

The Discipline of Intentional Community

by Todd Atkinson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of intentional community rooted in shared mission and mutual support, as modeled by Jesus and the early church.

Duration: 40:03

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Luke 9:1-5, Luke 9:10-27

Topics: "Spiritual Disciplines"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a common mission and purpose in order to build intentional relationships within the church community. The speaker refers to the story of Jesus calling his 12 disciples as an example of sharing in the ministry and mission of Jesus. The speaker encourages the congregation to actively seek fellowship and community, whether through small groups or informal gatherings, in order to support and pray for one another. The sermon concludes with the reminder that maintaining intentional relationships requires effort and dedication, but it is essential for the growth and success of the church.

Transcript

And so we're going to continue in the book of Luke and continue to study the word there. But the reason I want to look at this is because Jesus did something with his disciples. Something happened between those 13 guys.

That when the disciples planted churches. They were great churches. Like whenever somebody talks about what they want their church to be or to look like.

I think that most people talk about getting back to the way church was done in Acts. Because when they planted the church in Acts. It had like everything everything that it was supposed to have.

And we as River of Life are a part of that same lineage. We trace our roots as a body as a church to that church. And so something happened between Jesus and his 12 disciples.

That these disciples, these apostles had something significant to pass on in the church. Let's look at just one verse here in Acts chapter 2. It's just explaining what the church looked like. And it's just this phrase that always sticks with me every time I think about relationship.

I think about community. I think about this statement and it says this. It's in verse 44 if you want to look.

But it says all believers were together in some translations. It says one in heart and had everything in common. I find in myself that when I read that statement.

I think that's exactly what I'm looking for. It's like all those things in the back of my mind or in the back of my heart that I desire to see from community. It's almost summed up in that statement.

The idea that we could be together. We could be one in heart and have everything in common. Now I think it's important to understand that that early church was not all in one age demographic.

Okay, they weren't all skateboarders. Okay, they weren't all carpenters. So it's not the reason they had everything in common.

They had everything in common for a different reason. And that's what I want to look at today. What did they have in common that made them so united? That made them the picture of community and fellowship and church.

And so to do that today, why don't you turn with me to Luke? Why don't we pray just before we read anything? Father, we deeply desire your spirit today. We deeply desire your spirit. And just as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 2. Lord, we don't want wise or persuasive words.

Don't want the hollow and weak words of man. Lord, we want the power of your spirit to give testimony to your scripture today. We want the power of your spirit, the same power that filled Jesus to do his ministry.

That filled the apostles to fulfill their callings. That same spirit that was there. That was there on the days that this happened.

The things that we're about to read today. You were there, Holy Spirit. And so in that same spirit, we desire to read your word today.

In that same spirit, we desire to be one and to grow in understanding today. So Lord, I ask that you would anoint your word. And that it would ring true, untainted by me.

In your name, Father. Amen. In a few minutes, we're going to look at a couple instances in Luke where we see what we just finished talking about in Acts.

We see this deep community. We see an intimacy where Jesus and his disciples are sharing things of their hearts. I mean, if you've read the Gospels, you see time and time and time again of instances where Jesus shares something of himself.

Or the disciples share something of themselves. Usually if the disciples are sharing it, it's probably something that needs to be corrected or changed. But regardless, there's a safety there.

There's a home to it. There's family elements of it. There's a deep acceptance.

And so I believe what happened with these 12 disciples in Jesus Christ laid the foundation for how the apostles planted churches. For the DNA that they put into their churches. Which is the same DNA we want to be found in us today.

So let's look at... This is really just going to be the main component of my message today is this text. But let's read it. It's in Luke chapter 9. And we're going to start in verse 1. If you don't have your Bibles, you

can follow along on screen.

When Jesus had called the 12 together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases. And he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them, take nothing for the journey.

No staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town as a testimony against them.

So they set out and went from village to village proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere. Now one thing that I would like to ask today is all of us... I don't believe there is an exception to this rule or to this example. But each of us in some way or another in our history, in our past, have had relationships that hurt.

We've all had relationships that caused pain, that caused breakage in our hearts and shattering all of us. So none of us is really exempt from that unless maybe you're like a one-month-old baby and your parents haven't messed up yet. But I think it's safe to say that we're all in the same boat.

And so I don't come to you today speaking as if I am the premier teacher on healthy relationships. I suppose more than anything I come to you today to teach about this as just one of you. That we're all in this together and we've all been hurt.

Whether it's in church or family, there is pain and hurt. So before we go on today, I want to ask that we would take a risk together today and say maybe we dream again at what relationship could look like. We dream again at what church could look like.

Because I'll be honest with you, if I go from here, as soon as I start talking on this text, you're going to be like, Oh man, I've been here before and I got screwed. I got beat. I got burnt.

But today I think we've all been in that place. But something deep in the depths of our hearts says this has to work. This has to be glorious.

So let's look at this text that I just read. So here we have Jesus calling his 12 disciples. Now in the previous chapter in chapter 8, Jesus spends a night in prayer all through the night.

Until the morning he gets up, he calls all his disciples together and says, Okay, I'm going to choose from you 12. Now I find it interesting. I was thinking through this.

So is Jesus praying through the night to make sure he's making the right decision? I think more than anything, he just loves to be with the Father and the Spirit. So he prays through the night and that morning he chooses the 12. But what's interesting about that text is he doesn't just say, I'm going to choose 12 of you to be my best buddies.

We're going to be best friends and spend all our time together. We're going to play pool, maybe go to the arcade. I know there is no such thing as arcades anymore.

I guess there's a couple. We're just going to get together for poker nights and spend lots of time together. What he does is he calls the 12 out and he says, to make them apostles.

So he calls 12 out to make them apostles. Which means not just to be social buddies, but to have a purpose. There's a reason for this relationship.

And we see it here in chapter 9, verse 1. When Jesus had called the 12 together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases. And he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom and to heal the sick. The difference of the disciples from the crowd, which we've been talking about for months, is that they share in the ministry of Jesus.

They share in the mission and the vision and the purpose. They don't just simply receive from it. They share in it.

And so today, this is the part, this is why I prepped you before I said this. Is that the beginning of true intentional relationship, I believe, is to have a common mission and purpose. Is to be a part of the same direction, the same goal, the same end.

My example of this, this is how you can tell I have a toddler. Or I guess she's not a toddler, she's four now. But we watched the movie *The Fox and the Hound* together.

And I believe this is a good example of that. It's a relationship that it's all cute and cuddly when they're little. But as they mature, it's a relationship that doesn't share a common purpose or a common goal.

A common mission. They're actually opposing missions in the end. But it's this idea that one's mission is to actually hunt down and make a pelt out of the others.

Which, you know, isn't fully a good example of where we're at. But it's this idea that because they do not share a common purpose, you can see the strain and the breakage it puts on their relationship. Okay? And it's the same idea is that we must share a common mission.

That we don't just simply show up to receive of this mission of community, of church. But that we share in the completion of it. It doesn't exist just for social get-togethers.

It exists for a purpose. For a mission. For the kingdom.

And so the twelve have this amazing opportunity where they then take on the mission as their own. They take on the purpose as their own and drive towards it. Doesn't mean they're perfect.

They're still mess-ups and screw-ups. But they own the mission. Now many of us bought into a mission at some point in our lives.

Bought into an idea or a vision. And most, if you've been involved in a church in that, I meet many people, myself included, who got burned by the mission. Where it was just the mission.

It felt like all that mattered was what you did. Or what I did. But this is why I want us to start over today.

What if we were to allow our hearts and our minds to reinvent, so to speak, what this looked like. All this healing and all this stuff that has been brought up in the last few months. With Pastor Ron coming from Florida and talking about the discipline of receiving.

The discipline of going to the feet of Jesus. And allowing our hearts to be healed. Allowing the hurts and the breakages to be mended.

Allowing ourselves to be living, breathing examples of the restoring power of the gospel. Where it's not just theoretical. We're living examples of it.

I just can't help myself from thinking, what if? What if this is possible? And for many of us who've been hurt in that, I want us to look at how Jesus functions within mission, within the common purpose. He brings these guys in together. In verse 10 of chapter 9, if you can put that up.

It says this. Should I wait for it? Got it. When the apostles returned, this is after, so he sends them out, right? Go heal the sick and proclaim the kingdom.

And so after, this is verse 10, they come back. When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida.

Now let's just pause for a moment. What I found myself doing is when I bought into a mission, I bought into a vision. I saw this most of my life being involved in church.

Where you give your all to that mission, but it seems to end in this type of burnout of, I give up. I've got nothing left to give. And I found myself for many years, honestly up until this year, coming to verse 10 as if I was one of the disciples and being like, I did everything, this is what I did, this is what I did, this is what I did.

And hoping at that moment, that based on what I did, I would find acceptance, love. But it seemed like every time I came to that verse 10, it was never good enough. And this last few months has been crucial to me as a disciple of Christ to understand that he just loves me, that he just accepts me, that he's happy with me and that I'm a son.

This is just a side note. I remember Todd was talking about, when he first taught this to us as a congregation, I don't know if you remember the day where it was like, you're worthy. Before God, you're worthy.

And talked about sitting at the right hand of God and just in that place of favor. And he said, ask for something, pray for something. And he talked about his house.

Does anyone remember that? Thank you. I had a thing like that where I was driving home from Regina actually one day. And I just felt the Lord just saying, I'm going to show you.

I'm going to teach you. I'm going to open your eyes to see how much I love you and I favor you and you are my son. Especially the words you are my son were extremely difficult for me to actually accept in my heart.

It was like I got it, but I don't know. It's hard to explain. But there was a request I had of the Lord and I was just like, okay, if I'm going to ask you to just help me see this, there is something that I could never get myself that I'd like to just ask you for.

And what I asked for, and this isn't some kind of weird twisted name it and claim it thing. I just honestly asked the Lord, there's no way I could ever get this for myself. And so if it's on your heart, I guess you're God, you can do what you want with it.

But on my 25th birthday at our Wednesday night, young adults, my young adults and some people from the congregation raised money and bought me the exact thing that I was praying for. And you'll see it

someday. It's a Gibson guitar and it's beautiful, absolutely beautiful.

And they brought this thing out and I opened it up and I saw the box and I cried like a girl. And I cry all the time. But for me, it was just like this moment where the Lord is just like, I'm serious about this.

And so for me to come to like this verse 10 all the time, it just felt like I just kept coming there. And it's been a hard few months for that because I've just been like pushing hard and I find myself, my tendency is to work harder when I'm not feeling, I don't know. It's hard to explain.

But Jesus in this moment in verse 10, He puts the priority on His guys. Where He's just like, look, yes, you're sharing in this with me, but let's withdraw. Let's pull back.

Let's be together. And actually in this instance, it doesn't work because 5,000 people follow them. Okay, and then we get the feeding of the 5,000.

And it's funny, at the end of this, that feeding of the 5,000 talks about how the disciples collected 12 more baskets of bread. And when I read it originally, I'm like, oh man, if I was the disciple at that point, I'd be like, I'm tired and I'm picking up bread and I'm putting it in a basket. I was just imagining them at this point.

They're like, we heal people now, we're picking up bread. But Jesus doesn't forget, you know, that it's time to withdraw. And so we see in verse 18, if you keep going in Luke chapter 9, it says, when Jesus was praying in private and His disciples were with Him, He asked them, who do the crowds say I am? They replied, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.

But what about you? He asked. Who do you say I am? And Peter answered, God's Messiah. And it's like, this is a key moment.

Like one of His disciples is getting it. Like this is a deeply intimate moment between Jesus and His disciples. And He didn't forget when the 5,000 showed up.

He's like, no, we're going to withdraw. We're going to pull back and be together and just spend time together. And I know that many of us have felt like we bought into the mission, but no one ever cared to make sure we drew back.

Or when I wanted to draw back, people got mad. Or, you know, whatever our experiences are. I guess I just kind of want to say today that our church, like as a staff, these guys, I work with them every day, and they care for me.

You know, like they make sure that I draw back. They make sure that I'm okay. And I know that this is just beginning elements, and I know that there's so much room where we're going to grow as a church in this stuff.

But I just want to say to you today, like, take a chance again. Take a chance again to be in. To buy in.

To make the vision your own and to run with it. Because even though we're not perfect, at least I can say with confidence that we are going to be great at this. Where we care for each other so deeply.

And we always back each other up. And I kind of feel like the discipline today, so to speak, of intentional relationship, I almost feel like today's discipline is to fight for it. Like this end, what we see in verses 18,

almost right through to the end of this chapter, not quite, but we see here in verse 21, Jesus predicts his death.

21 through 27, and it's a deep plea. I can't imagine, like, what you would feel being there when Jesus is saying, this is coming. And this is gonna, like, I'm gonna die.

I'm gonna be beaten. Like, the weight of this moment, the sharing of the intimate things of his heart, the hard stuff. Like, the disciples didn't even understand it when he predicts his death.

In Mark, in this same story, Peter rebukes Jesus after it. Okay, so Jesus bears his heart, the deep things of his heart that nobody else knows. And one of his closest friends rebukes him.

Like, now, if he was wrong, it's okay, but he's God, you don't rebuke God. I mean, he just finished saying, you're the Messiah. Don't say that.

Just doesn't quite compute for me. But we see, even if we follow this, we talk about what does community ideally look like. It's intimate.

It's real fellowship. It's encouraging. It's like being at home.

And we see Jesus share the deep things of his heart and things that they didn't understand or know what to do with. But then after that, they see the transfiguration. They see Jesus in all his glory.

That would be amazing. But there's something about this idea of right relationship, of true relationship, where we don't just get together and, you know, waste time and do stupid things, but where we get together and we do things on purpose. We spend time with people on purpose.

I know many of us today have weeks where we're just lonely. We just want to spend time with somebody. And I believe that this is the place for that.

To discover the mission. To make it your own. To be part of it.

To have this mission in common. And to go hard for it. But to pull back with those same people that we sweat and bleed and toil with.

And just be. And just hang out. And spend time together.

If somebody needs prayer, to pray for them. But to just be together. And the reason we're teaching this today is because it's important to us.

It's important that we know this. That you're not a machine. That we're a family.

And we'll fight for that. And we'll bleed for that. The same way in the past weeks we've looked at how Jesus withdraws to prayer.

He does it the same to be with these guys. To withdraw and to be in fellowship. To withdraw and to just enjoy each other's company.

But we truly have to be disciplined in this. Because our culture is extremely independent. It's all about me, me, me, me, me, me.

Until I need something. And then it's like, how come we're in our own community? It's like, oh, I just realized I've been doing everything all by myself. For myself.

But we have the opportunity to be in some ways counter-cultural. Where we experience true relationship. It's why we do things like 55 Plus and Boomers.

It's why we have family night on Thursdays. It's why we have stuff for young adults and young marrieds. It's why our kids are together right now.

These aren't throwaway times or programs. These are things that we do intentionally to have relationships. They're things that we set a time so you can count on it.

You know what's going to happen this day, this time. We don't do it to lock you into a 50-year commitment. We're just trying to make it work.

And so I want to encourage you today to be disciplined. To seek some sort of withdraw into fellowship and community. It's essential.

Whether it's one of those groups. Or maybe you just grab three or four people and just say, Look, let's just get together weekly to just support each other. To be in this together.

To pray for each other. Look at the word. Study Sunday's notes.

Maybe last Sunday Bill's preaching was really good. The point is that we must fight for it. Or else we'll just lose it.

And today, I just believe this church is everything going for it. I'm so happy here. I love it here.

I was telling the 9 o'clock guys, I'm like, On Thursdays, I realize it's almost Sunday. I get so excited. It's like after Wednesday, I'm like, Oh, I love Wednesdays.

And then Thursday comes and it's like, Sunday's almost here. And I'm all excited. Because I love it.

But we have to fight to get past the cultural norms of just Facebook. Just these random connections. This doesn't mean that we're all best friends all the time.

I'm just saying, come and buy in. Know the mission. Let us have that in common.

And we'll move forward together. Always putting time and effort into being one. Being together.

My last note on this is that, In terms of understanding the mission so that we can have it in common, This is why we have membership. My sermon didn't just end and now I'm doing a public announcement. I'm trying to explain that this is why we do stuff like this.

It's so that you can know where we've come from. Like for me, I've only been here a year. The membership class is key for me.

Because I understand where we've come from. And now I understand where we're going. Because when I become a part of this church, that history is mine.

That lineage is mine. And so now I come in and I see the goal. I see the mission.

I see the heart and the purpose. And I press forward in that as one. The point of membership is not to get you out to the AGM.

Okay? That's the annual general meeting, if you don't know what that is. Okay? As you can tell, we just had that last week. And it wasn't like a big hard push with banners.

The point is that we share a common mission. We share a goal and an end. And it's the glory of His kingdom.

It's a beautiful church. It's a gospel with power that changes the earth. And it happens here.

It happens here. So just in closing, it's not an oxymoron to say that we want to be one in heart and have a common mission. And then to say that we value you above what you do.

Okay? It's not an oxymoron. We're deeply and intimately connected. Because our mission is each other.

The mission is to see each of us function in our callings and giftings and purposes and lead more to Christ for the glory of the kingdom. But that equilibrium, that balance, is key to what we do here. And so today, just to add to the many things that we've been studying on what it means to be a disciple.

Today, it's to hang out with disciples. Okay? To just be and hang out and enjoy the fellowship, the communion of the saints. And to fight for it.

And to make it a high priority. It doesn't mean we'll all get to spend time with everybody. Okay? Okay? But we'll all have our areas where we're moving forward in our common mission and goal.

And we're spending time together. Does that make sense? Hopefully it wasn't too... It didn't? I'll start at the beginning. Okay.

Well, let me pray. And then I'll go over to the side. Father, I just thank you for your glorious church.

Lord, I'm honored and blessed to be a part of it. I love it. I love your body.

And so, Lord, as you were the head today, Lord, I just ask that you just take what's right and work with that. And just help my words to just fall off if they want to view. But, Lord, today we just want to be a community that's committed to real relationships.

Lord, we don't want to be a crowd. We want to be your body. We want to be intimately connected to you, the head, and intimately connected to each other.

And, Lord, we want to do it on purpose. We're not asking for some miraculous thing to happen, Lord. We want to build it.

Lord, we want to take action in the power of your spirit to see that happen in this church. So, Father, if there's new people here today, I ask that you would lead them to find a home here. And if it's not us, then, Father, I ask that you would help us to help them find where that is.

And, Lord, for just those who have been here forever, I pray you give them just a resurgence of energy for relationships and fellowship. Lord, that they would not give up on these essential principles. Lord, that you would give us a revival in this area.

A renewed passion to be with each other. Renew that passion in us. Father, let that passion, that revival be the healing salve to the pains of old.

Lord, let that be the thing that heals the very pains that caused us to fear this in the first place. And, Father, I ask that it would all be to your glory. That it would all be to your glory.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.

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