

A hand is shown in the foreground on the left, pointing towards the right. The background is a vast field of tall grass under a sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The overall scene is peaceful and contemplative.

INTENTIONAL

COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY
4 WEEK

NARRABEEN BAPTIST CHURCH

in·ten·tion·al
adjective

done on purpose; deliberate.

INTENTIONAL

There are many synonyms to the word “intentional”
purposeful, deliberate, planned, designed.

Intentional is not a word you’ll find used very often in the Bible.

However you still see it on every page.

From the beginning, God had an intentional plan
to not only create but to rescue people.

He intentionally sent His Son, Jesus,
to pull us out of darkness and into His marvelous light.
Jesus intentionally chose followers to carry out his
saving plans for the world after His resurrection.

We see throughout God’s Word that we, the church,
those who have been called out by Christ,
have a purpose – to intentionally be
the family of God on mission to make disciples.

You will not find anywhere in the Bible that states God is pleased that
you prayed a prayer of salvation but then intentionally or
unintentionally live your life the same as you did before.

Rather, in response to the Father’s great love for us,
we should be motivated, excited and intentional about how we choose
to live...not just in a building on a Sunday,
but everywhere we find ourselves.

The question for you is – Do you take your call seriously?
Do you, wherever you are, live with intention?
Or do you really believe that occasional attendance at a church service
or a Bible study is the proper response to God’s love?

This study is intentioned to help you dig into God’s Word
and figure out, through the empowerment of the Spirit,
how to actually LIVE OUT your life with intentionality,
doing what you are called as the church to do;
namely to make disciples.

WEEK ONE: INTENTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

If you were to think about an average week in your life and all the people you interact with during that week – family members, friends, co-workers, church friends, your butcher, your baker, your candlestick maker, random people you sit next to on the bus – how many people would you say you interact with?

Now out of that number, how many of those people in the last year, outside Christian friends and family, have you talked about Jesus with?

How many of those people have you made a conscious, intentional decision to walk alongside of so that they may come to follow Jesus?

For many of us, the first number would be very large, the second number a lot smaller than that and third number might not even be registerable.

There are many reasons why we give for those diminishing numbers:

- I don't know how to talk about Jesus with others, let alone disciple someone.
- I am scared to share my faith.
- I do not think I am where I should be in my relationship with Jesus, so I am not the best candidate to walk alongside others
- I have tried to talk about Jesus with others before but it backfired or went nowhere
- I do not think it is my job to share Jesus with others or to disciple anyone
- I don't care if people follow Jesus
- I am too busy to spend time sharing Jesus with others (other things are more important)

Do you find yourself identifying with any of these statements?
Which one(s)?

Have a look at Luke 5:27-32.

What is happening in this passage?

Why would Levi (also known as Matthew) get up, LEAVE EVERYTHING and follow Jesus?

What would make someone do something like that?

What is the first thing Levi does after he decides to follow Jesus? (verse 29)

Why do you think Levi chooses to do this?

For Levi, what is the next logical step for him after deciding to follow Jesus?

Levi made an intentional choice. He met Jesus. He was called out by Jesus. Without a blink Levi made the next logical step:

“I want to invite my friends to meet Jesus, too.”

He didn't spend ages in a Bible study. He didn't work on his personal walk with Jesus. He didn't attend a course of evangelism. Levi just did something we all do. When we feel excited about something, we tell others about it. When we know our life has been changed in a major way, we cannot keep it to ourselves.

Why is it then our lives look so unlike Levi's? How is it that we can interact with so many people regularly every day and not want to show Jesus to them?

If you look at Levi's response to meeting Jesus – throwing a banquet and inviting his friends – does anything stick out? Did Levi walk them through a New Christians course? Did he hand them a postcard with information on Christmas services they could attend?

Where, specifically, did Levi intentionally start making disciples (in what location – see verse 29 again)?

Let's look at a few other examples of "intentional relationships".
Read the verses below. Where do all these events happen?

Acts 8:26-35

Acts 16:13-14

Acts 16:25-34

John 4:5-15, 39-41

On the road, in a workplace, in jail, at a well (there are many of locations we could examine) – these are the sorts of places intentional relationships happen. In the ebb and flow of everyday life. Every moment, every place can be sacred.

Do you see all the areas of your life the same way these early followers of Jesus did? Places and space and moments to come alongside others to intentionally lead them to Christ in word and in action? Why or why not?

Usually what stops this from happening is not the desire to see those around us cared for, loved on and nurtured in Christ, but a fear of how to even start.

We think if we want to share Jesus with people it means standing up and preaching at people to repent, or at least come to church.

But what if the answer is a lot simpler than that?

Some people (like in these stories) come to faith immediately after hearing about Jesus. But for many others (it took the disciples three years), they come to know and love God in stages over time.

By the way - you've got nothing to do with it

Before you read any further, it will be helpful to remind you that helping people come to the knowledge of Jesus is not up to you. It's just not.

If it was, we would have one of two problems:
We would either develop a “hero complex” – in which we believed it was up to us to save the entire universe OR we would develop a “guilt complex” because despite our efforts, we see little transformation happening.

So it is a good thing that is not up to us.
Jesus reminds us that it is our job to be obedient, but it is the Spirit's job to change people (see John 16:8).
It is also the Spirit's job to give you the words to say to people, even when you don't have a clue of how to even begin (see Luke 12:12).

Your job is simple: show up and be intentional!

If all of this is true, it does not take a soapbox or a theological degree or an extroverted personality or persuasive reasoning for us to be qualified disciple makers.

We don't have to wait until someone comes to a church service. But if all these biblical realities are true, then it is our job to say, “Aight Jesus. I want to love this person like you love me. Help me to do that.”

Of all those people you interact with daily, who is ONE person you can intentionally disciple (walk alongside with)?

Besides praying for that person (which is where we should start, carry on AND finish) – what is one SMALL way you can intentionally love them, know them, care for them or show them Jesus?

Maybe you want to start with a hearing a story...

WEEK TWO: INTENTIONAL CONVERSATIONS

Most of us have a desire to share Jesus with others...but we don't quite know what to say or when to say anything, and whenever we do try talk about our faith it does not come out right.

Has this ever been your experience?

Can you think of a time you royally failed at trying to talk about Jesus with someone else?

The other issue we often have is this: there are people we've known for years – and it would seem very strange to suddenly start talking about Jesus when for the whole history of your relationship, you've never said a word. Or it would come across as highly confrontational for you to bring up Jesus.

But we do believe God wants to speak into the lives of others, right?

Or have we convinced ourselves that instead of us speaking, we simply need to bring our friends to church so that the pastor (who we think is better equipped than us) can do the speaking?

Have a read of Romans 10:8-15.

When Paul talks about the “one who is sent to them” – whom, do you think, he is talking about?

Does Paul say (anywhere in this passage) that those that are called to “preach” are some sort of special category of people? Or do you think he is including YOU in his discussion?

Read Acts 17:16-34.

Cultural anthropologists and sociologists would label what Paul is doing as “Resonance” and “Dissonance”.

Resonance simply means listening intently to what someone is sharing and finding those areas where your story (or for our purposes, the story

of God) intersects or agrees. It's finding and feeling and acknowledging the heartbeat of another person's story and saying "Yes! This thing that you are talking about is actually what the Bible speaks about too!"

How can you see Paul resonating with his audience?

Dissonance means identifying where a person's story and your story (or God's story) diverge. Dissonance, as far as the stories we share are concerned, means recognizing where a person's narrative, symbols, values, beliefs, etc., do not line up with what God has said to be true.

Where do you see dissonance come into play in this conversation?

Paul here moves from resonance and dissonance to a third movement, which we might call "**Gospel**". This step involves inviting someone to transformation. Paul is not content to say "I agree with this and I disagree with that." – instead he uses this conversation to invite the audience to find their story in the pages of God's bigger story.

How do you see Paul doing this here?

Read John 4:4-30.

What is intentional (speaking the love and truth of God) about Jesus' conversation with this woman?

How does Jesus use a conversation about water and thirst and mountains to talk about himself?

How do you see Resonance, Dissonance and Gospel playing out in this narrative?

How does Jesus (in this conversation) move this woman from talking about superficial things (water) to deeper things (relationships) to the deepest thing (God and reconciliation)?

Let's give this model a try out loud.

Take a topic that someone in your life (a friend, co-worker, etc.) likes to talk about. Maybe it's the environment. Maybe it's refugees. Maybe it's rugby. It doesn't matter, just pick something.

If you're seeking to have an intentional conversation with someone, how would you go through the three movements (Resonance, Dissonance and Gospel) with that topic?

Resonance

Where does the story of God connect and agree with _____ ?

Dissonance

Where does it disconnect and deviate from _____ ?

Gospel

How do I speak the Gospel into someone's life about _____ ?

AN EXAMPLE: WORK

Resonance:

God created work, there is a purpose to it and when we have the right attitude toward it, we can actually find pleasure in what we do, in what we make and can enjoy the fruit of our labour.

Dissonance:

When you prioritize your work (or the pursuit of money as a result of your work) as the most important thing in your life, you're actually distorting how God created it. It then enslaves you and destroys other areas of your life, as well as turns something that should bring God glory into a god itself – a god that will never actually satisfy you.

Gospel:

When we are transformed by Jesus, our work is transformed from an idol or a burden to something that we can find joy in. Jesus releases us from the monotony of the Australian Dream (work, make money, hope to find happiness, repeat) because we have something, someone more to live for. I'd love to chat more about how every area of your life can be made new by following Jesus....

As you journey throughout a normal day, look for how you can do these things well.

Listen to the stories people share.

- What are they excited about?
- What do they light up when discussing?
- What do they worry about?

These things come up everyday, if you pay close enough attention.

How do we Resonate, Dissonate and bring Gospel into these conversations?

WEEK THREE: INTENTIONAL HOSPITALITY & GENEROSITY

Read Luke 16:19-31.

What do you think this story is about?

Do you think the story is as simple as rich people automatically go to “hell”? What, hinted at in several places in the text, demonstrates the rich man’s fate is not determined simply based on his wealth?

The rich man ends up in “Hades” (v. 23) because he knew Lazarus by name, he saw him begging every day (if Lazarus could see the food falling from the rich man’s table, it is safe to assume the rich man could also see Lazarus outside his gate), yet did nothing.

Earlier in this chapter is a strange story of a “shrewd” manager (vv. 1-9). This manager is fired from his job because he’s been stealing money from his boss. But before he’s rendered jobless, he uses what resources he has (cutting deals with clients) to gain future reward (these clients helping him out down the track). Oddly enough, the boss praises his deceitful manager, though if you follow the logic of the story, he’s basically been cheated out of even more money. Jesus tells his followers to be just like this guy – to use the things that you have (your resources) for future eternal purposes.

The point of both of these stories (one a positive and one a negative example) is that what we have (our wealth, our cars, our homes, etc.) is not really ours anyway (see Luke 16:11-12), but God’s – to be used for love on others so that they may come to know and experience the love of Jesus both now and for eternity.

You can read through the entire Bible and find this same paradigm everywhere – God pours His love out on you (in various ways), not so that you will hoard it for yourself, but so that you will extend that love to others in the hope they will come to know Jesus as well.

Which leads us to discipleship.

Have you ever thought of using what you have (your money, your home, etc.) as a means to share the love of Jesus with someone else?

If not, why not? If so, can you describe that experience?

Read 1 Peter 4:7-11 and Hebrews 13:1-3.

What are these passages saying?

The word translated as “hospitality” is the Greek word *philoxenos*, which literally means “love of strangers”. In the Bible, the “stranger” has a range of people it describes: those alienated from God, foreigners (especially refugees and asylum seekers), the poor, the lonely, etc. It’s a broad term that means “those on the fringes” – physically, relationally, spiritually.

Further, in biblical times, hospitality was shown primarily by opening up one’s home – inviting someone in, hearing their story, sharing a meal, offering refuge. In many cultures today it is considered shameful to NOT invite a stranger into your home and make time for them.

Have you ever been welcomed in to someone’s home when you were a stranger and lavishly cared for, fed, and listened to? If so, how, and what was that like?

When was the last time YOU used your home as a means to love and care for a “stranger” (as defined above)?

Why do we often struggle with taking this biblical command seriously?

Read Luke 14:12-14.

If this is Jesus’ own words to you, how can you actually do this?

Some questions to ask yourself:

1. Do you believe hospitality is part of God's command to make disciples?
2. If so, who is one person (or couple) that you can open your home to and share the love of Jesus with?
3. When will you do this?
4. How can the family of God (especially your Community Group) join in on the action?
5. Who will you tell so that you can be held accountable to actually follow through?

In pastor David Platt's book *Radical*, he challenges his readers to respond radically to the love Jesus has given to us. At the end of the book he outlines five radical responses we as Christians should have. One of these responses is to "sacrifice your money for a specific purpose". He would have us learn to differentiate what is necessary for us to live and that which is luxury. He challenges the worldview many Christians have that mirrors the American (and Australian) Dream: I deserve to have good things. These good things then become idols and distractions for us; leaving us to ignore the vast poverty that exists around us. Platt calls Christians to take Jesus' words seriously and live in such a way that "stuff" has no hold over you – that you live on what you actually need and every thing else should be used to make disciples – sacrificially given away in order that people may know the love of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

⁶ Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written:

*'They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;
their righteousness endures for ever.'*

¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every oc-

casation, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

¹² This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³ Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. ¹⁴ And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Paul here is inviting the church to give to a specific cause: there has been an earthquake and famine in Jerusalem and people (especially Christians) are starving. As Paul travels from place to place telling people about Jesus and planting churches, he also calls on this worldwide family of God to support their brothers and sisters through generosity.

According to Paul in verse 12, what is the reason for our generosity?

Why should we be generous in the first place?

In verse 7, Paul says there is no standard on how much you should give. It's not about compulsion, but rather about an overflow of your heart. It's an attitude – we give because God gave.

In what ways are you currently demonstrating generosity to others in response to God's great love for you?

In verse 13, Paul says that because of your generosity, others will praise God...which means they will essentially, see and experience the love of Jesus through your giving. This is what intentional generosity is all about – making disciples.

Often our problem is our giving is erratic and unfocused. We give every once and a while when we feel compelled. Random giving is the opposite of intentional giving.

David Platt proposes maximum impact on how we give.

Here is how he proposes this can be done:

1. Spend your money in gospel-centered ways. Ask yourself: is this new tv going to help me make disciples of Jesus? Or is there a person I can support or organization that will help me achieve my goal in bringing others to faith?

2. Give in a way that is church focused. There are many people and places that need your generosity. But there is something purposeful and beautiful in partnering with others in the family of God in showing generosity together and...

3. For a specific purpose. When we are told to give money to the poor, that idea is often intangible and nebulous. But a person or a task – that is something easier to get behind. You also know what your money is going to. You could give to building an organic farm in Mullimbimby that will be a base for sharing the gospel with migrant workers or a water tank in Vanuatu or a friend studying at seminary or about to go on mission or to the kids ministry at NBC. When you give to a specific person or task, you actually know you're a part of something.

4. Give to someone or something you can trust. There are lots of people and organizations that want your money. But you often then don't know what happens after you've given. We are called to be wise in how and when we give, so do some research as to where your dollar goes.

How will you commit this intentional generosity this month?

What will you sacrifice in your life so that others can come to know Jesus? How can you use and/or give up the “stuff” you've been given to make disciples?

Who can you tell so that they can hold you accountable?

WEEK FOUR: INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

There are 47 verses in the New Testament where we are instructed to do or be (fill in the blank) for “one another”. These can be roughly lumped into four categories:

- unity within the family of God,
- love for others,
- humility in relationships
- deeply caring for one another.

Similarly, throughout the various instructions in the New Testament (given by both Jesus and his followers), almost all of them are not directed at “you”- as in you, individually – but to “you all” – all of you, plural, as a community.

What this tells us is the Christian life is meant to be lived out alongside others as we encourage, challenge, pray for, go deep with, serve and love one another.

This flies in the face of the popular line you often hear: “My faith is a private matter between God and me.” You will not find that sentiment anywhere in Scripture.

Read Mark 2:1-5.

What is going on in this story?

Based on whose faith did Jesus heal the paralyzed man?

How do you see intentional community (believers doing faith alongside one another to bring someone to Jesus) being lived out here?

Craig Groeschel, who is a pastor at Life Church in the US, stated one of the values of his church community like this: We will do anything short of sin to reach people who don't know Christ. To reach people no one is reaching we'll do things no one is doing.

How true is this of your life?

If you were to rate yourself on a 1-10 scale, with 1 being “Totally Apathetic to Making Disciples” (you haven’t led someone to Christ recently or ever; you aren’t praying for people to find Christ consistently; you haven’t shared Jesus with anyone in anyway) and 10 being “Passionate and Active about Making Disciples” (You led someone to Christ in the past month and multiple people in your lifetime – where would you find yourself?

Now if you had support to do this – friends joining you in helping others come to know Christ, how do you think that would change your rating?

The thing is, even in Groeschel’s statement above, there is the “we” component. Discipleship best happens alongside others.

Consider these men in Mark 2 for a moment. One of these guys alone could not carry his friend to Jesus. So he recruited some help. Most roofs of Israelite houses were a mixture of mud and manure. Together as a unit, these guys braved dirt and faeces so that their friend could meet with Jesus. That is intentional community coming together to support one another as they bring friends to Christ.

Read John 1:35-49.

What pattern of intentional community do you see happening in these verses?

What is so appealing about the phrase “come and see” that makes people actually check Jesus out?

What do you think would happen if instead of trying to come up with the best explanation of the Gospel you could think of, you invited someone to “come and see” Jesus being lived out in your own life?

Most of us have come to know Jesus specifically because an intentional community gathered around us. Family members, friends, co-workers, teachers, kids and youth leaders, etc.

These are the people who invited us to “come and see” Jesus in their own lives. Can you name those people who showed you Jesus – both before and after you came to faith in Christ?

Are you doing this same thing for anyone else currently? Why or why not?

What would it look like for you to invite someone to “come and see” Jesus?

What could it look like for your intentional community (your church family and Community Group) to partner with you in loving someone into the Kingdom?

All of this begins with prayer. We often will pray for someone once or twice or randomly when we remember. God calls us to pray continually, together as a community for the “strangers” in and around our lives. Over the next year, who is one person you and your community can regularly pray for to know Jesus more?

How can you be like the four friends (in Mark 2), like Andrew and Philip (in John 1) THIS WEEK to someone?

How will you go about doing it?

How can your community help you?

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