

Essentials for A Discipling Community - Part 4

I. REVIEW: THOP AS A DISCIPLING COMMUNITY

- A. As a discipling community our vision is to host the presence of Jesus in the power of His Spirit, maturing in and demonstrating His teachings and nature.
- B. With the aim of putting this vision in action we pursue 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 one over the others, but seeking to fully embrace the values 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. With this in mind, last week I shared how I've come to observe how we have allowed worldly values to cause us to deviate from The Way according to 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.
- E. Our values of comfort, consumerism, independence (even from God), recognition, influence, power, etc., have impacted how we have approached spiritual family, discipleship, kingdom living and ministry.
- F. 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)**

- G. Proceeding from the outpouring of the Spirit, the church began to demonstrate (under the guidance of the apostles and elders) 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.
- 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)**
- H. We first took notice of the disciples’ devotion, and the value it still carries for every disciple no matter the generation. Then we covered 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. Last time, we shared on the how the scriptures defined what our fellowship is to be like. And that of communion with Christ and with one another being **intermeshed and inseparable.**
- I. 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 #5: TO THE PRAYERS

- A. Concerning these components of a discipling community we’ve addressed, they are all uniquely beautiful in how they contribute to the fellowship and consecration of God’s family. Yet I believe prayer is the golden thread that ties each of them together.
- B. As we see all through the book of Acts, through the apostles in their exhortations to the Church, and the overall canonical witness throughout Scripture, prayer was and is of the **utmost importance.** Therefore, we must catch fresh vision of what Luke characterizes as **devotion to prayer.**
1. That it may uproot any familiarity we possess, causing us to lean into the fear of the Lord and reverence for this sacred discipline. Also, to realize how essential it is for the tethering of the body of Christ, the edification of our inner man, and fulfilling our prophetic assignment as the people of God.
- C. The three things I discern Holy Spirit is stressing to His church in this hour is the importance of obedience to the Father’s commands, abiding in Christ, and expressing our faith in Him through a devoted life of prayer. The latter being the fulcrum for the former.

“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. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”
(John 15:5, 7, 10-11)

- D. Notably, we cannot walk obediently if not for God working in us, and as the High Priest of our hearts it is Christ who sets our hearts ablaze with love and sees to it that our flame should never go out. Not to mention, we cannot come out of the wilderness leaning on our Beloved if He does not first touch our hip.
1. Prayer is the place and posture in which these all are fostered and kept. We must wrestle. Furthermore, if we take Jesus at His word that apart from Him we can do nothing, prayer is the very means that deconstructs the idol of self-sufficiency.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

“But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”
(Hebrews 9:11-14)

- E. When Jesus communicates His house will be a house of prayer, the implication is that His church will be a praying people. It further connotes that prayer ought to be one of her essential functions and primary rhythms—personally and corporately.

- F. So, given Lukes testimony in Acts regarding the applications of devotion to prayer, and what is presented to us in the Word. When it comes to the prayers, there are three avenues I ascertain the Lord is placing His mandate on as a church and as a house of prayer:

1. ***Corporate Prayer:*** Despite any tendency we may have toward introversion, nothing can be done in a vacuum. The Lord delights and has used this as His chosen means of establishing His Kingdom in the earth.

“Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.” (Acts 3:1)

“And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One

who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us. (Acts 16:13-15)

- a. The synagogue and the “place of prayer” was the original context in which Paul established churches on his missionary journeys. It was the very means of the radical explosion we see exhibited in the early church. The Jews would gather in the synagogues daily at the hour of prayer, and the Jewish diaspora with no synagogue would gather in strategic locations outside their city to pray. In these meetings Paul ensured the Gospel was *experienced*, through the houses of prayer and fellowship that ensued the Gospel was *faithfully lived*.
 - b. With reference to public worship, there must be a house of prayer and an hour of prayer: the ninth hour, that is, three o'clock in the afternoon, was one of the hours of prayer among the Jews; nine in the morning and twelve at noon were the other two. See Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10. It is of use for private Christians so far to have their hours of prayer as may serve, though not to bind, yet to remind conscience: *every thing is beautiful in its season.*¹
 - c. This phrase “*place of prayer*” in the Greek being προσευχὴν. An expounded definition of this phrase: a place set apart or suited for the offering of prayer. If this was the means the Lord saw good to bless for the explosion of His church. I believe the Lord is bringing us back to the ancient paths, and is emphasizing the establishment of προσευχὴν (proseuche’s) once again.
2. **Intercession:** Amidst a time when literal walls were in need of gaps bridged, the Lord is searching the earth for a people who will stand in the gap in the Spirit. To give Him no rest, stirring Him to action for His promises to be made manifest in the earth.
 - a. God will not do apart from prayer what He has set himself to accomplish through it.
“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.” (2 Chronicles 16:9)

“I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.” (Isaiah 62:6-7)

¹ Henry, M. "Commentary on Acts 3 by Matthew Henry." Blue Letter Bible. Last Modified 1 Mar, 1996. https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Act/Act_003.cfm

And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. I have returned their way upon their heads, declares the Lord GOD.” (Ezekiel 30:22)

- b. It is also an invitation to join in with the eternal ministry of the Son and the Spirit.

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (Romans 8:33-34)

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. (Romans 8:26)

c. “We are separated from one another by an unbridgeable gulf or otherness and strangeness which resists all our attempts to overcome it by means of natural association or emotional or spiritual union. There is no way from one person to another. However loving and sympathetic we try to be, however sound our psychology, however frank and open our behavior, we cannot penetrate the incognito of the other man, for there are no direct relationships, not even between soul and soul. Christ stands between us, and we can only get into touch with our neighbors through him. That is why intercession is the most promising way to reach our neighbors, and corporate prayer, offered in the name of Christ, the purest form of fellowship.” - Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*Cost of Discipleship*)

3. **Personal Devotion:** Our end goal is to know Him. As Christ says, “*And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*”² He is calling us to be like the wise virgins with oil in their lamps (Matt. 25). This oil presented as the knowledge of God. This oil is cultivated through devotion in and to prayer.

² John 17:3 ESV

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” (Matthew 6:5-8)

“But you are my witnesses, O Israel!” says the Lord. “You are my servant. You have been chosen to know me, believe in me, and understand that I alone am God. There is no other God —there never has been, and there never will be.” (Isaiah 43:10)

“and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” (Colossians 3:10)

- a. To give ourselves to private devotion is to adorn ourselves in the knowledge of God. So the Lamb would rightfully receive the reward of His suffering.
- G. A community devoted to the prayers is a people wholly committed to corporate gatherings of prayer. Who also live from a place of intimacy cultivated in private devotion. A people who seek the Lord in secret for *oil in their lamps* and gather for the illumination of the Lord as a body.

III. OUR PROPHETIC ASSIGNMENTS AS A HOUSE OF PRAYER AND AS A CHURCH

- A. Each of the components of what Luke reveals in Acts 2:42 first occurs on the mountain of the Lord. Thus, our prophetic assignment is revealed to us throughout the Old Testament in what occurs on the mountain of God.

“And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, “I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.” (Isaiah 56:6-8)

- 1. To the teaching.

“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Micah 4:1-2)

2. To the fellowship and breaking of bread.

“Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.” (Exodus 24:9-11)

- B. Our prophetic assignment prepares us and declares of our end in eternity!

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:1-4)

- C. This prophetic declaration seems to tarry throughout history. But I find it necessary to acknowledge the history of this assignment and also recognize the disparity between the church's devotion to/identity as a praying people from the resurrection of Christ to the present.

1. Early church context in Acts.
2. Carrying of the Apostolic movement by the early church Father's (Clement of Rome, St. Ignatius of Antioch, & Polycarp of Smyrna).
3. Genesis of the Monastic movement in 227 A.D. by Abba Antony and the Desert Fathers/Mothers.
4. Great Reformation in 1,500's with Martin Luther.
5. Methodist Movement in Europe through the Wesley's, and the First Great Awakening in America through Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield.

- D. The church has slowly migrated from an entity adhered together, built up, and multiplied through corporate gatherings and personal disciplines of prayer. Gatherings of prayer once occurring daily now seldom occurring weekly, monthly, if at all in congregations all throughout the west. Intimacy with Christ cultivated in the secret place so ignored that people communicate with their Creator as if they are monologuing with a stranger.

1. Given the hour we are in, we must return to our roots as a praying people!

IV. PRACTICAL STEPS TO CULTIVATING A LIFE OF PRAYER

- A. What precedes practicality in promoting a life of prayer is first the posture of our hearts in which we pray. Devotion to prayer is ultimately birthed from desperation.

1. Many examples are presented in Scripture, but the lives of Hannah, David, Daniel, and Anna embody this strongly.

“She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly... “Oh no, sir!” she replied. ‘I haven’t been drinking wine or anything stronger. But I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the Lord. Don’t think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow.’” (1 Samuel 1:10, 15-16)

“Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.” (Psalm 55:17)

“When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.” (Daniel 6:10)

“And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.” (Luke 2:36-37)

2. James further advocates that proper posture determines the fruitfulness of our prayer lives.

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” (James 4:2)

“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. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.” (James 5:16-17)

- B. Get the word in your heart.

1. If you pray the Word, it’s much harder for to miss His will. Additionally, if the Spirit brings all the words of Jesus to remembrance, we must have His words in us in the first place to remember.

“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” (John 15:7)

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” (Psalm 119:9-11)

2. Delight in Him!

“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.” ~ Psalm 37:4-5 ESV

- a. If we delight in the Lord, the desires of our heart shift into alignment with the heart of God. Jesus concerns Himself with the intentions of the heart because it is the source of outflow. If He gets ahold of our hearts our hands and our mouths will follow suit.
 - b. If we commit ourselves to faithfully carrying out His commands and devoting ourselves to His ways. He will act on behalf of His Beloved.
 - c. Caleb mentioned something a couple weeks back that struck my heart. He said, “If signs and wonders came to confirm the gospel preached. Could it be that the absence of signs and wonders in our present services is a result of God refusing to confirm a Gospel that we’ve created?” Paul says in 2 Timothy, “God cannot contradict Himself” and to David Psalms 89:33-34 He says, “but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David.”
 - d. So, us asking God to act in a manner that does not align with truth is to ask Him to breach the very nature He is bound to, which He cannot and will not do. However, the Lord delights to carry out His word. Therefore, if we are filled with truth, we are simply provoking the Lord to action and giving Him no rest. And this is something we see throughout the testimony of the Scriptures, from David, to Jeremiah, to Daniel, to Anna, and the Apostles. The Lord longs for a people filled with truth devoted to praying His word!
- C. Catch a vision of the magnitude and influence of prayer. It is the means given to us to commune with the God of the universe who inclines Himself to hear from us.

“O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear.” (Psalm 10:17)

“I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.” (Psalm 40:1-3)

- D. When we need help, the helper Himself—the Holy Spirit—is the spirit of prayer.
“Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died.” (Zechariah 12:10)
- E. Devotion to prayer, especially in the corporate context, must also be in tandem with devotion to one another.
 - 1. There's nothing that can replace equity with one another. We must give ourselves to the difficult work of love.
“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.” (Romans 12:10)
- F. Structure your day around time in prayer. Not the other way around.
 - 1. Utilize the moments of stillness in your day to enter His presence, and go out of your way to come to the prayer room.
- G. “Prayerlessness is disobedience, for God’s command is that men ought always to pray and not faint. To be prayerless is to fail God, for He says, Ask of me.” - *Leonard Ravenhill (Revival Prayers)*