

# *The Three Dimensional Life*

## *Part 1 - In*

Luke 6:12-19

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ January 10, 2016 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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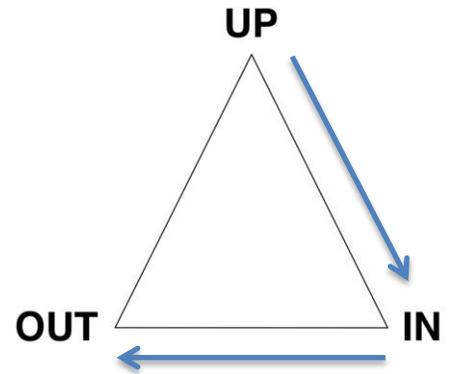
<sup>12</sup> Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. <sup>13</sup> And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: <sup>14</sup> Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, <sup>15</sup> and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, <sup>16</sup> and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

<sup>17</sup> He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>18</sup> They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. <sup>19</sup> And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. (Luke 6:12-19, NRSV)

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Today we're in the middle of a three-week sermon series where we are asking what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Remember, if you are a disciple you are not just a person who admires Jesus from afar but a person who has decided that the most important thing in your life is to live the way Jesus would live if he were in your shoes. This is especially true when it comes to relationships, and for Jesus, as we see illustrated in the passage we just read, there were three relationships that defined his life.

First, as Jesus climbs the mountain to spend the night praying we see that his relationship "up" with his Father was primary. Then, when Jesus comes down the mountain to form a long term community of friends we see that his relationship "in" with the disciples was also central. Finally, as Jesus goes with his disciples to bring healing and good news to those in need we are reminded that his relationship "out" with the hurting world around him was also a priority.<sup>1</sup>



Up-In-Out. This is the three-dimensional relational life of Christ that he modeled for us as a pattern for our own lives. Last week we talked about how our relationship upwards with our Heavenly Father is meant to be our primary relationship because it is in and through our relationship with God that we find our deepest and most permanent identity in life as his beloved sons and daughters, and also where we discover our ultimate direction and purpose in this life. This morning, then, we will move to see how our relationship "up" with God leads us to our relationships "in" with our fellow disciples in the church.

To begin with, when we come to know God we come to know a God who is one God but who exists in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This mysterious divine nature of God, which the church calls the Trinity, is a reality we Christians confess even though we will never understand it. Though One, God is also three. God is, by nature, community. God is family, if you will – Father, Son and Spirit. What's more, we see this Triune nature of God reflected in the universe around us. In the creation accounts of Genesis 1-2, for example, we see that when God created there was a complimentary pattern woven into the universe. There is heaven but also earth, sea and land, light and dark, night and day, male and female. In creation when different things are made to come together in dynamic unity and then,

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<sup>1</sup> This shape and description were developed by Mike Breen, *Building a Discipleship Culture*, (Pawley's Island, SC: Three Dimension Ministries, 2011), 67-83.

themselves, generate more and more life and beauty through their unity, when that happens creation is reflecting its Creator.<sup>2</sup>

All this is most profoundly evidenced in humanity. Humans are distinct in creation because we were made in God's image, made to reflect the nature and character of God in even greater ways than the rest of creation. And one of the main ways we reflect God is in the way that we were made to live in deep community. No human being was created to exist as an island. In fact, there is a longing in every single human soul for true community, and life will never be whole for you until you find it. You were made to belong.

I recently read the story of Englishman Danny Wallace. Some years ago Danny traveled to Switzerland to attend the funeral of his great-uncle Gallus Breitenmoser who had died at the age of ninety. It was there that he first heard about a crazy idea his uncle had pursued years before. Following World War II, Gallus grew tired of city life with all its gossip and slander and meanness, and so he decided he wanted a different life. Since he owned some land he started a farm and invited others to join him to live and work in what he hoped would be a community of mutual respect. His goal was to attract 100 people to join him in this effort. He only got three, and so after a week he gave it up. But for the rest of his life, even after he died, his family never stopped talking about old Gallus' crazy idea.

Well, Danny didn't think it was so crazy. In fact, the more he thought about it, the more he wanted to see if he could do something similar. So when he returned home, that next week he placed a brief ad in a small London newspaper that read, simply: *Join me*. Then he left his address and instructions to send along a passport photo.

A few days later Danny received a letter from Christian Jones, who included a photo of himself and a menu from an Indian restaurant in his part of London. The idea had become reality. 1 person and joined Danny. It was enough to inspire him to put up a website which, in short time, grew his community from 1 to 101, surpassing his great-uncle's goal. It was amazing! There were no meetings planned. No tasks to accomplish. No mission to fulfill. All people had been asked to do was join by sending a photo. People had signed up for no other reason than simply to belong.

Soon, however, people began to ask about the purpose of this new community. So Danny got creative. He called his new community the Karma Army and sent out an email which revealed that their purpose was to each undertake one random act of kindness every Friday, now to be known as Good Fridays. So people started buying sandwiches or newspapers and handing them out in the park. Groceries were carried. Neighbors' cars were washed. Kind words were spoken on the street. All done freely as a part of this new community.

As some of you may know, Join-Me.co.uk is now a web site where thousands and thousands of people from around the world have gone to join the Karma Army with no club dues, no regularly scheduled meetings, and no mandatory rules and regulations to follow.<sup>3</sup> People, all kinds of people, have simply wanted to belong.

Why? People are starving for community, and they're so hungry they'll join simply because they are asked to do so. And if they are not invited into community they will go out looking for it.

I spend a lot of time in coffee shops, lots of different coffee shops. I've noticed that most coffee shops often have the same people sitting there day after day in the same place drinking the same drinks. The same is true of bars, just with different beverages. These are spaces where people have found a place to belong. I believe that Starbucks has been so hugely successful not because they make the best cup of coffee – in my opinion, they don't – but because they have done such a good job of creating community.

In fact, Forbes Magazine a few years back reported that Starbucks at that time had done such a good job of creating community that they found they couldn't get people to leave their stores which, as a result, had become overcrowded. People would just sit there all day for the price of a cup of coffee. Their answer, at least according to this article, was to redesign their stores – maybe you've noticed this – to make them less comfortable and, thus, speed up the flow of traffic.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> I'm indebted to Tim Keller for this insight in this post: <http://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/the-bible-and-same-sex-relationships-a-review-article>

<sup>3</sup> Cited by Mike Breen, *Building a Discipleship Culture*, 78-79.

<sup>4</sup> See article at <http://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2012/05/29/starbucks-hold-on-us-is-bigger-than-coffee-its-psychology/>

God made us to belong and if we have to go to a website or a coffee shop or a bar or a stadium to find community, we'll go. In fact, one of the deepest human hurts which exists is the pain of being excluded or left out. We've all felt that pain.

It is not accidental that the very first thing Jesus does in his public ministry is to go out and create a community. Right after his baptism Jesus immediately begins to call his disciples, these men with whom he would spend the next three years.<sup>5</sup> Biblical scholars estimate that Jesus spent 18 months, just about half his three-year public ministry, simply spending time alone with his disciples. Remember all those accounts in the Gospels where Jesus is wandering around Galilee trying to get away from the crowds and remain anonymous so he can be alone to connect with his inner circle? Creating this "in" community was crucial for Jesus.

Why? Well, when we read the Gospels it becomes clear. The point of Jesus' first community was that these men, and the women who were also eventually included, would learn to become like Jesus. For three years they experienced the fullness of life with Jesus. They didn't just meet him at the synagogue once a week for a lesson but daily walked with him, ate with him, joined him in his ministry, watched him, listened to him, laughed with him, prayed with him. You might remember that there was even a point where Jesus gathered not only the 12 but about 70 of his followers and sent them out to neighboring villages.<sup>6</sup> He sent them in pairs (again, community!) to go and basically do themselves what they had already seen him doing, to share good news of the kingdom and offer healing to people ready to receive these things. Because, of course, this is what disciples do. They learn to live as Jesus would live if he were in our shoes. But this learning takes place, as Jesus modeled it so clearly, in community.<sup>7</sup> In fact, I believe God put in each of us such a strong desire for community because God knows that it is in community, specifically community where he is at the center, where we learn to become the kind of people God made us to be, the kind of people who reflect the life and love of Jesus.

As I've said many times before, the goal of the Christian life is not simply that we come to believe all the right things about Jesus or get our ticket's punched so that we can go to heaven some day. The point of the Christian life is to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus so that we can then join God in the transformation of the entire world, and that initial transformation of discipleship happens in the context of community.

Think about it this way. Imagine you are sitting in worship one Sunday and the sermon that morning seems to have been written with you in mind. It hits you right between the eyes. Ever happen to you? Well, imagine that day the clear message you hear from God is that you are living day to day at such a frantic and stressful pace that it's sucking the life out of you. It becomes clear to you as you sit there in the pew that Jesus wants something to change. Well, since you are a person who is serious about wanting to follow Jesus you don't take this message lightly. Problem is, you're not exactly sure what to do about it. In fact, when this happens to us, many of us don't do anything about it. Maybe we tell a friend or somebody in our family about it. At best, we set goals to change things, goals which usually never materialize. In the end, the clear word from God meant to transform us has no such effect.

But what if later that week you are with some other disciples who have gathered together again, like Jesus' disciples, for the purpose of living more fully into Jesus' life, and you tell them about this message God gave you on Sunday. They listen carefully, asking questions meant to help you get to the root of the workaholic pace you have set for your life. Eventually, they help you see that the problem is that you don't believe you will be found worthy in life unless you accomplish great things. Your identity, in other words, has gotten all wrapped up in your success with your job, your family, your accomplishments. You've forgotten that the true and unshakable source of your identity is your belovedness as a child of your Father in Heaven.

Then, with the guidance and encouragement of your community you decide to take a step towards responding to God's message to you. Specifically, you decide you are going to begin to practice Sabbath. One day a week you are going to set aside your work and rest from all efforts to accomplish things. On that day you will simply pray and play, reminding yourself that your identity is not in what you produce. At your invitation, your friends even promise to pray for you in this step. A couple of them even commit to also taking a day of Sabbath and spending it together. Finally, you know that next time you gather they will ask you about how it's going.

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<sup>5</sup> See Mark 1:16-20

<sup>6</sup> See Luke 10:1-12

<sup>7</sup> He even sent them out in pairs! Jesus never had disciples do anything alone. Going to fetch a donkey was even an activity that was to be done together.

You see, when and if this sort of thing happens in this community of disciples we begin to model the pattern Jesus set for us when he gathered together the very first community of disciples. We listen to His Word but it doesn't stop there. By the grace that God gives through the community we find we are able to take steps to let His Word not only inform us but transform us so that our lives begin to look more like His life. In the example I gave, a person comes to rest in the identity God has given her instead of killing herself chasing after an identity the world has falsely promised.

The beauty of this is that everybody in the community of the church is meant to be on this same journey. It's not just one of us but *all of us*. You've got your unique set of things God is working on with you, but so do I as does everybody else around the circle. In fact, this sort of community only works when we recognize that we are all equally in desperate need of God's grace to transform us. Then I can quit pretending and freely confess my own sin and shortcoming because you are doing the same thing right alongside me. Again, because the first relationship in our life "up" with our Father in Heaven has made us secure in our identity as his beloved sons and daughters, we can then move "in" to community with one another freely able to be honest about our sin because we know that our sin does not change our identity.

You know who does this well, better often than the church? Alcoholics Anonymous. In fact, AA got its start in the church. Though it exists today in different form than it originally did, when it began it was simply a place for people who were serious about wanting Jesus to transform them to gather together in community and unashamedly tell the truth about their unhealthy dependence on alcohol and then together work to change. You see, pretending has no place at an AA meeting. Since everybody there is an alcoholic, what's the point of pretending? And AA isn't just about the meetings. Mainly it's about the relationships, the community of people committed to how they live with one another in whole and healthy ways.<sup>8</sup>

In a similar way, Jesus means for the church to be the sort of community where I can come in and openly confess, "Hi. I'm Jeff and I'm a recovering sinner." And then you confess the same. And then we find small circles of community, each centered around Jesus, where we can, in a sense, become a family which is committed to one another in our lifelong, Spirit-empowered recovery effort.

Too often, however, we live mostly solitary lives in the middle of the crowd. Or, it's just me and Jesus, the two of us, trying to make our way forward together. When I was a youth director many years ago at another church the name we chose for our junior high group was J.A.M. It was an acronym for "Jesus and Me." This was the late 80's and I think "JAM" was a sort of youth-friendly name in those days, but in retrospect it was a horrible name and I pray God protected kids from our ignorance so they didn't grow up imagining that the Christian life was just about "Jesus and me" going down the road together.

Look at the Gospels. It was *never* just Jesus and me. Everything Jesus did was in community. It was always Jesus and us. It still is, which means that if your connection to the church is mostly limited to coming and sitting in the pew on Sunday and hearing God challenge you with things which you never really share with others or work through with others who are committed to this journey with you and then, at best, your connection with others is limited to chatting with others socially over a cup of coffee on the patio afterwards or even doing activities in the church together, then I have to tell you that you are truly missing most of the depth and breadth of the grace God wants to give to you but will only give to you through a life lived in community, a life full of constant and mutual confession, prayer, encouragement, challenge, hospitality, and service.

Remember these final words Jesus spoke to the community of his disciples before he ascended to heaven? They are known now to us as the Great Commission:

**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**  
(Matthew 28:18-20, NRSV)

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<sup>8</sup> I'm indebted to Dallas Willard for this illustration, *Living in Christ's Presence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 133-134.

There's a lot here but one of the main things we see here is that, according to Jesus, *the main work of the church* is to be the work of making disciples, of leading people from all nations to place their faith in Christ and be baptized into Christ's identity as a beloved child of God, *but then also* to come to obey everything Jesus commanded us. Everything! Once again, the Christian life is not only about right belief, but is about right belief that *leads to right living*. If you are a disciple of Jesus then you are a person who has agreed with him that the most important thing in life is to let him help you, by way of the community of the church, to live as he would live if he were in your shoes.

Our own mission statement rightly reflects this priority. Faith Presbyterian Church is *a community loving Christ, building disciples, serving all*. We are a community which seeks to love Christ first, to make that "up" relationship primary in our lives. But then, out of that primarily relationship Jesus calls us to move "in" with him and one another that we might grow as his disciples. And this is all of us, by the way. This is not a pattern for the super-spiritual, whoever they are. This is the pattern, as was evidenced in the Gospels, for ordinary disciples like you and me.

As some of you know, our leadership has recently recommitted ourselves to this end. We've recognized that in some ways we, like most churches, have become a bit too consumed with building the church, focusing too much of our energies on programs, and classes, and buildings, and projects, and even worship services. All those are good things – don't get me wrong. But Jesus never told us to build the church. Did you know that? Jesus told us to build disciples. Because if you focus on building the church you'll never get disciples. If, however, you focus on building disciples, forming Christ-centered communities of people committed to living as Jesus would live if he were in our shoes, then you will eventually get the church as well. And so we have committed ourselves to learning from others who do this well how we, in our context, can live out this part of our mission statement and build disciples in the way that Jesus built disciples, disciples who went out and, in turn, built other disciples who, in turn, built other disciples after them.<sup>9</sup>

The ultimate purpose in all this, of course, is that as Jesus' disciples we will be sent "out" to the hurting world beyond us. As people rooted "upwards" in our identity as God's beloved, and shaped "inwards" by Christ in the context of community to reflect him in our lives, we are then sent "outwards" into the world as his empowered representatives to join him in seeing the Kingdom of Heaven transform not just the church but the entire world.

But, of course, more on that next week.

Amen.



## The Next Step

### A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read Luke 6:12-19. What do you notice here this time through the passage?
2. Notice that Jesus called twelve to be his "inner circle" of disciples from among the larger crowd that was following him. Do you imagine that this caused any problems (envy on the one hand, pride on the other)? Is Jesus playing favorites here?
3. Why do you think it is that Jesus invested so much of himself in such a small group of people? Is this meant to be a model for us?
4. In claiming that our deep longing to belong and join community is part of the way we reflect God's image, Jeff made this statement: "In creation when different things are made to come together in dynamic unity and then, themselves, generate more and more life and beauty through their unity, when that happens creation is reflecting its Creator." What does this mean to you?
5. How important is it to you to belong to community? Which community do you most value at this time?

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<sup>9</sup> I love how Paul expresses this in II Timothy 2:2, "What you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well." (NRSV)

6. Are there at least a few others in the church who know enough about how God is at work in your life that they can pray for you, challenge you, encourage you, and come along side you (and you do the same for them)? Would you like to be a part of this sort of community?
7. Why isn't the church more like Alcoholics Anonymous, everybody coming in and freely admitting, "Hi, I'm Jeff and I'm a recovering sinner."? Why is it our tendency in the church just to pretend that everything is fine?
8. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, once said, "There is nothing more unchristian than a solitary Christian." What do you think he meant? Do you agree?



**Table to Table Question**  
*Questions for kids and adults to answer together*

Is the church supposed to be like a family?  
How is it the same? How is it different?