

## The Pursuit to Know God Better Through Biblical Discipleship Authentic Christian Community

**Eph. 3:3-11** – “As I briefly wrote earlier, God himself revealed his mysterious plan to me. As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ. God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets. And **this is God’s plan**: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God’s children. **Both are part of the same body**, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because **they belong to Christ Jesus**. By God’s grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News. Though I am the least deserving of all God’s people, he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. I was chosen to explain to everyone this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning. **God’s purpose** in all this was to **use the church to display his wisdom** in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. **This was his eternal plan**, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.” (NLT)

Exercising your personal capacity to believe, the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross has accomplished your justification in God’s sight; and now, trusting Him to save you from a sinful lifestyle, you are counted as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But simply being a believer in Jesus doesn’t make you a disciple of Jesus Christ. A disciple is a learner, a follower of Jesus, someone led by the Holy Spirit, walking in His footsteps.

**1 Peter 2:21** – “For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.” (NLT)

**Luke 14:26-27** – “Those who come to me cannot be my disciples unless they love me more than they love father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and themselves as well. Those who do not carry their own cross and come after me cannot be my disciples.” (TEV)

Jesus states the reality very clearly, that our relationship to Him is the priority. And as each believer takes the necessary steps to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, it presents the possibility for authentic Christian community to be achieved, which brings glory to God and releases God’s life within the body of Christ.

Because you truly want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, you may be prompted to ask a couple of questions: “What are the necessary steps we must take in becoming a disciple of Jesus?” And “What does authentic community look like?” Well, Paul enlightens us within the verses of this twelfth chapter.

### I. STEPS IN BECOMING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST

In the opening verse the apostle Paul tells us that the **first step** in becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ requires that you **present your body** as a living sacrifice to God. He puts it this way:

**Romans 12:1** – “And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

Presenting your body as a living sacrifice to God is an act of surrender and dedication, and it is necessary because sin (the rebellious nature you received from Adam) dwells in the members of your body. So, when you present your body to God as a living sacrifice you are actually making a decision to die to the lusts of your sin nature: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

That's why Paul said:

**Gal. 2:19-20** – “For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (NLT)

The **second step** requires that you refuse to be conformed any longer to the world-system and **be transformed** by the renewing of your mind through the Word of God. Only then, will you be able to demonstrate that good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. He says:

**Romans 12:2** – “Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” (NLT)

The **third step** requires you to **embrace a sober evaluation** of yourself that is in accord with the measure of faith God has given you. Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think. That opens the door to pride and all manner of sin. He states it this way:

**Romans 12:3** – “Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.” (NLT)

The **fourth step** a disciple of Jesus Christ takes is to **recognize that the Holy Spirit has** placed you in the body of Christ and **joined you to other believers**. You must now be led to identify your giftedness and find your place and ministry in His body.

That's why we have prepared these evaluations for you in order to help you identify your giftedness and find joy and fulfillment in serving the Lord and His body.

**1 Cor. 12:12-13** – “The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.” (NLT)

Avoiding this step of finding your place and building meaningful relationships in the body of Christ actually hinders authentic community from happening.

The **fifth step** I take as a disciple of Jesus Christ is to learn how to properly relate to unbelievers even when they are hostile toward me.

**Romans 12:17-21** – “Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, ‘I will take revenge; I will pay them back,’ says the Lord. Instead, ‘If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.’ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.” (NLT)

Well, if you missed any of these previous messages from Romans 12, you may find them on our website at: [www.vicc4life.com](http://www.vicc4life.com).

## II. AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY REALIZED

Now, let's talk about authentic community and hopefully get a picture of what it actually looks like. **Authentic community is realized when:**

- **The real you is expressed** – Rom. 12:9

The *real you* refers to who you really are, not what you want people to think of you. That's authenticity. **Authentic community** is realized when the real you is expressed:

**With Authenticity** – “Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them.” Without hypocrisy or pretending, means you relate to others without a mask. For authentic community and genuine love to occur between followers of Christ, we need to take off the masks. Hypocrisy by seeking to impress, acting as though we have it all together, or being untruthful works to frustrate and even eliminate the possibility of authentic community.

In the book of Acts chapters 4-5 we have the encouraging act of Joseph, surnamed Barnabas, selling a field and giving the money to the apostles. Ananias and Sapphira also sold a piece of property, but they only brought a portion of the money to the apostles and in an act of hypocrisy claimed it was the full price and subsequently were judged by God for their hypocrisy.

**In Purity** – “Hate what is evil. Cling to (hold tightly) what is good.” It has been said that the one security against sin is being shocked by it. People who are continually crossing the line ask questions like: “How close can I get to sin without crossing the line?” “How much can I drink before it's a sin?” “How far can we go in this relationship before it's called sexual immorality?” “How much can we bend the truth before it's a lie?”

When people wear masks, relationships become more and more superficial. Your soul begins to shrink and guilt arises. After a while you find you don't want to be around other believers, or hear God's Word, or participate in activities that force you to confront your hypocrisy.

Remember, God's love flows through clean vessels.

**Authentic community** is realized when the real you is expressed, and when real needs are met:

- **Real needs are met** – Rom. 12:10

**Out of Devotion** – “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.” Too often we are so busy there's no room in our hearts, no margin in our schedules to really love people with devotion. Being devoted to each other means we are ready to lay down our lives for one another. The goal is to be passionate about our brother and sister's success.

**Authentic community** is realized when the real you is expressed with authenticity and purity, and when real needs are met out of devotion and with humility:

**With Humility** – “Take delight in honoring each other.” Do you honor and give preference to others? It's amazing how much grace there is to go around when people honestly long for the success of others more than their own.

Being devoted to one another and giving preference to one another is all about the real you showing up and meeting real needs. Jesus is the greatest example of this when he humbly embraced the cross in order to meet our real need of salvation.

**Phil. 2:6-8** – “Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.” (NLT)

So, what would it look like for you to follow His example and take the initiative to meet some real needs in your community or church family?

**Authentic community** is realized when **the real you** is expressed with **authenticity** and **purity**, and **when real needs are met** out of **devotion** and **humility**; and all for the **right reasons** with the **right motive**.

- **For the right reasons** – Rom. 12:11

**With the right Motive** – “Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically.”

I wonder if, for some people, church has become more of an event to attend, rather than a community or family to which they belong.

Do you ever feel like ministry is a duty to fulfill rather than a joyous act of serving the people we love? The right motive has to be centered in making the kingdom of God the priority in your life and His will your passion.

**Using the right Method** – “Genuine service to God is characterized by”:

Diligence – excellence

Enthusiasm – passion

The fresh realization, that I am serving the Lord and not just ministering to obtain the appreciation and accolades of people, came home to me after I spent about 30 hours, which included premarital counseling and a variety of preparations for an off island wedding.

At the conclusion of ceremony and reception, an envelope was slipped into my pocket with an honorarium. Later, when I looked at the amount I realized they considered my time to be worth a little more than a dollar an hour. My conclusion was that I wasn’t valued or appreciated.

My initial response was a desire to refrain from ever officiating another wedding. That is, until the Lord spoke to my heart and asked me if I was serving Him or the appreciation of people. It was a valuable moment in which I had the opportunity to check my motive and to repent for having an improper focus.

**Authentic community** happens when **the real you** meets **real needs** for the **right reasons** with the **right heart motive** in the **right way**.

- **In the right way** – Rom. 12:12-13

**With Upward Focus** – “Rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.”

Living with an **inward focus** can lead to discouragement and even depression. An inward focus can put you on the path to bad theology and set you up with unrealistic expectations that makes you the kind of person who gives up on God and other people.

But an upward focus means you are rejoicing in “a confident expectation of a completed end.” Hope is not wishful thinking like: “I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow” or “I hope the stock market doesn’t crash” or “I hope things go better at work.” These are statements of desire, but Biblical hope is an internal confidence and trust with absolute certainty. Christ’s return is our blessed hope.

An **upward focus**, looking to God in prayer, enables you to consider it all joy and persevere through tribulation.

**James 1:2-4** – “Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.” (NLT)

**With Outward Focus** – “Contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.”

There is a very real danger that any of us could begin to love solely with words, instead of with deeds and in truth. The command to “contribute to the needs of the saints” moves authentic community beyond the realm of small talk to where the rubber meets the road.

Authentic community demands that your wallet must come out of your pocket for both biblically required giving – the tithe – and for the freewill giving of alms – meeting the needs of the poor.

**James 2:14-17** – “What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, ‘Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well’—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.” (NLT)

I believe the early church lived in authentic community with one another, and as legitimate needs surfaced among them, they simply reached into their pockets and provided financial assistance with the wisdom and discernment that the Holy Spirit provided.

I so appreciate the burden that God has place on the hearts of Jim Plihal and others in their desire to reach out beyond our church family to meet the real needs in the community of Vashon. The steps we have taken in this regard have blessed several families, but we want to do more in the months to come.

You see, when the world sees God’s people step up and love those who are unlike them, and especially those who are antagonistic toward the gospel, the world takes notice, especially those who are open to the truth of God’s Word.