



Fulfilling God's vision of making disciple-making disciples...

We Are Vision: Relational Community
Vision Church
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The fear of loneliness drives people to do desperate things. It drives some to stay in abusive relationships just to be able to say that they have a relationship, it drives some people to live life without boundaries and this creates people who can't say 'no' to people and over-commit themselves and the fear of loneliness even fuels inauthentic relationships that lack depth. In general everyone wants to be loved and accepted in some capacity, but oftentimes the mechanics of relationships that have both depth and meaning are often undefined. Our culture in fact is getting us away from real relationships and replacing them with e-relationships. I'm not talking about online dating, but I am talking about the potential detriment social media poses to our relationships. For instance within 160 characters we know what people are watching, the latest Love & Hip Hop details and if a mother got child her child support check for the month. A status update let's us know if you're married, single, dating or in a 'complicated' situation. As a result many of us have replaced real relationships with e-relationships because they allow us to keep people at a distance and they allow us to inflate our success. I'm not against social media and I think it can serve a purpose, but more and more studies are showing how the over indulgence in the social media world without limits causes one to develop an e-personality that keeps us from pursuing and engaging in real authentic relationships. This reality is not just limited to the world of social media. The impacts of this is seen in the lives of Christians whose only display of their faith is their religious views on their profile. My point in all this is that our third core value that we will discuss today is pertinent in a society that is breeding lonely people that appear to be fine, but are really suffering from a lack of authentic, biblical community. Studies show that the average American family manages about 35 separate relationships on a day-to-day basis - children, extended family, neighbors, government, school, friends, work, store employees, landlords, telemarketers, and obviously I could go on and on. These encounters often precede the family getting invited to church. Consequently, people are dealing with the unprecedented phenomenon of grouped isolation - what some refers to as "crowded loneliness." We are in desperate need of meaningful relationships, yet too busy and too pulled to maintain them so we often settle for pseudo relationships and because we feel so pulled in different directions the idea of community sounds great, but the work it requires is seen as 'work' and oftentimes believers deprive themselves of the value of experiencing Christ in the lives of other believers. Our third core value is

Relational Community and we call it that because we refuse to have a transactional community. When we say relational we're saying that people are in relationships within the church and the community. It's all too common for people to be in church, yet be lonely. I realize that some people are lonely by choice because of a refusal to allow people into their lives, but as we planted the church we have a desire of seeing people genuinely loved and cared for each other within the local church body.

Context of Acts

The book of Acts was written by Luke around 62-64 AD to his boy Theophilus and it records that history of the Christian church. Acts is a continuation of what Luke wrote in his gospel (the gospel of Luke). Acts reveals progress of the gospel as Jesus' disciples took it from Jerusalem throughout Judea, Samaria, and the outer most parts of the world (Acts 1:8). Acts begins with the ascension of Christ, the replacing of Judas with Mathias and the events of Pentecost. As Gentiles begin responding to the gospel, the book of Acts transitions to Paul and his ministry. Acts forms a bridge between the four Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, showing how the apostles carried on Christ's work and providing a historical background for Romans through Revelation so the book of Acts connects the New Testament.

Now as we approach this idea of **Relational Community** within our church I think it's important to understand what biblically constitutes a church and we should examine the mechanics that make a church a church. I'm gonna steal a definition from Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology and the eight components that make a church a church from Mark Driscoll's Vintage Church. There are different types of churches through scripture:

A house church is called a church in Romans 16:5 (greet also the church in their house), 1 Corinthians 16:19 (Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord). The church an entire city is also called a church (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1 and 1 Thess. 1:1). The church in a region is referred to as a church in Acts 9:31: "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up." Finally, the church throughout the entire world can be referred to as "the church." Paul says, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25) and says, "God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers..." (1 Cor. 12:28)... We may conclude that the group of God's people considered at any level from local to universal may rightly be called "a church." - **Wayne Grudem**

The aforementioned quote from Grudem gives us two dynamics of the church; the universal church which includes all spirit-filled, born-again believers all of the world and the local church which is a smaller groups of believers whether in a house or church building living out scripture together. Before some of you run with saying I can be a church at my house by myself or I can watch in on television and "have church" it's important to note that scripture spells out what churches actually do to be a church. In other words just listening to someone preach, doesn't constitute a church nor does the combination of worship and preaching constitute a church.

When we look closely at what the early church did, we get a vivid picture of the mechanics of a church.

There are eight stones that make a church a church and they are:

- 1) Regenerated Membership (Acts 2:41)
- 2) Qualified Biblical Leadership (Acts 2:42 and 1 Timothy 3)
- 3) Preaching of scripture and worship of Jesus (Acts 2:42)
- 4) The biblical sacraments of Baptism and Communion are administered regularly (1 Corinthians 11:17-33 and Romans 6:1-11)
- 5) The church is unified by the gospel (Ephesians 4:1-3)
- 6) The church is holy/Administers church discipline (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)
- 7) The church dedicates itself to fellowship with one another (Acts 2:42-47)
- 8) The church lives missionally and evangelizes it's community and making disciples (Matthew 28:18)

Take Note...

Authentic relationships take intentionality, consistency and dedication

Acts 2:42

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

It's interesting the way Luke writes this because verse 41 informs us that the church is spirit-filled and baptized, this means that they're saved. As a result of accepting Christ we've given details in how this plays out in our lives in how we engage one another. In other words salvation isn't achieved by works but it manifest itself in our actions, largely in how we love one another, in fact scripture makes this clear in John 13:35 where Jesus says that his disciples are known by their love for each other and their neighbor. We see in the text that they devoted themselves to teaching and fellowship or the Greek word used here koinonia. **Koinonia is God's people living together in intentional, relational community to see each other doing well in every way: physically, spiritually, materially and emotionally:**

The indicative of the text is that they (the early church) were intentional about being in each other's lives. Relationships will always lack depth without these three components: Intentionality, Consistency and Dedication.

Intentionality – we must intentionally pursue relationships because there is always mutual benefit in relationships centered on the gospel. **We hold Relational Community in high regard because people tend to overestimate their strength and underestimate the value and necessity of having people within their church to speak into their lives.** One of the ways we're intentional about this at Vision Church is our small groups called Vision Groups (missional communities that get together around the sermon and pray, rejoice and live on mission together) It's important to understand that you and I have a place in the earth that God wants us to fulfill for his

glory in the lives of others. In **Acts 1:20** it says:

²⁰“For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “ ‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and “ ‘Let another take his office.’ My point in sharing that is Judas was replaced by Mathias in this text but it says that his **position** can be replaced, but not his **place** in the earth. When we reject this we’re missing out on the opportunity to be used by God.

Consistency – the early church did this (apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer) regularly because it’s easy to drift away from fellowship with God when you’re not fellowshiping with His people. Consistent time in the word and fellowship with his people is needed for growth.

Dedication – being dedicated to this is essential because like any relationship it takes work and it’s not always easy. The biggest misunderstanding within the church concerning the idea of being dedicated to one another is the idea of family. **Most people don’t really respect the church so when they get upset, rebuked, hurt or bored they just get up and go to a new one. What if everyone took this posture? What if the first time Crystal made me mad I divorced her? What if your mother disowned you for talking back? What if you were left the moment you made a mistake? A lack of dedication to the local church reveals a lack of understanding of God’s word and fellowship. Jesus says in Mark 3:31-35:**

Mark 3:31-35

³¹And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³²And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” ³³And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

When my wife, dad, children, brother or anyone else in m family offends me that doesn’t negate the reality that they’re family. Too often relational community is stopped by people who are so focused on self that they don’t sit long enough to grow or they’re to inflexible to try something new to grow.

We see that they were devoted to two primary things here in the text and they are the apostles teaching which is the gospel and fellowship. Verse 42 mentions 4 things apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer, but I think in a since we can lump them together. **Here’s what I mean, he apostles teaching and prayer I believe go hand in hand because prayer is needed for the embracing and understanding of God’s word and the breaking of bread is one of the many ways that we fellowship with each other.**

When we examine the apostle’s teaching it’s important to note that they were under the authority of the apostles that God had put over them and it’s important to note that because many people don’t understand biblical authority. Since we’re primarily

focusing on the element of fellowship I'll say this, you must submit to spiritual leadership that's biblically qualified out of reverence for God. Your pastor isn't God, but God has placed him in your life and you should make it a joy for him to pastor you.

Hebrews 13:17

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Take Note...

God displays himself in miraculous ways when groups of believers place faith in him collectively

Acts 2:43-44

⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

When the people of God are in fellowship with each other and pursuing God together the power of God is displayed in miraculous ways. One of the things that people have said is they're encouraged to see people getting saved and baptized here at Vision Church. This year we're believing God to baptize 100 people that means we're collectively engaging people with the gospel and seeing them confess Christ as Lord. There's something powerful about experiencing the power of God with other brothers and sisters in Christ.

Acts 2:45

⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

I mentioned earlier that fellowship is concerned about how are brothers and sisters are doing spiritually, emotionally, physically as well as financially. I've been encouraged by stories of members taking up offerings for people to get tires, help with moving and giving to each other financially. This encourages the elders because we see that we're living out scripture and the truth is that when believers live out scripture it makes scripture believable.

Acts 2:46-47

⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The idea of Relational Community here at Vision Church isn't something that we just want to say, we want to own it. Here's why, people really do want authentic

fellowship, but either they've been hurt, they don't know it actually exists or they've not been presented the gospel. We see here in verses 46 and 47 that the church continues to break bread in their homes, but there's also the attending of the temple service. Sunday services are great and obviously we will keep doing them, but true relationships are built outside of a 1 and half hour gathering Hebrews 10:25 addresses the reality that we need to be in the corporate gathering and this verse shows us the importance of the smaller gathering. As the people of God committed themselves to God and each other they had a name within their community and gained favor with people in the community we believe God will do this with Vision Church as we continue to engage our city with the gospel. Lastly we see that God added daily to their number those who were being saved and this is our dream. Everything we do is for the purpose of seeing people come to know and confess Jesus as Lord and master. This is who we are, ***We Are Vision.***