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Learns and Grows in Community  
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*Romans 13:8-10,*  
*Galatians 6:1-2*

**Colossians 3:12-17**, “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. **Bear with one another** and, if anyone has a complaint against another, **forgive each other**; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; **teach and admonish one another** in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

**Romans 13:8-10 (NRSV)**, “Owe no one anything, except to **love one another**; for the one who **loves another** has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet;’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, **love is the fulfilling of the law.**”

**Galatians 6:1-2 (NRSV)**, “My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. **Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.**”

Today, we’re on to **Trait # 4 of a Healthy Disciple—a healthy disciple learns and grows in community. A healthy disciple is involved in spiritual and relational growth in the context of a safe and affirming group of like-minded believers.** Christians believe in one God, yet we describe God as a small group—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—in relationship with one another in a mutually supportive and enhancing way. During Jesus’ ministry, a significant amount of his time was spent with his small group, the apostles, modeling for them and teaching them how to love and support one another and how to function as a healthy small group. As we read in the Gospels about the interaction of Jesus with his small group of future leaders we see them **sharing** life together (*Mark 4:35-41*), learning to **pray** (*Luke 11:1*), **processing** the things that are challenging them (*Mark 10:23-31*) or that they don’t understand, such as asking Jesus to explain a parable (*Mark 4:10, 34*) so they can grasp the meaning, or inquiring why they had been unable to cure a hurting child (*Mark 9:28-29*). The apostles learn to **care** for one another (*John 13:34-35*), and they help each other to **grow** sometimes even through disagreements (*Mark 10:35-41*). **Given how Jesus models the importance and the value of learning and growing in community, it’s not a surprise that this becomes the pattern for the early church.**

We have many small groups at BBC that provide the opportunity for us to learn and grow in community. On Sunday morning, we have groups for people of all ages. On Monday morning

and evening, we have Men's groups here at the church. On Tuesday morning and evening, there's a Women's Bible study. Throughout the week, we have over 100 people meeting in small groups in homes in various towns. Then there are groups like the Worship Team, Choir, and Building and Grounds that have a clear task or purpose, but also provide the opportunity for social connection and support. It's great to be part of a healthy, well-functioning group. However, as Steve Macchia points out in his book, *Becoming a Healthy Disciple* (p. 88), "not every group is a healthy group. Many groups today are focused on the narcissistic needs of the participants rather than on the Bible, prayer and the most effective application of truth into the lives of those who gather together to study, reflect, learn, and grow."

Of course, our desire individually and as a congregation is for our small groups to function in a healthy, rewarding manner. Steve describes how that happens and what it looks like (page 95). "For our Christian community experience to be the very best possible, we will need to come before God with an earnest desire to help others grow in maturity as we open ourselves up to their input into our lives as well. If we're going to experience the richness of learning and growing in community, then we need to be in a covenant group with people we trust and with whom we we can share our lives through thick and thin." Being in a group is committing to one another and saying, "I want to grow up in Christ with you, I want to play with you, laugh with you, cry with you, pray with you, share with you, study with you, and grow with you, and I hope you want the same. We are committing to live out all the 'one anothers' of the Scriptures."

The "one anothers" of the Scriptures are the many mandates of how we as Christ followers are to interact with and treat one another. The New Testament lists many "one anothers" we're to practice with each other. The foundational and most important is that we are to **Love one another** (*John 13:34-35; Romans 13:8; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12*). Love for one another is demonstrated and shown in a variety of ways. For example, as we **care for one another** (*1 Corinthians 12:24-25*), **greet one another** (*1 Peter 5:14*), **bear one another's burdens** (*Galatians 6:2*), and **encourage and build up one another** (*1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13, 10:25*).

Part of learning and growing together is facing challenges, disagreements and conflicts, and handling them appropriately. So, we're told to **confess your sins and pray for one another** (*James 5:16*). **Bear with one another and forgive one another** (*Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:13*). **Admonish one another** (*Colossians 3:16*), and **submit to one another** (*Ephesians 5:21*). In the best of small groups, we seek to **serve one another in love** (*Galatians 5:13*) and to **spur one another on toward love and good deeds** (*Hebrews 10:24*).

**These "one anothers" are not optional for the Christian life; this is how God tells us to live with one another.** Think about how different your life would be, your family interactions, your small group, our church, our nation, the world; if everyone who professed or claimed to be a Christian actually lived out these "one anothers" in a consistent way that was obvious to anyone. It is painful and sad to observe that we are far from doing so. Being in a small group is a blessing and a gift; especially in hard times; we have a circle of caring support that's

invaluable. Diana Bennett put it this way, “When small groups are grounded in prayer and proper preparation, when they are facilitated and allow ownership and high trust levels to develop among members, then the members experience meaningful community, care and connection with God and one another. It’s out of that time together that spiritual growth becomes evident, life change occurs, and healthy disciples of Jesus Christ are formed.”

Steve Macchia shares **five principles for developing healthy community experiences that enable us to learn and grow**. With each one I’m going to share a quote from a BBC small group member that helps to illustrate it. When a group is working well, it is a

**Safe Place to Share** – safety in community means that we’re free to be who we are while at the same time growing to become all that God intends. One example of this from the life of Jesus and the apostles is in *Mark 4:35-41* in which the disciples are in a boat with Jesus when a storm suddenly comes upon them on the Sea of Galilee. They feel free to share their fears and their lack of faith. Jesus calms the storm and their fears, and without saying it, reminds them they’re all in the same boat. Anything that was going to happen to them was going to happen to him also. We’re also in the same boat with our small group members, we have our own fears, and in a good group it is a safe place to share those fears and to be vulnerable knowing that Jesus is in our midst and present with us. One BBC person shared, “Being in a small group helps me feel more connected to our church. It is a place where daily inspirations and struggles can be **shared** in confidence within an intimate setting and support is limitless and without judgement. It is a place where we have all grown in faith together.”

**Safe Place to Pray** – The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray as John the Baptist taught his disciples (*Luke 11:1*). Jesus replied by teaching them what we call the Lord’s Prayer, but which more accurately perhaps should be known as the Disciple’s Prayer because it’s how we as disciples are to pray. This prayer is brief, simple and concise. In a small group we learn it’s safe to pray out loud in a simple and concise way, and praying for one another strengthens the bonds of a small group or any two persons. “The specific Small Group **prayers** offered for my family and me this past year have been invaluable to me.”

**Safe Place to Process** – In *Mark 10:23-27*, we see an example of the disciples asking questions, trying to gain clarity and process something that Jesus told them. “Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ And **the disciples were perplexed at these words**. But Jesus said to them again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’ **They were greatly astounded** and said to one another, ‘Then who can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.’” A BBC small grouper wrote, “Small group Bible study has given me **a safe place** to ask questions, and share doubts and successes with other seekers. The discussions are always eye opening and useful, no matter which study we use to approach the Bible. The advantage of sharing with people in such an intimate setting is a profound sense of community.”

**Safe Place to Care** – In *John 13:34-35*, Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Our theme next week is a healthy disciple commits to loving and caring relationships so we’ll talk about this in greater depth next week. One of you shared about your group, “Being in a small group, sharing one another’s concerns and celebrations has brought us closer together. **There is an intimate level of true caring and concern among our members for which I am very grateful.**”

**Safe Place to Grow** – In *Mark 10:35-41*, we find the story of James and John asking for positions of prominence in glory, which ticked off the other disciples. Sometimes in small groups we have to grow in our communicating and interacting especially when we have different opinion, views or perspectives. Spiritual growth sometimes involves addressing and dealing with conflict as Jesus had to help the disciples to do in *Mark 10*. Like in a well-functioning family, a healthy small group learns and grows together, and by doing so becomes closer and more understanding of one another. One of you noted, “Not only does our Small Group **help us learn more** about God, Jesus, the Bible, and our faith, but it is our immediate family within our extended Christian family at BBC.”

**Jesus tells us in *Matthew 18:20*, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” We experience the truth of this statement as we learn and grow in community.** I conclude by giving one of you the final word.

“I cannot imagine what the past 15 years would have been like without my small group. This is a place for me to feel convicted of my sins in a very loving and safe place that helps me get back on track and reconnected with God. It has also been a place to feel validated and cheered on in my never-ending journey of discipleship. No other place do I feel so loved for exactly who I am: bad parts and good equally. I have loved every member that our all-knowing God has sent to our group!”

**Blessing: “Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. Let all that you do be done in love.”** *1 John 3:18, 1 Corinthians 16:14*

### **Questions for Discussion or Reflection**

1. If you’re a part of a small group of any kind, share one thing about your experience in your group that you especially appreciate. Note the variety of responses that people identify. What does that tell you?
2. Why do you think there are so many “one another” statements in the New Testament (love, care for, encourage, pray, admonish, serve, etc.)? What does that tell you about the nature of the Christian life? About being part of the church?

3. What would happen and what would it look like if every person in the church was actively trying to live out the “one anothers?”
4. Of the various “one another’s” in the New Testament that were shared in the scriptures and sermon, which one do you find the easiest to practice? What is one you find more difficult to do—what can you do about that?
5. Based on the sermon and the chapter in Steve Macchia’s book, if you’re reading it, what steps can you and your small group take to become even healthier and more Biblical?