

So were going to start this morning with a little game of name association. I'll give you the first name and you give me the next in these famous duos:

Batman & Robin	Ben & Jerry
Lone Ranger & Tonto	Ozzie & Harriet (or Sharon as in Osborn)
Simon & Garfunkel	Laurel & Hardy
Brad & Angelina	Lewis & Clark
Tweety & Sylvester	Abbott & Costello
Bonnie & Clyde	Sonny & Cher
Jack & Jill	Kermit & Miss Piggy
Mickey & Minnie	Fred & Ginger (Astair and Rodgers)
Bert & Ernie	Donnie & Marie (Osmond)

We are created for relationship. We are created for community.

God has hardwired us for connection. He has designed us to relate to others. In fact, Jesus said that being his disciple boils down to two simple relationships: *loving God* and *loving others*. In other words, life really is all about connecting—it is all about relationships.

I spoke about this a few months ago in one of the messages in the *What On Earth Am I Here For* series. During that message I shared that:

**The church is a collection of purposeful relationships into which we bond ourselves- it is a group of individuals with whom we relate as together we live out and experience our calling as disciples of Jesus.**

In that message I shared that:

We fulfill our second purpose, we learn *What On Earth Am I Here For*, ***through our relationships with other believers who purposefully seek to move in the direction that God is leading.***

We can update that with our key phrase of this series by saying that we learn *What On Earth I Am Here For* **through our relationships with other disciples of Jesus who are centering their lives around loving God and loving others.**

Jesus never intended for his disciples to do the work of centering their lives on loving God and loving others by themselves. For Jesus, being a disciple means being in community. That was the way Jesus lived his life; and it has been the pattern for disciples of Jesus ever since. So the church is that vehicle which provides an intentional community of disciples with the framework in

which to live their lives together so that they can test out and learn more about loving God and loving others.

Individually, we can read the Gospels to get to know Jesus; but we need the fellowship of a community of believers to help us through the process of centering our life on loving God and loving others.

One of the statements I often hear from people who don't participate in the life of a local church is that they can meet God anywhere, including on the back 9 at any golf course! I hate to admit it; but they are right. You can meet with God anywhere- after all God is everywhere!

One of the other questions I often hear people express is something like this: Can I be a disciple of Jesus without being involved in a community of faith? Again, the simple answer is yes; but...

But, while you can be a disciple of Jesus without being in a community of faith; you will miss a lot along the way.

-You will miss the opportunity to experience the fullness of Jesus' presence that comes with being in a community of faith for worship and shared growth experiences.

-You will miss out on the opportunity for the encouragement, guidance, wisdom and accountability of other disciples in your life.

-And likewise, you will miss out on the opportunity to be a part of transforming the lives of others.

I love this statement from Jim Harnish that sort of summarizes those points:

"There are times when I come to worship to affirm the faith that I hold, but there are other times when I come to worship so that the faith the church affirms can hold me. There are times when I come to sing my song of hope, but there are other times when I need the church to sing that song for me. There are times when I am present with my small group in order to encourage someone else, and there are times when I need to be present so they can encourage me."

That was actually the case of someone last week. They told me how much being present last Sunday meant to them at a very important juncture in their life. While they were here they found encouragement from someone else who understood where they were in life; and through the singing and the message they found their hope renewed. And while all those different elements blessed them, I was blessed in turn when they shared that being a part of this body made such a difference for them!

While I cannot promise that every time you are in the fellowship of other disciples that you will have a 'heart-warming' experience; I can tell you that if you are not there it will not happen. And likewise, if you are not there, you may miss out on the opportunity to be a part of transforming another person's life.

The importance of our connectedness as disciples of Jesus is evident throughout scripture.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, which is a compilation of the thoughts of the wisest man who ever lived, King Solomon, we find these words:

9 Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. 10 If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. 11 Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? 12 A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.  
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 NLT

Solomon makes the point that life, lived together, is far better than going it alone. And when applied to our goal as disciples of centering our life on loving God and loving others; Solomon's wisdom reminds us that we need one another.

The early disciples of Jesus made an impact, first in Jerusalem, and then elsewhere as they drew from their connection to one another. Luke, who made certain of the accounts he wrote about through personal knowledge or personal contact with the people who were there, notes in Acts 2:42 that the disciples of Jesus 'devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to fellowship...' (Acts 2:42 NIV)

As that passage continues through the end of the chapter you see the power of their connection in the awe that accompanied their life together. Their relationships benefitted everyone, met the physical needs of people and led to the growth of the church.

The Apostle Paul, this one-time persecutor of the Jesus' disciples, turned disciple-maker for Jesus; gave us the image of the church as a body. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul reminds the disciples in Corinth that being a disciple of Jesus is not a solitary experience. Like a human body, to function optimally, we need one another. And there is no part that is less important than any other part.

The writer of the book of Hebrews emphasized the important of our connected when he wrote:

24 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. (*sounds a lot like encouraging one another in centering our life around loving others*) 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, (Hebrews 10:24-25 NLT)

I think it is important to note that even in these early days of the church, disciples of Jesus needed to be reminded that life for a disciple of Jesus is about the relationships we keep with one another. These are 'purposeful relationships' that encourage us in centering our lives around loving God and loving others.

On your outline is a list of 'one another' statements that are found in the scripture. I would encourage you to go home and explore that list together with other disciples. Ask each other how you are doing '*one another-ing*' one another.

How are you doing at serving one another? How can you encourage one another to forgive one another? (continue with list as time permits)

We can be solitary disciples of Jesus; however, alone we will not have the impact on our world that we can have together.

We can be solitary disciples of Jesus; however, alone we will not find the daily encouragement that is needed to continue growing as disciples.

We can be solitary disciples of Jesus; however, other disciples will never be able to benefit from your gifts, your presence and your experience of being a disciple of Jesus.

So what do you need to do?

You need to connect with other disciples on a regular basis. We have existing groups that you can connect with; or we can assist you in getting a group started.

If you are a parent; may I encourage you to demonstrate to your child the importance of being with other disciples; and encourage them to seek out those opportunities available for them.

Don't give up meeting together in times of corporate worship. And that is our topic for next week.