their footsteps!

What does Jesus want to say to you about your desire for prestige and respect?

What does Jesus want to say to you about the effectiveness of your preaching to change people compared to the power of His word and His Spirit?

Will you spend more time teaching people to listen to Jesus instead of getting them to listen to your preaching?

S7 – Big PA systems

This is the seventh training in the S-Path: **Simple Church**.

Motto: Love one another – Go and make disciples

John 12:28-29 The crowd said it had thundered

John 12:28-29 Jesus said, "Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered.

Do you try to make your own thunder, or do you leave it to God?

Many West African churches blast their services through powerful PA systems. This seems to be valued as a means of advertising the services. But PA makes no contribution to making obedient disciples, and it is probably damaging the hearing of those in attendance. A loud PA will drive away those who find the noise uncomfortable and it encourages an emphasis on the noise that we can make rather than listening to the quiet voice of Jesus.

What does Jesus want to say to you about your use of loud PA?

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.

S8 – Special Clothes

This is the eighth training in the S-Path: **Simple Church**.

Motto: Love one another – Go and make disciples

Matthew 23:5-7 Everything They Do Is For Show

Matthew 23:5-7 Jesus said, "Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries a wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others."

What does Jesus want to say to you about wearing special clothes for church services?

What does Jesus want to say to you about having special places for leaders to sit?

What does Jesus want to say to you about people calling you "Pastor"?

James 2:2-7 Fine Clothes and Filthy Old Clothes

Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

Do you and many others dress up for your church services? What would strangers feel if they came in poor clothes and no shoes?

Does your church dress for mission, to make the poor feel welcome, or to look smart to "honour God" or impress others?

What does Jesus want to say to you about changing the dress-code in your church?

S9 – Tithes and Offerings

This is the ninth training in the S-Path: Simple Church.

Motto: Love one another – Go and make disciples

Matthew 6:3-4 Let Your Giving be in Secret

Matthew 6:3-4 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Are your offerings taken publicly so everyone can see who gives and who does not? How would someone who is too poor to give feel?

What does Jesus want to say to you about this?

2 Corinthians 9:7 Give without Compulsion

2 Corinthians 9:7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

How many tithes/offerings are taken at your services?

Do you try to persuade people to give? Do you quote verses about God rewarding our giving? Do you rely on the collection to support your family?

What does Jesus want to say to you about how you take offerings?

S10 – Spiritual Fathers and Mothers

This is the tenth training in the S-Path: Simple Church.

Motto: Love one another – Go and make disciples

Matthew 23:8-10 Do Not Call Anyone On Earth 'Father'

Matthew 23:8-10 Jesus said "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah."

Do you let people address you with any special title, such as "Pastor" or "father" or "mother"?

Do you have a spiritual father or mother or sons or daughters?

Are there people who think of you as their spiritual father or mother?

What does Jesus want to say to you about these titles?

S11 – Becoming a Missionary Training School

Is Jesus calling you to stop focussing on your church and start to make obedient disciples who will go and make obedient disciples?

If so, how can you do this?

Conclusion

There are a lot of areas mentioned above where we recognise we have followed the traditions of men instead of obeying Jesus.

I hope that you will listen to Jesus and try your best to obey Him by correcting these outward and inward practices.

The most important thing is to open our spiritual ears to hear Jesus and our hearts to obey Jesus. Without that our 'house' will fall in a terrible destruction (Luke 6:49).