



gracefellowship

Follow The Leader
September 6, 2020
Developing Life Rhythms: Community

:: Acts 2:42-47

In this series we are talking about developing healthy life and soul rhythms that will allow us to be disciples who can make disciples. Our definition of a disciple comes from Matthew 4:19...

19 And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (ESV)

That word, disciple, means a lot of things to a lot of people. When we say it, here's what we mean:

A disciple of Jesus is one who follows Jesus, is being changed by Jesus and is on mission with Jesus.

To truly be a disciple of Jesus it's important to have life rhythms that reflect the way Jesus lived. Our lives can easily become unbalanced as we navigate life in a world shaped by a pandemic. But just because the nature of the way things have changed, it doesn't mean we have to be totally unhealthy. Jesus left a pattern for us to follow in order to stay connected to Him. The life rhythm Jesus seemed to model for us is:

Solitude (Personal Worship) ----- Community ----- Mission

Last week we talked about being with God. We need an UP rhythm that leads us to times of solitude and personal worship where we are alone with the Father to hear from Him as we read out Bible, pray, and meditate. Today we are going to look at the rhythm Jesus had of being in community with others.

Jesus established a life rhythm of spending time in deep community.

Last week we talked about how Jesus would get alone with God and had an UP rhythm to His life. Focusing on the vertical relationship with God fed Jesus' soul and allowed Him to hear consistently from His Father about what steps to take next in life.

Being in community is an IN rhythm.

Community is necessary for a healthy soul. No matter how much of an introvert you are or if you consider yourself a loner, you need relationships with other people. Jesus will never be content with second place in the life of a believer. He must always be our first and most important relationship. When we accept Him, we follow Him. But God also designed us to live in community with other people. So, when God asks us to live our lives in a certain way, it's because He loves us and knows us best for us. He knows how He designed us to survive and thrive.

Genesis tells us why community is so important in the first two chapters of our Bible.

:: Genesis 1:1

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The name of God used in this passage is 'elohiym (אֱלֹהִים 'ēlôhîym). In Hebrew this is plural. In other words, within the first verse of the Bible we see that God exists as one God in multiple persons- Father, Son and Spirit. God has eternally existed in divine relationship. We see this even more deeply at the end of the account of creation.

:: Genesis 1:26

26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Genesis 2 tells us that God formed one man and put him in a garden called Eden. After an unknown period of time God looks at Adam and says, "It is not good for the man to be alone." God doesn't say "Man isn't good." He says loneliness isn't good! Was Adam alone? No, God walked with Adam and had a relationship with Adam. But Adam didn't have anyone who was like him. Before God makes a wife for Adam He gives the man a job- name all the animals! This seems like a weird progression in the story. But I want you to see what God is doing. He knows it's not good for Adam to be alone, so He stirs up that loneliness by marching all the animals in front of Adam. Genesis 2:20 says, "But for Adam, no suitable helper was found." None of the animals fixed the relational gap in Adam's life.

So, God puts Adam to sleep, takes one of his ribs, and uses it to form a suitable helper for Adam. Look at what happens when Adam wakes up:

:: Genesis 2:22-23

22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

Adam looks at the woman God provided for him and said, Now this is someone I can be in true community with. God literally wired us to be in relationship. This is evident when He gives the Law to Moses. Each of the 10 Commandments tell us how to be in right relationship with God and how to be in healthy relationships with our fellow man. By the time we get to the New Testament, Jesus is asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” And His answer was perfect: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” But then He added, “And the second is like it- love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and prophets are fulfilled in these two.”

Paul then wrote in Romans 13:10, “Love does no harm to a neighbor, Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

:: Romans 13:10

10 “Love does no harm to a neighbor, Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

When you go back and look at one of the earliest stories in Jesus’ life you will find him around the age of 12 in the Temple at Jerusalem and He is listening the teachers of the Law and asking questions. Luke’s account of the gospel tells us that everyone was amazed at Jesus- even when He was so young. After this, the story of Jesus skips ahead to the age of around 30. There is one sentence that tells us about the years of Jesus growing up between age 12 and 30.

:: Luke 2:52

52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Jesus grew in wisdom as He studied and applied the teaching of the Torah and he grew in physical stature, which we would expect. But we’re also told Jesus grew in favor with God and man. Jesus developed the rhythm of being with God and He developed a rhythm of being in relationships, building community. Why were these two things so important to Jesus’ life to have a healthy rhythm?

- God has wired us for relationships. God is a relational God and He designed us to be relational as well.
- **A Christian unwilling to be in Christian community is like...**

When Jesus begins his earthly ministry He takes the passion He has developed for community and calls disciples to follow Him. Jesus created community by first just inviting people to follow Him casually. Then we are told in Luke 6 that He chose 12 to be in deep relationship with Him and become His inner circle. As you read the story of Jesus’ life you see how He developed community. Jesus and the disciples...

- ate together
- traveled together

- played together
- sat around camp fires
- served together
- went to Synagogue
- celebrated the Jewish feasts

And to make the community complete, the disciples argued with one another! I wouldn't want you to think that their relationships were any different than yours and mine! We have to learn to put up with one another as we do life together. There are tons of places in the NT where the apostles write to churches and plead with them to bear with one another through the challenges of their life in community together.

Now, beyond the fact we are hardwired by God to be in relationship with others, why is community so important to Jesus? Community, for Jesus, wasn't just about having a group of friends to hang out with so He wasn't alone.

Community was how Jesus intended to change the world.

Throughout human history every civilization that has risen to power has done so through a leader with wealth and military power.

Jesus builds His Kingdom through loving community! Community isn't just a good idea, it's a revolutionary way of life. Jesus' Kingdom advances all across the globe as disciples of Jesus invite people into relationship with God and relationship with His followers. The best form of evangelism is inviting people into relationships and living out authentic faith with them.

Building community includes reaching the lost- those outside the loving community of Jesus' Kingdom.

When we talk about community as an "IN" rhythm I don't mean just focusing on us. Jesus wasn't creating a private club for Christian membership. When we find community in the local church we should want to help others, who are far from God, find their way in as well. Jesus models this idea for us so well as he lived in community not just with the 12 disciples, but with people the religious elite couldn't stand.

:: Mark 2:13-17

13 Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them.

14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

15 While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

16 When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Levi, also known as Matthew, leaves his job as a tax collector to follow Jesus. Tax collectors were despised in Jewish culture because they were typically Jewish men who were working with Roman authorities to collect taxes for the occupying forces of the Roman Empire in Israel. Tax collectors were traitors to their own people. That didn't stop Jesus from inviting Levi to follow Him. Not only that, we find that Levi throws a party for Jesus and all sorts of riff-raff shows up! The Pharisees indicate there are tax collectors and all types of sinners at this party- and Jesus is hanging out with them and enjoying a meal. Eating a meal with someone was an act of intimacy. So the Pharisees ask Jesus' disciples about their Master's behavior. I imagine they didn't know the answer exactly, so one of them went and whispered the question in Jesus' ear. I love how Jesus answers: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (17)

Jesus saw building community with sinners as a primary way for His message of loving community and Kingdom building to spread. Then guess what we see after Jesus dies, is resurrected and ascends back to heaven? The disciples of Jesus follow His lead in building a community of people who have been changed by Jesus and are passionate about reaching others who don't know the love and grace of Jesus.

:: Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.

45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Why were people being added to the Church every day? Because the disciples of Jesus were living in authentic community, worshiping, eating meals together, sharing and meeting needs and showing the world around them what the Kingdom of God was like.

Community is meant to keep us from developing an attitude that my faith is personal and private. Our faith in Jesus is meant to be shared.

I appreciate what my friend, Jim Putman, wrote in one of his books, "The Power of Together."

"God is the great grace-giver for sure, but notice how He gives His grace. People in the church are His means for delivering His grace. For those who have a "me-and-Jesus-only" attitude, this should be a wake-up call. God desires to love us and be in relationship with us and then through us He will love others. His love flows to us, but we are not to be like a dam that merely blocks the love and creates a pool for us alone. We are to be like a river that allows that love to flow to us and through us." - Jim Putman, The Power of Together

Illustration: Privacy Fence

When we lived in TX one of the cultural phenomenon we discovered quickly when we bought a house was that everyone has a privacy fence. Every single yard in a neighborhood as an 8' tall fence that goes along the entire back yard. We could drive into our garage, go into our house and do whatever we wanted in our back yard without ever seeing a living soul. As a result for the 5 years we lived in our house we barely spoke to the people who lived right beside us. In fact, one winter our neighbor's husband died and we didn't find out until the next spring when everyone started mowing their yards again and we never saw him.

As Christians we can't afford to build privacy fences around our lives. To have a healthy life rhythm we have to do more than just invest in our relationship with God. We have to move past the UP rhythm of being with God and branch out to the IN rhythm of inviting people into our lives.

Let me give you two closing thoughts on how to do that.

1. **Fight for community.**

Some of you might be sitting there saying, "I've tried this before and I got hurt. I opened up and got into a community with some other people and I got burned." I hear you and I'm sorry. But this is important. Fight for it. The NT is full of teachings about how to fight for relationship. I've listed some in the notes for you to look up on your own if you're using our app. Relationship and community is messy, but it's worth fighting for!

God is relational and has created us to be as well, so guess what Satan will try to do- he will try to destroy relationship. He will do everything possible to keep you focused on your pain instead of your place in God's Kingdom! Fight for community.

Skye, just list these in the notes- don't include the passages.

Ephesian 4:1-6

Ephesians 5:15-21

Philippians 2:1-4
Philippians 2:14-16
Colossians 3:1-17
2 Timothy 2:22-26
James 1:19-21
James 5:13-16

2. Evaluate what life rhythms you have that limit stronger community.

One of the common things we hear is that people are too busy to be in a Life Group. All that really means is you have other things you prioritize over community. We will find time to do the things we really want to do. We say all the time, "Life change happens in circles, not rows." Coming to church is important, but you should put equal importance in being in deep relationships with other people in a community where people are sharing their hurts, needs, dreams, triumphs and where you are together seeking to advance the Kingdom of God by inviting others into that community. I want to highly encourage you to get involved with a life group.

- Social distancing is a terrible term in our culture right now and it's creating a rhythm in people that limits community. We need to practice physical distancing while in social community. Sit outside; sit 6' apart, wear a mask if you want to, but do not buy into the idea that you need to distance from people socially. You can't afford to do that! God didn't create you to hole up in your house and avoid people.

Here's the last thing I want us to do together before we close this morning: take out your phone and text someone you haven't seen in a while. Preferably text someone who goes to our church, but if you are new with us and don't really know anyone here, sent a message to someone else and let them know you miss them and would love to catch up. Text messages are impersonal; this is a first step. Follow up with them and find a way to get together if you can.

- Pray
- Closing Song
- Announcements

Life Group Discussion Guide

Ice Breaker: What app on your phone is most helpful/practical for you and why? What app do you use the most and why? (If you have time, use both questions, if not choose one.)

Reminder: Try to find time to pray for things beyond who is sick, a work project, etc... While important, let's not get stuck there when we pray. What things do we need to be seeking God about in our lives and world? If prayer moves heaven and gets to the ear of Almighty God, what should we pray for as a group/church?

Set up the Bible passage: In Acts 2 Peter preached a message to a large crowd in Jerusalem during Pentecost and told about the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. This would have happen 50 days earlier during Passover and would have been events most of the people were aware of, had heard rumors about, or had even been eyewitnesses of. The passage we are going to read shows how people responded and how the first group of Christians formed a community.

Read Acts 2:36-47 together as a group.

1. What things do you see taking place in this passage to build community?
2. From this passage what do we learn about the role of community in the lives of the first followers of Jesus?
3. In the message on Sunday Joel talked about the way we are wired to worship. How does the Bible support that claim? (What evidence do you see for that in the Bible?)
4. How has being in community impacted your life?
 - This may be an opportunity to discuss the definition of a disciple- one who follows Jesus, is being changed by Jesus and is on mission with Jesus- and asking people to discuss how/if being part of Christian community has helped them in those areas. Remember to listen for things that may help you guide someone in a next step of their faith journey.
5. How does God use Christian community to change the world?
6. Was there anything from the message on Sunday you had thoughts on or wanted to discuss further?
7. What is one action step you think God is asking you to take this week to follow Him, be changed by Him or be on mission with Him?
 - Let the group know you will take notes and plan to begin next week following up on these things!