

COMMUNITY

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Take a minute to pray for God to guide you as you study...

Whether you are an introvert or an extrovert, there is one thing that matters to both...community. Some people feel energized by being alone where they can recuperate and be refreshed and renewed, while others thrive off of a room full of people, lots of conversations, and being the center of attention. Both types of people, whether you believe it or not, need community. A community is a network of people that are close enough to care about your well-being. Sometimes, some of the most important people in your community are your family. Other times, your community is full of high school and college friends that turned into forever-friends. Building a community helps in so many ways, but it's definitely a huge part of being a disciple. In fact, God designed community to be something that all disciples have as we work together to battle the great controversy in life.

From the very beginning, God wanted humans to be in community. After Jesus had bent down and breathed life into Adam's lungs, He looked around and said,

Genesis 2:18: "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be _____. I will make a helper suitable for him.'"

So, God took one of Adam's ribs and created the most beautiful creation, woman. And I find it interesting that God called her Adam's "helper." How was she supposed to help? What was her purpose? Or maybe God's design is for everyone to be in a community so that we help each other. Listen to the way Solomon puts it as he talks about the beauty of community.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can _____ the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

It's no secret that we were made to be with one another and help each other. God's design from the beginning was for not only God to be in community and relationship with humans, but it was also for humans to build community with each other.

The benefits of Christian community are incredibly valuable! In fact, I would suggest that without a Christian community of fellow believers and disciples, you are actually handicapping your relationship with Jesus. That sounds pretty strong, but the value that comes from community is immeasurable.

Here are several reasons why disciples NEED community.

ACCOUNTABILITY

This sounds kind of funny, but having a community around you that loves Jesus like you do will help you stay accountable to the calling God has placed on your life to be a disciple!

Hebrews 10:24-25: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but _____ one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

When your fellow disciples are constantly encouraging you to live more and more for Jesus, to honor Him in your life in all that you do and say, it makes a major impact on how you decide to live. When we can "spur one another onward," I believe that we are living out God's design for community.

Solomon puts it slightly different, but it's the same thing.

Proverbs 27:17: "As iron sharpens iron, so _____ person sharpens another."

It's almost like a sword in the battle between Christ and Satan. When we are getting "dull" or seem to be falling away from growing as a disciple, it's our Christian friends, our community, that is there to "sharpen" us and bring us back towards being a growing disciple.

Here's another reason why disciples NEED community.

COMFORT

Community may be most noticed during heartache and struggle. At times when you don't think that you can carry on anymore, it's your community that lifts you up and encourages you. Here's how the Bible puts it.

Proverbs 17:17: "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of _____."

During adversity, your community is there to help you up and pull you in tight. Your community exists for times like this, when you need them the most!

Galatians 6:2: "Carry each other's _____, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

It's interesting that Paul says that part of fulfilling "the law," is actually carrying each other's burdens. That's powerful! That tells me that being community for someone else is actually part of being a disciple!

BASIC POINT

God's design for community is to support you, encourage you and keep you growing as a disciple.

And yet here's another reason why disciples NEED community.

MISSION

Disciples really have one purpose, to go and disciple others as they begin to grow in a relationship with Jesus. Sometimes it's easy to sit back and think that being a disciple is all about us, but our calling is to reach others! And a community of disciples will always help you stay on focus, the focus of reaching the lost.

In the New Testament, "the church" had just begun. There was just a small group of disciples that were still figuring things out. And even though they had no idea what they were doing, they knew that they were going to be focused on mission no matter what. Everything they did revolved around helping the message get to the lost. Here's what their community looked like.

Acts 2:42-47: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 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, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

That’s what a community on mission does for each other! They shared food. They shared their homes. They did anything and everything, whatever it took to keep the mission going. They knew that mission was everything, and they would not be stopped. That’s what your Christian community is supposed to do for you and what you are supposed to do for it...keep each other focused on the mission of reaching the lost!

SERVING

Romans 12:5-6: “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form _____ body, and each member belongs to all the others”

The Bible uses an analogy to describe the church, and it describes it as a body. In a body, there are many parts that function together. You’ve got a mouth, so that you can chew food that gets nourishment to the rest of your body. You’ve got legs so that you can get up and walk to the refrigerator to get that food. You’ve got arms, so that you can open the refrigerator door and cut things up and put things in the microwave and lift that food to your mouth. You’ve got eyes to see what you’re doing as you prepare that food. Your body, although it has many different parts, is working together to make something happen.

This is the same way that the church functions. We all are different in so many ways. Some are men, some are women. Some are young, some are old. Some are white or black or Asian or Hispanic. We are all different, but we all have the same goal...to reach the lost, and so we must work together, like a body, to make that happen.

Building a Christian community is so critical to your continued growth as a disciple. Without community, you are likely to drift away and lose your desire to grow. I’ve seen it happen time and again, and it could have been stopped if that person had had a community that would support and love on them.

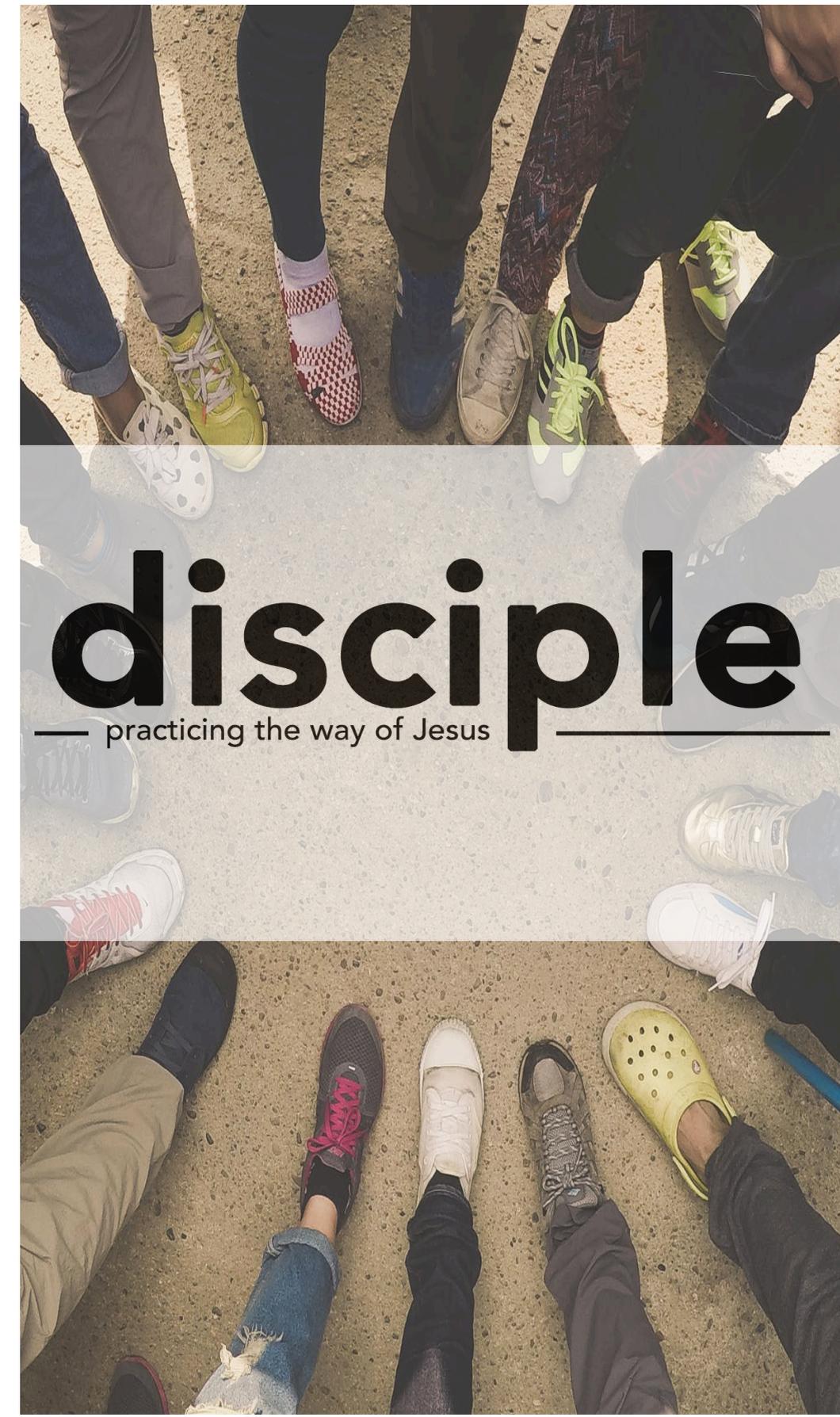
This is the last lesson in DISCIPLE, and I hope that you have grown as a disciple as you practice the way of Jesus. May you continue to make effort to grow in your relationship with Christ, and may you be more and more connected to His mission of saving people.

“Heavenly Father, may You continue to richly bless those that have gone through these lessons. May You challenge them and grow them as they strive to know You better. May they experience the outpouring of your Holy Spirit in their lives as they stay focused on Your mission. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.”

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

1. Who are the people in your community?
2. In what ways have you seen your Christian community help you?
3. How can you build a better, stronger community?

LESSON 12: THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY



disciple
— practicing the way of Jesus —