

Next STEPS Week 4
October 7, 2018

Welcome to the fourth week of a series Next Steps. As in *next steps to a better you*. If you missed any of the series just visit our website. Today, we are going to look at another step that is another important step that is *acknowledged* as an important step in all kinds of organizations and efforts.

- This is a principle leveraged to help people succeed in business and run successful organizations.
- This step leveraged by weight watchers and diet groups everywhere.
- This is a principle that is employed by gyms and health clubs and physical fitness and training programs.
- It is a principle that is leveraged and used in AA and every kind of recovery program there is.
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This principal is leverages in all kinds of clubs and cultures which is actually a biblical principal that somewhere along the way the Church more or less lost sight of. But we have learned this principle is absolutely vital for you to grow as a disciple. To rediscover this step we are going to look at a passage taken from the beginning of the Bible. We will be looking at Genesis. at the very beginning of the story we read:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Gen. 1:1

And after describing the constitutive elements of creation the Bible tells us God created Adam, and then:

*God saw everything that he had created
and saw that it was good*

Genesis 1.2

The whole world is created good. There is no sin in the world. There is no war, no disease, it is a complete paradise. In the course of this creation, we learn...

The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and care for it. Gen 2: 15

All the world is good and God gives the first man Adam a job, a mission, to care and cultivate the land. It's just a footnote, but an interesting one... Work is not a punishment. It is part of God's plan. And it was part of what Adam did in paradise. A gift from God and he gave it to humanity before anything went wrong in the world. Adam is in paradise. He has a good relationship with God. He has a good job. He has a good place to live, good food to eat. All is good, which makes this next verse somewhat surprising. Then the Lord God said:

It is not good Genesis 2.18

Everything is good in this good creation, except for one thing that is not good.

It is not good for the man to be alone. Genesis 2.18

God recognizes a problem in Adam's life that even Adam at this point does not truly understand. So, here's what happened: God said...

*I will make him a suitable partner.
So God formed out of the ground
various wild animals and various birds of the air,
and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them;
whatever the man called each would be its name.*

But none proved to be the suitable partner for the man.
Genesis 2.18, 20

Didn't God know that none of the animals would satisfy Adam's need for companionship? Didn't He know all the animals would fall short? Of course God did. He knew, *but Adam didn't*. As the animals fail to meet Adam's need for companionship, for a suitable partner, he is helping Adam to realize that he needs *human* relationships.

He's building his desire for fellowship and companionship. We can be alone and lack friendships and companionship and not even realize we're missing. So one of the very first things that Adam learns, is this need. And you know the story from there.

Relationships are key to physical health, mental health, emotional health, even financial health, And what is true for every other avenue of life is true for your spiritual growth and health.

Until you have friends in faith, until you leverage intentional relationships to grow as a follower of Christ, you are limiting and inhibiting your spiritual growth. As long as you are all alone when it comes to following Jesus, you will not be all you *could be* as a follower of Christ. You are limiting what Jesus can do through you and in you and how he can change and transform you to be the great mom or dad or husband or wife the great boss or business leader, the great student leader you want to be. It is not good for you to be alone in facing your faith and facing a world that is actually hostile to your faith. God says it is not good for Adam to be alone
Because God is not alone.

God is a community of three persons –Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are continually loving one another and glorifying one another for all eternity. In a perfect community that is, in fact, a small group.

The step we're looking at today is what we call **small groups**, or faith sharing groups. And I am fully aware of what a hard sell they are in a Catholic setting where anything beyond the one hour once a week deal is unheard of, but just hear me out anyway.

First thing, - Small Groups are where our big church gets small. It is great to be in a big church, and there are lots of advantages to it, personally I love it. It's fun, it's exciting, we can do a lot of things small churches can't do. But let's face it. This can sometimes be impersonal.

There is something about "*everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came.*"

That is just not going to happen here, where we've got 2,500 families, 900 of whom come on any given weekend to one of 4 different Masses. Small Groups are where our great big church gets small, up close and personal. Its where everyone can find friendship and fellowship.

People, who *know* you, know *about* you and *care about* you too. Friends in faith will help you go further, faster in the direction you want to go in.

Small groups are our strategy to get you friends in faith.

- They're the place where you can find encouragement from others who face the same challenges and struggles you are facing.
- They are place to learn from other people's life experiences. You don't have to figure everything in life out on your own. You can learn from other people's successes and failures.
- You can learn from how other people parent or manage money or lead a department.

They rely on a simple formula: 70-90 minutes once a week, the group spends some time catching up on everyone's lives, the group goes deeper in gospel message for the weekend, there are discussion questions, led by the group leader. The session ends with brief prayer, no one is ever asked to say or do anything they're not comfortable with.

Small Groups are where our great big church gets up close and personal. Small Groups are our delivery system for member care. Ultimately our groups are the way we care for you and look out for you as a church family. I can't do it all, and that's not God's plan anyway.

God's plan is that the members of the church engage in a mutual care *for one another*. Because you know the members of your group you're going to be more qualified to provide support and care than I will ever be.

The problem with small groups though is that they are like retirement savings. If you *wait* until you need it, you won't have it *when* you need it. You save and invest now for your retirement so you will have it when you need it. Here is the truth: trouble is coming your way eventually.

I don't want to sound overly dramatic, but it's true. If you get in a group now, when that trouble comes you'll be better prepared for whatever life brings. I could tell you some stories of people in this parish who have been supported through trauma and sickness, through loss and grief, through conflict and divorce, by their small groups. When that stuff comes your way, you need more than platitudes and expressions of consolation from your church.

You need a network of care and support and that's what your small group can provide. And getting in a group is not just about what you *get*, but what you

give. The opportunity to pour into the lives of others is also a richly rewarding thing to do. Small Groups are where our big church gets small, they're the delivery system for member care, but more than that and most of all Small Groups are schools for discipleship. I like to say that Small Groups are schools for discipleship. Spiritual growth and health requires more than just a good relationship with God.

Spiritual maturity, just like emotional maturity is developed in relationships. You were made for community. You were made for relationships. The very nature of reality begins with a community of Father, Son and Spirit.

We grow in prayer, in our appreciation and celebration of the sacraments, in our understanding of love of Scripture, in all the steps of discipleship further and faster if we're doing it in relationships with others. Heaven itself will be a relational experience.

So today out in the atrium, you have the opportunity to leverage relationships and community for your spiritual growth. Give it a try. And give it a try even if you've tried it before and, for whatever reason, had a bad experience. It's true some people have. You've had a bad meal before, and you still eat. Give groups another try. There are men's groups, women's groups, moms groups, seniors groups -Groups that meet at nearly every time and day of the week. You can sign up for a short term 6 week commitment if you're hesitating, and give it a try that way.

Discipleship is simply following the Lord, step by step, on the path of greatness. It's following the Lord step by step...In the direction of discipleship. A little bit more today than yesterday. A little bit more tomorrow than today And in the process discovering a more successful a great life.