

Transformation – Ecclesiastes 4:12

Get Real and Find Freedom

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This is our seventh message in the “*Becoming a Disciple*” series which is loosely following the book by Greg Ogden called “*Essential Guide to Becoming a Disciple*.” We’ve been looking at the Great Commission phrase by phrase for six previous messages and we still have one message to go looking at the Great Commission.

But today, (before we do that final message), we’re going to get very practical. Today may sound a little different than the in-depth Bible studies we usually do here because today we want to talk about the *practical environment* that is most conducive to *Getting Real and Finding Freedom in Christ*.

So, today is going to sound a bit more practical than our normal Bible studies. Today we want to look at the environment where we’ve seen more *real-life transformation* than any other.

In every one of these messages we start with a core truth and a question to help us get thinking in the right direction. Our core truth today comes from Ecclesiastes 4:12.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NLT)

12 A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

This is a verse of *committed relationship* in life.

Last week we looked at the *committed relationships* where Jesus made the first Disciples. Today, we’re going to look at the *committed relationships* where we make disciples *following the example of Jesus*.

In the Gospels, Jesus made the first Disciples *within close, committed relationships*. Then, in Acts, we see the Church take off through *similar close, committed relationships*. But it was 1,000 years earlier that King Solomon gave us the *reason why* in Ecclesiastes 4:12 that we just read.

Because *one* person alone is taken out so easily. But *two* can stand back-to-back and conquer and *three* are even better, because a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

We know this is true in every area of life – from marriage to the military. No man (or woman) is an island and if we try to go through this life (and even more so – trying to follow Jesus) *as an island* our defeat at the hands of any number of enemies *is almost certain*.

Because we were created *for relationship*. Specifically, *two types* of relationships.

A *vertical relationship* with God
and a *horizontal relationship* with others

From the Garden of Eden – to the Ten Commandments – to the entire New Testament – the Bible is all about these *two types* of relationships.

And so, when we talk about a *transforming, discipling relationship* how can we see it in any other environment than within *close-knit relationships*?

That is our core truth and here is our question today.

What are the necessary conditions to create an atmosphere of Transforming Discipleship Growth?

The obvious (and already established) answer is within close-knit relationships. But more specifically, today we want to talk about the two critical conditions that are required *within our close relationships* that lead to this *transforming, discipleship growth*.

Here they are.

#1) Transparent trust developed over time

#2) The truth of God's Word embraced and applied to all areas of life

done in an environment of seeking God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

In these close, discipling relationships, transparent trust – developed over time – creates the environment where the truth of God's Word can be embraced and applied to all areas of our lives.

We believe these discipling relationships are best accomplished in groups of three or four people of the same gender.

We believe these small groups of three or four create the highest possibility of this *transparent trust* being developed and then *in* that environment of transparent trust the truth of God's Word can be applied to every area of our lives.

So, let's look at a few scriptures to "paint a picture" of what these close-knit, discipling relationships should look like.

If you have your Bible, turn over to Mark Chapter 10. In Mark Chapter 10, James and John (the Sons of Thunder) come to Jesus and ask him a numb-skull question. They want to sit in the places of honor next to Jesus when he sits on his throne.

Then in Mark 10:41 the other disciples hear about this request and get angry, and so Jesus teaches them a few things. Then in Mark 10:44-45 Jesus says this.

Mark 10:44–45 (NLT)

44 and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.

45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

This word "slave" is DOULOS. In this context, it refers to what we call a "bond-servant" which means "slave by choice."

A bond-servant is someone who *willingly gives* themselves up for the *good of another* and that is a key element of these small discipleship groups – each one *willingly giving themselves up* in order to *serve, support, encourage* and *exhort* the others.

Then, flip over to Galatians (just after Romans and Corinthians.)

Galatians 6:1-2 are the foundational verses for us *coming alongside* one another and *helping* one another live *transformed lives* in Christ.

Galatians 6:1–2 (NLT)

1 Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.

2 Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.

That's the perfect picture of these small, *close-knit discipleship groups*. The word "share" in verse 2 means "*to help carry each other's burdens*" and *that* is what these groups are called to do. To help carry each other's burdens and to gently and humbly *help* one another on the path to *true transformation* in Christ. Are you getting the idea?

Okay, so keep turning to the right just four books to Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians Chapter 5 are Paul's *final encouragements* in this first letter he wrote to the Thessalonians.

And in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 he says,

1 Thessalonians 5:14 (NLT)

14 Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.

Again, a perfect picture of what these Discipleship Groups are *called to look like*. The word “lazy” (in the first sentence) carries a broad definition. The NKJ says – ***warn those who are unruly***. Another translation says – ***warn those who are irresponsible***.

And this is *why* there *must be transparent trust* developed over time, because at some point when you’re being unruly and irresponsible you need a trusted Brother (or Sister) to tell you, “*Hey bro, you’re being unruly and irresponsible.*” And you need to be in a place with that other person where you can (and will) *receive* that encouragement.

And finally, we see the example of *the Master* in John 13. So, let’s turn back to the Gospels to John Chapter 13.

It was the night before Jesus would face the Cross. He was carrying the *heaviest burden* that any man has ever carried. But that night – before the meal we call the Last Supper – John 13:4-5 says,

John 13:4–5 (NLT)

4 [Jesus] got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, 5 and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

And then after some *vivid teaching* moments, down in John 13:12-15 we read,

John 13:12–15 (NLT)

12 After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, “Do you understand what I was doing?

13 You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am.

14 And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet.

15 I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.

Now, this does not mean we have to *actually* wash each other’s feet in our discipleship groups. When Jesus says (in verse 15) – ***I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.*** He means *be a true servant* to one another.

In fact, the servant who washed feet in a first century household was considered the *lowest servant* in the home. So, Jesus was saying take the place of the *lowest servant* to one another.

These four examples from scripture paint the picture of what these small, *close-knit discipleship groups* are supposed to *look like* and are supposed to *act like*.

And this environment takes a lot of *commitment* and *sacrifice* because it is contrary to our *nature* – because we are self-focused by nature. And it is extremely contrary to our *culture* because we live in a self-focused culture.

Which is why Romans 12:2 says,

Romans 12:2 (NLT)

2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think . . .

That is what this transforming environment *allows* God to do. But it takes a real commitment to the critical conditions.

#1) Transparent trust developed over time

#2) The truth of God's Word embraced and applied to all areas of life

in an environment of seeking God and the power of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives.

To close, let's look closely at these two critical conditions.

First, **Transparent Trust developed over time.**

In the book, "*Essential Guide to Becoming a Disciple*" Greg Ogden says this.

The extent to which we are willing to reveal to others those areas of life that need God's transforming touch is the extent to which we are inviting the Holy Spirit to make us new.

This is a *really huge truth* because the stuff that's damaging (and even destroying) our lives is the stuff we *keep in the dark*.

It's *the struggles* and *the sin* that we hid behind the Christian mask. *That* is what God wants to *transform in our lives*.

Because that is the stuff that's keeping us from *living the new life in Christ*.

And so, we've got to get to the point, with a few other truly *trusted* Christ-followers where we can (in time) be truly honest (which takes a while). It takes some time to build that *transparent trust*.

And so, we have solid resources in our Discipleship Groups to teach groups what *to do* and *not to do* in order to create a safe environment of *transparent trust* where *true transformation can begin to happen*.

And then, the second critical condition. **The truth of God’s Word, embraced and applied to all areas of life.**

And you may be saying, “*Wait, isn’t God’s Word always supposed to be first?*” YES, it is.

But we’re talking about creating an environment for true *transforming spiritual growth* and when you begin embracing and applying God’s Word in an environment of transparent trust and accountability *that is when you really begin to see true transformation and spiritual growth*.

We’re talking about an environment where there is more than just “information sharing” of God’s Word, which is (sadly) what we see most often on Sunday morning and even in group Bible studies. This is where the information in God’s Word is shared then everyone goes on their way and does whatever they want and not much transformation actually occurs.

But, in these small discipleship groups, *as* transparent trust is built and *as* each person is truly committed to caring for and serving two other people *then* God’s Word is applied in a way that can be embraced and committed to with others who will help carry the burden. They will be praying for you and lovingly *holding you accountable* and they will be there for you to spur you on to seek God in that area and to continue to apply God’s Word (in the power of the Holy Spirit) until *true transformation has occurred*.

So, again, we are focused on these close-knit discipleship groups because this is where we have always seen the most true transformation and spiritual growth. And I want to encourage you to get more information about starting or being part of one of these groups.

We don’t create the groups for you. We help you create the groups with people you already know. But we will give you all the resources, and training, and encouragement that you need to make your group transformational and fruitful.

Let me read Ecclesiastes 4:12 one more time. This time from the paraphrase THE MESSAGE.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (The Message)

12 By yourself you’re unprotected. With a friend you can face the worst. Can you round up a third? A three-stranded rope isn’t easily snapped.