

Discipleship 101: Fellowship

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Will you pray with me? Gracious God, we offer thanks for this day and for the opportunity to be here together in worship. As we've gathered here this morning, help us to put aside concerns of our daily lives.

Let go of the demands that crowd upon us and simply be present here to your spirit and to your words. In the spirit of the psalm, Lord, may we be still and know that you are God.

We offer you prayers of thanksgiving for life and for all those things that make life good. We offer gratitude for the abundance and fertility of the earth.

Help us as we work to maintain the health and beauty of the earth for generations to come. Help us as we seek to make this good earth a safe home for all your children.

We confess, Lord, that though your earth is abundant, though creation that you've provided for us is abundant, many of your children live in poverty and want.

[1 : 07] We know from your words through the prophets and apostles that this is neither your will nor your purpose. Father, sustain us with the gift of hope as we work to do your will so that all people might share fairly in the good things of your creation.

Father, we bring to you our concerns for peace in our community and around the world. Father, we pray for the continued conflict in Ukraine, the senseless aggression Russia has taken towards them.

We ask that you would bring peace and we trust in your power over that situation. Father, scripture tells us that while we may live in a troubled world, you have overcome that trouble.

And the final victory is yours. In all these things, Lord, we ask for the strength to face the hard realities of our world. To not despair, but to stand with the vulnerable.

Stand with victims of violence and injustice. And to stand with those who live on the margins of life. We bring to you, Father, our personal concerns for ourselves and for our families that we may not share with others openly.

[2 : 33] Father, there are health concerns and other issues in our church family and we seek answers. We ask for healing. Lord, we desperately need your strength, your peace and your encouragement.

Not just this morning, but every day of our lives. Father, we pause to recognize again this morning that you are God and we are your people.

We thank you for your provision for our needs. Lord, we submit to your power and your authority over our lives. And we bow humbly before you and recognize your grace, your love and your kindness to us.

And we pray all these things in the powerful and wonderful name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Well, just a quickie.

If you are visiting with us today, here is a connection card, which Leah mentioned. They're on the table right outside the door. And I don't want to miss you. I don't want to miss connecting with you.

[3 : 42] And we will pray for you if that's what you'd like. And so that's an opportunity for you to connect with us. So welcome here for this Sunday, March 27th.

March 27th. Depending on the day, it feels like spring. Some days it feels like winter again. So it is Alberta. Welcome to Alberta again, right?

So welcome, whether, as I said before, if you're in person or you're listening to the service later through our various channels. So this morning, we're continuing in our sermon series called Discipleship 101.

And through this series, we're continuing to look at the importance of discipleship, both in our individual lives and in our lives as a church.

And we've recognized that discipleship is a journey of growth and learning for us as individuals. But it's also a journey that we take together as we're disciplined by others.

[4 : 43] And as we continue in our sermon series this morning, I'm going to refer to some things from a discipleship resource that I've mentioned before called Master Life. And by now, next slide, please.

By now, I hope you're getting familiar with this graphic. It's called the Disciples' Cross. And it's a teaching tool that was created by a man named Avery Willis.

So far in the series, we've learned that a disciple is... I could do a lot of quiz stuff this morning, but I won't. A disciple is a follower, right?

A follower of Jesus Christ. And so at the center of the Disciples' Cross, we've got that circle that reflects Jesus. And you can't read it from where you're seated, probably, but it is John 15, 5.

The passage that talks about Jesus being the vine and we are the branches. Jesus is the central connection in our lives as Christians. Jesus is there.

[5 : 43] He's the center. He's the middle. He's the intersection of both the vertical and the horizontal axes. And having him at the center of this diagram is on purpose.

Because as we've talked about many times, and this is critical for us to remember as disciples, Jesus has to be, my friends, has to be the center of your life.

For a disciple, Jesus is the point around which the rest of our lives revolve. He is our foundation. He is our anchor. He is the person and relationship that grounds our lives and gives them purpose and perspective.

He's the center of our universe, quite literally. He needs to be our number one priority. The foremost person. The most important person in our lives.

And as we've been reminded a few times, if Jesus is not the center of your world, quite simply, you may not be a disciple yet.

[6 : 56] But once we recognize Jesus as the center, then we move from there. We move towards our relationship with the Lord, which is up and down. That's that vertical axis.

He's up and we're down. So not meaning to say, you should be down, you should feel down. Not at all. So last week, you may remember that I reminded us of the first part of our church mission statement.

Does anyone feel brave enough to recite it with me? I've attended, before I became a pastor, I attended a church. And our pastor at that time would periodically bring it up.

And you'd hear little murmurs of the church mission statement. Not everyone knew it. And it was even posted on the wall. He said, you can cheat. It's right behind me. So it's just four words, the first half.

Reaching up to God. And that reminds us that the priority and orientation of our relationship with God. That's the first, the foremost thing in our life.

[7 : 58] And then two weeks ago, let's go way back there. We talked about the lower part of the axis, which represents the need to be grounded in.

Do you remember? The word. Grounded in the word of God, scripture, the Bible. And as one quote I read recently put it so beautifully, the Bible, this is awesome.

The Bible is not an accessory in the life of a disciple. It's a, any guesses? Necessity. It's not an accessory. It's a necessity.

Isn't that great? We don't just carry it around. It is our food. It is our guide. It is our wisdom. And when we spend time with the Lord daily in his word, and we touched on this, when we do that, we recognize that four things happen.

This is a refresher, by the way, for anybody who's new or visiting, giving you a little bit of backstory. So we get to know the Lord when we spend time in his word with him.

[9 : 03] We receive guidance and direction from the Lord through his word. We can bring our needs and desires to him in that time with him. And we can see God.

We can begin to recognize God making a difference in our lives and through us in the lives of other people. And last week we talked about the top section of the vertical.

And that is prayer. We recognize that prayer is also like being anchored in the word. It is a necessity for a disciple. Because prayer for a disciple means that we're literally coming into the awe-inspiring presence of God.

Do you remember that? I said it's not just a box that we tick off. But when we engage in prayer with the Lord, we come into his presence. In a very real way.

In a very literal way. And we talked a little bit about the foundation of prayer last week. Remember? We began with? Close.

[10:09] Good, Sherwin. Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving. So we begin by thanking God, not for what he's going to do for us, but for who he is, for his character, for his qualities.

And then we move to, as Sherwin said, praise. We move from thanksgiving in our prayer to praise. We begin to praise God, again, for who he is.

We move from praise at that point to confession. Excellent. So we move into confession.

We begin to recognize, in resonating with God, the ways in which we are drawing back from him. Holding back from him.

Choosing our own path over the path that he has for us. Confession. And following confession, we can move confidently to asking.

[11:07] To asking. And through petition for ourselves and our personal needs and desires, according to God's will. Remember, we talked about that. This is not about God being Santa, who we give him a wish list and he answers it.

But it's about praying in perspective of what God wants for our lives. Praying for his will to be done in and through us.

That's what petition means. And then another form of asking is intercession. And we touched a bit on that this morning when I prayed.

Lifting others up before God in prayer for their own needs. For their circumstances. Within our e-newsletter, we have a prayer list every week.

Those folks we are lifting up. We are recognizing where God has answered prayer. We are praying for people ongoing. For health and provision. And different things in their lives.

[12:07] So I think we pretty thoroughly covered that vertical axis. The word, scripture, and prayer. But that's only half of this diagram.

Only half of the disciple equation. So for some people, the horizontal piece, the outward relationship piece, never even really crosses their mind.

They're more focused on the vertical. So as long as I'm good with God, I'm good, right? I've got it covered. But there's more to being a disciple than just that.

And as I mentioned a few weeks ago, the vertical axis represents our relationship with God. So then the horizontal axis represents our relationship with people.

And this is reflected in the second half of our church mission statement. Which says, in other four words, reaching up to God and perfect, reaching out to people.

[13:12] Jesus didn't save us and redeem us simply to keep us to himself. Keep us removed from others and the world. That's not our role.

That's not our calling. That's not our mission. And we can see in Jesus' own life when he walked the earth, he was still God. He maintained a connection with his father.

But he also surrounded himself with other people, right? We recognize that in scripture. And he didn't choose just one. He didn't say, this is Bob. He's my best friend.

He chose 12, right? He wanted other people around him. Our Lord modeled that example. And he also knew that those 12 could not be alone.

They couldn't do what they needed to do on their own. They couldn't be what he called them to be on their own. They needed each other. And this is what we're considering this morning in our sermon titled fellowship.

[14:18] Fellowship. So it's an important aspect of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. But even more than that, it's a critical aspect of what it means to be part of a local church.

So what is fellowship? Well, there are members of our fellowship committee here. And I get to sit on that committee too.

So when we hear that word fellowship, we may automatically think of what we're going to do this morning. Talking after church over coffee. Sharing meals together.

Building friendships. Fellowships. But what's the best way to define fellowship? Because it's more than that. So I could read you a dictionary definition.

I could read you something from a concordance. Or from a Greek or Hebrew dictionary to consider how it's used in scripture. But I think it's wise to consider how Jesus uses it.

[15:16] In John 13 verses 34 and 35, Jesus says, 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.

Jesus makes it clear here that his disciples will be known by, recognized by their love for one another. Not by what they know, by their high and mighty attitude.

By the way they set themselves apart from other people. But by the way they show love. So I think we can define disciple fellowship as being in loving relationships with each other.

Is that fair? I like this. Because what it says is you are called to love me. Good luck.

[16:23] I am called to love you. It's an honor. To be a disciple loving and caring for and about one another is very, very important.

So sometimes it's not easy to directly translate a Greek word into English. And as many of you know, I've been preaching at the Arabic church that meets here.

And so I'm preaching there tonight actually. So I preach in English, then Ibrahim translates into Arabic. So he and I go back and forth and I tease them and say, two sermons for the price of one. God help them, literally. But so sometimes what's done is called transliteration. And sometimes that's used.

So what that means is, next slide, madam. There you go. What that means is, does the top look extremely confusing? So that means literally taking characters from one language and translating them, converting them into similar characters in another language.

[17:35] So the top word is the Greek word for fellowship. And so there really isn't a direct translation. So it's been translated to an English word, which is koinonia.

And that's the English word that we get, which is the closest we can get to Greek fellowship. So does fellowship for you mean putting up with each other?

Does it mean making sure we have Christian friends or making sure we have friends who don't know Jesus? Does it mean making sure we're in with the right people, connected to the right people?

What does fellowship love or disciple love look like? Well, I'm going to suggest again, hopefully this won't surprise you, that true discipleship fellowship looks like Jesus.

In John 15, verse 12, Jesus says, My command is this, love each other as I have loved you. So what did Jesus' love look like then?

[18:45] What does it continue to look like right now, right here today? Well, first of all, we need to recognize that Jesus tolerates us.

Don't take that the wrong way. He puts up with us. Have you ever thought about how difficult you can be? I can be cranky. I can be stubborn.

Just ask Michelle. But that's what love is. It's tolerating to some extent, right?

It's putting up with our worst qualities. But there's so much more than that. Jesus sacrificed for us. He intercedes for us with his father.

And can you recognize that he's honest with us, too? When you spend time with Jesus, do you ever feel that sense of conviction from the Holy Spirit that goes, Hmm, I'm just going to shine a light right there.

[19:49] Do you ever feel a little bit squirmy? That's tough love, my friends. That's what we need. Jesus' love for us looks like the ultimate sacrifice.

I hope we can recognize that. Willing to give everything out of love. Even his own life. Do you have a relationship like that in your life where you would take a bullet for someone else?

That's what it means. When Jesus gave everything so that we could be in relationship with him, in relationship with his father, have an eternity because of him.

So you may never be asked to give your life for someone else. It's probably fairly unlikely, especially in this part of the world.

But you can demonstrate sacrificial life, love, life and love, in other ways. We should tolerate each other.

[21:04] And being tolerant is a good quality. So it's not putting up, I'm not saying put up with bad behavior and just let it roll. You can call someone out on bad behavior.

But it's willing to be tolerant of our qualities that are less attractive, perhaps. Be willing to sacrifice for each other. Give up something so that someone else can have.

Intercede for one another before God. And ultimately be honest with one another. The church, and I'm not saying this church, but all churches, particularly in the West, have a tendency to be passive-aggressive.

It's one of my least favorite qualities and one of my least favorite things that is a reputation in the church. There's somehow a perception that if I come at you with my demands, well, it sure would have been nice.

You know, it sure would have been nice if someone had updated the computer so that it didn't need to be updated this morning at the last minute and cause a hassle. Passive-aggressive. It stinks, right? It hurts.

[22 : 18] And that's not true because I think the pastor maybe should have updated it. But that's the reality, right? It's passive-aggression. I think as Christian Canadians, it's a double whammy.

We think that somehow we're sparing somebody hurt by being passive-aggressive with them, by trying to take a little bit of a shot at someone. Well, this will be good for them.

It'll wake them up. It's unkind. So be honest with one another. Sometimes words are hard.

Sometimes that's hard in relationship.

But a healthy relationship grows from that. Can you recognize that in relationships where you've had conflict and gotten through it together, that relationship is far stronger because of it?

That's what love looks like. But also I want us to remember that your church family should be a safe place. Should be a place where you don't feel like you could be blindsided at any moment.

[23 : 21] Where you could be criticized or attacked or anything like that. It should be a place where you feel safe. Where you feel cared for. Where you feel cared about.

Where other people, where you know other people, have your best interests at heart. And that they're always seeking to support you. To encourage you.

As you follow that path to becoming the person that God wants you to be. Friends, God designed us for community.

Can you recognize that? COVID has been hard on community, hasn't it? Very hard. Hebrews 10 verses 24 and 25 says, Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.

Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. But let us encourage one another all the more as you see the day approaching.

[24 : 33] So the message there is encouragement. Is community. Is fellowship. Is care and love for one another.

And if you hear that spurring someone on, that doesn't mean kicking them in the sides. To make sure they do what you want. That's not spurring. But encouraging them.

Right? Encouraging someone else. Being a source of support for them. Building them up. And helping them when they find themselves in need.

So let's take some time to consider the benefits of deep and intentional disciple shaped fellowship. Well first, true fellowship gives us a place for accountability.

Sometimes we get ourselves into situations and circumstances where we can't recognize that we've lost our way. Has that ever happened to you?

[25 : 37] You get off on a path. And you don't even realize you've lost your way or certainly lost perspective. And perhaps we've even given in to pride or to sinful patterns of behavior that have drawn us away from Jesus.

Fellowship with other believers. Fellowship with other people who have your best interests at heart. In healthy relationship with them. With people that you trust.

Can give you an objective perspective. Objective perspective. So to be clear, this is not about criticizing someone.

Not about judging a brother or sister in Christ. Not about saying, well you know what I see you doing, which is dead wrong. Not. No. Back up. Not. Not. No. This is not about seeking to set someone straight.

Right? Have you ever gone into a situation with someone and said, well I know what to crack your knuckles. And I'm going to wade right in and set this person straight. Check your heart.

[26 : 44] Because remember that we are called to look inside first. We are called to consider what's going on in our hearts.

Before we consider offering insight, perspective, wisdom to someone else. And friends, make sure that your motives are pure.

Make sure that your motives demonstrate love first. If you don't have a loving relationship with someone or a relationship where there's mutual trust there, don't ever feel like you somehow have the right to speak into their life.

The time, the relationship needs to be invested in first. Remember that we're called to be known by our love first.

Right? Not by our judgment. Christians have a reputation of being excellent judges of other people. Remember that we're supposed to be known by our love first.

[28 : 01] And if you have no love for the person you feel justified in correcting, guess what? It's likely you who are in the wrong.

It's likely you who may have sin issues to deal with. Because if you just can't wait to put someone in their place, maybe it's you that needs the place putting.

And even if it stings, you're far more likely to listen to harsh or hard words from someone you know who loves you. Someone who cares about what's in your best interest.

Can you recognize that? It's much easier to take a difficult dose of reality when it's done out of the context of care and love.

So accountability can only come out of a relationship of mutual trust that's built on love. Second, true fellowship gives us a place for renewal.

[29 : 12] Who could use some renewal right now? You can put your hand up. I see fingers. Loneliness and stress are significant concerns in our world.

If you look on Amazon and see the kinds of searches or even Google, look at the kind of search volume for those types of terms right now. They are off the chart.

People are struggling more with their mental health now than perhaps any other time. Many people have nowhere to go and nowhere to turn.

And so God created us for, he calls us into fellowship with each other. So within this community, we're called to be a support network for one another.

We're called to be here for one another and love and encourage one another. Maybe you've never thought of this before, but maybe you have. Chances are very good that any problem or difficult set of circumstances that you are facing in your life, there's likely someone right here, right now connected to your church family, who's been through similar, if not the same situations.

[30 : 35] And they can offer insight and encouragement. And they can tell you what it's like on the other side of what you're going through. Tap into that kind of network.

Someone who's been through the kind of situation you're in right now in your life can offer you perspective. And if you consider the many challenges you've likely come through in your own life, maybe you can also recognize that you can be the same to someone else.

I had a friend who recently lost a parent. And first parent, right? And so struggling, and I came alongside and I said, welcome to the club.

I said, it's one of the worst clubs I've ever become a member of, but I'm here for you. And I said, I've lost both.

So I said, you know, I'm here for you. So there's an example, right, of an experience that you may have been through that someone else, if you make those connections, you can be a source of support and encouragement to someone.

[31 : 53] Because we can probably all recognize that God can and will take the hard lessons that you've learned, the hard circumstances that you've been through in your life, the struggles that you've been through.

God will use those things to make you a source of encouragement to someone else. So friends, ask him to point you to those people.

Third, true fellowship gives us a place for, not surprisingly, relationships. Proverbs 17, 17 gives us some wise insight on fellowship.

I love Proverbs. It says, a friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. So that really gives insight to what we've talked about there for the last minute or two, that friendship loves at all times, in all circumstances.

It's loyal. It's trustworthy. And we are forged in adversity. Our relationships are strengthened through adversity. We can encourage each other in adversity.

[33 : 05] Friends, Christians need each other. Can you recognize that? We need teammates, right? We need people to cheer us on.

We need people who will support us on our journey. Because just like Jesus didn't expect the disciples to go it alone, he doesn't expect you or I to either.

We need people that we can trust who will be there for us, who will listen to us, who are invested in and care about us just as we are.

People who will be there for us simply because of the significance that we have to them, not for what we can do for them.

Have you ever had that kind of relationship, that kind of friendship, where you feel like, yeah, I remember being a kid, the kid with the video game system, always everybody's friend, right?

[34 : 10] But people who care about you for just who you are. That's what it's about. And also, as I touched on before, people who are sometimes there to confront us in love because they know us and there's a relationship of trust there.

So again, I'm not talking about being judgmental or critical or making people feel bad for making mistakes. I'm talking about investing in relationships and building each other up in constructive ways.

investing in relationships, especially the kind that Jesus intended for his disciples to experience, involves being intentional.

You've heard me use that word a lot over the past three years. Being intentional and engaging with other people. Some people are just, just want to check the church box, right?

They aren't really interested in getting involved with people there. So, I go to church, done. Check. I go once a month, I go once every two months, done.

[35 : 25] That's my responsibility. But you're missing out. You're missing out on, as I've said all through this sermon, the opportunity to be in a source of encouragement, but to be encouraged as well.

That's what fellowship in community is about. And honestly, that's my concern with online church. church, because it gives people an opportunity to engage, to tune in to Jesus, to worship God and connect on their own terms.

But it also keeps people disconnected from other believers in many ways. And COVID has made that very challenging. But that's my encouragement for you, is that this place, in person, in community, in fellowship with one another, is what the plan always has been.

So perhaps you're hesitant to engage with other people. Perhaps you're hesitant to trust, if your trust has been broken before.

Maybe you used to consider yourself to be a people person, but somehow people ruined that for you. That's what a friend of mine says. I used to be a people person, but people ruined it for me.

[36 : 54] I hope that's not your experience. But if any of these things, if hesitance, or feelings of unsafe, being unsafe, or feeling, past feelings of hurt, keep you from engaging in community, ask God to help you heal those hurts.

Ask Him to heal them for you. And to restore you to a place where you can trust. Where you can engage in meaningful, discipleship-shaped, I created my own tongue twister, discipleship-shaped fellowship again.

Because it's important to start loving our brothers and sisters in Christ. You ever done that? Gone to church, and then you don't see people from church for the rest of the week, and then you see them next Sunday.

Have you ever stopped and thought about, these people are the people I'm spending eternity with. So why do I see them so rarely? We're going to be spending eternity together.

And it's going to feel like an eternity in good ways. So it's good to invest in these relationships now. Because I feel that when we resist engaging in a local church, when we resist investing time, spending time with other believers in a community of fellowship as God intended, we're quite likely depriving ourselves.

[38 : 31] I honestly believe that. We're missing out on a vital part of what it means to be a Christian. what it means to be a disciple. And we're missing out, I believe, on the opportunity to be used by God to make a difference in the lives of others, and quite possibly to be made different by them as well.

Amen.