

## 236 *Following in faith (not fear)*

Tom Wright, in expounding Revelation 14, recounts seeing in the Middle East a trail of sheep following a shepherd. That's how it worked in Jesus' day and he says it's the same today: the sheep recognise the shepherd's voice and follow. So that's **following and trusting a person** – which seems exactly what Jesus asked of the people of his day.

I'm not saying that my church is perfect, but it's certainly different from my experience of other (evangelical) churches over the years. Our main model seems to be of everyone loving and serving each other – and I'm not talking just about the regular members.

You will find local people here who talk about 'my church' – but they rarely go! Well, maybe to the annual bereavement service or carol services or Christingles (we have to put on several each year), and of course marriages, christenings and funerals. But when the church has practical needs, they are more than happy to serve alongside us.

As an example, Sue and I run a cafe on a Tuesday morning, hosting Toddler Tunes – toys and songs for the littlies – and a group of older folk, some recently bereaved. Many of these people don't come to church services, but they love and serve each other and they **invite their friends**.

'But don't you preach the gospel?!' you ask. If people actually come into the church, isn't that a great opportunity to tell them the good news of Jesus?!

When they come to be married or to have their babies baptised, the vicar makes clear what's what, I'm sure. What I do is just to relate to them personally, and together we share life's ups and downs. I try to listen to God and to listen to the people I'm with, and I trust God to use me just as one small piece of 'input' into their lives, edging them closer in their relationship with God.<sup>1</sup>

This to me is the 'following' model of Rev 14 and other passages:<sup>2</sup> we follow Jesus, as disciples, with others alongside us, but on **their own terms**, not ours – disciples working with other disciples, all at different stages, all of us growing in our relationship with God!<sup>1</sup>

Contrast that with the model I've seen and used for years: We get people to come to church or to meetings and 'preach the gospel', they hopefully come to faith and then we try to get them to become disciples. And what does that 'preaching the gospel' look like? Chances are it's as per the booklet, precised below, that a friend's church has urged them to use as a Christmas effort.

I'm not saying it's perfect, but I know which model I can gladly dedicate (the rest of) my life to.

Paul Bev. 9.1.23

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<sup>1</sup> I believe that, because God loves everyone, they each have a relationship of sorts with God. Mine is to help them enhance that relationship in any way I can, pointing them ever closer to a full reciprocal relationship with God.

<sup>2</sup> Wordcounts: NT (Gospels+Acts)  
follow... 155 (**110**)  
discip... 308 (294)  
lov... 323 (**100**)

And wasn't the early church referred to as 'followers of The Way'?

Precis: *The Ultimate Christmas Wishlist* Rico Tice

Chapter 1 tells the reader that ‘in Jesus you get what you would really like in life’, and that is: ‘the hope, the peace, the purpose and the confidence that we’re all searching for’. (Is that what **your** friends and family are searching for? Not mine, I don’t think, but anyway...)

Chapter 2 tells them that the Gospels are ‘historical biographies’ containing eyewitness accounts. They tell how Jesus stilled a storm and healed people; this proves that Jesus was who he said he was – God here on earth – and this gives us **hope** in that, although life is difficult in many ways, we know that there are good things we can enjoy now and that ‘even sweeter days lie ahead’.

Chapter 3 tells readers that they are living their lives on the basis of ‘My life, my rules’ and ‘that matters to God’ because those who live by their own rules, not God’s rules, will be judged. ‘This is what the church calls “sin”.’ But it’s OK because Jesus died to take the punishment that we deserve (like when a cycle helmet is smashed instead of my head), so we can escape God’s judgement and have **peace**.

I’m afraid that I didn’t read the final two chapters (**purpose** and **confidence**). Is it just me, or do you have F&F who would react other than negatively to this approach? Then again, I’ll bet that God has already used this booklet – more than once! – to bring people to faith in Jesus. Annoyingly, God is like that!

Am I just being totally negative and biased?! This looks to me like: Start from where they are not (wanting purpose etc.), tell them the Bible is true, and this proves xyz, tell them they are basically selfish, tell them that therefore God will judge them (and send them to hell, some of them may presume), tell them that life may be a bastard at times, but ‘even sweeter days lie ahead’. Am I wrong to feel so negatively towards this booklet?