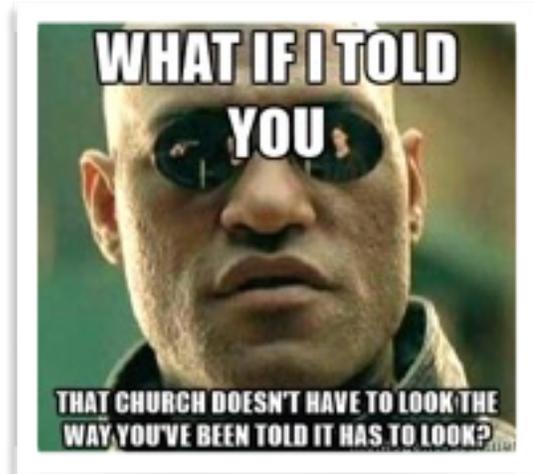


## Empowering Disciples through Simple Church

*What if Church doesn't have to look the way we've always thought it had to look? Your paradigm will start to shift after this session as we focus on weekly Church gatherings, what it means to be led by the Spirit, incorporating complete participation through scripture discussion, testimonies, and prayer throughout worship, and how leadership facilitates Church life. While it will be a different experience of Church for many, every aspect of Church life can be an opportunity to disciple and learn to be led by the Spirit. All of this will make effective, capable disciples who are empowered and live by Christ's Spirit. Sometimes we just make things more complicated when they really need to be simpler.*



### I. Acts 2:14-21; Joel 2:28-29; 1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 4:8-16

- A. What are the common themes in these passages?
- B. The Church believes and recognizes the truth of these verses theologically, but does the traditional church format promote or hinder these theological truths in being practical realities?
  1. Can "church format" change to better promote discipling believers?

### II. Active vs. Passive Discipleship

- A. In your church community, what is the main opportunity to disciple fellow believers?
  1. Is that opportunity mainly active or passive discipleship?
  2. How can you make that opportunity be almost completely active discipleship?
  3. What are some assumptions in the way church format is that we can get rid of?
    - a) Christendom-era church
    - b) Assumptions in how church is or how we think it has to look

### III. Pre-Constantinian Churches vs. Constantinian Churches

- A. What are some of the main differences between the early church of approximately the first 300 years of Christianity and the current-model church of approximately the last 1700 years?
  1. How did the early church engage in active and powerful discipleship?
  2. What was the result?
- B. What are the similarities between the period in which the early church existed and the current period in which we live?

### IV. Practical Considerations

- A. Active discipleship should involve every aspect of church life.
  1. Smaller groups
    - a) Bigger is not always better.
    - b) Group multiplication and reproducibility
    - c) Leads to deeper discussion and more participation
    - d) Every person present can function in their Spirit-given gifts.

2. Leadership and facilitation of church-community gatherings
  - a) Disciples who disciple others who disciple others who disciple others and so on
  - b) With a shift towards active, Spirit-led participation by everyone present, more people are empowered, encouraged, and built up in the life of the church community.
3. Scripture
  - a) Contrary to the Christendom-era church, there does not have to be a sermon preached.
    - (1) What is the main context of preaching in the New Testament?
  - b) Teaching, based on scripture and participatory discussion, allows people to interact with God's word and discover truths together, making the impact of scripture more powerful.
  - c) Information and theological truth is conveyed in the contexts of relationships and experiences together and with Christ.
4. Singing
  - a) Does not have to be formal and organized with a singular leader or group
  - b) Allow disciples to contribute and suggest songs; encourage leadership by the Spirit.
  - c) Worship can encourage other artistic expression, such as poetry, dramatic reading, painting, etc.
  - d) Everyone takes ownership; becomes something that can be led by anyone, anytime, not just by gifted, professional musicians.
5. Prayer
  - a) Allow Jesus and the Spirit to lead, prompt, and guide.
  - b) "Real-time" prayer
    - (1) Pray during, often, and throughout a gathering by the leadership of the Spirit.
      - (a) Give yourself and the disciples freedom to not be locked into praying only at specific times during a gathering.
      - (2) Allow others to lead prayer and initiate prayer.
      - (3) Embrace and allow for silence.
6. Testimonies
  - a) Allow disciples to share what they have seen God do in their lives during the week or month!
    - (1) God is constantly at work in disciples' lives, not just at one point in a disciple's life.
    - (2) Disciples will build one another up and encourage one another.
    - (3) Does not have to be a life testimony—encourage short testimonies about current experiences.
    - (4) Be sensitive to the Spirit's leading.
    - (5) Allows the community to celebrate what God is doing in others' lives.
7. Responsibility
  - a) Give disciples the responsibilities of children, and disciples will act like children.
  - b) Give disciples the responsibilities of adults, and disciples will have to and be forced to grow and become more mature, acting like adults in the faith.
  - c) Christendom-era Christianity is one that, at the foundation of its form, essentially outsources the responsibilities that every Christian disciple should have to the "professional Christian" or paid clergy.
    - (1) What are concrete ways your church community can actively move towards complete participation during a gathering?
  - d) If every Christian is filled and empowered by the Spirit, what are ways, through giving responsibilities, that you can help others realize who they are in Jesus Christ and in the Spirit?
8. Accountability
  - a) Smaller church-community groups foster closer, more intimate relationships and a willingness to be more open and confessing to one another
    - (1) Disciples are accountable in the context of Christ and built up in their identity in Christ.
  - b) Active, participatory church gatherings prevent the spread of heretical ideas.
    - (1) Every disciple is accountable to every other disciple present at a church-community gathering.
    - (2) Many more checks and balances
    - (3) With passive, hierarchical, centralized church-gatherings and church models, if the leader becomes heretical, it is much easier for the rest of the church community to follow.

9. Children
  - a) Allow kids and children to participate fully with adult disciples.
  - b) Allow children to pray for adults.
  - c) Allows adults to learn child-like discipleship
  - d) Kids and children have the same Spirit as every other disciple, not a child version of the Spirit.
  - e) Adults will learn just as much from kids as kids will learn from adults.
  - f) Intergenerational discipleship is critical in raising children who have a strong faith throughout their lives and who do not leave the church once they are on their own.
10. Finances
  - a) Encourage fellow disciples to set aside a separate, personal fund that they can use and draw from to give freely and charitably when the Spirit prompts giving, when needs arise, or to simply give out of love and honor.
11. Evangelism
  - a) No need for programs
  - b) Inviting people into a way of life
  - c) Be expectant of divine appointments with others and be obedient to the Spirit's promptings in showing Christ's love to others.
  - d) The love and presence of Christ as an experiential reality in the gathered community, coming through testimony, the gifts of the Spirit, and prayer and ministry to another
    - (1) Encourages an expectancy and wanting for Christ in others' lives
12. Keep it simple!
  - a) Ockham's razor applies just as much to the Church and church communities as it does to anything else.
  - b) Know your priorities: loving Jesus and loving neighbor, being with and spending time with Jesus.
    - (1) Encourage and equip the saints to be "all in" disciples who make "all in" disciples.
  - c) Don't make things more complicated than they need to be!
    - (1) The institutional, centralized church can fall into this temptation easily.
13. No one is advocating for anarchy or dis-organization at a church gathering.
  - a) Leaders still *lead, facilitate, guide, and coach*, but rely on the leadership of Jesus and the Spirit at every gathering.
    - (1) Invite other disciples to facilitate for the gathering or help facilitate.
    - (2) Exercise bottom-up leadership, rather than top-down leadership.

**V. When opportunities present themselves, live life together.**

- A. Be willing to take steps of faith with other Christian disciples and non-Christians as well.
- B. Have constant, regular meals and fellowship together; even do normal errands together!
- C. Become an actual and true family together and learn to be a healthy family together in Christ; use family language at your gatherings.

**VI. Allow Jesus to lead!**

- A. Jesus is King!
  1. At every church-gathering level, allow Jesus to be the King!
  2. Don't say he is King with the church-gathering words, then take that responsibility back from him in the church-gathering actions.
- B. APEST leadership and facilitation
  1. In fostering apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and teaching leadership in every church community, leaders and disciples are accountable to different ministry giftings, therefore bringing balance to church communities, and allowing Jesus to be the primary leader who unites the church community.
    - a) Shared responsibilities, rather than all responsibility all on a singular leader who can more easily become burned out due to all the weight on his or her shoulders
    - b) Centralized vs. decentralized leadership and organization: which is better?
  2. Be willing to allow others to share what God has placed on their hearts. The Spirit is working and moving in every single disciple in the church community. Everyone has something to contribute and is empowered, encouraged, and built up when they are allowed to share.
  3. Release control; don't consolidate control.

**At your church and at your regular church gatherings, even on Sunday mornings, how can you incorporate these ideas? (Warning: you may receive pushback, even from church leadership. Don't be discouraged, but press on and demonstrate the grace and patience of Jesus Christ in it.)**

**Looking at this example of a church gathering, how will disciples be empowered, stronger in their faith, and more aware of the Spirit within them in their everyday lives?**

**“My church is not like this and I have a hard time envisioning this there—is this type of church life possible at a traditional church? Yes. See examples of Woodland Hills Church, St. Paul, MN, and The Chapel, Buffalo, NY.**

**If we are willing to take steps of faith regarding how church is “done” and challenge assumptions, the church in North America will see incredible works and miracles of God. We should not confine God to the “visible” church, but be open to the vibrant “invisible” church and the powerful breath of God in it.**

**The wine of Jesus Christ is incredible, but the wineskins and wine bottles of Christendom are bursting and cracking (Mark 2:21-22). Are you willing to pour the wine of the Church into new wineskins? (<https://thekayakingchurch.com/2016/09/25/wineskins/>)**

A Few Resources:\*

- *Church 3.0* by Neil Cole
- *Megashift* by James Rutz
- *The Forgotten Ways* by Alan Hirsch

\*Note: These books are good resources for practicing simple church and empowering disciples. However, just because I have listed them as a resource does not mean I fully endorse 100% of their content. Be critical, discerning, and sensitive to the Spirit, but also allow yourself to be encouraged and challenged by other ways of thinking as you read.