

What is a "Primal" Group?

Perhaps a much better term exists than "*primal group*"¹ to communicate this essential aspect of LifeChange in which community begets community. However, let's begin with what I presently see without quibbling over terminology.² Why do I believe "*primary groups*" are such essential building blocks to multiply catalytic *koinonia* in community, both in number and in depth? I have been discipling for years and as a whole very much like what has come out of my leisurely time with a small, temporarily closed band of people centered around Scripture, trusting our indwelling Trainer to give insight and LifeChange. But there's more...much more (key concept in 1 Thess.). I'm in the early process of working this out more fully, so please come alongside and experiment with me and learn how to develop healthy *primal* groups to train others for healthy LifeChange as communities birth other groups.

For a starter, we have been designed by the original "*Primal Group*," Father, Son and Spirit. They model all the essentials of any healthy primary relationship. God fashioned us in this image so we can reproduce and pass on this flourishing life to others. Ask ourselves: "*What factors do we see in the mutual relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit that we can adapt as a flexible, working model?*"

In Genesis one and two prior to the Fall, God startles us as He states that it's "*not good*" for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18), even with the Father, Son and Spirit as companions in the Garden. We are incomplete without others like ourselves as companions and partners. God's solution was to fashion the first human "*primal group*," husband and wife, with the dual focus of deep relationship and reproducing others like them. After the Fall, this husband/wife relationship became a *primary* means to unlock change to a restored relationship with God and with each other.³

Jesus also launched His ministry by drawing men to Himself and training them in "*primary groups*" to multiply. Jesus is not only our perfect model for maturity, but also our perfect model for ministry. During His time on earth, Jesus accurately reflected His Father's heart as He trained in "*primary groups*" leading to LifeChange. This seemed natural for Jesus as He tapped into God's design prior to the Fall. Our Ministry Model nurtured through three sets of four *primal* groups, fused together into the Twelve.⁴

With these three solid examples, let's open our minds and dialog together. Both depth of relationship and ability to reproduce are essential. *Both/And*. For me, this *Both/And* creates a major tension. In-depth

relationships require extended time together, energy and focus to develop those *primary* relationships. Multiplying LifeChange groups by launching new groups demands time focused outside our *primary* relationships, drawing others in through *open*, permeable groups, beginning with far less depth, even with the lighter touch of socialization. Where do we find the resources for both in our busy schedules?

Do we really believe that God calls us both to deepen relationship with Him and also to reproduce, both deeper and wider? Ask yourself.

Our Family-of-Three fashioned us with built-ins so we are hard-wired to be most healthy in *primary* groups of 3-5 persons aligned with God.⁵ Tap into this God-given, high-leverage opportunity for healthy LifeChange springing from such open, vulnerable, supporting relationships.

In His initial design, God made us “*persons-in-community*.” Today the business world is even beginning to recognize this, utilizing more of the innate power in group dynamics. Nothing comes closer to fully demonstrating God’s original-intent for humanity than such primal oneness. No wonder the climax of creation was “*man and woman*” created together in God’s image, the first human *primary* group (see Genesis 1:27). Such unity attracts and draws others in close (John 17:20-23). Our high-leverage point for LifeChange and healthy spirituality is in *primary* groups.

However, if we focus all our attention on our current *primary* group and invest little time reaching out beyond ourselves, even something so good may develop into an unhealthy clique, isolated from others, impermeable, and ingrown. Why?

Because of this amazing power for God to transform in *primal* groups, such groups that begin so well can degenerate over time into a clique...with the people blissfully unaware. Their *primary relationships* are so enjoyable and feel so good (and they are!), yet they may not notice that their group now tends to resist change and to unknowingly build impenetrable walls to “outsiders,” even those in our same faith-community.⁶ Have you been around a group that has been together so long that they have inside jokes and stories, often leaving you feeling like an outsider? “OK, Jim. What’s wrong with maintaining such good *primary relationships*?”

Nothing! They are wonderful. After decades of ministering, I have a large number scattered around.⁷ Nurture these existing *primary relationships*, but not at the expense of multiplying *primary groups* in faith-communities. For me, the greatest personal cost is when I must stop

meeting regularly with a *primary* group, just like we must launch our children into life or we stunt their growth.⁸ I miss the regular time with them immensely. But we must release them to God's ministry call on their lives for them to thrive, which includes ministry and multiplication.

So, how can we live in the tension of enjoying deep, primary relationships and yet avoiding a clique and launching fresh *primal* groups? Read the Gospels. Jesus' ministry model of Three Stages⁹ lays out in broad strokes how He maintained the tension between both "*wide*" and "*deep*." Jesus released His original four *primary* groups after twenty months so they were free to launch fresh groups.¹⁰ Of course, we don't need to be as radical as Jesus (He disbanded the groups when He died!) But please let's embrace the essential underlying truth.

Take Jesus seriously as our ministry model. I believe healthy *primary* groups must be time-limited (Jesus limited His to twenty months), although *primary relationships* may last forever, just not in the same *primary group*.¹¹ If you don't buy-in to my understanding, soak in Jesus' model yourself. *How do you understand Jesus' ministry model? How are you personally practicing this in today's context?* How do you simultaneously practice both "*deep*" and "*wide*"?

Depth calls for extended time together for a season with those few in our *primary* group to cultivate deepening vulnerability leading to LifeChange and vision. Breadth calls us to be welcoming, inviting others into our depth in nurturing other LifeChange groups.

All God's living creation in Genesis 1 "*reproduce after their kind.*" It's Reality hardwired into our design as image-bearers. Jesus commissions His disciples to reproduce at least three spiritual generations (Matthew 28:19-20), and Paul adds a fourth generation (2 Timothy 2:2). And experience also supports this.

The first thing Jesus did after His baptism and forty days in the wilderness was to begin to gather seven men to Himself (the first seven in the Acts 1:13 list of the original twelve disciples). "*Come & See!*" Jesus invited them to dialog with Him with a very low level of commitment (you will find this beginning in John 1:35-51). This stage was a welcoming, open-armed, permeable approach. After a few months together, Jesus sent them home to weigh a deeper relationship with Him.

Jesus next approached these seven a second time and invited them in closer, adding Levi/Matthew to the original seven (Mark 2:13-14). "*Come & Follow Me.*" This transition stage lasted less than one year. His disciples carefully observed how Jesus ministered in the *wide* group (the crowds), even as He took them aside and began to explain more to

them in the beginning stages of LifeChange *primary* training groups. The disciples caught His heart and His vision, although they *did* little.

In the final stage, Jesus spent the night praying to His Father before calling the Twelve...and they came (Mark 3:13-19). The 3rd stage is: “Come & Be with Me.” In this *primary* group, Jesus experienced full-orbed *primary relationships* together with His Twelve for twenty-months. All the way to the cross, Jesus stimulated LifeChange in His disciples and trained them to reproduce like He did,¹² ultimately releasing them to “Go and make disciples” like He did.¹³

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).

The Twelve as “Primary/Primal” Groups

For your reference, here are the four lists of the Twelve in the New Testament. Let me break down these three primary groups a bit from the Biblical and historical information available.¹⁴ We know the most about the *first* LifeChange *primary* training group since these men are so prominent in the Gospels, and three of them are mentioned in Acts.

#	Mark 3:16-19	Matthew 10:2-4	Luke 6:14-16	Acts 1:13
1	Peter	Peter	Peter	Peter
1	James	Andrew	Andrew	James
1	John	James	James	John
1	Andrew	John	John	Andrew
2	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
2	Bartholemew (Nathaneal)	Bartholemew (Nathaneal)	Bartholemew (Nathaneal)	Thomas
2	Matthew	Thomas	Matthew	Bartholomew
2	Thomas	Matthew	Thomas	Matthew
3	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus
3	Thaddeus	Thaddaeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
3	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot	Judas, son of James	Judas, son of James
3	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	<i>Not in List</i>

Digging deeper as we piece together a bit of their background from scattered Scriptures and early Christian documents, it seems that His Twelve Disciples gathered together in three “*primary groups*” of four each, even as they were also part of the larger group of twelve. And these very ordinary men turned the world upside down. For our purposes, I want to highlight their *oikos* relationships with one another, that is, their natural connections. If this intrigues you, William Barclay’s *The Master’s Men* is good for further study.

The *first* LifeChange *primary* group has four very familiar names, Peter and Andrew, James and John. Both sets were brothers and were partners (*koinonia*) together in a fishing enterprise out of Capernaum. Additionally, James and John were also first-cousins of Jesus; their mom, Salome, was His mother’s sister.¹⁵ Read through the Gospels together and notice how often the three, Peter, James and John, are mentioned

together in special times with Jesus.¹⁶ And John, the one who rested his head on Jesus at the Last Supper, was apparently Jesus' favorite. What a suggestive study this makes for *primal* LifeChange groups.

The *second primal* group for LifeChange is also an interesting study because of the complementary strengths each brings to the whole.

Philip,¹⁷ Andrew and Peter hailed from the same home town, Bethsaida. This connection is probably why Jesus sought Philip and called him to follow (John 1:43-44). Nathanael¹⁸ was the first person Philip invited to Jesus, "*come and see*," indicating a previous relationship (John 1:45). Matthew¹⁹ is also called Levi, the son of Alphaeus.²⁰ Thomas²¹ is included with these other three in all four lists, the one who could not live with unanswered questions. Every group needs one of them!

We know very little about the *third* LifeChange *primary* training group.²² Simon the Zealot came from the 1st century Jewish radical group called the Zealots,²³ and Judas Iscariot probably also did since he tried to force Jesus to act and start a rebellion. William Barclay also believes there is "*considerable evidence*" that Thaddeus/Judas, the Son of James could also have been a zealot. James, the son of Alphaeus was probably the brother of Levi, the son of Alphaeus in the second group²⁴ (Mark 2:13-17). William Barclay conjectures that James could possibly be the link in this *oikos* group (he is first in the 3rd *primary* group in each of the lists), perhaps even a Zealot himself. If so, perhaps their fervent patriotism is the connecting link of these last four (their *oikos*).

I took extended space to show the interconnectedness of the disciples (their *oikos*) to demonstrate how Jesus focused ministry on *primary* groups as His preferred vehicle to train in LifeChange and ministry. Jesus not only came to give His life so we might live, but also modeled a dynamic, catalytic way to grow healthy community from the bottom up. For me, it seems from the list above that Jesus intentionally gathered His Twelve into three temporarily *closed primary* groups of four each for in-depth training for LifeChange, both for deep relationships and also for ministry...without neglecting the crowd.

In our unique season of life, this is a solid, broad-based foundation from which to experiment and discover how we can become a vital part of a *primary* group, both for in-depth LifeChange and also to reproduce. Although the expert Discipler, Jesus, focused on multiple groups, I would suggest each of us begin with **one** LifeChange *primary* training group of 3-5 others. "*Focus on the few to reach the many.*"

Who of the same sex do you already feel drawn together with (your *oikos* relationships)? Are they *F.A.T.* (that is, Faithful, Available, Teachable so they would be open)?

In our 21st century lives, if we do follow Jesus' model, we must first put to death as the central focus of how to build churches the typical Western Christian focus on size and visibility, hustle and bustle... initially. Jesus built from the ground up, pouring His life into *primal* LifeChange training groups as small as three or four persons over a period of two years (*deep*), without ever ignoring or marginalizing the crowds (*wide*). Then Jesus left, releasing them to cultivate their own *primal* groups. Over time, though, Jesus' initially "slow" approach of exponential multiplication built a movement that has influenced billions.

- "WIDER" – "Come & See"
- Bridge between "WIDE & DEEP" – "Come & Follow Me"
- "DEEPER" – "Come & Be with Me," ministering together as partners, sharing their lives deeply in *koinonia*. Bonding often happens more quickly for those who have worked and sweated together, learning to respect each other in the fires of ministry.

Nurturing "Primary/Primal" Groups

The building blocks for ideal Christian *koinonia* or community are healthy *primal* groups for LifeChange, ideally 3-4 people, modeled after the original *Primary* Group, Father, Son and Spirit. Christian *primary* groups are forged by the Spirit of God around responses to the Word of God (1 Thes. 1:6b). These fundamental relationships cannot be assigned or programmed. However, over time as our churches are built this way through natural *oikos* relationships, from the bottom up, we will shift the focus from expert-directed to a more community-based mutuality.

Although the Spirit causes growth, as good farmers we cultivate a "soil" conducive to fruitful growth through our mutual "one another" responses. Our ideal focus for training for LifeChange is *primal* groups, not merely individuals (although ministering to *any one* person is a vital part of ministry). The ideal fruit of an apple tree is an apple orchard, not just apples. Each of us carries equal responsibility for healthy spiritual growth and multiplication since God designed all of us as image-bearers to be influencers (Genesis 1:26-28), regardless of our role, responsibilities, or position. 1 Thess 1:6-7 sketches out three essential aspects the Spirit uses to forge such high leverage growth in *primal* groups. I believe all three elements are just as crucial today as in Paul's ministry. Please also add your own experience and insight to make this your own.



First, RELATIONAL Connection (life-on-life) (1:6a):

- Each one in a Christian *primary* group must buy-in personally (“become”). This taps into the freedom available in *koinonia*, as we mutually encourage, comfort and challenge each other without judgment and towards our highest and best (1 Thess. 2:12). All three together with authenticity and with no-holds-barred honesty remove bitter roots within, allowing the life of Jesus to radiate out to others.
- Allow *primary* groups to fuse together as naturally as possible, perhaps with previously existing relationships (*oikos*), or with new relationships forged by the Spirit of God.
- Become imitators of those with healthy character (even from a brand new Christian). Seek out Christians with healthy character to imitate. Imitation demands extended life-on-life time together for Christian formation until a critical mass is reached. This also makes “hiding” undesirable, thus accelerating LifeChange.
- Also become imitators of the Lord, modeling our life after Jesus’ life (1:6, note sequence “*us & the Lord*,” 2 Cor 3:17-18; Rom. 8:29).
- LifeChange *primal* training groups normally grow over time into a mutual friendship and deep connection (“become,” John 15:12-17; 17:20-23), not based on positional authority or roles.
- Jesus discipled in *same-sex* groups. This is not sexist (an all-women group was also closely associated with Jesus, Luke 8:1-3). For this kind of relational intimacy forged in such groups, same-sex groups are wise and effective.

Second, BIBLICAL Responsiveness (Word & Spirit) (1:6b):

- Develop a welcoming attitude toward God’s Word, like a good friend who stirs up life and refreshment and flourishing growth. The Spirit forges a Christian *primary* group around God’s Word.
- Paul models a priority for which Scriptural concepts we need for healthy growth: *a heart fully abandoned to*: (1) who God is and what He generously provides through His presence, (2) our design and renewed identity in Christ (a high view of redeemed humanity), and (3) our call and outfitting as intentional, lifelong partners with God, the One who is actively involved in His world (1 Thess 1-3 comes before the responses of 4-5; Ephesians 1-3 prior to 4-6; Romans 5-8 before the commands to do in 12:1f).
- Learn how to teach to release active learning through a style that invites all into the mutual learning and growing process together. “*Discovery by Doing*” encourages pre-preparation in Scripture.²⁵
- Learning is not merely Bible study, but we also learn the “*why-to*” and “*how-to*” for worship (1:2-3), mission (1:4-5), and

doing community together (1:6-10 + 2:1-13), and the skills and values necessary to give our lives away through these channels.

Third, INTENTIONAL Multiplication (action learning) (1:7-10):

- Learning is not static, but actively putting what we are learning into practice personally in our lives and giving it away through mutual ministry together. Little sustainable NT learning happens without doing. Who we are (Romans 8:29) colors all we do.
- Base this intentional life you live out and give away on faith (“turned to God”), love (“to serve the living and true God”), and hope (“to wait for his Son from heaven,” from 1 Thess. 1).
- As models of Christ, live the life of Christ out loud (“they themselves report...”, 9). Note that it’s both *inward* in community (6-7), *outward* in mission (8 +3-4), and also *upward* in worship (8b + 2-3). *Both/And/And*.
- *What is the fruit of an apple?* An apple orchard. From the get-go, sow Paul’s intended end because of their God-given potential.
- A *primary/primal* group is relationally dynamic. So its “shelf-life” seems to be shorter. Jesus’ “Come & Be with Me” group lasted only twenty-one months. Studies in group dynamic find a small group can become ingrown after two or three years. Plan on multiplying the group, and keep sowing this into its DNA.
- “*Deeper*” happens in part in a more limited context of contact (like perhaps only in a healthy disciple-making group). “*Wider*” demands that this life expands into our daily spheres of contact, into our work and recreational lives and our social settings.
- Because of the uniqueness of every image-bearer and their call, each group will look somewhat different. Sow the basic DNA into the group you multiply, but don’t attempt to reproduce the exact dynamics. The Spirit of God is the one who creatively forges groups, each unique because each person is unique.
- Add your additional thoughts to this partial list.

What Now? “Making” & “Multiplying”

How did Jesus, the *Second Man*, walk out God’s original Eden-ideal? The same way we do since Jesus is our model for humanity in full dependence on God. John gives a glimpse into His dependent, three-fold approach to life. He walked fully as a man, even though Jesus is simultaneously fully God, oh mystery of the incarnation!

- “The words I speak are what I hear from My Father.”
- “I can do nothing by Myself, but only what I see My Father do.”
- “I can do nothing on My own initiative because I seek only the will of My Father.”¹²

These responses are not a product of the Fall in Genesis 3. Jesus was without sin, free, creatively engaging life to the utmost. Jesus was, therefore, not driven by what appears to be right/wrong, or pushed and shoved by others, but drawn by His Father's will. Jesus actively worked in the world around Him, partnering with his Father and with the Spirit.

"As You sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18).

Even as Jesus fulfilled His destiny, the Trinity beckons us to enjoy a similar divine dance, with Him supplying direction and strength as Lead-Jesus aimed to make disciples who reproduced down to the fourth generation. Give your strength freely to others. Come join the dance!

"If there would emerge in our day such a fellowship, wholly without artificiality and free from the dead hand of the past, it would be an exciting event of momentous importance. A society of genuine loving friends, set free from the self-seeking struggle for personal prestige and from all unreality, would be something unutterably priceless and powerful. A wise person would travel any distance to join it."²⁶

Why can we build such *koinonia* in faith-communities today? Before time, the Father loved the Son, the Son loved the Father, and each loved and was loved by the Spirit. This Community-God at the center of the universe draws near to us to draw us into this circle of His inner Self-Giving love as co-lovers. The Son became fully man (without ceasing to be God, oh mystery) to bring *this* life all the way to us. It's a wonderful ministry to influence people to grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

As this relational God and His connected, creation-intent for us stand at the epicenter of our lives, it changes how we see ourselves, use our time, and approach people. Then give away this priceless, powerful life as *life-on-life disciple-makers*. Faith-communities are built like this, one person and one *primary* group after another, from the foundation up.

I long to see a host of such faith-fellowships raised up in our 21st century cultures, lighthouses for the Light of the world. Some may be communities within the larger community of a local church. Others may launch new church plants in the same geographical area or around the world, LifeChange *primary* training groups that gather together to form small or large churches. In either case, together we can model something prophetically hopeful to a world in desperate need for answers. The world will get a glimpse of God's unchanged Eden-intent in Genesis 1 and 2 as they experience mutual *koinonia* in our faith-community.

As necessary it is for each of us to *make* disciples, high-leverage, catalytic growth happens when each of us take the next step to *multiply* disciples like Jesus modeled.

Jesus...called to him those he wanted...that they might be with him and that he might send them out... (Mark 3:13-15).

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”
(Jesus in John 20:21).

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 on making and multiplying disciples).

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others (Paul in 2 Timothy 2:2, 4 generations).

How does this sound to you?

The Body of Christ is a big part of the delivery system for grace to transform: *relational intimacy*, *Biblical authority*, and *intentional doing*.

Jesus' Twelve as "Primal" Groups

I was watching Monday Night Football with Travis Twyman, pastor at the Inland Vineyard, and his family in the Fall of 2015. Travis is a bright thinker who thinks from Scripture. In a few sentences, he mentioned how he was stirred to think about “*primal groups*.” I was hooked! I began to bombard him with questions. We discussed “*primal groups*” during the rest of the game (I’m not sure who won!) The first few sentences brought “conversion” to my previous thinking and experience in discipling for decades. This added dimension to what I already partially did as I met with men in disciple-making has exciting potential.

Why do I believe “*primal groups*” are such essential building blocks to multiply catalytic *koinonia* in community, both in number and in depth?

I have been discipling for years through small, temporarily closed bands of people centered around Scripture. We trust our indwelling Trainer to give insight and LifeChange. But there’s more...much more (key concept in 1 Thess). I’m in the early process of working this out more fully, so please come alongside and experiment with me. Learn how to develop healthy *primal groups* to train others for healthy LifeChange as communities birth other groups.

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	3:10-19	10:2-4	6:14-16	1:13
1	Peter	Peter	Peter	Peter
1	James	Andrew	Andrew	James
1	John	James	James	John
1	Andrew	John	John	Andrew
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Digging deeper as we piece together a bit of their background from scattered Scriptures and early Christian documents, it seems that Jesus’ Twelve Disciples also had close affinity with the others in three “*primal groups*” of four each, even as they were also part of the larger group of twelve. Notice from the list, each has an “anchor” as the first person in each group (although within the group of four the order differs).

Peter certainly operated as “*first among equals*” in the Twelve. Philip invited Bartholomew (Nathanael). *Both/And*. And these very ordinary men turned the world upside down. For our purposes, I want to highlight their *oikos* relationships with one another, that is, their natural connections, which accelerates quick bonding. If this intrigues you, William Barclay’s *The Master’s Men* is helpful for further study.

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The *second* *primal* group for LifeChange is also an interesting study because of the complementary strengths each brings to the whole. Philip²⁹ hailed from the same home town Andrew and Peter, Bethsaida. This connection is probably why Jesus sought Philip and called him to

follow (John 1:43-44). Nathanael, called Bartholomew in the lists,³⁰ was the first person Philip invited to “*come and see*” Jesus, indicating a previous relationship (John 1:45). Matthew³¹ is also called Levi, the son of Alphaeus.³² Jesus specifically invited him from his job as a tax collector to join. Thomas³³ is included with these other three in all four lists. We know nothing about his call. Outside the lists, only John’s Gospel mentions his actions, four times.³⁴ Thomas is the one who could not live with unanswered questions. Every group needs one who does not accept pat answers!

We know very little about the *third* LifeChange *primal* training group of four.³⁵ Perhaps the fervent patriotism of the Zealots³⁶ was the affinity between these four.

- James, the son of Alphaeus was probably the brother of Levi, also called the son of Alphaeus in the second group (Mark 2:13-17).³⁷ William Barclay conjectures that James could possibly be the link in this *oikos* affinity group since he is first in the 3rd *primal* group in each of the lists. He may have even had Zealot tendencies himself.
- Thaddeus/Judas, the Son of James is second in each of the three groups of four. William Barclay believes there is “*considerable evidence*” could also have been a zealot.
- Simon the Zealot came from the 1st century Jewish radical group called the Zealots.
- Judas Iscariot held the common purse for Jesus. He probably also belonged to the Zealots since he tried to force Jesus to act and start a rebellion. He is last in the first three lists and excluded in Acts since he had taken his life.

Even though I sketched out the possibility of three groups of four, let’s think more fluidity than fixed groups. Groups morph based on need, the most effective group being the smallest group that provides all the skills to accomplish the task. For instance, read through the Gospels and notice how often the three, Peter, James and John, are mentioned together in special times with Jesus. Matthew 17:1, the Mount of Transfiguration; Mark 5:37, raising from the dead of the twelve year old girl; Matthew 26:40, in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Also, John and Andrew are linked together as disciples of John the Baptist, and were catalysts for inviting the other three mentioned in John chapter one. When the Seventy were sent out two by two, each group of four possibly split into two.

Recent Studies on Group Size and Dynamics³⁸

Recent studies also suggest the power of smaller groups to bond and change. The University of Oxford anthropologist Robert Dunbar discovered that the number of people the average person could have in her social group is around a hundred and fifty. Anything beyond 150 would be too complicated to handle at optimal processing levels. This number changes according to a precise formula, roughly a “rule of three,” which could impact how the church views group size.

1. **150** is the norm for casual friends. Such relational communities seldom have more than about 150 members.³⁹
2. **50** is the norm for people we call closer friends.
3. **15** is the norm for a circles of friends that we may turn to for sympathy in times of need. We can confide in them about most things.
4. **5** is the number Dunbar’s research shows is our closest support group, like the *primal* groups I’m discussing. Another independent study by MIT These are your best friends, and may be family members.

Another study came up with very similar numbers. They analyzed mobile phone date from 2007, prior to widespread use of social media. These 6 billion calls made by 35 million people came up with these layers based on frequency. 128.9 people in the casual friend layer, then 29.8 close friends, 11.0 in our sympathy circle, and 4.1 for closest support group.⁴⁰

What is the purpose of your group?

1. If casual friendships, then **128-150**. If relationship in the group is unimportant, like for mega-church services, then any size.
2. If close friendships, then **30-50**.
3. If a circle of sympathetic friends, then **11-15**.
4. If vulnerable, open friendships like with best friends, then **4-5**.

The smaller the group, the deeper the connection we often have. For instance, at parties I like to find one person and connect more deeply with that one in conversation. When only a few persons are interacting, adding just one more individual may make a big difference in how they relate.⁴¹ In a three-member group, *three* possible pairings exist. In a four-member group, there are *six* possible pairings; add a fifth member for each of the four to relate to and you have *ten* pairs. For a group of fifteen, the relational connections soar to **105**. Closeness and collaboration tend to decrease with added pairs. Know what you want to accomplish when you choose a size of group.

Cooperation, collaboration and teamwork have become essential features in much learning, as have skills in listening, drawing out information, and persuading. This occurs best as all participate in learning. As the group size increases, fewer members have the chance to participate. Herbert Thelen proposed a principle that for members of groups to have maximum motivation to perform, the number of group members should be the *smallest* possible and still retain all the social and achievement skills required for the particular activity.

Regarding leadership, in a small group or team, leadership and other roles are likely to be shared or rotated. In a large group, the formation of subgroups and the increasing differentiation of roles will ensure the emergence of a leader. What is the cutoff number? Many theorists, researchers and practitioners agree that five to seven members is the maximum for groups with shared or rotating leadership.⁴²

Virtual interactions through social-media increasingly dominate our world, especially the younger generation. So what happens if you are raised from a young age to see virtual interactions as akin to physical ones? No one has yet gathered sufficient data to know how these group numbers may change. And our brain is incredibly adaptable. This bodes well for small groups who have learned to pray for personal needs by appropriately laying on hands.

However, when subjects in a study were lightly touched to measure reflex response, their bodies released endorphins. Our skin has a set of neurons that respond to light touch. Until social media can replicate that personal touch, it can't fully replicate social bonding. From past research on social interaction, we know how crucial the early childhood experience is in developing those parts of the brain that are largely dedicated to social interaction, empathy, and other interpersonal concerns. Deprive a child of interaction and touch early on, and those areas won't develop fully. Envelop her/him in a huge family or friend group, with plenty of holding and shared experience, and those areas grow bigger.

Additionally, with social-media, anyone can pull the plug and walk away. There's no forcing mechanism that makes us have to learn and relate in difficult situations to work through problems together.

Conclusions from the Master's Men

What's the point?

I took extended space in order to show the interconnectedness of the disciples (their *oikos*). Jesus developed *primal* groups in part from

primary relationships, those with a natural affinity, like the 1st century word *oikos* conveys. Please don't artificially paste groups together to launch disciple-making groups, like with a mass call to match up disciplers with disciples. This does not seem to be Jesus' way since He hand-picked the Twelve after praying to His Father all night. May we be counter-cultural, returning to Jesus' model, even though it's not the norm in our more highly structured, big-group training processes in the 21st century. Bigger is not necessarily better.

Primal groups seem to be Jesus' preferred vehicle to train in LifeChange and ministry. Jesus not only came to give His life so we might live. He also modeled a dynamic, catalytic way to grow healthy community from the bottom up, like modeled in the Trinity, the first Small Group. For me, it seems from the list above that Jesus intentionally gathered His Twelve into mono-gender, *closed primal* groups, perhaps in three groups of four, for in-depth training for LifeChange. Note carefully. *Primal* groups are both for deepening relationships and also for ministry so the crowds are not neglected.

This lens provides a solid, broad-based foundation from which to experiment and discover how we can become a vital part of a *primal* group. This builds in-depth LifeChange and also reproduce other disciples in groups. Although the expert Discippler, Jesus, focused on multiple groups of four, I would suggest each of us begin with **one** LifeChange *primal* training group of 3-5 others. "*Focus on the few to reach the many.*"

Who do you already feel drawn together to (your *oikos* relationships)? Are they *F.A.T.S-o's* (that is, **F**aithful, **A**vailable, **T**eachable and **S**erving others)?

"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

In our 21st century lives, if we do follow Jesus' model, we must first put to death as the central focus of how to build churches the typical Western Christian focus on size and visibility, hustle and bustle... initially. Jesus built from the ground up, pouring His life into *primal* relational; training groups as small as three or four persons over a period of two years (*deeper*), without ever ignoring or marginalizing the crowds (*wider*). Then Jesus left, releasing them to cultivate their own *primal* groups. More than thirty men hung out with Paul on his missionary journeys. Over time, though, Jesus' initially "*slow*" approach of exponential multiplication built a movement that has influenced billions.

- "WIDER" – "Come & See" (2-3 months)

- A transitional bridge between “WIDER & DEEPER” – “Come & Follow Me” (9 months)
- “DEEPER” – “Come & Be with Me” (20 months) ministering together as partners, sharing their lives deeply in koinonia. Bonding often happens more quickly for those who have worked and sweated together, learning to respect each other in the fires of ministry.

What is a LifeChange "Primal" Group?

For a starter, we have been designed by the original "*Primal Group*," Father, Son and Spirit. They model all the essentials of any healthy *primary relationship*. God fashioned us in this image so we can reproduce and pass on this flourishing life to others. Ask ourselves: "*What factors do we see in the mutual relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit that we can adapt as a flexible, working model?*"

After the six "*it's good*" in Genesis one, God startles us as He states that it's "*not good*" for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Even though they walked with the Father, Son and Spirit as companions in the Garden, Adam alone was not good. We are incomplete without others like ourselves as companions and partners.

The original pattern, or archetype, for healthy human relationships in "*primal groups*" goes far beyond marriage, yet includes marriage. God solved the "*not good*" problem by fashioning the first human "*primal group*" of two, husband and wife. The dual focus was deep, meaningful relationship (the aim of all *primal groups*) and physically reproducing others like them (necessary to procreate).

God fashioned Eve to be Adam's complement and helper within a mutually responsible "*primal group*." God hand-crafted Eve as a person fully suitable for him so they could deepen intimate relationship with each other and also mutually fulfill their God-given assignments...and with the additional features necessary in any marriage, to procreate so the race could multiply. Both/And/And. God designed us to cultivate open, vulnerable relationship (Genesis 2:25) with those who complement or complete us (Genesis 2:18), and are thus different from us. So every "*primal group*" strives for intimate relationship (in a non-sexual sense).

After the Fall, this husband/wife relationship became a primary means to unlock change to a restored relationship with God and with each other, used as a powerful picture of our relationship with God.

Jesus also launched His ministry by drawing men to Himself and training them in "*primal groups*" to multiply. Jesus is not only our perfect model for maturity, but also our perfect model for ministry. During His time on earth, Jesus accurately reflected His Father's heart as He trained in "*primal groups*" leading to LifeChange. This seemed natural for Jesus as He tapped into God's design prior to the Fall. Jesus,

our Ministry Model, nurtured through three sets of four in *primal* groups, fused together into the Twelve.¹

With these solid examples, let's open our minds and dialog together. Both depth of relationship and ability to multiply are essential. For me, this *Both/And* creates a major tension. In-depth relationships require extended time together, energy and focus to develop those *primary relationships*. Multiplying LifeChange groups by launching new groups demands time focused outside our *primary* relationships. We draw others in through *open*, permeable groups, beginning with far less depth, even with the lighter touch of socialization.

Where do we find the resources for both in our busy schedules?

Do we really believe that God calls us both to deepen relationship with Him and also to reproduce, both deeper and wider? Ask yourself.

Our Family-of-Three fashioned us with built-ins so we are hard-wired to be most healthy in *primal* groups of 3-5 persons aligned with God.² Tap into this God-given, high-leverage opportunity, which over time develops *primary relationships* for healthy LifeChange springing from such open, vulnerable, supporting relationships.

In His initial design, God made us "*persons-in-community*." Today the business world is even beginning to recognize this, utilizing more of the innate power in group dynamics. Nothing comes closer to fully demonstrating God's original-intent for humanity than such primal oneness. No wonder the climax of creation was "*man and woman*" created together in God's image, the first human *primal* group (see Genesis 1:27). Such unity attracts and draws others in close (John 17:20-23). Our high-leverage point for LifeChange and healthy spirituality is in *primal* groups.

However, if we focus all our attention on our current *primal* group and invest little time reaching out beyond ourselves, even something so good may develop into an unhealthy clique, isolated from others, impermeable, and ingrown. Why?

Because of this amazing power for God to transform in *primal* groups, such groups that begin so well can degenerate over time into a clique...with the people blissfully unaware. Their *primary relationships* are so enjoyable and feel so good (and they are!). Yet they may not notice that their group now tends to resist change and to unknowingly build impenetrable walls to "outsiders," even those in our same faith-community.³ Have you been around a group that has been together so long that they have inside jokes and stories, often leaving you feeling like an outsider?

“OK, Jim. What’s wrong with maintaining such good primary relationships?”

Nothing!

They are wonderful. After decades of ministering, I have a large number of *primary relationships* scattered around.⁴ Nurture these existing primary *relationships*, but not at the expense of multiplying *primal groups* in faith-communities. For me, the greatest personal cost is when I must stop meeting regularly with a *primal* group, just like we must launch our children into life or we stunt their growth.⁵ I deeply miss the regular time with them as friends I meet with regularly. But we must release them to God’s ministry call on their lives for them to thrive, which includes ministry and multiplication. And I still stay connected, perhaps meeting monthly or quarterly.

So, how can we live in the tension of enjoying deep, primary *relationships* and yet avoiding a clique and launching fresh *primal groups*? Read the Gospels. Jesus’ ministry model of Three Tiers⁶ lays out in broad strokes how He maintained the tension between both “*wider*” and “*deeper*.” Jesus released His original three *primal groups* of four after twenty months so they were free to launch fresh groups.⁷ Of course, we don’t need to be as radical as Jesus (He disbanded the groups when He died!) But please let’s embrace the essential underlying truth of what Jesus modeled.

Take Jesus seriously as our ministry model. I believe healthy *primal groups* must be time-limited (Jesus limited His to twenty months with the Twelve), although *primary relationships* may last forever, just not normally in the same *primal group* for spiritual health.⁸ If you don’t buy-in to my understanding, soak in Jesus’ model yourself. *How do you understand Jesus’ ministry model? How are you personally practicing this in today’s context? How do you simultaneously practice both “deeper” and “wider”?*

Deeper calls for extended time together for an extended season with those few in our *primal* group to cultivate deepening vulnerability leading to LifeChange and vision. Wider calls us to be welcoming, inviting others into our depth and multiplying other relational LifeChange groups. All God’s living creation in Genesis 1 “*reproduce after their kind.*” God hardwired this Reality into our design as image-bearers. Jesus commissions His disciples to reproduce at least three spiritual generations (Matthew 28:19-20), and Paul adds a fourth generation (2 Timothy 2:2). And experience also supports this.

The first thing Jesus did after His baptism and forty days in the wilderness in John 1:35-51 was to begin to gather men to Himself.⁹

“Come & See!” The initial focus for the discipler in “Come & See” is to get a good feel for the person. These men set the initial pace, similar to how the “horse whisperer” related to a skittish horse.¹⁰ Jesus was patiently waiting until they were drawn to Him, meeting them where they were until they felt safe and secure with Him. This tier was a welcoming, open-armed, permeable approach. After a few months together, Jesus sent them home to weigh a deeper relationship with Him.

Jesus next specifically approached four of these original six from John 1 a second time. He invited them in closer, also adding Levi/Matthew to the original six (Mark 2:13-14).¹¹ “Come & Follow Me.” This transition tier lasted less about nine months. His disciples carefully observed how Jesus ministered in the *wider* group (the crowds), even as He took them aside and began to explain more to them in the beginnings of LifeChange *primal* training groups (*deeper*). The disciples caught His heart and His vision, although they *did* little.

In the final tier, “Come & Be with Me,” Jesus spent the night praying to His *Father before* calling the Twelve...and they came (Mark 3:13-19). In this same-gender, temporarily closed *primal* group, Jesus experienced full-orbed *primary relationships* together with His Twelve for twenty-months. All the way to the cross, Jesus roused LifeChange in His disciples and trained them to reproduce like He did,¹² ultimately releasing them to “Go and make disciples” like He did.¹³

What Now?

How did Jesus, the *Second Man*, walk out God’s original Eden-ideal? The same way we do since Jesus is our model for humanity in full dependence on God. John gives a glimpse into His dependent, three-fold approach to life. He walked fully as a man, even though Jesus is simultaneously fully God, oh mystery of the incarnation!

- “The words I speak are what I hear from My Father.”
- “I can do nothing by Myself, but only what I see My Father do.”
- “I can do nothing on My own initiative because I seek only the will of My Father.”¹²

These responses are not a product of the Fall in Genesis 3. Jesus was without sin, free, creatively engaging life to the utmost. Jesus was, therefore, not driven by what appears to be right/wrong, or pushed and shoved by others, but drawn by His Father’s will. Jesus actively worked in the world around Him, partnering with his Father and with the Spirit.

“As You sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

Even as Jesus fulfilled His destiny, the Trinity beckons us to enjoy a similar divine dance, with Him supplying direction and strength as Lead-Partner. Give your strength freely to others. Come join the dance!

“If there would emerge in our day such a fellowship, wholly without artificiality and free from the dead hand of the past, it would be an exciting event of momentous importance. A society of genuine loving friends, set free from the self-seeking struggle for personal prestige and from all unreality, would be something unutterably priceless and powerful. A wise person would travel any distance to join it.”¹⁴

Why can we build such *koinonia* in faith-communities today? Before time, the Father loved the Son, the Son loved the Father, and each loved and was loved by the Spirit. This Community-God at the center of the universe draws near to us to draw us into this circle of His inner Self-Giving love as co-lovers. The Son became fully man (without ceasing to be God, oh mystery) to bring *this* life all the way to us.

As this relational God and His connected, creation-intent for us stand at the epicenter of our lives, it changes how we see ourselves, use our time, and approach people. Then give away this priceless, powerful life as *life-on-life disciple-makers*. Faith-communities are built like this, one person and one *primary* group after another, from the foundation up.

I long to see a host of such faith-fellowships raised up in our 21st century cultures, lighthouses for the Light of the world. Some may be communities within the larger community of a local church. Others may launch new church plants in the same geographical area or around the world, LifeChange *primary* training groups that gather together to form small or large churches. In either case, together we can model something prophetically hopeful to a world in desperate need for answers. The world will get a glimpse of God’s unchanged Eden-intent in Genesis 1 and 2 as they experience mutual *koinonia* in our faith-community.

How does this sound to you?

Are you yearning for a deeper sense of meaning and significance on your journey with the Community-God? How much of your time, talent and treasure are you willing to invest? What role are you now playing in partnering with God in His enterprise? What is the next step for you? Yes, the investment will be high, although the ROI¹⁵ will be still higher. What does your heart yearn for? Let your authentic life speak out loud.

What's Your Take-Away?

¹ *Primary* means first, chief, principal, earliest, primitive. *Primal* means original, primeval, first, fundamental. Both words fit well for what I believe is fundamental to healthy change through small groups.

² I was watching Monday Night Football with Travis Twyman, pastor at the Inland Vineyard, and his family in the Fall of 2015. Travis is a bright thinker who thinks from Scripture. In a few sentences, he mentioned how he was stirred to think about “*primary groups*.” I was hooked! I began to bombard him with questions, and we discussed “*primary groups*” during the rest of the game (I’m not sure who won!) The first few sentence brought “*conversion*” to my previous thinking and experience in discipling for decades. This added dimension to what I already partially did as I met with men in disciple-making has exciting potential.

³ In Genesis 2:18, I believe God speaks first and foremost of the centrality of “*primary group*.” The original pattern, or archetype, for healthy human relationships in “*primary groups*” goes far beyond marriage, yet includes marriage. God fashioned Eve to be Adam’s complement and helper within a mutually responsible “*primal group*.” God hand-crafted Eve as a person fully suitable for him so they could deepen intimate relationship with each other and also mutually fulfill their God-given assignments. . .and with the additional features necessary in any marriage, to procreate so the race could multiply. *Both/And/And*. God designed us to cultivate open, vulnerable relationship (Genesis 2:25) with those who complement or complete us (Genesis 2:18), and are thus different from us. So every “*primary group*” strives for intimate relationship (in a non-sexual sense).

⁴ Some say four groups of three based on the times when only Peter, James and John are together at special times with Jesus. I base my thoughts primarily on the lists. Here’s what’s crucial, though. Three groups of four. . .four groups of three. . .what does it matter? Jesus multiplied disciples through groups of three or four.

⁵ As we look at Jesus’ life as a model for ministry, it’s important to note that His *primary* group was a same sex group. Relational intimacy grows here, so I would encourage us to put weight on what Jesus modeled.

⁶ Actually, the founder of the movement I’m presently in actually taught **against** *primary* groups in a church planting context. His experience as a church growth consultant had seen many illustrations in older, institutionalized churches of stagnation because of impenetrable *primary* groups. Yes, there is a grave danger if they become a means to isolate. Let’s hold the dangers in

tension with the tremendous upside. I would not want to be blinded to the upside because of past abuse. Let's learn how to keep the tensions in harmony, between intimate relationships and also reproducing "*primary groups*" personally. Jesus did this by putting a "drop-dead" time on His groups, literally for Him.

⁷ I disciplined for years through time-bounded, *closed* groups. Closed groups builds depth and time-limited allows them the possibility of multiplying. Yet I still have close relationships with a large number from these past groups. When we get together again over lunch, we normally begin right where we left off in our depth of relationship with no drop off.

⁸ Rearing children parallels nurturing in *primary* groups. My children and I still have a close relationship, although we don't spend the time together that they did when they were under our roof. But what a wonderful season, watching them over time becoming all God made them to be. They could not have reached these heights without launching out on their own. The greatest cost in releasing was diminished time with them; the greatest blessing is watching them follow God's call on their lives.

⁹ *Come & See*" (3-4 months, with no commitment); "*Come & Follow Me*" (9-10 months, a choice to follow Jesus; watching and doing little else now); "*Come & Be with Me*" (20 months, active training as leaders/influencers).

¹⁰ This is approximately how long His "*Come & Be with Me*" phase lasted, beginning at Mark 3:13-15. By the way, one group continues without the downside of *primary* groups because of the Fall in Genesis 3...that is, our relational Community-God, Father, Son and Spirit. By extension, through faith Jesus draws us into this Family-of-Three to experience relationship in their *primal* community, and this lasts also. We certainly never become *lit'l gods*, although resting in His relationship is the place for most powerful growth...in His *primal* group, which goes on without end.

¹¹ Again, I'm still thinking this through and plenty of room exists for disagreement and dialog.

¹² Jesus trained in two steps. "*Watch me.*" "*I'll watch you.*" Then go and do it.

¹³ Bill Hull has done a great job of taking a harmony of the Gospels (which lines up the Gospels best we can in sequential order) and A. A. Bruce's brilliant work, *The Training of the Twelve*, and brings it into the 21st century. These three stages ("*Come & See,*" "*Come & Follow Me,*" "*Come & Be with Me*") lead to Jesus' intended end, "*Go & Multiply Disciples.*" One of Bill Hull's works

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Two problems with the list of disciples exist. First, where is Nathanael in the list, apparently one of the Twelve from John 1:43-51 and John 21:2, where

Nathanael was still with Jesus' disciples. William Barclay's solid conclusion is that he is Bartholomew. For our study, it's not crucial, but I have adopted this.

The second question of identification with the Twelve is with Thaddaeus and Judas the son of James. This is a bit more difficult, and scholarship takes different approaches. William Barclay in *The Master's Men* (1959) identifies these as the same person, noting that it's not unusual for a person to have more than one name, Thaddaeus being his surname. I will follow this since it makes little difference for our purposes.

¹⁵ Mark 10:35 + Matthew 20:20. Also compare the three lists carefully that are parallel, Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40 and John 19:25. Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Mary the wife of Cleophas most likely are the same person. If so, the remaining person is called Salome, the sister of Jesus' mother, and the mother of Zebedee's children. This would mean that Salome was the mother of James and John, the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. James and John were then full cousins of Jesus.

¹⁶ Matthew 17:1, the Mount of Transfiguration; Mark 5:37, raising of the twelve year old girl; Matthew 26:40, in the garden.

¹⁷ Philip hailed from Bethsaida, the same home town as Andrew and Peter. He had a relational missionary instinct. As soon as Jesus invited Philip to follow Him, he invited his friend, Nathanael, simply saying "Come and see" (John 1:43-51). Later in Jerusalem during the last week of Jesus' life, some Greeks came to Philip, the one who connects, and asked to see Jesus. Philip immediately went to Andrew, Mr. Connector in the first primary group, and tried to bring them with Jesus.

Two other brief statements about Philip help broaden his character. In the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus asked Philip where to buy bread to feed the crowd (John 6-5-6:7). Also, in John 14:8-9, Philip boldly asked Jesus to show the group the Father.

¹⁸ Nathanael had a previously existing connection with Philip. Nathanael had a worshipper's heart since Jesus saw him in His mind under the fig tree, a common, secluded place for prayer. Nathanael immediately questioned, but quickly moved to worship (John 1:45-51). He was in this spiritual journey for the long-haul, still being with them after the resurrection when the disciples went fishing (John 21:2).

¹⁹ Matthew/Levi was a tax collector, whom Jesus directly invited in. He wrote the book of Matthew.

²⁰ Levi (Mark 2:13-17); Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13).

²¹ Thomas is known as "*Doubting Thomas*" for his questions about Jesus after the resurrection. For me, though, he was a man who could not live with unanswered questions, the one who became certain by doubting. Every

LifeChange *primary* training group is helped to deepen and keep life real with a bit of this “show me” realism in the group.

²² The NT has no mention of the call of any of these last four, until the Twelve were called in Mark 3:13-19.

²³ The Zealots were the last of the great Jewish parties to emerge as fervent patriots. Unfortunately, their zeal was ultimately responsible for the final destruction of the Jewish state.

²⁴ James, the son of Alphaeus, may be the brother of Levi/Matthew. If so, and if as conjectured James was also a Zealot, think about the reconciliation! Levi the tax collector, James the Zealot, fighting against everything from Rome, and particularly the hated tax collectors, together in Jesus’ band. If this is so, perhaps even with the blood relationship, the two were in different *primary groups* because they had a different *oikos*, yet linked by being next to each other in the Matthew and acts lists.

²⁵ I have written a number of 5-week “sprints” that utilize this active way to learn from Scripture, which calls each to prepare **prior to** the group on the assigned passage, bring “fresh bread” to share.

²⁶ James R. Newby, *Best of Elton Trueblood* (Nashville: Impact Books, 1979).

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³⁴ **Thomas:**

- John 11:6 - "Let's go up with Jesus to die" at Lazarus' death.
- John 14:5 – Questioning Jesus, how they can know the way.
- John 20:27-28 – First post-resurrection appearance to Thomas when doubting other Apostles: Jesus told him to put his finger in His side, and Thomas responded, "My Lord and my God!"
- John 21:2 – together with Peter fishing with Nathaniel and two other disciples.

³⁵ The NT has no mention of the call of any of these last four, until the Twelve were called in Mark 3:13-19.

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³⁸ A couple of web addresses I used for content were:

<https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/social-media-affect->

[math-dunbar-number-friendships](#) and <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocslD/resources/small-group/sgt103.html> and https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dunbar-layers-friendship-study_us_5728d4c5e4b016f37893ac14 and <https://www.bustle.com/articles/158302-the-ideal-number-of-best-friends-is-lower-than-you-think-but-dont-start-dropping-people>

³⁹ “When Dunbar consulted the anthropological and historical record, he found remarkable consistency in support of his structure. The average group size among modern hunter-gatherer societies (where there was accurate census data) was 148.4 individuals. Company size in professional armies, Dunbar found, was also remarkably close to a hundred and fifty, from the Roman Empire to sixteenth-century Spain to the twentieth-century Soviet Union. Companies, in turn, tended to be broken down into smaller units of around fifty then further divided into sections of between ten and fifteen.”

<https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/social-media-affect-math-dunbar-number-friendships>

⁴⁰ The results are still under peer review, Pádraig Mac Carron, one the study’s authors, told The Huffington Post.

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dunbar-layers-friendship-study_us_5728d4c5e4b016f37893ac14

⁴¹ The number of possible person-to-person links (L) increases rapidly as the size of the group (N) increases. The formula is: “ $L = (N^2 - N) / 2$.”

⁴² According to Oxford Brookes University:

<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocslD/resources/small-group/sgt103.html>

¹ For the breakdown of the Twelve in three primary groups of four each, I have drawn heavily from William Barclay’s *The Master’s Men*, and excellent, short compilation by a man with a masterful grasp of language.

Some say Jesus had four groups of three based on the times when only Peter, James and John are together at special times with Jesus (no Andrew), although another time all four are together. I base my thoughts primarily on the lists and what seems to be affinity within the groups of four. In each of the four list, the groups of four are always identical, although not necessarily in the same order (Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14, Acts 1:13). Here’s what’s crucial, though. Three groups of four...four groups of three...what does it matter? Jesus multiplied disciples through same-gender groups of three or four.

² As we look at Jesus’ life as a model for ministry, it’s important to note that His *primary* group was a same sex group. Relational intimacy grows here, so I would encourage us to put weight on what Jesus modeled.

³ Actually, the founder of the movement I’m presently in actually taught **against** *primary* groups in a church planting context. His experience as a church growth consultant had seen many illustrations in older, institutionalized churches of stagnation because of impenetrable *primary* groups. Yes, there is a

grave danger if they become a means to isolate. Let's hold the dangers in tension with the tremendous upside. I would not want to be blinded to the upside because of past abuse. Let's learn how to keep the tensions in harmony, between intimate relationships and also reproducing "*primary groups*" personally. Jesus did this by putting a "drop-dead" time on His groups, literally for Him.

⁴ I disciplined for years through time-bounded, *closed* groups. Closed groups builds depth and time-limited allows them the possibility of multiplying. Yet I still have close relationships with a large number from these past groups. When we get together again over lunch, we normally begin right where we left off in our depth of relationship with no drop off.

⁵ Rearing children parallels nurturing in primal groups. My children and I still have a close relationship, although we don't spend the time together that they did when they were under our roof. But what a wonderful season, watching them over time becoming all God made them to be. They could not have reached these heights without launching out on their own. The greatest cost in releasing was diminished time with them; the greatest blessing is watching them follow God's call on their lives.

⁶ *Come & See*" (3-4 months, with no commitment); "*Come & Follow Me*" (9-10 months, a choice to follow Jesus; watching and doing little else now); "*Come & Be with Me*" (20 months, active training as leaders/influencers).

⁷ This is approximately how long His "*Come & Be with Me*" phase lasted, beginning at Mark 3:13-15. By the way, one group continues without the downside of *primary* groups because of the Fall in Genesis 3...that is, our relational Community-God, Father, Son and Spirit. By extension, through faith Jesus draws us into this Family-of-Three to experience relationship in their *primal* community, and this lasts also. We certainly never become *lit'l gods*, although resting in His relationship is the place for most powerful growth...in His *primal* group, which goes on without end.

⁸ Again, I'm still thinking this through and plenty of room exists for disagreement and dialog.

⁹ We find seven men in John 1:35-51, the first seven in the Acts 1:13 list of the original twelve disciples.

¹⁰ Interesting enough, my granddaughter, Paige, just visited the ranch of *'the horse whisperer,'* Buck Brannaman. I read his story and watched his method of training a horse who had been misused on You-Tube. Fascinating! And very similar to how Jesus approached and related to disciples in "*Come & See.*"

The initial focus in "*Come & See*" is to get a good feel for the person. Jesus gently introduced them to His Father's plan ("*you shall see heaven open...*"), but only as they were thirsty.

¹¹ In John 1:35-51, the five are: Peter, John Andres, Philip and Nathanael (alternate name used in lists of Bartholomew). Jesus challenges James, John's

brother, at the beginning of “*Come & Follow Me*” in Mark 1:29. Levi, also called Matthew, first shows up in Mark 2:14). The other five first appear in the final tier beginning in Mark 3:13, “*Come & Be with Me*” when Jesus spends the night in prayer asking the Father to direct. I’m just reporting, not evaluating.

¹² Jesus trained in two steps. “*Watch me.*” “*I’ll watch you.*” Then go and do it.

¹³ Bill Hull has done a great job of taking a harmony of the Gospels (which lines up the Gospels best we can in sequential order) and A. B. Bruce’s brilliant work, *The Training of the Twelve*, and brings it into the 21st century. These three tiers (“*Come & See,*” “*Come & Follow Me,*” “*Come & Be with Me*”) lead to Jesus’ intended end, “*Go & Multiply Disciples.*” One of Bill Hull’s works

¹⁴ James R. Newby, *Best of Elton Trueblood* (Nashville: Impact Books, 1979).

¹⁵ A business term meaning “*return on investment.*”