

Why Church Matters: Part One

Speaker: Tim Mackie

[EMSB theme fades in]

Hey everybody, I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, "Exploring My Strange Bible." I am a card-carrying Bible history and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have. On this podcast, I'm putting together the last twenty years' worth of lectures and sermons, where I've been exploring the strange and wonderful story of the Bible and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can all be helpful for you, too. I also helped start this thing called BibleProject. We make animated videos and podcasts and classes about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find all those resources at bibleproject.com. With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

[EMSB theme fades out]

All right, this teaching is the first of, just, a short two-part series that represents some teachings and reflections that I gave a number of years ago when I was a teaching pastor at Door of Hope Church, about the way the church is described in the book of Acts, chapter 2. There's a famous line in Acts, chapter 2, verses 40 through 42, that just describes a day in the life of one of the first communities of Jesus, gathering in Jerusalem.

And so what we explore in this teaching is essentially that the earliest churches were groups of people who were learning to form new habits together—new habits of living and of thinking. And specifically, we explore in this teaching what the word "disciple" means, and why it is that, from the very beginning, Jesus communities have always incorporated learning—learning new ideas as a core part of the habit of a follower of Jesus.

It's interesting to contrast and to think that in modern Western cultures, "openness to new ideas" is not the first thing that comes to people's minds when they think of Christians. Usually it's the opposite—it's of people who are not open-minded at all. And that's sad—and that goes against the grain of the Jesus movement right from the very beginning, which was just the opposite. It was a community of people who formed a

habit of constantly looking to learn new and different ideas that help them make sense of the world in light of their commitment to Jesus.

So this is a teaching from Acts, chapter 2. It's about the word "disciple," how it means "learner," and what it means for a community of Jesus to be committed to constantly learning. So there you go. Hope this is helpful for you. Let's go for it.

[Musical break (2:47–2:50)]

Good to have you guys here. I invite you, if you haven't already: open your Bibles with me to the book of Acts, chapter 1. And we—in this month leading up to moving all of our gatherings and our offices and, kind of, all our activities over to Northeast—it occurred to us that this is such an important—a teachable moment for us as a church.

It's a time of transition, and it's the perfect time for us to refocus our understanding and our vision of what the biblical vision of the church is. *What on earth are we? And what do we think we're doing? And what does it mean for us to be "faithful to our calling,"* and so on? And so this is just a great time for us all to think through: What does it mean to be a part of a church? What does it mean to be a part of *this* church? And what do we think that we're doing? And what does it mean for you guys to participate? So this is great.

So what we're going to do is spend the next few weeks camping out in the first chapters of the book of Acts, which is like a foundation story of the Jesus movement and how this whole thing got started, and how we're sitting here today. And so we got some ground to cover, and we're going to learn about the idea and the reality of "discipleship" in the New Testament tonight.

So Acts, chapter 1, let's just dive in. Luke, who is the author of both: of the Gospel after his name—this is his part two. It's a two-part work, "Luke-Acts." And so he opens up here, just like he did in the Gospel of Luke. And he says, "In my former book, Theophilus"—the Gospel of Luke—"I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions, through the Holy Spirit, to the apostles he had chosen.

"After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God." Oh, to have been a fly on the wall at those Bible studies—you know?—with the risen Jesus.

And what's interesting is there's a number of passages in the New Testament that refer to this little period here, after the resurrection, but before his ascension. And Paul, like—for example, in First Corinthians 15, he mentions that one of these appearances was to a group of five hundred people at once, who were eyewitnesses to the risen Jesus. So this isn't like Jesus appearing to little, small groups of five people in a closet, or something like that. This is very public—over a period of, like, over a month—hundreds and hundreds of people are seeing Jesus. And what is Jesus doing? He's eating with people—[Tim laughs] because that's what you do when you're alive from the dead, I guess.

So verse 4, “On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command. He said, ‘You guys, don't leave Jerusalem. But wait for the gift my Father promised, which you heard me speak about. John baptized people with water, but in a few days y'all are going to be baptized’”—or “immersed”—“with the presence of the Holy Spirit.”

And so you can imagine—I mean, this remarkable, incredible thing has happened—that not even death gets the final word in God's good world anymore, because of the good news about Jesus. And you can imagine they're rearing to go—they're rearing to tell people. And Jesus essentially says, “‘Hurry up and wait,’ and just stay put right here.”

“They gathered around him,” verse 6, “and they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time you're going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And he said to them, [Tim paraphrasing] ‘*Sheesh*, you guys—you know? Come on, it's not for you to know about the times or the dates the father has set by his own authority. Forget about the timeline here—that's not the main thing.” Oh, that many Christians throughout history would have heeded these words, right?

So verse 8, he says, “Here's the point and here's what I do want you to do. You're going to receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you all will be my witnesses, starting right here in Jerusalem.”

So this is a community of Jewish followers, in Jesus, the Messiah of Israel. But then it's going to break out of the boundaries of just the tribe of Israel. It's going to expand to their cousins, up north in Samaria, and then, just, outside the bounds altogether, to all the nations of the earth to become included in the people of Jesus.

Okay, so this connects with what Josh was talking about last week, when Josh opened up the series about “the mission, the vision, the nature” of the church. He gave this wonderful definition that the church is a community of people who are gathering around: not a religious idea, not a philosophy of life, not a certain mode or practice of spirituality. We gather foremost around a person: around the risen Jesus—the crucified, risen Jesus.

And we believe that he's alive and that he's real and that we're looking towards him at the center. And we believe that he's real, and that he's looking back at us and that he's guiding us as a community. We gather around the risen Jesus, who's present with us by the Spirit of God.

And particularly, the church is a community of people around Jesus who are in a living, vital, relational connection to Jesus and with each other. And we are a group of people empowered to become—what does he say here? The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus's followers to become what? *Witnesses*—to bear witness to the reality of the kingdom of God breaking into our broken, screwed-up world, changing us individually—and we bear witness to that.

How does the church bear witness? Turn to chapter 2 with me. So these—you know, a couple hundred—on this day, one hundred-twenty Jewish believers in Jesus—they're gathered in Jerusalem on one of the great feasts of Israel: of Pentecost. And so tens and tens of thousands of extra people would have been packed into the city of Jerusalem as a pilgrimage feast.

And so they're gathered there, and what Jesus said was going to happen *happened*. They have this profound, mysterious, and very powerful experience with the Holy Spirit, who mediates the very presence of the creator God, and of Jesus himself, to Jesus's people.

And what happens? What happens is they begin to bear witness to Jesus in a really remarkable way. So there's all these different Jewish people, but from different parts of the world—from different languages. And so you have a group of one hundred-twenty believers in Jesus, and then, all of a sudden, they start sharing the Good News about Jesus, but in languages that people can understand—but that they've never learned before. That's remarkable. You know, that doesn't happen every day.

And it draws a huge crowd—a huge, huge crowd gathers. And who stands up? Who sees a moment here and stands up to address the crowd? Look at verse 14—chapter 2, verse 14, “Peter stood up with the eleven”—the others who were eyewitnesses and followed Jesus, both before his crucifixion and now after—“Peter stood up with the eleven, he raised his voice, and he addressed the crowd, ‘Fellow Jews and all of you living in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you. Listen carefully to what I say . . .’”

And what goes on, what follows, is one of the first—one of the most profound, compelling, amazing sermons—it's one of the first Christian sermons ever. And what it is: it's a Jewish believer in Jesus addressing a whole bunch of other Jewish people. And so this is not like street preaching in Portland or something. This is thousands of Jewish people who are devout Jews—they're followers of Yahweh.

They're devout: they pray through the Scriptures, they hear the Scriptures in synagogue, [and] they're waiting for the Messiah. They already have all the pieces in place, and Peter presents to them and demonstrates from the very Hebrew Scriptures that they all agree are God's word, that Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah.

And how effective is his witness here? Look at—so the end of the speech. He goes . . . down—look at verse 41, after Peter's sermon is over. Verse 41—it says, "Those who accepted his message, they got baptized on the spot." And how many people were we talking here? So "about 3,000 were added to their number that day."

Now, as someone—as a pastor who works at a church—that just stresses me out. [Tim laughs] To think about—how would you even deal with that whole . . . ? That is so—that's awesome, and it's so many people. Like, how do you responsibly take care of something like that—that grows that much in a day? But that's what happened.

So look at what Luke's done here. He gives you the story, "You're going to be empowered to be my witnesses." What's the very next story about? It's about both this group being empowered to be witnesses—through their words, as they tell the story in languages they didn't know—and then Peter gets up and he shares, verbally, the story of the Good News about Jesus, and *this* is a very effective witness.

The church continues to witness—keep reading. The witness does not stop. Keep reading. Verse 42, "So they"—the one hundred and twenty, and now 3,000, at least 3,120—"they devoted themselves"—they started a new life of habits and routines together—"they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

"All the believers were together. They had everything in common. They were selling property and their possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They were breaking bread in their homes and eating together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God, enjoying the favor of all the people, and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

So people are added to the number of Jesus's people through the witness that's empowered by the Spirit. You guys with me here? That's what these opening chapters of Acts are all about. And that's the church fulfilling its mission. How does the church bear witness to Jesus in Acts chapters 1 and 2? Well, a couple of different ways, doesn't it?

So through verbally telling people who didn't know the story of Jesus, like, telling it, right? Telling the story of the events of his life, his death, and resurrection—the meaning of those events and why they're significant for everybody, everywhere, and for all of

human history. Right? So that's one way of bearing witness. And when it's empowered by the Spirit, it's effective.

But it is not the *only* way to bear witness, because what happens—the Gospel is a story that, when you're faithful to tell the story—to just tell what happened and why it's significant, and why the story of what happened with Jesus is precisely the answer to the human condition and to what's wrong with our world and what God is doing about it—when we're faithful to tell that story—not be ashamed of it—just talk about Jesus and what happened—*things happen*.

Stuff happens—when you tell that story, things “click” with people. And conversations and stories that you have no idea about in people's lives—you know, in their past leading up to that moment—you have no idea. *Things happen*. And so that is one way that the Holy Spirit empowers the witness.

But here's what's interesting. This paragraph that we just read about the life of the church is *also* a form of witness. Did you guys catch that? How does the Lord add to the number of his people? Through the witness of the church. Well, how does the church witness? Through people, like Peter, telling the story—but also through, just like, these believers adopting this new routine and common life together, that's so attention-getting and bizarre to onlookers that it's, just, attractive—and it also is a form of witness. Do you guys see that here?

So the Spirit-empowered “witness,” it happens through *word* and *deed*. That's what I'm getting at here—actually, that's not what I'm getting at—that's what Luke's getting at here, right? So it's through *word*, and that *word* creates and brings into being a community of people who are being transformed by that *word*, and then whose common life together reinforces the message and *itself* becomes a message. Just the common life of the church itself, when it's faithful to living out the story of the Gospel, itself is an effective witness.

So what we're going to do in the next few weeks is really dive into this depiction of the church here, in this paragraph, and explore: *What does it mean for us?* And kind of let it, kind of, re-inspire us as a church in this time.

Look at verse 42 with me. What marks this community and their common life as a witness? And we read that “community” was marked by something, it's that they *devoted themselves to something*. Now, that word “devotion” there—part of what makes the Bible so difficult to read, I think, for us sometimes, is that there are certain words that just become “charged,” Christian-subculture words. And then they, kind of—they get used so much, we don't know what they mean anymore. This is a horse I like to ride, right? And so I think it's very important for us to recover these terms.

So when you hear the word, in the Christian setting, of, like, “devotion”—“I do devotions—have you been doing your devotions?” That has a very specific meaning, doesn’t it? It’s like a code word, right? And so it’s, like, when people are new—when new Christians are coming to our church, it’s like, “What? What is this code language?”

So what that means is “establishing a rhythm of reading your Bible and prayer, on some kind of regular basis,” right? So . . . that’s not what he’s talking about here. That’s a very good thing to do—that’s not what he’s talking about here.

So this is not actually, particularly, a religious concept at all, that you “devote yourself to something.” This is a group of people who were marked by a new set of habits—by a new set of routines generated [in] response to this announcement: the Good News about Jesus. And so they “devoted themselves.”

And so we all have these, our things—just think through it. Like what’s something you do every day? You do it every day: hopefully, brush your teeth or something like that, you know? Or basic hygiene. It’s Portland—some of us drink a lot of coffee every day, multiple times per day. And so we all have, and orient much of our lives, around habits, rhythms, and routines.

You can tell an *enormous* amount about somebody, and about what they value and what their priorities are, by looking at their habits—because it’s clearly what they prioritize and repeat, and do and repeat. And what marked this community was: a community of people who individually and collectively adopted a whole new set of habits.

And this, itself, is an interesting angle of vision on what it means to be a church. A group of people around Jesus, who, if I’ve become a Christian, I’m adopting a new set of habits. And if I’m growing as a Christian, it’s about constantly refocusing and recentering myself on a core set of habits together.

And I want to focus on these habits tonight. And I’m going to write them up here—kind of, translate them so we can really get our minds around this, here. There’s four things—did you see them here, in verse 42? What are the four things?

What’s the first thing that they “devote” themselves to? Okay: “the apostles’ teaching.” So really think through what this means. So this community of people just exploded from a couple hundred to thousands, overnight. So what does that mean that they “devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching”?

Well, it means that they’re gathering. Look down at verse 46—look what it says. Verse 46, “Every day they continued to meet in the temple courts,”—which, the temple courts are massive. Think of a large, open space, a few football fields’ size. And there’s a big building, the temple, but there’s all this open meeting space. It’s the largest open space

still in Jerusalem today. And so this is where you can gather five-hundred, eight-hundred, 1,000 people—which, clearly, they did.

But they're not just meeting in large gatherings. What are they also doing? What does it say? They're "meeting in homes" throughout the city and the region. And so what does it mean that a community of thousands of people devotes themselves to the apostles' teaching? They're clearly gathering. A simple way of saying this—of their "absorbing" and "hearing teaching" is: this is a community that's marked by *learning*.

What is a church? First and foremost, it's a community that's *learning* something. It's devoted to becoming *learners*. Now this is a big, wide, expansive concept that we're going to explore for most of the rest of our time here. But this is mentioned first: the apostles' teaching. We'll talk about what that means in a second.

What's the second thing they devote themselves to—the second habit that marks this church? "Fellowship." [Tim laughs] So there's another "churchy" word, right? So "fellowship," which I think, for most of us, just means "hanging out," right? So "this was a great time of fellowship," or whatever—but it just means "it was great to hang out with you and talk and catch up, hear your story."

So that's *included* in fellowship, but that's not primarily what this word means. Some of you know the Greek word underneath this because it was kind of a popular one, especially in the Jesus-movement in the seventies—some of you have the wood-etching plaque on your wall—*koinonia*. Anybody? *Koinonia*. *Koinonia* means "a commitment to share," to share your life and your time—i.e., in "hanging out"—but more profoundly your stuff and your energy, your time and your resources, and your very life itself. And it's a commitment to shared life and shared stuff.

What's the third thing? So verse 42—third thing, somebody? The "breaking of bread." So eating together. And eating together, as it is kind of for us today—if you invite someone to your place, and, you know, you buy the food and prepare it for them, you have it at your table, at your apartment, or your house, or whatever—that's not simply being friendly. There's a symbolic statement being made there, of sharing and opening your life.

And for the early Christians, we know this was the setting in which—what we call "communion," and we do in our large gatherings with the bread and the cup—this was the setting—at meals, when Christians would gather, they would have, as part of their time of prayer, or something, as a part of the meal—of taking the bread and the cup together, to remind themselves of the broken body and the shed blood of Jesus.

And so this is about creating relational connections and inviting people into each other's lives. And so how do you—[Tim refers to what he's written] I'm just going to say, "being

together”—but it’s not just casual, it’s a *commitment* to sharing life and investing in relationships with each other, with your table.

And what’s the last thing they dedicate themselves towards? Prayer—and some of you actually have different—some of you have “prayer,” singular. Does anyone have “prayer—the *prayers*,” plural? Yeah, some of you do. So that’s literally what Luke says here: “They dedicated themselves to *the prayers*.”

And this is still, almost entirely, a Jewish community, in which there is already a 2,000-year-old tradition of “the prayers,” that you say at morning, noon, and evening. You say the Shema prayer: *Yahweh, Yahweh alone is our God—love Yahweh your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength*. You pray that three times a day. And then there are cycles of praying through the book of Psalms, on different cycles.

And the early Christians adopted these. They also adopted the prayers of Jesus. This was really—we could translate this as: “they gathered to worship—to pray to Jesus and pray to God the Father in the name of Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, *worship*.”

And so here you go. Whatever a community of Jesus is, according to the vision here, it’s a group of people who are gathering, in all kinds of different ways—big, big gatherings, throughout homes—for these core sets of purposes here. “Learning”—and we’ll talk about what they’re learning in a minute here—the specific focus. They’re humbling themselves and letting their minds be remade with a whole new story.

They’re sharing their lives and their stuff together. They’re investing in relationships with each other, and they’re doing it all as a response of worship and gratefulness to Jesus. There you go. That’s church. That’s church right there. It seems very simple, doesn’t it? But it is kind of simple, actually. Facilitating gatherings for these purposes.

Now, just stop and think this through with me. So I’m sure there are already lots of communities in Jerusalem—and there are many in Portland—that do this kind of thing pretty well, you know? [Tim refers to written notes] Just the second and the third, you know? So “sharing your stuff”—particularly food together and hanging out—you can do that, like, in any street corner in Portland, know what I’m saying? So many “temples of food and fellowship”—right?—in the city of Portland. So there’s nothing particularly “churchy” about that.

So what makes this gathering unique? It’s the *one* who’s the focal point of their worship that they’re looking towards: *Jesus*, at the center. And it’s also the Jesus who’s remaking them, and remaking their minds, as they learn a whole new story and a new way of life together.

And so this is the set of *devotions*—this is the set of *habits*. Becoming a Christian and joining a church involves letting these become habits that become priorities in my life. That's a part of the vision of the church here.

Okay, let's take the next step, here, to this first one [Tim refers to the surface he's writing on]. They're "learning the apostles' teaching." What does that mean, and why is it first? It's first because, like I just said, if you didn't have *that* and you didn't have *this* [Tim referring to a visual], then you could do *this* with anybody anywhere. So whatever they're learning, and the one that they're worshiping, makes this a whole, unique thing unto itself.

They're learning the apostles' teaching, which is *different*—so what did Peter—think back—what did Peter just do? He got up—he addressed 3,000 people. And what story did he tell? He told the story of the Gospel, which is—it's retelling the story of the life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus [and] what those events mean.

How, in Jesus, God was among us, reconciling the world to himself, absorbing into himself the collective sin and the results of humanity's selfishness and brokenness, leading towards death—absorbing it into himself on the cross—overcoming it with his love when he rose from the dead, and offering that new life and grace—a chance to become a new kind of human being again, by Jesus's own personal presence and commitment to me.

And so that's the story that Peter tells—he tells that story—and that's *different* than the apostles' teaching. So think about this. So that's just the Gospel—that's the announcement of the Good News about Jesus. What the apostles' teaching is: it's teaching that helps me explore the million-and-one different *implications* of that announcement.

So the New Testament doesn't exist yet, right? So it's being written at this very time, when the story is happening yet. So you have the actual apostles—they're still alive. And so what they are guiding these new followers of Jesus in is: "What does it now mean to live as if the Gospel is true, as if Jesus is truly the risen Lord of the world who loved me and gave himself for me? What does it mean?" And it creates this whole—the Gospel is a world-creating announcement.

And what the apostolic teaching—for us, it's in the form of the New Testament—it guides us in exploring what it means to live as a follower of Jesus. Because the Gospel creates a whole world, that it takes a lifetime of learning to learn how to let that seep into every nook and cranny of my life.

So think about it like this with me. So I got my first skateboard as a Christmas gift. I was eleven years old. And this was very similar to the impact of the Gospel on my life, nine years later, when I became a Christian when I was twenty, and here's why. Because I

got—my parents are so rad—they got me my first skateboard—that was epic in and of itself. They got me a stack of skateboard videos, which was awesome—VHS tapes—actual tape inside? You know, right? You put them in the VCR—remember that whole thing?

And so a stack of—and for those of you interested: *Santa Cruz: Streets of Fire*, anybody? Natas's part? Holy cow, that was incredible. And then a whole series of *Bones Brigade* videos—the one that's etched in my memory is *Ban This* and *Public Domain*—anybody? Frankie Hill's part, the opening part—incredible, yeah. [Tim laughs] Okay, so, alright.

So what they also gave me was a hit—my first hit pack, because there was—this was, you know, this was a time when those . . . it's not what old women wore. That was a time when, like, this was cool. [Tim laughs] And it was patterned to match my skull-pattern, parachute pants, right? And what they also gave me was a subscription to *Thrasher* magazine.

And so here's what happened. This was not just—I didn't just get a gift, and I took up a new hobby. This was about—over the course of that year, I adopted a *new* identity and a new *look*, a new way of viewing myself, and a new community—right?—a new crew of people who were being transformed in a similar way.

I was—and then through these videos, and through this media, and through *Thrasher* magazine, I was being brought into this *world*. And this world is—the urban landscape—I remember the first time I saw Ray Barbee's part. And he's this, kind of, one of the contributors to what street skateboarding is today. And he just took a normal sidewalk with, like, bus stop benches and pantry stairs and a handrail and a little curb cuts and wheelchair ramps on the sidewalk, and he turned that into a skate park as he would cruise down the street. And I was like, "Yes, yes, yes."

And it was like this—it envisioned me that, all of a sudden—I grew up just two blocks away, here, on Hawthorne—and so all of a sudden, Hawthorne from Safeway up Twenty-Seventh, all the way down to Water Avenue, from my friends and I, this was our—it became our skate park.

Now I had been, as long as I can remember, you know—Hawthorne Boulevard—like, riding or walking, riding my tricycle, or something, around these streets. But all of a sudden, the same exact street became my skate park, because I now lived in this world where the urban landscape is a skate park.

[Tim laughs] And your arch-nemesis in this world is the security guards, right? And so, what is the role? Well, you do what you see them doing in the videos—which is hurl abuse at them, [Tim laughs] even if they do nothing to you, you know? And so that's

what you do, you know—and it's this identity. And I lived in that, and I still, kind of, live in it, virtually, online . . . by being addicted to thrashermagazine.com—anyway.

So do you guys get what I'm saying here? It brought me into this “storied” world. It was a world-creating event for me. The *Gospel* is like that. We all have stories in our view of God—or maybe you don't believe in God, or whatever, God is the “divine energy” in all things, or he's the perpetually ticked off old man, or whatever, like your dad, or something—and so we all come with an angle and a vision about a story of what the world is like.

And what the Gospel does is it announces to you that the world is different than what you thought it was. And that there are whole ways of viewing yourself and your relationships and God in the world that might just be plain wrong, or they're just deficient, or they're distorted or skewed.

And the Gospel is this announcement: The being who is responsible for this huge, crazy, strange, wonderful world that we live in is not distant, is not aloof, is perpetually and eternally *committed* to his good world that God has made, and revealed God's own self to us in Jesus of Nazareth, uniquely and perfectly. And that God's heart is a heart that beats for love and for justice and to set all things right, and to redeem and to reconcile sinful, broken humans to himself. Amen?

And that creates a whole different story for your life. And it takes a lifetime to retrain your mind about what the word “G-O-D” means. About your own identity, about your own value, that the Son of God loves you and gave His life for you, and that you *matter* and that you have a story and that you're a part of a community that *needs* you and needs your story of what Jesus is doing in you.

It takes a lifetime, and it reshapes—it's a whole new story for how you think about your money, and how you think about what you do for a job or career, how you think about sex, and what you do with relationships and conflict and forgiveness. It's the *whole* landscape human experience completely remade in a whole, brand-new worldview.

And so this is going to happen overnight? [Tim laughs] You know what I'm saying? This is going to take a *lifetime*, which is why learning the apostles' teaching, which is what the New Testament does, gives us, proclaims to us this world and what it means to *live* in the world created by the Gospel.

And so both in large gatherings and small gatherings, the apostles' creaching—[Tim laughs] apostles' *creaching*?—teaching, it tops the list. And it frames all of these because we're sharing our stuff together, not just because it's like “love” and “share our stuff,” it's because our foundation story as a community has, at its center, a self-giving act of love of Jesus himself on the cross, so that others could have life.

And if that's the foundation story of our community, then of course this is how we're going to do life together. And we're going to do it, not, like, thinking that we're amazing people who are finally getting communal life right. We're doing it as a response to worship to Jesus—you guys get what I'm saying here? Okay. So this is the vision of Acts 2.

Now I'm just going to, we're going to look at two other biblical passages here, but they all tie together, right here. So in other words, what Acts 2 is painting for us, even though it doesn't use the word, is that—it's painting a life of a community of disciples . . . of disciples.

Now you might know that word, and the word doesn't occur here in Acts chapter 2. And so what does this have to do with discipleship? *This* right here [the apostles' teaching] has everything to do with discipleship. We're making disciples.

The next passage is Matthew chapter 28. This is some of Jesus's last words, the risen Jesus, to the community of disciples in that forty-day period that Acts talked about. And here Jesus says this. It says, "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go 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 I've commanded you. And surely, I'm with you always to the very end of the age.'"

Jesus is a personal presence at the center of the community that we're looking to. And what's the main task, or commission, given here? It's not "bear witness"—it doesn't use that word. But it uses this idea here of "making disciples."

Now, I don't know, do we—does anybody use "disciple" in anything other than church subculture language? Do you use disciple in, like, day-to-day conversation? Disciple? Do you talk about, like, in—did you use it this week? No, well then, right. The case is settled, right there, so. It's a religious word.

But the concept is not particularly religious at all. And so here's the thing. Our English word "disciple," it's kind of a funny word. It's a religious word. The Greek word for disciple is *mathetes*. Why don't you say it with me? So *mathetes*. That's not the word Jesus uses right here.

The word he uses is the verb: the action of making a disciple. And that's *matheteuo*. Do you guys see that? Why don't you say it with me: *matheteuo*. Do you see the root words are the same? *Mathetes* is somebody who *matheteuos*. And what does the word *matheteuo* mean? It means "to become a learner of." To commit to learning at the feet of a teacher. You commit yourself to someone, to learning from them, and all of a sudden, we're right back here at Acts chapter 2, aren't we?

So a community of Jesus is a community of disciples. What is a disciple? It's someone who's committed himself "to become a learner of." You're a learner. And the remaking of our minds is one of the top missions and priorities of the church because of the Gospel; it remakes the world, and we learn to live in the world created by the Gospel. And we do it together by these routines and habits here.

And so one of the primary tasks of the church is to facilitate gatherings and environments where people are not just learning—and you can see here, this isn't just learning ideas. This isn't becoming bookworms. This is learning a way of life and a new way of thinking. And we do it together.

And this is exactly what Jesus is talking about here. And as we are becoming learners, one of the primary things is that we're teaching. We're being taught the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of the apostles. Do you see, this is, here we go. I'm just trying to make it super clear. You guys with me here? It's not that complicated, actually.

Okay, so when does one become a disciple of Jesus, then? For some of us, the word "disciple" has connotations or connections or that it's like the Marine Corps of Christianity or something like that. Like, "Okay, sure, they said they were Christian, they placed their faith in Jesus, but I was a Christian for a while, *then* I became a disciple, a follower of Jesus," or something.

And that's a very common understanding, but it's nowhere to be found in the New Testament. As we're going to see in just one more passage here, the moment you pledged your faith in Jesus and responded to the Good News about him, you became a disciple.

Look at what Paul says, here, in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 20 through 24. Paul describes this community of Christians—mostly non-Jewish, hundreds and hundreds of miles away from Jerusalem, a couple decades later—and he describes this process for them. And he says, "You all learned Christ when you heard about Him and were taught in Him." And what is the Greek word for "learn"? *matheteuo*, *matheteuo*.

So you could equally translate this as, "You became disciples of Christ. You became learners of Jesus." How and when did you become a disciple? Well, he says, two key moments here: One is "when you heard about him." So, like Peter's announcement in Acts chapter 2—or like a friend or like your parents for some of you—at some point you heard the Good News about Jesus, and if it clicked with you, and you responded in faith, and you pledged your faith to Jesus, that was when you became a "learner of Christ." You became a disciple when you "heard and responded."

But it doesn't stop there, because he says, "you heard and responded," but then continued this journey of being taught in him. And what's the content of that teaching? Well, how did he describe it here? He says, "Just as the truth is in Jesus"—you were

taught in learning—“to take off your old humanity of your former way of life, to be renewed in the spirit of your mind”—here, it’s all about the learning—the new way of thinking and the new way of life—“and to put on the new humanity, which is created to be like God in true justice and holiness.”

So the word “disciple” actually never occurs once, in all of Paul’s letters. He never says like, “Be a disciple,” or, you know—but he talks about the idea of growing as a disciple all the time, because he talks about “learning” all of the time, and about the “remaking of your mind.”

So this is a big deal, and this is primary to what it means to “be the church” is that: we’re gathering in rhythms and routines so we can establish habits together—individually and corporately. We gather in big gatherings, we gather in home gatherings. And the primary thing that reshapes everything else is that we are a learning community that’s learning to live out the announcement of the Gospel, and the implications of that for every facet of our lives.

And we do it together, because you *can’t* do this by yourself. Imagine trying to learn . . . some of you have done this before—no, you’ve never done it before. You’ve never learned a language by yourself. You never have. And even if you went into a closet and learned a language by reading a book, you’re learning from that person because the person wrote that book.

So it’s exactly what’s going on here. It’s learning a brand-new language, a way of talking, a way of articulating, a whole new way of thinking, and you cannot do it alone. And so the “remaking of our minds” happens together, by our investment of—our commitment to each other—by spending time together, and all of it is an act of worship to Jesus. Come on now. Somebody say “amen,” or something, I don’t know.

So, okay. So I just want to reflect on this. That’s all the passages I want to read. And really, what I want to do now is just stop and reflect on what this means for us. Door of Hope, right now, is in a season of transition. And I want to throw out a handful of questions—put the ball in your court—to ask you what it means to be a part of this community of disciples.

First of all, the word “disciple-making” or “discipleship,” I think when—again, in kind of church-subculture language—some of us hear that, a very certain idea comes into our minds. I’m going to venture a guess here. And when I say the word, like, “discipleship” or “are you being disciplined,” or “are you discipling someone,” our minds immediately go to one person who’s been a Christian for a while, maybe with someone who’s a newer believer, and they commit to having coffee or breakfast or something together, one-on-one, over a series of a year, or something, reading the Bible and praying for each other.

You guys with me? I say “discipleship,” or “making disciples,” that’s what comes into our mind.

And that is an immensely important habit as a Christian. But that is not what the New Testament calls “discipleship.” “Making disciples” is something that happens when all of this—when you are a learner, you can learn in a *million* different environments. Disciple-making is happening right now. [Tim laughs] You didn’t even know it was happening. Our minds are being challenged by the Scriptures. We’re being taught, and thinking things through, and *what does it mean for us in light of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection?* Disciple-making is happening right now.

And Acts 2 is one of the biggest gatherings they had, was for learning the apostles’ teaching. Here we go. It’s happening right now. And so when we limit the concept of becoming or growing as a disciple to just one form—one-on-one that takes place—I think it just makes the picture too small. When the New Testament talks about “making disciples,” it’s much more expansive and robust than that.

And so here’s the three questions I want to pitch towards you. And just think about yourself, your own story, who you are as a Christian, your own commitment, or lack thereof, to being a disciple here, at Door of Hope.

So the first question is: Who are [the] disciples in a church community? Who? Who are the disciples, and who are called to “make disciples,” in these passages that we’ve looked at? Did you get any elite core of the “qualified leaders,” are the ones who “make disciples,” or something? [Tim laughs] No, no.

Who’s a disciple? If you self-identify as a Christian and have pledged your faith in Jesus, in response to him, you’re a disciple. Congrats—you’re a disciple. [Tim laughs] Okay? So you may not feel like you’re a very good one, and that’s okay—whatever—most of us aren’t. And so we’re growing, and we’re learning. You’re a learner along with us—that’s the whole point.

And so right from the very beginning—you might be a newer believer or coming back to your faith after a very, very long time, and—you are a disciple, and the Spirit of God is in you. And you’re looking towards—we want to encourage you—to look towards Jesus, and we want to remind you that He’s looking at you, you know?—which might, kind of, freak you out, but it’s true.

And you’re growing, and you’re learning, you have something to offer. You, at the very least, have your story to offer of what on earth God’s doing in your heart that makes the Gospel compelling and real to you, and how God’s changing you. That story is so precious. It’s such a precious gift that you have to share with other people here. You may not feel mature or whatever. [Tim laughs] None of us really are, you know? And

those of us who think we are, it's just a facade, and it would be better if you just saw through that quicker, and we can get on with the real growth?

And so if you're a new believer, what does it mean to become a disciple? Well, I mean, we have gatherings. It's happening right here, so way to go. You're doing it right now. So we have all kinds of—join a community group. And that's one of the ways that we bring people, like in Acts 2, into smaller groups together. And it's about learning each other's stories, opening our Bibles together, [and] praying for each other. That's a form of discipleship.

We had our first Friday of late-night prayer together. That's a form of disciple-making, because we're learning to pray and learning different forms of prayer together. There you go. Just get involved. Come. You're doing it right now. You're doing a great job, you know? You're a disciple. And so that's the "who" of discipleship, right from the beginning.

For someone who's been a Christian, a disciple for a long time, there comes a shift, and this is an important one, where the mark of a growing and maturing disciple is about this shift towards an other-centered view of the world. It's a part of the remaking of our minds in community.

And so a maturing disciple experiences this shift of seeing the church as "helping me grow," and about offering things that "help me grow"—it gets turned inside out. And this now becomes the place where the first question I ask is not, "How can the church help me?" It's "How can I contribute to the mission of making disciples here?"

And so that may be a part of certain structures of gatherings that we have—community groups or serving with the kiddos or something like that. It may be just beginning to notice the people around you. [Tim laughs] If you haven't noticed, there's hundreds of people here right now. And I'm guessing a lot of them you don't know.

And I'm guessing maybe some of you didn't even notice that there were some people just sitting absolutely by themselves for the first ten minutes of the gathering here. And maybe some of you may not notice there's people every week who walk in the front door who are clearly like, "Where do I go?"

And it's just taking that initiative to say, "Man, this is just a wonderful place to meet new people, initiate relationships, and be a part of our collective mission here," which is helping each other grow. It's not that complicated, but somehow we make it complicated—you notice that? And so that's the "who." It's all of us.

When does someone become a disciple? When does growing as a learner of Jesus take place? Well, Paul said right here, it starts—you become a disciple the moment you

pledge your faith in Jesus, and “you heard.” And then it’s a lifelong remaking of your mind.

And so this is what’s interesting is that: you get some disciples, maybe they’ve been a Christian for a long time, and they were already kind of bookworms. And so the whole, like, learning the habit of engaging with Scripture, while learning from the teachers in my community—but taking responsibility for my own engagement and learning from the Bible in my own day-to-day rhythms and habits—that’s part of growing as a disciple—and so, what’s funny is some people get really good at that, because they usually already have a disposition towards that.

But then there’s all these other areas of their lives where they’re still, like, *babies*. You know what I mean? So they’re like, they really like—they’re stingy—not generous at all, like one of the core practices of the Gospel compels us towards. They haven’t learned to manage how their money works in their life. So they actually have something to share with other people—and they’re total unforgiving jerks towards people—but they really know the Bible well. And you’ve met these Christians, right?

And so that’s great. I’m happy that person’s around at Door of Hope, because they need to grow. And so does a person who doesn’t know the Bible very well at all. They have a more generous disposition, but they’re really struggling with issues of forgiveness with some sort of people—that’s great. That’s great. There’s room to grow.

And all of us are at different places and different parts of our lives, becoming more and more devoted, consistent followers of Jesus. It’s all of us, and it’s all the parts of our lives all the time. Are you guys with me?

Which leads to the last question—so that’s “who”—that’s “when” does it happen—and it leads to the last question: that’s “where.” And so one of the most difficult things in ordering a church—and it’s something we just keep trying to figure out and wondering if we’re not supposed to figure it out—is that: we can, as a church—like just the leadership and the elders and the community group leaders—we can facilitate the “Acts 2 thing”—gathering, big gatherings, gathering in homes.

The most difficult thing to gather is the one-on-one connections, people becoming close, best friends, and so on. And just—we can’t program that, you know what I mean? And often what happens is people get frustrated with churches because they come and they’re apart and they don’t find a best friend within a year or something. And they get frustrated, and they leave, or something.

And part of it—and I’m trying to be friendly in this challenge here—is that I think there’s an assumption that the church “ought to be doing *this* for me.” In other words, the church is helping me form a social network. And we believe that forming social networks

and forming deep friendships is a crucial part of growing—don't hear me wrong on that. But that's not our primary task.

Our primary task is to help facilitate gatherings, large and small, so that people find—I mean, we do end up being, kind of, a matchmaking church, just by nature of . . .? Come on—you know, how many weddings did Josh and I do last summer? So that happens.

And it's just like—it's the same thing. I really try to encourage people with, like, community groups. Sometimes it takes about two to four experiences in a community group before the "chemistry" happens. You guys know what I'm talking about—the "chemistry." It's the group where everybody's "nice," you shared stories, and you did that study, or whatever, did that sermon series, or something—but you're not particularly excited to join that group again. That's okay. That's all right. Don't feel guilty about that. Join a different group.

And along the way, pray that the Lord will bring someone into your life—or even more so, pray that Jesus will bring someone onto your radar that you can initiate with, and you can invest in their lives and make history with them, you know what I'm saying?

And so I think a lot of people's frustration with church is that, you know, we don't often find friends there—and we can't program that for you. I think a lot of people's frustration with church is that they think the church ought to be doing different kinds of things, like, for example, spinning off nonprofits or starting different ministries towards justice or the poor or poverty, and stuff like that.

And please don't mishear me: if you are a disciple of Jesus for any amount of time, you will encounter the words and the teachings of Jesus—a huge amount of them are focused on how, if the Gospel's working itself in your life, you *will* begin to develop a compassionate, caring, action-oriented heart towards the poor in your community, right? Just read the teachings of Jesus, right?

So somehow ministry towards the poor and issues of justice, that is what the church should—that's what the disciples of Jesus should be doing in a city and in a community. Is that what we see as our strength in the leadership of the church, organizing that? No. No, what we want to do is sit you in front of those teachings of Jesus until they keep you up at night. And you can't stop thinking about the people who aren't in your warm apartment—sleeping under the bridge—and so that you join people in doing something about that.

And you are a disciple of Jesus. The Spirit of God is in you. You're a part of Door of Hope. You are a door of hope in the city, and you are—go do it. God bless you. Do you hear what I'm saying here? And so disciples of Jesus will be doing these kinds of things in the city.

It doesn't mean that we need to start a Door of Hope ministry to do it. You're a part of Door of Hope, you know what I'm saying? It's just—we make things a lot more complicated, I think, when we want the church to organize all of these things, when what we're trying to do is facilitate gatherings of people—am I being clear?

I'm just trying to achieve clarity for us. This is a time of transition, and I think it's just important for us to realize what we're doing—as an organized community, as a part of our rhythms and patterns—and then what should just “happen.”

One of the greatest joys that I have in living in the Hawthorne area, here, and the two hundred coffee shops that are between Division and Burnside, right? And so where I go to study and work on my messages, and I can hardly go into any coffee shop where I don't encounter one or at least two, three people from Door of Hope—open Bibles—they're praying, they're talking to each other.

It's so awesome—this is church. *That's* church. *This* is church. *This* is part of making disciples—and *that's* church, because that's part of making disciples too—are you guys with me? And so this is what we're part of, and so that's “where” it happens. It happens in all these different gatherings, and we're all disciples, all of the time.

So here's my question to you: What does it mean for you to be a part of Door of Hope? You're a new Christian, coming back to your faith, you feel stagnant, you've been a Christian a long time—whatever. You're a disciple—you're a learner of Jesus. You have areas where you need to grow.

Are you initiating—finding or looking for places where you can invest and help us make disciples, either on your own or by participating in the gatherings we facilitate? Are you actively looking to grow in the areas of life where you're deficient as a disciple of Jesus? And there's no shame in that, that's all of us. We all need to grow, that's the point.

And what does it mean for you to be committed to this community of disciples? That's the question I want to ask you. And that's the question I want you to pray about as we transition to a new location and then think about the future of Door of Hope. We need you. The Spirit of God's in you. You're a follower of Jesus. You're a disciple.

We need you to respond to the Gospel—just like I need to, and Josh and the elders—as we grow together.

[EMSB theme fades in]

All right, you guys, thank you for listening to the “Strange Bible” podcast. We’ll be exploring another key theme from the book of Acts, chapter 2, in the next episode. So there you go. We’ll see you then. Thanks for listening.

[EMSB theme fades out]