

# THE THIRD WAY – SESSION 8

## Academy of Christian Discipleship

### Introduction

This is your last session in this year's Academy. If you made it this far, we commend you. But we also want to thank you. On behalf of the entire team, I bless you for participating, meeting, investing, listening, studying, wrestling, praying and experimenting. As I have said before and will say again, we are about the business of formation, not information! We are also utterly dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit who transforms us from one degree of glory to another!

I also want to thank the people who have contributed on the production end of this series. That would include Josh Leim, Julie Canlis and Terry McGonigal, who did such excellent work as presenters. I am fortunate to work with such competent and godly colleagues. That would also include Jackson and Naomi, who filmed much of the series, Chase, who edited the series, and Michelle, who handled many of the details.

Now a word about this final session. Christians at worship and Christians in community actually served as a major form of witness in the early Christian period. Life was very public back then. Churches did not look like fortresses, with a cement mote around them, as many do today. Christians met in the larger apartments of wealthier members. Anyone nearby would know it, too. They would watch them and hear them. Christians shopped in the same markets and worked trades that put them into constant contact with their pagan friends and neighbors. It was virtually impossible to have a privatized faith. Christians in community and Christians at worship witnessed by what they believed, how they behaved and lived in fellowship with each other. Jesus said to his disciples, "They will know you are my disciples by how you love one another." We can see this playing out in early Christianity.

The church has become a big target for criticism over the past decades. It is easy to find fault with her. Yet there is nothing quite like the church, however flawed as a body and institution! Try to think of another community that functions like her. This month I want to challenge you to re-commit yourself to the church, to your local church body, and to try your best under God to build the church up rather than tear the church down. And I also want to challenge you to re-commit yourself to worship, not as a consumer but as a genuine participant. In worship God is the audience; we are on stage. We "perform" for him.

Finally, I want to challenge you to discuss as a cohort what lies ahead for you. How can you continue on this same trajectory, and how can you cultivate a culture of discipleship in your church body?

Thanks again for your participation.

## Worship & Community in the Acts of the Apostles (8.1)

Introduction: Jordan Peterson

Worship: paying deepest attention to God

First, how does worship shape us?

- What we love the most
  
- Our practices reveal what we worship
  
- Practices that constitute true worship . . .
  
  
- Acts 2
- Acts 4
- Repetition of summaries
- Placement in the narrative
- Facing persecution
- The church's life in worship never changes
- Devotion to worship, giving constant attention to . . .

- Focus on Jesus!
- The apostolic testimony!

Second, the church's community

- Koinonia: common life
- Fellowship within the normal course of life, the hustle and bustle

Third, breaking of bread

- Food!
- Kingdom feasts
- The Lord's Supper

Fourth, prayer

Fifth, radical and joyful generosity

## Worship & Community in Early Christianity (8.2)

Introduction: trip to Costa Rica

Identity

- Multiple identities

- Paul's experience: as a Pharisee: Phil 3:4-7
- New in Christ: II Cor. 5:16-17
- Impact on community: Eph. 2:11-22
- Primary vs. secondary identities
- Example, a different kind of husband!
- Radical shift in identity among Christians. Examples: male and female, or slave and free, or ethnic

## Worship

- Social conditions in ancient urban society
- Christian worship
  - Form of public witness
  - The Eighth Day
  - The "Book"
  - Order of Worship: Justin Martyr

- Eucharist

### Community

- One church!
- One Confession: Rule of Faith
- The language of family

### Conclusion

- Centrality of Jesus as Lord
- Church body as a form of witness

## Worship & Community Today (8.3)

### Worshiping the Triune God in an iPhone Age

### Review

- The Trinity tells us something about God
- The Trinity tells us something about ourselves

### Our Situation: The Trinity has never been more relevant

- Western individualism

- Western Distraction
- Western Depersonalization

#### God's Response

- The Trinity retrains our speech
- The Trinity retrains our worship
- The Trinity reorients us toward others

## Spiritual Exercise

We know that very early on in the history of the church the Lord's Prayer became *the* prayer of the church. The *Didache*, a manual of church life that dates to around the year 100, mandates that Christians recite the Lord's Prayer three times a day. That prayer contains the essential elements of true prayer. It affirms that God is Father and that God is holy. It asks that God's kingdom rule be manifested on earth as it already is in heaven. It asks for daily bread, for daily forgiveness, protection from temptation, and deliverance from evil. And it acknowledges that all power and glory belong to God.

Some churches might recite this prayer in worship; but most do not. And we rarely use this prayer in our daily rhythms of prayer and worship, if we pray at all! So the exercise for this month is to pray the Lord's Prayer, *slowly* and *thoughtfully* (thinking about what you are praying) once or more times a day: during your morning devotions, for example, or at meal times, or before bedtime. As you pray this ancient prayer, the prayer "Jesus taught us to pray," think about what you are actually praying!

## Special Project

The church witnessed to the Gospel simply by being the church, the church at worship and the church in fellowship or community. Your special project for the month is to consider what it would mean for you to recommit yourself to being a faithful member of the church. The average church attendance of “regular” members has dropped to well under two times per month. In short, membership does not mean much anymore. What would recommitment mean for you?

The church made a turn sometime in the 1970s and 80s in a consumer direction, probably because so many Boomers were adrift, threatening to abandon the church altogether. Some Boomers were wooed back because churches appealed to their consumer interests. That is not altogether bad, of course. But it had a consequence: worship became a performance that the few did for the many. How good is the music? Is it *my* kind of music? How good is the message? Does it really speak to *me* and help *me*? And so forth. But worship is not about a performance done for us. It is about what we do before God. So consider, secondly, preparing for worship and giving yourself in worship as an act of praise, devotion and commitment to God. Imagine that it is not the worship band and preacher who are on stage. You are on stage. God is watching you as you worship him.

## Homework Assignments

### WEEK ONE

- Pray
- Read Acts 2:42-47
- Read Acts 4:23-31
- Read Acts 4:32-37
- What do you learn about early Christian community in these texts?
- How can we translate and apply those texts to our setting?
- Spend time celebrating what your church is rather than complaining about it!
- Pray for renewal in the life of your church.

### WEEK TWO

- Pray
- Read John 13:1-20
- Read John 13:31-38
- Read John 17
- What do you learn in these texts about early Christian community?
- Pray that your church become a church characterized by love, service and prayer

### WEEK THREE

- Pray

- Read Philippians 3:4-11
- Read II Corinthians 5:16-21
- Read Ephesians 2:11-22
- What do you learn in these texts about how primary identity shapes how we see and relate to others? What was Paul like *before* his conversion? How did Paul change *after* his conversion? How did his conversion affect his relationships?
- How do you see yourself? How does that affect the way you see others. Pray that same kind of transformation into your life.

#### **WEEK FOUR**

- Pray
- Review the texts you have already read.
- Focus your attention this week on praying the Lord's Prayer
- Pray for renewal in your church.

## **Cohort Questions**

### **First Cohort Session**

1. Begin with prayer.
2. What have you learned from the texts you read for homework?
3. Review what you learned about worship and community in Josh Leim's lecture. In Jerry's lecture. In Julie's lecture. Are any themes emerging?
4. How is this relevant to your church? How your church worships? What kind of community exists in your church? Discuss the strengths as well as weaknesses of your church.
5. Reflect on the experience of reciting the Lord's Prayer every day.  
Pray for each other

### **Second Cohort Session**

1. Begin with prayer.
2. Spend the session discussing the special project.
3. And spend time as well thinking about where you want to go from here, how you can sustain momentum in becoming a disciple-making church. Discipleship is not an option for the few but the expected lifestyle of the many. There can be no division between being a Christian and being a functional disciple.
4. What would it mean—and require—for your church to become such a church?
5. Pray for your church as well as for each other.