

Why is it so rare today to find a church that continually casts a vision for discipleship? With that vision-casting comes the call to make the necessary sacrifices to grow a culture of biblical discipleship. This is all tied to the gospel. Gospel saturation results in gospel transformation. Supernatural community sometimes called “deep community” is sustained by discipleship. This is nothing less than doing God’s work God’s way. Without the above taking place, there’s a lack of transformation. Without transformation, we don’t have supernatural community. As a result, churches will seek to gain new members by a substitute form of attraction. They will content themselves with a culture of seeker-ism, consumerism, and spectatorship.

But, the great commission mandate, given by our Savior, hinges upon the truth that the nature of the church is organic. In other words, we are alive in Christ and we are members of His body and members of one another. This means that the way we do church must communicate the nature of the church. (Eph 4:25) How we do church ought to exposit what the church is. The book of Ephesians was given to guard the doctrine of the church and the book of Philippians was given to guard the practice of the church. And 1 Cor.12 and 13 provide a mighty counter to today’s cultural Christianity which allows members to be content as end users who do not edify one another. The gospel is the key. It is the mold into which Christ pours every believer. The gospel is to shape our relationship with God and with one another. As such, it is the hub from which all the spokes of the Christian life radiate outward.

Therefore there is no more important question than this, “How much are your life ministry and goals controlled by this massive guilt transfer at Calvary?” Only the gospel can take you from duty to delight, from passivity to passion for His glory; from formalism to formation into the image of Christ, and from dull socializing to deep community.

When we are gospel saturated, we will celebrate taking the vertical to the horizontal. In other words, our union with Christ and with one another will be expressed in the formation of partnerships for the purpose of discipleship. Only when we are controlled by this massive guilt transfer at Calvary, will our heart be fully engaged. We will insist upon building with Christ by edifying one another. We will be deliberate in finding our place in the body of Christ so that we can be a blessing to others. When we feed on the gospel so as to have it saturate our thinking, we are communing with Christ by means of the gospel promises. This means we are using Christ for the reasons God gave Him. This experience does not terminate upon ourselves alone. Communing with Christ produces radical identification with Him. This means that Christ’s cause will become our cause. Our time, talent, affections and resources will go toward building with Christ so as to see every believer become complete or mature in Him. When this becomes to take place in a church body, conversations move from merely social and casual to intentional. When we read the New Testament, it is remarkable just how many commands are there to govern how believers are to speak to one another. Some of the most common verbs are encourage, exhort, comfort, admonish, implore, edify, stimulate, and speak to one another, etc.

After a recent Bible lesson on this topic of spiritual fellowship and how we are commanded to speak to one another, my daughter asked a very poignant question, “Dad, why don’t people in the church talk to one another in this way?” The answer is, “without a vision, the people perish.” Discipleship is submission to Christ; for He has given us the

Great Commission mandate. The hard truth I explained to my daughter is that we do not live in a church culture of discipleship, but one of passive spectatorship and merely social fellowship. It is all too common in that approach to associate numbers with success, to depend upon promotion in Ecclesiastical engineering to increase our ranks. But, what a bland substitute this is for Christ's pattern which sees every member involved in building one another to maturity.

The secret to a thriving church is the obedience of men who see their role as spiritual influencers. Central to our vision at ***Gospel for Life*** is to build men up through nurturing friendships and mentoring. The vast majority of Christian men are neutralized by discouragement. As a consequence, they are not pursuing radical servanthood. They desperately need a hand on the shoulder from a caring brother who will supply life on life soul care. These men who are paralyzed by their defeats need personal encouragement. They need to hear that God wants them to keep going to them for more grace especially when they feel unworthy and least eligible for that grace. Now, here is what is missing in the church today. This message of grace and love is best communicated in a relational space in which spiritual care and parenting is communicated in a partnership for growth. Sadly, the vast majority of churches today are thinking only in terms of plugging in the layman, not empowering the layman. ***Gospel for life*** exists to empower men.

There is no other way to move a church into the Ephesians 4 pattern of a fully ministering laity. This is Christ's pattern. Both evangelism and growth toward maturity are dependent upon discipleship. Within these caring partnerships, depth of conviction grows substantially. The outcome is both a willingness to make sacrifices and a willingness to suffer for the cause of Christ. This is nothing less than having our lives conformed to the truth. This is where the real excitement is when our convictions serve us and attack our discouragement and enable us to fight the good fight of faith. This is how Paul mentored Timothy: "Lay hold of eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:12).

When men become engaged in the fight, they rise above cultural Christianity and begin to make a substantial difference for the Lord. Their influence begins to radiate out as concentric rings of a circle. First, they become faithful in abiding in Christ. Next, their spiritual sphere of influence is recovered in their family life. Next, they find their place of blessing in the body of Christ. And then they become salt and light in the world and the workplace. Faithfulness leads to greater opportunity for more faithfulness.