

GROUPS: THE CIRCLES FOR CONTENT AND CARE // Matthew 28:18-20; Titus 2:2-6

Message from the series, Polity: Church Structures in Baptist Life

Main Idea: The church is called to make disciples and groups are a primary way for disciple-making to happen.

We were built for relationship. God has always been in relationship with himself within the trinity. Adam was given a relationship with a helpmate, with whom to worship and labor. Jesus had circles of relationships of various sizes including twelve disciples.

Discipleship is built on relationships. Although the concept of small groups is extrabiblical (there's no mention of it in the Bible), it is still an effective and efficient way to make disciples, a methodology that's adapted to meet our circumstances.

1. Biblical Material

The Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) gives a primary command: make disciples. We are told to do this “as we are going.” This assumes you *will* go, and indicates that disciples are made while you are doing life. These verses also imply the relational nature of the commission—Jesus “came near” (v. 18) and said “I am with you.”

Discipleship requires transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit, but we are able to participate in it. It is not merely a transfer of knowledge. Learning is a major component, but it is not the end of discipleship.

Titus 2 speaks to the relational aspect of discipleship—older men, younger men, older women, younger women. The more seasoned build up the less seasoned. Their teaching and lifestyle must match, but this is only discerned if they are letting people in, if the less seasoned are seeing them live their lives.

2. Current Reality

There are two purposes for groups: theological education and community. Groups have the opportunity to discuss and work out applications of truths and also to provide community and accountability—intentionality matters.

Setting can influence the nature of the group—Sunday school is a type of group, but groups can meet any time or place. However, groups work best in person, as a gathered body.

There are potential pitfalls groups face. They may develop Lone Ranger disciples—those on the roll, but not part of the body. They may have lost their focus on discipleship—they may have become a social club, lacking biblical intentionality. Or they have lost their desire for true spiritual growth. They may talk about Jesus, but ultimately keep things at a superficial level.

3. Remedial Suggestions

We do not currently have a system or process for growing disciples, from moving people from new believers to mature disciples, connecting them with mentors and ministry opportunities. There is no pipeline for deacon and elder development, no training for teachers. We could have more classes on topical or expository studies; develop more core curriculum classes; marriage classes; new believer and new members classes.

A challenge to all: Find a group, and within a group, ask hard questions—what is the highest purpose of our group? How are we practicing accountability? Who are we discipling? Are we looking after each other's interests (1 Timothy 3:15).

To get groups right, we must ultimately get polity right. We must practice intentionality toward growth and discipleship.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are groups important? Why would they be effective and efficient in the making of disciples?
2. What hindrances to groups do we see? How can we avoid the various dangers that threaten groups?
3. How can we balance both theological education and community formation in groups?