

Three Relationships Every Christian Needs

When Jesus began His ministry, He did not rent a coliseum for an evangelistic campaign, start a mailing list, or put billboards all over Jerusalem announcing His healing ministry. No, the first thing He did was assemble a group of close followers.

He called them His friends.

Mark 3:14 says Jesus appointed the Twelve “so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach.” Notice that His relationship with them was not just about the work of ministry. He was not just calling followers to perform a task. He was not a foreman employing hired hands. He wanted their fellowship first—and then he would let them preach out of what they learned from Him.

Jesus is all about relationships. And He specifically told His disciples that He didn’t want this relationship to be performance based. He said: “No longer do I call you slaves ... but I have called you friends, for all things I have heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15).

In many parts of the church we’ve forgotten about the essential need for fellowship and tried to build the church without it. We developed a sterile church model that is event-driven and celebrity-focused rather than genuinely relational.

We build theater-style buildings where crowds listen to one guy talk. The crowds are quickly whisked out of the sanctuary to make room for the next group. Many of these people never process with anyone else what they learned, never join a small group and never receive any form of one-on-one discipleship.

Because we lack relationships today, we have tried to fill the

void with technology. We think if we can create a wow factor with cool video clips, 3-D sermons and edgy worship bands, the crowds will scream for more. I don't think so. Trendy can quickly become shallow.

I've had enough of this sterile religion. I've learned that ministry is not about getting big crowds, filling seats, tabulating response cards or eliciting raucous applause. It's not about running on the church-growth treadmill. Religion that focuses on externals cannot produce life. If our faith does not flow out of relationship with God, and result in deep relationships with others, then it is a poor imitation of New Testament Christianity.

Do you need to go deeper in your relationships? I tell Christians all over the world that they need three kinds of relationships in their lives, apart from family relationships:

1. "Pauls" are spiritual fathers and mothers you trust. All of us need older, wiser Christians who can guide us, pray for us and offer counsel. My mentors have encouraged me when I wanted to quit, and propelled me forward when I lost sight of God's promises. In the journey of faith, you do not have to feel your way in the dark. God gave Ruth a Naomi, Joshua a Moses and Esther a Mordecai. You can ask the Lord for a mentor to help guide and coach you.

2. "Barnabases" are spiritual peers who are close, bosom friends. They know everything about you, yet they love you anyway. They are also willing to correct you, bluntly if necessary! They provide accountability in areas of personal temptation. They offer a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on. And they will stay up all night praying for you when you face a crisis.

Everybody should know the benefit of Proverbs 18:24: "There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." But you cannot find faithful friends without seeking to be one first. Don't

wait for your Barnabas to come to you—go and find him.

3. “Timothys” are the younger Christians you are helping to grow. Jesus never told us to assemble crowds, but He did command us to make disciples. Relational discipleship takes a lot of time and energy, but investing your life in others is one of the most fulfilling experiences in life. Once you have poured your life into another brother or sister and watched them mature in Christ, you will never settle for superficial religion again.

Like Paul, we must go out and find our Timothys. We must invest in them personally. It’s not about preaching to them; they want a relationship with us that is genuine. They want spiritual moms and dads who are approachable, accepting, affirming and empowering. If we don’t mentor them now, there won’t be anyone running alongside us when it’s time to pass our baton.

The Christian life is a vibrant, love relationship with God—but it doesn’t end there. I pray you will open your heart and invest in the people around you.

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