**MOVING BEYOND SHALLOW DISCIPLESHIP**

**20240128**

We throw the word discipleship around and use it lightly. In my own life I have walked a road of discipleship with those who lead me, those I lead with, and those who I lead. This road is a road of relationship and intentionality. I realized a long time ago that I need others. When making decision, seeking wisdom, and wanting to grow into the person God has called me to be, I have sought out intentionally those who can disciple me.

After all what does success in life look like? Success according to Scripture, is becoming the person God calls you to become, and doing what God calls you to do–in his way, and according to his timetable. But we need people around us to walk intentionally with is in a relationship of discipleship.

Discipleship is a relational process of helping someone establish a relationship with Jesus and helping that friend in the life of faith. **Disciple making Is Intentional – Jesus didn't sit in a carpenter shop with a welcome sign on the door**

This is an intentional road that is paved with relationship, love, and friendship. A few years ago, I felt that my relationship with the Lord was getting 'stale'. Every Christian book I was reading felt like dry plain toast. I prayed because I had to, worshipped because that is what you do at church but internally, I was empty. I sought out a Jesuit priest and went to see him monthly for two years. It was a transformational and powerful time. I never realized that I knew God as Lord, Saviour, Master, God, but never truly new Him as Father. That changed through an intentional relationship with a Jesuit priest.

I have sought out leaders and friends who I could walk out my life with intentionally and relationally and continue to. I have a discipleship relationship with and speak with many leaders who are friends who have walked the road before me to bring guidance, wisdom, and growth in my life.

Here are some misconceptions about a life of discipleship:

1: Discipleship is something I can do by myself—just Jesus and me.

Fact 1: Discipleship is relational. To be obedient to the Great Commission, we need to be disciples who are making disciples of Jesus.

2: Discipling others is too complicated—let the professionals do it.

Fact 2: Discipling others is actually not so complicated. Fishermen and tax collectors who had no formal theology training did it.

3: Discipleship is a program of the church.

Fact 3: Discipleship is not a program, it's a lifestyle. Every Christian should live a lifestyle of discipleship – all the time.

4: Making disciples is fine if you find it fulfilling.

Fact 4: It's not all about self-fulfilment. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

5: Seriously, I'm so busy, I don't see any way to add more into my life.

Fact 5: If we totally buy in to our cultural value of "busyness," discipleship will not take place. We must value the things of God and make room for discipleship.

The reality is that every one of us needs help and has help to give.

- Loneliness is often a huge problem
- Every person needs a group of friends
- Friends who know the honest details of our lives
- Friends with whom we can show our weaknesses
- It is very difficult to kick our own butts when we are wrong or give ourselves a hug when we need encouragement or be aware of our own blind spots

WHO IS ALERT TO THE CONDITION OF YOUR LIFE?

**DAVID & SAMSON**

- Lived within a generation of each other
- Both called at a young age
- Both were leaders used by God
- Both failed sexually
- Why did David fulfill God's purpose for his life and Samson die alone?
- Not one name is given as a friend of Samson - He was a loner
- David surrounded himself with Godly friends

**John Wimber** said, "You can discover your spirituality in solitude, but you can only fulfil your spirituality in community."

The true test of discipleship is the test of love. The measuring rod by which my life and leadership will ultimately be assessed is that of love. When I'm thinking clearly, I realize that I'd rather be known for being a man of love than a man of vision. I'd rather be thought of as a man of love than a man of strategic intent.

**DISCIPLESHIP HAPPENS IN SMALL GROUPS – DISCOVERY GROUPS**

How were they able to live out this type of closeness? Early Christians facilitated a common life through small groups…

**Col 4:15** Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

**Rom 16:5** Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

Small groups are also the basis for Christian community today. For us too grow and be healthy as a church we need to develop small groups.

Jesus even said it: **Mat 18:20** For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Paul, in **Ephesians 4:2** says, “Be completely humble and gentle with one another in love.”

How can we love each other if we never relate personally?

That is the point of small groups. They are places where people can relate, can actually be disciples who make disciples, multiplying out and living out the gospel.

I believe that so much you learn in the Bible is tested by being in a small group of people that rub you raw. In the context of small groups we learn how to love the unlovely, and push through difficulties in relationships, are reconciled and in doing so fulfil the command of Christ for us to love on another.

Often we are the ones in need of special love and support to get us through difficult times. Loving one another is not just another good idea; it is one of Christ’s great blessings. Fellowship “The common sharing of the grace and of the blessings of God” is the garden in which the fruits of the Spirit multiply, the place in which eternal life is lived out here on earth.

Fellowship “The common sharing of the grace and of the blessings of God” starts with relationship with Christ, loving His whole Church and getting into relationships in the context of small groups… We need spend time together with good people… Bad company corrupts good character…

Regardless of our age or spiritual strength, over time, unwise relational influences will negatively affect our walk with the Lord. Satan is determined to pull us into sin and wreck our lives, and he often uses wrong relational influences to accomplish his goal. We need fellowship to sustain in this walk in this life…

What does biblical discipleship look like? I have a whole lot of scripture put together: Scripture commands us too…

Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10),

Honour one another (Romans 12:10),

Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16; 1 Peter 3:8),

Accept one another (Romans 15:7),

Serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13),

Be kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32),

Admonish one another (Colossians 3:16),

Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13),

Spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24),

Offer hospitality (1 Peter 4:9),

And love one another (1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11; 3:23; 4:7; 4:11-12).

That is what true biblical discipleship "The common sharing of the grace and of the blessings of God" should look like.

The need to create a structure of belonging grows out of the isolated nature of our lives, our institutions, and our communities.

**THE LORD CALLS US TO COMMON LIFE AND COMMUNITY.**

**1Co 1:10** I have a serious concern to bring up with you, my friends, using the authority of Jesus, our Master. I'll put it as urgently as I can: You must get along with each other. You must learn to be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common. (MSG)

Our world is organized around certain principles that are marketed as if they produce community, <u>but their effects are the opposite.</u>

Here are a few:

**CONVENIENCE:**

In earlier days, we were promised leisure time with the invention of the dishwasher, washing machine, and our own telephone line.

Now we shop online, have gourmet ready-to-cook or already-cooked meals delivered to our home, speak into a device that saves our shopping list and then places the order with Checkers 6060 for us and everything is delivered to our home.

And the we have Takealot which you can order almost anything and have it delivered to your home, now Amazon is rumored to be opening in SA, so there will be more options. <u>BUT CONVENIENCE DOES NOT CREATE COMMUNITY.</u>

**SPEED:**

Speed in and of itself has become a value. The world says, "Faster is better!" Wait time on the phone is intolerable, so now we get automated responses, called bots. In fact, in the world of commerce, we are reaching the point where we would rather talk to an intelligent machine than to a human being.

We also seem more pressed for time, valuing all things virtual. <u>BUT SPEED DOES NOT CREATE COMMUNITY.</u>

**ELECTRONIC CONNECTIONS:**

Texts, emails, Telegram, Signal, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Tik-Tok, and more make constant sharing of images and information easy and entertaining.

They promise to give us more time and increased productivity; better networks are sold as a connected world.

Yet there is the question of whether any of these examples produce the sense of community and belonging I believe they actually increase our isolation and produce less well-being.

Yes, these developments provide contact, diverse information, and an infinite range of opinion.

But they do not create the connection from which we can experience community, where we are emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically cared for, and we in turn can care for others. As Christians we call this place 'The Church'

Building community comes through building relationships and connecting with one another. And it starts without an agenda. We cannot build community at a conference, we build community around the table.

Dr Luke tells us how:

**Act 2:42-44** They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer. (43) A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. (44) And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had.

Shared ALL THINGS! The Greek word is HAPAS

absolutely *all*, *every* one: - all (things), every (one), whole of life.

The Lord calls us to common life and community, He calls us to cultivate a life in common. And it doesn't come through convenience, speed, or electronic connections. It comes from sharing life together.

Discipleship may happen by absorption (Relationships) or through a well-thought-out strategy (Discovery Groups).

However, there can be no discipleship without Jesus as Lord, without mission, and without engaging risk and adventure. We are not called to be ACTS 2:4 and NO MORE Christians.

All Christians are called to discipleship, but not all are meant to be teachers of the Word.

All are called to be witnesses or missionaries wherever we are, but not all are called to become a missionary in a foreign culture.

A Christian woman or man called to be a dentist is as called (and, therefore, mandated and accountable for that calling) as is one called to be a pastor.

Our place of involvement in the world is always a mission field. God wants us to serve Him and extend His Kingdom wherever He places us, whether in the business environment or a church pulpit.

Discipleship is about intentional relationships, recognizing, receiving, releasing, and reproducing Jesus.

Being involved in discipleship we need to realise ahead of time that:

(a) you probably don't have what it takes;

(b) it's going to cost you everything;

(c) the benefits are internal and will probably need to be deferred; but

(d) do it anyway!

An emotionally healthy disciple slows down to be with Jesus, goes beneath the surface of their life to be deeply transformed by Jesus, intentionally develops meaningful discipleship relationships, and offers their life as a gift to the world for Jesus.

WE WANT TO CREAT A CHURCH CULTURE THAT DEEPLY CHANGES LIVES to be people who slow down to be with Jesus, go beneath the surface of our lives to be deeply transformed by Jesus, and offer our life as a gift to the world for Jesus.

Why not hang out with someone today, sign up and join a Discovery Group or sign up to start one, and begin to cultivate an intentional discipleship life in common?