**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 11-20-2022
Target #2 – Learning and Growing in Community**

Most of you probably know, but if you go to the end of Chestnut Grove Road and make a left onto Old York Road, you will soon come to a shooting range. It is often rather crowded there.

But why? Why do so many people frequent this shooting range? Well, I think that it is a popular place because people find it helpful. People become more accurate shooters.

You know, there is a familiar saying, which you’ve probably all heard. And this saying is --- I’ll start it and you can finish it. “Practice makes perfect.” Exactly. Well done.

While I think that this saying is a bit of an overstatement, anyone who has ever played sports or an instrument knows that practice makes a bit difference. I know as a music teacher, Kara can definitely testify to the huge difference that regular practice makes for her students. Practice helps a whole lot.

Friends, just as these things are true with shooting ranges and with music and sports, it is all-the-more true when it comes to living faithfully as a Christian in this world.

But how do we practice Christian living? One of the things I just love about the Methodist movement is that it is meant to be very practical. Wesley and others wanted to have Christians frequenting the spiritual shooting range, so to speak, to practice becoming stronger and stronger disciples of Jesus Christ.

Last week we began a 3-week series focusing on our God-given vision as Chestnut Grove Church **to be a light on a hill sharing the love of Jesus Christ**.

But for us to live this out well, we need to practice doing the right things. It takes time and energy and dedication, but it is so worth it. In a similar way, most hunters who get a deer would appreciate the time and energy they spend practicing.

To live out this very important vision, we need focus and direction. We need to discern what we are to aim for so that we practice living the Christian life well.

Last week we highlighted the most foundational core value or target to help us to fulfill this vision, which was to ABIDE IN JESUS. This means that we are to stay strongly connected to Jesus through prayer and worship. More than anything from us, the LORD desires for us to know Him and to have a living relationship with Him. And prayer is the most important part of doing this well. Prayer is communication with our Creator and Savior and we need to be abiding in Jesus through prayer if we are to be that light on a hill sharing the love of Jesus Christ. It all begins with prayer.

But it doesn’t end there, friends. The next core value or target is just as critical.

To help introduce this core value or target, let us turn to our Scripture for this morning, found in Acts 2:42-47. (This is actually not the Scripture that is on the power point, but the Lord impressed it on my heart yesterday that this would be a more fitting Scripture than I originally planned on).

So please turn in your Bibles to Acts 2:42-47. Luke writes these words in describing the early church.

**42And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43And awe[**[**d**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2&version=ESV#fen-ESV-26981d)**] came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.**

There are quite a few things happening in these 6 verses. But all of them describe the importance of doing life together. The early church was all about community. They would eat together. They would reflect on the apostles’ teaching together. They would share in Holy Communion with one another. They would care for needs that would arise together.

And we are told that the Lord added to their number daily those that were being saved.

The first core value or target for us to live out our vision of being a light on a hill sharing the love of Jesus is very vertical in nature. Prayer. Worship. Time in God’s Word.

This second core value, or target, however, is very horizontal. Did you catch that from these verses?

From the early church onward, an essential part of maturing as Christians involved Christians relationships with their brothers and sisters in Christ.

The word disciple literally means learner. And our learning and growing in Jesus is best experienced through being intentionally connected to other believers.

I believe the LORD is blessed and we are blessed when we practice learning and growing together. I recognize that we can and should learn and grow on our own. My hope in passing out little write-ups on the different Bible books of the month is that this will help us to learn and grow on our own, as we are reading the Bible.

But there is something beautiful and powerful when we are intentional in practicing learning and growing together. For example, our Thursday morning Bible studies are wonderful times of fellowship and learning together.

One thing that you may not realize, but it was the Methodist movement that emphasized small groups perhaps more than any Christian movement over the centuries. And I think that this was one of the reasons why the Holy Spirit moved so powerfully through the first century of the Methodist movement.

John Wesley and others were very intentional in prioritizing small groups as an essential part of the life of the church. In fact, at one time it was a requirement for Methodist Christians to be actively a part of a small group. Every week they would gather together for about an hour to hear from one another how their walk with Jesus was going. They would pray together and share together. Sometimes they would eat together and share Communion together. And God added to their number, similar to how God did in Acts chapter 2.

The bottom line is that they were doing life together. The church is called to be a community. The Lord does not call us to be Christians living as islands unto ourselves, but to be actively seeking to do life together.

I recognize that for most of the American Church today, this is not something that is practiced. Church is a Sunday morning event for many, rather than a community doing life together, that also gathers to worship God together and hear God’s Word preached and taught on Sunday morning.

Sadly, since about the time of the Civil War, this important part of discipleship was largely lost. To pick up the football analogy from last week, this practice has been fumbled.

But whenever this rich part of Christian and Methodist heritage was picked up, there has been good fruit that has come of it.

I believe that the Lord is calling us here at Chestnut Grove to practice intentional discipleship in this way. My hope is that within the next few months, we will begin at least 3 small groups based off of the small group model practiced a couple of centuries ago.

I am convinced that there is so much untapped potential of growth and discipleship that the Lord wants to lead us into through these small groups.

If you find your heart is being stirred as I am speaking to you about this, please listen to the Holy Spirit. Talk to me about this. I am still in the planning stages of how this could look, but if something within you is saying ‘yes, this would be helpful and impactful for me and for our church and for us to become that ‘light on a hill sharing the love of Jesus Christ,’ please let me know.

Proverbs 27:17 teaches us, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

We will sharpen one another in our walk with Jesus through these small groups. We will learn from how the Holy Spirit is working in others and others will learn from how the Holy Spirit is working in you and in me.

Friends, as amazing as Sunday mornings are, and they are amazing here at Chestnut Grove with much love and fellowship being experienced, I believe that a critical part of discipleship happens --- of learning and growing happens – outside the Sunday worship service in these small group settings.

In these small groups, prayers will be lifted up, Scripture will be shared, some food will be consumed. But most importantly, we will be doing life together and will be experiencing the rich fellowship that Christ desires for His church in even more ways than we are experiencing right now.

Friends, I firmly believe that 2023 is going to be an amazing year for us as Chestnut Grove Church. And one of the reasons that I believe this is that I feel the LORD will help us to re-dig from this rich well that is meant to be part of our birthright as Christians.

So what is the big takeaway from this message?

I believe it is that just as the light of Christ will grow in us as we are intentional in abiding in Jesus each day, I believe that light will become a blaze as we become more intentional in practicing life together as small groups.

The Greek word in the New Testament is koinonia. And koinonia is this concept of fellowship and life together.

Sisters and brothers, these core values of abiding in Jesus and learning and growing in Jesus in community --- they will help us be strong vertically and horizontally. And it is as we do this well, we will be poised to share the ever-growing light of Jesus with a world that so needs Him. Next week, as we begin Advent and our journey towards Christmas, we will focus on our third and final core value and target – sharing Jesus with others.

Let’s pray…

Resources: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

# <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBGSa9UnS8E> Early Methodist Small Groups: Seven Minute Seminary