

Community and Discipleship - Panel Discussion (Dean Taylor, Etc)

by Dean Taylor

The sermon emphasizes the vital connection between community and discipleship, drawing from historical and biblical examples to inspire intentional living among believers.

Duration: 1:37:34

Scripture: Acts 2:42

Topics: "Christian Community", "Discipleship"

Description

This sermon focuses on the importance of community and discipleship, with speakers sharing insights on historic examples, biblical foundations, practical examples, and necessary principles for fostering a cohesive brotherhood. It emphasizes the early church's simplicity in following Jesus before theological complexities arose, highlighting the need for intentional community living and the challenges faced in maintaining unity and diversity within a brotherhood.

Transcript

Well, I'm really looking forward to this opportunity to be taught by four experienced brothers in Christ who have a lot of insights to share with us on the topic of the panel this evening, community and discipleship. And I'm going to introduce them to you, beginning at my right to your left, and perhaps they need no introduction, but there may be some here that don't know who these brothers are as well. So, Brother Dean Taylor will be speaking to us.

He'll give us a prepared presentation in a little while on historic examples of community. When he's finished with that, then Brother John D. Martin will come forward and he will speak to us about biblical foundation for community. And Brother Matthew Miglione will come forward and he'll present examples of community.

And then Brother Ernest Eby will come forward and he will speak to us on principles necessary for community. So, we're going to hear some prepared presentations, brief presentations on the biblical foundation for community, historic examples of community, present examples of community, principles necessary for community. I didn't quite give them to you in the same order the second time, but that's the presentations, the prepared presentations that we'll have.

When we finish with that, then we have harvested your questions. There have been some other questions provided. We're going to engage in a time of interaction between the panel members on these questions.

And what we'd like to do at the end, somewhere around 745 perhaps or thereabouts, we'd like to give opportunity now for you as participants in this discussion to address the panel if there's any points that need clarification and additional enlightenment. So, that's kind of the broad overview of the evening. And I'm just thinking this could be a tremendous blessing to all of us as we have this opportunity to talk about this subject together and to consider it community and discipleship.

What does discipleship really look like in community? And so, I'm going to ask Brother Dean Taylor to come forward and begin the prepared presentations. You other brethren can just follow along then in turn. Thank you, Brother.

Given the topic of the historic examples of community and then given five minutes to do it is interesting. You know, I will just say that I have been interested. I've always been a student of revivals.

I love studying revivals, the histories of revivals. And I will say that when I started to study revival, many times you see experiences when clearly God has broken into a place and revived people. Souls were saved.

Things were changed. Sin was put away. But then every now and then when you read through history, you read not just an individual being converted and radically changed, but you hear the entire congregation.

And then from that, there's something that happens that gives birth to something extraordinary. And that has always been something that's been very interesting to me. I've seen that in the early church and several times, particularly the revival that happened in 1525 with the Anabaptists, of course, I was very interested in.

Also, I'm very interested in and become a student of the Moravians. And I do have a documentary that Mike Atnip and I did. It's for sale back there.

And I went into detail. I was very impressed with the discipleship that I saw amongst the Moravians. And when I lived here in Lancaster County, just right up the road is Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, which was a mission community.

And there's something as I studied those brothers that were there and how they shared their life and everything they did, their businesses, their things that they did went to prosper the kingdom of God. And the more I studied that in groups like that, I just get inspired. And so I guess maybe that's part of my vision and dream to see that in reality today.

But to go in and just a few minutes left of what I have here of historic discipleship and historic communities discipleship, I thought I would just read the account in the book of Acts. If I could bring it down, you know, what do you do? I'd love to say something about the Moravians, the Anabaptists, the different ones, but I'm just going to read the account in Acts. It's in Acts chapter 2. And when the Holy Spirit came, it says in verse 43, And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

And all that believed were together and had all things common, and sold their possessions and good and part of them to all men, as every man had need. And they continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Holy Spirit poured out again when they prayed for boldness in chapter 4 in verse 31. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken, where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.

Neither said any of them that of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and the great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made unto every man according to his need." Now real quick, I have about a few seconds left.

Again, the beautiful thing about what we read in the Acts account is that this is not a command. And I said that in my sermon this morning. We don't see anything in there that's a command.

You have to do that. But don't miss it because it's not a command. It's a testimony.

And what is it a testimony of? It is a testimony of a church living out in a radical way the teachings of what came before it, which was the teachings of Jesus Christ. In my opinion, it's the only church that we completely see that was started by no man. It was started by God.

In my opinion, it's like the Holy Spirit saying, okay, everybody step back. I'm going to show you what this stuff's supposed to look like. And so, but as we see different radical expressions, we see it in the book of Corinthians.

We see different brothers doing these things. The point is this. The point is Jesus.

And Jesus came to establish a kingdom. He was glorified when He establishes a people and sanctifies them in the midst of an unjust nation. And when He does that, He is glorified.

And I'm blessed with the example that we see here in the book of Acts. And I'm blessed as I've been a student of revival, that every now and then you see a group to be able to lay down their differences, become one, and walk out those kingdom principles together. As John G always says, to show the whole world what the whole world should look like if it only followed the King.

So amen. I thank you for those examples. I thank the Lord for those examples in history, and I praise the Lord for them.

A biblical foundation for community. John the Baptist and Jesus both began their ministry with one word, repent. Now in common understanding, what should have followed that is repent if you want to go to heaven.

That's what most people hear after that word, or if you don't want to go to hell. I don't want to minimize those two realities. I believe in both of them.

But Jesus specifically said, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Now Jesus always called the gospel the gospel of the kingdom. You go through and read it.

The seed. If you ask most people, what is the seed that was sown in those four soils? Most people say the word of God, and that's correct. But in Matthew, it specifically says it was the word of the kingdom.

And we have his kingdom parables, and we have a prayer that is just saturated with the kingdom. We'll talk about that in just a moment. And so Jesus' message was the kingdom.

He said he was sent to preach the kingdom. Now his audience, when they heard that, what would they have thought? Well, they were Jewish people. And I think in their minds, a kingdom of heaven, that would be an ideal king.

Oh, yes. Our prophets spoke about a time like this. They said there would be a day when there would be no war.

There would be no poor. Everybody would have what they need. Children could play safely in the streets.

Old people would be taken care of. It would be the ideal community. This must be what Jesus is talking about.

And if you look at what he says right after that in the Sermon on the Mount, that's indeed what he's talking about. A community where the property accumulated to oneself is not the norm. It's sharing and giving.

A place where there's no violence. Evil is not resisted. A place of purity.

A place of prayer. And then you go to the prayer. The prayer has all plural pronouns.

There's not I. There's not me. There's not mine. There's not my.

It's our. It's us and ours. And so it's very obvious that Jesus had in a redeemed society.

The emphasis today is on redeemed individuals. That's good. You can't have a redeemed society till you have redeemed individuals.

But if that's as far as the gospel that you understand goes, you have only part of the gospel. God's purpose is to redeem individuals because he wants to make up a redeemed society, present to the world what God intended originally at the beginning before sin came into the world. He's always wanted a people.

In the Old Testament, he wanted a kingdom that would show all the other kingdoms what his kingdom looks like. And to be very honest with you, it was not the perfect kingdom that Jesus came finally to give us. But it was good enough that the Queen of Sheba came and she said, in my country I heard about this, but now I can see that the half wasn't even told me.

This is a blessed people. They have blessed laws. It's a blessed society.

God has always wanted that. What makes us think that he wants anything different in the New Testament? In fact, Peter says, you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people that he should show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. So it's the same idealist in the Old Testament.

Now, the early church took this seriously. Our brother just referred to it. And so they took the teachings of Jesus and then you read Acts 2 and Acts 4, and that's what it looks like.

It says they broke their bread from house to house. Their possessions were freely shared. It was at least a partial realization of those wonderful Old Testament prophecies.

And we live in a time, I tell you, I answer the billboard lined number for Kim. And when I present this ideal to them, this really resonates much better than if I just stuck to individual salvation. When I paint the picture of what this is supposed to look like, finally, when God has them redeemed, joins them with others who are redeemed, and the society they can enjoy and present to the world, it's indeed a very appealing message.

So the biblical basis for community is right there in the first words of Jesus. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has arrived, is here. And God help us to present that to the world.

Well, they were both right on five minutes, so I better stay on mine. You know, when I was asked to speak on present examples of community, my initial impulse was just to give you a one-minute bio of five different communities. I could have talked to you about my community, different ones that we've seen, maybe some of the first communities I came into, and I realized at some point that's just a shortcut.

That's not what I should talk about here. In this short time, what I would like to convince you of is that community is a ubiquitous term. There's no command to be in community in the Bible because you are in community.

And community is a spectrum event. There are all kinds of communities that are nested inside of each other. Community means the group of people that you have things in common with.

And what we're talking about when we talk about biblical community is doing that on purpose and finding things in common, like making choices to have things in common. Because I'm in community just because I was born in an Italian American immigrant family, because I was raised in a certain part of the country, because I live in a certain town, because I have certain interests, hobbies, professions. All of these things are communities.

And what we're seeing, what I want to present to you as present examples of community is actually not the ones we're talking about. See, I live in Boston. In Boston, there's all four major sports teams.

I hate sports. But my life revolves around them because they clog the whole city. We have a football team, a baseball team, a basketball team, and a hockey team.

And it clogs the whole city. And I see people that have a community in Boston all the time. They wear their colors.

They have their chants. They do their things. And it's fascinating from a sociological perspective to say, what is it that's motivating all these people to have all these things in common? What are they getting out of this present example of community? They're getting a shared sense of value.

They're getting a place of belonging. They're getting common goals and achievements, a sense of story. All of these things are what we take out of our notions of community.

And just like Dean talked about this morning when he was first coming out of the United States military, my wife and I had a similar experience in coming out of our gang on the streets, that we had an initial impulse that we had come from a group of people who were deeply concerned about each other, who were deeply

involved in each other's lives. And for my wife and I, when we came into the evangelical church under this individual salvation model, it was just about us. And what we found was everybody was just about them.

And so we had this longing and this lack. And I saw Brother Bob on Sunday morning and on Wednesday evening. And I didn't know Brother Bob from Adam.

All I knew was that he was a guy that shouted amen in the pulpit, in the pew. I didn't know anything about him. And we longed to be a part of a people.

And I was so glad when I found out that the gospel wasn't about me, that the gospel was about being a part of a community, that God had taken me out of my horrible, wicked place and made me a part of a people. And that's the present example of community. Now, I looked long and hard for that in a lot of different places and one of the first places that my wife and I found it was when we came into Mennonite churches.

And we're so grateful to our Mennonite brothers and sisters for being an example of that. Because for the first time, I came out of the evangelical world. I had a lot of radical ideas about Jesus' teachings and the kingdom of God.

But what I saw with my own eyes was for the first time, was a group of people who knew each other apart from Sunday and Wednesday. A group of people that they shared tools, they shared life, they knew each other, they were extended families together, they lived in the same area together, and they knew about each other. And that was so refreshing to me.

So what I've learned since then is that our present examples of community are a spectrum. There's not any one thing that is community. And what I would say to all of us here is that, how are you doing that on purpose? Like, what about your experience in community? What's more important to you? People that fish in the same places you fish or hunt in the same places you hunt in the same way? Or people that do the same trade as you? Or people that you're involved with in some other place? Or are you purposefully making decisions with your life to have more in common with your brothers and sisters? Because, you know, one of the early Christians said that if we are heirs together of the grace of life, how much more the things of this life.

And so, we don't find this specific command that says, thou shalt live in intentional community. But what I always ask myself is, what would drive us the other way? What motivation would there be in separating myself out of the community? What biblical concern would lead me to a place where I wanted more of my own life, more separation, more autonomy, more independence? And that's where we should evaluate our spectrum of present community. Principles necessary for community.

I'm going to focus specifically on principles necessary for discipleship in community. Prior to the New Testament era, there was much focus on family lineage and family loyalty. We see this all throughout the Old Testament.

Often when a person is introduced in the Old Testament, his father's name and or his tribe is also mentioned. This pattern changes abruptly in the early church. As the early church got started, all of these family dynamics were greatly diminished, and the family concepts got applied to the church, the family of God.

Many people in the early church joined the church at great cost. Their family members did not often join with them, and so the church was their only family. So, the first principle necessary for community to happen is for the church to become our family.

In a healthy biological family, each member is more interested in the success of the family than in their own personal accomplishments or interests. The same must be true in the church family. In a healthy family, discipling and spiritual nurture take priority over ministry projects or financial accomplishments.

In a healthy family, individuals listen to each other and learn from each other, and they care about what the others are thinking and feeling. Can you make parallels to a healthy church family? Can you imagine what it would look like if all of our churches were like a healthy family? You can contrast this with an immature or dysfunctional family in North America, in which each person does his own thing independently of the others. Nearly 20 years ago, I volunteered at a discipleship training center that ministered to broken and dysfunctional men--men who found it difficult to love or be loved.

Our goal as staff was to disciple these men in a healing, healthy Christian community. This environment was the closest thing I ever experienced to what these brothers have been talking about so far this evening. Talking about spiritual things, personal needs, and praying for each other was as natural as talking about the weather.

Each day during the week, we gathered early in the morning to pray and to give each other advice and encouragement for the tough challenges we would be facing that day. Next, we shared what we had learned from the Lord that morning, and the men discussed their past 24 hours with their mentor. Once a week, we looked each other in the eye and said, Brother, I love you.

I like how you--and then we would go on to mention some things that we appreciated about them as a person. Also each week, we had a time when the men would look each other in the eye and say, Brother, I love you. Here's a weakness I see in your life, and here's an example of the weakness that I saw just the other day.

Even though this was very difficult to do and very difficult to receive, the men in the program who made the most spiritual progress would say that this exercise was probably the most helpful part of their time at this discipleship center. The rest of the day, we worked together in a woodshop that had scripture verses painted all over the walls. It was in this woodshop that I got a real vision for what community could look like.

It was not uncommon at all for one man to go to another brother in the shop and talk about an intense struggle that was going on in his heart. And if a man was struggling severely or being attacked by Satan, we would shut the whole shop down, and we would gather around this man and pray with him. As I lived there day after day, this seemed really right to me.

Having previously worked in a business that was geared toward efficiency and profitability, this woodshop seemed to have the kind of atmosphere that I think that God intended for all Christian workplaces to have. But good things like this come at a cost. It costs somebody or some church about \$25,000 to \$30,000 in donations in order for a man to spend eight months at this discipleship center.

For some reason in our Western culture, we've lost the principle of discipling each other, but we're willing to give hundreds of thousands of dollars to nonprofit organizations to do this discipleship work for us. Then

life goes back to the normal, fast-paced lifestyle that doesn't take time for people. I think there's something really broken about this system of living.

In fact, I think it's so broken that I wonder if we can even call it living. Many of the broken men who came to the discipleship center where I served would have never ended up in the broken state that they were in if someone would have mentored them earlier in life. All of us can benefit from discipling, but discipling is especially effective with people who are in their teens and 20s and 30s and 40s.

So the principle here is that an ounce of prevention is worth a ton of cure when it comes to Christian discipling. For some reason, we think people in our churches should be willing to disciple others for free, but if those same people then go to work for a nonprofit organization, then they deserve to be supported financially. And so a final principle for community discipleship is that those who labor on behalf of the church, especially where you do not have community of goods, these people need to be supported proportionately.

Otherwise, people in the community are going to get missed and they're going to get neglected. So in conclusion, I would like to call the Church of Jesus Christ to create healthy communities, communities that are a safe place and a place where children and adults can experience the same kind of spiritual nurture that many of us experience in a healthy Christian family. Okay, thank you each one for that.

I'm going to move the lectern off to the side now so you can see the panelists better. And if it's okay, I'll go ahead and leave the microphone here. If somebody's distracted by that, I'll remove it.

Just make it known. So we've got some questions that we want to address to the panel, and we're very anxious and waiting with anticipation the responses, the insights that they have to offer to us. Okay, I think we're ready to begin.

God bless you with insight, grace as you minister to us this evening. I'd like to ask you brothers this question. Different times today we've heard the term used, Anabaptist.

And perhaps you could give us a little insight as to what did the Anabaptists and others believe about the call to discipleship within close, accountable, brotherhood relationships following Christ, not merely individual commitment? It's a great question. One of the biggest differences when the Anabaptist revival started was its contrast with the state concept of the church. And the very idea that you were forming this church of believers automatically made them separated from the state church system that they were finding themselves.

And from the very beginning, you see this just coming out right from the beginning. When revival started in Zurich, right over to Zolokon the next time, they just automatically broke into sharing. They were accused of automatically going into having all things common.

And there just seemed to be something natural. And whether it's the Hutterites or the Swiss Brethren, and particularly more the Swiss groups, both of them had radical expressions of helping each other built into their gospel. And I take it down to two principles of the reason why I'm with the Anabaptists today.

In an early letter from Conrad Grebel, he said two things that I think are fundamental in our understanding. He said the teachings, excuse me, he said the word of God is intended to be, I understand the word of God without complicated interpretation, and out of that I speak. Simple word of God.

The next thing he said was the words of Jesus were meant to be put into practice. Those two things made it different than the state church system, and it had within it a sort of family that the early Anabaptists had. I think it's still, we see it in all the Anabaptist churches.

Like Brother Matthew said, when you come from an evangelical to any of the Anabaptist church, you automatically see that sense of community that we knew nothing of in that evangelical world. And I thank the Lord for that. Well, the Anabaptists had a tremendous emphasis on what they called the rule of Christ, which was Matthew 18.

You committed yourself in an Anabaptist setting to speak to a brother who needed your admonition and correction, and that just simply was, they referred to that as the means of continual revival in the brotherhood. So the discipleship was a real thing with them, where each person took responsibility for whatever needs they saw in their brother. Just two quotes here, one from an early Anabaptist and one from a more present-day Anabaptist.

First one's from Michael Sadler. He says, is the church really demonstrating the new life in Christ if there's no discipline, if there's no fencing in of the Lord's table, no demand for purity of life? And the one from a more modern writer goes like this, corporate worship, mutual aid, fellowship, and mutual accountability characterize this community. An individualistic or self-centered Anabaptism is a contradiction in terms.

Who is that? I don't think I have any more questions. Thank you. Thank you for those responses.

Here's another question. How can we cast vision for and promote the biblical model of community that we see demonstrated in the book of Acts? Well, it's very hard to have community if people are living miles and miles apart. I think one of the downsides of the automobile was to scatter our communities to the four winds.

And I think if we're really going to have community, we're going to have to think in terms of what we can do, and it'll be a very intentional thing to bring our people geographically together. I mean, it just is a reality that you're not going to be a part of your brother's life if he lives a half hour to an hour away. You're going to see him on Sunday morning, and that's about it.

So geographical proximity is a real issue. And I don't think that since the acceptance of the automobile, we really have given much thought about what the automobile has done to us and how we should address this issue to bring our communities geographically close together. I would say that in academic studies of community in the broad sense, not just the Christian community, communities are broken into three main categories.

One main category is geographical communities. A second category is communities of lifestyle or shared value systems. And the third major delineation of community is shared goals, like you would find political action communities in that category.

The Christian community, properly understood, is all three. It's a geographical community with a shared lifestyle and common goals. And it makes it a very dynamic community when all three of those things line up, and there's a synergy between that.

For my own purposes, community has fulfilled the function the way I implore other people to be more intentional about their expression of community, is that I recognize somewhere along the way when I abandoned my nationalism, my national identity, and forsook it to Christ, that there was a judgment

coming of the nations, of all the nations. And I happened to be born in this one, and there's a lot of very specific judgments that are going to come on this one. And what I determined early on is that I have to do something with my life to distinguish myself to God as not being a part of that community, but being a part of his community.

And so there's some very good reasons why we should be forsaking the status quo that some of us were raised in and that we see all around us, and imploring one another to have more purpose with each other. And those three categories of geography and lifestyle and goal are a good way to think about that. One of the things also, I think the question, how do we get back to the axe model or something like that, the one thing I will say is, the one thing that needs to be done is give the axe model a try.

You know, it seems like even in some of the casual discussions that I've had here at the place, there seems like immediately a reason why that doesn't work. You know, well, you can't do that because of this or the other. And it kind of goes back to that example of the Bach manuscript.

There's something beautiful about this expression, and I think it's exciting when I see groups and all these represented up here, of just giving this whole thing a try. And I think we'll start to see that once we do that, we'll say, oh, I'm starting to see the reason why the Holy Spirit did that. And again, without any kind of legalistic way of looking at it, but expressing that just like we see it in this beautiful pages of the symphony that we have before us.

I'll speak from a Mennonite standpoint. In my experience through the years, when the discussion got to axe two and axe four, most of the discussion was on why those should not actually be practiced. And really what we should have done, well, I think part of it was we thought Hutterite.

That's the way that's done, and we don't believe in that. What we really should have done is looked at those and said, look, there may be many ways for this to be worked out, but here are some ideals. Let's move toward the ideals represented in this passage rather than axing out the whole passage and not even considering what might be there for us to consider and ways we can actualize what we see pictured there.

Thank you. Is it possible for true discipleship to happen, using this term to speak about a personal decision to follow Christ and teaching others to follow Christ, in a spatial building one day out of seven? Can that really be called the body of Christ? Well, that's a yes and no answer, and the answer is no. I think the simple answer to that is yes.

Many people have been disciplined with far less interaction with Christians under duress. I think maybe if we ask the question like this, can true discipleship happen if a person chooses to limit his interaction with other Christians to one day in seven, then I would say the answer is obviously no. Point well made.

Thanks. My experience would be that discipleship, when it gets real, is about real stuff, and we people, in general, happen to be very good at keeping the parts that need the most work away from the most possible people. What I find in my community, one of the ways that we're trying to shape our life together is that it's informed by this perspective that I have that some of my favorite saints, some of my closest brothers, people that I have loved and respected the most, tend to have this one glaring inconsistency in their life.

It's a very common thing that people that I have loved dearly have one kind of niche in the armor that makes them weak and vulnerable, and I have to assume, after having all those experiences with men that

I respected, I thought of better men than myself, having this kind of weakness, this fatal flaw. We see it even in David, is that if all these men that I respect have these problems, these issues that they need help seeing, then I have to be humble enough to say that I must too, and the biggest problem that I have in my life is the one that I'm least apt to see on my own, and so recognizing that principle is a spirit of wisdom because wisdom loves correction, because wisdom sees correction as an opportunity to be more like Christ, and if I don't have my life in the middle of people that I have loving relationships with that I trust and know are serving God with me, then I'm not being open enough and vulnerable enough to let people see that part of me that needs grace and healing and repentance, and that's what's at the core of this question, I think. Thank you.

Next question, how does the culture we live in militate against true discipleship? We see things like capitalism, individualism, and materialism, which we believe are not of the Father but of the world, and all that is in the world is passing away, but the Kingdom of God will last forever. Have these things affected weak Western Christians in far greater ways than we realize? How can we escape from being a frog in the kettle in the 21st century context that we find ourselves living within? Kind of a long question, but I think you get the point. Yeah, amen.

You know, when Jesus came in, He brought in an entire new way of life, a new humanistic humanity, and in this concept of a new humanity, He gives us the grace to live out this Kingdom that He wants to establish, and you are right. I mean, Jesus spoke of the world in very caustic ways. I mean, He spoke of it, you know, coming from the evil one, and in Revelation, it sort of sums up all the different systems of the world with the attractive term of beast, and as we see Jesus giving us this Kingdom of God, His design is for us to defeat this beast.

Well, what is this beast trying to do to us? It's trying to destroy the things that Jesus wants, and so it wants to break us down, and we see through history things that have happened, like during the French Revolution, we see it now breaking down groups of any kind, breaking down church, breaking down associations, and you get people into individuals, and then the nation runs the whole thing. Jesus wants for us to be able to come together, be a people of God, that He can be glorified in that people of God, and that's going to affect every part of our lives, so I think everything in this modern world, and perhaps it's always been, has dictated a war against the Lamb and against His church, from individualism to the way we use our money, to the way we spend our life, to those sorts of things, and the Holy Spirit creates a new humanity that makes something beautiful, that glorifies God on this earth. That sounds a bit like anarchy, that which you described, and sounds like the last statement in the book of Judges, where every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

So in every age, there's this idea that if we want to be influential, we need to really stay up with the times, so if society is starting to use pencils, we all need to start using pencils too. If society markets their things in a certain way, Christianity needs to market its values and goals the same way. And I think one response to this is that if somebody promotes a simply Christianized version of what the world is doing, and what everybody else is doing, it's only going to have a limited appeal.

But if something is genuine, and people will notice it and go to the ends of the world to find it, and they'll hunt it down even if they can't find a phone number for it, and they watch it and they observe it. And so, I don't think our goal should be to be relevant, I think our goal should be to follow Jesus, and ask questions like, what did he take time for, what was important to him, who did he spend his time with, who did he say we should invite to our house for dinner, those kinds of questions. And by pursuing that, we'll be relevant

in whatever ways he wants us to be relevant.

If the question is, we all know, I think, intrinsically, that these systems of the world are contrary to discipleship. The markets of the world are pulling us away towards baubles and greed and successful business, and the lust of the world is pulling us away, and all these things are pulling us out of the discipleship, the church, and into the mold of the world. Romans is teaching us that.

But what I would say is that, and it's something that John Dee mentioned a little bit earlier, is that what we should be doing is not just rejecting those things, but providing new solutions. So it's not enough for me to say that capitalism is a way of the world, and it's dragging people away, I have to follow that up with saying, look how we live, and this is a different way to do things. That the society of Jesus has an alternative way of being, that we don't have to follow the world and those things, that there is another option available to us.

But instead of being self-interested and self-involved and self-consumed and isolated, we can have this different way of living that really represents the society of Jesus, employing creative applications of the teachings of Jesus that are relevant, that speak to people. Because the people around us, they see the same kind of emptiness in their lives. I come across a lot of empty people on the streets of Boston.

People that are just trudging along, stuck in the machinery of the world, and feeling disillusioned, disaffected, depressed, and alone. And what they need is the same thing that we need. We need a people where we belong, where we are finding the fulfillment that Christ planned for His people.

And we've got to do that in a way that is both challenging and showing a new way. What was interesting to me in the last century was there was a group of people that said, our concept of economics is from each according to his means, to each according to his need. That was Marxism.

Where did that come from? But the interesting thing is, they won the imagination of one-third of the world with that slogan. They never delivered on it because they couldn't. And that's the glory of the Christian church.

When they say it doesn't work, it doesn't work. A hundred million people died because of that philosophy applied by men who were selfish. But they should be able to see that in the Christian church, things work that don't work elsewhere.

That's the glory of the Christian church. Thank you. Next question.

What does group discipleship look like outside the family for young fathers and mothers who are already very busy with their own families? What does group discipleship look like outside the family for young fathers and mothers who are already very busy with their own families? There's a lot of answers, I think, to that. But the one that comes immediately to mind is, again, an issue of proximity. So I have 10 children, and they're still young.

My oldest is 16. We have a very full life with the things that we do in the church, things we do for business, and things we do for family. And I have often prayed to God in gratitude for the opportunity that we have to live close to my brothers.

I've often told my brothers that live in my community cluster, our lives are so busy with good, right, and holy things that if we didn't live next to each other, we would never have access to these things. Because

the way that that kind of discipleship works in my community is that when the children are playing, and you have a minute, because my children are playing with Jeremy's children, and we're sitting there watching them together, we have the opportunity to share our lives in spiritual ways. And it's those unplanned aspects of community that I find yield the greatest and the deepest fruit in my life, that because we're immediately accessible to each other, we have opportunities to share our lives in ways that you just can't plan for.

I think I know what was meant by outside the family, but my immediate response is a lot of discipleship can be done right inside the family. These people out there are looking for family. They're looking for people.

I heard somebody say to me, I'm looking for a family to take me in to show me how it's done inside the family. So I think we need to think also in terms of bringing people into the family and actually having them live and see how it's done in the family. Amen.

One of the things I noticed both about the earlier question about discipleship individually and now the ones with the family, there is something that goes on when you live close together that's this everyday unconscious discipleship that just goes on for being a people together. Now, that's a double-edged sword. What I have seen is that community is a tool, and it's a very, very powerful tool.

But it is a tool that can be used for good or a tool that can be used for bad. And it must be very intentional. I appreciate Matthew used the word intentional.

And so when you're there, there's a sense that God has given to us of coming together. And I watch the young people. We were city people, and I moved into a farm community.

And the next thing you know it, I see my son driving a big tractor down the road, this type of thing. And from that to other practical things, there's just something about living together that you don't even, it's like, OK, now we're going to have discipleship class. There's something that just happens with everyday life.

Even for myself and for my children. Thank you. I'm going to go back to Acts 2 and 4 now with the next question.

The quote from Scripture is, One heart and mind, and no one said that any of his possessions were his own, but instead they held everything in common. There was not a needy person among them, because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet. So the question is actually a two-part question.

I'll just ask the first part initially, and then we can kind of jump off from that first question into the second one. Question is this. Do Acts 2 and 4 demonstrate how Luke 12, 33 can be actually put together, put into practice? Now, Luke 12, 33 is the passage that says, Sell that ye have, and give alms.

Provide yourselves bags, which wax not old. A treasure in the heavens that fadeth not, where neither moth corrupteth. Thief approacheth, moth corrupteth.

Lay up your treasures in heaven, and so forth. So the question is, do Acts 2 and 4 demonstrate how Luke 12, 33 can actually be put into practice? Yes, I think it does. I think what we see is a first example of applying the teachings of Jesus.

You know, it's funny. Coming from an evangelical world, usually who makes so very little of the words of Jesus, it almost seems strange to read what happened in Acts. And so that's why we come up with all these strange commentaries of, why did that happen? There must have been some bizarre need or something like that.

But if you're a church that looks at the words of Jesus and tries to find some way to apply those, suddenly Acts 2 and 4 makes sense. And when we see that, and you see what they did with it, they weren't a community just for the sake of a community. They were meeting needs, going out, evangelizing, and doing those things.

And the church was growing. They were able to lay that millions of dollars in the apostles' feet. But yet the next day, the apostle is able to say, silver and gold, have I none? Because none of them owned those things of their own, but yet everything was used for ministry.

Again, I see that through history, the early Anabaptists, the Moravians, some of the early Methodist societies, of just a total sold-out group applying those teachings of Luke chapter 12. So I would say, yeah, it's a blessing. I long to see it someday in our community too, just like that.

I think we have to change our whole concept of giving. I know I had to change mine. And I guess I owe Roger Hertzler this insight, that giving is an investment.

It's not like paying the telephone bill, that when you've paid it, you'll never see that money again. The money you give is the only money you ever will see again. And if we ever got that through our heads, you know how misers act.

They save every penny to put it into that investment. If we really believed that the investment we made in the kingdom is an investment we will enjoy through all eternity, then we would be liberal givers. The Bible says God loves a cheerful giver.

The Greek word for that is hilleros. God loves a hilarious giver. And then after that, you have that verse that says, God is able to make all grace abound toward you.

It's predicated on that verse, that you're a hilarious giver. God then is too. He's able to make all grace abound toward you, that you always having all sufficiency and all things may abound into every good work.

Unlimited grace, unlimited service based on unlimited generosity. And I think once we get that through our heads, this whole idea of what we do in relation to our brother's need and the needs of the world will change. So a brother who is now with the Anabaptist world, who's formerly a Baptist preacher, said once that in his church, the only two sermons they had was salvation and giving.

They did one the one Sunday and the other in the next Sunday. And they had to keep this up in order to keep the church budget up to par. And I think that idea of giving a portion of our goods to the Lord needs to be done away with.

That does not accomplish what these passages are talking about. The New Testament concept is sacrificial giving and sharing everything that we have with others in whatever way we can. There's a brother that's going on to his reward.

Many of you would know him or some of you may know him. His name is Dwayne Tucker and he literally did this. He would give just about anything he had.

He said the only thing he didn't share was his toothbrush. The follow-up question to that then is this, is community of goods the practical way of doing what Jesus told his disciples to do? It is a way. I see even in scriptures, even in the gospel accounts and certainly throughout the New Testament, very clear, obviously different ways to do this.

There's no way you can read in Timothy and in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 there. But what you see behind both Paul's teachings and the book of Acts teachings are these radical teachings of Jesus. I'm afraid what happens with we getting to these community debates is someone says when they argue for community, the other one says, aha, no, we can see there's not a common purse here.

And suddenly the communitarian loses the Jesus teachings to his community and the non-communitarian goes off in his finances and also loses the teaching of Jesus. Behind all of that must be Jesus and his teaching. And then it comes out in beautiful and creative way.

We serve a creator God. And I think he's going to do that over and over in our generation. As long as we just keep being faithful to the words of Jesus.

Thank you. This question comes from one of the young brothers here in this audience. And his question is this, and let's think about this and just see what we can do to provide some insight for individuals caught up into this scenario.

When your discipleship options are excessive, how do you prioritize them? When your discipleship options are excessive, how do you prioritize? How do you decide which one to do first? You have too many. You have so many options as how you might disciple individuals. I guess I'm thinking I wish we had that problem.

I like Mother Teresa's answer. She says, how do you count to a million? Somebody said, you can't feed all these people in India. She said, how do you count to a million? One, two, three, and you just do it one at a time.

And keep going. I think, too, it's important to keep in perspective that if we're talking about where we're expending our ministerial efforts, that we're much more interested in quality than quantity. And that if we're talking about making disciples and discipling people intensely the way that Jesus and the apostles model, then we're looking at long-term projects.

And if we do that thoroughly and well with a few people, there's much more opportunity for that to expand. We don't have to disciple a million people. We don't have to disciple 20 people.

If you're in a place where you have something to offer to younger brothers, to new disciples, to even older disciples, to spend that time in a few people and to do it well and thoroughly and to really train up lives to do the same, that's a much more profitable way to spend time. And that is the model that Jesus left with us. He worked really hard with 12, less with a bigger group.

But with those 12, they impacted the world. And perhaps that's also a part of his teachings when he said, first in Jerusalem, then in Judea, then into Samaria, then to the outermost parts of the earth. Perhaps that would be.

Well, Brother Finney would tell us that into Jerusalem means into the next big city. Okay, we have a question here that I'm sure at least one of the panelists could give us a lot of insight on, and perhaps all of you could. What are some Christ-honoring practical ways to learn from the military's successful methods as we seek to be a brotherhood of warriors for Jesus? It's already been addressed a little bit today, but the question again is, what are some Christ-honoring practical ways to learn from the military's successful methods as we seek to be a brotherhood of warriors for Jesus? Amen.

I think, you know, Matthew, same way with his gang, the same thing as a military is a gang. And the biggest thing that I see is, I mean, in eight weeks, you have people coming from any background, coming together, and the end of eight weeks, bark like a dog, jump when they're told to jump, and march to any place on the earth to serve the mission and to expand the empire. And with that, that common goal, that common dream, the common orders that you're marching under is something that's actually very impressive.

If we could learn to be a church that has the kind of commitment, the kind of solidarity of being able to come together as a people and to drop some of our little idiosyncrasies and little things that we disagree with and go into battle with that kind of a purpose, I think that it would be very effective. We can learn that from the military and hopefully be something like it. In both cases, in the military or the place I come from, what makes those communities effective is the same thing that Paul's mentioning, that we should fight like good soldiers, that to abandon my own self in the greater cause is what's common to all soldiers, that I am a piece in a plan of something much greater than myself.

And every soldier, and in my experience in our gang in the streets, is that that willingness to sacrifice yourself for some greater cause is the ultimate lesson to be learned from those institutions. And it's fairly rare in our circles. I don't see that in the same level among us, by and large, as we do in those worldly applications.

The children of this generation are wiser than the children of light when it comes to sacrificing yourself for a common goal. Well, I think the problem has been all of us are trying to get to heaven. I think that's really why this kingdom concept needs to really get hold of us, that our church is a cause, it's a kingdom.

We want our church to succeed, and we put everything into it. A young person is struggling with all of his difficulties as a young person trying to get his life together, but his goal is way out there in the future. Probably, in his mind, he's gonna live another 50, 60 years.

He doesn't have an immediate cause. And if our churches could be kingdom churches with a cause, and it's the kingdom, not my personal salvation, I think we've given our young people something to live for now as they fight their own personal struggles. Very good.

Now, let's move from that focus. Let's go back to the business arena, our occupational arenas, and let's think about this question. Can and should businesses be structured as a context for discipleship? Is it safe and effective to combine the rules of economy and profitability with the needs of spiritual growth? I think I understand the question.

It is amazing, I will say, living in the community that I live in and seeing the businesses and everything working for a common goal. It was something that I would have frankly thought, even being in Lancaster County, that would have been impossible. I remember one time I was speaking at some place and a man who ran a restaurant had just got into some huge problem over the finances with his brother that he was a

partner in business with.

And he said to me, I guess I've come to the conclusion that Christians shouldn't go into business together. Do you agree with me? He said. And I said, you know, I don't.

I think somehow God should be sovereign over those things as well. And I don't know, I sort of inherited this. I plucked from the grapes that I didn't have to plant.

And our communities have obviously been doing this for hundreds of years. But it is amazing just to watch what happens and able to work that out decade after decade, century after century. And all that just go for the common good.

It can work and it has happened. And I do find it to be challenging and a beautiful expression. Brother John talked about this common goal that we can have to build up the kingdom.

And I've run into a few businessmen who work together with the purpose of providing discipleship in their business. And that was their goal. And because of that goal, a lot of the differences that employers and business partners deal with, they didn't deal with because the purpose of this business is to disciple people as much as we possibly can with the resources that God has given us.

One example I'm thinking of is something I heard about here about a couple of years ago. There was a businessman who decided he wanted to use his business as a way to help the losers in this world get a start in life. And most business owners aren't looking to hire losers, but that's what this man's goal was, to use some of his profit for that purpose.

He got his employees to get on board with him and they were all eager to get started with this. And so first man came to work and he never did know anything about packing a lunch. So it came lunchtime and they all sat down to enjoy their lunch and he went off and bought his lunch.

And he was complaining about just not having enough to make ends meet. And so his fellow employees said, well, why don't you pack a lunch like us? And he's like, well, how do you do that? And they said, well, you go to the store and you buy some lunch meat and you get some bread and you lay it like this and you put some butter on. And they're discipling this man in just how to make a lunch.

They have other things coming, but this is step one, you know? And so the next morning, he shows up without a lunch. And he said, what happened? He said, well, he got the stuff home last night and he was so hungry, he just ate it all. And so some of these are really elementary things.

If you're going to disciple people, you have to start where they're at and build up from there. Amen. Very good.

Okay, this will require some listening, but just think about this and try to give the best response you can. There appears to be an asymmetry regarding the topics of community and non-accumulation. Doesn't it devolve into a case of many who give away all and a few who own the assets, property, et cetera? Someone needs to have the large investments, hold the major assets, and be liable to the bank for the loans to make community possible.

I want to believe in community, but I want to see it for everyone. Not becoming a society of the serfs and the peasants. Any thoughts? Just a little bit.

You know, in some ways, our communities are very mature communities. And some little ones have started, and sometimes it started on one person's farm. And they say, hey, and they're very generous.

And they say, everyone else can come move on my farm. And then, well, next thing you know, they're getting into some trouble and the whole thing falls apart. We have noticed that it is better from the beginning to have that ownership to truly be communal.

And to have that thing owned by everyone. Because it's right. If you do that, it could be actually, I could see that as being very dangerous.

The way we've worked it out in our communities is it's a completely, something that's owned by all the brothers equally, all the families equally throughout the whole church. So I could see that that would be very dangerous. And some people, just by trying to be benevolent, having everybody live on their farm, or they're the ones that have it, could have that work out in that way.

So yeah, I would say it would also be caution to do it that way. I can certainly see the danger. Our community doesn't function the same way.

Our community functions on some people providing properties and things for others. We're a young community. So what I found, I've been a part of a few communities.

And what is often lacking in the initial desire to have some kind of commonality and communalism is a catalyst that makes it possible. And those catalysts that make it possible are rare and unique people. They're the Zinzendorfs of the world.

And there just aren't a whole lot of them. When they're there, they can be very dynamic and powerful in being a catalyst to starting things. And I don't know that always has to, I don't know that has to end in that way.

I think if there's a way, there's many different safeguards to that. I think brotherhood and shared life and a lot of, there's a lot of things we can put in place in the brotherhood that help keep those things in check as well. Thank you.

Different times during this discussion, there's been comments made about our community the way we do things. I'm wondering maybe if the audience wouldn't just like to have perhaps each of you just real briefly describe what kind of community you're a part of and just give us a little insight in that. I'm suggesting maybe a couple of minutes to do that.

Each one of you, each one, two minutes. Okay. Our communities are very interesting.

Basically some revivals came through some old order Hutterite colonies about 20 years ago through some of the preaching of charity. Moses and Zach Poonen and some of those and through different things and different growths in the spirit had experienced revival. That revival eventually led to some trouble dealing with the old order bishops and things like that and wanting to do simple things like baptism on your faith and preaching in English got them excommunicated.

And so through that there's been several different colonies that have come out of the old order system and now are trying to say, okay, what is God's calling on our life as a community? Through the years, I know, particularly our community in Elmendorf, I'm at Altona Christian community in Elmendorf. You know, for

years it was like we were told, okay, it's wrong what you're doing, you know, give it all up and then you'd go from one extreme to the other and I think through about 20 years there's been some maturity there. 15 years have been some maturity.

And the idea now is to not throw out the baby with the bathwater, but say what is God's calling in our life as a community? So we're trying to do that, trying to go forward, trying not to have community for the sake of community, which tends to be the way in the old order system, but yet to try to put the teachings of Jesus Christ into reality and express that the way we see it the best we can in the book of Acts and the Gospels. So I'm very blessed to be there. It's been a very encouragement for me.

Well, our community's vision was not Hutterite community. It was geographical proximity. We started out with everybody living within about three miles of the center of the community.

That has changed some. Our vision was each person had his individual business, but he would not accumulate wealth to himself, but he'd put his extra money into the general treasury, and out of that would be paid hospital bills and the kind of things that the individual finds difficult to handle for himself. We also had vision for a community where everybody was involved in all major decisions.

If you were going to buy a property, that was discussed by the whole brotherhood. So we tried to be accountable to each other. We tried to have a common purse.

We tried to live in geographical proximity. But I will say this. All of that has to be very intentional.

It is very easily lost. Shippensburg Christian Fellowship, right? Shippensburg Christian Fellowship. Yeah, I'm in Boston at Followers of the Way.

I started towards community because of just very close experiences with one of my oldest and dearest friends, and we started making economic decisions together, very small ones, buying lawnmowers together, doing things together. And that set us on a path towards community. I was a part of a few different small groups in and around Anabaptist communities.

And along the way, I developed a burden for urban community because as I experimented with community, I saw more and more that the increase in our resource, both spiritually and economically, had somewhere to go, and that the fruit of those experiments were most useful in the clearest view of the most people. So if there's something to be gained out of community life, it's gained best in front of the most people that can see it, that this city-on-a-hill view of community was a really important notion. And that was gleaned through a lot of my time of going into cities to do street ministry and finding a little efficacy in those things.

But I found a real difficulty in finding people that were interested in the same thing. The few people that I could come across that were interested in community were not interested in urban community until I came across Finney Curvell and I had some mutual friends in Pennsylvania. And when we met each other, we were both talking about the same thing.

And so we decided to start in Boston. And it's interesting to hear the different impetus for that there's these different applications of what God's trying to do with community. So we knew that coming into Boston in an urban environment, we don't have the same resource that your community would have.

Land and space is the ultimate premium. And so we knew at the outset that we would have to have a vision for growth that didn't mean being able to have 40 families on one piece of property. So we've decided our vision and our hope is to grow in community clusters.

So we have a multifamily. Three of us families live in one place and about a mile away. There's a family that lives with the single brothers and another mile away is a sister that has a house for some people there.

And we're growing as clusters of community within our area and hope to continue to expand that. I'm part of the Followers of Jesus Church community in State College, Pennsylvania. We're about two and a half years old or so.

And our goal for community came from several different sources. My interest got sparked early on, like I told you earlier in my little talk there with the Discipleship Center. But more recently, I visited Homestead Heritage in Texas, which is a huge community, but they have the same cluster mentality.

And so there in State College, we're all within one mile of the center. We can bike to the center if we want. We have a community garden that anybody can participate in that wants to.

Most of our things are opt-in, so it's not required to be a part of these different activities. We try to eat a meal together at least twice a week. And interact with each other closely that way.

Thank you. Thank you for that. Now, I want to address the audience.

I do have several cards that I wasn't able to get to this evening with questions. I tried to pick out the ones that I thought might be of broadest interest and might be the most stimulating. But I want to give you the opportunity, if you'd like to, to address questions just from the floor to the panel.

There's at least one or maybe two handheld mics that we can try to quickly get to you. And so we would be glad if you felt to ask a question. Try to ask it succinctly and clearly.

And we'll see what we can do with that. Last night, Brother Joe was quite enthusiastic about the Millennials and the technology of the day. And how exciting this is.

I'm wondering how to build community, not necessarily a common purse, but discipleship, accountability, et cetera, through conference calls, social media, technology like that. I would say they have a place. But they have a very limited place.

So I personally use social media to reach out into broader categories because I have a lot of... I have people that I used to be in my gang with, people from my Baptist church. I connect with certain people and have some stimulating conversations there. But I would say those mechanisms, while they can have some profit, especially for people that are somewhat estranged or isolated, they don't do the same thing as being in life together.

And so I wouldn't diminish the value of those things, but I would say they're a far inferior substitute for actually living with people and having a life shared in common. Yeah, amen. Again, maybe like in a teaching thing that was done specifically for evangelism, we actually found it to be such a distraction in our community that we completely eliminated social media.

And I know there's some good things that could be done from it, but we felt that the problems from it outweighed it and just felt we needed to eliminate it. So it is a challenge in this millennial age. I would say, though, that one thing that we have thought a lot about in utilizing those things is the dissemination of materials and resources primarily for groups that are together.

So not everybody is going to be writing literature and giving teachings and things. Not everybody has the resources in every group for those things. And to use those mechanisms to spread materials, I think is something that we should definitely be pursuing.

Next question, right up here in front. Actually, Kurt, we had someone here. Okay, go ahead.

I've appreciated the announcement on more than one occasion in this meeting these days that we welcome people who are not of the Anabaptist tradition and we appreciate their participation and we can learn from them, they can learn from us. A few months ago, my wife and I were in an Anabaptist Mennonite church and we were welcomed, and I was asked to speak briefly and did. But then the preacher got up and for an hour warned the flock that there was false doctrine and heresy being spread among some of their fellowships.

He went on to identify it specifically as wholeness doctrine of the Western Armenian tradition and not even to eat with them. Now, my question is, how much diversity can we have in community? Whether it's at Roxbury just for three days, or can it actually last longer than three days, and how much diversity can we live with? Those questions would be so far over that they would kind of laugh at our community, I think, at some of those questions. And maybe they shouldn't, but, you know, I don't know.

I guess it goes into those ideas of the ministry. When we're doing the things that Jesus told us to do, we tend to ask different questions than the Armenians and the Calvinists argued over. And so, I don't know.

Your group would probably more deal with some of those tricky questions. Yeah, it's a huge question with huge answers, how much diversity. It's the thing, here's the ultimate answer that I would say, though, is that it's the thing that has to be worked out in the context of a brotherhood.

Like a brotherhood who's in the context of loving, trusting relationships has to determine that together what spectrum of diversity they can have amongst themselves and still feel like a cohesive brotherhood. All of us must remember when the church began, there was not a Bible. There was not a New Testament.

There was not a printing press. And so, all these theological issues that got down to real, systematic, logically constructed theologies where verses were very, very cleverly put together to make some very, very, as far as I'm concerned, obtruse point was not even possible. Their concept of Christianity was to follow Jesus.

And when Arius came up with this concern, now, just what is this about the Trinity? Is Jesus eternal and of the same substance as the Father, or was he a created being? That really was a stupid question that should have never been asked. His bishop told him that, but he wouldn't listen. And so, all of this theological stuff is sort of irrelevant.

And there are many questions. God is sovereign, man has a free will. Why do we have to reconcile those two? Why do we even have to answer that question? Why do we say God is sovereign, man has a free will? And let's let the unity of those two things somewhere be in the mind of God and just go on inviting people to Christ and understanding that all of them are responsible to make a decision.

So, I sense what you're saying is that, let's remember that the early church was made up of individuals who were the common people heard Jesus gladly. They were followers of Jesus. They weren't worried about most of the theological questions, whether there was going to be a millennium or whether there wasn't, whether a man had free will or whether he didn't.

And all these questions have been argued for 2,000 years and have never been satisfactorily answered to the unity of the church. Why don't we just lay those aside and be followers of Jesus? Amen. Thank you.

We have a question right up here. I'll just make a statement and you can yay or nay it, but in any context of a conversation about the kingdom, the first thing that comes to my mind is where's the king? Because the whole thing is irrelevant without the Lord Jesus Christ. The way I have come to this conclusion over the years as we've worked in home churches and things, is that people have often come to us who don't know the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

They're attracted by community. And so I think that we need to remember Jesus' words in John chapter 10, that he is the gate into the sheepfold and there's no other way to climb up. In other words, if people are knocking on our door because they like the idea of community, that's a beautiful thing.

That's what drew me here in 1990 out of an evangelical past. But the question has to be asked, do you know the king? Is Jesus your personal Lord and Savior? Jesus said, I am the door into the kingdom and there's no other way. You can't climb in through a window.

You have to come by me. And so in any conversation of the kingdom, we have to beg the question, where's the king? And hold the king primary. I agree with community that we live out the practical Christian life and grow in our maturity as believers in community.

But there have been times when my wife and I haven't had a community in different places we've been where a community we were in had failed or what have you. But I'm just making the statement that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and that no one comes to the Father but by him. Amen.

So do we have a yay or a nay, guys? Yay. Perhaps the term community that's been being used tonight is that may be contributing to a little bit of confusion. I don't know if it is or not.

We've used the term kingdom as well. Would the terms kingdom and community be very closely aligned to each other? In our minds, yes. Actually, you won't find the word kingdom in a lot of Anabaptist literature.

They use the word geminda. How would you translate? I don't know German. In their mind, that was synonymous with the kingdom.

I would see localized community as outposts of the kingdom of God proper. I see them as cities in the kingdom of God. Thank you.

Thank you. Any other questions? We have time for one more or maybe... Yes, here's a question back here. I think this was here first and then... Sorry, I didn't see you, Tim.

I skipped him earlier. Brothers, I appreciate your time. I know one of you, a couple of others, I've shaken your hand this afternoon.

I have a question though. This whole community thing sounds very intriguing. I have driven here from Oregon.

My trailer is packed. Can I join you? I say that somewhat sarcastically and just saying to load it with a question. How do you become a part of one of these communities? And how do we start this? How do you kind of screen and say, well, I mean, kind of like this brother asked, who joins, who doesn't? How does this work when you have a stranger who might want to come in and become a part of you? Yeah, I have some answers to that.

I think there's a couple of ways to look at that. First, I think the principles, the biblical principles of community that we've talked about are for all of you right where you're at when you go home on Monday. There's all kinds of things that every one of you can do to have more life in common with the people that you fellowship with.

You don't have to go anywhere. And I was told, I was frustrated at one point in my life that I didn't have as much of an intentional community where I was as I wanted, as my ideals were expressing. And a faithful brother told me, Matthew, if you believe in community, then live it where you're at, and God will give you opportunity to live a fuller expression of that when you're ready for it.

And I think that's good, sound advice. It's advice that I took then, and it's brought me to a place where I really am very, very fulfilled in the expression of community that I get to experience. But there was a lot of steps along the way where it was just a matter of being faithful to my ideals, to having these principles worked out in shoe leather that no matter what everybody else around me is doing, I'm going to invest my life.

I'm going to find places to share. I'm going to find places to be involved, no matter what even my brothers around me are doing. And that's led to more and more increase.

Well said. The question was somewhat addressing, though. If an individual wanted to be part of State College or Followers of the Way or Shippensburg or whatever, how would that happen? In our communities through the years have had a lot of people come and go.

And so one of the things they've made a policy in is some people get like this infatuation. They get a community bug and they'll show up. And in their wisdom, they've not allowed people to just give money to them or that type of thing.

And they'll set that aside. And mainly it's just coming along and being there. And usually just daily life of dying to yourself and living in community usually weeds out most people.

And so you'd think, oh, if somebody had all this way of life, it'd just be filled with people. There's challenges to that. There's a reality and being exposed in a way that tends to do the weeding for itself.

So yeah, those people are welcomed. And then when they learn to live that everyday life, we see if they stick around, kind of like the way Jesus did. And for us, we have a long range vision that there should be groups like the Followers of the Way in a lot of places.

And we have a desire to help foster that goal. We also have a goal locally in our congregation that we want to have a focus on making a local church and making local disciples. And I have seen already where moving a bunch of people in, a disproportionate amount of people are transits, takes the church's eyes off of local ministry.

And so I think different, you know, depending on what the purpose of the church is in any given place, we have to weigh these issues of what's our main focus as a people. And we want to see everybody have as a full kingdom expression in their life. But we also want to make sure that for us, that we think of our obligation being to the lost people around us and to the needy people around us, and that we want to make disciples of the people that we're around.

And those things, I don't know if there's black or white answers to them, but they have to be held in tension. So it's something to consider when moving people into a community. And how do we foster community in other places? And if we have a few brothers in the same area to say, okay, why don't you guys start working together and making decisions that increase these things in your own lives? Okay, I think we'll take time for one more question.

Right back here. Way back there. Okay, all right.

We'll take that. That'll be the last question. Thank you.

I appreciate your patience with another question. Would you speak a little bit to the issue of the persecuted church? How does community play into that whole thing of if we are persecuted? You know, we're here in the country where we have the liberty to set up these communities. It might be somewhat simpler here.

How does community prepare us for almost certain persecution that's coming? Is it necessary? I think you get the idea of what I'm asking. I think the principles are very important. You know, as we get into an area that the world is attempting to scatter us and to distract us and to make us follow after their creeds and their understanding, the concept of being able to come together and lay your life down one for another is absolutely essential as we come forward into persecution.

And I think obviously, you know, the way we have the models of our living arrangements are maybe going to have to be creative. I mean, certainly mine and even Matthew's would maybe have to have some modifications if persecution was really intense. When I read through the Hutterian Chronicles, there were times where they intentionally broke up, went into different areas, still had secret times where they came together, and then when the persecution lessened, they would come back together in community again.

And amazingly did that over the centuries through incredible, intense jihads of Muslims coming against Eastern Europe and such. So it is historically been done and lived through and encouraged. It encouraged the saints through those times.

And I do think we're getting to some times when in different ways, in different creative senses of seeing that, we need to learn to trust one another, to depend on one another, and to encourage one another as that we see the day approaching. Brethren, do you have any final words that you would like to share with those in attendance tonight? Any final thoughts on this topic of community and discipleship? I really like what Matthew said. Yeah, that we're talking about something that Jesus gave for every one of us.

I really wanted, that's a perfect take home. You know, our churches are pretty full and we're not trying to gather everybody up to move to Minnesota or to Shippensburg or to Boston. But what we want you to do is to take these teachings of Jesus Christ.

You know, when I read through, I challenge you to do this. When you get home tonight or tomorrow, take the Gospel of Matthew and look at the 13th chapter. In the 13th chapter, he goes through several

examples of it's the chapter, correct me if I'm wrong, it's the chapter, the Kingdom of Heaven is such.

And he gives the parables, the parable chapter. And in each one of those, he starts with something small. A mustard seed.

Some yeast. A coin that collects interest. And each one of those, that seed grows and it grows and it grows.

I challenge you, go back with all that you've heard during this conference this weekend. Read Matthew 13. And I believe that the Gospel of the Kingdom will set in you like a tiny little seed in a way that you've maybe never experienced before.

And it will grow. But don't think you've got to get up and move or something. Give that to your communities.

Give that to the people where you are and express the practical and real following of Jesus Christ where you are. So, amen. I appreciate what you brought us there.

So, Christian communities are one of the most powerful ways to influence the world. And when it's done well, it has a tremendous impact on the world. When it's done wrong, it also has a very bad, tremendous impact.

And so, I'd say that one of the worst things any of us could do would be to become an independent community. You can have independent individuals, but you can also have independent communities who can't hear from the broader church. And so, my encouragement is that if you're interested in moving more towards community, talk to some people who have learned a few things, learned a few things the hard way, and just see what advice they'd have.

Yeah, my final thoughts would be that I was frustrated for a lot of time in, and I referenced it, going into the streets and trying to work with people and trying to preach the gospel and investing a lot of time, energy, effort, tears, a lot into trying to live out my commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And I have come to believe that that message, the message that Jesus came to be king and to establish a society of people is incomplete without these visible manifestations of these people living together and doing these things. And so, whatever you can do to make more of that where you are is aiding the kingdom of God.

However you can divest yourself from your own life and add yourself into a people, the more commonality that we can have, the more of one heart, the more of one life, the more of one people we can be in every place where we are, the more effectively we are witnessing a living epistle of who Jesus is to the world around us. It's absolutely indispensable to the gospel. I would also say that it's absolutely indispensable to my own personal discipleship.

We're here, the whole theme of this weekend is discipleship, and I don't know about other people. I know for my life, I could, I need the insight of my brothers and the access that they have to my life to refine and to change and to shape me into what God wants me to be. I'm just not enough to do the job.

My family's not enough to do the job of becoming like Christ. I need my brothers, and the more access I can give them to me and the more of myself I can give to them, the more holistically we are the body of Christ. I would give just one caveat.

The devil knows the potential of this better than any of us does. He would love for us to keep our individualistic, save me if I can just get myself to heaven. He would love for us to just stop right there.

In the book of Acts, it says when they did what you here described in those two passages, it says great grace was upon them. With great power, they gave testimony and great fear came upon all the people around them. And the devil knows that if he can keep us individualistic in our concept of what it's all about, he can keep us powerless.

And having said that, you can expect that any attempt you make in this direction will be fiercely opposed by the devil. He'll develop attitudes in you, attitudes in people. You're going to have to learn to have forbearance and forgiveness and lots of space for your brother because the devil, he doesn't want this picture ever to be seen.

So, you know, there are many people who get together, start a church and they love each other so much they could eat each other. And sure and lo and behold, about two years later, they're doing just that. So, there were hundreds of communes started during the hippie era.

All of them failed. The only ones that are still going are the Hutterites and your community and Shippensburg's still working at its vision. But this is a very hard thing to do.

I don't want to discourage you, but I want you to realize when you come up against it, that's to be expected. The devil will do everything he can to make this impossible. Thank you, brethren.

I do want to just express appreciation on behalf of those in attendance tonight. I sensed that there was a great deal of appreciation for the insights that you provided. God bless you for the way you're living this out and God bless you for the way you shared with us this evening.

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