

Deeper Relationships: The Triangle

Our first calling is to do what Jesus did and follow his example.

We have all seen children copying an adult. That is the way that people first begin to engage with this process of learning. Walk the same way as you do! This is a deliberate attempt to learn.

We are called to be deliberate learners of Jesus. As such we are called to live 3 dimensional lives. Love God, love the body of Christ and love the world.

Firstly the UP dimension – Jesus was in constant contact with his Father, conversing both silently and out loud. He used remarkably intimate language. It was an amazing revelation to first century Judaism that you could call God “Dad”.

They worked with the understanding that God was the overbearing judge of the universe who was waiting to catch you out. It is almost impossible to comprehend the bombshell this was!

Many of us still find it difficult to speak of God in intimate terms. We prefer to use Christ instead of Jesus. We are not really sure if we can talk of him as a buddy.

We speak of God as “Father”, yet this word “Petre” was the honorific title given to the head of the family. Not the intimate word Jesus uses here, literally “Daddy”.

This is something for us to think through as we seek to disciple others. What do our words and actions communicate?

We are called, like Jesus, to dig for that relationship.

He would often be found praying alone, and on other occasions he would pray out loud about the most intimate things.

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray because they heard him pray. Silent prayer and reading is a modern development. Not before the 13th century did this become common practice.

Augustine described in awe and amazement how Bishop Ambrose (of Milan) could read and all you could see was his lips moving.

It's interesting for us to note that the Wailing Wall is not called the wall of silence. The Pharisee and Sinner could hear each other's prayers.

¹¹The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. (Luke 18:11)

This was an extroverted praying culture.

The most important thing about the upward dimension – God calls us to be a spring and not a bucket! People describe their spiritual lives as a bucket – they get filled up at Church or somewhere of anointing and then they start to leak.

Jesus said to the woman at the well,

¹³... "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13–14)

What Jesus did was excavate! He dug and he spoke naturally of a desire to keep digging.

Over the centuries the Church has learnt to live life before the Father by developing the spiritual disciplines. We need to re-learn many of these disciplines.

If we teach our people these disciplines, then they have tools to dig.

Love the Lord by reading the Bible – the discipline of study from different angles, devotional commentary, a few verses, or even read it like a novel.

Learn to pray in different ways. Learn to listen to God in different ways. God wants to interact with me in lots and lots of different ways.

To use a golfing analogy; I need to learn to use different clubs. You won't get out of a bunker with one club!

Jesus wants us to live like him – to live our lives as a prayer, to ask ourselves regularly the question "What is my life saying to God in my non verbal communication" At least 75% of our communication is non verbal so why any different with God!

What is my life saying to God?

The same is true of other relationships in our lives. Intimacy is developed through discipline.

What about the IN dimension?

The Son of God could do whatever he wanted. He walked through a crowd and healed everyone. It's unlikely that we will ever access such a level of anointing!

What does the Son of God do? The first thing he does is to find community.

Jesus was so committed to community that everything was done in a team. When he wanted a donkey, he sent 2 people. It's fascinating that we continue to employ individuals for ministry and Jesus never did. Paul in Athens and Peter with Cornelius are exceptions but they were rare!

As far as Jesus was concerned no one went on his or her own. It was all done in teams.

Matthews list of the 12 are all in couplets – 6 pairs. I think we are amazingly individualistic. Jesus the Son of God began his ministry by finding some people to hang out with!

Danny Wallace and the "Join Me" phenomenon: 2 years ago, an out of work film producer went to the funeral of his Uncle Orberry, a Swiss man, and listened with rapt interest to the story of this man's rather tragic life. After WWII he had wanted to form a community of 100 people to live together. Yet the most he was ever able to gather was 3.

After the funeral Danny placed an advert in the personals of a local paper – "Join me, send a passport photo to this mail box".

Someone sent him a photo and an Indian takeaway menu. The guy had suggested he try Chicken Korma.

Danny bought the curry and went round to his house and shared it.

Within a week 15 people had responded. The advert only said "Join Me". These were ordinary people, desperately lonely and living in London. So Danny started a "join me" website and in no time at all he gathered 100 people.

Danny got chatting with one of the guys on the web – they agreed to meet in Leicester Square for a drink the next day. Danny went. A guy in the chat room the next day wrote, 'I have met with "Him"'. Danny realised they were talking about him. He had become a cult leader!

One of the girls said we don't do anything, if we are going to be connected we need to do something otherwise I am leaving.

So Danny got them all to gather for a picnic in Hyde Park. He left a tape to be played on a portable cassette player with the message he had recorded. "I would like you to do random acts of kindness to anyone you meet in the park." It became known as "Good Friday". Everyone thought it was a great idea and bought food, train tickets for people in the park.

As people met in the chat room they decided that they wanted to do it every week! No religious veneer, just a desire to meet.

They found out about a guy called Arthur, an ex-prisoner who they had given money to. Apparently he had scammed £6000 during his life as a con artist! They thought this was a very poor return for a life's earnings. They agreed to give him £150 a week if he promised never to do it again. Before they knew it they had thousands. Now it's a global phenomenon. (Go to www.join-me.co.uk and see how to be part of this!)

Don't you find it interesting? This is a phenomenon, there are books out now about it! This is a cross-cultural reality of a postmodern generation that is craving community. The extended family has atomised to individual friendships. We have lost the ability to do community. A simple invitation to join any form of community will be grasped with two hands.

The Hollywood view is that all Jesus did was heal the sick and cleanse the lepers! The reality is that at least 18 months was spent in what the older commentators used to call his retirement ministry, when he simply spent time with his disciples. He went through Galilee but he did not want anyone to know where he was because he wanted to spend time with his disciples.

A question for you - is the Church a cause, something that makes things happen, a movement or an entity? Or is it an effect, the result of something else happening?

We run our Churches as though it was a cause but the more you study the life of Jesus I wonder whether the Church is the result of discipleship. Was the way Jesus started it the way he wanted it to continue?

As we follow Jesus something happens, we become the representation of him in the world. The church is the result of people being discipled by him and that in him a new kind of community emerges. We need to attend to the inward dimension!

You cannot make disciples during 2 hours on a Sunday. We were called to a Covenant community where we become one with God and each other.

On the day of Pentecost the confused tongues of the whole world were overcome by the Holy Spirit. God reversed the curse of Babel.

The ordained/laity divide is deeply divisive for community.

There is a deep vein of religion that expresses itself in making me different from everyone else. Others don't expect the same level of anointing! We end up with a priestly caste overseeing a group of cultic observers!

I don't believe that this is what Luther meant when he stood for "the priesthood of all believers"

The Gospel is easy and complex all at the same time – come to Jesus, he loves you and you're going to heaven, but after that it's hard.

Jesus said faith would be "Simple but Hard", we have made it "Complex but Easy!"

Outward Dimension

Often we see Jesus connecting with the crowds, having compassion on them,

²⁸"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:28 – 29)

Time and again he was moved by the needs of people and actively sought out the marginalised, lost and hurting. He was somehow welcome at the homes of the religious elite and tax collectors.

Most of us and our Churches are good at 2 of these dimensions!

Evangelical – UP and OUT (Bible – Evangelism)

Charismatic – UP and IN (Worship and Fellowship)

Liberal – IN and OUT (Living in Community and reaching out to Society)

Church history is littered with movements that have positioned themselves around two of these dimensions. Post Modernity is often old-fashioned liberalism. "We are a community", and "let's just love the poor".

Amazing that there are only three things to do and yet we find it so difficult.

Which are your strengths and which are your weaknesses?

What could you do on your own? What do you need your community to help you with?