

CREATING UNCOMMON UNITY

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We hear a lot about community today in both society and the church. What the world promotes is a watered-down contrast to the teachings of Jesus. As Christian leaders, our goal is to develop in our ministry settings an uncommon-unity, based on the Word of God and prayerful pursuit of genuine Christian community.

What Jesus developed with his disciples is embodied in the truest sense of the word community. When the disciples first encountered Jesus, they responded to his call "Follow me ..." and their lives were radically transformed. Living in common-unity with Jesus, the disciples followed after his teachings and example and experienced an uncommon unity in Christ.

Jesus empowered them with the Spirit, gave them authority to drive out demons and cure diseases (Luke 9:1), and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick (Luke 9:2). In addition, he gave them instructions for their journey, "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them," (Luke 9:3-5).

Jesus and his disciples huddled together in community and then he would send them out continually to fulfill his will in the hearts and lives of needy people. In Matthew 10 we see a wonderful picture of such a huddle, in which Jesus taught his disciples, "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master," (Matthew 10:24,25). Jesus' desire was that his disciples become like him as they grew together and learned within the environment he created. Then he said to them, "What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the housetops," (Matthew 10:27). His teachings, given in the context of community, were to be shared with others.

These words, and scores of additional instructions, were given to the disciples so they could grow and discover what it means to be a Christ-follower. He taught in parables, gave specific examples of his teachings, expected discipline and obedience, and put up with a lot of immature behavior. Jesus continually strove to build community with his disciples and encouraged them to pursue this among themselves. The cycle of bringing the disciples into community and then mobilizing them for new experiences of service was repeated throughout the years he spent with them.

He built community among his disciples, but he sent them out as a team in community with one another (Luke 9:10), knowing that along the way they would need to lean on each other. He built community by teaching people in groups both large and small. He

even fed them in community (Luke 9:14). Jesus was sent to earth for many reasons, one of which was to model the priority issues of learning and growing in community. All the while, Jesus was preparing them for his earthly departure, when they would be implementing this lifestyle in the establishment of the Christian church.

Robert Coleman, in his classic book *Master Plan of Evangelism* describes in depth the community-building tactics of Jesus. Coleman summarizes the example of Jesus in eight key concepts:

1. **Selection**—Jesus called a few men to follow Him who could bear witness to His life and carry on His work after He returned to the Father;
2. **Association**—He stayed with them, making it a practice to be with them, drawing them close to Himself;
3. **Consecration**—He required obedience, so that they would willingly deny themselves for others;
4. **Impartation**—He gave Himself away to His disciples, giving all that He had, withholding nothing, not even His own life;
5. **Demonstration**—He showed them how to live, practicing prayer, turning to the Scriptures, teaching, serving, and sharing the Gospel naturally and freely;
6. **Delegation**—He assigned them meaningful work, keeping His vision before them and calling them to fulfill His will;
7. **Supervision**—He kept check on them through His questions, illustrations, warnings, and admonitions in order to keep them on course to know and fulfill His work through them;
8. **Reproduction**—He expected them to reproduce themselves in the lives of others through witness and mission.

With whom are you investing today so that an uncommon-unity can develop in the context of your shared ministry? Christian leadership understands this priority and seeks every way possible to ensure its formation. It's out of the quality of our Jesus-centered community that we have the joyful privilege of sharing the life-transforming gospel!