

serving in community_

DAILY DEVOTIONS



Week 3 - Day 1 - Created for Community

Being an everyday disciple of Jesus requires involvement in a community. The Bible makes it clear that God never envisaged or allowed for lone ranger disciples. Everyday disciples find commitment to and involvement in a community both essential and strategic. This Plan explores the importance and purpose of community for disciples of Jesus. (These devotions have been adapted from another Plan I have written for YouVersion [Jesus Style Leadership 4 – Sent and Team]).

Please note that this Plan offers more than a daily reflection on Scripture. It is designed to forge everyday disciples who are aware of God’s presence and hear God’s voice throughout the day. Please try to build the lunchtime meditations and evening reflections into your routine, as well as the morning devotions. Before each session, pause to be aware of God’s love and presence.

MORNING

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-31, 2:18

^{1:26} Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” ²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them... ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good... ^{2:18} The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Devotion

Genesis 1 and 2 provide two different pictures of creation. Genesis 1 gives the overview and Genesis 2 expands on some parts. God did a great job with creation. After each creative flourish, the narrator emphasises that God saw that what He had done was good. This culminates in 1:31 where God comments that His creation was “very good.”

But as Genesis 2 brings out, there was one aspect of creation that God said was not good. This was the creation of a lone man (2:18). It’s not that God made a mistake that had to be corrected. Genesis 1 shows that it was always God’s intention to create a community of people, because that is what God Himself is like. God said, “Let us make mankind in our image” (1:26). God is Trinity. He is both one and three (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). God has always been community, so His intention in creating us was to create a human community like Him.

Adam couldn’t reflect God by himself. A lone person could not be community. Right at the centre of creation were two people (Adam and Eve) who would together represent God on the earth. This remains God’s good intention for us. We have been designed and created to serve together, to grow together, to live together, and to show God together. We can only do this in community.

Prayer

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, You serve together in love, unity and interdependence. I know this is a high ideal but I long to serve together with my Christian brothers and sisters in a way that represents You well. Make me aware of the community You have called me to and help me to anchor myself firmly and lovingly in this community. Keep teaching me how to represent You in and with my community.

Today's Bible Focus

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.’”

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

1. *Remember*: Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect*: Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent*: Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release*: Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

Week 3 - Day 2 - Community Really Helps

MORNING

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

⁷Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: ⁸There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. “For whom am I toiling,” he asked, “and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?” This too is meaningless— a miserable business! ⁹Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour: ¹⁰If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. ¹¹Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? ¹²Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Devotion

We’ve seen that the concept of community comes from the very nature of God. Because God lives and works in community, so do we. But the wisdom teacher of Ecclesiastes takes a different approach. He looks at life “under the sun.” The expression “under the sun” means without taking God into account. He concludes that even if there were no God, no purpose, and no future hope, aloneness would still be a terrible frustration and curse for people.

The teacher argues that everyone can see that there are huge benefits in doing things together. You work better. You help each other with problems. You support each other. You pass your blessings on. You defend yourself better. You can even keep each other warm (a big issue in cold Israelite winters without heaters). Even if there was no revelation from God, it’s obvious that “two are better than one” (4:9). Aloneness is a “miserable business” (4:8).

He’s right of course. We don’t need God to tell us that we are built to work together in relationships. The concept of community is part of the fabric of God’s world. Of course, there are some things that we have to do alone, but the more we work with others, the more healthy, supported, and effective we will be. As a disciple of Jesus, you need your community, and your community needs you.

Prayer

Thanks for the people You have put around me as I serve You. Thanks for my mentors and my friends and my church community. I am so glad that I don’t have to serve You alone. Please help me to build strong relationships that will last. May I be a good friend and a loving community member. May those close to me know that I care for them and have their backs.

Today’s Bible Focus

“Two are better than one.”

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Week 3 - Day 3 - Unity in Diversity

MORNING

Scripture: John 17:20-23

²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Devotion

Christians are a varied lot. We have different cultural backgrounds, different political views, different priorities, different perspectives, and even different theologies on some issues. Surprisingly, our diversity is actually a great strength of Christianity. It means we can embrace such a wide range of cultures and practices. You will find disciples of Jesus in every single ethnic group.

But while our diversity is wonderful, it is also a challenge. We frequently find it difficult to work together with people who are different from us. In this prayer, Jesus is praying for those who would believe in Him in the future. That’s us (and millions of others). He prays that we will be unified in the way the Trinity is unified – complete unity (17:23). Of course, that sort of unity is impossible humanly, but we have all been saved by the same grace of Jesus and we all have the same Spirit living within us, so we share a huge amount in common.

It’s this unnatural but incredible unity among disciples of Jesus that will show the world that Jesus is real (17:21, 23). It’s easy to get on well with other Christians if you never have anything much to do with them. But that’s not unity. Unity is forged in the cauldron of community with Christians who are different from us. Our unity in our diversity shows the power of God. It’s only in community that we can truly represent Jesus.

Prayer

Sometimes it’s easier and less complicated just to do my own thing in serving You, Lord. That way there are fewer tensions, disagreements, restrictions, frustrations, and complications. But I know that Your ways are better, and You call me to serve with other disciples of Jesus in real community. Please help me to love those in my community and life who see and do things differently from me. May we together show our world that You are real and loving.

Today’s Bible Focus

Jesus: “May they be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me.”

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Week 3 - Day 4 - Serving Together

MORNING

Scripture: Romans 12:3-8

³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Devotion

Some disciples of Jesus are super confident in their abilities and are keen to do everything they can. Others feel inadequate and are reluctant to take on responsibility. Both attitudes will cause problems in a community in which everyone's contribution is needed and valued.

1. To the self-confident, Paul says: "Don't think of yourself too highly" (12:3). Don't get carried away with your abilities and achievements. You're probably not as talented or gifted as you think. You can't do it all by yourself. You really do need the help of others in the community. Work out what your gifts are and give space for others to use theirs. Remember that everyone in your community has been placed there by God to contribute.

2. To the inadequate, Paul says: "You have been gifted by God and your contribution is vital" (12:6-8). Put every effort into using your gifts. Don't hang back or make excuses. Get in there and give it a go. This is good advice. If you have not worked out what your gift is yet, then try different things and see how God uses you. As Paul makes clear, the body (or community) needs everyone to pull their weight in a humble way. As everyday disciples, Jesus is expecting us to play our part in community.

Prayer

Thanks for the gifts You have given me. May I use them well. Please keep me from pride by trying to do too much by myself or by over-emphasising my contribution. Please also keep me from underestimating my influence and not putting in the effort. I really do want to make a difference by humbly using my gifts effectively with my brothers and sisters. Use us, Lord.

Today's Bible Focus

"Each member belongs to all the others."

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Week 3 - Day 5 - Carrying Burdens

MORNING

Scripture: Galatians 6:1-5

¹ Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. ³ If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. ⁴ Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, ⁵ for each one should carry their own load.

Devotion

There seems to be a contradiction in this Scripture. We are to "carry each other's burdens" (6:2) and we are to "carry our own load" (6:5). That is a lot of carrying. What does Paul mean?

In our community, we are responsible for each other. If someone goes down under their burden the whole community suffers. So we share the load and support each other. This means correcting others (gently) when they are doing wrong as well as caring for them when they are doing it tough. It's so good when you know that your community has got your back; that they will be there for you when you are struggling with sin or with life.

But then what does Paul mean when he says that each one should carry their own load (6:5)? Well, one danger of community is comparing and competing with other members. We can think we are superior because we're more gifted, achieving more, or working harder than others in the community. Or we can feel inferior because we are not as able as others. Paul says to forget about what others do. Don't compare. We are each accountable to God for what He has called us to do. Don't let any slackers or heroes in your community be an excuse for you not to give it your best shot.

Prayer

Thanks again for my brothers and sisters, especially those that form my close community. Help me to be humble and supportive and to share the load that others are carrying. Help me to care enough to gently correct my friends when necessary. But keep me from fixating on what others are doing or not doing. May I serve You well whatever happens in my community.

Today's Bible Focus

"Carry each other's burdens."

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Week 3 - Day 6 - What Community Can Achieve

MORNING

Scripture: Nehemiah 6:15-16; 7:1-3

^{6:15} So the wall [around Jerusalem] was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶ When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God. ^{7:1} After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the Levites were appointed. ² I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do.

Devotion

It took 52 days for the Jews to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. That's incredible. I've watched roadworks that have taken years to complete using modern equipment, and here the Jewish community, under significant pressure and opposition, rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem (including brand new gates) in less than two months. With a new wall around their capital, the Jews could control their own destiny (under God) at last. This is the power of a community working together under God.

Nehemiah was a godly leader. He grieved, prayed, believed, shared faith vision, and helped deal with external opposition and internal conflict. But the community did the work. Nehemiah would have had no chance of completing this project by himself or with the small team he brought from Persia to Jerusalem. He needed everyone to pull their weight. And they did.

You can imagine the community's excitement and confidence in God when the last gate was hung. This was their wall. Everyone knew that God had done something very special, including the surrounding nations. As you live and serve with your community, you will see God do things that seemed impossible. This is the power of a community of disciples serving God together.

Prayer

In a divided world that prizes independence and individualism, may our church community show our world that we are stronger and better together. As Your disciple, may I humbly serve with my community, encouraging and strengthening others as well as giving it my best shot. And most of all, may those who surround us see that we are doing all this with Your help.

Today's Bible Focus

"The surrounding nations realised that this work had been done with the help of God."

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