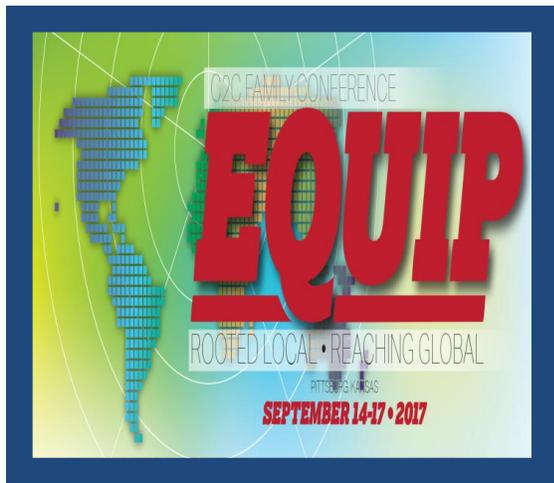


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Leaders Among The Flock



Chris Richards sent an account about something she saw on her trip to Israel, "We saw a shepherd in Israel with a few sheep. The land was arid, I couldn't see any grazing land around for miles, it was hot and I was amazed that those sheep could survive. The shepherd was with them, right in their midst." **"With them right in their midst" is an important place for any leader.** Even in the most desolate grazing land where it looked like there was no way to sustain life the shepherds were there with the sheep. Leaders should be among the sheep in

everyday life. Like 1 Peter 5:2 says, "shepherd the flock of God **among you.**" A leader's most important place is **among the flock, not just behind a pulpit.**

The real relational life of God's people in many churches is often facilitated through small group involvement. While people may be attracted to God's house by ministry (miracles, meetings, and programs), they end up being joined and involved through real family relationships. Small groups help facilitate that.

We see this in how Jesus began to build His first church in Jerusalem (Acts 2 & 4). God's people were "devoted...day by day" to both large groups ("in the temple") and small groups ("from house to house"). This was an

If the majority of Jesus' life was spent walking among a small group, then it may be important for all leaders

important part of their life and mission.

Should all leaders be involved in small groups if not leading them?

Over the past 36 years I have experienced small groups as a main way Jesus has built among us. In serving other churches I have also experience a variety of ways people have applied small groups. One of the questions that has often come up is, "should the pastors/elders be involved in leading, or in the life of small groups? " In response I have heard everything including:

- Elders shouldn't be involved unless they are leading because they will overshadow the small group leaders.
- Every leader should only lead a small group but never be just a part of one.
- Elders should only lead until they can train up a small group leader.
- Elders are busy enough that they need to take the small group night as an evening off.

While opinions vary as to why, or why not pastors/elders should participate in small groups, here are some reasons I would advocate that every leader should be involved. Even if they are not leading they should be involved, "among the flock."

- **It keeps leaders close to people.** Leaders are sheep first and should be among the flock. God's house is a people business and leaders are designed to be among His people.
- **Small groups are at the heart of a church walking in God's health and care.** Practicing in the 59 "one anothers" recorded in the New Testament is key to churches walking in His life. You can't do most of them in a corporate meeting once or twice a week. You definitely can't do them from behind a pulpit. Small groups are a key to people connecting with Jesus, and one another, in order to make progress in God. Leaders need to be right in the midst of that process.
- **Leader's need to be around God's people as they process real life.** Sharing victories, challenges, crisis', real family pressures, pressures at work, and overall real life stuff is what we live day in and day out. Jesus lived this kind of life with the 12. As He did, real life events came up providing fertile ground to reveal and apply His Kingdom.
- **Involvement in a small group will help in the development of other leaders.** Leaders can help mentor the other leaders in the group by their example in leading, or by giving advice and support.

- **What leaders celebrate usually becomes what resonates among God's people.** If we say small groups are an important part of church life it should be backed up by a leader's involvement.
- **It helps break leaders of any leadership bubble so they can be more incarnational.** I like the way the message Bible reveals Jesus' incarnation. *John 1:14 MSG The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.* Unfortunately leaders can often live in a bubble in which they are outside of living real, normal, everyday life with people. People need to see a leader's real life example. This is what it means to be authentic. What is communicated behind the pulpit should be lived out in real life. Scriptures speak much about leaders living a real life example among people (2 Tim 3:10-11, Acts 20:18-28, 1 Thes 1:5-6, Heb 13:7). Jesus' life was open for all to see (Jn 18:20). His claims were backed up by His manner of life. This should be the same for any leader.
- **It helps leaders know the real thoughts and condition of the flock.** A Sunday morning atmosphere doesn't always tell the whole story. Psalms 27:23 says, "Know the condition of your flock." It is hard to hide things in a small group.

Small groups on mission was **at the center of what Jesus did in serving people and expanding God's kingdom.** From that foundation the disciples served, engaged in God's

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mission, and expanded the Kingdom . A reading of the gospels shows us that Jesus spent the majority of His real relational time with His small group. If Jesus needed to be in a small group so do we.

God has designed His people (body) in such a way that "every joint supplies...nourishment" that leads to the overall health and maturity (Eph 4:26, Col 2:19, Rom 12:3-9, the 59 "one anothers"). The things that promote spiritual health like, "love one another, pray for one another, move in Spiritual gifts towards one another, carry one another's burdens, confess you faults to one another, or admonish and encourage one another" mostly happen in the context of more intimate relational life. Leaders need to be involved in community life among God's people that is facilitated through small groups.

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