



COMMUNITIES ON MISSION

INTRODUCTION

The church, the new community of people who have come to know Christ as Lord and Savior, is God's vehicle, God's dream, God's plan for accomplishing His mission for the world. The church belongs to Jesus; it is His idea. HE is the One who will build it, which implies that it is supposed to grow.

"on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not overcome it."
~ Matthew 16:18

The Greek word used by Jesus in the scripture above is ekklesia, meaning "called out ones". Visualize a large group of people who live by their own personal whims. Christ approaches them and calls out, "Follow Me! Separate yourselves from those who live by their own personal desires. Be My disciples!" Some hear Him and then turn away. Others make a clear decision; they walk out from the large group. They come to Christ. They have decided to follow Him. These are the "called out ones". They are the church.

Since the church is Jesus' idea, there is a right way and a wrong way to do church. We must do church HIS way. The New Testament actually gives us the blue print; it tells us what was in the heart of Jesus for His church. When people see church as merely something you go to, which happens in American Christianity, we often miss out on one of main vehicles of our sanctification. If we're following the blue print, the body of Christ, the community of believers is a major aspect of what God has provided as the means for our growth.

There is something that happens that is more than 1+1=2 when believers are in community with one another. Our western lens of reading scripture blinds us to what it really means. We often read the Bible as if it was written to us specifically, when many passages are written to us as a whole. In 1 Corinthians 3:16, for example, Paul is NOT telling individuals that they are temples of the Holy Spirit; though he does do that in 1 Corinthians 6:19. He is telling the community of believers that they, gathered together, are

God's temple. **So 1+1=3. The Holy Spirit is present in our midst.** The new community, on mission for God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is what God intends for the redemption of the world.

“The world desperately needs the church to be the church.”
~ Richard John Neuhaus

- *In what ways is this description of the church different than what you were taught in your upbringing?*
- *Does it make sense to you that if we are to follow Jesus, we must follow His blueprint for the church?*

Communities on mission have five marks that we're going to consider in this study. They have a radical unity, a deep love for one another, a commitment to godly conflict reconciliation, accountability to living a Christian lifestyle, and a desire to influence others for Jesus.

PART 1: A RADICAL UNITY

The book of Acts is a record of Christ's followers in the first century whose lives were set ablaze by God's mighty love. They turned their world upside down, not only with the revolutionary message of salvation by grace, but with a revolutionary love and a radical unity. Their love meant sacrifice, commitment, serving one another, defending each other and allowing no disunity. Consider the standard of love and unity that scripture commands for us.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
~ John 13:34-35

“I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”
~ John 17:23

The Apostle Paul emphasized this same standard of unity.

“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”
~ Philippians 1:27

- *Describe the standard of unity that the New Testament calls us to.*
- *How is that even possible? What would that look like?*
- *Notice in the first two scriptures what the effects of this radical love and unity are. What are they?*
- *Notice from Philippians what the purpose of our unity is. What is it?*

The effect of radical love and unity is our ability to influence the world for Jesus, to show unbelievers that we are legit. This is possible if and only if we are ON MISSION, if we are “striving together for the faith of the gospel,” that is, if we are trying to change the world.

“Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”
~ Colossians 3:14

“being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
~ Ephesians 4:3

Colossians explains to us that the choice to love is what enables unity. In other words, our differences in preference don't need to divide us. We can have differences of opinion, different preferences for how the church should be, yet still be 100 percent united. The goal is bigger than our personal wants. Ephesians explains to us that we have a part and God has a part in the unity of the church. Our part is to be diligent to never let anything disunite us. If we are troubled by something, if we are offended or hurt, we are to work hard at it; it isn't always easy. God's part is the power of the Holy Spirit within us to not be defensive, to forgive, to apologize and to love; this is what establishes the peace that comes from unity.

Note again Jesus' words in John 17:23, **“I in them and You in me.”** Don't miss this! The unity that we are called to express to one another originates with us actually being united in Jesus. We truly are grafted into Jesus when we believe. The same way my organs and systems work together to give my body life, every part of the body of Christ must also function in unison.

“Upward Unity” is an important concept that emphasizes the significant role of pastors and missional community leaders in the health and progress of the church. Upward unity is your commitment to follow the leadership of your pastors and missional community leaders and allow no unresolved negativity in your heart toward them.

(John) From personal experience, I've found that the most significant relationships to my growth are the very ones I am most tempted to believe the worst of, rather than believing the best. It is not a surprise then to see that the church at Corinth had a bad attitude toward the Apostle Paul even as he

poured out his life for them. 2 Corinthians 10:10 sadly records, "For they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.'" Don't be naive. If Satan can produce a bad attitude in the Corinthian church toward the Apostle Paul, he certainly is capable of producing seeds of distrust, suspicion, or bitterness within us toward our spiritual leaders.

- *Describe "upward unity" in your own words.*
- *What should you do if you develop some form of attitude against a missional community leader? Against a pastor?*

PART 2: A DEEP LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

Acts records that the early disciples shared their meals together, enjoying genuine relationships with one another, and taking communion together; they remembered what Jesus had done to forgive them. They formed a brotherhood of those who believed. In fact, the New Testament reveals that they actually called one another "brother" and "sister" to remind themselves that they, indeed, were part of a new family. They also gave sacrificially to meet one another's needs. History actually records that many Christians sold themselves into slavery for the sake of others. They had a sense of unity based not on denominational affiliation but because of a common calling and mission. There are some 59 verses in the New Testament that describe how we are to treat one another. Comment on each verse below as to how this would look in our community. Take your time; our love for one another is extremely important.

1. "...Be at peace with each other." (*Mark 9:50*)
2. "...Wash one another's feet." (*John 13:14*)
3. "...Love one another..." (*John 13:34, 35, 15:12, 15:17; Romans 13:8*)
4. "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love..." (*Romans 12:10*)
5. "...Honor one another above yourselves." (*Romans 12:10*)
6. "Live in harmony with one another..." (*Romans 12:16*)
7. "...Stop passing judgment on one another." (*Romans 14:13*)
8. "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you..." (*Romans 15:7*)
9. "...Instruct one another." (*Romans 15:14*)
10. "Greet one another with a holy kiss..." (*Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20*)
11. "...When you come together to eat, wait for each other." (*I Cor. 11:33*)
12. "...Have equal concern for each other." (*I Corinthians 12:25*)
13. "...Serve one another in love." (*Galatians 5:13*)
14. "If you keep on biting and devouring each other...you will be destroyed by each other." (*Galatians 5:15*)
15. "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other." (*Galatians 5:26*)
16. "Carry each other's burdens..." (*Galatians 6:2*)

17. "...Be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:2)
18. "Be kind and compassionate to one another..." (Ephesians 4:32)
19. "...Forgiving each other..." (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13)
20. "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." (Ephesians 5:19)
21. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)
22. "...In humility consider others better than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3)
23. "Do not lie to each other..." (Colossians 3:9)
24. "Bear with each other..." (Colossians 3:13)
25. "...Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another." (Colossians 3:13)
26. "...Admonish one another (Colossians 3:16)
27. "...Build each other up..." (I Thessalonians 5:11)
28. "Encourage one another daily..." Hebrews 3:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11)
29. "...Spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (Hebrews 10:24)
30. "...Do not slander one another." (James 4:11)
31. "Don't grumble against each other..." (James 5:9)
32. "Confess your sins to each other..." (James 5:16)
33. "...Pray for each other." (James 5:16)
34. "...Love one another deeply, from the heart." (I Peter 3:8; 4:8)
35. "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." (I Peter 4:9)
36. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others..." (I Peter 4:10)
37. "...Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another..."(I Peter 5:5)

This has already been covered once, but once you get this into your heart, this shifts everything. An "others orientation" is when my life no longer is oriented around me and my wants, but around serving, giving to and loving other people. It is marked by coming "to give, not to get."

- *Which of the above scriptures is most challenging to you?*
- *What do you think this community does well?*
- *What do we need to work on?*
- *How oriented toward others do you believe you are?*
- *What step of growth would you like to see happen in your life, in this regard?*

PART 3: A COMMITMENT TO GODLY CONFLICT RECONCILIATION

"Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar of whole burnt-offerings and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave there your gift before the altar of the whole burnt-offerings and be going away. First be reconciled to your brother, and then, having come, be offering your gift."

~ Matthew 5:23-24

This may be the most disobeyed verse in all scripture. Rather than resolve our conflicts, Christians often just bury or simply leave, and the body of Christ is damaged as a result; our own growth is even stifled. Right or wrong, conflict resolution is one of the main ways God can sanctify us.

The Principle: When the Holy Spirit points out and/or reminds you there is an offense between you and another, whether it is your fault or the other person's fault, even while in the process of worshiping, you must stop and go do all you Biblically can to be reconciled to that person first, then return to worship. What this principle shows us is exactly how important unity in Jesus' church is to Him. He tells us, "Stop worshipping. I don't want it! I want, instead, for you to go get right with your brother or sister."

Practical Steps toward reconciliation:

- (1) Ask to speak in private. People are less defensive one-on-one.**
- (2) State your observation of what happened, not your accusation.**
- (3) Express your feelings: "When you did _____, I felt _____.**
- (4) Be open to this partially being your fault as well.**
- (5) Tell the person what you need. "I think what I really need from you is just for you to own that your words were insensitive, and to apologize. That's it."**
- (6) If, for whatever reason, it doesn't go well, I would simply point that out and ask if the person would be willing to have a third party enter in to this, so you two can reconcile.**
- (7) Ask your missional community leader or another trusted spiritually mature person to help.**

- *How do you feel about resolving conflict as Jesus here commands? Can you commit to doing it Jesus' way, even if you don't want to?*
- *Have you ever used these principles in a process of reconciliation where it went well? What was the result for your relationship?*
- *Have you ever used these principles in a process of reconciliation where it went poorly? What was the result for your relationship?*

PART 4: ACCOUNTABILITY TO LIVING A CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE

They were very aware that an unbelieving world did not understand the gospel message AND that they were watching the lives of the Christians to see if they were "legit". The early believers were totally committed to living out their faith in every way. The Christians not only called themselves "brother" and "sister" to remind themselves that they were now part of God's family, they were also called "saints" or "holy ones" to remind themselves that because of what Jesus had done, God had now fully accepted them. This acceptance by God did NOT lead them to living like people who didn't know Jesus. Instead, God's unconditional love deeply motivated them to live out their faith in every way.

"It is the Christians, O emperor, who have sought and found the truth... They do not commit adultery. They do not live in fornication. They speak no untruth. They do not keep for themselves the goods entrusted to them. They do not covet what belongs to others. They honor father and mother. They show love to their neighbors... Their women, O emperor, are pure like virgins. Their daughters are chaste, kind and gentle. Their men refrain from all unlawful intimate relationships. They keep free from all impurity, for they live in the expectation of the recompense to come in the other world... They love one another. They do not neglect widows. Orphans they rescue from those who are cruel to them. They are ready to give up their lives for Christ, for they observe the words of their Christ with much care. Their life is one of consecration... This O emperor, is the rule of life of the Christians, and this their manner of life... And see, because of them, good flows on in the world! Truly it is they who have sought and found the truth, and from what we have understood here, we must conclude that they alone are close to the knowledge of truth."

~ Aristides, AD 137



Christian accountability has at least four elements: (1) meeting together, (2) acknowledging sin or failure when it is present, (3) prayer, and (4) encouragement, but accountability often doesn't work.

- Accountability fails when believers HIDE, when we choose to not be open about our sins and struggles.
- Accountability fails when we don't LOVE, when it feels "programmatic," that is, when it seems devoid of genuine and caring relationship.
- Accountability fails when we don't CHANGE, when the goal becomes mere confession of sin rather than actually changing internally, "a circle of cheap confession by which you obtain cheap peace for your troubled conscience" (Jonathan Dodson)
- Accountability fails when we forget the GOSPEL, when we focus only on our external behavior, the sin pattern, and not on the heart or how the person is doing.
- Accountability fails when we don't CONFRONT, when we fail to speak up. It fails when we give acceptance and love but not the hard truth that we sometimes all need to hear.

Consider the following scripture as they relate to accountability.

"Confrontation is a precious gift. The lack of it is fatal to individuals and can lethal to communities."

~ John Ortberg

"Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy."

~ Proverbs 27:5,6

"Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted."

~ Galatians 6:1

"Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; It is oil upon the head; Do not let my head refuse it..."

~ Psalm 141:5

"And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or more witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer."

~ Matthew 18:15-17

- *Which of these categories are the main ones you relate to personally?*
- *Which of these seem totally foreign to you?*
- *How can recognizing our different wiring help us to become a community that loves better?*

Reproof and correction is a responsibility of all believers; it is a mark of a community on mission. If we're ON MISSION, than Jesus' instructions here carry more weight than our fears or reluctance.

PART 5: A DESIRE TO INFLUENCE OTHERS FOR JESUS

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said "The church is the church only as it exists for others." If we are ON MISSION, then attempting to reach out to an unbelieving world should be a constant part of our communal life. Since aspects of outreach were included in both "The Life We Were Meant For" and "Living Missionally," all we are going to address here is how missional communities can partner with the wider body of believers who attend H2O. Here are some ideas:

- **Come early for H2O cafe.** Did you know that the cafe opens at 10:30 a.m., and we have new people every Sunday, many who don't know Christ? Why not show up early, and make it your mission to begin redemptive relationship with newcomers?
- **Invite your friends to LifeGroup events.** Once a month, our missional communities either do a relational hang time, an act of service or an outreach event. All three of these are ideal for inviting your friends. Many people "belong" before they believe, becoming part of the community before committing to Christ.
- **Invite your friends to H2O Sunday service.** Even on our most churchy Sundays, we're still pretty untraditional and real, things that God can use to bring unbelievers to faith.

SUMMARY

Sanctification occurs in community, and we trust that this study has helped you to see how having a radical unity, cultivating a deep love for one another, being committed to godly conflict reconciliation, and giving and receiving accountability all play into the process of us becoming more like Jesus.

ACTION POINTS

1. One of the most practical ways to build upward unity is simply to pray for your spiritual leaders. This week begin the practice of praying for your Missional Community Leaders and your pastors.
2. In what is referred to as “the Lord’s prayer,” Jesus taught us to include these words in our prayers: “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” By praying these words and asking the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind anyone you may have offended or any Christian you feel disunited with, you can become much sharper at maintaining the unity of the Spirit growing?

Why or why not?