

Four Sermons on Discipleship

The Jesus Model

Sermon 1

Be sure to have the following prepared before the worship service:

1. One of your new Foundations leaders ready to give a testimony about the Foundations Group
2. Spiritual Growth Plans to pass out to people as they enter the worship service
3. Signup sheets for people to sign up for Foundations Small Groups after the worship service
4. Foundations leaders available after the service to answer questions and sign people up to be in their group

Introduction

This will be the first sermon on the importance of small groups in the life of a Christian. It will cover 4 weeks and include the following messages:

1. The Jesus Model
2. The Early Church Model
3. The Paul Model
4. The Responsibility of the Christian

Let's begin by asking the question: What model did Jesus use to reach a lost world?

Let's look first at what He could have used:

1. He could have founded a university to train His followers to make disciples.
2. He could have spent lots of money to train His followers to make disciples.
3. He could have waited until the 20th Century and used all the technology available to make disciples. (radio, TV, Internet)
4. He could have traveled to every part of the world to make disciples.
5. He could have used miracles to make disciples.

He did not do any of these things to fulfill His Great Commission to make disciples of every nation. Instead, He left a model that can be used by every church in every nation to fulfill the Great Commission.

You will notice that this model:

1. Does not require large sums of money.
2. Does not require those involved to be "professionally trained".
3. Does not require large buildings.
4. Does not require people to give up their jobs or leave their families.
5. Is adaptable to every culture and country.

Let's look at this model together and see how Jesus left us a model to reach the world that is simple (anyone can be involved), realistic (anyone can be reached no matter their gender, race, economic status or age), relational (anyone will feel comfortable using this model) and transferable (can be taught to others).

1. Jesus gathered people to Himself.

Jesus never intended to reach the world Himself. His model is to use people to reach other people. So the first thing He did was to collect a group of men together that He could use as a foundation to begin a movement that would multiply as time passed.

2. Jesus brought these men into a group.

Jesus not only gathered a group of men, He made them a group with Himself as the leader. In time, the 12 disciples left their families to spend all of their time with Jesus. It is important to notice the size of the group. Jesus could have collected many more than 12 to train, and He could have gathered less. Instead, He chose a number that meant He would be able to get to know each man individually, coach them as needed and have them get to know and understand His person and message. Successful small groups follow the model of Jesus and have around 12 people. This insures that the members get to know each other, have opportunity to share in the group, minister in the group and interact with each other. This is not possible in larger groups.

3. Jesus's group shared a common mission.

Jesus gathered these men to share a common goal, to become "fishers of men" (Mt. 4:19). Later He would expand this common goal when He gave the disciples the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-30). Small groups have as their common goal the fulfillment of the Great Commission to make disciples.

4. Jesus trained the disciples by giving them information.

Jesus spent time giving the disciples information in sermons, parables, stories and in response to questions they asked Him. Learning the message of the Bible is essential for Christians, it is part of the Great Commission that states "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you".

5. Jesus not only gave His disciples information, He coached and mentored them.

Information with application only makes Pharisees. Jesus spent time coaching His disciples and applying the Bible to their lives. Examples of Jesus applying the Bible to the disciples include the following:

Let your light shine before men.

Be reconciled to your brother.

Forgive those who have done wrong to you.

Love your enemies.

Lay up treasure in heaven.

All of these, and more, are found in the Sermon on the Mount Mt. 5-7.

6. Jesus spent time with His disciples.

Jesus spent three years teaching, training, coaching, instructing and mentoring His disciples. This amount of time was necessary for them to become equipped to carry out the Great Commission. You cannot make disciples quickly; time is needed to develop the character and conduct needed to fulfill the Great Commission.

7. Jesus let them have the ministry after He ascended to heaven.

It is amazing that Jesus entrusted men with the responsibility to reach the lost. The disciples trained others just as they were trained and began a process of multiplication that continues to this day.

Conclusion: This is a model that can be adopted by any church. It is simple, does not require large amounts of money and is adaptable to every culture and country. It does require trained leaders, willing and obedient participants, material that will equip and train and a place to meet. For now, it is enough to remind ourselves that the model Jesus left us to reach the world is founded on the idea of small groups of Christians being trained, coached and mentored in the same manner Jesus trained His disciples.

We have been training small group leaders for the last several months. These trained leaders will be starting small groups in three weeks. These new small groups are called Foundations Groups. Please look at the Spiritual Growth Plan you received. This shows how the Foundations Groups follow the same four stage small group process Jesus used. We call the four phases Come, Grow, Serve, and Go. The content of the Foundations Groups is worship, fellowship, God's Word, Prayer, Service, and Outreach. The content provides a summary of everything Jesus taught and includes all areas in which we need to grow spiritually.

The Foundations small group leaders are available after the service to answer any questions you may have. Foundations small groups meet at different locations and different times. There are signup sheets available, so you can sign up today to be in a group. These Foundations groups will be starting in three weeks.

The Early Church Model

Sermon 2

Be sure to have the following prepared before the worship service:

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Introduction

This is the second sermon on the importance of small groups in the life of the Christian. Last week we looked at the model Jesus used in training His disciples and discovered that He chose to use the small group model to equip them. Not only did Jesus use this model, but as we will see the early church employed this same model.

I. The Word for Church.

In the Greek language the word that is translated “church”, which is “ecclesia” actually means “gathering”. The word became corrupted during the Middle Ages and came to refer to the building where Christians met for worship. So now we commonly say, “Let’s go to church”, meaning, let’s go to the building where we meet. Why is this important? If we believe that the church is primarily a building, then that becomes the focal point of where we do ministry. As we will see, you cannot model how the early church ministered if you center most of your ministry around your building or meeting place and meet primarily in large groups.

II. How they Ministered. Acts 2:42-47

Let’s look at what the early church actually did together.

1. They learned the Bible. They spent time listening to the apostles teach them about Jesus.
2. They fellowshiped together. They spent time together in order to get to know each other; sharing their experiences, backgrounds and needs with each other.
3. They broke bread. This may mean that they had Communion together, but it may also mean they took their meals together as a group. This would build a sense of community, unity and harmony.
4. They prayed together. They spent time in prayer for each other, another way of building intimacy and partnership in the new church.
5. They had all things in common. The practical application of this was that they met each other’s needs by selling property and possession to help those who were in difficulty.

Note: The results of these actions were:

1. Signs and wonders were being done by the apostles. Christians who minister in this way have the blessing of God on their efforts.
2. They were united in purpose and spirit. There was no division in the church and because of that unity their ministry was very effective.
3. They had a good testimony. Christians, who are united, do good works and show their love by meeting the needs of others will have the respect of those who are not yet Christians.

4. Many people were being saved. Because they were using the model that Jesus used, meeting not only in large groups (In the Temple) but in smaller groups (house to house) they had success in their evangelistic efforts.

III. Where they Ministered.

1. In the Temple. They taught publicly in the Temple courtyard to reach large groups of people. Acts 2:46 5:21
2. House to house. The apostles knew that it was not enough to teach large groups of people. They knew that people needed to meet in smaller groups to experience what they had learned with Jesus. These smaller groups met in houses where they fellowshiped, prayed, ate together and experienced life together. Acts 2:46 5:42 (notice that they met both in the Temple for large meetings and in houses for smaller groups) Acts 20:20 (notice that Paul taught both publicly and in houses).
3. The Early Church met exclusively in homes. There is no record until the third century of churches meeting in buildings rather than in homes. Though it is not wrong to meet in a building, this was not the custom of the early church which seems to have met exclusively in homes. Rom. 16:5 1 Cor. 16:19 Col. 4:15 Philemon 1:2 2 John 10
4. What happens when Christians meet in a house? (Or in any setting that provides for small groups, this could be a church building as well).
 - a. It follows the model established by Jesus.
 - b. It allows for flexibility.
 - c. It allows for informality.
 - d. It allows for intimacy.
 - e. It allows for meeting individual needs, both spiritual and physical.
5. What happens when Christians meet only in a building in a large group (think worship service)?
 - a. Little opportunity to build relationships.
 - b. Little opportunity to have real fellowship.
 - c. Little opportunity for real prayer.
 - d. Little opportunity to meet needs of individuals.
 - e. Little opportunity to multiply.

IV. Conclusion

It is good to meet together in a large group worship service. This gives Christians the opportunity to worship together, to be taught together, to pray together and celebrate Baptism and Communion together. It is also important and necessary to meet in small groups for fellowship, prayer, teaching, meeting needs and learning from each other. Let's do both together as a church!

As we mentioned last week, we will be starting small groups in two weeks. These new small groups are called Foundations Groups. The Foundations Groups provide fellowship, prayer, teaching, meeting needs, and learning from each other just as small groups did in the early church. Please look at the Spiritual Growth Plan you received. This plan gives you information about the content and process used in the Foundations Small Groups

The Foundations small group leaders are available after the service to answer any questions you may have. Foundations small groups meet at different locations and different times. There are sign up sheets available, so you can sign up today to be in a group. These Foundations groups will be starting in two weeks.

The Model of Paul Sermon 3

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Introduction

This is the third sermon in a series on why it is important for Christians to be involved in small groups. We first looked at the model that Jesus used when He trained His twelve disciples. He trained His disciples for three years in a small group setting that equipped them to train others and begin to change the world. Then we looked at how the early church used the small group model in relation to teaching, fellowship, prayer and meeting needs. This week we will see what the apostle Paul says about small groups.

I. The Illustration of the Body. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

What does this mean?

1. Christians need each other. Paul uses the illustration of the church being like a body because it shows how much Christians need each other. The human body was designed by God so that it works best when all of its parts work in harmony. He says in v. 14 "For the body is not one member, but many". This means that every Christian needs every other Christian to make the church work effectively.
2. Every Christian is important. Paul writes that every part of the human body is important and needed if it is going to work well. Similarly, every Christian is important and has a place in the ministry of the church. Paul makes the point that if every part of the body were an eye, it would not work. God has designed the body, and the church, so that every part of the body, and every part of the church, is important and needed.
3. In the church, those who seem the least important are many times the most important. This truth, found in vs. 22-24, says that those members of the human body which seem the weakest are most important. Similarly, in the church, those members who seem the weakest and least important are actually as important and needed as those who seem the most "important".

Application: This principle, that every Christian is needed, that every Christian is important, is best applied in a small group setting where Christians can relate, learn and be together in a setting that is both intimate and accountable.

II. The Illustration of Gifts. Romans 12:3-8 1 1 Cor. 12:1-11 Eph. 4:11-13

What does this mean? God has given the church gifts for each individual. There are many different gifts, but they were given to both build up the church and to reach the lost. From Paul we learn that:

1. These gifts are used in the context of relationship. All of the gifts that Paul writes about are to be used in relation to ministering to other people, whether Christian or non-Christian. Whether it is teaching, showing mercy, being hospitable, serving, giving or leading, all of the gifts are used in the context of being with people. The only structure in the church where nearly all of these gifts can be used is some sort of small group.
2. These gifts benefit everyone. God gave these gifts so that not only the church, but the world as well, would benefit. In 1 Cor. 12:7 Paul writes that these gifts are given for the common good. In Eph. 4:11-12 Paul writes that the leadership gifts were given to equip the entire church for the work of ministry. The best structure for training and equipping the church, as well as having everyone use their gifts for the common good, is the small group. In the worship service, only a few get to use their gifts. If a church has a network of small groups, it makes it possible for everyone to use the gift that God has given them.

Application: This principle, that the gifts that God has given to the church benefit everyone, means that Christians need a place to not only use their gifts, but a place to find out what there gift is. The small group is the best structure to accomplish this purpose.

III. The Principle of “One Another”

Paul uses the phrase “one another” many times in his letters. This phrase, and the adjectives used with it, show how important Paul believed it was for Christians to be involved in each other’s lives. Some of the words used with the phrase “one another” are:

Admonish	Rom. 15:14	Love	1 Thess. 4:9
Care for	1 Cor. 12:25	Comfort	1 Thess. 5:11
Serve	Gal. 5:13	Bear weakness	Rom. 15:1
Submit	Eph. 5:21	Bear burdens	Gal. 6:2

What does this mean?

1. Christians have a responsibility to each other. Christians are supposed to be involved in the lives of other Christians in ways that will help fulfill the Great Commission to reach a lost world. Church members should have structured times when they can pray, talk, learn, share and relate to each other.
2. This responsibility is both positive and negative. Some of the words that Paul used to describe the relationship Christians have with each other are positive; such as love one another, serve one another and comfort one another. Some, however, are negative. Paul writes that Christians are to “admonish” one another. This means that it may be necessary to help those who are weak or struggling by speaking truth to their situation. He also writes that we are to “forgive” one another (Col. 3:13). If you have to forgive someone, it means that you have to talk to them about something they have done to offend you. Finally, the writer of Hebrews says that we are to “exhort” one another (Heb. 3:13). He specifically relates this to sinful behavior, which means that Christians have the responsibility to help those who are struggling with sin to repent and change their attitude or behavior.

Application: Obviously, the responsibility Christians have to each other, shown in the phrase “one another”, is fulfilled best in small groups. It is hard to see how many of the commands that Paul writes about concerning the relationship Christians have with each other can be carried out except in the context of a small group.

IV. The Illustration of Family. Rom. 14:13, 1 Cor. 5:11, Gal. 6:10, 1 Thess. 4:10

Paul uses the illustration of family to show how intimate the relationship Christians have with each other should be. Many times Christians will be closer to other Christians than to members of their own family.

What does this mean?

1. Families are small units. Families come in all sizes, but they are not usually as large as a church. This gives us the idea that Paul wants the members of the church to think of themselves as a family, something that is difficult when you think in terms of dozens or hundreds of people, easier when you think in terms of 7 to 12, which is typically the size of a normal small group.
2. Families spend time together. Families experience life together. In the context of a church, Paul is thinking in terms of how Christians should experience life together as families do.

Application: Obviously, the responsibility Christians have to each other, shown in the phrase “one another”, is fulfilled best in small groups. It is hard to see how many of the commands that Paul writes about concerning the relationship Christians have with each other can be carried out except in the context of a small group.

We will be starting small groups next week. These new small groups are called Foundations Groups. The Foundations Small Groups implement the following principles the Apostle Paul taught:

1. The principle that every Christian is needed, that every Christian is important, is best applied in a small group setting where Christians can relate, learn and be together in a setting that is both intimate and accountable.
2. The principle that the gifts that God has given to the church benefit everyone, means that Christians need a place to not only use their gifts, but a place to find out what their gift is. The small group is the best structure to accomplish this purpose.
3. Obviously, the responsibility Christians have to each other, shown in the phrase “one another”, is fulfilled best in small groups. It is hard to see how many of the commands that Paul writes about concerning the relationship Christians have with each other can be carried out except in the context of a small group.
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The Responsibility of the Christian

Sermon 4

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Introduction

This is the fourth sermon in the series explaining why it is important for Christians to be involved a small group. We looked at the model that Jesus used in training His disciples and discovered that He used the small group model. He limited his group to 12 so that He could interact with them, pray with them, teach them, mentor them and coach them. We saw that the early church also met in small groups to learn from each other, pray with each other, fellowship with each other and meet each other's needs. Last week we saw how Paul used the small group model in establishing churches that met in homes. We saw how used different illustrations to show how important it is for Christians to spend time with each other so they can minister to each other. Finally, we saw how he used the phrase "one another" to explain the type of relationship he expects church members to have. The obvious conclusion is that the small group is the best structure to accomplish the models that we see from Jesus, the early church and Paul.

We know that the worship service plays a vital role in the life of the church. It is usually the only time that the entire church meets together. It is the structure that allows the leadership to provide vision, encouragement and teaching to the church. It is also the only structure where the entire church can meet together in worship. Yet, churches that only have a worship service, or lack the type of small groups that accomplish what Jesus, the early church and Paul accomplished in their small group models, do their members a real disservice. Churches that do not have vital, relational, intentional and growing small groups will never bring their members to maturity in Christ.

I. The Responsibility of Leadership.

Those who are responsible for the leadership of the local church have the responsibility to provide small groups for their members so that they can grow in the faith and begin to reach the lost for Christ. Our leaders have taken this responsibility seriously and have trained members of our church to lead groups that will accomplish these goals.

These groups will:

1. Help you Grow.
 - a. In God's word. 1 Peter 2:2
 - b. In obedience. John 14:15
 - c. In knowing God's will. Col. 4:12
 - d. In talking with God. 1 Thess. 5:17
2. Help you Serve.
 - a. By learning your spiritual gift. 1 Cor. 12:1-11
 - b. By following Jesus' example. 1 Peter 2:21
 - c. By helping you find your place of service. Gal. 5:13

3. Help you Go.
 - a. To find your mission in life.
 - b. To learn how to give your testimony. Col. 4:5-6
 - c. To discover how to share the good news. 1 Peter. 3:15
 - d. To learn how to invest in and invite those who are unchurched. 1 Tim. 3:7, having a good reputation makes it easier to invest in and invite people

II. The Three Commitments Model.

We think that is reasonable for church members to be committed to three different areas in the life of the church.

1. The worship service. We think it is reasonable for each church member to attend the weekly worship service to worship, learn and be together as the entire church. 1 Cor. 11:22 14:23 Talks about the entire church meeting together.
2. A small group. We think it is reasonable for each church member to attend a weekly small group that is appropriate for where they are at in their spiritual life. Acts 20:20 talks about Paul teaching publicly and in houses, i.e. small group).
3. A place to serve. We think that it is reasonable for each church member to find a place to serve that matches their gifts, abilities, personality and experience. 1 Cor. 12:7

III. What is the benefit to us as a church and to us personally as church members?

1. Obedience is always good. God wants us to be involved in a small group. By obeying Him we will be blessed both corporately as a church and individually. Ps. 1:1
2. We will be able to effectively minister to each other. It is only in the small group that we can begin to see meaningful life change and growth in our faith.
3. We will be able to effectively reach the lost. We will have groups that you can invite the unchurched to attend. We will learn in our groups how to reach your family members, co-workers, friends and neighbors who do not know Christ.

IV. What is your responsibility?

The small group is the best structure to accomplish the models that we see from Jesus, the early church and Paul. Today we have talked about what is reasonable for our church members to do.

Now we would like to give you one more opportunity to respond to our challenge of becoming involved in the Foundations small groups we are starting. Today you can sign up for a Foundations small group immediately after the service. You need to do this and you will not regret being obedient to God in this manner!

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