

# Biblical Community

When leading a community of believers to embrace mission, we must first consider whether God has told us how this is to take place. Rather than developing strategies of our own, we want to recognize and embrace God's way of leading a group into mission. When we read the New Testament, this new paradigm emerges; biblical communities equipped to live Spirit-led lives, leading to an ever increasing alignment with the mission of God.

## Spiritual Life

It is crucial that we articulate the goal that God has given for any community of believers to focus on as they pursue the mission of God. The goal of each community is not programs, forms, buildings, but it is the pursuit of the Person of Jesus Christ, trusting Him to live His life through them. Biblically defined, spiritual life is not simply an internal change, but it is, in fact, a much broader kind of change. Spiritual life is the life of Jesus bringing inward transformation, which in turn, fuels outward transformation.

As we develop a more complete picture of spirituality from the grace paradigm, it is unavoidable to note the emphasis on inward transformation versus outward behavior modification. God's desire is that, through the grace paradigm, we would initially recognize that self effort has only brought condemnation upon us. Grace also proposes, by nature of the meaning of the word (gift), that, in our state of inability, we accept the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf (salvation). Based on that acceptance, Jesus takes up residence in our lives and desires to slowly transform us from the old way of living into the new.

To fully embrace the grace paradigm, we must also accept the nature of how grace desires to work in us. To that end, we must understand and accept that the grace provided to us and in us was never intended for mere internal theoretical and spiritual acceptance, but would always direct us to an outward demonstration of grace in community. As James stated in his letter, we must be "doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves". God desires that our inward life change compel us to humble sacrifice for the benefit of the Body of Christ on mission for Him.

In the missional sense, we must embrace the holistic truth that we have been redeemed in order to embrace mission and sacrificially live in it with others. Redemption was never solely for our own personal gain, but is intrinsically designed to lead us to embrace mission together in community.

## Community

If we consider the narrative of the New Testament we find that the story outlines for us a theology for and living example of God's desired form for energizing His mission in the world. To be fair, the use of the word "form" can be a bit misleading primarily because of our misunderstanding of it. We have made form to mean one single cookie cutter set of processes that apply to all groups in every circumstance. This is far from the biblical understanding of what "form" is.

A form is a context in which principles can be implemented in real life. The biblical form for missional living is an organic collection of diverse people living in diverse circumstances that must collectively wrestle with and apply principles to their shared context. To plainly draw the distinction, it is principles over processes.

This idea of community has been the forgotten piece of this grace approach to life change. It is only when we pursue transformation in community that we receive the full results that God intended. The life of Christ is best described as selfless love toward others, yet we often remove ourselves from the only context where we can grow in and demonstrate this quality, which is biblical community.

Jesus is the best example of this form being put into practice and seeing the positive results that came from it. He demonstrated a commitment to a small group of people that chose to embrace life together and pursue Jesus. They were unaware of all the details and were not privy to the end game, but they collectively pursued Jesus and he used that "container" to mold them together into a missional force that is still an example to us today.

Make no mistake about it, Jesus could have chosen any other way to do it, but He chose small community built around a shared vision as His form of choice. Can good things happen in great numbers of people? For sure they can. But Jesus proposed that great things happen when a smaller group of people unite around a common vision for intimacy and selfless love.