

" Visioning: Serve"

– *Galatians 5:13-26, John 15:1-9*

- God has a special vision and a purpose for Hillcrest. The vision begins when we connect with God and connect with one another. The next step is to grow to full maturity in faith. The third step is to serve others in the name of Jesus. This is how we bear fruit by giving our time and energy to help make disciples. Practically, we engage this



step when we serve on a ministry team.

SERVE

Something wonderful happens as summer draws to an end... I'm talking of course about Fall Festival! I bet many of you have gone to some of the fall festivals around here. The fall festivals got their start as harvest festivals. These harvest festivals are celebrations of the fruits and vegetables that we have grown out of the earth during the year. God provides the right conditions to grow fruits and vegetable for our nourishment. So we thank God for the food that sustains us.

Harvest or Fall festivals are not new to the church. In Leviticus chapter 23, the ancient Israelites were told by God to celebrate the feast of the first fruits during

the harvest season. Even though Christians don't have a formal holiday for the harvest, we should still give thanks for the fruit that God brings forth from the earth.

But God does not only create the conditions for fruits and vegetables to nourish us, God creates the conditions for Spiritual fruits to nourish our Spirits. And, we get to participate in this process. It is as if the congregation were a field, and each of us were plants in the field. And plants... produce fruit.

Producing fruit is the sign that a plant is mature. That is why fruit is an image that is used by Jesus and Paul and many others to describe what mature believers in Christ produce in their lives. In the Children's sermon we just named some of the fruits of the Spirit... love, gentleness, joy, peace, faithfulness. One who is has grown into a disciple of Christ displays these fruits in their interactions with others.

Over the last three Sundays I have been describing what it might look like for Hillcrest to have a simple vision for making disciples in our congregation. On the first Sunday we talked about calling the first step in the disciple making process: Connect. The idea is that we can only become disciples by first connecting to Jesus, and then to one another. This step is primarily carried out in the worship service and through church wide events. On the second Sunday, we talked about calling the second step: Grow. The idea is that we can only become disciples if we seek out teaching and encouragement in a small group intentionally focused on Jesus. This step is carried out within small groups where we can form relationships where we can be real with others and let them speak into our lives.

Today, I suggest that the third and final step might be called: Serve. This step is symbolized by the cluster of grapes on the vine and cross that you see on the screens. When I say serve, I mean to serve in a ministry of the congregation. Serving is how we bear spiritual fruit. In fact, the very introduction of Paul's teaching about the fruit of the Spirit starts when Paul writes This in Galatians 5:13, "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love." Then Paul goes on to describe the difference between giving in to the acts of the flesh and bearing Spiritual fruit. Bearing Spiritual fruit is accomplished when we put others before us in service to them.

When we see needy people that are hungry for food, we serve them food. When we see people that are hungry for God and relationships, we serve them the fruits of the Spirit. Serving people, the fruit of the Spirit is different than putting a bowl of grapes on the table in front of someone. Serving the fruit of the Spirit happens when you put the needs of others before your own desires in the name of Jesus Christ.

Our congregation can train people to serve others spiritual fruit by allowing people to serve in the ministries of the church. This is the “rubber hits the road” part of the Christian life, and in order to make disciples, a congregation must move people through the step of serving others. This final step in the process of making disciples is necessary to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Church worship service provides a place for people to connect to Jesus. It provides a place for people to hear the good news that God loves them so much that God gave up His own son to be killed so that we could be in right relationship with God forever. Church worship services and events provide a place for believers to connect with one another.

Small groups in the church create a place for believers to grow in their faith in Christ. In these small groups, people learn about God in relationship with others. In small groups, people are encouraged to live a Godly life and admonished when they run off of the path of righteousness. In short, people mentor one another in becoming the people that God wants us to be!

When we serve in the ministries of the church, something wonderful happens. Our faith is tested and proven. This is true, because service and obedience to God has a cost. We are giving up our time, our money, our energy to do our part in God’s work of making disciples. And this can be difficult at times. It is hard to choose others over ourselves. But that is what God asks us to do, so that others can share in the everlasting relationships that we get to enjoy with God and one another!

In 1st Peter 1:6-7 we read this, “In all this (meaning our hope in our resurrection through Jesus) you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though

refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

When we serve others in the ministries of the church, our faith is proven because of our willingness to put others before us because God asks us to. That is what bearing Spiritual fruit is all about! All the things that are called fruit of the spirit are related to putting others before ourselves. Our service is how we bear spiritual fruit. It is something that engages us in the larger mission of the church of Jesus Christ, to make disciples.

Remember the mission that Jesus gave us in Matthew 28:18-20?

“...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 have commanded you...”

This is the mission that God sends each of us on individually. But thank God that we don't have to take on this mission alone! God created us to do this with others. This is why we serve in ministries together, on ministry teams.

Some examples of ministry teams in our church are the worship committee & Choir, the deacons, the property crew, the sewing group, our children's church and Sunday school leaders, and our mission committee. Hillcrest has ministry teams that work hard to provide the environment for us to participate in God's work of making disciples. Some teams work inside this building and some teams work out in people's homes and the community. Wherever you serve in the ministry of the church, this is the third step in how Hillcrest Church can make disciples.

You might be wondering why I am saying everyone needs to serve in some capacity in one of the ministries of Hillcrest. You might think that you can serve God anywhere you go, and in many different ways outside of the congregation. This is true. But serving in one of the ministries of Hillcrest allows people to serve in a capacity where they are still accountable and in relationship with others in the congregation. This is the way in which we as a congregation train up disciples of Christ. It is a simple process designed to make disciples. Sure, we all serve God when we love others over ourselves, in any place. But Serving in the

congregation's ministries helps the church to make disciples. First, by testing and proving our faith in Christ, causing us to bear spiritual fruits. Second, by creating the environment for others to become disciples in our Hillcrest family. In other words, the students become the teachers, and then we all teach on another. That is how we participate in going and making disciples of Jesus.

Connect, Grow, Serve. It is a simple three step process that Hillcrest can use to make disciples. Sounds easy enough, right? That is the point. It is supposed to be super simple and easy. The hard part is sticking to the process.

Over time, congregations almost always add things that clutter up the process. This happens because there are so many good ideas for ministry in a congregation. Each person in the congregation could probably come up with multiple things that Hillcrest could add to its list of programs. But having a simple process for making disciples only helps if we can stick to it. Sometimes, the congregation has to say no to programs or ministries that might complicate or overextend the process. Not because the ideas are bad, but only because sticking to a process is a way to ensure that we are accomplishing the mission that God gave us. Sticking to the process is the only way that we can have a roadmap for how to make disciples of Jesus that bear spiritual fruit in the world. And we know from our scripture this morning that branches that bear fruit are the only ones that God, our master will not cut off and throw in the fire.

So let me ask you one more time, just to drill the point in further, what are the three steps that Hillcrest can use to make disciples of Jesus? Connect, Grow, Serve. That is right.

In conclusion, I have some homework for each of you. I would like you to think about the three steps disciple making process. I would like you to pray about it. Can you see yourself fitting in to such a simple process for making disciples? Can you see how a simple process like Connect Grow Serve might help us to make sure that Hillcrest is a congregation that makes disciples? Ask God to let you know if this kind of plan might help us to bear spiritual fruit, and glorify God.