

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday April 25, 2021. "Table: Circles are better than rows"

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message this Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotional is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. Take as long as you need to dive into this material and feel free to share it. We're deep into 2021 and with the vaccine roll out it looks hopeful as we move towards a new reality. A growing group who follow all the safety guidelines joins us at the church. Our children's and youth area are fully open and we are seeing a good response. We're so encouraged with your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We still are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions you have, please pass them our way. We feel just as isolated as you, and we want to maintain that connection with each of you.

II Recap.

We've spent two weeks unpacking *'tabling'*. *'Tabling'* is simply creating informal times of regular gathering, sometimes best over food or drink, in which relationships are intentionally grown deeper and more life-giving. *'Tabling'* is for the purpose of growing relationships deeper through honest conversation and openness, to cultivate and nurture a circle of people who can **help us be the best us we can be**. Hopefully we do the same for them. AND it's okay, in fact encouraged, to have differing views and opinions about issues so there can be strength found in a diversity of views. **Safety is found in a commitment to each other, and to the relationship itself**, rather than the protection of a certain position or agreement on issues. We understand this is VERY difficult to do, valuing the relationship over being right. That's what makes these kinds of relationships so important. And the reason we are to work with everything we have to grow these kinds of relationships in our lives. We give the practice and process of cultivating these relationships the name *'tabling'*.

III Sunday.

We wrapped up this series on *'tabling'* with the final truth. IF, and that's a huge if, our desire is personal growth, self betterment, then the **ONLY** way that happens if we fully embrace AND practice the truth that "circles are better than rows". Rows are when we gather weekly for worship, and circles are when we gather with a dedicated few in conversation that helps us grow. This simply means that life was not meant to be lived gritting it out on our own, but rather with others, in intentional gathering to help each other become the better 'us'. Last week we talked about people who are different from us, and this week we talked about people who are on the same life journey.

So, let's kind of hit a general 30,000 foot view of healthy, maturity producing relationships.

Start with a little self-inventory. What kind of people are you drawn to?

What do you look for in close relationships? (not romantic)

How do relationships help grow you as a person?

The scripture Sunday was a walk through Paul's closing remarks in one of his letters, that was most likely read at several different home churches. When the followers of Jesus first began gathering after his resurrection, they didn't meet once in a week in worship services like we do now. They met in people's homes, with no bible, and just read Paul's letters that were circulating around. And in one of these letters, Paul commends the church for fulfilling very specific duties that he felt were an important part of gathering, or tabling. So read **Colossians 4:7-18** and then answer the questions.

What jumped out to you about this passage?

What are some specific activities that could be a part of why we gather in small groups?

Kal walked through this passage and pulled out a few elements Paul mentioned that seem to be essential in why we *'table'*. Why circles are better than rows.

1. Checking in with each other for encouragement and growth. Paul mentioned in this wrap up that they would 'catch-up' so to speak and let each other know how they were doing. The truth is we simply cannot make it through life alone. We need people we can trust and count on to not only help guide us, but also to become the better us. This comes from people who are committed to our growth.

2. Comfort in difficult times. Paul mentions a few people by name, and talks about what a 'comfort' they had been in difficult times. There are those times in our life we don't need a lesson, the 'truth', how to fix the situation we're in. We just need someone to sit with us, and 'be' with us in those tough times. This is what circles, *'tabling'*, does better than rows, (just attending on Sunday), does.

3. Genuine and specific prayer. Paul not only mentions a prayer warrior by name, but he also talks about a deeper level of praying than simply the comforts and details of life. There were some serious elements of personal growth that were mentioned here. We all know there are surface level prayer concerns, (health, job, some family issues, decisions), and then there are deeper PRAYER CONCERNS. Deep hurt, doubt, faith struggles, and more that we just don't feel comfortable sharing with just anyone. This is why we need to meet regularly with circles. With people we can be vulnerable around and know not only is that info safe, but we will be prayed for.

4. Studying for personal growth. Then this final point was made that the early followers of the person and teachings of Jesus did not have a bible or some slick DVD series to watch. They had nothing but some oral stories of Jesus, and a few circulating letters from Paul or other disciples. They were just trying to figure out what it looked like to live committed to this person who had risen from the dead. Our western minds just love gaining information. We tend to study scripture to figure out the facts and details. These early followers didn't have scripture, so their purpose to gather in circles, to *'table'*, was for personal growth. Asking; ***"How can these teachings and truths about Jesus help me to be a better me?"*** THIS is the goal and purpose of gathering to study.

IV Challenge.

The challenge is a simple one. Like the car sales person would say; ***"What would it take to get you in a group?"*** We already can see why this is so important. Paul is pretty straight forward, and out front in the benefits for him and other followers of gathering in circles, 'tables'. So, the final question; ***"What's keeping you from choosing to make 'tabling' a central part of your spiritual growth?"***