

“THE DNA OF ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH”
PART III: INWARD

“WHAT ARE WE MADE OF?”

MARK 8:31-38

ICEBREAKER

THE FOLLOWING ARE ACTUAL RESPONSES FROM COMMENT CARDS GIVEN TO THE STAFF MEMBERS AT BRIDGER WILDERNESS AREA IN 1996:

- **TRAILS NEED TO BE RECONSTRUCTED. PLEASE AVOID BUILDING TRAILS THAT GO UPHILL.**
- **TOO MANY BUGS AND LEECHES AND SPIDERS AND SPIDERS WEBS. PLEASE SPRAY THE WILDERNESS TO RID THE AREA OF THESE PESTS.**
- **PLEASE PAVE THE TRAILS...CHAIR LIFTS NEED TO BE IN SOME PLACES SO THAT WE CAN GET TO WONDERFUL VIEWS WITHOUT HAVING TO HIKE TO THEM.**
- **THE COYOTES MADE TOO MUCH NOISE LAST NIGHT AND KEPT ME AWAKE. PLEASE ERADICATE THESE ANNOYING ANIMALS.**
- **A SMALL DEER CAME INTO MY CAMP AND STOLE MY JAR OF PICKLES. IS THERE A WAY I CAN GET REIMBURSED? PLEASE CALL...**
- **ESCALATORS WOULD HELP ON STEEP UPHILL SECTIONS.**
- **A MC DONALD’S WOULD BE NICE AT THE TRAILHEAD.**
- **TOO MANY ROCKS IN THE MOUNTAINS.**

INTRODUCTION

THESE COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS INDICATE THAT THE PEOPLE WHO MADE THEM DO NOT REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO STAY IN A “WILDERNESS AREA.”

THEY WERE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING CONVENIENT AND COMFORTABLE, BUT NOT TRULY A WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE.

IN A SIMILAR WAY, MANY PEOPLE TODAY DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A GENUINE CHRISTIAN.

THERE ARE MULTITUDES THAT OFTEN FOLLOW JESUS OR CLAIM TO BE A CHRISTIAN BUT THEY DO SO ON THEIR TERMS AND NOT HIS.

THEY DO NOT TRULY COMPREHEND THE BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF DISCIPLESHIP.

BECAUSE OF THIS IGNORANCE, THERE ARE MANY WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES TO BE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WHO ARE NOT, EVEN THOUGH IN MANY WAYS THEY LOOK LIKE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

THEY GO TO CHURCH, HAVE A PROFESSION OF FAITH, READ THEIR BIBLES PRAY, EVEN GIVE IN THE OFFERING, BUT THEY ARE NOT THE REAL DEAL, OR AT LEAST ARE NOT LIVING AND THINKING LIKE THE REAL DEAL.

JESUS CONFRONTS THIS PROBLEM IN OUR TEXT TODAY.

HE MAKES VERY, VERY CLEAR WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN AND THEREFORE THERE IS NO REASON FOR ANYBODY TO BE IGNORANT OR SELF DECEIVED.

TODAY IN PART 3 OF OUR SERIES, “WHAT ARE WE MADE OF?” AND I’VE TITLED TODAY’S MESSAGE, “INWARD,”

BECAUSE TODAY WE’RE GOING TO FOCUS ON THE SECOND PART OF OUR MISSION AS A CHURCH.

LET’S REVIEW THE FULL STATEMENT AGAIN:

THE MISSION OF THE ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH IS TO HELP PEOPLE KNOW GOD, TO GROW PEOPLE INTO FULLY DEVOTED DISCIPLES OF JESUS, AND TO EQUIP PEOPLE TO GO IMPACT THEIR WORLD FOR CHRIST.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A FULLY DEVOTED DISCIPLE OF JESUS?

WELL, THERE ARE FEW THINGS THAT MARK THE LIFE OF A DISCIPLE.

AS WE GO THROUGH THESE MARKS, I WANT YOU TO TAKE A GOOD, HARD LOOK AT YOUR LIFE AND ASK YOURSELF, “IS THIS TRUE OF ME?”

I. LET US LOOK FIRST AT THE MARKS OF A TRUE DISCIPLE.

A. A TRUE DISCIPLE PUTS JESUS FIRST IN ALL THINGS. (MARK 8:34-38 KJV)

[34] AND WHEN HE HAD CALLED THE PEOPLE UNTO HIM WITH HIS DISCIPLES ALSO, HE SAID UNTO THEM, WHOSOEVER WILL COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME.

[35] FOR WHOSOEVER WILL SAVE HIS LIFE SHALL LOSE IT; BUT WHOSOEVER SHALL LOSE HIS LIFE FOR MY SAKE AND THE GOSPEL'S, THE SAME SHALL SAVE IT.

[36] FOR WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT A MAN, IF HE SHALL GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD, AND LOSE HIS OWN SOUL?

[37] OR WHAT SHALL A MAN GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS SOUL?

[38] WHOSOEVER THEREFORE SHALL BE ASHAMED OF ME AND MY WORDS, IN THIS ADULTEROUS AND SINFUL GENERATION, OF HIM ALSO SHALL THE SON OF MAN BE ASHAMED, WHEN HE COMETH IN THE GLORY OF HIS FATHER WITH THE HOLY ANGELS.

- 1. THE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST NEEDS TO BE SET APART FROM THE WORLD.**
- 2. OUR FOCUS SHOULD BE ON OUR LORD AND PLEASING HIM IN EVERY AREA OF OUR LIVES.**
- 3. WE MUST PUT OFF SELF-CENTEREDNESS AND PUT ON CHRIST-CENTEREDNESS.**

B. A TRUE DISCIPLE FOLLOWS JESUS' TEACHINGS IN ALL AREAS OF LIFE. (JOHN 8:31-32)

[31] THEN SAID JESUS TO THOSE JEWS WHICH BELIEVED ON HIM, IF YE CONTINUE IN MY WORD, AND THEN ARE YE MY DISCIPLES INDEED;

[32] AND YE SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE.

- 1. WE MUST BE OBEDIENT CHILDREN AND DOERS OF THE WORD.**
- 2. OBEDIENCE IS THE SUPREME TEST OF FAITH IN GOD. (I SAMUEL 28:18)**

[18] BECAUSE THOU OBEYEDST NOT THE VOICE OF THE LORD, NOR EXECUTEDST THE FIERCE WRATH UPON AMALEK, THEREFORE HATH THE LORD DONE THIS THING UNTO THEE THIS DAY.

3. AND JESUS IS THE PERFECT EXAMPLE OF OBEDIENCE AS HE LIVED A LIFE ON EARTH OF COMPLETE OBEDIENCE TO THE FATHER EVEN TO THE POINT OF DEATH. (PHILIPPIANS 3:6-8)

[6] CONCERNING ZEAL, PERSECUTING THE CHURCH; TOUCHING THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS IN THE LAW, BLAMELESS.

[7] BUT WHAT THINGS WERE GAIN TO ME, THOSE I COUNTED LOSS FOR CHRIST.

[8] YEA DOUBTLESS, AND I COUNT ALL THINGS BUT LOSS FOR THE EXCELLENCY OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST JESUS MY LORD: FOR WHOM I HAVE SUFFERED THE LOSS OF ALL THINGS, AND DO COUNT THEM DUNG, THAT I MAY WIN CHRIST.

C. A TRUE DISCIPLE BEARS FRUIT. (JOHN 15:5-8)

[5] I AM THE VINE, YE ARE THE BRANCHES. HE THAT ABIDETH IN ME, AND I IN HIM, THE SAME BRINGETH FORTH MUCH FRUIT; FOR WITHOUT ME YE CAN DO NOTHING.

[6] IF A MAN ABIDE NOT IN ME, HE IS CAST FORTH AS A BRANCH, AND IS WITHERED; AND MEN GATHER THEM, AND CAST THEM INTO THE FIRE, AND THEY ARE BURNED.

[7] IF YE ABIDE IN ME, AND MY WORDS ABIDE IN YOU, YE SHALL ASK WHAT YE WILL, AND IT SHALL BE DONE UNTO YOU.

[8] HEREIN IS MY FATHER GLORIFIED, THAT YE BEAR MUCH FRUIT; SO SHALL YE BE MY DISCIPLES.

1. OUR JOB IS NOT PRODUCING FRUIT.

2. **OUR JOB IS TO BE LIKE JESUS, AND IF WE DO, THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL PRODUCE THE FRUIT.**
 3. **THE FRUIT IS THE RESULT OF OUR OBEDIENCE.**
 4. **AS WE BECOME MORE OBEDIENT TO THE LORD AND LEARN TO WALK IN HIS WAYS, OUR LIVES WILL CHANGE.**
 5. **THE BIGGEST CHANGE WILL TAKE PLACE IN OUR HEARTS, AND THE OVERFLOW OF THIS WILL BE NEW CONDUCT (THOUGHTS, WORDS AND ACTIONS) REPRESENTATIVE OF THAT CHANGE.**
 6. **THE CHANGE WE SEEK IS DONE FROM THE INSIDE OUT, THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.**
 7. **IT ISN'T SOMETHING WE CAN CONJURE UP ON OUR OWN.**
- D. A TRUE DISCIPLE ALWAYS HAS LOVE FOR OTHER DISCIPLES. (JOHN 13:34-35)**

[34] A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE UNTO YOU, THAT YE LOVE ONE ANOTHER; AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, THAT YE ALSO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

[35] BY THIS SHALL ALL MEN KNOW THAT YE ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YE HAVE LOVE ONE TO ANOTHER.

1. **WE ARE TOLD THAT LOVE OF OTHER BELIEVERS IS THE EVIDENCE OF OUR BEING A MEMBER OF GOD'S FAMILY.**
 - a. **I JOHN 3:10; IN THIS THE CHILDREN OF GOD ARE MANIFEST, AND THE CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL: WHOSOEVER DOETH NOT RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NOT OF GOD, NEITHER HE LOVETH NOT HIS BROTHER.**
2. **LOVE IS DEFINED AND ELABORATED ON IN I CORINTHIANS 13:1-13.**

3. **THESE VERSES SHOW US THAT LOVE IS NOT AN EMOTION; IT IS ACTION.**
 4. **WE MUST BE DOING SOMETHING AND INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS.**
 5. **FURTHERMORE, WE ARE TOLD TO THINK MORE HIGHLY OF OTHERS THAN OF OURSELVES AND TO LOOK OUT FOR THEIR INTERESTS.**
 - a. **PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4; [3] LET NOTHING BE DONE THROUGH STRIFE OR VAINGLORY; BUT IN LOWLINESS OF MIND LET EACH ESTEEM OTHER BETTER THAN THEMSELVES.**

[4] LOOK NOT EVERY MAN ON HIS OWN THINGS BUT EVERY MAN ALSO ON THE THINGS OF OTHERS.
 6. **THE NEXT VERSE IN PHILIPPIANS (VERSE 5) REALLY SUMS UP WHAT WE ARE TO DO WHEN IT COMES TO EVERYTHING IN LIFE.**
 - a. **“OUR ATTITUDE SHOULD BE THE SAME AS THAT OF CHRIST JESUS.**
 - b. **WHAT A PERFECT EXAMPLE HE IS TO US FOR EVERYTHING WE ARE TO DO IN OUR CHRISTIAN WALK.**
 7. **THIS IS ESPECIALLY EVIDENT IN HOW DISCIPLES TREAT EACH OTHER IN THE FACT OF CONFLICT.**
 8. **THE WORLD HANDLES PERSONAL CONFLICT WITH GRUDGES WITH TEARING EACH OTHER DOWN, WITH GOSSIP.**
 9. **BUT TRUE DISCIPLES OF JESUS LIVE ON A HIGHER PLAN THAN THAT.**
- E. A TRUE DISCIPLE TAKES AN ACTIVE ROLE IN EVANGELISM AND MAKING DISCIPLES OF OTHERS. (MATTHEW 28:18-20)**

[18] AND JESUS CAME AND SPAKE UNTO THEM, SAYING, ALL POWER IS GIVEN UNTO ME IN HEAVEN AND IN EARTH.

[19] GO YE THEREFORE, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST:

[20] TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU: AND, LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE WORLD. AMEN.

- 1. WE ARE TO SHARE OUR FAITH AND TELL NON BELIEVERS ABOUT THE WONDERFUL CHANGES JESUS CHRIST HAS MADE IN OUR LIVES.**
- 2. NO MATTER WHAT OUR MATURITY LEVEL IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, WE HAVE SOMETHING TO OFFERS.**
- 3. TOO OFTEN, WE BELIEVE THE LIE FROM SATAN THAT WE DON'T REALLY KNOW ENOUGH OR HAVEN'T BEEN CHRISTIAN LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**
- 4. NOT TRUE! SOME OF THE MOST ENTHUSIASTIC REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE ARE NEW BELIEVERS WHO HAVE JUST DISCOVERED THE AWESOME LOVE OF GOD.**
- 5. THEY MAKE NOT KNOW A LOT OF BIBLE VERSES OR THE "ACCEPTED" WAY OF SAYING THINGS, BUT THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED THE LOVE OF THE LIVING GOD, AND THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT WE ARE TO SHARE.**
- 6. NOW, HERE'S WHAT'S THE UGLY LITTLE SECRET THAT WE DON'T LIKE TO TALK ABOUT: NOT EVERYBODY WHO CLAIMS JESUS AS THEIR LORD AND SAVIOR ARE DISCIPLES.**
- 7. YOU SEE, SOME OF US JUST WANT ENOUGH OF JESUS TO KEEP US FROM GOING TO HELL WHEN WE DIE.**

8. WE THINK OF CHRISTIANITY AS OUR LITTLE PERSONAL FIRE INSURANCE PLAN.
9. WE'LL TAKE THE FIRST STEP OF FAITH AND TURN OUR LIVES OVER TO JESUS, AND THEN WE'LL JUST DROP THE REST OF IT.
10. WE NEVER DEEPEN OUR FAITH.
11. WE NEVER BECOME TRUE DISCIPLES.
12. AND WHAT WE END UP WITH IS A CHURCH WITH A LONG OF "CONVERTS," BUT VERY FEW "DISCIPLES" WHO ARE ON FIRE FOR GOD.
13. YOU KNOW WHAT? I WANT TO BE A TRUE DISCIPLE, DON'T YOU?
14. BUT HOW DO WE GROW AS DISCIPLES?
15. I MEAN, IS IT JUST ABOUT COMING TO CHURCH, PAYING OUR TITHE, READING OUR BIBLES, AND SUCH.
16. HOW DO WE MOVE FROM "CONVERT," TO "DISCIPLE?"
17. THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS, BUT THERE IS ONE WAY IN PARTICULAR THAT I BELIEVE THE BIBLE INFERS IS BEST.

II. AND THIS METHOD OF MAKING FULLY DEVOTED DISCIPLES IS REFLECTED IN THE NEXT 2 CORE VALUES I'D LIKE FOR US AS A CHURCH TO EMBRACE. CORE VALUE # 3 AND #4.

- A. DISCIPLESHIP HAPPENS BEST IN SMALL GROUPS.
 1. WHAT I'D LIKE TO SUGGEST TO YOU THIS MORNING IS THAT SMALL GROUPS WILL BE OUR PLAN A FOR DISCIPLESHIP BECAUSE, ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD, THERE IS NO "PLAN B."
 2. IN THE NT YOU CAN FIND APPROXIMATELY 50 SCRIPTURES THAT DEAL WITH THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH – WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE ARE TO BE ABOUT.

3. **WITHIN THESE 50-SOME SCRIPTURES YOU FIND 21 “ONE ANOTHER COMMANDS” IN THE NT WHICH INSTRUCT DISCIPLES OF JESUS HOW THEY ARE TO RELATE WITH OTHER DISCIPLES.**
 4. **THE OVERARCHING COMMAND IS TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER, LIKE WE TALKED ABOUT JUST A MINUTE AGO.**
- B. BUT THAT LOVE IS SHOWN IN MANY WAYS. IN FACT, THERE ARE 20 OTHER COMMANDS THAT RELATE TO LOVING EACH OTHER. LISTEN TO JUST A FEW OF THEM:**
1. **ROMANS 12:10; “BE DEVOTED TO ONE ANOTHER IN BROTHERLY LOVE. HONOR ONE ANOTHER ABOVE YOURSELVES.”**
 2. **EPHESIANS 5:21; SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER OUT OF REVERENCE FOR CHRIST.**
 3. **COLOSSIANS 3:13; BEAR WITH EACH OTHER AND FORGIVE WHATEVER GRIEVANCES YOU MAY HAVE AGAINST ONE ANOTHER.**
 4. **ROMANS 15:7; ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER, THEN, JUST AS CHRIST ACCEPTED YOU, IN ORDER TO BRING PRAISE TO GOD.**
 5. **COLOSSIANS 3:16; LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY AS YOU TEACH AND ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER WITH ALL WISDOM, AND AS YOU SING PSALMS, HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS WITH GRATITUDE IN YOUR HEARTS OF GOD.**
 5. **THESSALONIANS 5:11; THEREFORE ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER AND BUILD EACH OTHER UP, JUST AS IN FACT YOU ARE DOING.**
 6. **GALATIANS 5:13; YOU, MY BROTHERS, WERE CALLED TO BE FREE. BUT DO NOT USE YOUR FREEDOM TO INDULGE THE SINFUL NATURE; RATHER, SERVE ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE.**

C. NOW, LISTEN: IN TODAY'S BUDY CULTURE (AND LET'S BE HONEST – WE ARE ALL BUSY!) HOW CAN WE POSSIBLY LIVE OUT THESE COMMANDS?

- 1. THE BEST WAY I KNOW IS BY INVESTING TIME IN RELATIONSHIPS WITH AA SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO ARE DEDICATED TO LIVING OUT THESE COMMANDS!**
- 2. THAT'S WHY OUR "PLAN A" AT ABYSSINIAN IS GOING TO BE TO CHALLENGE EVERY PERSON WHO ATTENDS HERE TO "THINK SMALL." THAT IS – TO MAKE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY A PRIORITY IN THEIR LIVES.**
- 3. AND EVEN THOUGH WE ARE HEADING IN THIS DIRECTION BECAUSE THE BIBLE SUGGESTS THIS IS THE BEST WAY FOR A CHURCH TO OPERATE, THIS IS NOT JUST BECAUSE "THE BIBLE SAYS SO," BUT BECAUSE WHEN WE DO SO, WHEN WE "THINK SMALL," IT WILL PRODUCE BIG RESULTS IN OUR LIVES AND FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**
- 4. SO, WHAT ARE THESE BIG RESULTS?**
- 5. BEFORE I ANSWER THAT QUESTION, LET ME PUT IT OUT THERE TO YOU – OVER HALF OF YOU ATTEND A SMALL GROUP. WHY DO YOU DO IT? WHAT KEEPS YOU COMING BACK? WHY DO YOU THINK SOMEONE OUGHT TO "THINK SMALL?"**

III. HERE ARE JUST A FEW GOOD REASONS TO GET INVOLVED IN A SMALL GROUP IF YOU NEVER HAVE:

A. SMALL GROUPS PROVIDE A PLACE OF ENCOURAGEMENT. (HEBREWS 10:25)

[25] NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING OF OUR SELVES TOGETHER, AS THE MANNER OF SOME IS; BUT EXHORTING ONE ANOTHER: AND SO MUCH THE MORE, AS YE SEE THE DAY APPROACHING.

- 1. SOME OF US READ THESE VERSES AND ALL WE CAN SEE IS, "GO TO CHURCH." AND THAT'S A GOOD START, BUT YOU KNOW WHAT?**

2. **THE PEOPLE THOSE WORDS WERE WRITTEN TO HAD A DIFFERENT IDEA ABOUT WHAT IT MEANT TO “GO TO CHURCH.”**
3. **THE EARLY CHURCH MET TOGETHER IN EACH OTHER’S HOMES.**
4. **SMALL GROUPS OF BELIEVERS CAME TOGETHER IN EACH OTHER’S HOUSES FOR TEACHING, FELLOWSHIP, DISCIPLESHIP, AND ENCOURAGEMENT.**
5. **THEY DIDN’T HAVE BIG, NICE SANCTUARIES LIKE OURS.**
6. **THEY HUDDLED TOGETHER AROUND TABLES AND FOOD AND EXPERIENCED AND CLOSENESS AND A SPIRITUAL GROWTH THAT DOESN’T HAPPEN ANYWHERE ELSE.**
7. **IT HAPPENED BECAUSE THEY HAD A GENUINE FELLOWSHIP AND GENUINE ACCOUNTABILITY.**
8. **FOR SOME OF US, OUR IDEA OF ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER IS THE MEET AND GREET TIME ON SUNDAY MORNING.**
9. **WE TAKE 5 MINUTES TO SHAKE HANDS, INTRODUCE OURSELVES, CHECK IN ON EACH OTHER, ETC.**
10. **BUT LET’S BE HONEST: HOW MUCH ENCOURAGEMENT CAN WE REALLY DO IN 5 MINUTES.**
11. **AND FOR SOME OF US THE WORD, “ACCOUNTABILITY” JUST MEANS A QUICK, “HOW ARE YOU DOING?” ON THE WAY TO BOB EVANS AFTER SUNDAY SERVICE.**
12. **I DON’T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I WANT SOMETHING DEEPER.**
13. **AND YOU KNOW WHAT? SO DO YOUR LOST FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO HAVE WALKED AWAY FROM THE CHURCH.**

ILLUSTRATION

MANY OF THEM ARE LIKE THIS YOUNG GUY WHO WAS FED UP WITH CHURCH WENT TO SEE THIS WISE OLD CHRISTIAN IN HIS CABIN TO GET SOME ADVICE.

HE TOLD HIM ALL THE THINGS THAT WERE BOTHERING HIM ABOUT CHURCH, AND HOW HE FELT THAT HE WOULD BE BETTER OFF WITHOUT THE COMPANY OF OTHER CHRISTIANS.

AS HE WAS SPEAKING, THE OLD MAN SILENTLY TOOK THE FIRE TONGS AND REMOVED A RED-HOT GLOWING COAL FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE FIRE AND SET IT ON THE HEARTH.

THE COAL GLOWED FOR A WHILE, BUT EVENTUALLY DIMMED AND TURNED BLACK.

HE LET IT SIT THERE A WHILE AND THEN TOOK THE TONGS AND PLACES THE COAL BACK IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FIRE.

WITHIN SECONDS THE COAL WAS GLOWING RED HOT ONCE AGAIN.

THE YOUNG MAN TOOK THE WORDLESS LESSON AND LEFT DETERMINED TO STAY INVOLVED WITH CHURCH.

THAT PIECE OF COAL? THAT'S YOU. THAT'S ME.

JUST AS COALS BURN OUT WHEN THEY ARE REMOVED FROM THE COMPANY OF OTHER COALS, WE WILL NOT LAST LONG IN THE FAITH IF WE ARE REMOVED FROM TRUE FELLOWSHIP.

THAT'S YOUR LOST CHILD, TOO. THAT'S YOUR UNSAVED BEST FRIEND. BUT THEY DON'T THINK THAT THEY CAN FIND THE ANSWERS TO THEIR SPIRITUAL HUNGER IN A ROOM WITH 100 OTHER INDIVIDUALS.

MANY OF THEM HAVE WALKED AWAY FROM THE CHURCH BECAUSE OF THAT.

MAYBE THEY COME FOR A LITTLE WHILE, BUT THEY DON'T REALLY EXPERIENCE THE CHURCH BECAUSE THEY DON'T FIND THOSE RELATIONSHIPS OF GENUINE FELLOWSHIP AND GENUINE ACCOUNTABILITY.

BUT THEY CAN FIND THAT IN SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO KNOW THEIR NAME.

14. **BY THE WAY, MANY OF YOU ALREADY BELIEVE THAT DISCIPLESHIP HAPPENS BEST IN SMALL GROUPS BUT DON'T KNOW IT.**
 15. **YOU KNOW WHY? BECAUSE MANY OF YOU LIKE THE FACT THAT OUR CHURCH IS A SMALL CHURCH.**
 16. **YOU LIKE THAT FEELING OF CLOSENESS. OF KNOWING EVERYBODY'S NAME. OF NOT FEELING LIKE JUST ANOTHER FACE IN THE CROWD.**
 17. **IT'S KIND OF COMFORTING.**
 18. **THAT'S THE POWER OF SMALL GROUPS.**
 19. **BUT IT'S NOT HEALTHY FOR AN ENTIRE CONGREGATION TO OPERATE LIKE ONE BIG SMALL GROUP.**
 20. **IN FACT, IT'S A PROVEN FACT THAT SOME CHURCHES RESIST HEALTHY GROWTH BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT THE CHURCH TO GET ANY BIGGER THAT IT IS.**
 21. **AND THAT'S SIN. IT'S COMFORTABLE, COZY, SIN, BUT IT'S STILL SIN.**
 22. **WE'LL TALK ABOUT THAT A LITTLE BIT MORE NEXT WEEK.**
- B. SMALL GROUPS PROVIDE A SAFE PLACE TO FIND ANSWERS TO YOUR SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS.**
1. **THIS IS WHY SMALL GROUPS CAN REACH YOUR UNSAVED KIDS OR FRIENDS WHERE A TRADITIONAL SERVICE CAN'T.**
 2. **IF YOU'RE NEW IN FOLLOWING CHRIST YOU NEED TO KNOW THAT IT'S SAFE TO ASK QUESTIONS – ANY QUESTIONS – AT YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING.**
 3. **IT'S A GREAT PLACE FOR YOU TO AIR YOUR DOUBTS AND MISGIVINGS AND WONDERINGS**

**ABOUT THE BIBLE OR ABOUT CHRISTIANITY,
AND FOR THE GROUP TO HELP YOU
DISCOVER ANSWERS ALONG THE WAY.**

- 4. QUITE OFTEN YOUR QUESTIONS (WHICH YOU MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT WERE “DUMB”) CAN BE SPRINGBOARDS TO INCREDIBLY INTERESTING AND LIFE-CHANGING DISCUSSIONS ABOUT WHY WE DO BELIEVE WHAT WE BELIEVE.**
 - 5. I MEAN, LET’S BE HONEST: SOMETIMES WE ALL HAVE QUESTIONS.**
 - 6. BUT IN THE CONTEXT OF A SMALL GROUP, YOU CAN FEEL FREE TO ASK THOSE QUESTIONS FIND ANSWERS.**
- C. SMALL GROUPS PROVIDE A PLACE FOR YOU TO BE USED BY GOD TO HELP MEET OTHER’S NEEDS.**
- 1. EVERY WEEK IN YOUR SMALL GROUP THERE WILL BE A CHANCE FOR PEOPLE TO SHARE PRAYER REQUESTS AND NEEDS THAT THEY HAVE.**
 - 2. DURING THIS TIME EVERY PERSON IN THE GROUP HAS THE JOYFUL OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME PART OF THE SOLUTION FOR THAT PERSON WHO SHARES.**
 - 3. PERHAPS THEIR PROBLEM IS SOMETHING YOU HAVE FACED BEFORE AND YOU CAN SHARE WHAT YOU LEARNED.**
 - 4. PERHAPS YOU CAN SIMPLY PRAY FOR THEM AND THEN KEEP PRAYING FOR THEM AND ENCOURAGING THEM THROUGHOUT THE WEEK.**
 - 5. MAYBE YOU CAN EVEN PROVIDE A SERVICE TO THAT PERSON THAT WILL ACTUALLY TAKE CARE OF THEIR NEED.**
 - 6. SEE, HERE’S THE UGLY LITTLE SECRET THAT PEOPLE DON’T LIKE TO FACE: THE PASTOR CAN’T TAKE CARE OF EVERYONE. IT’S JUST NOT POSSIBLE.**

7. **EVEN IN CHURCHES THAT HAVE MULTIPLE PASTORS ON STAFF, THE PASTORS CAN'T TAKE CARE OF EVERYONE.**
 8. **WHEN PASTORAL CARE IS LEFT UP COMPLETELY TO THE MINISTERS OF STAFF, PEOPLE FALL THROUGH THE CRACKS.**
 9. **AND THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE IS TAKEN CARE OF IS FOR EVERYONE TO BE CLOSELY INVOLVED WITH A SMALL GROUP OF OTHER BELIEVERS.**
 10. **CAN YOU IMAGINE THE LEVEL OF CARE WE COULD PROVIDE TO EACH OTHER IF EVERY ONE OF US MET WITH THE SAME GROUP OF 10 OTHER PEOPLE EVERY WEEK?**
 11. **IMAGINE THE CARE YOU WOULD RECEIVE WHEN YOU LOST SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU.**
 12. **INSTEAD OF JUST THE PASTOR CALLING YOU AND PRAYING FOR YOU, YOU WOULD HAVE THE PASTOR PLUS 9 OTHER CLOSE FRIENDS LIFTING YOU UP. SENDING YOU CARDS, BRINGING YOU FOOD, PRAYING WITH YOU.**
 13. **WHAT IF YOU LOST YOU JOB? IF YOU'RE NOT INVOLVED IN A SMALL GROUP, YOU'RE PRETTY MUCH ON YOU R OWN IN DEALING WITH IT.**
 14. **BUT IMAGINE IF YOU LOST YOU JOB AND NINE OF YOUR CLOSE FRIENDS WERE ACTIVELY LOOKING FOR JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOU.**
 15. **WOULDN'T IT BE GREAT TO HAVE THAT KIN OF SUPPORT IN A TIME LIKE THAT?**
 16. **YOU SEE, AS MUCH AS WE NEED TO BE HERE ON SUNDAYS FOR CORPORATE WORSHIP, WE NEED EVEN MORE SO TO BE IN CLOSE, CHRIST-CENTERED RELATIONSHIP WITH A SMALL GROUP OF OTHER PEOPLE.**
- D. SMALL GROUPS PROVIDE A PLACE FOR YOU TO HAVE YOUR NEEDS MET BY PEOPLE WHO CARE.**

1. **SOMETIMES WE ALL NEED SOME HELP GETTING OUT OF SOMETHING WE'VE GOTTEN OURSELVES INTO.**
2. **THAT'S WHAT SMALL GROUP MINISTRY IS ALL ABOUT?**
3. **IT'S A SIMPLE FORMAT – BUT IT CAN BE THE MOST IMPORTANT 90 MINUTES OF YOUR WEEK.**
4. **WE BELIEVE THAT BECAUSE OUR LIVES ARE SO BUSY WE NEED TO LEVERAGE THE TIME WE SPEND TO MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE WE CAN.**
5. **SMALL GROUPS – BECAUSE OF THEIR EMPHASIS ON REAL RELATIONSHIPS AND SERVING GOD TOGETHER, HAVE ALWAYS BEEN OUR “PLAN A” FOR DEVELOPING DISCIPLES – AND THERE IS NO “PLAN B.”**

IV. LIFE HAPPENS BEST IN COMMUNITY.

- A. **THE WORD COMMUNITY IS A COMBINATION OF THE WORDS, “COMMUNE” AND “UNITY.”**
 1. **LET ME ASK YOU: WHY DO YOU THINK STARBUCKS IS SO POPULAR, ESPECIALLY AMONG YOUNGER PEOPLE?**
 2. **MY WIFE LOVES STARBUCKS, BUT I'M JUST GOING TO TELL YOU: NONE OF THEIR COFFEE IS WORTH FOUR DOLLARS A CUP.**
 3. **YOU KNOW WHY PEOPLE GO TO STARBUCKS? TO TALK TO EACH OTHER. TO SPEND FACE TO FACE TIME WITH EACH OTHER.**
 4. **YOU OLDER PEOPLE HERE KNOW THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS.**
 5. **SENIORS LOVE GETTING TOGETHER JUST TO SPEND TIME FACE TO FACE WITH EACH OTHER.**
 6. **BUT SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE BABY BOOMERS AND GENERATION X, THE ART OF**

THE FACE TO FACE CONVERSATION WAS LOST.

- 7. I THINK A LOT OF IT HAS TO DO WITH THE HUGE BOOM IN TECHNOLOGY THAT ALLOWS US TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH PEOPLE WITHOUT EVERY HAVING TO REALLY SPEND TIME WITH THEM.**

B. AND SO TODAY, THE CHURCH HAS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO HELP PEOPLE REDISCOVER THE BEAUTY AND THE BENEFIT OF DEVELOPING DEEP, PERSONAL, RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PEOPLE.

- 1. AND LET ME TELL YOU: YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR 20'S AND 30'S, IN PARTICULAR, ARE STARVING FOR THIS.**
- 2. WE ARE A GENERATION THAT IS SLOWLY DYING FROM LACK OF COMMUNITY.**
- 3. SO THE CHURCH AS AN AMAZING OPPORTUNITY TO REACH THESE YOUNGER PEOPLE THROUGH SMALL GROUPS AND COMMUNITY.**
- 4. IN PARTICULAR, MANY OF US ARE HUNGERING FOR AN OLDER PERSON TO TAKE US UNDER THEIR WING AND MENTOR US.**
- 5. WE REALIZE THE WISDOM YOU SENIORS HAVE. WE JUST DON'T KNOW HOW TO TAP INTO IT.**

C. SO SENIORS, THIS IS A CHALLENGE FOR YOU TODAY: LEAD THE WAY WHEN IT COMES TO THESE CHANGES.

- 1. BE THE ONES WHO ARE OUT IN FRONT SUPPORTING THESE CHANGES.**
- 2. THE TIME FOR THE PASSING OF THE TORCH IS NOW.**
- 3. CHURCHES ALL OVER THE COUNTRY HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT HOW THE PASSING OF THE TORCH TO A NEW GENERATION HAS BEEN COMING FOR 20 YEARS.**

4. **LISTEN, YOU'VE HEARD ABOUT THAT TIME. AND NOW, YOU'RE LIVING IN IT.**
 5. **I WANT YOU TO THINK ABOUT THE LIFE OF THIS CHURCH OVER THE NEXT 10 YEARS.**
 6. **IF NOTHING HAPPENS, IF THINGS JUST STAY THE SAME AND REJECT THESE CHANGES, IF THAT TORCH ISN'T PASSED, WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN? THE CHURCH ISN'T GOING TO BE HERE.**
- D. LISTEN: YOU ARE LIVING IN A TIME RIGHT NOW IN LIFE OF THE CHURCH UNLIKE ANY OTHER IN HISTORY.**
1. **WE HAVE AN INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY TO TRANSITION INTO A NEW, GLORIOUS AGE IN THE LIFE OF THIS CHURCH.**
 2. **I KNOW MANY OF YOU LIKE TO THINK OF 30 YEARS AGO AND HOW MANY ATTENDED ABYSSINIAN AND YOU LIKE TO THINK OF THAT AS THE "GOLDEN AGE" OF THIS CHURCH.**
 3. **LISTEN, WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY OVER THE NEXT DECADE TO MAKE THAT AGE IN THE LIFE OF OUR CHURCH LOOK LIKE A WARM UP.**
- E. AND FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO REMEMBER THAT TIME, I WANT YOU TO HEAR THIS LOUD AND CLEAR: WE NEED YOU. WE NEED YOU, WE NEED YOU, WE NEED YOU.**
1. **I PLEAD WITH YOU: CATCH THIS VISION.**
 2. **GET ON BOARD WITH WHERE GOD IS TAKING US.**
 3. **GET OUT FRONT AND LEAD US.**
 4. **LET THIS BE YOUR FINAL, GREAT WORK.**
 5. **I KNOW YOU MAY BE FEELING WEARY OF WELL-DOING.**

6. **I KNOW IT SOUNDS HARD. I KNOW IT SOUNDS UNCOMFORTABLE. BUT IT WILL BE SO WORTH IT.**
7. **AND ONE DAY, THE REST OF US WILL CATCH UP TO YOU IN HEAVEN AND WE WILL CELEBRATE THE SOULS THAT WERE SAVED AND THE LIVES THAT WERE CHANGED BECAUSE OF YOU THE FAITH YOU HAD TO STEP OUT AND TRANSITION THIS CHURCH INTO A NEW AGE.**

CONCLUSION

“WHAT ARE YOU MADE OF INWARDLY?”

INVITATION

I WANT US TO PRAY FOR OUR SENIORS, TODAY. SPECIFICALLY, I WANT US TO PRAY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN HERE AND CAN REMEMBER WHAT IT WAS LIKE WHEN THIS BUILDING WAS PACKED TO THE GILLS.

I WANT US TO GATHER AROUND THEM PRAY THAT GOD WOULD USE THEM MIGHTILY TO LEAD OUR CHURCH DURING THIS TIME OF CHANGE AND THAT GOD WOULD HONOR THEIR FAITHFULNESS BY ALLOWING THEM TO LEAVE A LEGACY OF GREATNESS HERE AT ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH.