

A Disciple...Breaks Bread

Introduction

(Show picture of Chicago Bungalow) In the year 2001, there was a house a lot like this in Chicago. It was run down, weeds everywhere, apparently abandoned. Well, the house finally came up for auction because of back taxes. And when the people who bought the house went in to clean it up, what they found was horrifying. They didn't just find an run-down house, they actually found a man named Adolph Stick, who had apparently died of natural causes. He was sitting alone in his reading chair, and right next to Adolph Stick was a newspaper. In the year 2001, he was sitting next to a newspaper dated 1997. Apparently, this man had been dead for four years, and no one even noticed, not a neighbor, not a relative, not a friend. (TITLE SLIDE) Adolf Stick was certainly not in the fire. His embers of connection had died out long ago. I mean, how does someone die and no one notices?

Today, we need to talk about the relational aspect of being a disciple. Remember, the vision of Living Hope Church is to be a church that makes disciples who make more disciples. And in order to do that, we believe at a minimum, we should commit to W+2—we should commit to corporate **worship** which should fuel our **witness**. Additionally, the +2 is 1st—Small Groups, and 2nd—Service. Today I'm going to be discussing Small Groups—about how we can stay connected like the coals of that fire.

But as I talk about Small Groups, I'm not going to give you the structure or content of our groups here at Living Hope Church. I'm not going to be talking about where our small groups will take place or who should lead them. In fact, we still have a lot of praying and discussing about the details of our Small Groups here. So please pray with us as we formulate a plan to make small groups an integral part of our ministry through which we will deepen our ability to make disciples who make disciples.

So today, what I want to do is teach you the mindset, the attitude, the beliefs you should have about community life that will help you be a productive member of any small group that you are a part of here at Living Hope Church.

So, to boil it down: (**SLIDE**) A disciple of Jesus breaks bread, which means he or she does life *together* with other disciples.

Let's open up our Bibles to Acts 2, verse 46: here we learn about the early church and their regular activities. The Bible says that, "Every day [the disciples] continued to meet together," where? In two different places.

First of all, they met in the temple courts. Sounds a lot like what we are doing right now. That's why part of our mission is a commitment to corporate worship—the **Big W**.

But secondly, the Bible says they did what? It says they broke bread. And where did they do that? They did it in their homes. Now, a lot of people think, "Well, okay, breaking bread, that means they shared the Lord's Supper. They had communion together in their homes." And they did, but that's not completely what the phrase breaking bread means. It means much more than just that.

In the New Testament, meals were extremely important. And these early disciples met together very regularly to have fellowship—to do life together. And a primary way they did this was by eating together.

Meals today, for most people, are quite different than this. Today is the age of fast food. Eat and run. Meals are just a way to get some energy before we run off to the next thing.

But the meals in the New Testament were much more like our Thanksgiving meals, where people gathered together and there would be several rounds of food, and they would stay late. There was a *relational* aspect to these meals. People were doing life together.

But a huge problem in the church today is that people are *friendly*, but we don't create an environment where people can truly *make friends*—where people are really known.

Now, I shared this material many years ago with the Union people, but a refresher will be good. The CtK folks haven't heard this before—and it is so instrumental in getting a proper perspective on small groups.

SO—the problem with much of the church today is that we have all tended to put on masks. We act like we're living in the *Land of "Doing Just Fine."*

The *Land of "Doing Just Fine"* is place where we are surrounded by nicely groomed people who smile broadly and shake each others' hands firmly. Our conversations go something like this:

"Hi, Jeff. How ya doin'"

"Doin' fine. Matt. Yourself?"

"Fine, Jeff. Fine. Couldn't be finer. Fine day, eh?"

"Fine indeed, Matt. Oh, hi Ken. How ya doin'?"

"Well, hello, Jeff. I'm doin' fine..."

...and on and on it goes with the "doing fines." We're all fine, just fine. Thank you very much.

But the time has come for us who say we are "doin' just fine" to acknowledge the truth: We are *not* fine, not fine at all. We're hurting. We're lonely and disconnected, confused, and frightened. We are convinced there is no real help for our issues and that the best thing we can do is to hide our true identities.

If we could take off our masks, many in this room would say, "I'm tired...really tired. I feel betrayed—betrayed by what I have been taught, betrayed by my own behavior, and betrayed by my community of faith. And most of all, I feel betrayed by God himself." But we keep the mask on, because we believe if we ever revealed our true selves, we would just be rejected. Why would all these holy people in church want to hang out with a sinner like me, right?

And this belief system is a huge hindrance to Biblical Community! So I ask: How can we get from living with a mask to living with openness and authenticity? How can we get to a life of breaking bread with one another, where we truly live out life together?

Well, to help us answer that, I want to give you an illustration straight from a book *TrueFaced*, by Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and John Lynch...

To Please or to Trust?

So...the day comes when we are forced to choose. We stand before two roads, and our choice will make all the difference. We may not even realize we are making this choice,

but we all make it many times on our journey. It's the most important ongoing decision any of us will make as Christians.

As we're walking down life's road, we arrive at a tall pole with signs pointing in two different directions. **(SLIDE)** The marker leading to the left simply says *Pleasing God*. The one leading to the right reads *Trusting God*. It's hard to choose one over the other, because both roads have a good feel to them. We must choose only one, and it will indelibly mark the way we live.

Pleasing God and *Trusting God* represent the primary motives of our hearts that cause us to act in a certain way. These motives, in turn, produce certain values, which produce multiple actions.

Pleasing God and *Trusting God* are both admirable, but since I can have only one primary motive, I ask myself, "Which of these motives best reflects the relationship I want to have with God?"

In the end, I choose the path marked *Pleasing God*. The *Trusting God* path just seems too—passive. I want a fully alive experience with God. The *Pleasing God* path seems like the best way. I think, *All right then, I am going to please God. I'll discipline myself to achieve this life goal. I will please him and he will be pleased with me.*

So I set off with confidence. In time I come to a door with a sign that reads **(SLIDE)** *Striving to Be All God Wants Me to Be*. These words reflect the values that flow out of the motive of *Pleasing God*, and they describe how we believe we should act. Since my motive is a determination to please God, I will value being all God wants me to be. So, I open the door by turning the knob of **(SLIDE)** *Effort*. As I enter this enormous room, a hostess with a beautiful smile greets me and says in an almost too polite tone, "Welcome to *The Room of Good Intentions*." **(SLIDE)**

Oh, yes. I like the ring of that. I like being perceived as someone who is well intentioned. "Well, thanks," I answer. "I think I've found my home. How are you?"

The hostess pauses for a moment and then reaches into her purse to pull out a mask bearing a guarded expression and a thin smile. She puts it on and answers, "Fine. Just fine. And you?"

The entire room suddenly gets quiet, awaiting my answer. "Well, umm, thanks for asking. I'm kind of struggling with some things right now, some areas that don't seem to be in keeping with who I know I am supposed to be. I'm not really sure I'm doing well on a lot of—" The hostess cuts me off and hands me a similar mask. I don't really want to put it on, but others in the room encouraging me to do so. I want so much to be accepted here so I put it on.

And now everything feels different. I am quickly overcome with the realization that less self-revelation will be a smart move here. I realize that no one in this room wants to hear about my struggles, pain, or doubt. If I want to be welcome here, I'd better keep my cards closer to my vest and give the appearance of sufficiency. So, I slowly and carefully say the words, "Actually, I'm fine. I'm doing just fine. Thanks for asking." Satisfied, everyone in the room turns back to their conversations.

You see, everyone in *The Room of Good Intentions* has the value of *Striving to Be all God Wants Them to Be*. They are sincerely determined to be godly. Their value produces actions that are best summarized by an enormous banner on the back wall that reads **(SLIDE)**, *Working on My Sin to Achieve an Intimate Relationship with God*. They have made it their goal to be godly, and they fully expect the same of everyone else in the room.

As I read the words on the banner, I can't help but think, *Sounds a lot like, "Be holy as your heavenly Father is holy." Yep. I'm in the right place. The people here have sincerity, perseverance, courage, diligence, full-hearted fervency, a desire to please God, and a sold-out determination to pursue excellence. Yes, this is the place I've been looking for. One day soon, God and I will be close.*

Yet, as weeks turn into months, I can't help noticing that many people in this room sound a bit cynical and look pretty tired. Many of them seem alone. Quite a few seem superficial—guarded. After a while I realize I've been shifting too. I no longer feel as comfortable or relaxed here. I have this nagging anxiety that if I don't keep behaving well—if I don't control my sin enough—I'll be on the outs with everyone in the room. And with God!

So, I start investing more effort into sinning less, and I feel better...for a while. But the more time I spend in *The Room of Good Intentions*, the more disappointment I feel. Despite all my striving, all my efforts, I keep sinning! In fact, some days I'm fixated simply on trying *not* to sin. It feels like I am making every effort to please a God who never seems pleased enough! I carry an overwhelming sense of guilt because I have to hide my sin—from everyone in the room and from God.

I am so tired of pretending and keeping up appearances. As I search for the door, I decide to retrace my steps and head out for the *Trusting God* trail?

So back I go to the fork in the road. **(SLIDE)** It still feels wrong to take the road marked *Trusting God*—as if I'd be getting away with something. This road seems less heroic than the other. A bit ethereal and vague. And it appears to give me nothing much to do other than, well...trust. All I ever heard in the *Room of Good Intentions* was that I have to "sell out, care more, get on fire, buck up, shape up, and tighten up." This road doesn't seem to give me any of that.

But I think, *I'm only risking a little time and effort. Besides, the cracks in my mask are getting bigger and bigger—I don't know how long I can keep bluffing.*

So, I begin walking on life's path with the motive of *Trusting God*. Eventually, I spot a door, and as I approach it I read the words on the sign above it **(SLIDE)**: *Living Out of Who God Says I Am. What in the world does that mean? It can't mean what I think it means! When do I get to do something here? Where's the part where I get to prove my sincerity?* I shake my head and stoop down to read what is says on the doorknob **(SLIDE)**...*Humility.*

Suddenly everything snaps into focus. I've tried so hard, I've supplied all the self-effort the other room demanded, yet received nothing but insecurity and duplicity. I've run out of answers, run out of breath, run out of ability, and so I cry out, *God, if anything good is*

to come out of this whole deal, you will have to do it. I've tried. I can't. I'm so tired. Help me. With those words I turn the doorknob.

As I step inside, another hostess immediately approaches. She smiles kindly and, with a voice that is at once knowing and reassuring, says softly, "Welcome **(SLIDE)** to *The Room of Grace*." I answer tentatively, "Thank...you."

She presses, "How are *you*?" The room grows quiet.

Well, I've been here before and so, not to be duped twice, I answer, "I'm fine. Pretty fine...Who wants to know?" But the room stays quiet. Gun-shy from the first room, I interpret their silence as judgment, and so I yell out, "Alright, listen! I'm *not* fine. I haven't been fine for a long time. I'm tired. I feel guilty, lonely, and depressed. I'm sad most of the time and I can't make my life work. And if any of you knew half my daily thoughts, you'd want me out of your little club. So there, I'm doing *not* fine! Thanks for asking!"

I reach for the doorknob to leave and hear a voice from far back in the crowd. "That's *it*? That's all you've *got*? I'll take your confusion, guilt, and bad thoughts, and I'll raise you compulsive sin and chronic lower back pain! Oh, and I'm in debt up to my ears. You better have more than that puny list if you want to play in my league!"

The greeter smiles and says, "I think he means you're welcome here." Emboldened, I smile, and call back, "Do you struggle with forgetting birthdays?" He walks right up to me all the way from the back, puts his hands on my shoulders and says, "Birthdays? I can't remember my *own*!" Everyone in the room laughs the warm laughter of understanding, and I am ushered into the fold of a sweet family of kind and painfully real people. There is not a mask to be seen anywhere.

As I walk further into the room, I notice a huge banner on the back wall. This one reads **(SLIDE)**: *Standing with God, with My Sin in Front of Me, Working on It Together. I think, Wait, this can't be right. How can that be? It sounds presumptuous. Imagining God with his arm around me as we view my sin together? Come on! Surely they've written it down wrong. I've always been told that my sin is still a barrier between God and me. If it could be true that God actually stands with me, in front of my sin, well, that would change everything. If it were true, God has never moved away from me no matter what I've done! Oh my goodness, I'd have to rethink everything.*

Despite my doubts, I can't help but notice that in this room, *The Room of Grace*, everyone seems vitally alive. The people are obviously imperfect, full of compromise and struggle, but they're authentic enough to talk about it and ask for help. Many have a level of integrity, maturity, love, laughter, freedom, and vitality that I don't recall seeing in the people in the other room. I feel the start of something I haven't felt in...well, as long as I can remember. It's safety or something like it. *Toto, I don't think we're in Kansas anymore (TITLE SLIDE).*

Living in the Room of Grace

You see the difference between these two rooms, right? At Living Hope Church, we to create small groups that are within *The Room of Grace*. And this goes way beyond the structure and curriculum that we use. It's in the Room of Grace where we can live as

disciples who break bread with one another. The Room of Grace allows us to interact with openness, authenticity, forgiveness and acceptance.

You see, God has done something amazing. Through Christ's death and resurrection, those that trust in Him have received justification. That means that God sees us as righteous. The righteousness that Christ has, has been imputed to us who trust in Him. We are completely, 100% righteous in God's sight. So we need to view ourselves *and* one another as saints who are completely righteous. But yet, we do still deal with our sinful nature. We can't hide that from God or from one another. Therefore, we must be willing to take off our masks and reveal ourselves and permeate GRACE, GRACE, GRACE. Grace does some amazing things to help us create spiritual community.

First of all **(SLIDE)**, **Grace melts our masks**. Masks abound in *The Room of Good Intentions*. It is the world of false appearances. It breeds compulsive sinning. In contrast, *The Room of Grace* is full of light—not darkness. Grace creates authenticity. And authenticity melts masks, and reveals our true face.

To create the Room of Grace, Larry Crabb writes that...

Integrity is the first step: We must admit to our community, to a spiritual friend or a spiritual director, who we are at our worst. We must tell our stories to someone without consciously leaving out a chapter.

And a second way that grace changes our spiritual community **(SLIDE)** is that **Grace changes how we treat each other when we sin**. In the Room of Grace we experience true intimacy. We no longer see one another with our sin between us. We no longer come to our relationships feeling ashamed and unacceptable. Larry Crabb wrote that the response of the community to our true faces is of utmost importance.

If the response is anything less than unconditional love, our brokenness becomes fragmentation...We disconnect from ourselves and from others.

In the environment of grace we need to see one another as saints who sin, rather than as sinners who are saved. If we truly believe in our hearts that we are saints, then we're able to stand with each other in the reality of our sin. But if we don't believe that, and instead view each other as sinners, we will demand that others work on their sin in order to have a relationship with us. If we do that, we will then be tempted to hide our sin from one another.

Grace radically changes how we see each other and how we deal with sin. We can now be exactly who we are, with all our issues and problems and unresolved stuff, and still fully experience grace, love, and acceptance. C.S. Lewis wrote that God "work on us in all sorts of ways, but above all, He works on us through each other."

This is the type of community I would love to foster within our small groups here at Living Hope Church. Only in this type of community can we be matured into disciples who make disciples.

Breaking Bread

So as we close, let go back to Acts 2 and keep the *Room of Grace* in mind as we talk about the fact that a disciple of Jesus breaks bread.

Let's look at two key thoughts about breaking bread. The first thought is this **(SLIDE): breaking bread demands extreme commitment**.

In Acts 2, what had just happened. Well, Peter had just preached about the resurrection of Jesus and 3,000 people on one day surrendered their lives to Christ. The church of Jesus Christ was just being birthed. And Verse 42 says these new believers did several things. It says that they were completely devoted *"to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."*

Now, the Greek word that is translated as fellowship is *koinonia*, and it means "to share." It means doing life together. And for us at Living Hope Church, we want some sort of Small Group to represent true Biblical community for each of you. Our Small Groups are family to us. We cry together. We laugh together. *We break bread*. And that isn't accidental—it is intentional, and it takes commitment.

Listen to this: too many of us have gotten into the habit of thinking about the Christian life as "my *personal* relationship with Christ." Of course, this is essential, because no one else can have a relationship with Jesus for you. It does have to be *personal*, but a relationship with Jesus was never intended to be *private*.

True Christian fellowship is living and experiencing God together as believers.

So breaking bread demands a commitment. A second thought is this **(SLIDE): breaking bread produces extreme results**. Look at the results from Acts 2.

Verse 43 says that *"everyone, all these believers were filled with awe and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles."* There was holy awe because of what God was doing through His people.

Now look at verses 44 and 45—how many of the believers were together? Would you answer that question? How many were together. The Bible says "all." *ALL were together and they had everything in common.*

What did they do? The Bible says, *"Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need."* That's amazing, isn't it?

And as we close today, look at what the Bible says in verse 46, *"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes. They ate together with gladness and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."*

What would happen if you were so committed to loving people God's way that non-believers looked at you and said, "I don't know about your belief, but your love is so real, I want to find out more about the God that is behind your love."

May God mold us into that type of community. **(SLIDE)** Let's pray...

Father, move on our hearts to truly be disciples, committed to loving you and loving one another. Father, I pray in the name of Jesus that You would so move us right now that we would be overwhelmed with Your love, and we would aggressively desire to share it with Your people.

God, give us that Acts 2 type of power. May we realize that our life is not our own. Lead us into a Biblical community where we do life intimately with one another, experiencing You in a new and a deeper way that those who don't know You would look on and say, "I want in on that," and we could introduce to them the author of this kind of love, Your Son, Jesus Christ.

Lord, if that's going to happen, we know we need your Spirit to move in us and change us. We ask you to do so in the precious name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.