

UNIT 5 - THE POWER OF ASSOCIATION

And He appointed twelve so that they might be with Him

TRUTH

"So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us."

I Thessalonians 2:8

IN BIBLE

God wants to have an intimate relationship with His people and has expressed that in many ways throughout Scripture. God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. God's presence was with the people of Israel through the cloud and fire as He led them. God promised His people that the Messiah would come and His name would be Immanuel. Jesus spent much time with the disciples during His earthly ministry. When He was about to leave, He promised that the Holy Spirit would remain with them. The early church continued this ministry of with-ness as the church continued to make disciples of the nations. The power of association cannot be denied as we see what happens when God dwells with His people and they follow His model of "with-ness." The potential for life change through Life-on-Life Missional Discipleship is accelerated and multiplied when we associate together in an intentional way to become mature and equipped followers of Christ. There are many reasons why association with disciples is a challenge, but these Scriptures will help you see how important this is. Hopefully this will stir a conviction for and practice of Life-on-Life Discipleship!

Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23 – Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, there was a prophecy about His coming.

What is the name, meaning and significance of this prophecy as it relates to Jesus' relationship with His people?

Mark 3:14

Why would Jesus want His disciples to be with Him?

Luke 11:1-13

Why did the twelve ask Jesus to teach them to pray? What does that show us about how Jesus disciplined them?

Matthew 20:17; Mark 10:32

As Jesus approached the end of His life and ministry here on earth, how much time did He spend with the disciples? The multitudes? The religious leaders of the day? What do you think His strategy was for doing this?

Acts 4:13

What was the impact of the disciples' spending time with Jesus? What impact did these men have on the people and culture of their day?

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8

How did Paul and the other disciples of Jesus approach their ministry?

TO SUMMARIZE

The principle of association is fundamental to the character of God. The power of association is at the root of how God carries out His purposes for His church throughout time. Life-on-Life Missional Discipleship is so effective because of this association factor.

God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden and desired that close fellowship with them. In the time of Moses, God told him to build the tabernacle because God said He would dwell with His people. The presence of God in the Old Testament is symbolized in various ways to show His heart to the people, so they would know He was with them. Isaiah announced that Immanuel, "God is with us," would come. Jesus is the prophesied Immanuel. God no longer needed to use symbols, shadows and types to show His presence because the Savior had come in the flesh to be with us.

After Jesus completed His first year and a half of ministry, He appointed the twelve apostles to do two significant things. First, He wanted them to be with Him. Initially this may seem strange or insignificant, but consider what these Jewish disciples would begin to realize about Jesus. As they spent time with Him, they heard what He said about Himself as the Promised One. They watched Him do miracles that could only be done by God Himself. The relationship Jesus had with His disciples was the foundation to the ministry they would carry out. Secondly, Jesus would send them out and equip them to be effective. It has been said, "Life was Jesus' classroom." It was in the context of doing life together that these disciples were transformed.

As we follow the public ministry of Jesus, we see that, as He got closer to the cross, He spent more time with His disciples and less time with the crowds. Think about just a few of the things He did uniquely with the twelve.

- He confronted their sin and their ignorant beliefs. We see this take place in seemingly casual settings: walking along the road or at a meal (see Matthew 18, 20; John 13).
- He prayed in front of them. Why do we have so many of Jesus' prayers recorded in the Scripture? Because His disciples heard Him pray. John 17 is a powerful prayer – and for many of us, it's been significant in our lives and the way we think about ministry – but the reason it's recorded in Scripture is because John heard Him pray it. He taught them to pray because they saw Him praying and asked how to pray (Luke 11:1-13).
- He shared the Gospel with crowds and individuals in front of them. He brought in this new kingdom, declared truth and interpreted the Scripture in ways that people had never heard – and He did it in front of His men.
- He grieved in front of them. He grieved over Lazarus and wept over the city of Jerusalem. They saw Him experience the brokenness of the world and experience true, deep emotions.

Jesus invited the twelve into His life. His life was their curriculum. This type of ministry was not unique to Jesus. The disciples would continue this life-on-life approach after Pentecost.

In Acts 4, people observed Peter and John as uneducated and common men, but they also recognized the boldness that was a characteristic of Jesus' life in them because they had been with Jesus. We see Paul, Silvanus and Timothy following Jesus in this kind of ministry as well: "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the Gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8). God has designed human relationships so that "with-ness" is how a lasting impact can be made.

Spending time with disciples outside of group time is a significant difference from how most small groups operate. In order for this to happen, the group has to be small enough so the leader has the capacity to invest the time. Because people have many commitments and busy schedules, a leader can only effectively disciple three to five people. It is important that the availability of the disciple for relationship outside of the group time is considered in the selection process.

EQUIPPING

What does the phrase “more is caught than taught” mean to you?

Consider a person who has made a positive impact on your life. What was significant about his/her words and actions?

Thinking back to the situational leadership stages, how does equipping and supporting relate to association?

Brainstorm ways you could have informal association time with a disciple.

Brainstorm ways you could have formal association time with a disciple.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Because “with-ness” is such an important aspect of Life-on-Life Missional Discipleship, leaders must count the cost of making this investment in a few people. The availability of the leader and the disciple needs to be considered before a formal discipleship relationship starts. Consider some of these accountability questions as you think about the principle of association.

To what degree would I be able to spend time with disciples outside the group time?

What aspects of my priorities and schedule do I need to rearrange so that association can happen?

What do I need to trust God about concerning association?

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MISSION

“I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ.”
Philemon 1:6 (NIV)

Were you actively engaged in missional living last week? Did you serve someone? Did you talk to anyone about your faith? Did you make progress on your plan to make the gospel known to someone on your prayer list?

This week, continue using the Mission Activity Log and be prepared to discuss it with your Journey Group at your next meeting. If you don’t have an accountability partner to help you focus on the plan you made two weeks ago, consider getting one, and make it your goal to track your progress for the next 60 days.

Now think about this. Sometimes God gives us opportunities to be missional that we hadn’t expected. Other times we create opportunity ourselves by being intentionally focused on missional living. Have you created any opportunities to follow through on your plan? Have you missed opportunities that God has brought your way? Take a moment to reflect on opportunities you may have missed recently.

Opportunities God gave, but I didn’t take advantage of:

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Opportunities I could have created but didn’t:

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Now consider how you could create an opportunity to follow through on your plan in the next few days. What could you do to be more actively engaged in mission this week?

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SUPPLICATION

“Now, my son, the LORD be with you; and may you prosper, and build the house of the LORD your God, as He has said to you. 12Only may the LORD give you wisdom and understanding, and give you charge concerning Israel, that you may keep the law of the LORD your God. 13Then you will prosper, if you take care to fulfill the statutes and judgments which the LORD charged Moses concerning Israel. Be strong and of good courage; do not fear nor be dismayed.”

1 Chronicles 22:11-13 (NKJV)

In his wisdom, King David spoke words of encouragement and blessing over his young, inexperienced son, Solomon. Solomon later asked God to give him wisdom.

Pray the riches of God with and for your children. In doing so, you will give them a blessing.

My prayer request regarding the truth for this week:

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My prayer request regarding a situation in my life:

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My prayer request regarding living a missional life:

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Prayer requests from others in my group:

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