

Best Small Group Ever Manuscript

Session 3 – FRIENDSHIP

We've been talking about the Best Small Group Ever for a few weeks now and we've been looking at the ministry of Jesus and his small group of 12 disciples that formed Jesus' foundation for the church. All of Christianity that you see today can trace its roots back to this best small group ever.

If we're honest, that's a super tall order. I don't expect you to be super spiritual gurus. I don't want you to be exhausted trying to live up to an impossible standard. You won't be the best small group ever. But I want you to be the best small group that you can be.

I also want to take a moment for us to consider the fact that the disciples weren't a great small group because of how spiritually mature and superior they were. Actually, when we read the gospels sometimes we're shocked at how immature and stubborn these guys were.

At one point, John, who calls himself "The disciple that Jesus loved" asked Jesus if they could call down fire from heaven to destroy a town – all because that town didn't accept their message. Of course, the answer was emphatically "no!" but we still have to wonder what was going through John's mind at the time. Of course, Peter denied Jesus three times after Jesus told him he would and after he swore he wouldn't. He was also really impulsive and a little unpredictable. At one point he's tracking so well with Jesus that He's the first to confess that Jesus is the Messiah and immediately after that he says something to Jesus that makes Jesus say, "get behind me Satan!"

The disciples weren't theologically or biblically trained. They were tax collectors and fishermen and tradesmen. They weren't known for their spiritual prowess. They also argued over who was better than who, they didn't understand Christ's teachings, they often saw only earthly and human solutions to the difficulties at hand despite having witnessed miracles numerous times.

In short, this wasn't an ideal group of people for a small group, let alone for the foundation of the Christian faith. And that idea shouldn't become cliché. It's worth repeating over and over and over again that God doesn't call the qualified. He qualifies the called.

I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit wasn't lying when He said that God can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine. I truly believe that the same power that raised Christ from the dead is in all of us who believe. Each one of us is capable of experiencing the life changing power of Christ. But how do we do it? Is pursuing God through Word and Worship enough? I actually don't think it is. We miss out on a huge key component of the Best Small Group Ever if we look at Jesus and his disciples and all we see are individuals studying God's word and worshipping. Why? Because they were doing it together. There was a common love between these men.

Pastor Francis Chan once told a story about a former gang member who was baptized at his church. He came regularly for the first several Sundays and then eventually he came less and less until finally he stopped coming altogether. When someone from the church asked him why he hadn't returned he said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I just had the wrong impression. I thought that when I got baptized it would be like when I was initiated into a gang. I thought the church would become like my family and that people would have my back. I just had the wrong impression."

Guys. Girls. Listen. Gangs do a better job of community and family than the Body and Bride of Christ. Gangs. Doesn't that bother you? Let it bother you. Don't fight it. It should bother you.

Yet undoubtedly, fellowship was a huge part of the early church.

Acts 2:46 "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts..."

Hebrews 10:25 "And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."

But real genuine fellowship rarely happens in a fellowship hall. The answer is not: more events, more programming, more conferences or more church services. Nor is it more growth groups, life groups, connect groups, home groups, care groups, fellowship groups, small groups, cell groups, link groups, community groups, journey groups, men's groups, women's groups, Moms groups, or MOPS groups. Some of those things are good and a valuable part of many church ecosystems but meeting together for one more hour a week won't give you the life changing community that we're talking about.

That's why we stress friendship. We believe the Best Small Group Ever will always have three key ingredients: Word, Worship, and Friendship.

Friendship allows us to operate as we were meant to operate. The Bible tells us that we're to encourage one another, love one another, even gently rebuke one another. We can't do those things unless we're friends. When I'm your friend and you're doing something I think you shouldn't be doing, I can say, "Hey, this isn't who you are and it doesn't represent Christ well, what's going on?" Friends have this amazing ability to be able to speak truth into each other's lives.

A small group meeting once a week isn't enough. Even more so if you have a hard time attending regularly. We need to be pursuing each other. We need to be sharing life together. When we look at Jesus and his disciples, we see a tight knit group of guys who loved each other and spent considerable amounts of time together. They pursued each other, shared meals with each other, and spent days on end with each other.

One of the reasons our church started small groups wasn't so our people could know everyone but rather it came from an admission that it wouldn't be possible to know everyone. Instead our focus has become deeper relationships - not more relationships. Small groups aren't for getting to know more people but rather they're for getting to know a select few people really well.

I'd rather have godly, influential, transformational, iron sharpening friendships where people pursue a life of godly worship together (and share life struggles) rather than surface level relationships where people talk about the bible together and avoid vulnerable discussion about things that matter.

In John 15:15 Jesus tells his disciples, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."

Jesus isn't looking for servants to blindly obey orders. He wants friends. After Peter denies Jesus three times, Jesus is crucified, raised from the dead, and comes to the disciples. They've spent an entire night fishing. And at dawn Jesus calls to them from the shore where there's a fire and breakfast waiting for

them. (it just so happens that the last time Peter was by a fire he denied Jesus). Jesus turns to Peter and three times says, “Peter, do you love me?” and each time Peter says, “Yes, Lord, You know that I love you.” Three times Peter denied Jesus and so Jesus gives his friend Peter the opportunity to confess his love for Christ three times.

And one thing is undeniably clear.

These are friends, sitting on the shore of a lake, eating breakfast cooked over a fire, and acknowledging their love for one another. Even if a stranger were to pass by, they'd think to themselves, that looks like a great small group of friends.

Take a moment and reflect on this message. What does it mean for you? How are you challenged to live differently? What's something that's new for you? Consider what it would look like to be the **BEST SMALL GROUP EVER**.