

15 Men and an Egg-shaped Ball

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Yes, you've got it! Rugby! And what a game – far better than football, in my book. Full of action, adventure, passion and teamwork. A man's game, without doubt, although of course now played also by women. No mixed teams yet, and I don't suppose there ever will be!

As I said, it's a game full of action, adventure, passion and teamwork. Sounds like the church, doesn't it? Or does it?! When that scrum (no, I don't mean the church!) gets down and you've got your head stuck between two other backsides, with 2000lb worth of pressure directed through your neck, you've got to understand teamwork! When that line stretches out across the field and you're on the run, passing the ball back, you've got to know the other guys pretty well so that you can understand how best to work together in order to gain ground. When the ball comes in to the line-out you've got to know who's going to jump and who's going to lift and how you're going to take advantage of the catch in order to set up an opportunity for a try.

Coaches of rugby teams and, of course, of any sporting team know how to make disciples: impassion, envision, train and release and, as they're doing it, build a strong sense of team. A good coach will also build meaningful relationships with individual players and exercise discipline where needed. Good coaching hones the bottle needed by players who are involved in what is a high impact sport.

Church leaders need to be good coaches – or at least, that skill and ministry must be present on the leadership team. Problem is that you don't get paid as much! Still, who's concerned? The rewards are actually far greater. To see a disparate group of people impassioned, envisioned, trained and released is fruit worth working for.

If I remember rightly (and I know I do without looking it up!) the main objective of the Great Commission in Matthew 28 is to make disciples – and yet it's probably the thing that we fall down on most. Jesus' coaching yielded a team that was strong and impassioned enough to make major inroads for the Kingdom in a culture that, whilst having a religious heritage, was largely hostile. I don't think we're a million miles from that ourselves in this day and age so we could do with following Jesus's coaching methods here and now.

Anything I write here has been written about and said time without number, but perhaps we're desperate enough to now do something about it. The whole thing must start with purpose and intentionality. We must **firstly** set our sights on the priority of making disciples. The more I think about that word, "making", the more I'm challenged by it. Disciples don't grow on trees and, usually, they don't just happen.

Secondly, we as leaders have to model it – both living as disciples and working with a small group to make them disciples. That's why the best place to start is with the church's core leadership team. Indeed, that's where it should start. There's a necessity to spend regular time together, learning, sharing and holding one another accountable, if we're to make disciples of others. If the Minister spends her priority time with another small group in order to make disciples the danger is that the leadership team falls behind in being relevant to the purpose.

I must be honest here. I think I started well whilst in Poynton, but dropped away as time went on. The usual busyness and demands on time took over and the disciple-

making process, within the leadership, faded. I wouldn't hide the fact that in my current role with Mainstream I will be passing on what I learnt as much from mistakes made as from fruitfulness developed. However, in the church of which I and Marion are now a part, we're again relating to a leadership team on a purposeful journey of discipleship. And it's very challenging!

If the leadership team is a group of growing disciples the **third** point I want to make is obvious, namely that the discipling culture will spill over into the rest of the church – not by default, mind, (although there will be more of that than before) but by design. Each member of the leadership team passionate about, and involved in, making disciples - imagine it!

OK, get started! You may start slowly, but at least start purposefully. Me? I'm going to spend a bit more time at Sale Sharks rugby matches and see if I can pick up a few more tips.