

Essentials for A Discipling Community - Part 3

I. REVIEW: THOP AS A DISCIPLING COMMUNITY

- A. As a disciple 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 add 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 shared previously how I've come to observe how we have allowed worldly values deriving from the enlightenment movement and post-modern culture to cause us to deviate from the Scriptures in which we find sufficient counsel in hope to obtain Christ's call to spiritual maturity, missional fruitfulness and increasing in the knowledge of God.
- F. Our values of comfort, consumerism, financial independence (even from God), recognition, influence, power, etc., have impacted how we have approached spiritual family, discipleship, kingdom living and ministry as members of the kingdom of God.
- G. I feel a profound charge from the Holy Spirit to seek to recapture Christ's calling and ways. To fulfill the commission of Christ, we are to corporately invest in biblical spiritual transformation, formation and maturity, being equipped for the work of the ministry, to build one another up, and be filled in the fullness of God.

- H. As a leader of this community, I am convicted by the call and responsibility the Scriptures gives us to see to it that we all are equipped for the work of Christ (corporately and individually) unto us all working properly, building one another up unto increased revelation of Christ, faithfulness, and fruitfulness in Christ (cf. Eph. 4).

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)

- I. Proceeding supernatural events of Pentecost, the church began to demonstrate the ways and culture of God's kingdom, a new creation community and family, a prophetic view into the coming age. New creation in the early church was demonstrated in their culture and lifestyle displayed collectively.
- J. We took notice first of their devotion, and the value it still carries for every disciple no matter the generation. Then we covered last time their devotion to the ministry of word and the value of the ministry of the word of God that the early church apostles and elders advocated for.
- K. As noted by Luke, they devoted themselves or "gave full attention to..." to four items: 1. ***the teaching of the apostles***, 2. ***to the common life***, 3. ***to breaking bread*** (communion with Christ and one another), 4. ***to [the] prayer(s)***.

II. ESSENTIAL #3: DEMONSTRATING THE KINGDOM TO COME THROUGH THE COMMON LIFE

- A. According to David Brown offers another translation of the same verse, "***And they attended constantly upon the apostles' teaching, and on fellowship.***" Brown then asserts that this means "*they yielded themselves readily to those instructions which, in their raw state, would be indispensable to the consolidation and establishment of that immense multitude suddenly admitted to visible discipleship, and were found regularly at the stated meetings of the believers for Christian fellowship and mutual edification.*"¹
- B. Expounding a little more on the point of fellowship Luke notes how this common life or fellowship expressed amongst the disciples. Luke would characterize this common life by noting that they willing shared everything by:
1. Being generous to one another and taking care of one another needs.
 2. Going daily to corporate prayer together.
 3. Having communion and shared meals *with simple joy*.

"All the believers shared everything in common; they sold their possessions and goods and divided the proceeds among the fellowship according to individual need. Day after day they

¹ Brown, David et al. (n.d) A Commentary Critical Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments.

met by common consent in the Temple; they broke bread together in their homes, sharing meals with simple joy... (Acts 2:44-46 Phillips)

- C. In another summary about the community of new creation people, Luke notes that this continued as thousands escaped the lull of the spirit of the age and entered the kingdom of God. This did not change the culture, yet they continued to excel in these attributes. Noting that Barnabas joining the community and following this culture of generosity “*thus*” sold his property and brought the money to be distributed amongst those that were needy.

“32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. 36 Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.” (Acts 4:32-37)

- D. Lest we think that the common life has to do with just generosity as it pertains to finances, the Scriptures would expand the list. This common life or *fellowship in the Spirit* is to practice self-denial and the blessedness of being the giver in multiple ways as a member of our divinely justified community.

1. We share in a common life joining in building one another up by the gifts of grace given to us by the Spirit that we might function in them under His leadership and the guidance of the Scripture—in love.

“3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.” (Rom. 12:3-8)

“4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. 12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is

with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. ” (1 Cor. 12:4-7)

“20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” (1 Cor. 12:20-26)

“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts...12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.” (1 Cor. 14:1, 12)

2. We share in a common life as a means of healing and communal strengthening for endurance.

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (Rom. 5:1-5)

“We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” 4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, 6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” (Rom. 15:1-7)

“14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (Jas. 5:14-16)

3. We share in a common life to enjoy more readily and more frequently the presence of Jesus.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And we are writing these things so that our[a] joy may be complete.” (1 Jn. 1:1-4)

“19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” (Matt. 18:19-20)

4. We share in a common life as a means of maturing in the teachings and character of Christ.

“9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” (Rom. 12:9-18)

“We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” 4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, 6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” (Rom. 15:1-6)

“5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 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. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. 12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col. 3:3-17)

- E. Paul ends his second letter to the Corinthians with a very specific hope and prayer. This describes what I believe we need to be successful in the common life. It is beneficial if we seek to excel in this in our personal lives as it will benefit the corporate assembly as well.

"11 Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. 13 All the saints greet you. 14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor. 13:11-14)

III. ESSENTIAL # 4: COMMUNION WITH AND IN CHRIST

- A. The common life is centered around the table of Christ. This is the center of why we fellowship. Jesus left us a snapshot of Himself for us to remember Him by and gather around. When we do, it should remind us of His great love for us as shown supremely on the cross. It should fill our hearts with the desire to see Him when He comes again. That snapshot is the Lord's Supper.

"14 And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. 15 And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. 18 For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." (Lk. 22:14-20)

- B. Some feel that a weekly observance is too frequent my cause it become a meaningless ritual. Yet, the church in Acts seemed to gather weekly “**to break bread**” (Acts 20:7). Of course anything you do repeatedly runs the risk of becoming meaningless. But the solution isn’t to do those things less frequently, but to deal with *the problems that cause our hearts to grow cold*. Could it be that Christ would
- C. Paul, would encourage us to approach communion with careful reverence for Christ and for one another. He shares there is a supernatural work being done in us when we come together (in unity) centering our gatherings around Christ and as mutual beneficiaries of His sacrifice. Without proper respect for one another, unity and patience with one another our observation of this sacrament results in discipline from the Lord (even physically expressed through illness and death) rather than a blessing.

“17 But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because *when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.* 18 *For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.* And I believe it in part, 19 *for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.* 20 *When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat.* 21 *For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.* 22 *What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.”* (1 Cor. 11:17-22)

“27 *Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.* 28 *Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.* 29 *For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.* 30 *That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.* 31 *But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.* 32 *But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.* 33 *So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—* 34 *if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment.”* (1 Cor. 11:27-34)

- D. Paul’s is stating here to share in communion while mistreating another is *to show contempt* for Christ’s death, *to malign* the gospel, and *to tempt* the judgment of God. We are all humbled beneficiaries of God’s mercy solely on account of Jesus and His sacrifice for us all. The same mercy that has made us individually right with God, is the same mercy that showed encourage our patience and respect for one another.
- E. To participate in communion in ***an unworthy manner*** has traditionally been interpreted broadly to mean to participate while having unconfessed sin. This may be due in part to a misinterpretation that understands “unworthy” as describing the sinner rather than the manner of partaking. But Paul’s focus in this passage was much narrower.

- F. The unworthiness he had in mind was participating in the Lord's Supper in a way that failed to exhibit the unity of the church in Christ. That this was his meaning can be seen quite clearly in his exhortation in 11:17-22 and then giving instruction to correct this in verses 33–34. To prevent unworthy eating and subsequent judgment, he did not advise the Corinthians to confess their sin, but to be considerate toward one another (wait for one another and to eat at home).
- G. Paul insisted that something much worse was happening other than division and factions among them. Remembering and proclaiming Christ is the purpose of communion, violators actually sin against the body and blood of the Lord. One commentary further states, "*That is to say, their offense violates the central, sacred purpose of the Lord's Supper: honoring Christ for his work of salvation. To sin against the body and blood is to sin against the very hope of salvation. They also sinned against the body and blood of the Lord by sinning against Christ's church, or more particularly against the poor Christians who were not granted admission to the Lord's Supper. To sin against those for whom Christ shed his blood and gave his body is to sin against Christ himself.*"²

IV. IN SUMMARY -

- A. This common life or *fellowship in the Spirit* is to practice self-denial and the blessedness of being the giver in multiple ways as a member of our divinely justified community.
- B. We share in a common life joining in building one another up by the gifts of grace , given to us by the Spirit that we might function in them under His leadership and the guidance of the Scripture—in love. We share in a common life as a means of maturing in the teachings and character of Christ.
- C. The common life and communion in and with Christ are inseparable. Yes even the sacrament should be observed as often and with great reverence for Christ and for one another. This is so important to Christ, that even His judgement is attached to violators of this calling to practice this fellowship of love and peace in the Spirit.
- D. In this common life we demonstrate the love and patience that God has for us all. As we demonstrate this we display the supernatural benefits of Cross (towards all those that believe), the power of this gospel—the mercy of God towards those who repent and it is a witness of the expanding and coming kingdom which will ultimately restore the whole creation.

² Pratt, Richard L., Jr. (2000) Holman New Testament Commentary