



"Community in the Making of Disciples"

Idea: Discipleship is the goal of biblical community.

Intro: Today, we are concluding our summer sermon series. We've been exploring the theology of biblical community. We have defined community as "a unified body of individuals" or *one-together*. In our study we have discovered that community exists and is desired in this world because creation follows the pattern of its Creator. God is a communal being comprised of three distinct Persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. One together, they dwell in perfect community, equal in being but subordinate in role.

The Bible testifies that the Triune God created all that there is; therefore, creation bears His mark of community. What we see in the universe, then, is that every part has its counterpart, and this is most beautifully seen in the creation of mankind. Adam was the very first human created. God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed life into him (Gen 2:7). God also fashioned the woman Eve from Adam's rib, and the two of them became a perfect reflection of the glorious community existing within the Godhead. Adam and Eve enjoyed the beauty and responsibility of overseeing God's creation without any shame (Gen 2:25).

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve's perfect community with God and with one another was destroyed when they sinned against the Lord by eating from the forbidden tree. Adam and Eve died spiritually and later died physically. Despite their rebellion, God still pursued them. God covered Adam and Eve's sin and promised that a Messiah would come to put an

end to sin. God furthered that promise in the call of Abram and the establishment of Israel as He called out a people to Himself through whom the Messiah would come. The promised Messiah came in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. God the Son came to man. He lived a perfectly holy life, and He offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. The work, which Jesus accomplished on the cross and in the grave, made possible the restoration of man to the community for which he was created.

Individuals who repent of sin and place their faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ are brought into the household of God. They become part of the community of faith called the church, sharing a common life in Christ. They dwell in *community*. The believers who make up the church are a unified body of individuals who are one together in Jesus Christ.

The early church presents a beautiful picture of what this community looks like. We learn from Luke's depiction of the early church in Acts 2 that they understood and embraced community. They recognized that it was Christ alone who had brought them near to God. Their belief in the gospel message ushered them into eternal community with the Godhead and with other believers. Jesus's disciples and those who were closely connected to him became the genesis of a multiplicity of small groups who met in the temple courts and homes throughout the city of Jerusalem. The early church became a community of communities who were interconnected and interdependent following Pentecost.

In response to the community they now enjoyed, the members of the early church devoted themselves to the Lord, to certain spiritual disciplines, and to one another. We also see that the early church's strong sense of community resulted in their advancement of Christ's kingdom. Following Pentecost, the Lord continued to add to their numbers daily those who were being saved. In other words the Kingdom continued to advance as the community exemplified by the church validated the preached message.

The early church followed the pattern of Jesus in building community. Jesus dwelled in community with both large and small groups of people. He was together with the 120. (We can think of them as the church.) He was in community with His twelve disciples (small group). And He was in community with Peter, James, and John (discipleship group). We have discussed what it means to be a part of the body of Christ, the church, and why that is important in the life of the believer.

Last Sunday we talked about the need to be in community with a smaller group of people and what that looks like at Red Lane. This morning, we are going to finish up by narrowing the focus around discipleship groups. I want to speak to “Community in the Making of Disciples.”

“all things were created through him and for him” – Col 1:16

Inquiry: You and I were created by God and for God. We were created to be in relationship with Him. Our sin, however, has driven a wedge between God and us (Is 59:2). Sin always separates and isolates.

“Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him.”

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer

As believers and followers of Jesus Christ who have had our sins forgiven and experienced new life, we must continually be on guard against the encroachment of sin into our lives. Sin is disastrous. It not only displeases God, it also pulls us away from intimacy with Him and from one another. The good news is that the Lord desires to be in community with you. This desire is why He went to such great lengths to secure your redemption from sin. The Enemy knows that if he can lead believers into sin, he can disrupt the relationship between Christ and the Christian. He also knows that it will disrupt the relationship between the Christian and other Christians.

God, however, has already prescribed the protective covering and sanctification against sin. It is the church. It is the body of Christ and the believers’ involvement in it. When believers are living in biblical community as a church, dwelling together in small groups, and replicating themselves through smaller discipleship groups the power of Satan and sin are loosened. And the loneliness of isolation turns into a community of intimacy.

Jesus calls us to discipleship. He calls us to learn how to live in community with our fellow believers and to introduce others to it. Read Matthew 28:18-20.

Anything old is old-fashioned to the typical Western mind. Two movements in history, however, changed the course of history by recovering and rediscovering what was lost. They are the Renaissance (1300-1700) and the Reformation (1500-1600). By looking to the past, they were able to take huge steps forward.

Discipleship is not a new concept. Jesus commissioned His followers to it. The early church modeled it. Today, however, in many ways we have lost and at best redefined it. We need to get back to this time-tested and culturally relevant discipline. We need discipleship because it cultivates a deeper walk with Christ, which in turn yields disciples who are discipling others (2 Timothy 2:2).

Have you ever wondered why the modern church doesn't seem to be making any significant impact in culture? Could it be that the church is missing its purpose? In his book, *WikiChurch*, Steve Murrell tells the story of a ten-year-old judo student who was seriously injured in a car accident. The student's left arm had to be amputated. Everyone thought his judo career was over, yet despite his handicap, he persevered and continued training. His teacher, aware of a plan the boy didn't yet understand, taught him one move and one move only. The boy petitioned his teacher every day to teach him more than one technique, but the teacher would not change his mind. Every day of every week of every month was spent perfecting this one move.

The boy entered his first tournament after the injury and, against all odds, advanced to the finals. His opponent in the finals was more seasoned, faster, stronger, and in possession of all his limbs. The match was a stalemate until the seasoned competitor lost focus for a moment. The one-armed boy performed the only major move he knew, and his opponent could do nothing to counter it. To everyone's surprise, the one-armed boy was crowned the champion.

According to Murrell, the boy won the match for two simple reasons: "First of all, he had mastered one of the most difficult moves in all of judo. Second, the only defense against that move is to grab your opponent's left arm." The story communicates a principle that we must understand: simplify. Learn to keep the main thing the main thing. Jesus commands us to "*go and make disciples.*" Until disciple-making becomes the ministry of the church and not a ministry in the church, we will never see our discipleship efforts impact the world the way that Jesus envisioned.

What is discipleship?

Discipleship is not:

- A class or seminar
- A degree you earn
- A program

- A 12-week Bible study
- A 40 day home group
- A quick process (McChristian Culture)
- A quick fix
- Reserved for super Christians
- Hard
- An option

Discipleship is *intentionally equipping believers with the Word of God through accountable relationships empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to replicate faithful followers of Christ.*

A discipleship group is

- A group of 3-5 believers.
- Committed to meeting weekly.
- Committed to meet for six months
- Committed to study Scripture and pray together.
- Committed to memorize Scripture together.
- Committed to replicate themselves.

Jesus modeled discipleship. Both his followers and the religious leaders often called him “Rabbi”. The word literally means “my master.” It was used to address a learned teacher or sage. In first-century Palestine, a rabbi traveled from place to place to communicate his teachings and his interpretations of Scripture to the masses. Young men who had passed certain educational requirements would attach themselves to a rabbi and follow him from about age 18 to 30. Then they would take up their own rabbinic ministry. Jesus is the only rabbi in history to go after and call followers to Himself.

16 Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. – Mark 1:16-18

Jesus spent the next three years pouring His life into these disciples, making them fishers of men. His model was:

- Jesus ministered, and the disciples watched Him. (Matt 5-7)
- Jesus allowed the disciples to assist Him in ministry. (John 6:1-13 feeding the crowd)
- The disciples did the ministry with Jesus’ assistance. (Mark 9 casting out a demon)
- Jesus watched as the disciples ministered to others. (Luke 10 the seventy-two sent out two-by-two)

MARCS of a Discipleship Group

1. Missional

While the disciples were huddled together in fear and disillusionment on the Sunday after Passover, Jesus suddenly appeared.

"Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* – John 20:19-21

Jesus comforts his disciples with the word: *shalom*. He reminds them that their mission is to be modeled after His own. It's a rescue mission. He expects them to follow in His footsteps, to treat people as He has treated them, to do the things that He has been doing. He then enlists and empowers them by breathing on them.

The purpose of the filling of the Spirit in Scripture is always in the context of proclaiming God's glory. Every follower of Christ has been tasked to carry out the mission of Jesus. Healthy D-groups keep the mission front and center. Missional living happens when D-group participants are held accountable to build *intentional friendships* and engage in *life-style evangelism*.

2. Accountable

Accountability is the glue that holds groups together. The purpose of a D-group is spiritual development. Well, you cannot expect what you do not inspect. Mutual accountability ensures that participants meet expectations of spiritual growth.

8 Accountability Questions

- Have you spent time in the Word and in prayer this week?
- Have you shared the gospel or your testimony with an unbeliever this week?
- Have you spent quality time with your family this week?
- Have you viewed anything immoral this week?
- Have you had any lustful thoughts or tempting attitudes this week?
- Have you told any self-promoting lies or half-truths this week?

- Have you participated in anything unethical this week?
- Have you lied about any of your answers today?

3. Reproducible

If you claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ, but you are not actively working to help others become followers of Christ, can you say that you're taking His Words seriously? Disciples follow their master. Jesus invited people to walk in His footsteps, imitate His actions, and carry out His commands.

17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. – Phil 3:17

2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. – 2 Tim 2:2

Paul's ultimate goal wasn't for them to follow him, but to follow Christ (1 Cor 11:1). Jesus invested His life into twelve men, and then following His death left the ministry to them. He intentionally restricted His ministry to Israel, but the disciples took it to the ends of the earth.

The discipleship process is not complete until the mentee becomes a mentor to others.

4. Communal

We were designed to be in community with others. D-groups provide a place to belong. D-groups, however, provide more than that. They provide a place for believers to dwell together in covenant community, growing and sharing in their faith. As we have learned the Bible often portrays salvation in a corporate sense. The Kingdom of God is a gathering of individuals who are one together in Christ. The Church is the body of Christ, and God has instructed His body on how they should live together. The "one another" statements are for the church as a whole, but they are more easily implemented in small groups and D-groups.

5. Scriptural

The basis for all that we do as Christians (worship, community, action, and faith) is the Word of God. D-groups, then, study the Word of God. They don't read the latest men's and women's books together or go

through a 6 week video curriculum. The reason is that the Bible contains all the practical, real world advice a man or woman needs. It will teach you to be a better father, mother, parent, and follower of Christ. Get into the Word until the Word gets into you.

- Study the Word slowly.
- Journal the Word daily
- Memorize the Word weekly.

Conclusion: Discipleship is the goal of biblical community. God has called us to make disciples, and this means evangelizing unbelievers, welcoming them into His kingdom, and then discipling them to grow closer to the perfect example set forth by the Son.

Discipleship fosters both spiritual and evangelistic growth. Therefore, every believer should be able to answer two questions:

“Who am I discipling?” and “Who is discipling me?”