



GOSPEL *for* LIFE

Discipleship in the Local Church with Jamie Strickland Season 3, Episode 7 Transcript

[00:00:09] [Intro] Welcome to the Gospel for Life podcast, we help people grow by connecting truth to life. Here's your host, Darryl Dash.

[00:00:30] Darryl Dash: Welcome back to the Gospel for Life podcast, today I'm really excited to talk to my guest and friend, Jamie Strickland.

Jamie serves as pastor of Discipleship Ministries at West Highland Baptist Church in Hamilton, Ontario. And he served with Power to Change in Canada, Peru, Denmark and the United Kingdom. In 2015, after serving with Power to Change for 13 years, he transitioned to pastoral ministry. And then almost three years ago, he joined the staff at West Highland in Hamilton.

And I'm excited to talk to Jamie today about his experience in leading discipleship in the context of a local church. So Jamie, welcome to the podcast.

[00:01:11] Jamie Strickland: Thanks Darryl, good to be here.

[00:01:13] Darryl Dash: So Jamie, a lot of times I interview authors of books on discipleship, and I've been wanting to talk to an actual pastor who's doing discipleship. So what exactly does a pastor of discipleship do?

[00:01:28] Jamie Strickland: Yeah, that's a good question. There is stuff that I guess as a pastor you're expected to do and to be a part of, the regular ministries of the church, so a lot of what I'm a part of is working with our community groups. So it's the groups of eight to 15 people that meet weekly or biweekly in the church and help coordinate that. We do have some adult education classes that we offer during the week at different times and also coordinate our one-on-one or kind of smaller pod discipleship as well.

And so some of it is coordinating, but a big part of it is trying to disciple some young men in the church as well, which is kind of what I'm really excited and passionate about.

[00:02:12] Darryl Dash: Did you end up working in the area of discipleship intentionally, or did it end up just being the direction that your ministry took, kind of by divine providence?

[00:02:22] Jamie Strickland: Yeah, well I really had my life changed when I was part of Campus Crusade for Christ at the time at York University, which became Power to Change. And that ministry really emphasized the value of not just assuming that everyone or that Christians know what they're talking about. Or that they know God's Word or they're regularly in God's Word or they know different spiritual practices, but actually investing intentionally in people to do that. And so I had someone come alongside me in my own walk with God that really helped me to grow. And then it just became something that I wanted to do in the life of other people. So eventually, I think God used it in my life, and then it caused me to want to be invested in other people's lives by disciplining them as well.

[00:03:11] Darryl Dash: So it's a good thing I talked to a lot of people who have been impacted by Campus Ministry, and it seems to shape two areas, maybe there are even three: evangelism, discipleship and just this hunger for a deep relationship. Is that what it birthed in you, a desire to really win people to Christ, see them grow, and then be part of a strong relational community growing together?

[00:03:39] Jamie Strickland: Yeah, for sure, and in some ways, it's partially unfortunate that those are the things that the church is called to do, but often neglects in what church kind of has become. Whereas on Campus, you're not putting on a big Sunday worship gathering, you're focusing on just when you have an hour or two during the week with someone. And so in those smaller groups or one on one context, you're talking more about evangelism. And I think when you're on campus as well, students are really thinking about what do I really believe? So there's a hunger to grow and to know more, and especially if you're on a secular campus, you're just being thwarted with all sorts of secular ideologies. And so there's a desire to grow and to know more yourself, but then there's a desire to share the gospel with others.

And so I think it's just that key point in someone's life where they're just open to those important aspects of the Christian life, evangelism and discipleship and just wanted to be on mission. It's a spiritual greenhouse, I think, for people.

[00:04:43] Darryl Dash: And it's really hard to replicate. I mean, it is a period of your life in which usually you're single and you're in a peer group that it's kind of like your own people. It's kind of hard to replicate later and you get a family, end up working, and life just looks a little bit different when you're out of school. But I know a lot of people have a hard time transitioning from that kind of ministry into the local church and finding some of the same things in the local church. So it is a real frustration that I know people feel. Maybe you can comment on that, but I wanted to ask you about how you actually begin learning about discipleship?

[00:05:18]: Jamie Strickland: Well, I guess first about the transition, yes, it is very hard. When you're a student, it's like what the disciples in their experience with Jesus, they had more time, they were with him day by day. And so when you're on campus, you're with people day by day, whereas, like you're saying, once you get a job and you have a family, you don't have as many spaces of free time to devote to these types of things. And so it does become more challenging for sure. And there has to be ways that you could be creative or think about how discipleship happens in everyday life, in the regular comings and goings of life, and not just Tuesday at 2:30 between classes. What was your second question?

[00:06:04] Darryl Dash: The second question was how did you begin to learn about discipleship? Were you disciplined yourself or did you begin to strategize about how to make disciples or how did that happen?

[00:06:14] Jamie Strickland: Yeah, it was definitely being disciplined. It's very key. I think discipleship is one of those things in some ways, like parenting, where a book can only take you so far. Eventually you remember what your parents did, for better or worse, with you, and then you're learning on the go as a disciple, with someone that you're discipling. And so books are definitely helpful, but for me, it was really being disciplined by someone who, again, this was originally my time on campus, who took me out on campus to do some evangelism to share our faith. But then also then brought me back where we would then talk about what had just happened, and talked about how my walk with God is going. And so I think discipleship is definitely something that you learn by experiencing someone discipling you. And then again, like the disciples with Jesus, they experienced it with him, and then they were able to do that with others. So that's kind of how I came to be a part of discipleship.

[00:07:16] Darryl Dash: That kind of leads to a bit of a challenge. What would you say to somebody who maybe didn't experience that so they don't know how to make disciples because they've never experienced somebody investing in them intentionally in that way?

[00:07:29] Jamie Strickland: Well one, it's never too late to be discipled. I would encourage you just as quickly as you are to go to a book is to go to someone whose life just as you observe them. I love my life to look more like this guy or this girl who I could just see is following Christ, and I'd love to kind of see behind the curtain a little bit into their life. And usually often if you ask someone would you meet with me just to help me grow my walk with God? Most people, mature Christians would love to do that with someone. So I'd say, ask someone, would you be willing to disciple me?

But as well, when you have a discipleship kind of lens, even as you're reading the Gospels, that's a great place to go. Just how did Jesus interact with the disciples? How did he model ministry? How did he do something with a crowd and then pull back with his disciples to teach them more? And then what do we even see in the Book of Acts with those disciples and how they went about ministry? And when you have that kind of lens on, you see things maybe that before you didn't see.

[00:08:41] Darryl Dash: Now this is really good Jamie.

You've already talked about as pastors we feel the responsibility to preach good sermons, and I'm a big believer in the importance of good sermons, but there are all kinds of things that we do that in the end after we're doing them. Sometimes we feel like we're still not being as intentional as we need to be in making disciples. Maybe we're ministering to the crowd, but we really don't know how to be more strategic than that. And we hope people are growing, but we're not really sure. So what advice would you give to pastors about how to become more intentional in building disciples, not just providing great sermons and crowd size events, but actually getting into intentional disciple-making in their ministry?

[00:09:25] Jamie Strickland: Yeah, I'd say for a pastor just to look at your current schedule and see where there are items in my Monday to Friday where I could potentially invite someone into that? And so I think there are a lot of times where we do things on our own where we could easily bring someone along with us. So it could be a visitation in a hospital, for example. Is there another person in your church you could bring with you to do that, even just as you're starting your sermon prep? I find, there's a lot of guys, even at my church, that do shift work, and they're available often during the day, so if I can meet with them as I'm prepping a sermon, just to demonstrate how I do that. So I think that's probably the first thing, is where can I just bring someone into what I'm already doing? So it's not adding another thing, it's just being more intentional with my schedule. And then the second thing is that really you just start with one person.

[00:10:28]: I think sometimes we think we need to start a huge, massive program or something, but really it's the simplicity of just putting some space in your calendar to meet with someone. And whether that's on a Saturday morning or whether that's meeting with someone at their place of work for lunch on a weekly basis. There are always these little windows or pockets in our schedule that if we're going to say I'm serious about making disciples, again, not just one-to-many, but one-on-one, that I just need to put into my schedule. And again, I think for most pastors, there are probably many young men at your church who would love to meet with you and just go through some sort of content and material, even just to talk about life with you.

[00:11:16] Darryl Dash: And how would you advise they start, just with the invitation and then maybe reading passages of scripture or going through a book? Or is it just life on just getting to know each other and asking questions?

[00:11:29] Jamie Strickland: I don't think there's a one size fits all with making disciples. There's a balance that we have to find between intentionality and relationship. And sometimes if we get caught too much into a specific program or curriculum, we just try to jam everyone through the same thing. And often what works for one person doesn't work for another. So I think at the start it's just inviting someone out to coffee or to lunch, getting to know them. Especially if there's a young person in your life that you see, like I see some potential that if we met, I could see you becoming an elder at the church, or I could see you being a community group leader, or I could see you discipling someone else. I think often, especially for young men, hearing a word of affirmation from their pastor saying I see potential in you, their tail starts to wag. They get excited.

So we have a definition of a disciple that we use at West Highland, it's not original to us, but we say a disciple is someone who's following Jesus, being changed by Jesus and committed to the mission of Jesus.

[00:12:36]: And so often I would just ask a guy “Where do you think in those three areas, just following Jesus, being changed by Him or being committed to His mission, that you think you need to grow?” And oftentimes it is being committed to the mission. But I like doing book studies, I'm a reader, and so often I'll say “I'd love to commit to going through three books with you, one on something around following Jesus, one around being changed and one around being committed to the mission.”

And a guy I'm discipline right now we started by going through *Desiring God* by John Piper, for just getting connected to Jesus. And for changed by Jesus, we actually use your book *Eight Habits for Growth*, which is very helpful and

practical for us in helping form the spiritual discipline: how is my life actually being changed? And right now we're just going through the Master Plan of Evangelism by Robert Coleman, for being committed to the mission of Jesus, helping him learn how he can make disciples himself.

[00:13:32] Darryl Dash: At the end of that process, would it be the challenge for him to continue with somebody else and disciple them, or how does that work when they've done that?

[00:13:41] Jamie Strickland: Yeah, exactly. And part of discipleship is at the beginning having a roadmap with the person and where we want it to go. So we're not just wanting this to be a relationship where it's just the two of us meeting weekly for five years with no endgame, but saying that after a year or two, I want to see you starting to disciple someone else. And so some of the things that we've talked about and things that I've modeled, I want to see that in you. And depending on that person, they might be ready to start discipling someone six months in, for another guy, it might be a couple of years. But again, that's why I'd say we have to try to go against the temptation to think one size fits all with disciple-making; that would definitely be the goal. And then the relationship between me and him then moves a bit more from discipleship to a bit more coaching. So as we're meeting together, perhaps even less frequently because you can't maintain so many relationships in your life at that intensity level. But we might then start to meet monthly and just talk about how's it going with the guys that you're discipling. And so it's not just cutting the cord, it's we're staying connected, but it changes the purpose of why we're meeting.

[00:14:55] Darryl Dash: So picture a pastor, they have an average-sized church, so maybe 150 people, maybe even smaller than that, and they're looking out there, they can see some guys that are hungry and they want to begin investing. How do they select the most strategic kind of guy to look forward to start with? What would you recommend?

[00:15:13] Jamie Strickland: Yeah, that's a great question, because I think one of the hardest things is when you make a commitment to someone who in the end isn't actually interested in discipling others themselves. And they just become someone who's just taking, and not looking to give as well. And so part of it has to be you have to have some sort of relational connection already where you've observed. And when I was with Power to Change, I know other ministries have used the acronym FAT [Faithful Available, Teachable], and so are they faithful in the things that you're already calling them to do? So they're already involved in a ministry, they're showing that they have that commitment, that faithfulness to both the ministry and to the Lord. Are they available? Is it someone who's just constantly missing appointments? It's going to be hard if they're not available

and want to be involved with you. And then teachable, have you seen them learn and apply things in other contexts where you think yeah, if I just spent some time with this guy, I can really see him growing into someone who can make disciples himself.

[00:16:27]: So that's what I'm usually still looking for, it's an old acronym and kind of funny, but it is quite helpful for us. Sometimes there are those guys that are available, but they might not be the best person for it. Again, there's an opportunity cost with discipleship that you can't have that kind of one-on-one intentional relationship with 100 people. You got to pick just a few guys that are going to take what you're teaching them and look to pass that on to others.

[00:17:00] Darryl Dash: I imagine that after you've been in this relationship with some people, you're going to be disappointed occasionally. Maybe you pour into somebody and then you look back after six months or a year and you realize that maybe they're just not as interested as you'd hoped. How do you handle disappointment, which I think obviously Jesus even faced, so what advice would you give?

[00:17:20] Jamie Strickland: Well I think that's part of it, is knowing that even Jesus faced disappointment in guys that He was investing His time in. Ultimately, we can just be faithful to what we feel God has called us to do. This might be just more general advice on disappointment. It's just that I can't own and carry everything that goes wrong in my life. I just look to be faithful to what God has called me to do. So even when looking at Jesus' selection of the twelve disciples, he spent the previous night in prayer before, and it's recorded that he then called those twelve disciples to himself. So am I spending time in prayer beforehand and if I've done that, in the end, I can only be faithful to do what God has called me to do. And entrust to Him that the fruit will come as a result of me abiding in Him and then being faithful to what He's called me to do.

[00:18:28] Darryl Dash: This might be a personal question for you, but do you ever get overwhelmed? You're in a fairly sizable church, and I know you've got other elders and pastors working, but do you ever get overwhelmed with the enormity of the challenge of we've got a lot of people here and we've got to care for these people? I know even sometimes in smaller churches, I feel that. I'm the pastor of a church plant and I look out and I can feel overwhelmed by even a small number of people. So do you feel that and how do you handle that feeling of like man, it's such a big challenge and responsibility to pastor all these people?

[00:19:05] Jamie Strickland: Yeah, it is overwhelming because you do wish you had either more hours in the day or more time to spend with people. But in the

end, I think I just have to keep going back to the way Jesus model thinks. He had crowds following him, He fed 5,000 plus, but concerned himself most with those twelve guys who were going to reach the masses. He knew He was in His human body and could not be everywhere with everyone at all times.

And so I look over the crowd, even of my church Lake West Highland, I think I can't meet with everyone, but I can meet with a few who will meet with a few. Who will then hopefully build this disciple-making culture in our church where disciples are being made, raised up and begin multiplying. Where our church has that healthy balance of a great Sunday morning worship experience with great preaching, where they're being fed that way. But they are also involved in a smaller group connection with people who are investing in them relationally more deeply in a way that I, as a pastor can't.

[00:20:18] Darryl Dash: That's really helpful. Jamie, are there any resources that you would recommend if there's a pastor or a church leader out there that wants to learn more about making disciples?

[00:20:29] Jamie Strickland: Yeah, for sure. I think I've already mentioned *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. That's a classic. I think it was written in the 60s originally, but I still keep coming back to it. It's very concise but very helpful. Basically a look at how Jesus made disciples, and how He used three years of public ministry to really invest in those twelve. And what are those principles that we see in His life from then that we can apply today? I think that's a great one. Another one that I've read recently that I find really helpful is called *Walk With Me* by Bill Mowry. And Bill has over the last few years been in a bit of a coaching/discipleship/relationship with me. And I've really found him personally, someone who makes disciples himself in his own life, but also then just the principles in that book, *Walk With Me*, I found very helpful for just a person who's looking to start somewhere. So I'd give those two books a recommendation for sure.

[00:21:28] Darryl Dash: I'm impressed by both of those. The Robert Coleman book is amazing. And what I find really interesting is he's just one of those guys that I've actually heard him at a church planting conference. I think he's in his 80s now, and if you look around when he's teaching, there's not a huge crowd there because people tend to be drawn to the new and the flashy or whatever. But if you go in, you just discover his passion is there, and I would say he's a Sage. The people that are there, man, they're soaking it up because they know they're in the presence of somebody who's really unique.

I would also echo Bill Mowry's work is really valuable, so I appreciate him, and his writing has been really helpful too.

So Jamie, I really appreciate talking to a pastor who's in a local church. You're just helping to flesh out what it looks like, so I really appreciate you sharing your wisdom with us today. I wanted to ask you a couple of personal questions as we get to the end of this interview. What has God been teaching you lately in your life?

[00:22:32] Jamie Strickland: I think over the past year, as you know, Darryl, our family has gone through a bit of tragedy. About a year and a half ago we lost our eleven year old son, he was killed in a car accident. And I think just the past year going through that, I've just seen God constantly teaching me about His faithfulness to His promises. And there are so many promises we have from God and His Word. And when we're not going through something, sometimes it's hard to really appreciate or love and embrace and cling to those promises. But I've just seen over this past year that God has been true to His Word. He is a sovereign God who oversees all things but is working them out for His glory and our good. He's held us fast, my wife and I over this past year. I've seen how He's used His church to come around us, both our local church West Highland and the broader church community, just showing so much care and love toward us.

[00:23:44]: It just made me reflect even in the last year going through the Bible in a year and just as a result of going through something so difficult, just time and time again, I said yes, this has been true, yes this is true. Lord you promised that you'd be near to the brokenhearted, you promised that nothing will ever separate us from your love. God, you've shown us that when your church is actually operating as it's supposed to in a community, it's just such an amazing community to be a part of and a special community that should be that city on a hill. And so I've just seen over this past year how all those promises are true and even in the midst of the hardest of times. So that's somewhat of a broad answer, but I think God is sovereign, God is good, and God is faithful through the hardest of things that we could experience in this life.

[00:24:42] Darryl Dash: It may be you've already answered this, but what's encouraging you lately? I feel like you've almost answered that, but I'll ask it anyway. Has there been anything else encouraging to you?

[00:24:52] Jamie Strickland: Yeah, I think just to see even as we're going through COVID as well as the past number of years, but just seeing as we've been able to gather back together in God's church. And just seeing the excitement of people coming together and praising the Lord, even the last number of weeks or months now worshipping God together just without masks. And the church has just been like wow, I remember hearing this loud singing before and I haven't

heard it in a while. But now as people have returned, I've just been so encouraged by the people of God praising God together in person. I connect with God through musical worship, and so being a part of a worship service where I can just hear the congregation singing has just been so good for my soul. So I've been encouraged by that.

[00:25:41] Darryl Dash: I love your love for the church. And I've been a cynical pastor way back at one point in my ministry and I'm so over that, I want to be in love with the church and as a bride of Christ. The church isn't perfect, but it really does make a difference that we love it and enjoy it as well. So I'm glad to hear that it's music to my soul, so thank you. Jamie thank you for your ministry, thank you for sharing with us today too. And appreciate you and you're one of those guys that I wish I knew better than I did. I wish that our past cross more often, but I have a debt of gratitude for you and grateful for your time with us today, so thank you.

[00:26:17] Jamie Strickland: Yes, thanks Darryl, it's been good.

[00:26:20] [Outro] Hey, thanks for listening to the Gospel for Life podcast. If you're interested in growing and helping others grow, please check out our monthly newsletter, go to gospelforlife.com/newsletter. And please don't forget to leave a review of this podcast on your favorite podcast platform.