

Discipleship

Discipleship is like raising your children in a subculture

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As a teenager, I lived in a suburb called Kingston, just south of Hobart in Tasmania. It was the most pure Dutch community anywhere outside of the Netherlands. Over 300 Dutch people lived on one street. Our church had about 600 mostly Dutch members. Calvin Christian School—the oldest CEN school—is in Kingston. The Dutch had their own school, bakery, soccer, basketball, and netball teams. The local shopping centre was owned by Dutchies, as was the biggest employer in town, and most of its staff.

Growing up in this community was strange. We knew we were different. We had salt in liquorice, played soccer instead of footy, ate olliebollen and not donuts, and did not shop on Sundays. One day I asked for an undercut at the hairdresser, only to be told that was too radical a haircut for a “Dutchie”. A couple of times, I was even assaulted for being Dutch.

We knew what Aussies believed and how they behaved, and we knew how we were different, and in our minds—better! We were a subculture. Our beliefs, values, rituals, and rhythms marked us out as “other”.

Last month I was in Borneo, East Malaysia. I was having lunch with Khee-Vun, a Hakka Chinese Christian man. *Hakka* means guest. Most Chinese groups are known by their region, so the Cantonese come from the Cantonese provinces. The Hakka were driven out of north and central China, and slowly

migrated south. When they settled, they were never entirely accepted or integrated, hence the name “guest”.

Khee-Vun and I were discussing how to disciple the next generation of youth. We are both aware of the flow of young people who grow up inside Christian families, in both the East and West, who do not remain Christians as adults.

To my great surprise, Khee-Vun began to talk about how the discipleship of Malaysian Chinese youth and children must change. His experience being raised with Hakka heritage gave him a metaphor for discipleship. The Hakka were always guests—they did not quite belong to the land as everyone else did. He was somehow a Malaysian, somehow Chinese, but in a profound sense, he was different from both. He was always a guest who did not quite fit or belong.

There are huge cultural shifts taking place in the West at the moment. Conversations about sexuality, inclusion,

and identity are the flash points. But the ideas that are shifting run much deeper than just those topics. The West used to hold to, broadly speaking, Christian beliefs and values. There was a shared understanding about who God was, right from wrong, how He was just and loving, and the reality of a day of reckoning and an afterlife. Christians fitted and could belong to that world.

But our world has moved beyond Christian to post-Christian beliefs and values. The individual who has the freedom to choose is now at the centre of their own universe, and no longer God. The dominant culture is now spiritual but not Christian, interested in who can choose—and not what they choose. Jesus came not to be served but to serve, whereas we fill our own tanks before we can think about filling anyone else's. Jesus invites us to deny ourselves, and take up our cross, whereas for the world, suffering undermines my self-esteem,

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and I have the right to protect myself from such negativity.

Christians do not quite fit in this new world. Even when the world uses terms like love, tolerance, freedom, and justice—these biblical terms have slightly new meanings. To be a Christian in the West now is to be different. We are other, or guests. Or as Peter says we are exiles (1 Peter 1:1), or aliens and strangers (Hebrews 11:13). Or as Khee-Vun says, we are now a subculture.

We raise our children in this world—a world that believes in self, choice, and freedom as the greatest goods. Our children will grow up fluent with these

ideals. Consequently, they will, to some extent, believe in these things too. This is dangerous, but not all bad. These ideas are not anti-Christian. Rather they are half-Christian. As the saying goes, the most powerful heresies are half-truths pushed too far.

But, as Christians, our citizenship is not in this world: it is elsewhere. We are in but not of this world. We believe, value, and practice other things. We believe that being like Jesus, who came to serve, and trusting in God are the greatest goods. We must teach our children what the world believes, where we agree and disagree with them, and why Jesus is a better choice.

David is currently the lead pastor at Dapto Anglican Church. He has worked in local church ministry for almost 30 years in Sydney, Tasmania, and Victoria. He is ordained as an Anglican and Baptist. He also works part-time as a church health consultant with City to City Australia. David is a published author. His book *Being Christian After Christendom* explores four questions: Where are we? How did we get here? What went wrong? What is the solution? This book is a dialogue between sociology, philosophy, history, and theology about the state of the world, and the church's role.

