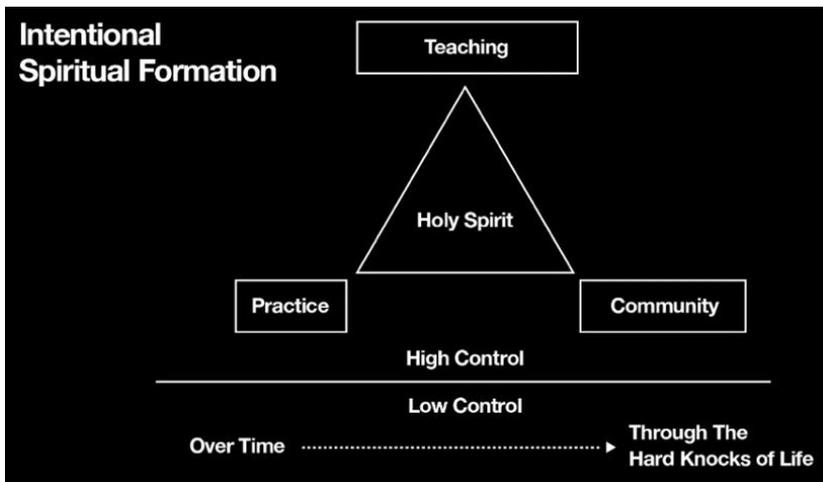




These notes are back on track with the practicing the way series, but here’s Matt’s talk from Sunday about the Ukraine situation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5F2bMY3JJE> Feel free to take some time at the start to pray for Ukraine and Russia if you want.

Why is community important to change?

Community plays a vital role in our transformation. But there is a gap between the idea of ideal community and the messy reality of community. Discipleship happens in the space in between.



“We are lonely but fearful of intimacy. Digital Connections... may offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship. Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other. We would rather text than talk... When technology engineers intimacy, relationships can be reduced to mere connections. And then easy connection becomes redefined as intimacy for stop put otherwise, cyberintimacies slide into cybersolitudes.” Sherry Turkle in Alone Together

Questions

- Do you agree or disagree with this statement and why?

Matt 10:1-4 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. ²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Questions

- Why do you think Jesus chose to have twelve disciples? Couldn't Jesus, as the Son of God, completed his mission on His own? Wouldn't that have been easier for Him?
- Noticing how this passage only describes two out of the twelve disciples, a zealot (the name literally means "dagger man") and Judas the betrayer, what can we learn from the diversity of the disciples, and what do you imagine their dynamic was like?

Matt 20: 20-28 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him. ²¹ "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." ²² "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. ²³ Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." ²⁴ When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Questions

- What can we learn about community from what Jesus taught in this passage about the kingdom of God?

Acts 2:42-47 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 4:32-35 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Questions

- List as many things as possible between you from these passages about what community looked like in the early church.
- Which areas come naturally to you and why?
- Which areas did you or do you find harder to live out and why?
- Is there anything in this list you feel like God could be prompting you to step out in?

When we read talk about the early church, we can often elevate it on a pedestal, wishing it was like that now. There's definitely much we can learn from the early church, but we often forget about the brutal reality of passages such as the very next chapter...

Acts 5:1-6 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ²With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. ³Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God." ⁵When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

Questions

- Noting the difference between the ideal church in Acts chapters 2 and 4, compared the messy reality of community in chapter 5, how do you feel about the concept that discipleship happens in the gap in between these two?
- Do you have any personal stories about a community or relationship which was at once not easy, but now is a testimony of God's goodness?

Six practical takeaways about community

1. Community is not optional for discipleship to Jesus (even Jesus had it)
2. Community is not optional for a well lived life (Human beings are made for relationship)
3. Community is the crucible where we are transformed and plays a key role in our spiritual formation
 - Exposure – shows what is actually inside of us (Pete Scazzero calls this your shadow side, "the damaged but mostly hidden version of who you are"). Some of us are blind to this until we step into real community, or a marriage, it exposes who you really are. This obviously causes conflict, but constructive conflict is good. The millennial way to deal with conflict is to 'unfriend' that person and move on, which solves nothing.
 - Encouragement – at a psychological and neurological way, our greatest wounds from relationship can only be healed by healthy relationship. Retreating from people will not work.
4. Community is not necessarily the same thing as a group of friends
 - There are strong ties and weak ties (strong ties are genuine deep relationships, weak ties are more like acquaintances).
 - There is no such thing as an online community. Community by dictionary definition is "people you live by"
5. Community is the by-product of commitment. You cannot have community without it.
 - We tend to ache for belonging and community, but also we want to keep our options open.
6. Community and real relationships take time and intentionality

Reflection and prayer time <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1uGOBpen3M>

- Remember that Jesus clearly never said community was easy, but it is worth it. Listen to this song whilst reflecting on these six practical takeaways about community and see if God wants to highlight anything to encourage or challenge you with regards to community.
- Spend some time praying for one another, speaking life and encouraging the ways in which you have seen or felt the group be a community