

Essentials for A Discipling Community - Part 1

I. THOP AS A DISCIPLING COMMUNITY

- A. As a discipling community our vision is ***to equip*** our community ***to mature*** in and ***demonstrate*** the Spirit, teachings and nature of Christ.
- B. The Lord has called Tulsa House of Prayer to ***advance*** unceasing prayer and worship, ***proclaim*** the gospel of the Kingdom, ***equip*** laborers for the return of Christ.
- C. We recognize that THOP has different faces, affecting how different people relate to us. We hold these three in tension. Not emphasizing on over the other, but seeking to fully embrace the value each expression adds to the other.
1. We are a ***house of prayer*** — we steward a space and times for devotion, worship and intercession. We partner with the Lord in calling watchmen (those that are willing) to take their station in prophetic watching, praying and proclaiming. (Isa. 62, Lk. 2)
 2. We are a ***missions base*** — we are a training and sending hub mobilizing laborers to fulfill Christ's commission locally and internationally. (Matt. 28)
 3. We are ***growing*** into a ***local church*** — as the Lord releases grace and gifting, we commit to the NT pattern for vision, values, and authority. This may be expressed in multiplying house-church plants. (Acts 2, 20)
- D. At the beginning of the year the Lord invited me to read the New Testament with Him as He wanted to increase my revelation of Christ and His Church. I have been confronted by the ministry of Christ and the foundational apostolic ministry following His resurrection.
- E. I've come to observe how we have allowed worldly values deriving from the enlightenment movement and post-modern culture to define how we approach fulfilling Christ's call to spiritual maturity, missional fruitfulness and increasing in the knowledge of God.
1. The enlightenment movement emphasizes ***reason*** (to the exclusion of revelation), ***individualism, and skepticism***. The enlightenment laid the foundations for the values we see and are called to challenge with our gospel in our post-modern culture such as ***the value of self-made happiness (tomorrow isn't promised get all you can), the pursuit of knowledge obtained by means of reason and the evidence of the senses (earthly and to the exclusion or indiscriminate inclusion of spiritual senses), and ideals such as self-attained liberty, progress, self-regulated toleration, fraternity, constitutional government, and separation of church and state.***

- F. Our values of comfort, consumerism, financial independence (even from God), recognition, influence, power, etc., have impacted how we generally approached spiritual family, discipleship, kingdom living and ministry.
- G. I believe not only in our community but throughout the Church worldwide, the Spirit of the Lord is leading us back to ***ancient paths***. To fulfill Christ’s commission, we are to corporately invest in spiritual transformation, formation and maturity, equipped for the work of the ministry, discern and accomplish the will of God, to building one another up filled with all the fullness of God (*guided by the Spirit and Scriptures*).
- “Thus says the LORD: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls...” (Jer. 6:16)***
“28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28-30)
- H. As the Lord raises up THOP as a discipling community we are convicted by and committed to the responsibility the Scriptures charges us with to see to it that we all are trained and equipped unto increased revelation of, faithfulness to, and fruitfulness in Christ (cf. Eph. 4-5).

II. ESSENTIAL # 1: **DEVOTION** AND GROWING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

42 They all gave full attention to the teaching of the apostles and to the common life [fellowship], to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42 NTE)

- A. As a result of the ministry of Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit, the church began to demonstrate God’s kingdom, a new creation community, a prophetic display of the coming age yielded to the leadership of God’s Messiah. New creation in the early church was demonstrated in their culture and collective lifestyle.
- B. Roger Gehring writes, “...*the image for the new people of God, which Jesus preferred, was an eschatological [end-times] **familia Dei (family of God)**. It is the substitute for earthly family, which is left behind by [Jesus] (Mk. 10:29-30) In this family God is the Father (Matt. 23:9) Jesus is the head of the household, and his followers are members of the household (Matt. 10:25). The older women that follow him are his mothers, and the [others his brothers and sisters]...He wanted to gather together the eschatological people of God, in which the love of God reigns just as it does in the intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father.”¹ [added by author for clarity]*
- C. So let’s notice together the first characteristic that Luke points out about the new people of God: they were devoted or “gave full attention to...” growing in the knowledge of God, the common life, communion, and prayer.

¹ Gehring, Roger W., House Church and Mission: The Importance of the Household Structures in Early Christianity., 2004, pg. 47

- D. This culture wasn't cultivated unconsciously. This devoted community was cultivated **intentionally and responsibly**. Devotion is the healthy response to a revelation of the coming kingdom, the cross of Christ, and the ministry of the Spirit (Eph. 1-3). This devotion was cultivated by the apostles and prophets of the day in cooperation with grace.
- "When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord."** (Acts 11:23)
- "And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith..."** (Acts 14:21-22)
- "When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words."** (Acts 15:31-32)
- E. Devotion is the first essential commitment and practice of every disciple. Jesus called His disciples with a simple and definite command, "Follow me." *This is the cross of every believer: devotion at all cost.* When a soul is truly convinced, convicted, and converted the supernatural response is serious, loving, and perfecting devotion to Jesus.
- "Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."** (Matt. 16:24)
- "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."** (Matt. 10:38)
- "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."** (Gal. 2:20)
- F. Devotion is necessary in order to fulfill the first and foremost commandment. There is no love without fulfilling all righteousness or obedience to all the commands of Christ. Therefore devotion in our discipling communities must be first and foremost.
- "Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment."** (Matt. 22:37)
- "15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments...21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." "** (Jn 14:15, 21)
- "5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing...7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples...10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."** (Jn. 15:5-8)

- G. Jesus requires absolute devotion. Jesus modeled this kind of devotion to His Father, and calls us to follow in His example. This is to be the pursuit of our heart. Intimacy is a result of vowed and perfecting devotion. God isn't seeking affectionate adulterers. He is seeking a faithful bride.
- "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown." (Jer. 2:2)***
- H. God's prophetic witness of His coming kingdom and the new creation is through a joyfully, hopelessly-devoted (for all the Grease fans) people. This people as a result of their devotion, find that in intimacy with God by His Spirit there is wholeness, freedom from spiritual oppression, endurance in difficulty, wisdom, righteousness and justice.
- "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* [reasonable service or "true and proper worship"] ***2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Rom. 12:1-2)*****
- " 13 After all, God himself is the one who's at work among you, who provides both the will and the energy to enable you to do what pleases him." (Phil. 2:13 NTE)***
- I. Fullness of joy is granted to the devoted. This was Jesus' portion and it is ours if we enter by the same way Jesus did. In modern culture we want the trophy without running the race. This isn't how the kingdom of God works. We must be in the pursuit of living a devoted life and in it the Lord blesses our weak, holy, loving efforts with joy to strengthen us to endure to the end.
- "10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you [the secret to my joy], and that your joy may be full." (Jn 15:10-11)***
- "8 But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." (Heb. 1:8-9; cf. Psa. 45:7)***
- "to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified." (Isa. 61:3)***
- "But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish...2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. 3 You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. 4 For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian." (Isa. 9:1, 2-4)***
- "52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 13:52)***

- J. This is how The Spirit is establishing the great commandment to have first place in the Church worldwide. We must give our full attention to (devote ourselves) and intentionally cooperate with God's grace in order to cultivate wholehearted love for God.

“37 You shall love the LORD...with all your heart... 38 This is the first and great commandment.” (Mt. 22:37-38)

“4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.” (Rev. 2:4-5)

III. DEVELOPING A DEVOTED LIFE

1. Humbly ask for and embrace the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus knew we needed “***another Helper***.” To walk in the Spirit is peace and life, not burdened, dry efforts of righteousness with a looming punishment overhead. We can have confidence in this ever-increasing sanctification free of punishment. This only comes by walking with and in the Spirit. *The same person that causes us to prophesy is the same one that causes us to walk in perfecting devotion.*

“15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (Jn. 14:15-17)

“31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” (Acts 9:31)

“17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17)

“13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” (Rom. 15:13)

2. Commit to being transformed by the counsel of the Scripture, through the grace of the Spirit, working it out in spiritual family.

“2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom. 12:2)

““9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” (Col. 1:9)

“15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph. 4:15-16)

3. Grow in prayer. This is imperative. We must be dedicated to a life of intimate, constant, and honest prayer. This is modeled in the life of Jesus. Not just individually but corporately seeking the grace and wisdom of God. (cf. Eph. 1:17-20; Eph. 5:7-21; Col 1:9-13)

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:[b] sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry...8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. (Col. 3:1-2, 5, 8-10)
“Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.”
(2 Cor. 6:1)

4. Devote yourself to practice obedience. Without applying the revelation of God to our lives it is of no profit to us, our sanctification, our affections, and our world. We must commit to persistently (even weakly) apply the revelation of God and practice the commands of Christ.

1. An example of applying the revelation of God: God is slow to anger, therefore I commit to being slow to anger. God is merciful, therefore I commit to being merciful.

“22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.” (Jas. 1:22-25)

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us...”
(Eph. 5:1)