

## Relational Environments

**We are transformed into Christlikeness in relationship with one another. (John 17:20-21)**



We were made to thrive in relationship and our spiritual formation in Christ is never fully developed or matured outside community. You can't be a lone ranger Christian; at least not a fully developed one. Authentic relationships with others provide a unique environment for us to experience spiritual growth. As we engage people relationally, in the context of on-going friendship, and we invite people into our lives we are changed and are further made into the image of Christ.

Alone we are a very poor reflection of God. Early Christians believed that God comes to us in community. They reasoned that as the essential nature of God is love and because it is impossible to practice love in isolation, God the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit must model perfect community.

The gospel isn't simply about the intellectual passing on of beliefs---it's about shared lives! There are 58 commands in Scripture that we can't obey outside the context of relationships with other people. They are the "one another" commands.

Living in community with other people carries its own set of disciplines if we are to live gracefully with one another.

Going to church with hundreds of other people to sit and hear a sermon doesn't ask much of you. It certainly will never expose you. That's why most folks prefer it. But community will. It will reveal where you have yet to become holy, right at the very moment you are so keenly aware of how *they* have yet to become holy. No doubt community is messy and there are times we will be deeply hurt by each other.

Somebody once said, "Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives." That's where the disciplines come in. Living in community with other people carries its own set of disciplines if we are to live gracefully with one another. Laughing together, weeping, learning, teaching, celebrating, forgiving, accepting help and sacrificial living and in admitting and owning our human brokenness with one another we discover it is we who are healed and experience the restorative and redemptive presence of Jesus. It's how community transforms us.

At times the strength of spiritual community lies in the love of people who refrain from getting caught in the trap of trying to fix everything for us, and it is in the atmosphere of trust, trustworthiness, honesty and mutual support where every part (person) finds its

health in right relationship to every other part (1 Cor. 10:17), and “we all grow to the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:13-15).

So much more than the potluck “fellowships,” in community people are committed and caring for one another in the trenches of life. For those who have fully entered into these small communities, they are finding a place where their deepest questions can be answered, their hearts can be exposed and cared for by others who deeply love them, and the ebbs and flow of life are a shared journey.

On the night of his crucifixion, Jesus looked forward to that day when he prayed that his disciples would be “one” (John 17:20-21). The second part of Jesus’ prayer was that “the world may know.”

In a similar manner, Jesus told his disciples in John 13:34-35, “So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

Francis Schaeffer called community the “final apologetic.” The ultimate defense...the ultimate proof...of Christianity is the community it lives in. We can look at scientific evidence and historical evidence and literary evidence and archaeological evidence and build proof after proof after proof to defend our beliefs. But at the end of the day, the proof is in the way we relate to one another. That is the final apologetic.

The ultimate defense for Christianity is authentic community.

Relational Discipleship happens in many ways at Faith. There are opportunities through the corporate disciplines such as a large group gathering of corporate worship, prayer and teaching. There are also environments of interpersonal connections such as life groups, mentoring relationships and spiritual friendships.



For those who have fully entered into these small communities, they are finding a place where their deepest questions can be answered, their hearts can be exposed and cared for by others who deeply love them, and the ebbs and flow of life are a shared journey.

