LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH FROM STEVE JOBS 1: STUFF

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Category: Following Jesus

A while ago, Krish Kandiah asked on Facebook what the Church could learn from Steve Jobs' life. Predictably, most of the answers were about the value of innovation, following a dream and wearing a cool black turtle neck sweater. However, the discussion got me thinking and I came up with three important lessons that the Church can learn from Steve Jobs and Apple.

At the outset, I should say that although I prefer using Windows for my computing, I'm not anti-Apple. I have both an iPod and an iPad (the one in picture, on my desk). This isn't a Windows versus Apple rant. If that's what you want, go somewhere else!

The first lesson, that I reckon the Church needs to learn from Steve Jobs is that people are all too easily fascinated by stuff. There are always huge queues of people lining up to by the latest Apple gadget, even if their previous generation iThing was working perfectly. They've got to have the stuff! The same is true, though with a little less hype, for Android phones. When a new, better than the last, phone is released, people are desperate to get their hands on it.

Phones started off as communication devices. The whole point of them was that two people, who were not within shouting distance of each other, could have a conversation. Although there has been a lotÂ of hype surrounding the various 'smart phones' most mobile devices are still un-smart (stupid?) and they are used for the simple purpose of allowing two people to talk to each other or to send text messages. They are about communication and community. Very often, smart phones, iPods and whatever are about the exact opposite - they are about isolation and individualism. Just sit on any train or bus in the morning and watch how so many people are cut off from the world around them in their own little bubble of iSound. The selling point for smart phones is not that they make it easier to talk to people (they don't) but that they have apps for every aspect of your life. Yes, people do use apps for twitter, facebook and what-have-you, but most apps are designed for individual use, not to build community.

Stuff can easily isolate us from others and can work against us building community and enjoying one another.

This is an important lesson for the church; because Christians can be as addicted to stuff as the next person. Church buildings can be stuff; the needs of the physical plant can easily get in the way of creating a group of people, united in their faith. It would be easy to add to the list.



Controversially, for us in Wycliffe, Bibles can be 'stuff'. It is fantastic to see a row of Bibles in different languages, with exotic scripts and strange words. I love it! It is wonderful to know that God's Word has become available in yet another language - fantastic! But, books in and of themselves - even Bibles - don't build the church. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we have to focus on communities of people, reading those Bibles and using them to align their lives with God's purposes for them in the world. We need to see people excited by the Scriptures and wanting to know more about them and

sharing them with the wider world.

'Stuff' isn't bad, it's simply a means to an end. The problem is that we like 'stuff' and when we allow it to become an end in itself, we lose our God-given call to build a reconciled community. The image of the commuter, isolated from the crowds on the train by his headphones and music playlists, is perhaps the antithesis of what we are called to be in this world. Then again, I am sometimes that commuter.