

Being More: Community as a Lifestyle

Lifestyle vs. Event

What contributes to a lifestyle? Lifestyles are made up of many factors. They have certain activities and markers that contribute to and become natural rhythms of a lifestyle. The scholar who spends hours studying; to the surfer who rises early to catch the morning swells; each participates in each activity as a part of their normal life. They likely do not give these activities a second thought, rather they are simply a part of their respective lifestyles.

An event is obviously different than a lifestyle. Events, may be isolated, somewhat irregular, and not typically a part of one's regular life. For example, if I go on vacation to Hawaii and attempt to learn to surf, it would definitely be an event, considering I live in Oklahoma and have never surfed. The point: events are often isolated, irregular and not a part a regular part of someone's life.

What about Missional Community?

How does missional community fit into this paradigm? If we are not careful our missional communities will become events. In fact, if we do not intentionally pursue community as a lifestyle, then missional community will default into an event. Since events are isolated, somewhat irregular, they are easily disregarded because they actually tend to get in the way of people's actual lifestyle. A missional community that operates as an event is deficient.

For example, Joe (fictional name but a real story) is a partner at Mercyview and a member of a missional community. Joe actively attends corporate worship and missional community. One particular week a friend of Joe's came into town. Joe decided to skip missional community because his friend was in town. There are surely many reasons Joe decided to skip missional community rather than invite his friend to join him. That being said, let me suggest one vital reason - he views his missional community as an event; an event that was easily disregarded.

By contrast, Katherine's (fictional name but a real story) sister is in town visiting. Katherine invites her sister to join her and they both attend missional community. There are surely several reasons this situation played out differently than the former. However, I know that Katherine has taken steps to make her missional community a part of her lifestyle by investing in the group and its people.

If a missional community becomes an event, then it may actually stand in opposition to a person's lifestyle. Events that do not fit nicely into one's lifestyle are typically disregarded. To say it another way, if missional community is an event, then the smallest inconvenience or disruption may cause the person to disregard the missional community. By contrast, a missional community that is crafted to become a part of its people's lifestyle may not be so easily disregarded.

Where to Begin

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-47

The picture we observe from Acts 2:42-47 exemplifies a lifestyle of community. Their lifestyle was born out of a need for mutual support as they lived in a culture that was hostile to Christianity. The early believers described in Acts 2 needed each other on a daily basis. The text describes them worshipping together, eating in each other's homes, taking care of each other and sharing what they had. These factors point to a lifestyle characterized by deep, authentic, life-giving relationships. The early church may not have survived if they had approached community as an event. Fortunately, the early church valued community as a vital piece of their lifestyle.

Becoming a Lifestyle

A missional community must strive to become part of its members' lifestyle. The obvious question is how? We will again turn to Acts 2:42-47 for our answers (refer to the passage above). Let me suggest that in Acts 2 we find two categories of activities in which the early church participated. It is my contention that a missional community must intentionally pursue each category to become a part of its member's lifestyle.

Category 1

The early church spent time together intentionally pursuing the Lord. In Acts 2 we see this category in the form of time spent in the temple, in prayer, and holding to the apostle's teachings. The Church is a community that is built upon the faithfulness and pursuit of God. Therefore, it is quite obvious that it would spend a significant amount of time worshipping the Lord, studying God's word, praying and going on mission. These are all critical facets of Christian community.

Category 1 relates to missional community in several ways. A missional community typically spends time discussing God's Word, worshipping, praying, and engaging in mission. These are aspects of the first category. For the most part missional communities at Mercyview naturally gravitate toward the elements found in category 1. Category 1 elements are essential, natural and wonderful aspects of missional community. That being said, Acts 2:42-47 seems to show us another category of community.

Category 2

In addition to the elements of formal Christian discipleship found in category 1, the early church engaged in other activities that were more informal in nature. From Acts 2 we read; that early church spent time 'breaking bread in their homes.' From this statement I am suggesting that the early church community spent time with each other engaging in regular life activities. In the text, the explicit example is sharing a meal in people's homes. This is an important look into the life of the early church. It shows us that they did regular, everyday things together. It is my contention that regular, everyday parts of life are essential for a missional community to become a part of its people's lifestyle.

It is important that a missional community spends time simply enjoying each other while building relationships in informal settings. Informal settings, in different places and times are essential contributors for a missional community to become a part of its member's lifestyles. After all, your group will only meet once a week. A once a week formal meeting is an event. You must be intentional about creating opportunities for informal gatherings, where you may simply spend time enjoying one another.

Becoming a Lifestyle

In order for a missional community to be an integrated part of its people's lifestyle, a leader must intentionally integrate the elements of category 1 and 2 into the life of their MC. The following is a brief discussion outlining how.

It Starts with the Leader

A missional community will default into an event without proper vision and action. You must steer the missional community to become a part of your people's lifestyle. You must intentionally integrate all 5 missional community components in the formal gathering and create informal opportunities outside of the gathering.

In the Gathering

The 5 Components (word, prayer, worship, fellowship and mission) play an important role in helping the MC leader balance the group's time together. Of the 5 Components, four of them (word, prayer, worship, mission) are category 1 elements. These components are essential elements of Christian discipleship. They are activities that God has ordained as means to encounter him. Fellowship is a category 2 element and is also an essential piece of the 'in gathering experience.' Fellowship is a broad term. It can look like a shared meal, snacks, board games, or conversation.

Balancing these elements is critical to the missional community gathering. However, a missional community that only meets in the gathering will become an 'event.'

Out of the Gathering

It is my contention that for a missional community to become a part of its member's lifestyle it must meet outside of the weekly formal gathering. The whole missional community does not

have to be present in these informal gatherings, but when more people gather, the better. Gathering in informal and different places allows members of the group to get to know each other in different contexts. Gathering more often provides more time together for building relationships. Becoming a part of group member's lifestyles requires time spent together. As the leader, think creatively and create opportunities for your group to spend time together, outside of the missional community.

Conclusion

We believe that missional community provides the best avenue by which people at Mercyview can form a lifestyle characterized by Christian community. The missional community will naturally default into an event without intentional leadership. As a missional community leader, you must intentionally steer you group to become more, to become a part of it's member's lifestyles.