

When we say we are about loving God, loving others and making disciples we are saying we are committed to a relational process of discipleship. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is relational. Making disciples is relational. Jesus, himself, made disciples in the context of relationship. I would even argue that a person cannot rightly understand the Bible outside the context of relationship. I would also argue that discipleship never takes place outside the context of relationships.

With everything hinging on relationship, how should we understand ***Spiritual Community***?

My goal, by the end of this article, is to help you understand what ***Spiritual Community*** is. It has been my observation there is some misunderstanding regarding this imperative element of discipleship. In this, and in future articles, I will begin to lay out how we can do it well.

Here are fifteen statements of what ***Spiritual Community*** is. These are not suggestions for ***Spiritual Community***. They are essential to it. So, here they are in no particular order, except the first.

SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY IS...

- A relationship in **CHRIST**.
- A relationship of **TRANSFORMATION**.
- A relationship of **BELONGING**.
- A relationship of **ACCOUNTABILITY**.
- A relationship of **REFLECTION**.
- A relationship of **CONFESSION**.
- A relationship of **ENCOURAGEMENT**.
- A relationship of **HONESTY**.
- A relationship of **TRUST**.
- A relationship of **COMMITMENT**.
- A relationship of **CONSISTENCY**.
- A relationship of **CHALLENGE**.
- A relationship of **CELEBRATION**.
- A relationship of **VULNERABILITY**.
- A relationship of **MISSION-MINDEDNESS**.

Your relationship with Christ is first and foremost in the discipleship process. It is the principal relationship. Being ***in Christ*** means we are in a relationship with Christ. If you or the other person(s) you do ***Spiritual Community*** with are not ***in Christ*** you cannot have ***Spiritual Community***. Being ***in Christ*** also means you are living in the Spirit of Christ or by the Holy Spirit. Because of this, when you do ***Spiritual Community*** it is always Christ, you and other people(s).

Get this. This is important. When we do ***Spiritual Community*** it is no different than when we practice other spiritual disciplines in that Christ is the one at work. He works in and through us to transform both us and others. This leads us to our next statement.

Spiritual Community is a relationship of ***transformation***. Christ is at work in you by his Spirit, transforming you from the inside out, from the “old person” into the “new person.” He also works in and through others to bring about this ***transformation*** in you. Again, Christ is also at work in and through you to bring about ***transformation*** in others. So what does this mean?

- ***Spiritual Community*** makes a tangible difference in our lives. If you believe you are practicing ***Spiritual Community***, but you are not living, feeling and thinking differently than you did before I doubt you are experiencing genuine ***Spiritual Community***.
- Your relationship with God is not just your own. The degree to which you live in Christ either helps or hinders God’s ability to use you to accomplish His work in others. It is not all about you.

- Other people's relationship with God **IS** your business. To use Paul's analogy of the body, when one part of the body develops cancer other parts of the body don't say, "That has nothing to do with me. It's none of my business."

So let's stop here for now and allow this to be an ongoing conversation. I encourage you to take some time to ponder these questions...

#1 – How many people does it take to do ***Spiritual Community*** as described here?

#2 – Am I in a relationship with at least one other follower of Jesus and practicing these 15 statements?

#3 – Who is/are the people in my life I practice ***Spiritual Community*** with?

#4 – How is my relationship with Christ helping or hindering God's transformative work in others?

#5 – How are the relationships of those I do ***Spiritual Community*** with helping/hindering God's transformative work in my life?