

Having spent the last 3 months preaching verse by verse through Paul's letter to the Philippians, today we turn a corner and begin a new series on the topic of discipleship. Specifically, over the next 4 weeks, we're going to explore how Jesus works in different *relational spaces* to shape us as his disciples.

The series aligns very closely with:

Cornerstone's Mission Statement

Making space for Jesus to shape people together in God's love.

When you break it down, the essence of this statement is that Cornerstone exists to make disciples of Jesus Christ. To be a disciple of Jesus is to follow Jesus as your Master. It is to be his apprentice— to model your life— your thoughts, words and actions— after his example, by the empowering presence of his Spirit.

In shaping us to become like him, Jesus shapes us in *God's love*, because God's love is fully and perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ— especially in his cross. Indeed, being shaped in self-sacrificial, Christ-like love for the sake of others is at the very centre of God's purposes for you and me.

One of the things I like about Cornerstone's Mission Statement is that it clarifies what *our* job is when it comes to making disciples, and what *Jesus'* job is.

Our job is making space for Jesus. Jesus' job— which only he can do by the power of his Spirit— is to shape us in God's love.

Because love is *relational* through and through, our main job as a church is to create *relational spaces* where people can be shaped together in God's love as they encounter Jesus and each other.

This series, as I said a moment ago, is about how Jesus works in *different relational spaces* or contexts to shape us as his disciples.

In particular, we'll be considering four relational spaces that we see Jesus using in his own disciple-making ministry as recorded in the biblical gospels, and he continues to use these spaces to make disciples today.

In doing so, Jesus was clearly on to something, because a modern-day cultural anthropologist named Edward T. Hall has discovered through his research that the same four relational spaces are fundamental to how human beings communicate, connect and interact with each other. ¹

For the purposes of this series, we're going to adapt Hall's language a bit, and refer to the four relational spaces as follows: ²

¹ See Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*, p. 7, 20, 36-37; see also Bobby Harrington and Alex Absalom, *Discipleship that Fits: Five Kinds of Relationships God Uses to Help Us Grow*, p. 51.

² Harrington and Absalom, p. 52-62.

The Four Relational Spaces

1. **Public spaces** – gatherings of 100+ people around a shared event or experience. The focus is primarily on the event or experience, rather than building relational depth with others who are there.
2. **Social spaces** – gatherings of 20-70 people, where we can share snapshots of who we are and build affinity with others.
3. **Personal spaces** – groups of 4-12 people, where we reveal ourselves on a more personal level.
4. **Transparent spaces** – micro groups of 2-3 people (4 at the most), where true vulnerability, openness and candor are shared.

Obviously, Jesus didn't use the language of public, social, personal and transparent spaces, but he clearly leveraged these spaces to make disciples, and he did so two millennia before any modern anthropologist or sociologist would identify or name them.

Jesus and the Four Relational Spaces

1. **Public (100's to 1000's of people)— Jesus and the crowds**
(e.g. Matthew 5:1-12; Mark 6:34; John 6:1-2)
2. **Social (20-70 people)— Jesus, the Seventy, and Parties**
(e.g. Luke 10:1; Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 19)
3. **Personal (4-12 people)—Jesus and the Twelve**
(e.g. Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 8:27-33; John 13)
4. **Transparent (2-4 people)—Jesus and the Three**
(e.g. Matthew 26:36-38; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 9:28-36)

This chart shows us that terms of public spaces, Jesus would often teach and minister to large crowds numbering in the hundreds or even thousands.

In terms of social spaces, we know that Jesus had a circle of about seventy disciples that he sent out on kingdom mission. As well, Jesus could often be found connecting with and reaching people in social contexts such as dinner parties, like he did in the homes of Matthew the tax collector, and Zacchaeus.

In terms of personal space, Jesus invested lots of time into a closer band of his disciples, the twelve.

In terms of transparent space, there were three disciples among the twelve that Jesus was particularly close to and with whom he was especially transparent— Peter, James and John.

Now, if Jesus continues to use the same relational spaces to make disciples today, then our job as a church is to either make such spaces available, or point people to where they are available. In Cornerstone's context, here's what that tends to look like:

Cornerstone and the Four Relational Spaces

1. **Public spaces** – Sunday worship gatherings; large-scale community events
2. **Social spaces** – Fellowship groups (e.g. Young Adults gatherings; Freedom 55); Open Table Thursday dinners; semester groups; recreation programs; serving on a ministry team; and our newcomers' class which is called Discover Cornerstone
3. **Personal spaces** – Small groups
4. **Transparent spaces** – marriages; close Christian friendships; discipleship/accountability groups of 2-4; Christian counselling; spiritual direction

While some of our ministries occupy a single space (small groups, for example, are solidly in the personal space), we also have some ministries where as many as 2-3 of these spaces overlap. Our youth ministry, for example, regularly incorporates public, social and personal spaces.

But what's important to understand is that these four spaces form a framework in which Jesus shapes us through our relationships with others. Therefore, each space is important. Each space has its place, because each space is set up to deliver a particular set of discipleship outcomes that the other spaces cannot effectively deliver.

What does all of this mean for us?

For one thing it means that as a church, we can't put all our eggs in the Sunday worship service basket, for example, or the small groups basket. We need to invest in and point people towards *all four relational spaces*, which we've endeavoured to do over the years, although currently certain spaces need more development than others.

Another thing it means is that in your own journey of following Jesus, you shouldn't put all your eggs in any one relational space basket. While a certain space may be a special focal point in your life for a season, each of the four relational spaces needs to play an important part in your overall discipleship journey.

So that gives you an overview of what this new series is about. And wherever you may be in your journey with Jesus, our prayer is that you will hear the Lord's voice through this series, and follow his lead when it comes to connecting further across these four spaces.

For example, maybe God would encourage you to make a commitment to attend Sunday worship more regularly. It's the primary public space that we offer. Maybe God would encourage you to engage more in the social spaces we offer at Cornerstone, like Thursday dinners, semester groups, rec programs, or serving on a ministry team. These are places where you can share snapshots of who you are and build affinity with others. Maybe God would encourage you to join a small group in the personal space, or to connect one-on-one with a counsellor or spiritual director in the transparent space. You can't do it all at

once, of course. But as we go through this series, listen to God's invitation for any next steps he would have you take.

In the time that remains, let's do a deeper dive into the first of the four relational spaces— *public space*.

Remember, in the public context, we gather around a shared event or experience— and for our purposes today, the shared event or experience we'll focus on is the **Sunday worship service**.

When it comes to public spaces, we saw earlier that Jesus would frequently teach and minister to large crowds, like when he gave his famous Sermon on the Mount, or when he fed the 5,000. ³ A great example of Jesus using the public space is found in Mark 's gospel. Jesus and his disciples were coming in from a boat trip, and:

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. ⁴

Interestingly, though, most early Christians didn't have access to venues large enough to host public-scale events, so they would meet for worship in people's homes in smaller, social space-sized gatherings of anywhere from 20-70 people or so.

That said, the book of Acts tells us that the very first Christians, who came from a Jewish background, would meet not only in homes but they also assembled in the temple courts of Jerusalem for what likely would have been larger-scale worship gatherings. We read in Acts 2 that:

Those who accepted [Peter's] message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad 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. ⁵

It's important to realize is that as a public space, Sunday services are set up to deliver certain aspects of discipleship much more effectively than the other three relational spaces. That said, we mustn't expect a Sunday worship service to magically deliver other aspects of relational discipleship that it just isn't set up to deliver.

The key question we need to ask is this: What discipleship outcomes *is* the Sunday worship service especially well set up to deliver? Today we'll consider two outcomes, the first of which is:

1. Recalibration & renewal in Jesus.

In public space worship services, we join with as many as hundreds of others in worshipping our crucified and risen Lord Jesus. As we raise our voices together in unison, our minds and hearts turn toward him as we gaze on his awesome majesty, beauty and love.

³ See Matthew 5:1-12; John 6:1-14

⁴ Mark 6:34 (NIV)

⁵ Acts 2:41-42, 46-47 (NIV)

Whatever kind of week you may be coming off of, public worship gives you a special opportunity to turn your focus away from self and onto Jesus. Through music, liturgy, the declaration of God's word, and the Lord's Supper, you can be refreshed and replenished in him. At the same time, this experience is not yours alone. In the company of others worshippers, you can find strength in being reminded that you have the benefit of belong to beautifully diverse family that's much greater than yourself— the church, the family of God.

Asaph, the writer of Psalm 73, was going through a crisis of faith. Seeing that the wicked only seemed to prosper and the righteous only seemed to suffer, he was ready to give up on God altogether. At one point, he writes:

When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered to sanctuary of God. ⁶

Asaph is at a loss to figure things out, and his faith is at an all-time low. But things begin to turn around for him when? When he went into the sanctuary of God. In other words, when he went into the place of public worship (in his case, it would have been the Temple in Jerusalem). He went deeply troubled, but he still showed up.

Follower of Jesus— whether you feel like it or not, make it your habit to show up for Sunday worship every week. It's very likely that here, with God's family surrounding you, you'll find fresh perspective leading to recalibration and renewal in Jesus. Because Asaph entered the sanctuary that day, he experienced a turnaround that inspired him to write one of the most beautiful prayers you'll find in scripture:

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ⁷

Like Asaph, when we make a point of showing up for Sunday worship, we give ourselves a vital opportunity each week to become re-tuned to the presence of God, and strengthened to follow his will and his way as we go about the rest of our lives— even in difficult circumstances.

Another way that Sunday worship services help recalibrate and renew us in Jesus is by providing movement and momentum in our discipleship journey.

Time and again, I've heard stories about how people who were not yet baptized were inspired by the testimonies of baptismal candidates, to the point that they decided to get baptized themselves. By coming to worship on a baptism Sunday, they experience movement and momentum in their own journey as disciples of Jesus.

And don't underestimate the impact of announcements during a Sunday worship service. Shout out to everyone on our announcements roster! During announcements, we share what's going on the wider life of the church across all of the relational spaces, and invite people to engage in those opportunities as the Lord leads—joining a Bible class or small group, serving in a ministry, coming to Open Table Thursday dinners, joining a global mission team. As you connect in these ways, you experience movement and

⁶ Psalm 73:16-17 (NIV)

⁷ Psalm 73:25-26 (NIV)

momentum in discipleship journey on the basis of having learned about such opportunities during a Sunday worship service.

Furthermore, people who are not yet followers of Jesus join us for worship services on any given Sunday. Some come because they were invited by a Christian friend or relative. Some come because an inner compulsion drew them here. Some come because they are feeling desperate for God's help. Some come because of a connection they've made through one of our community events or because we've served them through one of our outreach ministries. Our Sunday services always offer our neighbours a predictable time and place to connect with the church when they feel ready to do so, and over the years, hundreds of our neighbours have done just that.

Even if they only pop in on occasions like Christmas and Easter, or in times of loss or felt need, they nonetheless have a sense that Cornerstone is "their" church— which might come as a surprise to us— but it is very true for them.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul talks about how unbelievers can come into a worship gathering, hear God's truth proclaimed, and find that God is speaking straight into their heart, straight into their life situation, to the point that they fall down in worship, declaring, "God is really among you!"⁸

I can name specific people who came to a service like this as an unbeliever, and encountered Jesus in life-changing ways.

I'm thinking of a woman who in her first visits to Cornerstone worship services found that the songs moved her so much that she couldn't stop crying. Something about the lyrics and the movement of the music touched her deeply, and she experienced God's nearness and love. "The thing is," she explained, "I'm not even a crier!" And yet her tears just wouldn't stop flowing during those worship songs. In time, she was baptized, and has been a committed follower of Jesus for many years.

I'm also thinking of a couple who joined Cornerstone for worship services long ago, and during a time of communion, came to realize, "Jesus' body was broken—*for me!* And his blood was shed—*for me!*" Jesus had drawn them to himself through that element of a worship service. In time, this couple, too, was baptized, and they continue to serve Jesus here at Cornerstone to this day.

I'm also thinking of a guy who first started attending Cornerstone worship services years ago, and he noticed how I would raise my hands in worship. Later he would come to admit that initially he thought I looked absolutely ridiculous— *some lanky white guy waving his arms all around like a fool*. But then he explained that as he continued to join us for worship, he became inspired by the fact that I didn't care how I looked or what other people thought when it came to showing my affection to Jesus. "At some point along the way," he told me, "I actually found myself really respecting that." It's one of the many pieces of the puzzle that joined together to lead him to Jesus.

Not only do Sunday worship services help us in our disciple-making mission as a church by providing a space that is especially helpful for people to experience recalibration and renewal in Jesus. There's a second discipleship outcome that Sunday worship services are especially well set up to deliver:

⁸ See 1 Corinthians 14:24-25

2. Biblical teaching.

The apostle Paul once exhorted his protégé, a young pastor named Timothy, with these words:

I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he comes to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.⁹

Paul's exhortation to young pastor Timothy applies to those of us entrusted with the ministry of preaching and teaching here at Cornerstone. We are to, by God's grace and with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, to patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage you all with good teaching from the word of God, the scriptures, and the primary space where that happens is in our Sunday worship services.

Of course, the best biblical teaching is so much more than the transfer of information. The best biblical teaching gives us a vision of the good life. As pastor and author John Mark Comer says:

It undermines the untrue stories we believe; it says, "This is true, and this is a lie" ... It rewires our mental maps to reality, making it possible for us to live in alignment with reality in such a way that we flourish and thrive according to God's good wisdom and intentions. Nowhere is this truer than in the teaching we receive about God. As [A.W.] Tozer famously said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us," because we become like our mental picture of God. For this reason, discipleship to Jesus begins with the healing of our false images of God.¹⁰

This means that above all, good biblical teaching should always point us to the one to whom all scripture points— the one who is the ultimate revelation of who God is— Jesus Christ— who himself is the way, the truth and the life.

To counter the daily barrage of straight-up lies we receive from the world around us, as Jesus' disciples we must prioritize our exposure to good biblical teaching and truth. There are all sorts of ways to do this, but to do it during Sunday worship with the wider congregation is perhaps the primary space where this happens, as we learn and grow together as a community of faith in Jesus.

Biblical teaching can be especially impactful in a public context like a Sunday worship service. Why? First of all, a preacher's comments are aimed not at specific individuals, but rather at a large group. Because of this, hearers tend to be less defensive, and are usually better able to sense and acknowledge how God is speaking into their life.

I can't tell you the number of times when one of us has preached a sermon here at Cornerstone, and after service someone in the congregation will comment, "Pastor, it felt like that message was just for me. God was speaking straight to my heart. It felt like I was the only one in the room."

In fact, I heard someone make such a comment as recently as last Sunday.

⁹ 2 Timothy 4:1-2 (NLT)

¹⁰ John Mark Comer, *Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus, Become Like Him, Do as He Did*, p. 103

Furthermore, difficult topics can be tackled during a Sunday sermon with a candidness and directness that can be harder to achieve in other contexts. Along these lines, please pray for our preaching team as we prepare for a sermon series this fall on biblical sexuality. In the words of Paul to Timothy, pray that we would *preach the word of God*. Pray that we would *be prepared whether the time is favourable or not*, and to *patiently correct, rebuke and encourage you all with good teaching*— good, biblical, Jesus-centered teaching, full of grace and truth. Amen?

Biblical teaching in the public space of a Sunday worship service also allows core content or vision to be shared with a large number of people at the same time, calling the whole congregation to action in an area of need or of God's leading. This has been incredibly impactful for Cornerstone's overall journey as a church on mission for Jesus over the years, and it's one of the reasons why it's so important to be consistent in your Sunday worship attendance.

Finally, good biblical teaching will leave you with something to *do*— ways to *apply* the truth you've been hearing. As the Bible says in James:

But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. ¹¹

For this reason, we often give you something to do in connection with our sermons— a practice, a prayer exercise, a resource to use, an opportunity to sign up for, an action step to take. And along those lines, guess what? As the worship band makes their way back up, I have two takeaways for you as I wrap up this message.

The first takeaway is this: **make a commitment to God to attend Sunday worship weekly**. Statistics say that these days, those who describe themselves as “committed Christians” attend Sunday worship an average of – how many times per month? Any guesses? It's two per month. But I hope you've been convinced today that Sunday worship services are too important a part of your discipleship journey to be so lax your attendance. And if you're a parent, don't forget that your attendance or non-attendance sends a very powerful message to your kids, impacting their faith formation, for better or for worse.

The second application is to **pray to prepare yourself for Sunday worship** each week (www.cornerstonechurch.ca/joy).

To help you with that, we have put together a special handout for you: *Prayers to Prepare for Sunday Worship*. It has seven rich prayers that you can pick and choose from. Pray a couple of these prayers on a Saturday night or a Sunday morning before worship service. One of the prayers is called *A Prayer for Those Ministering on Sunday*, and it helps you cover all the teams and individuals that usually serve during the Sunday worship services. They very much appreciate and need your prayer cover!

Grab a free copy of this handout at the Welcome Desk on the way out, and you can also download a copy at the link you see on the screen.

Well today, we've talked about the first of the four relational spaces that Jesus uses to shape us as his disciples: public space— and the Sunday worship service in particular. We've seen that Sunday worship

¹¹ James 1:22 (NLT)

services are especially effective at delivering two vitally important discipleship outcomes: *Recalibration & renewal in Jesus*, as well as *biblical teaching*.

We look forward to seeing you again next Sunday when Pastor Andrew will do some biblical teaching about the place of social spaces in our disciple-making mission!